Rebuild World – Chapter 1, Akira and Alpha

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A young boy walked through the ruins of a vast city with a stern expression. In his surroundings, there were buildings in partial ruins. Fragments of the buildings were scattered all around and not a single soul was in sight. The sound of the boy's footsteps and the rocks that were crunched under his feet echoed throughout the ruins.

Clothes tarnished with filth and a lone gun were the only things the boy held. For the boy, this was all he had. However, in a place like this, he was unbelievably ill equipped. After all this was the place known as 'The Ruins of the Old World'.

In the ruins, there are autonomous weapons that mindlessly attack their target due to a malfunction. They were machines that were once designed for security, obeying a criteria set by their creators. Abandoned with only an order to kill their targets, these autonomous weapons continue to follow their only order.

The autonomous weapons are descendants of biological weapons. Evolved to survive the harsh conditions, they have blurred the lines between machinery and biological and, in the East, they are called Monsters. ‘The Ruins of the Old World’ was a den to these Monsters.

The boy understood the danger he was in as his face was frozen with anticipation. Despite knowing the danger he was in, the allure of the treasures tempted him. Or at least, objects that could be considered as treasures in the eyes of someone born and raised in the slums.

The boy’s name was Akira.

Akira sighed and murmured to himself, “….There’s nothing useful here. I risked my life all for this? … Do I have to venture deeper into the ruins?”

He tilted his head up and looked ahead. In the distance, there were countless of high-rise buildings. Even from afar, he could see the towering buildings still in good condition. That was a stark contrast to the destroyed buildings that stood around Akira. [If I managed to get there, would I be able to get my hands on an expensive relic?]

The possibility of obtaining a vast amount of money appealed to Akira’s greed. However, it was nothing but a fantasy. He immediately shook his head and as if to placate and remind himself, “No, it’s impossible. I’ll die before I get there.”

His current surroundings were in ruins, but, in the distance, there was a magnificent view. The difference between the two areas is due to the maintenance of the environment. In other words, in the ruins in the distance, the remains of advanced maintenance machines from the Old World era were still in operation. And the possibility of encountering those superior, functional security machines were incredibly high. It was impossible for a child like Akira to even survive in an area highly guarded by those machines. “It’s hard for me to even be here. I should stop and not go any further…”

Akira ignored his greed and continued to search around the area he was in.

The area he was in was the outer area of a place called Kuzusuhara Street Ruins. It was the closest Ruins from Kugamayama City, the place where Akira lives, and the largest ruins within the city's finance area.

The Monsters lurking around these ruins were Medium Weak and Akira was exploring in a Medium Safe Area.

Medium Weak is the classification that declares a person who is well-prepared could handle the Monster. Additionally, Medium Safe Area means there is a higher chance of surviving compared to the ruins in the distance. That being said, it does not mean Akira could let down his guard.

Akira was vulnerable due to the lack of proper equipment as he was just one step away from death either from the fangs of those mutated creatures or a bullet from those machines. On top of that, the gun he held lacked the power to defeat the Monsters. In order to take them down, Akira would have to engage in close combat and shoot at close range. In other words, Akira had no chances of surviving a fight. If he were to fight, it would most certainly end with his death.

However, he had no other choice but to enter the ruins. He lacked the money to survive another day. And so, his desperation spurred him on to entering Kuzusuhara Street Ruins.

Although he continued to search further, there was nothing. He tilted his head down and sighed. In his line of sight, a bone from a dead body was rolling along on the ground.

He had found similar bones in the past. And every time, he would search around the corpse in hopes of finding something but, he had never found anything. [What did I expect? Even the people before me hadn't found anything.]

Akira thought feeling melancholic. Either there had been someone who already searched the area before him, or, there had been someone reckless as he was, exploring without the proper equipment, only to be greeted with the consequences of their actions.

[…At this rate, the sun will set and it would be impossible to explore the ruins at night since I don't have any light. And, the probability of being attacked by Monsters is high… I survived the dangerous ruins so the experience I've gained is what matters… right? So, I should go back. If I stubbornly remained here, I'll just join that pile of bones.]

Akira began to think of excuses that he could use to return. Because he had risked his life to be here, it was hard to accept his defeat.

[There's no use in being depressed over this. I'll explore a little more and, if I don't find anything, I'll go back.]

To Akira, returning without any accomplishments meant that his decision of risking his life was meaningless and so, Akira decided to explore for just a bit more.

He suddenly stopped as he lifted up his head and saw a girl floating in mid-air.

He froze still.

That girl had such a fantasy-like, unreal beauty. Moreover, all of her graceful figure and beautiful body were exposed without anything to hide them.

Her beautiful skin was so different compared to those from the slum. It was way more lustrous than the skin of those girls living in the upper district of the city, who take care of their skins using fortunes, hard work, and technologies from the old world. Her beautiful limbs even rivalled fine art statues and drawings. Her flawless glossy hair flailed freely down to her waist, and her gallant expression would make anyone fall in love regardless of age and gender.

Akira could only stand there captivated by the beauty of that girl as if his soul was being sucked out. Compared to all the girls that he had seen in his still relatively short life, and even if he compared her to all the girls from his imaginations up until now, her beauty was simply peerless. Only with a glance, all the criteria of a beautiful girl inside Akira were all overwritten.

The girl was just floating there doing nothing. She didn’t even seem to have noticed Akira. Then a moment later, she gracefully turned her face around to Akira.

Akira’s eyes met hers. She didn’t seem to be bothered that Akira was looking at her naked body as she smiled and stared at him. Akira, who was still dumbfounded, slightly reacted to her smile.

The girl realized that Akira noticed her. When she realized it, she giggled merrily as she took a step closer to Akira.

Akira quickly put up his guard as he realized that someone he didn’t know was approaching him. In an instant, Akira immediately reassessed his current situation. His dumbfounded expression suddenly changed into such a stern look as he pointed his gun to her and shouted.

“Don’t move!”

The girl was a bundle of abnormalities.

The ruin of the old world was a dangerous place. Even a well-equipped and well trained squad could easily get annihilated there. But that girl was standing there, all alone, out in the wild, without even a single weapon in her hand. She didn’t even seem to be watching her surroundings. And even though she’s naked, she didn’t try to hide her naked body at all. Moreover, although the wind from the ruin was mixed with sand and dust, her hair was still spotless.

As a beginner, Akira was always desperately trying to be cautious of his surroundings. He would nervously react to even the slightest noise in order to avoid meeting any Monsters. But evens so, he didn’t even notice that girl was there even though she wasn’t even trying to hide herself at all.

Even when Akira was pointing his gun at her while shaking, that girl didn’t even seem to be afraid that Akira might pull the trigger by mistake. She kept getting closer and closer to Akira without showing neither concern nor fear.

His impression of the girl had completely changed from “An unbelievably beautiful girl” into “An unknown entity”. Then, as she kept approaching Akira, he shouted at her, giving her another warning.

“I-I’m telling you not to move!! If you move any closer than that, I’ll shoot!! I’m being serious here!!”

Normally, Akira would’ve shot at her without giving her any warning. But since she was unarmed and showing no hostility, Akira was so confused from this absurd situation, so much that his finger was frozen in place.

But there’s a limit to that. The girl kept moving toward Akira despite all his warnings. Looking at that, Akira was about to pull the trigger when suddenly, the girl just vanished from his line of sight. Although he didn’t even wink there, he didn’t see her moved outside his line of sight either. The girl just vanished instantly in front of his eyes.

Akira was shocked and trembling like crazy. He looked around nervously but he couldn’t find her at all.

“Don’t worry, I won’t hurt you”

Suddenly, Akira heard a voice from beside him where no one should be at. And when he turned his face toward the source of that voice, the girl was there, fully clothed, and close enough for Akira to reach her with his hand. She hunched over such that their eyes meet on the same height as she was smiling and staring at him.

Akira’s brain couldn’t process everything that was happening in front of his eyes. All his nervousness suddenly changed to fear as his mind blacked out.

But Akira shook his fear off and stood his ground, he was able to regain his composure. Those who lose their composure will die. That is one thing that he learned by living in the slum.

He immediately rose up his gun and pointed it to that girl again, and then he extended his arm with his gun on his hand as he tried to prod the girl with his gun’s muzzle.

The girl was actually close enough for his gun to reach her. But as he extended his arms, Akira found both of his hands were inside of her chest right until his wrists.

Although both of his hands were already inside her, Akira couldn’t feel anything. He could see clearly that someone was standing there in front of him, but both of his hands just couldn’t feel anything at all.

Akira was so shocked, so much that he just stopped working. He was frozen still, with both of his hands still inside the girl’s chest. All the while, the girl was trying to get a reaction from Akira by waving in front of him or calling him. But Akira was just standing there, dumbfounded.

A long time ago, a great civilization that spanned across the world was destroyed. What left of it are only half destroyed cities, crumbling buildings, and broken down machines. It happened so many years ago that it is hard for people nowadays to imagine the technological greatness of the old world.

In that world where even raindrops were artificially made, the rain kept falling there during all those long years, sweeping all the broken building, giving nourishment for trees to grow high enough to reach the sky, and eventually supporting the life of people who live in the surface.

The ancient civilization that people call as the old world had produced a lot of relics with their advanced technologies. Things like piles of unknown materials, half destroyed buildings that are floating in the sky, and of course, mountains of weapon that are unnecessarily destructive if they’re in the wrong hands. Mankind had spent so many years gathering all of these old world relics and reconstructing human civilization.

In the end, even a civilization with such advanced technologies that people might even mistake them as magic, couldn’t destroy all humanity.

In the far eastern part of the human civilization, there are countless corporate cities managed by a group called the governing corporate. And Kugamayama city is one of these corporate cities.

A part of the Kugamayama city was surrounded by a huge wall. Although all the areas both inside and outside of the wall are collectively called as Kugamayama City. There's a big difference between these two areas.

The area inside the wall was divided into 2 districts. The upper district was filled with rich people and people with powerful influences such as the corporate executives, while the middle district is filled with moderately wealthy people. And, there are the areas outside of the wall, known as the lower district. People who live there are mostly people who can't afford to live inside the wall. And if you go further away from the city, you can find residential blocks sitting right next to the dangerous area outside the city that people call as the wasteland. These blocks are the slums.

Akira is one of the many children living in the slums. In another word, he's just your normal everyday kid; he has no mechanical strength of a cyborg, no enhanced strength like those remodelled humans, and no augmented strength from the nanomachines. Just like all the children in the slums, he has no special skill, no school education, no parents, no guardian, no food, no money, and no one would grieve even if he dies.

As for the Monsters living in the wasteland, they would attack the city from time to time, and when that happens, the ones who suffer the most would be people who are living in the wasteland and in the slums.

Akira had survived 3 times through this kind of attack, in his first and second time, he just ran around and hid. It's thanks to those strangers who got attacked, killed, and eaten in his place, that he was able to barely survive.

While in his third attempt, he wasn't able to run away from a small dog monster and ended up having a death match against it after he picked up a hand gun that he found by chance.

Although he had no training in using hand gun, he was able to shot its head 3 times by pure luck. But even so, his luck wasn't enough. The monster was drenched in blood but still alive as it ran toward Akira and pounced at him with its big mouth open as if it's going to deliver a killing blow.

But before that monster’s abnormally big mouth was able to rip off Akira’s arms, Akira instinctively thrust his arm to its mouth up to his elbow and pulled the trigger on his hand gun. And so the bullet passed through the monster’s mouth, straight through under its skull, and pierced its brain, and thus killing the monster.

But then in the brief moment after that, as the monster was still alive, it clamped down hard on Akira’s arms. Fortunately, Akira was able to survive without losing his arm or his life.

After surviving his third time, Akira decided to be a hunter. Although he pretty much understood just how dangerous it was to be a hunter, he was feeling hopeful and brimming with confidence after killing a monster all by himself.

There are people who are working as hunters in this world, these people would venture the monster-filled wasteland outside of the city seeking for money and fame despite knowing that it’s such a dangerous place, the wasteland is so dangerous that it’s actually safer for them to stay in the slums where cheap guns circulating freely and the public order there is just the worst. But on the other side, the wasteland is a place filled with riches and power since you might find the ruins and the relics of the old world there.

These Monsters that attacking the human are also relics of the old world, the biological Monsters are samples of advanced biotechnology, while the machine Monsters are treasure boxes filled with valuable components. Anyone who can bring them back to the city will be rewarded with a huge amount of money.

Moreover, if you can bring back a highly valuable relic from the ruins, you might be awarded with enough money to even buy a whole city. And if you can take control of the facilities inside the ruin of the old world that are still running even until now, especially if you can take control of its military facilities, then you can even start a nation.

Competent hunters stand in a different world in term of power and money. With that much money and power, they can bring back more valuables

relics which give them more power and riches, thus they can aim for more dangerous and valuable relics. In the peak of this cycle, these hunters would equip themselves with overwhelmingly powerful equipment from the old world. There were even great hunters who were able to get themselves powerful weapon from the old world that made them even more powerful than a city.

Akira might have killed a monster all on his own, but it was only enough to give him a non-zero chance to come back alive from the wasteland.

But that was enough for him to take the gamble, if he kept his living style in the slums like that, he would just end up dead one day. And so in order to get out from there, he had no other choice but to take this gamble.

So the day Akira went on a journey aiming to be a hunter. Or, to be more precise, the day he was aiming for a better tomorrow.

Akira was still stood frozen in front of the beautiful girl, as for the girl herself, she was giggling while waiting for Akira to regain his composure.

It had been quite a while since then and Akira was still frozen there as he couldn't process the situation that he was in. But even so, nothing bad has happened to him, so he was slowly able to regain his composure. And once he has calmed down to a certain extent, his focus changed from the empty space and back to the girl's face.

The girl who noticed that just smiled back to Akira.

"Are you okay? Can you see me? Can you hear my voice? Where am I? Who are you?"

Akira who had calmed himself down had regained his composure enough to answer those questions, so he answering her questions while looking at her with suspicion.

"…I can see you, I can hear you well, this place is Kuzusuhara ruin, and my name is Akira…"

The girl laughed merrily.

“Thank goodness, my name is Alpha, nice to meet you”

At least he knew that she didn’t seem to have any ill will against him. Although it didn’t change the fact that she’s a mysterious entity to him, he understood well that she didn’t mean him any harm, so there’s no need for him to be overly cautious about her. Moreover, he’s in the middle of a ruin, its better if he put his attention for watching out for Monsters. As Akira concluded his thought, he lowered his guard.

“…So, Alpha-san, you’re not a ghost… Right…? I can’t touch you though…”

“…Yep, I’m not a ghost, though it’s not easy if you tell me to prove that. If I am to explain this current condition that you’re in. The me that you see here is a type of augmented reality. You recognize my existence here since the information about my voice and my appearance are sent directly into your brain. For some reason, your brain has the ability to receive information sent through wireless transmission in a special format, so that’s why you can receive the information that I’m transmitting. I don’t know whether it’s an inherent ability that you have since you were born, or is it an ability that you got from somewhere else. But for me too, I don’t hear your voice from the sound made by your vocal cord, but instead, I’m receiving the command that your brain is sending to your vocal cord in form of information packets, and then I’m interpreting it to voice. The same thing is also happening for your vision. That’s also the reason why I know that you can see me.”

Akira didn’t understand even a shred of Alpha’s explanation; Alpha could see that clearly from his expression. So Alpha explained the main points only.

“You’re the only one who can see me; you’re also the only one who can hear my voice. If you’re not careful, you’ll look like a crazy boy talking with air to other people. For now, it’s all good as long as you understand that. And also, you can call me Alpha and I will call you Akira.”

Alpha was giggling as she was giving Akira her explanations. For a small kid from the slum like him, that smile that had no trace of hatred, caution, or pity only served to increase her likeability, but Akira didn't realize that at all.

"…Alright, sure… I understand. So then, Alpha, what are you doing in this place?"

"I'm looking for someone who can see and hear me. I actually have a request, you see. But I can't ask them to do anything if they can't even hear me in the first place, you know. And it would be the best if that person is a hunter, after all, there's a good chance that they would listen to my request. But well, as you can see, it didn't go well at all."

Alpha laughed bitterly for a bit.

Akira was at lost for a while before he hesitantly opened his mouth.

"Well, uhh, I'm actually a hunter, you know…"

Akira could see clearly that Alpha was a bit surprised.

"Eh? You're a hunter? Although you're that young? How long have you been a hunter?"

"O-one"

"One year?"

"…One day, I just became a hunter today…"

Both Akira and Alpha were exchanging an awkward look. There's an awkward silence between them.

"…Nope, it's nothing. Just forget what I said"

Since he had decided to live his life as a hunter, he had no wish to hide the fact that he's a hunter. But, he thought that it was a bad idea to call himself

a hunter despite the fact he didn’t have the skill. After realizing that, he lost all his confidence.

But Alpha kept pushing the conversation forward.

“Please don’t say that, can you at least please listen to my story? After all, this must be some kind of fate that we met here,”

Even though he called himself a hunter, Akira didn’t have the skill, and Alpha knew that very well. But it’s also true that there’s no one else other than him who could communicate with her. Moreover, the fact that Akira was just an inexperienced hunter was not a minus point in the long run for Alpha.

“My request is that for you to delve into a certain ruin in secret. In exchange, I’ll give you my support, but this is only a down payment. Once you complete my request, you may take all the precious relics of the old world inside that ruin”

Akira was so surprised by that offer that he inadvertently raised his voice.

“Relics of the old world, you say…? Seriously!?”

As she heard Akira’s reaction, Alpha giggled inside her heart, while on the outside, she’s making a friendly smile that persuaded Akira further.

“Of course. Or more like, to be honest, you’ve used all your life worth of luck to get this offer, so if you don’t accept it, it’ll be bad for you, you know? After all, you’ve already run out of luck, so you won’t be able to survive for long without my support.”

The cynical side inside Akira was screaming at him that Alpha was trying to trick him. But to Akira, Alpha didn’t look like trying to trick him at all.

[…First of all, there’s nothing that she can get from tricking a little kid like me, right? She should have known that since I don’t have any money at all with me. Or is it that she’s just playing a prank on me? Moreover, even if

she’s being serious about her offer, is it really okay to accept a request from an unknown entity like her?]

After hesitating there, Akira realized what he should’ve realized right from the start and tried to rethink his current situation. It’s exactly because she’s an unknown entity who strangely enough would come to him with a request, so there must be some kind of secret or a particular situation behind it. But normally, no one would offer a request to a kid like him. That’s why; he knew that he should grab this opportunity. And so Akira hardened his resolve and said to Alpha.

“I understand. I still don’t know how far I should go for your request, but I’ll accept that request.”

Akira resolved himself so much that he himself was surprised by it, which was his first time as a hunter accepting a request.

Alpha looked so happy hearing that.

“That will conclude our contact then. Now, I’ll immediately start giving you my support as my down payment to you.”

And so, Alpha who was always giggling during their conversation suddenly changed into a serious mood.

“If you don’t want to die, then go into the building on your right in 10 seconds.”

“What do you mean…?”

Akira was about to ask her what she meant. But from that dead serious look on her face indicating she would not be take any question, he understood just how dangerous the situation that he was in and stopped his question middle way. If that wasn’t a lie, then he would definitely get killed if he stayed there. Once he realized that, he sprinted as fast as he could to the building on his right.

The moment Akira jumped into the building. A huge explosion blew off behind him, the wind from that explosion rushed through his side. Shocked by the explosion, he immediately looked back to where the explosion came from. He saw a huge crater right where he was standing a few seconds ago, the area around it was scorched in black from the explosion. If he stayed there just a few more seconds, there's no mistaking it that he would have been killed, at least he knew well that much looking from the aftermath.

Akira was frozen with fear from what just happened. But Alpha appeared so suddenly in front of his eyes and snapped him back into reality.

"W-what was that…?"

Alpha kept that serious expression from before as she pointed her finger to the stairs.

"Go there and start climbing up in 8 seconds."

Akira desperately ran toward the stairs and started climbing up. Then again, another explosion blew off behind him and the shockwave sent by that explosion stopped Akira from climbing higher. Once it died down, he immediately started climbing up again, and then he suddenly saw Alpha already standing on one of the stairs while pointing upward.

"Go to the rooftop in 5 seconds…"

Akira ignored his screaming lungs and legs as he kept climbing the stairs.

Akira followed Alpha's instruction and kept running, and then he finally reached the rooftop. Out of breath, there he saw Alpha standing in one end as she was waving at him, telling him to come closer. But by looking on how she was smiling and how she was waving at him, it didn't seem like he had to do that in a hurry, so Akira ran slowly to approach her.

Alpha then pointed her finger below. Akira was baffled, he though she's telling him to jump down, but then Alpha said while smiling.

“Be carefully looking down below. Make sure to do it slowly and quietly, okay?”

Akira slowly and carefully peeked down as ordered by Alpha. His face immediately turned pale, what he saw down there were Monsters who attacked him just now, they roaming around as if they’re looking for something.

The length of those Monsters was about 2 meters and they looked like dogs. If it was only that, they would look like just big dogs with strengthened muscles, but no, some of those Monsters had small cannons on their back, some of them had rockets, and some of them had small missile launcher. All of these Monsters equipped with destructive weapons were roaming outside looking to eradicate any invaders.

It would make him a lot of money if he could kill those Monsters and bring some of them back home. But Akira didn’t have the power or method to do that. That young hunter who just about to get killed by those Monsters looked frustrated as he was looking at the potential money that was out of his reach.

“Wh-what are those…?”

Then Alpha gave him a detailed explanation about the Monsters.

“They are the weapon dogs, the man-made living organism created in order to protect the city. Although guns and other weapons are growing on their body, they are not machines, they are living biological organism. I’m sure that these ones were programmed to watch over this area. They might evolve differently from one and another, but the weapons behind their back will get stronger as they grow up. Maybe that weapon dog with missile pods growing behind it is the leader of the pack.”

There’s no harm in hearing that information but Akira wasn’t actually asking for an explanation about those Monsters. The question that he muttered was only a form of his frustration because of his bad luck getting attacked by those Monsters. But then, a lot of questions came into his mind after hearing that explanation.

“But why guns can grow from a living organism? Isn’t that just strange?”

And so Alpha gave a simple answer to Akira’s simple question.

“Their living tissues have become home for the nanomachines inside them. Then these nanomachines use the metal ores that they ingested to grow guns on their backs. I’m pretty sure that they’ve deviated so much from their original design. Well, I guess they’ve evolved independently from their original design in order to adapt to the current condition.”

It is such an important piece of information that would even surprise the people who specialize in these Monsters. But someone like Akira, who didn’t know just how valuable that information is, could only understand was that there was a particular reason that these living organism could grow weapons on their bodies.

Alpha’s expression that was so serious when they were attacked but after it was over, she changed back to smiling. Judging from that, Akira calmed down as he understood that he’s pretty much safe in that place.

Silavin: Ah. Finally, we are releasing this novel! I think the author is amazing for writing this novel. It had won an award as well. Something fresh and interesting. Even before the manga came out, I wanted to translated already,

Anways, enough of my praises. This will be a weekly release. Each chapter is pretty long (around 4-6K words).

If you wish to support, the Patreon is up but I haven’t fully fleshed it out yet.

Anyways, hope you guys enjoy this series as much as I am going to. Peace.

edited

Silavin: Ahhh! Shit! Posted the wrong content. Sorry guys. It has been updated. Hope you enjoy.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 2, Alpha's support

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After he got away from the monsters, Akira let out a sigh of relief. Then Alpha laughed proudly as she said.

"How was that? I gave good support, didn't I?"

"Y-Yeah, I was saved because of that. Thanks."

As he tried to calm himself down, Akira thought of everything that just happened. The leftover thrill and adrenaline rush from the monsters' attack, his screaming lungs as he was short of breath since he was running around like crazy; the wariness toward the unknown girl, and the feeling of gratitude after he was saved by her. All of these feelings and sensations pooled into one as he made a mixed expression.

As for Alpha, she was just standing there, staring at him and trying to read deeper into his heart while giving off a wonderful smile that made Akira less cautious of her.

“You are very welcome. Now that you just got a taste of how great I am, I want to talk about what I want to ask of you. Is that alright?”

“Yeah”

Alpha kept staring at Akira’s eyes and gave off a nod as if she was about to bring a very serious talk.

“I’ll need you explore a certain ruin. But it’s not here, it’s in some other ruin, and it’s a very dangerous ruin. To be honest, It’s impossible for the current you to explore that place. Forget exploring the place, it’s impossible even for you to go there, you’ll surely be dead midway even with my amazing support. That’s why, before going there, I want you to prepare enough equipment and skill to explore that ruin, And that will be our main aim for the time being…”

Feeling that it would be a long talk, Akira hesitantly opened up his mouth and said.

“Uhmm, may I say something?”

“What is it? Just ask away if there’s any part that you don’t understand.”

“That’s not what I meant. So uhh, I understand that it’s an important subject, but can we save that for later? To be honest, I want to talk about how can I get back safely from here first if possible”

Alpha stopped talking and gave Akira a meaningful smile as she kept staring at him. The silence made Akira shrunk a bit and his expression stiffened.

[…Oh crap, did I make her angry? Maybe I shouldn’t have cut her talk there]

The weapon dogs were still roaming around the building, so he couldn’t stay there forever. he had to do something to get out from this sticky situation, otherwise, he would definitely get killed sooner or later. This is

the reason why he cut Alpha's talk short, but then, he realized that if he angered Alpha there, then it's the same as cutting off his own lifeline.

Akira's panic and nervousness started leaking off from his expression. Looking at that, Alpha just giggled without showing any worry.

"I understand. I also want to ask you about a lot of things once we're in a better situation. So let's get out from this place and go back to Kugamayama city first, then we can continue our talk after that, ok?"

"Yes, please"

Akira let out a sigh of relief as his survivability just shot up as he knew that he didn't anger her.

But suddenly, Alpha gave another order to him while smiling as if she intentionally wanted to erase that relief off him.

"In that case then go down right now"

Akira immediately gasped and choked. Then after he recovered, he stood up with a dumbfounded look.

Alpha didn't seem to be bothered by Akira's reaction. She just lightly walked off while waving at Akira as if she was trying to lead Akira who just stood still there.

"What's wrong? Let's go"

Which to that, Akira protested while panicking.

"No, well, I just came out from down there, right!? So why are we returning back to that place again!? There are still monsters roaming below, you know?!"

"I don't mind explaining it to you but… I'll do that while we move slowly. But well, if you can't trust my support, then there's nothing I can do about it. I won't force you or anything"

After saying that, Alpha kept walking deeper into the building, leaving Akira behind.

The fear of returning back to the death zone stopped Akira from moving his legs. But after seeing Alpha disappearing into the building, he just gritted his teeth and followed her.

Akira had no confidence if he could return back to the city safely on his own, not to mention that it's thanks to Alpha's support that he was able to survive the monsters' attack from before. That's why, he understood well that although it looked like a crazy idea to him, he had the best survival chance if he just followed her order. So, he decided to put his bet on her and rushed into that unknown girl.

Once he entered the building again, he saw Alpha was standing near the entrance waiting for him with a smile. Looking at her, Akira felt a mix of embarrassment and a slight strange sense of defeat. Then Alpha started walking down the stairs with Akira following behind her.

He walked down the stairs relatively slowly compared to when he climbed the stairs as fast as he could a few moments ago. Following Alpha's orders, he stopped, hid himself, and started walking again for a few times during his way down the stairs.

"…So, why are we returning below? Isn't it dangerous down there?"

"It's really dangerous down there, you know"

Akira was shocked and taken aback by Alpha's prompt answer. But then he hurriedly asked Alpha again.

"Wait for a sec!! It's dangerous, right?"

"There are monsters roaming down there, you know? So that place is far away from being safe. Did you come to this ruin without even knowing that? Do you think that it was purely because of your bad luck that you were attacked back there?"

“O-Of course I know that… But that’s not what I was asking. Just explain it to me already, you did say that you will do that while we’re moving, right?”

“In order for you to get back safely to Kugamayama City from this Kuzusuhara city ruin, you have to get out from this building. But I don’t think you have the ability to jump down from the rooftop and land safely, that’s why we’re taking the stairs-“

Akira didn’t even wait for Alpha who was trying to explain everything in detail to Akira. He interrupted her explanation with a strong tone while giving a look at Alpha that showed his distrust and dissatisfaction.

“Alright, alright. But tell me one thing, if I obey everything you say, then I’ll be able to return back safely, right?”

Alpha answered with a serious look.

“At least, I think you’ll have a better survivability compared to if you do this on your own. I did say this before, I won’t force you or anything. If you don’t trust my support, then I won’t give you any support since it would be a waste.”

Then Alpha kept looking at Akira as she was waiting for an answer. Depending on his answer, their relationship might end right there.

After a pause, Akira hung her head in self-loathing while saying.

“…Sorry, that was my fault. I’ll obey you, so please help me”

Alpha smiled back as if she regained her mood.

“Okay, so once again, I’ll be in your care”

Although he felt relieved, he’s still feeling uneasy. and so Akira carefully asked again.

“…And also. If it’s possible, can you explain to me the reason for your previous order in a way that is easy for me to understand so that I won’t feel uneasy? It’s okay even if you just explain to me the important main points.”

“There are individual differences in the behavioral pattern between each weapon dog. Whether they chase their target until the very end or they stay in one area. Whether they keep searching or return back to their base when they lose sight of their target. After observing their individual differences, I predicted that at this time, the chance you’ll encounter any monsters if you go back should be very low. The black powder that they use for their weapons is produced by a particular organ inside them. And this organ can only stock up limited amount of black powder. So once they used all of their available black powder, it’ll take some times for them to replenish it. Thus, if you encounter one of them during that period, then there’s a very small chance that you will get shot from behind when you run away from it. Of course they’ll come at you trying to kill you and eat you, but if you keep your distance so that they can’t bite you, then I’m sure you can kill them even with that weak handgun. After considering that big factor and so many other factors, I decided to give you that order. I’ve more or less summarized everything there but, should I explain it in more detail to you?”

“…Nope, that’s good enough… You could’ve explained that when we’re on the rooftop, you know?”

Looking at still unsatisfied Akira. Alpha smiled as if she was trying to cheer up a small kid and said to him.

“There will be a lot of instances where I don’t have the leeway of explaining things to you. So, if I have to explain each and every single thing to you all the time, then you’ll get killed one of these days. For an example, in case if a bullet will pierce your head in 3 seconds and I have to explain to you why you should get down on the floor as fast as you can, then you’ll get killed in the middle of my explanation. The same thing will happen if I tell you to get down on the floor and then you ask me why. After all, I can’t touch you, so it’s not like I can’t force you to get down. So there you have it, if you can’t follow my order without asking me the reason, then you’ll just end up dead. The same thing is happening right now, the reason why I can give you a long explanation here is because I know we’re pretty much safe right now, you know?”

“…I understand.”

Although he’s convinced by Alpha’s explanation, he also felt that the more he asked, the more he looked stupid. Therefore, he just hung his head and nodded.

After arriving on the first floor, his expression turned grim as he glanced at the aftermath of the attack that almost got him killed. He immediately looked around to make sure that there are no monsters left there. Once he confirmed it, he let out a sigh of relief and his expression relaxed for a bit. But all of those were erased when Alpha started giving him orders again with a serious look.

“Akira, listen closely to my orders and try your best to follow them. Every time you make a move outside of my order, it’ll increase the chance of you getting killed, you understand that?”

“I-I understand”

“30 seconds from now, run as fast as you can to exit the building and then go left. Just keep running following the road without looking back no matter what. And when I give you the sign, turn back, put your gun in front of you, and empty it. You understand?”

“…O-Okay.”

Akira already understood well that he would run out of time if he asked Akira for the reason. And so he just answered Alpha’s question with a firm nod while making a mixed expression of nervousness and fear.

Alpha slid aside as if she’s making a way for Akira, and then she pointed her finger to the exit while staring at Akira.

Akira anxiously took a peek outside the building, he could see the leftovers of the weapon dogs’ attack that was also there. It’s the scene of a death zone. He prepared himself to dash as fast as he could. As he leaned forward to take off and run away from that place with all his strength, his feet planted firmly on the ground. He hesitated. Executing and understanding are two different things. He understood it well, but he didn’t have enough resolve to execute it.

Alpha started counting down.

“5… 4…. 3…”

Akira imagined for a fraction of a second what would happen to him if the time ran out. And so he resolved himself and went off.

He blazed through the gaps between the half destroyed high buildings with all he had. He quickly ran out of breath, but he kept running. His heart started screaming in pain, but he kept running. The sole of his feet started feeling the pain from kicking the paved hard road, but he kept running. He gritted his teeth and kept running. He didn’t see any monsters around and he didn’t hear any sound of a fight either. So he started questioning why he kept running like that.

The silence around him was telling him that he’s all alone in that ruin. His lungs, his heart, and his legs were screaming in pain begging for a rest, but he ignored those screams as he kept running.

He saw nothing in front of him and he heard nothing from behind. He started to think that he’s already safe. But as he started to calm down, all the pains and tiredness from the running crashed down on him.

[I should be safe now, right?]

Akira stopped running and took a rest. But then he looked back to confirm his safety despite all the warnings from Alpha.

Akira was petrified. He saw a big monster not too far from where he was standing. Although it’s all alone, it’s more dangerous than the group of monsters that attacked him.

At a glance, that monster looked like the weapon dog that he just encountered from before with a big cannon growing on its back. But unlike them, it had such a distorted body as if it’s trying to break the norm with its 8 asymmetric legs.

What’s so weird about its dog-like head was how it had 2 eyes on its right side and 1 eye on its left side, it’s even dubious whether it could see clearly or not with those 3 asymmetric sized eyes. But, there’s no doubt at all that those 3 eyes were locked on Akira.

The monster opened its mouth and let out a loud roar. At the same time, the cannon on its back raised and shot a round. The explosive round landed not too far from Akira as it exploded and sent rubble flying. But thanks to all the rubble that scattered around, the damage that it caused around the area was reduced. In the end, Akira just felt a weak wind blowing on its direction and ended up just fine from the explosion.

The monster once again raised up its cannon as if it’s going to shoot another round. But nothing happened, it had ran out of ammo. Letting out another loud roar, its eyes once again, locked into Akira and started running toward him.

Since the moment he looked back, Akira stood still there surprised of what he saw. And even when the monster started running toward him, he wasstill frozen in place.

“Run!!”

Although he couldn’t see Alpha at all, he could clearly hear her voice shouted at him. He immediately snapped back into reality thanks to it and started running as fast as he could. But the monster had closed most of the distance between them, he would have standing further away from the monster had he kept running without looking back at all. It’s as Alpha warned him, his chance of getting killed skyrocketed every time he doesn’t do as Alpha instructed.

His whole body was screaming in pain, but Akira ignored it as he kept running. He could hear the stomping sound behind him getting louder and louder. But thanks to its malformed body, its running speed was relatively slow, thus Akira could keep his distance from it. But still, the earth rumbled and let out a thunderous sound every time its huge legs kicked the ground, it reminded Akira just how scary its huge body and legs.

Every time Akira felt the vibration and heard the sound of the monster's steps echoed from the distance, it shaved off Akira's sanity. There's no mistaking it, he would be turned into minced meat if one of those huge legs fell down on him.

Suddenly, Alpha appeared beside Akira as he kept running. She was fleeting right beside him as if she's floating and sliding above the ground. Akira could see clearly her mixed expression of seriousness and a bit of disappointment.

"Geez, I've warned you so many times not to look back, haven't I? Try to follow my order exactly as I tell you next time. I'll give you a sign when you'll have to turn and shoot back, so try your best to follow it, okay?"

"Shoot back!? Are you telling me to fight that huge thing with this handgun?!"

"I've been telling you this again and again, I won't force you to follow my orders"

"I'll be in your care!"

Akira shouted and wasted his precious chance to take a breath, but Alpha was satisfied by that answer and smiled happily.

"There's no need to aim for anything. Just point your gun forward and empty it as fast as you can, okay?"

"Okay!"

Alpha started counting down with her fingers.

"5… 4… 3…"

Akira resolved himself and made a grim expression. He knew that he had no other choice since he'll get killed otherwise.

"… 2… 1… 0!"

Akira turned as fast as he could and immediately emptied his gun without even aiming at all.

But when he turned back, the monster's big eye was already right in front of his gun's muzzle. The bullets that he shot in point blank range tore right through into the monster's eye and swallowed deeper into its head.

Akira kept pulling the trigger on his gun like crazy in a close range like that. All the bullets that came out from his gun went right into the monster's head thus injuring the monster from the inside.

Although Akira had caused a lot of damage on the monster, its augmented vitality saved it from instant death. But there's no mistaking it that it's already on its death door as it kept screaming in agony until its inevitable death.

Although the dead monster had fallen limp on the ground. Akira kept pulling on the trigger of his already empty handgun. it's only after he saw the blood coming out from its head and confirmed that the monster had totally stopped moving at all that he let go his finger from the trigger.

"…D-did I do it…?"

Akira breathing was roughly but he still managed to squeeze out a few words. Since he couldn't confirm whether it's really already dead or not, Akira kept his guard up while staring at the monster. Once he calmed down and fixed his breathing for a bit, the reality that he killed the monster started seeping in as he was looking at the dead monster soaked in its own blood.

"Akira"

Akira turned into the direction of the voice as he was about to slump down. Then he was about to say thanks and sorry with a still dumbfounded face when he saw Alpha pointed toward the outside of the ruin while smiling. He immediately pulled himself up back again.

"In 10 seconds…"

Akira dashed without even waiting for the end of her sentence.

Alpha kept looking at Akira as he ran off, she only gave a playful smile and suddenly vanished, leaving the dead body of the monster all alone behind.

Akira who kept running as fast as he could from the attacking monster didn't realize it, but there were a lot of things happening behind him.

Just like Akira, the monsters could also see Alpha, so they were trying to eat Alpha who was behind Akira.

While Alpha was actually using herself as a decoy to lead the monsters around, then she would let herself 'get eaten' after adjusting their positions.

The monsters couldn't feel anything at all although they clearly bit her. Thus, they would stop for a bit as they were confused to what happened.

Then, Alpha would tell Akira to use that chance to shoot at these monsters. And just like when Akira shot the eye and killed the monster from before, Alpha manipulated the monsters' position and condition by using herself as a decoy so that Akira could easily destroy them.

That group of monsters appeared the moment Akira accepted Alpha's request, but Akira who was running as fast as he could to the outside of the ruin didn't notice that at all.

Akira was somehow able to get outside of the Kuzusuhara city ruin. That place was still a bit dangerous, but it's way safer there compared to the inside of the ruin.

Alpha suddenly appeared and welcomed Akira as if she got there first before him. Akira immediately fell down on his knees trying to calm his breathing. Then Alpha gently spoke to him.

"I don't mind if you want to take a rest there, but is it okay if I continue our talk? We were in the middle of talking on how are you going to get enough equipment and skill to explore the ruin that I want you to go to"

"Ah, sure, go on"

“For the equipment, you’ll need to either buy them or scavenge them from the ruins. But the old world equipment from that you can find in the ruins are much more powerful than the commonly sold equipment. So I’m thinking that you can buy your first equipment, and then use them to hunt for better old world equipment from the ruins. As for your ability… There’s no other way but to train and experience real battle. But there’s no need to worry, I can give you the best training possible with my support.”

Akira couldn’t imagine what kind of training it could be. But hearing from how confident Alpha sounded, he at least knew that it must be some kind of super effective training.

“That would be really helpful. But is it okay for you to give me that much help?

“Don’t worry, this is included as my down payment, you know. Not to mention that it’s in order so that you can complete my request. So in the end, it’s more or less for my own sake too. If you think that I might have given too much for your down payment. Then you should give your best in your hard training”

“O-Okay, I’ll give my best.”

Akira winced and gave a nod, he could get a feel for just how harsh this special training that she’s talking about from her playful smile.

Alpha looked satisfied as she gave him a nod back.

“Our main aim for now is for you to be a good hunter so that you can get enough money to get high quality equipment. But first, you have to go to the hunter office, you need to register yourself as a formal hunter and graduate from being a self proclaimed hunter… Just in case, let me ask you about one thing, have you registered yourself as a formal hunter yet?”

Akira took out his hunter certificate from his chest. It looked like just a cheap piece of paper with the written prove saying that he’s a certified third rank worker from the eastern region corporate government. It also has his number ID as a hunter and his name written on it.

Looking at that measly hunter certificate that looked like a fake certificate, Alpha inquired further.

“…Is a hunter certificate… Something that looks that cheap? Please don’t take me wrong, it’s not like I’m doubting it, it’s all fine as long as you can use that as a hunter certificate… So, that thing is okay, right?”

“…It should be okay… I think.”

The staff in the hunter office gave him that piece of paper when Akira registered himself there, there’s no mistaking it. But after Alpha pointed out just how it looked so cheap, Akira started doubting himself.

“I want to ask you a lot of things like where did you register yourself as a hunter, is that okay?”

“Sure”

As he was telling Alpha his story from around that time, Akira remembered all the bad things that happened to him and made a mixed expression.

Akira went to a hunter office located in the lower district of Kugamayama city.

It’s located a bit far away from the slum city. From the outside, it looked just like a half destroyed bar as half of the letters on its signboard were already beyond recognition. If it’s not because of the hunter office symbol on its signboard, no one would know if that building is a hunter office.

The staff who served Akira was a drunk young man that didn’t look like he wanted to do any work. Being a hunter was quite a popular job. Even in the eastern region and there are a lot of great hunters in that area, but that man didn’t give that feeling at all. Although it’s a popular job, many people hate to be posted near the slum city. That man must be someone who got demoted and transferred into this post that was befitting of his motivation and ability.

Akira nervously asked that man.

“I came to be a hunter, may I do my registration here?”

That staff looked annoyed as he clicked his tongue and put off the magazine that he was reading. And then he moved on with his duty, although, Akira could obviously see that he didn’t want to do it.

“…Your name?”

“Akira”

The staff operated the terminal in front of him, not too long after, a printer near him printed out a piece of signed hunter certificate. He rudely took the paper from the printer and handed it over to Akira. Once he’s done with his job, he quickly grabbed his magazine and started reading again.

Akira was confused, he looked back and forth from the hunter certificate that he just received to that staff. He thought that registering as a hunter would take a lot more work than that, but there, he just told the staff his name and it’s done. He wasn’t sure whether the registration was really already finished or not, and so he involuntarily asked the staff.

“I-Is that it?”

The staff looked annoyed as he shifted his view from the magazine to Akira.

“That’s all, now go home”

“You just needed my name? Don’t you need any other information too…?”

He looked really annoyed from the bottom of his heart as he made a gesture to shoo Akira and said.

“Since you’ll be dead in no time, do you really think I’ll ask you for more information? I don’t care about any information that you have. To be honest, I don’t even really care about your name. I just asked for it because that’s the rule, I don’t even want to know if that’s your real name or not”

That reminded Akira of how much worth someone like himself has. After he realized that, he just shut up and walked away from the hunter office.

Akira kept staring at his certificate after he finished explaining how did he get it. As he understood the situation he was in, he vowed that he would crawl up from his current condition.

Alpha smiled as if she was trying to cheer up Akira.

“We’ll start your training with reading and writing, after all, collecting information is a very important thing. But don’t worry, you’ll be able to read and write in no time with my first class level support”

“I understand. I’ll be in your care… By the way, how do you know that I can’t read?”

“The name written in that hunter certificate, it’s Ajira”

That man didn’t only treat him unpleasantly, he even made a mistake in his job. Akira was desperately trying to hold himself back from crushing his own hunter certificate.

Then Alpha made a suggestion while smiling bitterly.

“Let’s just return to Kugamayama city for now, then we can continue our talk there. Until you learn how to write and read, I’ll do the reading in your place”

Akira just nodded without saying anything. He tucked his hunter certificate back in and started walking toward Kugamayama. Alpha followed and started walking beside him.

Akira asked a simple question to lighten the mood there.

“By the way, what is the name of that monster that I just defeated in Kuzusuhara city ruin?”

“It’s weapon dog”

“…Really? that one doesn’t look like them at all though, so that monster was also from the same type as them? “

“Presumably, that one made a mistake in executing its self remodeling. That’s why you’re able to easily defeat it”

“Was that appearance only for show?”

“That depends on how you see it. That monster had a fatal weakness that allowed you to defeat it and it might just be out of pure luck that you were able to use that weakness. But if you can defeat that kind of monster one more time, then you might interpret that as its appearance is just for show, of course that is if you can defeat it again without my support, you know?”

“Nope, impossible”

“Then that means that my support is just really that good, so you better be thankful for that, okay?”

“Thank you very much”

“You’re welcome.”

Akira and Alpha kept walking toward the city while having an idle talk just like that.

From the outside, Akira would look like an insane kid talking to nothing. But there’s no one there to tell him that.

That is of course save for Alpha who kept observing him from the moment they met.

Athena13 : Wait, so he defeated one big monster and some smaller ones then he went back home without salvaging even a single one of them…? Interesting.

Silavin: I doubt he can carry them. After all, I don’t think those dogs are light, considering that they have weapons growing out of their bodies

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Rebuild World – Chapter 3, The One Who is Responsible For Resolve.

Index

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Editor: Silavin

The slum extends from the outskirts of Kugamayama City and it sits right next to the wasteland. It's a place riddled with crime and bad economy, and not to mention the monsters roaming close to the edges, and the bandits prowling in the inside for weak people. It's basically a garbage dump for the city. So, Akira decided to be a Hunter in order to get away from such a place.

As Akira walked through the familiar road of the slums with Alpha, it reminded him just how strange this Alpha was. A refined facial feature with shiny and lustrous hair. Silky skin paired with a developed body highlighted by her tight sexy dress. Alpha is a being that would tempt any member of the opposite sex. It was just out of place that such a being did not attract any attention.

Moreover, this so-called old world design should've been more than enough to attract people's attention, it's so great in quality that even an amateur could easily understand that it was an expensive dress. If someone that was knowledgeable in the technology of the old world saw it, he or she would immediately be able to recognize that it was made with the advanced technology of the old world. Although it is an ancient relic from the old

world, anyone would be able to tell that such a dress was a treasure amongst the other relics. So in short, it is an object that would garner a lot of attention.

Normally, it would have caused an uproar with all of those conspicuous things gathered in one place, but no one reacted to Alpha at all. Thus, the fact that he's the only one who could see Alpha finally hit him.

And so Akira whispered to Alpha.

"So other people really can't see you, huh."

"Didn't I tell you so before? You didn't believe me, huh?"

Seeing Alpha's mood had turned a bit sour, Akira tried to make excuses in panic.

"Ah, I didn't mean it like that, it's just that it's not like I can normally notice it. After all, it's only normal to think that others can see what I can see, right? So I thought that there must be someone else other than me who can see you too."

"Oh, I see, that's what you meant, huh. Well, explaining it will take a long time, so let's put that aside for another time."

Unlike Akira who was whispering, Alpha answered his question with a clear voice, but it was only Akira who could hear that voice. If Akira responded back with the same clear voice, he would look like a suspicious boy talking to his imaginary friend.

"Akira, what are you going to do now? Do you have something you need to do after this? There's no need to worry about me, you can just go and do what you want."

"…Something I need to do, huh?"

Akira looked up into the sky. The sun was setting and the night was drawing near.

“I’m just going to sleep for today.”

Alpha looked a bit surprised.

“You’re going to sleep already? This early?”

“Yeah. The night is coming soon, I have to prepare a place for me to sleep.”

Akira went into one of the dark back alleys. He still had some time before the sun completely set but he had already crawled into a corner where he usually slept and leaned himself onto a makeshift wall made of scrap materials.

It would be really hard to find him there unless you already know that someone was there and intentionally looked around that place. Hiding himself like that was one of the things that he learned to stay alive in the slum as a kid.

Basically, Akira would start his day when the sun rises and end it when the sun sets. After all, he would need lighting to be able to work at night. But of course it was not free, so for a little boy without money like Akira, it was simply something that was out of his reach. Moreover, the already dangerous slum will get more dangerous once the night falls and Akira didn’t have the strength to be able to stay active during the night.

The biggest reason as to why he tried not to move around during the night was to minimize the danger. Since he knew that he would be asleep when others were still awake. He himself didn’t know for sure if it was the right choice. After all, the people who were awake during the night might also be good people. But one thing he knew for sure was that he was able to stay alive up until that point by doing that, so he believed that his way of living was not wrong and decided to keep living like that.

Once he set his sleeping place, his stomach growled for food, to which Akira just sighed and ignored it. But then Alpha made a suggestion.

“If it’s possible, it’s better if you eat some food, you know? If you keep yourself starved like that, your physical ability will diminish, which in turn

will lower the success rate when you explore the ruins”

Akira shook his head lightly.

“…I have nothing to eat. We completely missed the food distribution from the city and I don’t have any money to buy food since I used them for my gun and bullets. I’ll just endure it for today and wait until tomorrow’s food distribution… by the way, don’t you need any food, Alpha?”

“No, I don’t need food. Neither do I drink nor sleep. So there’s no need to worry about me.”

“I see, well, I’m sorry but can you let me sleep then? Goodnight.”

After he said that, Akira laid down on his side. And then Alpha said to him gently.

“Goodnight and sleep tight.”

Akira, who had closed his eyes, thought to himself.

[…Goodnight, huh? It has been quite a while since the last time someone said that to me… Wait, this might even be the first time.]

As Akira let himself be taken by the drowsiness that was more powerful than usual because of his tiredness, he tried to search into his past for such a memory. Putting aside whether that kind of thing had actually happened to him or not, he at least had no recollection when someone said goodnight to him. He slowly fell deeper into sleep thinking about this.

On the next day, Akira opened his eyes just before sunrise. He stretched his body to completely wake himself up. Everything was just like his normal everyday morning up until that point.

Alpha who was right next to him greeted him with a smile.

“Good morning, did you sleep well?”

Akira jolted and immediately fully awoken as he pointed his gun toward the source of that voice. He showed a level of caution as if someone that he didn’t know suddenly appeared beside him.

Alpha looked a bit surprised seeing his reaction, but then she gently said to him.

“I’m sorry, did I surprise you?”

Akira’s expression changed from one that showed a caution towards a stranger to one that showed a little bit of trust, although with a bit of hesitation. Then he finally remembered about Alpha.

“…Alpha?”

In contrast to Akira, Alpha showed a graceful smile.

“Yes, it’s me. Did you forget about me?”

Akira finally calmed down. He let out a sigh of relief as he lowered his gun and awkwardly apologized to Alpha.

“…Sorry, I was just a bit surprised there. After all, most of the time, when you wake up with some unknown person by your side, there’s a good chance that the person is a robber.”

“It’s okay, don’t mention it.”

Akira confirmed that he didn’t make Alpha mad, and so he felt relieved as he didn’t end up losing the only supporter that he just acquired.

[…Now that I think about it, bullets won’t be able to hurt her, so I guess she didn’t feel that threatened when I pointed my gun at her. Thank god, that was really dangerous.]

Although he had quite a hardship yesterday, for Akira, this day was different from yesterday. Today is the day when his life together with Alpha starts.

After that, Akira went to the food distribution area. It's a place where food from the city is distributed for free. They do this twice per day as the morning distribution is done early in the morning. Although there was still some time left before it started, there were people already lining up for food. Akira added himself at the end of that long line of people.

Everyone should behave and line up nicely during the distribution. If someone were to cause trouble or cut in line, that person would not get any food. There were even times where the food distribution was stopped because of that, and of course, the person responsible for that was beaten to death.

This was also some kind of teaching method from the city. The city would be better if the people in the slum at least learned how to stay in line. It also reminded them that everyone in the slum will share the consequences if even a single one of them did not follow the rules set by the city. Thanks to that, and the sacrifices from the people who were beaten to death in the past, even the most ruthless people in the slum would line up orderly during the distribution.

The food distribution also functioned as an event to gather people from the slum who couldn't get food on their own. It's also a way to maintain the civil order. After all, people of the slum wouldn't just quietly wait for their death when they have no food and money. Instead, people who have met their wits' end would pick up guns, that strangely enough were circulating freely in the slum, and turn into robbers. So the food distribution minimized these kinds of people by only distributing a minimal amount of food. It's thanks to this food distribution that Akira could survive up till this point.

The distribution had started and it was finally Akira's turn to get his food. Once he had gotten his food, he moved a bit away from the line. Keeping a certain distance from the line is very crucial for a kid like Akira. If he moved too far away from the line, then someone would come to rob his food, but he also needed to put some distance from the line so that he wouldn't disrupt the line or cause any trouble. So it's the best line of action for him to eat his food at a safe distance. And since both the robber and the robbed had guns, it was best to avoid any needless fighting that might get someone killed.

Akira stared into the food that he received. It was a sandwich wrapped in transparent plastic with a unique code written on it. Due to some unknown reason, he didn't start eating immediately. Looking at that, Alpha inquisitively asked him.

"You won't eat?"

The food that he received was synthetic food produced by a still-functioning suspicious tool excavated from the old world ruins. The food was relatively safe to eat with vegetables that have been experimentally cultivated in the wasteland, though it was hard to measure in terms of the level of contamination of the area. It also came with meat from a biological monster that was believed to be safe for consumption. These kinds of food were distributed freely to the poor people of the slum with goodwill.

After giving out the food, they would wait for a while to check if someone died or mutated because of it. If nothing like that happened, they would sell it to the commoners. And then another food made from ingredients that no one knows for sure whether it's safe or not, would be distributed next time.

That was the real identity of contents in his sandwich; its bread, and everything inside it.

"…No, I'll eat it."

The people who distributed the food would not say anything about it, but the people who received the food had a slight idea of what was going on. It was the same for Akira, he had noticed it more or less, but not eating was something he could not choose to do. He would die if he didn't feed himself with that food.

The food's taste was rather weird. Leaving the price and the safety aside, it's not something that you would eat because you want to. You would only eat it if you wish to survive.

Akira said to himself that he would become a successful hunter so that he would be able to eat safe and delicious meals. As he kept eating his weirdly flavoured and potentially toxic sandwich, he glanced onto the person who

he thought would be able to grant him that dream. Alpha reacted by showing him a gentle smile.

Eventually, the people of the slum who survived by relying on the free food would pay back the generosity that they received. After all, they're the first line of defence against the monsters that attack the city. They'll be fighting against man-eating mutated creatures and autonomous weapons that would attack humans, using their raw flesh, blood, and guns that circulate freely in excessive amount in the slum. Thus buying time for the City's defence squad to completely exterminate all attackers.

Among all the people that survived the attacks, there would be some who still remembered how to fight against these monsters. These people would become the lowest level of Hunter. If they do well, they'll be able to bring back relics from the ruins and contribute to the economy of the city. Some portion of the profit from this will be used to maintain the free food distribution in the slum.

So in short, Akira becoming a Hunter meant that he did what the city expected from him. You might think that as someone without power, he had no other choice but to do so. However, Akira strongly believes that this was a decision he made on his own. So even if he was forced to pick his life choices once more, he would still pick the same path of becoming a Hunter.

…

Akira went to the Kuzusuhara City ruin for the second time, but this time, he was traversing the ruin following Alpha's guidance. Some part of the roads in the ruins were buried under the rubble of the destroyed buildings and thus, was much easier to get lost. There were even areas that were like a maze. If he wasn't careful, he might get trapped in them. Not to mention, there were monsters that had turned this confusing place into their nest and there were also places constructed as a home for them.

The Hunters who came to the ruins in order to search for relics would hunt monsters that obstructed them from reaching their goal. They sometimes maintained a road leading deeper into the ruin to make their job easier. And, as they went deeper into the ruin, some of them would encounter strong

monsters and meet their demise. After repeating this process multiple times, the terrain would be harder to traverse and filled with stronger monsters as you go deeper into the ruin. But of course, thanks to that, there would be fewer people who were able to go to the deeper part of the ruin, thus you could find valuable relics still left behind there. In short, the deeper you go, the more dangerous it is and the more money you can earn.

Akira knew that as well, that's why he only explored the outskirts of the ruin yesterday. But today, he aimed to go deeper due to Alpha's suggestion. Of course, Akira hesitated at the beginning but Alpha convinced him and so he decided to follow her suggestion.

He knew that he couldn't get any expensive relics if he didn't go to the deeper parts of the ruin. And since Alpha told him that she would lead him and that everything would be alright as long as he followed her instructions, it was rather hard for him to refuse. He had decided to become a successful Hunter and had come to this place because of the deal he made with Alpha. So if he couldn't move forward despite Alpha's guarantee for his safety, then it would be impossible for him to be a successful Hunter.

In the beginning, he would follow all instructions that Alpha gave him without asking anything. But since he ended up doing things that seemed to be meaningless to him, he slowly started doubting Alpha.

He kept his back on the wall as he slowly moving forward. Rather than entering the target building through the door that he could see from where he was standing, he instead climbed a mountain of rubble close to it and entered the building through the window. After that, he immediately got out from that building through the door that he saw before. Then, he kept passing through the same road that he had passed before. Afterwards, he stopped and stood in the middle of the road for a while. He kept making round trips for a few times before going deeper. Although he kept following all the instructions that he had received, he thought that all he did there were just repeating meaningless actions.

There were also times when he got attacked by weapon dogs. When that happened, he would shut up and follow Alpha's every instructions without asking for a reason. But every time he did something that he thought to be

meaningless, his distrust piled up bit by bit. Then eventually, he couldn't hold it any longer.

"…Say, Alpha."

"Yes?"

"It's not like you're actually lost or that you're picking the road in random, right?"

"I'm not." Alpha gave him a straight reply.

"…Really?"

"Yes"

"I feel like I went through the same exact road a few times though…"

"That's because it was necessary. We had to take that road in order to avoid dangerous routes. But if you want to hear more reason for that, then it would be because of your bad luck."

Alpha answered his question in a way as if she was teasing Akira. And so his face twitched a bit.

"…So it was my fault, huh?"

"Yep"

Alpha gave another straight answer to him. Although those short and straight answers were convincing enough to stop him from saying anything back, they weren't enough to clear up the dissatisfaction and distrust inside him.

After they continued walking deeper for a bit. Alpha suddenly turned back near the end of an alley and gave a similar instruction that she's been giving for a while.

"Let's turn back."

“…Again?”

Alpha passed through Akira’s side, he was about to follow her, but suddenly he stopped, his legs just wouldn’t leave the ground. He could see a big road by the end of the alley. He was curious about what’s going on in the other side. He thought that if only he could take a peek, then he might be able to clear up all of his dissatisfaction from all the meaningless actions that he’s been doing.

[…Just a bit won’t hurt, right?]

As he said that excuse to himself, he carefully peeked out his head a bit out from the alley. But what he could see there was just the same old scenery of the wasteland stretched out endlessly.

[…It’s not like there’s anything over here, isn’t it?]

Just when he felt super annoyed because of what he had just found out, Alpha suddenly shouted at him with a strong tone.

“Come back here at once!”

Right after that, from the middle of the empty wasteland in front of his eyes, a light flickered together with a thundering sound. Then he could see a monster there as its optical camouflage temporarily lowered at the same time as its cannon fired. The moment Akira saw it, his face froze. In the middle of the place that he had thought was empty, a huge mechanical monster had stood with its camouflage function on.

The big warhead landed on a building not too far away from Akira. In an instant, that building was blown into smithereens together with the deafening sound and huge explosion from the impact of the warhead. It caused huge rubble to rain down around the area and left a huge crater. The explosion was so big that the ground where Akira was standing shook.

Looking at how Akira was petrified due to the shock, Alpha yelled at him.

“Come back quickly!! You’ll die there!!”

Akira immediately turned and ran as fast as he could. He blazed through the alley as debris crumbled down. Surrounding buildings were shaking because of the impact from the warhead. He followed Alpha's instruction to hide in a room inside a building not too far away from there. Outside, the sound and shaking from the cannons were still present as dust and shards from the ceiling showered down on Akira.

Alpha looked at him with a cold expression and said to him in a harsh tone.

"That was dangerous."

Akira who was hiding in one corner of the room just hung his head in response. There was a silence between them for a while before he answered in a small voice.

"…I'm sorry."

Alpha could feel self-loathing in that small sorry of his. It was more of a mumbling so it was hard to figure out what he said right off the bat. Her cold expression changed into a pitiful smile. And then she said in such a gentle voice.

"…You might have something to complain about my instructions, but I will never give instructions that would cause you any trouble. You can ask all the questions that you want later because I'll answer everything until you're satisfied. I've said this to you before, even if my instructions seem to be meaningless to you, there's a good chance that you'll get killed in the middle of my explanation if you ask me for a reason. That's why I don't explain anything. I know that it might be hard for you to trust me since we just met yesterday, but it will be a big problem for me if you die, you know. That's why I don't want you to die. This might be hard for you but please believe me."

Akira knew well that Alpha was being considerate to him. While still feeling guilty inside, he opened his mouth.

"…I understand. I'm sorry for doubting you."

“Don’t mention it. I myself never thought that you would totally trust me right from the start. After all, trust is something that should be built up with time. For both of us.”

All of what she said and how she looked at him, Akira understood that all of them were her being considerate to him and it helped him to get back his mood. And so to change the mood, he forced a laugh. Although it’s just a facade, it’s better than nothing.

“… You’re right, I should also build up your trust for me. So then, what should I do next?”

Alpha confirmed how Akira was feeling. So she decided to be more careful about giving him instructions until he recovered his mood to a certain level.

“You should wait here until the condition outside has calmed down. I’ll somehow lead the monster away from here but it will take some time.”

“Lead, you say? You can even do that?”

Looking at how Akira was a bit surprised, Alpha gave off a meaningful smile to him.

“It’s limited only to some of the mechanical monsters and under a certain condition though. Those mechanical monsters are basically the autonomous weapon that runs on autopilot and programmed to eradicate any invaders. That type of machine gathers image from the outside through the image capturing devices spread around the area in order to get a good grasp of the situation of the area. At this very moment, the monster that we encountered earlier should still be attacking your fake image. Its first attack missed because of the same reason. This method won’t work on monsters with a built-in camera or if they only make a decision based on local information.”

“…Hypothetically speaking, what would’ve happened to me if that monster was of that local type monster?”

Hearing Akira’s question, she answered with a smile and a happy tone.

“Of course, that warhead would’ve scored a direct hit on you and turned you into minced meat.”

“I-I see.”

Akira flinched at her answer. But maybe it was because Alpha answered with such a happy tone that Akira didn’t hang his head in self-loathing.

“Maybe we should stay and talk to each other for a bit more here. That’s right, if you have anything you want to ask me, then just ask away.”

It’s hard to come up with a question when you’re told that you can ask anything. But looking at how Alpha was waiting for him with a gentle smile, it’s hard for him to tell her that he had nothing to ask about. After all, it was also one of Alpha’s instructions, so he thought that he should follow it in order to build trust between them.

Akira searched through his memories from the time he met Alpha for something to ask about. And then something came up to his mind.

“In that case then, I have one thing I want to ask, why were you naked when the first time we met?”

Alpha was already using clothing at that time. Or more like, she started putting on clothing right after they met. So in short, she intentionally let herself naked there. At that time, it was so much of a shock to him that he never thought about it. But as he remembered it now, he realized that it was indeed weird.

Alpha let out a mischievous smile. The moment he was taken aback by that smile, she erased her clothes and exposed her beautiful body. She showed her curvy and bewitching body to Akira without any trace of embarrassment or hesitation. Making an inviting gesture as she said in a sweet voice.

“What do you think?”

Although he was taken by surprise, Akira was captivated by it. But then he immediately turned his face away in panic and said.

“Even if you ask me so… I mean, like, it’s fine already, so just put something on!”

Alpha showed a bit of disappointment as she returned her clothing on.

“It is a pretty nice body, is it not? It is attractive, right? Don’t you think it would gather people’s attention? After all, you had a good long look back then.”

“I-I couldn’t help it, you know!?”

“In short, that was the answer to your question.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s a very effective method to look for someone who can see me. Only hunters would come to the Kuzusuhara City ruin and there are not that many of them, so it’s really not easy looking for someone who can recognize me, you know. That’s why I was naked to attract people’s attention. Moreover, after a lot of testing, it was the best choice so that people won’t run away or hide in caution when they see me for the first time.”

“I immediately felt cautious of you there though.”

“But even so, you didn’t run away on the first sight, right? What would you do if what you saw back then from afar was an armed soldier?”

“Well, I would run, or at least, I wouldn’t approach that person.”

“Right? That’s why, if I thought of an appearance that would let people to immediately know that I was unarmed and attracted their attention, followed by some kind of reaction that would not be fear, then being naked was the best choice. But well, I never thought that you would react like that and would be so cautious of me back then, I’m sorry.”

Akira frowned a bit. He had indeed overreacted for a bit now that Alpha pointed that out. Although her explanation was convincing enough for him, Akira had some urge to retort back since she teased him by showing him her naked body.

“…But still, I think being naked was going too far, you know?”

“No worries, after all, this body is only a fake body. So I don’t really mind as long as I could reach my goal.”

“Fake body?”

“Yep, my body is not real and is made with the help of computer graphics. I can freely modify my body’s gender, age, body form, attires at will.”

As if she wanted to prove her point, she suddenly transformed into a small girl younger than Akira. Then she kept changing her appearance from one to another across all ages in front of surprised Akira.

After that, she changed back into her original appearance. But this time, she changed her hair to be short and then changed it to be long enough to reach the floor. She even made it float as if gravity didn’t affect it and made it turn into a rainbow coloured strip. The same with her clothing, she changed it to a school uniform, OL suit, sexy swimsuit, camouflaged cloth, pilot suit, and many other kinds of attires.

Akira was surprised by her change at first. But as she kept changing her appearance from one to another, he instead started enjoying the show. As a kid who was living in the slum, he couldn’t find any form of entertainment. As such, Alpha who kept changing her appearance and pose in front of him was enough to charm him.

Alpha was closely observing Akira as the boy was captivated by her performance. In the beginning, she was only changing her appearance at random. But bit by bit, she intentionally aligned her appearance, age, body shape, hairstyle, and attire to Akira’s taste, but he didn’t realize that at all. She kept changing her appearance and observing Akira while making a gentle and charming smile as if she was enjoying herself.

“Just tell me if you have any request for my dress. Ah, or is it that you prefer me to be naked? Naked, huh. As I thought, since you can enjoy this beautiful body like that, maybe naked is the best one?”

In response to such a seductive question, Akira retorted in panic.

“Anything is fine, just put on something! Geez, Why the heck are you so interested in going naked?!”

“I think it’s better if you get used into something like this so that you won’t get caught in a honey trap later, you know. Don’t you think it’s important to have a special training for this?”

As he let out a bitter laugh, he thought that he would sound like a pervert if he answered “Yep, I do”. So in place of an honest answer, he instead pouted in order to hide his embarrassment and said.

“…No one would try to seduce a little kid like me, you know.”

But Alpha retorted back as if she wanted to close his escape route.

“There might be no one that would seduce you right now, but there are many people who would seduce a successful Hunter. I just don’t want you to get into some trouble with that kind of people when you become a successful Hunter. Ever since ancient times, there have been many men who fell to ruin because of women, you know?”

Of course, he wanted to be that successful as a Hunter, but if someone asked his honest opinion, he actually had no confidence if he could achieve that himself.

“…Do you really think I can be that successful?”

To his question, Alpha answered with full confidence.

“Of course you can. After all, you have me as your support. I promise that I would help you with everything except for a few things. That is, I won’t help you in working on your own inner will, motivation and resolve. Or

more like, since I can’t do anything about those things, you should do something about them yourself.”

Akira didn’t say anything for a while, but then Alpha could clearly see his strong resolve emanating from his expression.

“I understand. I’ll take care of my own inner will, motivation and resolve.”

Alpha joyously smiled, showing her satisfaction. That smile was both praise for Akira, who resolved himself, and an expression of happiness for successfully manipulating Akira’s inner will.

Silavin: Hmm… the author sure has his way of explaining fan service… I like it.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 4, The Result Of Gambling With One's Life

Index

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The sounds of the cannon outside the building had already ceased by the time Akira finally calmed down after what had happened. Looking at Akira who had regained his composure and since the sound outside had stopped, Alpha decided it was time to continue their exploration of the ruin.

"It seems that the situation outside has calmed down, so how about we continue exploring the ruin? But be sure to follow my instructions this time, okay?"

Akira nodded with a serious face and said.

"Yeah, I promise that I'll follow all your instructions properly."

"Alright then, let's go."

As Alpha showed a satisfied smile, she started walking outside. Akira followed behind her with a serious face.

They exited the building and went to the location where they had encountered the enormous monster. They passed through the destroyed building and climbed a mountain of rubble before they finally left the remaining ruins from the previous battle. Then they continued going deeper into the ruin.

Akira knew that he had no chance of winning against that monster using his cheap handgun. Even if he was equipped with specialized weapons to fight the monster, he knew that he still wouldn't be able to win against that monster. Not to mention that such a monster was roaming around the area while going invisible. Whether it's for the better or for the worse, going through such an experience heavily affected Akira. His face naturally turned tense, but he just shrugged the fear that was creeping into him. He believed that everything would be alright as long as he kept following Alpha's instructions while moving forward carefully.

Alpha looked satisfied at how Akira was behaving. She put extra effort so that Akira wouldn't encounter any monsters that were roaming around that ruin.

After going deeper for a bit, they finally arrived in a district that could no longer be regarded as a part of the ruin's outskirts. Alpha pointed her finger to a particular ruined building among many others in the area.

"Akira, we'll be able to gather our relics there."

Akira curiously looked at the ruin that Alpha pointed. Since he had risked his life to come this far, it was only natural for him to expect some results. But Akira saw nothing except the same old ruin that he had seen on his way there. Or at least, it did not look like a building that he would expect to see after coming this far.

"If it is okay, may I ask you why you picked this place?"

After he blurted out his question, he was a bit nervous since he realized that the answer to his question might cause him to doubt Alpha. But then Alpha answered his question with a smile filled with confidence.

“Of course it’s okay. I’ll explain it to you as you gather the relics inside.”

After seeing how Alpha answered it with such a confident smile, Akira knew that he can expect some good results. As such, he entered the building with a good mood.

The building that Alpha selected was a former commercial facility from the old world. As he kept walking inside, Akira could see the remnants of the riches that had existed in this place. He found a door near a destroyed cupboard. As he peeked in, he could see remnants of destroyed mechanical monsters scattered above the bloodstained floor. Beside a big bone from a dead biological monster, he could see skeletal remains of a human with their complete equipment. This was a place that once was filled with all kinds of goods, but now, it is filled with testaments of how many hunters had come there looking for relics and how these hunters fought against the monsters.

Most of the buildings from the old world era were strong buildings. But even so, there were holes in the walls and burn marks on the ceilings. It showed the intensity of the fight that happened in these buildings. Hunters with weapons strong enough to cause that kind of damage fought against monsters with the same powerful weapons here; all for the sake of claiming the relics from the old world.

The dead corpses that scattered around inside were the best proof to understand the value the relics in this place. It is also the solemn remains of the hunters who have paid the price of their greed for relics.

“By the way, as for the reason I picked this place, it’s because of its level of safety. Most of the mechanical monsters were originally a part of the security system. Although some of them are running wild because their control device was destroyed, their main duty as a part of the security system is to exterminate any invader. As such, the biological monster is also one of its extermination targets. So in short, there’s little chance for you to encounter a biological monster in the area protected by these mechanical monsters.”

“But wouldn’t that mean there’s a good chance I’ll get attacked by these mechanical monsters instead?”

“Most of the mechanical monsters are following a strict patrolling routine, so they only go to a certain place at a certain time. That’s why it’s unlikely for you to encounter them if you have the knowledge of their routine. While on the other hand, the biological monsters tend to move their nest depending on their condition or roam around on a whim which makes it hard to predict their location. So, as long as you’re with me, going to buildings with more mechanical monsters will be relatively safer compared to a place filled with biological monsters.”

For Akira who didn’t even know the back alley of the slum, he listened to Alpha while showing a genuine interest.

“I see. So you can do that too, huh. How can you recognize their routine?”

“There’re a lot of ways to do that. But it would take years for you to completely understand all the details, so I’ll skip the explanation for it.”

And then Alpha gave a mischievous smile as if she was invincible.

“But even so, do you still want to hear about it? I did say that I would answer all of your questions after all. So well, I don’t mind telling you.”

“Ah, nope. No thanks.”

Akira took what she said as a joke. He thought that she had no intention of explaining it to him from the start. Moreover, he had a feeling that he would have to listen to a long explanation if he replied back by saying ‘yes’, and so he winced a bit as he let the subject slide. Seeing that, Alpha smiled because Akira reacted the way she thought he would.

“Is that so? Well, do tell me if you have a change of mind. That aside, there’s one more reason as to why I picked this place, and that is because of the relics in this place.”

“The relics in this place? Are the relics left here that expensive?”

“Well, the value of the relics is indeed important, but it’s more important whether you can bring them back home or not. Even if there’s a relic that can fetch you a lot of money, what do you think you could do if it weighs 10 tons? After all, even if it’s a light relic that you could carry with one arm, it would be hard to bring it back home in case you encounter monsters.”

“Well, that’s true.”

“So, it must be something that’s possible for you to carry safely back home and can fetch quite a lot of money. I picked this place after I included all of these factors into consideration.”

Akira was fully convinced that it was worth risking his life to come to this place after listening to Alpha’s explanation. But from there, he thought of something else.

“…Wait for a sec. Does that mean that the area I was exploring yesterday had no valuable relics?”

“That area was already fully depleted. It’s a place where even a kid like you could explore, so if it still had a lot of valuable relics, then it should be flooded with hunters right now. But that wasn’t the case, right?”

“…You’re right, that does make sense.”

As Akira thought all his risk that he took yesterday were for nothing, he was finally hit with tiredness.

“I always thought that I would be able to find relics in the ruin as long as I work hard. But… It seems that I was too naive. So it was pointless, huh?”

Looking at how dejected Akira was, Alpha gave off a smile to him as if she was trying to cheer him up.

“But thanks to that, you were able to meet me. So I think it was worth risking your life going to that ruin yesterday, you know? You’ll see from

here on just how lucky you are to be able to meet me. So you can look forward to it, okay?”

Akira laughed as if he cheered up for a bit.

“You’re right, I’ll be looking forward to it.”

“Just leave it to me.”

Alpha showed him a smile full of confidence as she replied back.

There were quite a lot of cheap relics in the outskirts of the ruin that he was in. Normal hunters usually wouldn’t even bat an eyelash for such cheap relics, but those relics were valuable enough for a kid from the slum like Akira. As such, Akira didn’t need to work hard to search for the relics. Alpha knew this as well, that’s why she had guided him into that ruin.

There are a lot of people other than the hunters who visit the ruins. For example, companies usually spend a lot of money to send soldiers into the ruins. These people would sometimes help each other and sometimes kill each other as they search for relics. They will stop only when both sides think that the relics aren’t worth the bloodshed.

When they finally decided that the ruin isn’t worth all the fighting, they would leave the place by themselves. First of all, the companies would pull back their soldiers. Since these soldiers cost a lot of money, it’s only reasonable that they have abnormally good equipments and skills. But because of that, every death of soldiers bleeds money. Thus, the companies would quickly call their soldiers back unless it was a rare and priceless relic like the production equipment from the old world that the current technology can not hope to replicate. After all, if it’s just the common relics, they can buy it from the Hunters. For big organizations loaded with money, like these companies, they would solve anything with money as long as it’s possible.

After the soldiers have left the ruins, the hunters will pull back but only after weighing the consequences of their decision. They will compare the threat from the monsters against the reward that they can get from the

relics. They will decide to go back after calculating that they will still get quite a lot of profit from selling the relics already in their possession.

Then finally, both the skilled common people and the unskilled common people will withdraw from the ruin. The skilled people are those who use their skill to barely stay alive and fight back the monsters as they gather relics. While the unskilled people are those who get baited by their own greed and run into their death. Thanks to both of these people, the number of relics left in the ruin will decrease as the number of dead bodies pile up. They'll leave the ruin only when the number of dead bodies outweighs the value of the relics that they can find. Only after these people withdraw will the ruins be finally left alone.

Today, Akira had stepped into that lonely ruin that was more desolate than usual due to the huge number of monsters roaming around that place. Normally, he wouldn't even be able to reach that place. For a place that had been left behind by Hunters with full equipment since they thought that it wasn't worth their risk, it still contained quite a lot of expensive relics.

But Akira had no idea of the value of these relics. He just kept stuffing things that Alpha pointed into his paper bag. Even the paper bag that he was carrying was something that he found inside the ruin since the bag that he brought from the slum tore open due to the weight of the relics.

After he finished collecting all the relics in the area, Akira looked rather worried. The grocery paper bag was rather thin and didn't look durable.

"…It's not like it will rip before we reach the city, right?"

"Don't worry. That paper bag is from the old world. In other words, it's also a relic from the old world. It's stronger than it looks, so it will be fine."

"I see. The old world technology is really something."

After that, Akira peeked into the bag. It was filled with relics carefully chosen by Alpha. These relics were small objects that even a small kid could carry around. There were a lot of objects that Akira didn't know about. A fine knife with its sheath, some unknown mechanical parts, some

boxes that Alpha said were filled with medicines, something that looked like a bandage, an object that resembles a wristwatch, and so many other things. There was still some space left in the bag and it wasn't too heavy.

"…Shouldn't we take back some more relics?"

Since he had come that far, he wanted to carry as many relics as possible. But Alpha responded to his naive question by shaking her head and making a serious face.

"No. This is already the limit of how much relics you can take. It is the maximum weight limit with which you can move freely on your way back home. I'll try my best to be careful on our way back, but in case if you encounter a monster, then you would be run away while carrying this paper bag. Thus if it's too heavy, then you won't be able to run away and end up getting killed. Even if you have the choice of just ditching the relics behind, it's better if it's not too heavy so it won't consume a lot of your stamina. So don't be greedy, okay?"

Akira did value his life, and more than that, he had decided to obey Alpha's instruction as much as possible. So, although it's rather frustrating, he nodded and gave up his naive thinking.

"…I understand. So then, just how much will all these relics fetch me?"

"To be honest, I don't know. After all, the price of relics changes with demand. And also, it's not like you'll sell everything. Leave the knife behind for yourself and it might be a good idea to not sell the medicines too. After all, it would be bad if you get hurt and don't have the means to treat yourself. Just think of them as some kind of insurance."

"Then that means that I have even less to sell now…"

"Those are necessary things, so just bear with it."

"…Okay."

And so, it was decided that he would only sell half of all the relics that he had. Although he was rather displeased, he knew that it was the best that he could do at that time and quickly got over it.

“Well then, let’s go back to the city. Our way back home won’t be easy, so let’s be careful, okay?”

“Ahh, Okay.”

“If you step into an area protected by those monsters while carrying these relics, then your movement will be slowed down. If the previous situation occurred again, then this time you’ll surely turn into minced meat. So you really need to be careful.”

As Alpha gave off a meaningful smile, Akira winced a bit.

“A-alright”

“Well, let’s go then.”

Once again, Akira nervously followed Alpha while she was giggling cheerfully.

Akira was somehow able to come back to the outskirts of the ruins. It’s still a part of the wasteland so it’s pretty much a dangerous place. But compared to the deeper parts of the ruins that was filled with monsters, it was way safer here since he did not come across any monster here. His nervousness vanished after getting out of the ruins. Knowing that he was not completely safe yet, all the tiredness suddenly hit him and he let out a big sigh.

Looking at him sighing, Alpha smiled and said.

“We can rest for a bit if you’re tired, you know? I’ll watch over our surroundings, so you can rest easy.”

“I see, but I want to get back to the city as soon as possible, so let’s continue for a bit longer.”

“Alright then, how about we have a chat while walking back home?”

Even if she said so Akira, a kid who grew up in the back alley of the slum, didn't have much to talk about. In the end, Alpha would talk while Akira simply responded to her.

"By the way, did you know that Kugamayama City was actually built for exploring this Kuzusuhara ruin?"

"Ohh, I see. You do know a lot of things."

"I might look like this but I actually know a lot of things, you know. Although, it's all about the eastern region. I know nothing about the center and the western region."

"The western region, huh… I don't know much about it. But I heard that it's the territory of the demons."

"I don't know much either. I have only heard rumors about that place, like the technology in that place doesn't advance at all or like mages exist in that place."

"As for the central region. What do they call it again? 'Nation State'? I heard that there is a lot of stuff happening there."

"If I have to give a rough explanation, The Central United Nations, or in short, The United Nations – All the nations united under that government is considered as a part of the central region and their government system is called as the Nation States. All the area east of the central region is called as the eastern region. The Corporatocracy of the Eastern Region refers to all the regions under the Corporate Government. Finally, all the area west from the central region is called as the western region. It's a place filled with rumors that I don't guarantee are true or not. Rumors like there's no gun there or magic exists in that place or a species known as elf lives there. Since it's a place filled with mysteries, there are a lot of people wanting to explore that area. Akira, do you have some interest in that too?"

"Nope, rather than that, I'm more interested in learning the common sense of the eastern region. After all, I can't read letters yet."

“I understand. Besides reading and writing, I’ll be adding common sense lecture to your special training. So just leave it to me.”

“I-I see, thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

Since Alpha gave him an extensive offer, he felt a bit of gratefulness mixed with fear. After all, the sentence ‘there’s no free lunch’ had already rooted deep inside him. Alpha just showed Akira a gentle smile. All that she’s willing to do were also for her own sake.

Once he arrived at the Kugamayama City, Akira immediately headed to the Exchange Centre of the Hunter Office. There were several Exchange Centres inside and outside the city. Depending on the place where you exchange your relic, the value of that relic might change. The Exchange Centres inside the wall mostly serve the First-Class Hunters. Thus those places are always filled with valuable relics. The competition between companies for such relics drives the price higher and higher.

Akira went to an Exchange Centre located in the lower district close to the slum. Most of the people who come here are new Hunters and people from the slum. It has the worst rate of all the Exchange Centres. People used to come here bringing things that can’t even be categorized as cheap relics. As time passed, the place that only bought relics turned into a shop that would buy almost everything. It became an important place for the people of the slum as it was one of their only sources of income.

Once he entered that place, he took out the relics that were reserved to be sold from the paper bag and put them on a tray. Then he took the tray and lined up in front of a counter. As Alpha told him, he didn’t sell the knife and the medicine box.

The attendant of the counter was a young man by the name of Nojima. When he saw Akira’s appearance, he knew that Akira was only a kid from the slum. So he was about to serve him like when he served any other kid from the slum. But once he saw the relics on the tray, his conduct changed suddenly. After all, they were not things that you could get in the slum.

“Show me your Hunter ID if you have one.”

Akira took out his Hunter ID that looked like a scrap of paper. Nojima took the ID and operated the terminal in front of him, then he returned Akira’s Hunter ID together with 3 coins. After that, he picked up the tray together with the relics on it and put it on a shelf behind him.

Akira stood there and stared at the three coins. 1 coin is worth 100 Aurum, so it’s 300 Aurum in total. Aurum is the currency issued by Sakashita Heavy Industry, one of the 5 big companies in the Corporate Government. The circulation of Aurum is strictly under the control of its sole issuer, The Sakashita Heavy Industry, thus it was mostly used in the economical areas under its influence. Kugamayama city is one of those areas.

The worth of 300 Aurum differs from person to person. For people who live in the lower district of Kugamayama City, it’s enough to buy a cheap meal. While for the people of the upper district, it’s just a spare change that isn’t even enough to buy a cup of water.

To earn this money, Akira had to endure attacks from a huge monster which almost got him killed, but luckily survived thanks to the support from Alpha. He had to go to a place that he normally wouldn’t be able to reach, to bring some relics. Recollecting his experience, he stood there with the money that he got on his hand after all the hardship that he went through by risking his own life. It was only 3 coins, only 300 Aurum.

Akira’s face was reddened with anger as his eyes met Nojima’s eyes. Nojima knew from the start that was exactly how Akira would react. As Akira was about to complain, Nojima gave an explanation to him as if he was reminding him.

“I know you have a lot of things that you want to say. But for an unknown Rank 1 Hunter with no past achievement, it’s already been decided that the first commission will be 300 Aurum only. The inspection of the goods will be finished by tomorrow or maybe even take longer. You should feel thankful for getting paid 300 Aurum for turning in goods that we don’t even know. They might even be just trash, you know. Once the inspection finishes, I’ll give you the rest of the money the next time you come here.

But if it’s worth even less than 300 Aurum, then we’ll have you to pay us instead. If you’re confident that you just sold us expensive goods, then come again next time to sell something else. The ID confirmation will be done through your Hunter ID, so if you lose it, then you can forget about your money and our trust. That’s all, any question?”

After listening to Nojima’s explanation, Akira understood the situation and was somehow able to accept some part of it. But his face still looked hostile since he couldn’t accept the whole situation, at the same time he knew that it’s meaningless to protest.

“…I just have to come here again tomorrow, right?”

“That’s only if the inspection has finished by tomorrow. The more expensive a relic is, the more time it will take to inspect it. And even if we’ve finished the inspection, it’s still meaningless if you don’t bring any goods, so bring something to sell with you. I’ll only give you the leftover money after you handover some goods to us.”

Although Nojima was very strict to him, he somehow felt that Nojima was being considerate to him.

It’s not really rare for a small kid like Akira, aiming to be a Hunter, to come to the Exchange Centre after somehow obtaining some relics. Nojima had seen these kinds of children a few times before. But only a very small amount of them would come there again for the second time, it was either because they gave up being a Hunter or got killed. And the number of kids who would still come back after their first 10 days was even lesser.

“…I don’t know just how many crazy things that you must have done to get those relics. But if you aim to live as a Hunter, you’ll have to do those crazy things on a daily basis. If you get your heart broken by just this much, then you should stop, otherwise, you would die.”

Akira replied back with a serious look.

“No way. If it’s just risking my life then it’s no different compared to life in the slum. I’ll rise to success, I definitely will.”

Someone with a strong resolve will obtain strength, and in turn, this strength will draw out that person’s full potential. Nojima smiled a bit as he could clearly feel the resolve from Akira’s words.

“Is that so? Well, just be careful out there.”

Nojima cheered up as he thought that the boy in front of him was going to be fine.

Silavin: Nojima seems like a nice chap. I was expecting the guy to try and scam Akira out of his stuff. But who knows? Maybe he did in the past and after numerous kids have died, he learnt to be more sympathetic.

BTW, Proofreading request for this novel has been closed. Thank you for those that have showed interested.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 5, The Value of One's Result

Index

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Standing outside the Exchange Centre, Akira kept staring at the 300 Aurum on his hand. Although he did get a clear explanation about why he got so little compensation, he still couldn't fully accept it. He then let out a sigh as if he was expelling unwillingness from his heart and put the 300 Aurum, compensation that he got from risking his life going to the ruins, into his chest pocket.

Alpha smiled as if she was trying to cheer him up.

"Don't worry, you'll receive the rest later. So just patiently wait for it, okay?"

Akira composed himself and his expression calmed down as he gave Alpha a deep nod.

"…Yeah, you're right. I shouldn't let it weigh me down."

As he somehow was able to force himself to calm down, he used that momentum to start thinking of his next plan.

“Alpha, I’m planning to go to the ruins again tomorrow, is that fine with you?”

“Of course. In that case, you should take a rest for today. I’m sure that you’re pretty tired.”

“Yeah, I really am tired. Let’s just take a rest for the day.”

Akira moved his gaze to the contents in the paper bag that he was carrying. The bag was filled with a knife, medicines, and many other things that he didn’t sell. For the current Akira, those things were really valuable.

“Well, we still have to hide these stuff though. So let’s head to the back alley first.”

As he was heading to the place where he had slept yesterday, Alpha suddenly gave Akira a signal to stop.

“What’s wrong?”

“Akira, be careful.”

At the direction where Alpha was pointing, 3 children appeared from a small branch road. As Akira was alerted by those children, 2 more children appeared behind him. All these children were from the slum just like Akira and their ages were more or less the same as him.

The leader of these children was the boy named Darbe who was standing right in front of Akira. He laughed and started making demands to Akira.

“Take out your money, you do have some with you now, don’t you?”

As expected, after hearing such a demand, Akira’s expression turned stiff. But he decided to try to defuse the situation.

“I have no money with me. You should know that by just looking at me. If you’re going to rob someone, then look for someone who is carrying money.”

At a glance, Akira's argument did look valid. If these children actually came to him only for screwing around and not for money, that should be enough to discourage them at least. But Darbe laughed repulsively and tilted his head as if he was mocking Akira.

"Stop with the lie, I saw it, you know? You just came out from the Exchange Centre, right? You headed to the ruin today and yesterday, but unlike today, you didn't go to the Exchange Centre yesterday. So you did find something, didn't you? Which means that you have some money with you right now."

Darbe and his gang had seen Akira go to ruins and decided to standby around the Exchange Centre. Compared to venturing into the ruin looking for relics themselves, it is way safer to just rob the people who return from the ruin. There are many people who follow this line of thinking. As for these small children, there was no way they could rob an adult Hunter, and so they had no other choice but to rob other children like Akira. This was one of the reasons why the number of child Hunter kept decreasing.

Akira let out a sigh and answered honestly.

"Look, I have no more than 300 Aurum."

"Hah? Stop screwing with me."

"I'm not screwing with you. They didn't give me anything more than 300 Aurum for all the things that I brought here. I'm not lying, they said that it's the rule. So you see, I don't have much money and it's not worthy of ganking me with 5 people. If you understand now, then just go somewhere else. "

Darbe looked at Akira with suspicion. But he did not look like he was lying. Moreover, he remembered that he had heard from someone before that the first payment for a new hunter is no more than 300 Aurum. And so he clicked his tongue in frustration.

"What the heck, And here I thought that we would get a lot of money for the first time after a while. Stop doing something so misleading like that!"

“My bad, so, can I go now?”

It seemed that the other children had lost their will. But that was not the case for Darbe, he still looked like he would tell the other children to attack Akira. Darbe scanned Akira for anything that looked expensive. But Akira was only wearing a ragged dress that was not worth robbing. Moreover, the paper bag that he was carrying was so dirty that it did not look like it had anything of value. Normally, that would be enough to make him give up, but he was so frustrated since he had promised his friends.

His frustration finally reached its peak, he let his emotion take over his body and pulled out a gun.

“Goddammit!! I don’t care anymore!! Give me your 300 Aurum if you don’t want to die!”

Akira who was already tensed, stiffened even more.

“…You won’t get anything from trying to shoot me, you know? After all, I would definitely fight back. Do you really want to do this for just 300 Aurum? Just stop it.”

“Shut up!! Just handover the money!!”

Fighting to the death against a penniless person would only make them deplete their money on the bullets. Moreover, fighting a cornered opponent might cause them fatal injuries. Darbe understood that, but he was looking for a way to vent his frustration and was pushed by the momentum after he pulled his gun. It’s 5 vs 1 and he already had his gun out first, having such an advantage made Darbe take a rash decision.

Akira’s face got grimmer. It was only 300 Aurum, it was not an amount worthy of risking his own life. While at the same time, it was the money that he had earned after risking his life and it was the very first compensation that he got as a Hunter. So in short, that money was not something that he could easily give up on, thus Akira had to make a difficult decision.

Suddenly, Alpha stood in front of Akira and looked at him with a relaxed smile.

“Akira, answer me quietly. Don’t worry, I can hear you no matter how small your voice is. Do you understand?”

“…Okay”

“If it’s needed, I’ll give you my support, so what are you going to do? Handover the money? Or escape? Or maybe kill them?”

If he just gave away the money that he had gotten after risking his life, it might let him survive longer. But it also meant that he had to give up on his money again next time.

He might as well survive if he ran as far as he could. But it meant that he had to run away again next time.

And lastly, he might survive if he killed them. But there was a chance that he might get himself killed in the process.

Akira made a decision without even hesitating.

“…I’ll kill them.”

Alpha smiled without showing any animosity.

“Roger that. I’ll give you instructions then. First of all, we’ll break through the encirclement. You can pass through the opening between the 2 children behind you, after all, they’ve lowered their guards and are standing a bit further away from each other then the rest. Turn back, take 2 steps forward, then lean forward as if you got tripped and run through the gap between those 2 children. After that, immediately jump into the small alley on the right side and we’ll start fighting back from there. You get that?”

“…I understand. And when exactly should I turn back?”

“Do it now.”

Akira immediately turned back.

On his first step. the other children stiffened as they were surprised when Akira suddenly turned back.

Then on his second step. the other children extended their hand trying to grab Akira. But their hands reached nothing as Akira leaned forward as if he had tripped. After that, Darbe pulled the trigger, but his bad aim had caused the bullet to pass above Akira who was leaning forward.

The other children were surprised by the gunshot from Darbe and stood stunned temporarily. Akira used that opening to go to the alley on his right and continued running. When the other children snapped back to reality and hurriedly checked the alley, Akira was long gone.

The boy who had narrowly missed Darbe's bullet came to him.

"Hey!! That was dangerous, dammit!!"

"Shut up! It's that boy's fault for moving so suddenly!! That damn boy, I'll kill him!! Hey!! What are you standing around for? Chase after him!!"

Another child replied back with an annoyed tone.

"Just give it up, there's nothing we can get from robbing a poor kid like him, right? Moreover, he already got away from us. If you're really going to aim for him, let's just wait until he comes back to the Exchange Centre again. After all, I'm sure he'll have a lot of money by then."

Darbe clicked his tongue in annoyance at his friends who had lost their motivation and gave up on chasing Akira. They disbanded and started getting on their own different ways. But just after taking a few steps, Darbe, who was unwilling to give up on Akira, looked back to the alley where Akira had vanished.

At the next instance, Darbe's expression turned grim. Akira suddenly jumped out from the alley while pointing his gun at him. Darbe was able to

evade Akira’s bullets since he was coincidentally looking at him. But the other children took the bullet and fell down while crying in agony.

“Damn you!”

Darbe was about to attack back as he pointed his gun to Akira’s direction. But when he did so, Akira was already gone and there was no one where he aimed. The surprise and confusion that came due to an enemy who appeared out of the blue started to die down. But in exchange, anger started to swell inside him overwriting the fear of death. His hand started trembling while holding his gun that was pointing to nothing.

“How dare he mess with me!!”

His loud voice that showed his anger reverberated around him.

—

Meanwhile, Akira was running on the back alley with a grim expression. Since he had immediately ran back into the alley without confirming whether his shots got any hit, he was able to distance himself from Darbe and his gang.

“Alpha! How was that?!”

“3 of them got hit, 2 of them rendered unable to fight. All of them are still alive.”

“I see, that was better than I had expected.”

Akira was not someone who was skilled in using a gun. Normally, it would be impossible for him to just jump out of an alley and hit 3 shots. An amateur would normally jump out of the alley and take his time aiming before pulling the trigger, then he would stand there to confirm whether his shots got any hit. But if Akira did that, he would definitely get shot back.

Who made it possible was Alpha. Alpha went out from the alley before Akira and stood in an efficient shooting position while pointing at Darbe and his gang. Akira just followed Alpha’s movement. He jumped out of the

alley to the position that Alpha showed and pointed his gun to the directions that he already knew beforehand by looking at Alpha, then he shot a predetermined number of bullets in those directions as fast as possible before running back to the alley. It was only because Akira followed Alpha's instructions precisely that he was able to successfully execute the surprise attack.

But it was not like his enemy had been defeated. The battle still continued.

"We're moving to the next position. This way!"

"Alright."

Akira kept running in the back alley as he was following Alpha.

Darbe was watching his surroundings with his gun ready as he peeked into the alley where Akira disappeared. He didn't see Akira there, but he thought that Akira might be lurking somewhere nearby. So, he brought his friend, who fortunately didn't get shot, and cautiously walked deeper into the alley.

One of the children shouted at Darbe with an uneasy look as Darbe was moving deeper into the alley.

"H-hey!! What are we going to do with them?! Are we just going to abandon them?!"

Darbe answered with a stern expression as if he was scolding back.

"We'll kill that boy first!! Otherwise, we won't even be able to move those guys to a safer place, you know?!! What would you do if he starts shooting at us while we're carrying them to the clinic?!!"

"I-I see, you're right… It's not like you're planning to abandon them, right?"

"If I was planning to abandon them, I would've been running away by now."

“I-I see.”

Darbe was immensely annoyed at his friend who he was talking with. He thought that if only these guys didn’t stop him, then they wouldn’t be in that situation.

—

Akira took a long detour to avoid encountering Darbe and his gang. Finally, he arrived back to where they were. He then carefully took aim at one of the boys’ head while keeping watch at the other children who were already injured. The dead kid, the fainted kid and the kid who saw Akira and whispered something, all of them were silenced as Akira pulled the trigger. There were 3 gunshots followed by 3 bodies rolling over the ground with holes in their heads.

“…That’s 3, only 2 more left.”

“Get back to hiding now.”

“Roger that.”

Akira withdrew to another alley and hid himself. As Akira rested his back on the alley’s wall and straightened his breathing, Alpha gave him her next instruction.

“Akira, take out the medicine that you didn’t sell and eat it.”

“But I’m not injured, you know?”

“Just take it, take about 10 pills.”

Akira was puzzled, but he immediately took out the medicine box from the paper bag and opened its seal just like instructed. He took out a few pills into his hand.

[…Since this is also a relic of the old world, then this is the medicine of the old world, right? This might be a super effective medicine. It feels like it’s

such a waste to take it while I'm not injured at all… But Alpha told me to take it, so…]

Since it was Alpha's instruction, it must have some kind of reason behind it. As Akira convinced himself, he swallowed the medicine.

—

Hearing the sound of gunshots, Darbe and his friends hurriedly ran back to his injured friends. Darbe's face twitched in anger looking at their dead bodies.

"Dammit, he circled around us, huh?!!"

Darbe's friends arrived behind him. Their face turned pale as they saw the dead bodies of their friends. One of them took a few steps back from Darbe before shouting at him with grim expression.

"I-it's your fault!! It's all your fault!! It's because you shot that boy!!!"

After shouting, he ran as fast as he could, leaving Darbe behind. As he ran, another gunshot reverberated. It was Akira who fired that shot, it missed. The boy kept running deeper into the slum while screaming and vanished.

Darbe was also thinking of running away but he couldn't. The hatred from seeing his friends getting killed and the scorn towards his friend who left him, pushed him forward. He just stood there without running away and shouted.

"That damn kid!! He's screwing with me!!"

There was only one branch road from where Akira could take a shot at the boy who was running. Darbe just shoved aside his fear of getting killed and ran towards the branch road.

As for Akira, he was getting himself ready for a shoot out against Darbe. He hid himself in the alley as Alpha was standing in front of him and telling him Darbe's position.

Akira was planning to shoot Darbe's head the moment he peeked into the alley, and for that, Akira was holding his gun with both of his hand and getting himself ready as he waited for that moment.

But something unexpected happened. Akira thought that Darbe would stop and carefully try to take a peek into the alley. But on the contrary, Darbe threw caution out the window and blazed into the alley.

Darbe thought that Akira would have run deep into the alley, that's why he sprinted full speed and plunged into the alley, but instead, he found Akira standing right beside him. He never expected such scenario.

Both of them were surprised. They found themselves in a close distance between each other. They hurriedly pointed their guns at each other and pulled the trigger at the same time.

Both of them fell to the ground, the bullet hit each other's arm. Both of them were severely injured. But as they were on the ground and writhing in pain, they thought of the same thing, the opponent was still alive and that shot wasn't enough to kill the enemy. Thus they hurriedly tried to finish their opponent and pointed their guns at each other again while ignoring the pain.

When Darbe was about to point his gun, he already found himself at the end of Akira's muzzle. Akira pulled his trigger and a bullet flew from his gun and hit Darbe in point blank range. It wasn't a killing shot, but it was enough to rob Darbe from his power to fight back. Darbe dropped his gun and fell down into the pool of his own blood, thus ending his short life.

After killing Darbe, Akira immediately looked at his injuries. There was a hole in his dress and quite a lot of blood was flowing out from it. It was a severe wound. But even so, he did not feel his movement dulled, he did not even feel any pain. As he was wondering at what was happening, Alpha suddenly shouted at him with a serious face.

"Akira, you have to tend to your wound."

"Alpha, for some reason, I don't feel much pain…"

“That’s the effect of the painkiller, the medicine that you took before. But it doesn’t heal the wound.”

“I see, so that’s why you told me to take the medicine beforehand, huh?”

It was all thanks to the painkiller that he could still move just fine. Moreover, since he got shot right after he took the medicine, he could immediately focus on tending his wound. Although the effect was light, it allowed Akira to survive.

“First of all, swallow 10 pills of the same medicine. Then take another 10 pills, open them up and sprinkle them onto your wound. And finally, dress the wound with the healing tape… Hurry up, if you faint and become unable to tend your wound, then you’ll die.”

Akira was somehow able to move his body that had gone numb. He took the paper bag that he dropped not too far from him and swallowed 10 pills. And then he opened up 10 pills with his still shaking hand and sprinkled them directly into his wound. The very same pain as when he got hit, assaulted him as he sprinkled the painkiller on his wound. He just clenched his teeth and somehow was able to bear the pain. And when he was done, he turned to Alpha while looking worried.

“A-Alpha, i-is this good enough?”

“Applying the painkiller directly to the wound would reduce the effectiveness of the painkiller. But on the other hand, that would let the nanomachine in the medicine to work directly on your wound, thus making it more effective. So just bear with it.”

Then for the final touch, Akira pulled out the object that looked like a bandage from the paper bag and dressed his wound with it.

“That should be enough. Let’s hurry up and move away from this place. It’s dangerous if we stay here for long.”

“I don’t even know if I can move… But I have to get away from this place no matter what or something bad will happen.”

Akira was somehow able to bear with the pain when he stood up and started walking. Every time he took a step, he could feel pain stung his whole body. But he managed to keep walking. Looking at how bad his wound was, it was actually a miracle for him to be able to move around like that. It only showed just how amazing the medicine from the old world was. It was able to heal him that much in such a short time.

But Akira was in so much pain that he didn't have the leeway to think about that at all. His face was twitching with pain as he kept walking.

Alpha looked at Akira who seemed like he was so close to fainting. To keep him conscious, she cheered him on with a serious face.

"Give your best!"

"Yeah"

Akira somehow managed to get to a different sleeping place from yesterday. He tried to keep himself awake as he was preparing his sleeping place, while watching his surroundings and being more careful than usual. He thought that he would definitely get killed if someone approached him in that situation. So he hid himself in the back alley in such a way so that no one would be able to find him. And when he finished preparing his sleeping place, he just dove into it and laid on his side.

"…Alpha, I'm on my limit. I'll sleep now, goodnight."

Alpha replied back with a soft voice while looking worried.

"Goodnight, have a good rest."

As Akira closed his eyes while still holding off the pain, his consciousness immediately flew off.

[…I hope I will still be able to open my eyes again tomorrow morning.]

Although he just made a wish there, he himself didn't know to whom he was wishing to.

—

Strangely enough, Akira woke up into a refreshing morning. As he was surprised by what happened, he was deeply moved when he found himself still alive.

“…I’m still alive, huh… Hm?”

When he checked his arm that was feeling weird, he found something on the place where he got shot yesterday. After looking closer, it was as if something was lodged in between his skin and the healing tape. So he cautiously peeled off the tape and found a malformed bullet. It seemed like the bullet was stuck in his body, and his body had pushed the bullet out.

“…Is this the bullet from yesterday? So it was stuck inside my body, huh?”

“That seems to be the case. It looks like the nanomachine tried to get the bullet out from your body but then it was obstructed by the tape. It might be a good idea to take the tape off.”

Akira was a bit surprised to find Alpha right beside him, but he was not as surprised as he was yesterday. This just means that Akira started to get used to having Alpha beside him.

After he forcefully pulled out the bullet that was planted on his skin, he put the tape back on the wound but did not feel pain any longer.

Alpha smiled again.

“Akira. Good morning. You’ve had a rough day yesterday but… Did you sleep well?”

“Yeah. I really had a good night’s sleep… I even overslept for a bit.”

The sun was already up, so it was way over Akira’s usual waking time. His stomach grumbled, he had not eaten anything since the night before and at this rate he would miss his morning meals too.

“Oh crap!! The food distribution hasn’t ended, right?!”

Akira hurriedly went to the food distribution place and he barely made it in time.

Originally, he was planning to go to the Kuzusuhara City ruins, but he canceled it due to Alpha's instruction. In the end, he decided to take rest for a whole day to fully recover his condition.

It was actually weird that he only needed a day's rest after getting shot at. Akira himself understood that it was indeed weird. But the pain had already gone and the numbness had, for the most part, disappeared. Akira finally realized that it was all thanks to the medicines from the old world. He was feeling awed as he was taking a rest in the alley.

[The medicines and the tape are both made by the old world civilization. So they are relics from the old world, they should fetch quite a lot of money if I sell them. As I thought, it was such a waste to use them… But then, I would've died otherwise.]

There are many objects created by the advanced technologies of the old world that can't be reproduced by the current technologies. And that is not only limited to medicines.

As an example, once, a certain small knife relic was found in the ruin. It could easily cut anything by only applying a very small amount of force, forget fish or meat, it could even cut steel and concrete. While at the same time, it couldn't cut human flesh no matter how hard you tried. At a glance, these two functions seems to contradict each other. Moreover, it wouldn't get dull even after you use it to split steel into two, it wouldn't rust even if you get it wet and it wouldn't corrode even when you dip it in aqua regalia. When the researchers from the companies turned off the safety check of the knife, it cut a tank, that was totally unreachable to it, into two before disintegrating it into nothingness.

More than half of the current mathematical knowledge were developed by decoding the mathematical knowledge of the old world. But even for the researchers who had spent their whole life studying, there were still so many relics that they were using without adequate knowledge of its operation. That's exactly why people will pay a lot of money for these

relics. Also, the real pleasure of being a Hunter is using these relics yourself rather than selling them.

His survival was all thanks to that highly effective medicine relics of the old world. Thus even for Akira who was not really knowledgeable, knew well that the medicines could get him a lot of money if he sold it.

But, he hadn’t realized yet that something much more amazing than the medicines, was right beside him.

Silavin: Nothing can replace a Wifu, Akira. Nothing.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 6, The Ghost of The Old World

Index

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Once again, Akira came back to the Kuzusuhara City ruins. He faithfully followed Alpha's every instruction as he moved deeper into the ruins. This time, they tried to not take the same route as yesterday. Even though he got shot not too long ago, he had to do a lot of physical work like climbing the ruins just like last time. But strangely enough, he did not find any difficulties at all.

Alpha gave Akira a smile as she was satisfied with how Akira was behaving and moving around.

"Look at you, it seems that your body is already fine."

"Yeah, I don't really understand why, but I'm really in a good condition today. Although I only rested for a day, I'm somehow feeling better than before I was shot. To be honest, this is rather scary."

Strangely enough, Akira's condition was abnormally superb. There was not even a single trace of tiredness on his face and his mind was sharper than usual. He could feel the power that was flowing inside his body right till his fingertips.

Akira came to realize his own physical condition and found it unnatural, even a bit creepy. Alpha spoke to him as if there was nothing weird about this.

“That maybe the effect of the medicine that you took yesterday.”

“Medicine? I’m indeed surprised that my wound healed that fast, but does it have anything to do with me feeling better than before I got shot?”

“I told you to take quite a lot of medicine just to be safe. It seems that it didn’t just heal your bullet wound, but it even healed your other wounds too.”

“But I shouldn’t have any other wounds, except the bullet wound though…”

In contrast to Akira who was getting more and more confused, Alpha’s smiling face did not change at all.

“Since we were free yesterday, I had asked you a lot of things about your daily life, remember? This is just a hypothesis made based on that information. I think the hard life that you’ve been through till now, has put your body under huge stress. So, your body was under a condition where it had non-lethal wounds.”

“Well, I agree that my life in the back alley is indeed a harsh one, but aren’t you exaggerating? After all, I could move around just fine, you know…”

“The living condition that you think as normal, is actually very bad. For example, if you keep living under such malnutritioned condition for a long time, then it will greatly deteriorate your body. After all, it’s as if you’re accumulating countless non-lethal micro wounds on the cellular level. The extra medicines that I told you to take yesterday as a caution, has healed those micro wounds that were accumulated in your body. I bet that’s why you’re feeling strangely healthier than before.”

“…So in short, does that mean that I was actually dying till now?”

As Akira showed a mix of conflicted and surprised expression to Alpha, she just returned Akira's look with a smile.

"Well, that is true. Aren't you glad that you're saved now?"

Akira's face frowned a bit, he realized just how harsh his life had been in back alley. But concluding all the hardships that he went through with just "I'm glad" did not sit well with him.

Even though they kept moving deeper into the ruins, they did not run into any monster. Alpha's instructions were normal and Akira did not even feel like he was traversing a place filled with monsters. Following Alpha's orders made him feel safe and helped him to be more relaxed. As such, although he was walking in the middle of a dangerous ruin, he was able to put his mind on something else other than being wary of his surroundings.

He was rather disturbed by the amount of leeway that he had, so he started a conversation, although they were in the middle of ruin exploration.

"Alpha, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, just ask away."

"Why are you using that appearance?"

Alpha was using a pure white dress with a lot of frills with both sleeves and its lower body filled with a lot of shiny ornaments.

"Oh my, doesn't it look good on me? Or do you want me to change to something else? Is this dress is not to your taste?"

Then Alpha playfully spun around while giving a beautiful teasing smile. Her dress fluttered around and her long glossy hair made a full circle. Then in place of her bare back, a boldly exposed chest appeared in front of Akira.

Akira was asking about Alpha's dress that did not fit the current condition no matter how you see it. But he was fazed by what Alpha did now and forgot about the question that he asked. Instead, he just normally answered Alpha.

“…Well, I do think it looks good on you. But still, if you want to talk about my taste, I actually like the dress that you were wearing when we first met.”

First of all, it was a unique dress from the old world that you can’t get to see every day, not to mention that their meeting left a strong impression on Akira. Thus, he came to like that dress. Alpha just giggled merrily as she knew well about that.

“The dress that I wore when we met for the first time, huh… So, in short, the birthday suit!!”

Right at the next moment, Alpha’s dress vanished. Then once again Akira got to see the beautiful body that was hidden under the glittering dress just a few moments ago. Akira was flustered and said.

“That’s not what I meant!! I meant the dress after that!! Don’t ever erase your dress like that!! Turn it back on now!! Why do you always show me your naked body like that??!!”

Alpha returned her dress and giggled a bit.

“To think that you’re not interested in this body, which was the result of a highly complex calculation inorder to make men’s imagination run wild. Akira, you’re really a small kid, are you in that age where you prefer to eat food than a girl?”

Akira became obstinate and said in a strong tone.

“Yeah I am, there’s no doubt that I’m just a small kid. If I don’t make enough money to buy food, then I’ll die. So yeah, I prefer food than a girl …So then, what is with that dress?!!”

There was a proper reason as to why Alpha was naked when she first met him. As such, he thought that there might also be a proper reason as to why Alpha was using an improper dress in the middle of the ruin. But it was not like he was desperate to know the answer. So if Alpha wouldn’t go along with him, then he’ll just drop the subject.

But then Alpha suddenly stopped teasing Akira. Although she was still smiling, she started to talk in a more serious manner.

“Do you still remember what I told you at that time? Didn’t I say that I needed a dress that would increase the chance of people noticing me and could elicit a reaction from them? Even now, I’m actively sending signals to your brain so that you can perceive me. But there’s something that interests me in that signal transferring process, you see.”

“Is there any problem there?”

“Actually, the management system of the Kuzusuhara City is still active and I’m hijacking that system to broadcast my image within a wide area. That’s why my image can also be seen through the equipment used by the management system of Kuzusuhara City. That’s also the reason as to why the mechanical monsters could see me the other day. So because of that, people with similar equipment will also be able to see me.”

Akira’s face stiffened as he understood what Alpha was trying to say.

“…So, in short, there’s someone who can see you right now, is it? Or that someone with such equipment is around here, right?”

Alpha’s smile vanished as Akira said that.

“Yeah. Don’t look back no matter what. That person is tailing you. He’s keeping his distance from you and he’s observing you, even right now at this very moment.”

Akira’s face turned grim. Alpha’s explanation was simple enough to make him understand the dire situation that he was in.

A bit further away from Akira, there were 2 hunters watching Akira’s every movement. A man by the name Kahimo was watching Akira with his binoculars. While another man by the name Hayya was watching Akira through his artificial eyes that were stuck on his half cyborg head. With such long range sight, both of them were tailing Akira from a distance.

They were very confident that an amateur like Akira wouldn’t be able to notice them. By looking at the equipment that they were using and how they seemed so familiar in using them, it was clear that both of them were not new Hunters who would only scourge the outskirts of the Kuzusuhara City ruin.

Kahimo had a rather puzzled look on his face as he was looking at Akira through his binoculars.

“That boy, he’s going quite deep into the ruin. Venturing deep with that amount of equipment is the same as suicide. What in the world is that boy thinking?”

Hayya just shrugged Kahimo’s question with a laugh.

“He’s not even thinking, he’s just a stupid boy. Isn’t that exactly why he isn’t limited by common sense and found those relics? The outskirt area of this place has nothing valuable left, that is the common sense of normal Hunters. I say that it’s faster if we just attack him and make him cough out information about the place where he found those relics.”

Kahimo answered back with an annoyed tone.

“Oii!! Weren’t you the one who stopped me from doing that?!! You stopped me by saying that it would be bad if we kill him by accident before he can tell us anything.”

Hayya just laughed at that rather tense exchange and tried to cool down the situation.

“Don’t say that. I never thought a small boy like him would be able to go that deep into the ruin, you see. Even you too thought that boy found those relics inside a building somewhere in the outskirts, right?”

“Well, that’s true. No one in their right mind would ever think that a boy from the slums would be able to go this deep all by himself, you know. This place itself is quite dangerous, and if we go deeper than this, it would be dangerous even for us.”

“You can say that again, so don’t be angry.”

It was not like both of them were following Akira because they were interested in making friends with him. Instead it was because they heard that a boy with measly equipment from the slum came to the Exchange Centre with an expensive relic. They were interested to find the place from where Akira found his relics.

It was common knowledge among the hunters that the outskirts of Kuzusuhara City ruin had nothing valuable left. But it was also not like the outskirts were completely devoid of anything valuable. There was still a good chance that you could find a lot of relics buried deep under the ruins.

There were numerous reports in the past where people found the entrance to certain places that should have been impossibly hard to find. As an example, recently there were reports saying something like a blocked access into a warehouse was somehow opened by chance from the monsters’ attack. But of course, it was not worth the risk to intentionally look for such a thing. Thus such encounters were really rare.

But when it did happen, a lot of Hunters would once again flood the abandoned ruin. If the first one who found the site could not bring all the relics in one go, then of course the leftover relics would be up for competition. So for that goal, there are people who keep their ears up for such a rumour to appear; Kahimo and Hayya were among those people.

There was a rumor going around saying that a small kid from the slums brought an expensive relic to the Exchange Centre and got himself involved in a shootout against other kids for the money that he received. Kahimo heard about this rumour, checked it and confirmed it. This also led them to believe that there existed a place which was accessible to a small kid from the slum and was filled with expensive relics. They believed that this place was located in the outskirts of Kuzusuhara City ruin. After all, there was no other place around the Kugamayama City other than that site where a small kid could explore safely.

They thought that if there were a lot of such relics lying around in the place found out by the kid, then that kid would definitely return to that place to

explore again. So, they decided to standby near the ruins looking for a kid, who met the description in the rumour, in order to get details about the place from him. And so they finally found Akira.

Kahimo was actually planning to capture Akira and make him cough the location of the place. But Hayya stopped him by saying that it would be bad if it turned into a fight and they accidentally killed him. Thus they changed their plan to follow Akira, who would hopefully bring them to the relics' location. But now they started to doubt their plan.

"Hayya, as I thought, we should just force him to cough up the location. After all, he's just a small boy with poor equipment. We should just be careful not to kill him by accident. You also want to do this the fast way, don't you?"

Hayya did not reply at all. So Kahimo became visibly annoyed.

"Hey, what's wrong??"

Hayya finally opened his mouth and muttered.

"…The boy… He should be alone, right?"

"Yeah, he should be alone, it doesn't seem like he has a friend hiding around here."

Kahimo was puzzled, he picked up his beloved binocular and looked at Akira one more time.

The binocular he was using was a pretty powerful binocular, it can see well from a very long range. It also had the night vision function so he could see clearly during the night as if it was during the day. Moreover, it can detect invisible light or see through simple optical camouflage. Then to top it off, it has the function to highlight monsters and people.

Other than this high-tech binocular, there were a lot of other equipment that uses network access, thus allowing them to retrieve the augmented reality information broadcasted from the ruins. But that function wasn't available

for this binocular. After all, there was a time when the mechanical monsters used that function for their advantage instead. At that time, they could not see enemies that were visible with naked eyes and almost got killed. Because of that experience, they set the binocular only for local function.

“He’s all alone. I don’t see any monsters, it’s only him.”

Hayya’s face twisted a bit and replied back in a fashion as if it was something that was hard to say.

“Well, Uhh. Let me say this first, I’m not under the influence of any drug, I’m not drunk, and I’m not trying to tease you or something…”

“Okay okay, then what? You’re being weird, you know?”

“…I can see a girl beside that boy.”

“A girl?”

Kahimo decided to recheck and looked back at Akira once again while making a puzzled face.

“Nope, nothing. It’s only him, him alone. I don’t see any girl, you know.”

“…I get it, you can’t see her, right? But I can see her clearly. A beautiful girl is guiding that boy.”

“If that is so, then tell me how she looks like, down to all the details.”

“…She’s wearing a white frilly dress that looks super expensive.”

“A frilly dress?? Have you gone nuts?? Where do you think we are? We are in the middle of the god-damn ruins, you know!!”

“It’s true!! I’m not lying!! And I’m not drunk either!! It’s definitely not an illusion!! I know better not to drink any alcohol or take any drugs before going to the ruins, you know!!”

Looking at how he reacted, Kahimo knew that Hayya was not lying. But it was also true that he could not see the girl. He made a puzzled look as he was confused by what was going on, but then he realized something.

“Hayya. both of your eyes’ parts are connected to the network, right?”

“Yeah, it’s equipped with high quality parts and of course I paid a huge sum of money for that. Although it has a network connection function that I’m so proud of, it can easily break in the middle of the ruin. It’s a high tech eye with a lot of functions, but its only downside is that it sometimes receives broadcasted transmission all on its own.”

“That’s because you got those parts through illegal means. After all, I bet you got those parts from looting dead corpses in the ruins. I’m sure the reason why those people died was also because of a sudden malfunction in their vision.”

“Shut up. Remodeling it is cheaper. So it’s fine, isn’t it? It helps a lot when you explore the ruins. But since its control device blew off together with its previous owner’s head, it’s not easy to change from one function to another. On the other hand, making a new control device will take quite a lot of money, so I’m putting that for later. But why did you ask me that out of the blue?”

Kahimo’s expression turned serious.

“I think that girl might be some kind of guide like feature of the ruin broadcasted by the network. Since you can see her while I can’t, then it means that she’s not a hologram, but rather, an augmented reality. There might still be an actively functioning system in the ruin that is broadcasting her image, that’s why your eye parts are receiving that strange information. So in short, she’s a ghost from the old world.”

Hayya was rather surprised as he looked back at Alpha to confirm what he was seeing.

“…That girl looks very real, you know? That girl is even casting a shadow. There’s nothing out of ordinary about her except for her dress. Broadcasted

images tend to have some differences compared to reality, like having no shadow, or having strange proportions, or having the ability to pass through walls. Basically they always have weird features. But that girl, except for her dress, she looks completely normal… Well, that dress itself is really weird though."

If it was not for Kahimo's serious expression, Hayya would have written that off as a joke. That is just how realistic Alpha's body was. Still with his serious expression Kahimo said.

"If that girl really is a guide like feature of the ruins, then it means that her image is being broadcasted with the technology of the old world. I wonder what kind of advanced technology they're using to be able to broadcast such a realistic image."

"…I see. So that's the ghost of the old world, huh. This is the first time I have seen it, it's really something."

Hayya kept looking at Alpha with curiosity. Since his partner not only believed in the girl that only he himself could see, his partner even came up with a reasonable explanation for that. Thus he couldn't stop himself from getting more interested in her.

As if to go along with their conversation or as if he had just remembered something, Kahimo opened his mouth again.

"…Now that I remember it, there's a ghost story in Kuzusuhara City ruin. If I'm not mistaken… The beguiling ghost."

"I've heard about that too. It's about a ghost that uses relic as bait and lures Hunters to go deeper into the ruins before killing them, right? I heard that there were many Hunters who followed her into the deeper part of the ruins and never came back. And then the ghost would lure Hunters that are still alive by using their dead comrades. Recently I heard that, rather than using human appearance, it even disguises itself as a cat or a dog."

After Kahimo gave a slight nod agreeing to what Hayya had said, he continued livening up the story with his tone and expression.

“Getting killed in the ruins while looking for relics, that way of dying is really normal for us Hunters. The real question is why there’s such a ghost story when it says that no one returned alive?”

“…Now that you mention it, I wonder why?”

“The answer is because there are people who didn’t follow it. The ghost only lures those who can see it and doesn’t lure people who can’t see it. It’s not like everyone can see it, you know. So it must be a story shared by the people who can see it to people who can’t see it. And since each person told a different story, there’s no way to actually confirm it. That’s why it has become a ghost story.”

Hayya shivered a bit. He realized that following Akira meant that they were also following the ghost.

“Wait for a sec, then that means that we’ll be dead if we keep following that girl, right?”

To Hayya’s question, Kahimo just laughed.

“…You can also think of it this way. Why do you think that boy was able to find an expensive relic? That’s because that boy can see that girl just like you. Then if that girl is a part of the guide function of the old world that is somehow still functioning right now, then she is guiding people who can still see her. That boy must have asked that girl for a place where he can find relics, and so that girl must have guided that boy to such a place while avoiding any monster encounters. So what do you think? That’s a good hypothesis, isn’t it?”

“I see!!! …Wait a sec, if just following her is enough to get relics, then why was that ghost story even created?”

“Following her guide would only lower the chance of meeting the monsters, it’s still possible to encounter them. Moreover, the Hunters who knew about her guide function might have spread that rumour to keep her for themselves. By repeatedly coming here and following her guide, they would quickly deplete the relics in the outskirts, so they had to go to the

more dangerous deeper part of the ruins. And while venturing deep in the ruins, one day they unfortunately encountered strong monsters and got themselves killed. That's why only the 'if you go with her, then you will get killed' part was left in the rumor. Basically, it's a ghost story that has been built over a long time."

As Hayya was convinced by Kahimo's explanation, he let out a laugh.

"So that's why, huh?! Then that means that it's not a problem if we follow her, right?!! Not to mention that boy was able to return alive, we won't get killed as long as we move carefully."

"There's no guarantee whether that assumption is true. But if it is true, then it will greatly increase our chances of finding relics. But well, the rumor says that it might get us killed, so it's still a dangerous thing."

Kahimo was trying to calm Hayya down. But Hayya was not able to suppress his excitement. He had found something that could easily find him a safe way to explore the ruins and find expensive relics. There is no Hunter who does not know just how valuable that is.

"It's fine, isn't it? You worry too much!! I won't simply let this chance slip by!"

"Calm down, let's keep watching him for a bit more."

Kahimo looked at Hayya with a calm look and thought.

[…People must have killed their own teammates in order to monopolize it. And the one who survived would tell other people that his friends were killed by the ghost of the old world. Of course, the one who could see that ghost was the one who killed them. There's a good chance that this guy will also do the same. But well, this guy is just too stupid. It will be fine if I can come up with a reason for him to go ahead of me…]

As he looked back at Akira, Kahimo was being too careful so that Hayya would not notice his plan.

—

Akira asked Alpha with a grim expression.

“Do you know what kind of people are following me?”

“2 guys. Judging by their equipment, they must be Hunters. They’re pretty well armed.”

“…Is there any chance for it to be just a coincidence? I mean, maybe it’s not like they are really tailing me, but more like they saw a small boy going into the ruins alone and decided to follow him out of curiosity. Or maybe it’s just that they are going in the same direction as me by pure coincidence…”

“No, that’s highly unlikely. I’ve been observing them for a while now hoping for such a possibility, but it seems that there’s no mistaking it that they’re tailing us. They kept their distance from us when we stopped to watch our surroundings earlier. So it’s obvious that they’re tailing us.”

As Akira kept his grim expression, he showed a glimmer of hope as he asked.

“…But why are they following me? Even if they attack me, I don’t have any money with me, you know. They should be able to clearly see that, right?”

That question was phrased as if Akira was hoping that Alpha’s assumption was wrong. She had already thought about his reaction when she revealed the truth out on Akira’s face.

“My guess is that they want to know how a kid like you were able to bring an excessive number of relics to the Exchange Centre. The real reason why they’re tailing you is because they hope that you will lead them to a place filled with relics. And while they are at it, they might as well just kill you and take the relics for themselves. I think that they had someone standing near the Exchange Centre in order to look for Hunters who seem to be easy targets, easy enough to kill while also bringing expensive relics to the

Exchange Centre. Or they may as well buy that information from someone inside the Exchange Centre. They have a lot of reasons to see you as an enemy. Actually they have more reasons to be your enemy than your friend. So Akira, if you don't treat them as your enemy, you might get yourself killed, you know?"

Akira finally gave up his naive thinking and took a deep breath. He felt even more uneasy after hearing Alpha's explanation.

"…Dammit!! It's the hunters this time, huh?!"

Two days ago, he had a shootout with little kids of the slum who had guns with them. But even so, he almost got himself killed and barely escaped alive. Now this time, he was going to fight with fully equipped Hunters. Akira got a headache from this sudden jump of difficulty level.

"Akira, just get into that building for now. Just do it as naturally as possible and try to be careful so that you won't be spotted by them."

"…I understand."

Akira moved carefully just like he was ordered to. But he was still feeling rather annoyed as he was dragging his heavy feet into the building. Then after he arrived in a room that Alpha guided him to, he rested his back against the wall and sat down.

"There's no monster in this building, so you can be at ease."

"…Yeah…"

Akira's reply was gloomy. He was thinking about how he should fight the hunters who were tailing him, but he could not come up with any good ideas. He had thought up some scenarios, but all of them ended up with him getting killed.

"Akira!"

Akira lifted up his face in reaction to that rather strong toned call. He suddenly saw Alpha's face really close, right in front of him, he let out a

small shriek as he jumped back in surprise and hit his head against the wall. That pain and surprise woke him up from all the bad scenarios that were running inside his head.

When the pain and the surprise had subsided, Akira returned to his senses and calmed down. With his unfocused gaze, he looked at Alpha. Seeing that he has calmed down, Alpha gave off a strong but gentle smile.

“Get a hold of yourself. The situation is not as bad as you think it is. I will never let you get killed while I’m providing support.”

Akira was surprised after hearing that, but it made him more hopeful.

“Can we run away from them?”

But Alpha’s answer to that question was totally unexpected for Akira.

“We won’t run. We’ll fight back. We’ll get them instead.”

Akira’s hopeful expression was instantly crushed as he was surprised by that answer.

“Can we really do that?!! It’s 2 against 1, you know? Not to mention that they are Hunters with full equipment!! This is not the same as when we were fighting against those kids with guns.”

Alpha answered back with a confident tone.

“These two cases are not that different. You have me with you, you know? By having me alone, your total battle power is way above them. Moreover, you were able to defeat that huge weapon dog monster only with your handgun, remember? Everything will be fine as long as you follow my instructions. So don’t worry. It will be okay.”

She gave off a smile saying this. While it is true that she was trying to clear up Akira’s worries, it felt as if they had a lot of leeway here.

“I-Is that so?”

Looking at how Alpha was behaving just like usual, Akira was somehow convinced. But it was not like this was enough to fully erase the doubt that he had when facing overwhelming enemies. It could be seen that Akira half doubted her and half believed her.

“…But, there are a lot of differences between monster and human. If you’re that confident, then we should be able to run away from them, right? I really feel that it might be a good idea to run away instead…”

Alpha gave a strict look to Akira who was being meek.

“That’s a big no-no, they’ll be able to shoot you with their weapons while you won’t be able to shoot back at them and it’ll be worse if we go to open land. Moreover, until when you want to keep running away? Even if you run away from them today, then how about tomorrow? How about the day after tomorrow? And even if you are able to run back to the city, do you think that they’ll suddenly turn nice and stop attacking you? When that happens, are you planning to run away again? Can you really run away from them? Are you planning to keep running away until you get killed?”

Alpha locked her stare at Akira, Akira stared back at Alpha without turning his eyes away. They kept staring at each other for a few seconds without saying anything. Finally, Akira relaxed his expression as if he had just realized something, it was clear that he had made up his determination right there.

“…I’ll only get myself killed even if I run away from here, huh. Alright, I understand now, let’s fight them.”

Akira resolved himself and stood up. There was no trace of doubt that he had just a moment ago. Then Alpha smiled gently at him as if to give him more courage and said.

“Akira, resolve yourself. If you can’t get over something like this, you won’t be able to realize your dream, which is to be a great Hunter, you know?”

Akira smiled bitterly, but there was a trace of expectation and joy on his face.

“You’re right. Also we had agreed that will, motivation and resolve are all my responsibility.”

Last time when Akira was about to get himself killed for going against Alpha’s instruction, he did say that will, motivation and resolve were all his responsibility. He now realized that he had to show that those words were not lies. If he couldn’t do that, then someone without money nor skill like him would have nothing of worth to show to Alpha. Else, all his words about piling trust and achievement would also become meaningless. That thought alone strengthened Akira’s resolve.

Show his willpower, muster his ambition, strengthen his resolve. Akira kept saying these things again and again to make himself feel stronger. Alpha just smiled confidently and said.

“And things other than those three are my responsibility. It seems that the time has come to show you my wonderful support capabilities. So just leave this to me.”

“Yeah, I’ll be counting on you.”

Alpha seemed satisfied with Akira’s reaction as she gave off a smile. After all, they would not even have the leeway to smile until this situation was resolved.

“…That aside, I never thought that this kind of thing would happen so fast. It seems that you really used your lifetime worth of luck when you met me.”

“…I think so too.”

Akira returned Alpha’s smile and then Alpha said in a reassuring tone while still showing a fearless smile.

“Don’t worry. Since I’ve taken all your luck, I’ll have to take good care of you.”

“Well thanks, that would really help.”

Akira gave Alpha a light answer while laughing for a bit.

“Yep, I’m really helpful.”

Alpha answered back while laughing merrily. Alpha’s smile that was produced from high tech computation was enough to calm and encourage Akira. Thus allowing him to regain his fighting spirit. Everything went well according to Alpha’s plan.

Silavin: Hmm… wonder why Alpha does just join another team if that is the case.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 7, The Beguiling Ghost

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Kahimo felt strange when he saw Akira walking into a building. It was a feeling that he got when he knew something fishy was going on. And since he knew that someone invisible to his eyes was accompanying Akira, it only made him more cautious.

“The boy started moving again. Hayya, how about the girl? Does it look like she’s guiding him there?”

“Yeah. The girl is pointing at the building and leading the boy into it, she entered the building together with the boy. The relics might be inside that building, so what to do now? Should we go in too?”

“…No, let’s wait outside for a while.”

“Are you sure? We might lose sight of the boy, you know?”

“We know that boy’s face. Even if we lose him now, we still can find him if we look in the slum. So, there’s no problem. That aside, we have to move carefully so that we are not spotted by them. And, if that boy comes out from the building just fine, then that means that the building is safe.”

“Oi oi, you’re really being too careful, you know.”

Since only Hayya could see Alpha, he was observing them closely. He really did not want to miss this chance, so he was urging Kahimo to follow them. But as Kahimo replied back with an unmotivated answer, he started showing his dissatisfaction.

Then Kahimo made an ultimatum.

“If you don’t want to wait, fine, just go ahead by yourself. After all, you’re the only one who can see the ghost, and if the ghost story is true, then you can go ahead and die too.”

“D-don’t say that. A-alright, I understand that I was being too hasty.”

Hayya was sweating a bit as he tried to dodge the suggestion with a laugh.

Kahimo and Hayya stayed there for some time, while observing the building. If it was only a quick search, then Akira should be coming out from the building anytime now. But even after waiting for long enough, they still did not see Akira coming out from the building. Thus Kahimo started getting annoyed.

“He’s not coming out. Is that boy dead or something? Or is he so absorbed in searching for relics that he didn’t notice the time?”

As for Hayya, who had been piling up dissatisfaction, was close to reaching his limit.

“Say, Kahimo. Let’s just stop laying low and search inside the building. If the boy is dead, then there’s no meaning waiting for him here. We’ll only be wasting our time, you know?”

“…You’re right. But there are dangerous monsters around this area, so just because we might find expensive relics, we should not lower our guard, okay?”

“I know, I know.”

Seeing Hayya acting all excited, Kahimo made a stern face. Despite all the warnings that he had given, Hayya was still not being careful.

Kahimo stopped in front of the entrance of the abandoned building.

“Hayya, I’ll be staying here so you won’t mistake me for the boy. You go ahead and search the building. If you find the boy or the girl, or if anything happens, contact me immediately. Also, come back here after 1 hour, no matter what, okay?”

“Okay. What should I do if I find the boy? Should I just drag him here?”

“You can do that if the situation allows it. If he fights back or if you are suspicious of him, then just kill him. If you find something wrong with him then just kill him. Don’t let him fool you and take advantage from it, kill him when you have the chance.”

Hayya looked surprised at all the “kill him” orders from Kahimo.

“Kill him, you say? You sure we don’t need to interrogate him?”

“We can’t be sure whether he would give in without a fight. So we can interrogate him only after shooting his leg or arm at least. And be careful not to get lured by the girl, they might have prepared a surprise attack for you.”

“Why are you being so careful with him? He’s just a small kid, you know?”

Hayya felt rather weird seeing Kahimo being really careful with the boy, so he tried to relieve the tension with a laugh. But his laughter died down as Kahimo kept staring at him with a serious face.

“We talked about the beguiling ghost just a moment ago, right? There’s a chance that the boy is being tricked and lured here just to get killed by that girl just like in that ghost story. I’m being careful because I’m worried about you, you know? But it’s not like I’m going to force you, so you can do as you like.”

“W-wait for a second, if that’s true, then are you really going to let me go in alone?”

“You’re the only one who can see the girl. So no one but you can do this. Go now. If you think you’re in danger, then get back here as soon as possible. I’ll wait for you here. She might actually have lured us here, so I have to secure the entrance or it will be bad, you understand now?”

“Y-yeah, I understand.”

Hayya nervously went into the building. Kahimo looked at him and thought.

[I’m sorry, but I’m still suspicious that it’s all part of that boy’s trap, and not to mention that you might betray me if you are able to find a lot of relics there. Moreover, there were a lot of dead victims in the past, that’s why it is a ghost story. So it must be pretty dangerous inside. Just give your best there. As for me, I’ll start with watching the current situation before going in. But well, I hope it’s just a needless fear though.]

Kahimo made a snicker as he sent Hayya off.

—

Akira was waiting inside getting ready to welcome Kahimo and Hayya. He was making a serious face, but nervousness could be clearly seen on it. He was trying to calm himself by taking deep breaths.

Alpha had already told him the plan. She assured him with a confident smile that he only needed to follow her plan to be able to win.

Akira believed that too and it was not just a blind faith. After all, in the past, there was a time when he was able to defeat weapon dogs with just his handgun by following Alpha’s instruction. Now he was trying to follow his own words about believing in Alpha and building trust between them.

“Akira. They’ve entered the building. One of them is on stand-by near the entrance and the other one is searching the building. They don’t seem like

they’re planning to interrogate you for the relics’ place, they’re planning to kill you. That’s why we’re also not going to hold ourselves back.”

“…Okay.”

Although he was interested in how Alpha got that information, he quickly dismissed it as a needless thought. If he thought of something needless, then he would make wrong move and it would prevent him from following Alpha’s instructions accurately, which in turn would increase the chance of getting himself killed. That is why he would execute Alpha’s instruction and plan as fast and as accurately as possible. That was the only thing he should be thinking. And so he made his resolve and refocused himself.

In order to encourage Akira even more, Alpha made an invincible smile.

“We’ll start now, are you ready?”

“Yeah.”

Akira gave a firm nod. There was not even a trace of doubt or fear on his face. All of his fear and doubt were shoved aside by his resolve.

Alpha gave a satisfied smile looking at that, then in the next moment, she vanished from Akira’s view, just like they had planned. After that, Akira took a deep breath, his face turned serious, and he started running towards the location Alpha mentioned.

—

As Hayya was carefully searching the building, his expression suddenly changed, he saw the white dressed girl in the hallway, that was Alpha. He saw that girl slowly vanished deep inside the hallways and he did not think twice when he started running towards her direction. But he somehow remembered Kahimo’s warnings and was able to stop himself and immediately contacted Kahimo.

“Kahimo, I saw that girl just now.”

“Is she with the boy?”

“No, she is alone. She was deep in the hallway, I’m going to pursue her.”

“The boy might be around, be careful.”

“Yeah, I will.”

Hayya started pursuing Alpha, but because he was moving slowly while being careful of Akira, he could not catch up with her. But at least, he didn’t leave Alpha out of his sight.

He moved slowly, confirmed the safety of his surroundings, and then moved again. While he kept doing so, his expression started to loosen up. And together with that, his vigilance also loosened up. Every time he looked at Alpha, he spent more and more time admiring her beautiful figure, as such, he spent less time watching his surroundings.

He could see Alpha’s fair skin from the big opening on that gorgeous white dress’ backside. Her silky hair was long enough to almost touch the ground. Every time she took a turn, Hayya caught a glance of her well endowed chest and beautiful face. The combination of her unique beauty and gorgeous dress eluded Hayya’s heart in no time. He really wanted to see her face closer and feel her soft skin.

Alpha’s alluring back was right in front of him. He could not stop his desire, he lowered his guard and his steps quickened. As his face twisted into a face of a pervert, he already threw the word cautious out of the window.

After following her for sometime, Hayya was finally able to catch up with Alpha. He grinned at Alpha who was just standing at the end of the hallway. He saw Alpha opening her mouth as if she was saying something to him.

Hayya tried to listen to what Alpha was saying, but he could not hear anything. He was a bit puzzled by that, but Alpha just kept moving her lips while smiling.

Alpha suddenly looked to her side as if she just noticed something, Hayya was baited to follow suit, but he saw nothing out of the ordinary through the

glassless window. When his expression got even more puzzled, suddenly sound from gunshots reverberated from his back.

He heard 3 gunshots. The first bullet passed through his armpit. The second bullet hit the floor where he was standing. While the third bullet brushed and tore off some flesh from his right ear.

The one who shot him was Akira. Akira shot him from the hallway at the opposite direction of where he was facing after he was baited by Alpha.

Hayya was stunned for a few seconds after what just happened. But then regained his focus because of the pain coming from his ear and started shooting back. The sound of gunshot continued to echo as he kept shooting. Countless bullets landed on the floor, ceiling and wall. But Akira had hidden himself from him when he was stunned. So his counter attack was just him wasting his bullets.

Kahimo's voice burst out from the communication device.

"Hayya!! What happened?!!"

Hayya was breathing hard as he shouted.

"I-It's that boy!! That boy just shot at me!! That damn boy!! He almost got me!!"

"He almost got you? Did you get shot from a close distance although you were being careful? Tell me everything!! And keep watching your surroundings!!"

Hayya tried to calm himself and began explaining what had happened. Hearing his explanation Kahimo got annoyed and started scolding him.

"Are you saying that you almost got killed because you were chasing that girl? Are you stupid or something? Didn't I repeatedly remind you to be wary of her?"

"W-well, it can't be helped, that girl was really beautiful, you know!"

“Hmm, so you’re saying that she’s so beautiful that it’s worth dying for, huh? No wonder why it turned into a ghost story.”

Hayya’s excuse that was made in a hurry was not enough to bring Kahimo’s mood back. Kahimo also knew well that it was not the right time to start talking about insignificant stuff like that, so he just cut it short and changed the subject.

“So, is that girl still there now?”

“Yeah, she’s just standing here. She seems to be saying something but I can’t hear her.”

“Well, that is expected. The only information that your eyes can retrieve from the network are just images. It can’t retrieve any audio. Just to be safe, check if you can touch her or not. Who knows, may be it actually is a physical entity that I just can’t see. After all, I normally can’t see an active autonomous doll with optical camouflage ability, but your eyes should be able to see them. So try touching her.”

Hayya extended his hand towards Alpha’s chest. But his hand could not touch that well endowed chest, instead, his hand went through Alpha’s chest and went inside Alpha’s image. Hayya was visibly disappointed.

“I can’t touch her. It’s just an image. To think that I can’t feel this amazing chest right in front of me, this is a type of torture on its own… Wait for a sec, but this is an image of such a beautiful girl. This image alone might fetch me a lot of money… Since I can see her, I’ll bypass the output from this image and…”

“This is not the time for that!! You better get a hold of yourself!!”

Kahimo scolded and shut Hayya down.

“Next, try telling her to raise her right hand.”

Hayya told Alpha to raise her hand, Alpha stopped moving her mouth and raised her right hand.

“Oooh? She just raised her right hand like I told her to.”

“Alright then. Tell her to point at the direction of people other than you. And next the direction of that boy near you.”

“What the hell is that order?”

“Just do it!”

”O-Okay.”

Hayya did as he was told, to which, Alpha pointed to the floor,

“Hayya, how was it? Did the girl point at me?”

“Wait for a sec… According to my AutoMap, I’m here and you’re there, so… Oooh!! She’s really pointing at you!! This girl is really something!!”

Hayya was a surprised and pretty much amazed. But then Kahimo replied back with a shout.

“Dammit!!”

“W-what’s wrong?”

“It’s a trap! That boy already knows our position! He might have asked that girl to point the other people around him and discovered us! That girl is just a bait!! The boy must have told her to just wander around inside the building and lure you to a place that is easy for him to launch a surprise attack! Now that girl has lured you to such a place!!”

Hayya immediately shouted out angrily.

“Th-that boy!!! How dare he look down on me!! I’ll f*cking kill him!!”

“That girl might be a guide or something from the ruin. Since it obeyed your order, so I’m sure it obeys just anyone’s order. Ask that girl to guide you to where the boy is and kill him, do you need my help too?”

“It’s okay! As long as he doesn’t catch me off guard, I can finish a little boy like him all by myself! After all, it seems that he’s just an amateur and he only has a hand gun with him!”

“Just be careful! If he was an expert, you would have gotten yourself killed in that surprise attack just now, you know?”

“I know. You just look out for that boy and make sure that he doesn’t run away.”

Hayya then shouted at Alpha.

“Show me where the boy is!!”

Hayya once again walked behind Alpha. But this time, rather than feeling infatuated by that beautiful figure, he was filled with so much anger that her seductive figure did not divert his attention at all.

—

Akira, who was running hurriedly to the next planned location, was able to hear Alpha’s voice.

“Unfortunately, that was a failure. Although it would have been great if you could have finished him there.”

He could not see Alpha, but he could hear her voice. It was the same when he launched that surprise attack on Hayya. He listened closely for Alpha’s signal for him to jump into the hallway and took shot at Hayya.

The dead corner where he hid himself, the timing for his surprise attack, the number of shots he took before withdrawing just as fast as he shot, all of these were done as instructed by Alpha. Akira tried his best to follow Alpha’s every order as accurate as possible.

But even so, he could not defeat the enemy. Akira’s expression turned grim as he showed a bit of regret.

“…That didn’t work, huh. Maybe I should’ve taken a better aim.”

He muttered those words as he could not help but think that if only he took more risk and took a better aim, then his enemy would be dead. Akira did not doubt Alpha's instructions at all. After all, the fact is that he was able to take the shot from behind enemy's defenceless back. In short, it was a perfect surprise attack. But even so, it could not finish the job. If he thought about the reason for that, there would be none except for his bad aim.

But then Alpha replied back with a rather harsh scolding.

"No, you should not. If you had taken more time and stopped even for a moment in order to take a better aim, the chance for you to be killed from the counter attack would've soared up. What you did was already the best course of action."

For preparing Akira's surprise attack on Hayya, Alpha considered their respective equipment, skill and their habits. As such, if Akira took an action outside of what he was instructed, then the chance for success of his surprise attack would plummet. And so she gave a strong warning to Akira.

"…I see. As I thought, I'm really weak."

It was not enough despite the fact that he had done all he could. He was again reminded of how weak he really was, he was downtrodden. Knowing that, Alpha said to Akira with a strong but gentle voice.

"Everyone starts as a weak person. Akira, you've done all you could and that's all that matters. Since you just launched a surprise attack on someone far stronger than you and were able to retreat safely, I think that alone was pretty amazing. As for your current lack of skill, later you can train as hard as you can to improve. I'll keep training you even if you say that you already had enough of it, so there's no need to worry about that."

Hearing Alpha saying something that was so obvious to him and how she behaved as if surviving this encounter was a certainty, Akira was able to pick himself up and let out a forced smile.

"…You're right, I'll be counting on you."

“Just leave it to me. And also, from that surprise attack just now, I was able to confirm the enemy’s equipment and his line of thinking. I’ve also completely analyzed his habits. You should be able to kill him next time.”

“Really? You’re really something, you know.”

“I’ve told you before that I have a high level of competency in these areas, haven’t I? Now, to get him next time, you’ll need to get really close to him, so get yourself ready for that.”

“I understand, don’t worry, I’m ready for it.”

He knew well that all he should do was to give his best for the next move too. He blazed towards his next position. His resolve could be seen on his face.

—

Hayya’s attention was not distracted by Alpha since he was very angry. He moved deeper into the building while being vigilant of Akira. But with time, his vigilance started to loosen up again. Since nothing out of ordinary happened, he began to calm down and relax. Moreover, as long as Alpha was guiding him, he had to look at Alpha’s back. Hence, he was once again lured by that beautiful back. And even if he tried to look away, it only made him more and more bothered by that mesmerizing view. As a result, he stopped being vigilant of his surroundings. Moreover, since he consciously tried not to look at Alpha, he was being careless of what was in front of him.

Even he himself started to think that this was getting pretty bad. His attention was divided between the distraction in front of him and watching his surroundings. He did not have the leeway of dividing his attention for something else other than those two things. This time, when he looked back at Alpha after scanning his surroundings, she was already standing near an intersection just ahead of him while pointing at a direction.

[…That boy is over there, huh!]

Hayya made a guess that Alpha was pointing at where Akira was hiding. He ran and stopped right before the intersection as he judged he was safe from that distance. With half of his chest peeking out from the intersection, he pulled the trigger on his finger and keep shooting at Akira's probable location.

The sound of the gunshots echoed through the hallway. Most of the high speed bullets landed on the floor, wall and ceiling. Countless shrapnel ricocheted through the hallway and hit all the blind side of the hallway.

When Hayya was about to change the cartridge of the gun which was now empty, Alpha lowered her hand. Hayya noticed that and interpreted it as a sign that his target has been eliminated.

"Alright, he's dead, huh!?"

Thinking that he had won, Hayya felt relieved and he stepped into the hallway without changing his gun's cartridge and tried to confirm that he had killed Akira. But he could only see a hallway that was destroyed by the flying bullets. His relieved expression suddenly turned grim.

"Oii, the boy isn't here, you know?!!"

Hayya walked back to Alpha while he kept shouting at her. But Alpha just smiled and moved her lips. Hayya could not hear her voice, so he angrily shouted at her again.

"The boy!! Show me the damn boy!!"

Again Alpha pointed to the direction behind Hayya and he looked back without thinking twice, but no one was there.

Suddenly, another gunshot echoed. Hayya knew that he was hit from the pain coming from his abdomen. He was stunned from the shock, this gave an opening to the assailant, who then fired multiple bullets at him. Although he was wearing only a cheap armor, it was enough to prevent him from getting any fatal wounds as the bullets could not pierce through it. But it

was enough to take him down. He fell down on the ground while screaming angrily.

Hayya tried to make sense of what had happened just now as he was lying down on the ground writhing in pain.

[…I got shot?! From where? I didn't see anyone though!! There is only that girl… Wait, that girl shot me!? Impossible!! She is just an image!! There's no way she was able to shoot me…]

Hayya was confused by the impossible situation he was in. But his confusion was quickly cleared up as Akira stepped out from inside Alpha.

[He was right inside her so I couldn't see him, huh!?]

Akira came closer to Hayya with both his hands gripping on his gun. He lifted his gun and aimed for Hayya's head.

Hayya gritted his teeth to withstand the incoming pain as he pointed his gun at Akira and pulled the trigger. But nothing happened, he then remembered that the cartridge in his gun was empty.

In front of his imminent death, Hayya racked all his brainpower, that he normally did not use, in order to survive. Then, right before his death, when everything was moving slowly he realized something.

[…So it was all a trap right from the beginning, huh?]

Alpha made him look away when Akira launched his surprise attack in order to take his attention away from Akira. She stopped in a strange location and pointed her finger so that he would waste all his bullets. She stopped pointing her finger so that he would stop exchanging the cartridge. She looked and smiled at him in order to lower his guard.

Once he realized that, everything about her, her dress, the hallway that she lured him into, her movement speed when she was guiding him, and all the other minor things, all of them were in order to kill him. He kept thinking of all these useless things in the short time that he was still alive. He just

wasted his precious time and brainpower for these meaningless things right before his death. And like that Hayya had spent all the time he had left.

Hayya muttered while making a crooked smile out of fear.

“… The beguiling… Ghost…”

After that, Akira’s bullet pierced through his head and ended his life. The last thing that he saw was Alpha’s ruthless smile as she approached and hugged Akira.

Kahimo’s voice burst out from Hayya’s communication device.

“Hayya, what happened? Did you finish that boy?”

But then Alpha warned Akira.

“You shouldn’t answer that. He would notice the situation if you do.”

Akira quickly stopped himself from making any sound and nodded.

“Let’s quickly take off his equipment. With this, we’ll have more weapons.”

Akira took Hayya’s equipment. Although it did not really fit him, at least he had better equipment now compared to before when he had his gun only.

“Then for the next step, throw his corpse out through that window.”

Akira was rather surprised to that unexpected order. But Alpha just smiled at him like usual.

—

Kahimo, who was on the first floor of the abandoned building, more or less understood what was going on and his face turned grim.

[There’s no mistaking it, I heard gunshots. After that, he stopped responding. It means that he’s at least in a condition where he can’t answer me or he might even be dead already. Did he do something stupid and was

caught off guard again? No, judging from the sound, it was at least a shoot out between them, huh?]

Kahimo was at a loss as to whether he should go and check the situation or just keep standing there.

[If I go and check them. I might get lucky and get to monopolize the relics. I can also sell his equipment for money. But, there's a good chance that we were actually lured here, the problem is, how far are we going to get lured in? And what if the fabled relics actually don't exist? What if that boy is actually luring hunters that can see that girl in order to kill them and then take their equipment? What if this building is actually his hunting ground? If that's true, then it's dangerous to assume that boy as a novice… Wait, am I over thinking here?]

The fabled relics and his dead companion. Both of these factors made Kahimo more suspicious. His mind was telling him to run away, he involuntarily shifted his gaze towards the exit of the building.

But right at that moment, he saw Hayya's body falling down. Hayya's corpse was stripped off its equipment. It made a huge sound as it landed on the ground. Kahimo was surprised and approached Hayya's corpse. But he stopped right before he stepped outside the building.

[The boy took Hayya's equipment. He is still alive and he deliberately threw his corpse outside. He knows my position…]

Kahimo raised his head and looked up with a dreadful expression. He could see the boy who killed Hayya running towards him with his handgun aiming to shoot him.

"…That damn boy!"

His opponent was just a small kid, the word patience and vigilance had gone from Kahimo's head. He changed his mind and started moving in order to kill Akira. When he pulled out the information terminal and checked for Hayya's location, he could see Hayya's indicator was moving. It showed that Akira had Hayya's information terminal.

[I knew it, he’s upstairs. It would be great if he misunderstands that he is the only one who knows others position. I can still outsmart him then.]

Kahimo let out a small laugh and rushed inside the building.

—

Akira received another instruction from Alpha for the next place for the surprise attack.

“Akira, take out the knife that you didn’t sell back then.”

“This one?”

The knife that he took out was a relic of the old world that he found during his first time in Kuzusuhara City ruin. Its blade looked dull and it looked as if it would not be able to cut anything.

“Yes, that one. There’s something prodding out on the bottom of that knife, right? Take your gun and shoot right through it.”

Akira stuck the knife on the ground and got his gun ready. As he was getting his gun closer to the knife, he asked Alpha.

“…Excuse me for asking this, it will break if I shoot it, right?”

“Yes, it will break.”

“It feels like it’s such a waste. This is also a relic of the old world, right? I should be able to get quite a lot of money from selling this…”

“Think of it as a necessary expense and get over it. Or instead, I have another way to get over this situation which is 3 times more dangerous, so which one you would choose?”

Seeing how Alpha was smiling full of confidence, Akira just shut his mouth and pulled the trigger.

—

Kahimo checked his terminal again for Hayya's location. Hayya's indicator was standing in the same place for 10 minutes. Akira might be waiting to jump on him there, or it could be some kind of a trap. Kahimo thought of both possibilities as he kept moving deeper into the building carefully.

Kahimo found Hayya's information terminal discarded in the middle of a hallway. He then took it while looking annoyed.

"…Did he leave it here because he knew that I could track his position using this?"

If he did not realize that Kahimo could track his position through that information terminal, then Kahimo could still set up a surprise attack on him. But if Akira noticed that Hayya was moving straight towards his position without taking any wrong turns, then he would have left the information terminal as a bait in order to prepare a surprise attack. If that was the case, Kahimo was thinking of predicting Akira's surprise attack and taking him by surprise instead. It was rather unexpected for him to be able to think like that in this situation.

Kahimo's face turned grim. He knew that it would not be easy to hide oneself in this place and shoot at him. But even so, he could not clear his bad feeling. Instead, it was only getting worse. The enemy must have set up a surprise attack. His intuition was telling him that he was correct, and in fact, he was actually correct.

On the next instance. Kahimo's body was split into two. His armor was completely useless. As the upper and the lower part of his body fell and rolled down onto the ground, he could see his blood and organs spilling out. Kahimo was shocked by the pain. In the short moment of his last remaining life, he noticed that there was a big cut on the wall right beside him. He understood that something cut him in half through the wall. But before he could finish his thought as to what exactly cut him, he drew his last breath.

—

On the other side of the cut wall, Akira was frozen still after he swung his knife sideways.

Just like Alpha instructed, he swung the knife sideways right after he destroyed the bottom part of the knife with his gun. And when he did that, a blue light shot out and cut Kahimo and the wall in front of him. The knife could not reach the wall from where Akira was, but even so, it left a 5 meters wide cut mark on the wall. He could barely see what was on the other side of the wall from the 1 cm thick opening on the wall. Smoke came out from the cut mark and there was a burning smell. After that, the knife vibrated and disintegrated into dust.

Akira was shocked and stood still while holding what was left of the knife. While on his side, Alpha smiled and nodded.

“Alright, you’ve killed him. We are safe for now.”

“…Eh, Ah, Right, I see.”

Alpha was behaving as if they just accomplished something small and minor. Akira’s mind could not catch up with what was going as he was standing there perplexed. And then he looked back to the knife which caused that situation, only its handle was left.

“Alpha, what exactly is this knife?”

“Well, even if you ask me, all I know is that it’s just a knife of the old world. It was meant to be used by common people and was sold freely.”

“Did the commoners of the old world need a knife that could even cut open walls?”

“It’s not like its main use is to cut walls, you know. It’s just that because they kept aiming for a better sharpness and durability, they somehow ended up with something that could even cut the wall. If you had not destroyed the safety device, you wouldn’t be able to do such a thing. You did destroy its main body, remember? With that, it could muster the maximum cutting power just this once. By doing so, it would be able to ignore its limit and use the maximum stored power, that should normally be used for maintaining its durability, to increase its cutting ability. If we had not done

that, then it wouldn’t be able to cut open the wall together with the person behind it.”

“…But, that in itself is already dangerous enough, isn’t it?”

“It’s a safe tool as long as you use it properly. But since we used it for such a purpose, that’s why it looks dangerous to you. But that is something to be expected, right?”

“Well, you’re right, I understand it now.”

Although he thought what Alpha said was indeed correct, he still could not help but think that the knife was a dangerous tool. And to think that something like that was distributed freely in the old world, it only made him to admire the old world even more.

Alpha giggled as if she was teasing Akira.

“So now, are you satisfied with my support? Although we had to destroy a relic from the old world, we were able to defeat 2 hunters who were way out of your league. You may be feeling really thankful for having me, right?”

In contrast to Alpha who said that as if she was joking, Akira nodded with a serious face.

“Yeah, it’s thanks to you that I was able to survive this situation. Thank you. I’m sorry that I did not fully trust you up until now.”

Alpha returned back to normal and smiled gently.

“There’s no need to worry about that. I’m happy that it was enough to make you trust me. So then, what do you want to do now? Should we return to look for relics like we originally planned? Or instead, should we just go back home?…Akira, you’re tired, right? It’s not efficient to keep pushing forward when you’re tired. There’s no need to push yourself too hard.”

Akira made a difficult face.

“…If I am to be honest. I’m really tired right now so I want to go back home. But we still haven’t gotten anything yet. If I want to get the rest of the money from the Exchange Center, I should bring something home…”

“In that case, how about we only search around this place. If I help you, we should at least be able to find some relics that other Hunters have missed.”

Akira then decided to follow Alpha’s suggestion to look only around that place before going home. He was only able to find some handkerchiefs. But these handkerchiefs were in such a bad condition that normal Hunters would have ignored them. Even for Akira, if it was not because Alpha told him that they were relics of the old world, he would have ignored them too. But even so, he decided to take them and concluded the search. And then he took as much stuff as he could from Kahimo and Hayya’s corpses before returning back to the city.

The building was left empty except for Kahimo and Hayya’s corpse. Hunters fighting against each other and not going back home was a common happening in the eastern region.

Silavin: It might be the case the Alpha might have been with other hunters. Might be a good story point to explore but let’s see what will happen in the future. See you next week.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 8, Trust

Index

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After arriving back to the city safely, Akira went straight to the Exchange Centre and lined up in front of one of the counters. And just like the last time, that Nojima guy was the one standing behind the counter.

Nojima remembered Akira vividly. But he did not immediately respond to Akira, instead, he acted as if Akira was just another stranger to him.

“Give me your hunter ID if you have one… Wait, it’s you, huh?”

Nojima was rather surprised at how much Akira had changed. The last time he met Akira, he thought that Akira was just another little brat from the slum. But Akira looked so much different now. He actually resembled a Hunter with the equipment that he scavenged from Kahimo and Hayya. But that was not all, the biggest difference was the faint aura that he was giving off, it was an aura of someone who had gone through the baptism of the wasteland.

Just registering yourself as a Hunter does not make you one. But the person standing in front of Nojima was indeed a Hunter, despite being only a newbie.

Looking at him, Nojima laughed a bit as he thought that Akira would not die anytime soon. Then he recomposed himself and started moving into his

order of business.

“So, what do you have this time… That’s weird, was that one you brought before due to pure luck alone?”

Although it did not look expensive whatsoever, it was an item that he brought back after putting his own life on the line. Thus, Akira was a little bit annoyed when Nojima badmouthed the item that he brought.

“Well, I’m sorry that it looks awful. But even so, it is a relic of the old world that I brought back from the ruin. I should be able to get the rest of the money from the previous relic with this item… And also, what do you mean by pure luck?”

Akira made a twisted face, which, Nojima just laughed lightly.

“You’ll know soon.”

Nojima took the same tray that Akira used before from the back shelf and used his other hand to operate the terminal. After that, banknotes came out from the machine beside it. Nojima took that money and put it inside an envelope before extending it to Akira while laughing.

“We finished checking the relic that you brought before. For this time, your total payment is 200,000 Aurum.”

Akira’s mind went blank for a sec when he heard that number. He then slowly reached for the envelope and took out the money. After touching and seeing the real thing in front of him, he was dumbfounded. For him, who fought to the death for mere 300 Aurum yesterday, this 200,000 Aurum was simply unbelievable.

Nojima was satisfied with how Akira reacted and laughed.

“There are not many kids who got this much money here, you know? Use them wisely, okay? Well then, go now before you start attracting more attention.”

As Akira regained his composure, he immediately put that envelope into his chest pocket in panic and awkwardly left the Exchange Centre. Looking at how Akira changed back from a newbie hunter to a small boy from the slum, Nojima let out a bitter laugh.

Even after leaving the Exchange Centre, Akira kept moving awkwardly, he just could not calm down. Seeing that, Alpha talked to him with a soothing voice.

“Akira, calm down. If you let yourself shaken by just this much money, it’ll only get worse in the future, you know?”

Hearing these words, Akira, who was speechless after getting the amount of money that he never imagined, inadvertently opened his mouth.

“Hah! Just this much money, you say!? What the heck are you talking about!? It’s 200,000 Aurum, you know!? It’s a huge amount of money for me.”

Alpha locked her stare at Akira as she said to him with a strong tone.

“No, this is just a small amount. It is simply nothing compared to the amount you can earn with my support. Get this inside your head.”

“W-well, even if you tell me so…”

“Moreover, you look like a retarded kid talking to himself now, so be more careful.”

Akira closed his mouth in panic. Because of the huge amount of money that he just got, Akira could become an easy and delicious target. Moreover, he was sticking out like a sore thumb since he was behaving awkwardly.

“Let’s take a rest for today. I’m sure you’re pretty tired after returning from the ruin. Moreover, you’ll only attract more attention if you’re just standing here.”

“Y-you’re right. I understand.”

Akira was calm enough to answer Alpha with a whisper. But he was still looking rather restless on his way to his sleeping place. But then Alpha suddenly stopped him with a serious face.

“It’s not this way.”

“Eh? But my sleeping place is over there.”

“Nope, you’re going to sleep in an inn today. You have the money for that now, right?”

“W-well, you’re right, but…”

Because he just received an amount that he could never imagine, Akira felt really heavy parting with the money. But then Alpha smiled gently to him as if she was reprimanding a small kid.

“If you feel really heavy parting with just this amount, it will only lower the worth of your life, you know. And it’s not like we’re going to use it needlessly. Since you acquired it properly, so you should use it properly too. I’ll give you my support on how to efficiently spend money too… So, you trust in my support, right?”

Akira just could not say no after being told that. Both of them had promised to build trust between them. And so he made a firm nod while trying to calm himself down.

“…Okay.”

“Thank you, so then, shall we go to the inn now? By the way, is it really okay if I pick the inn for you to stay?”

“Yeah, I’ll leave it to you.”

“This way then.”

Alpha giggled as she walked in front of Akira to guide him. As he was following Alpha from behind, he could not help but to worry just how much money he would need to spend for the inn.

It was normal for inns to let their customers bring their weapons. But since they would bring strong and destructive weapons, it would cause death victims and huge damage to the inn if they used those weapons to cause a ruckus. As such, all the customers were expected to behave nicely. It was a basic rule that all the customers should adhere to. Now then, even if you cause someone's death or some kind of loss to the inn, you would still be considered as a well-behaved customer if you properly pay the inn enough compensation. But since Alpha picked a cheap inn near the slum city, the rule was not very strict here. The inn would gladly accept an armed kid from the slum as long as that kid paid them. Thus, Akira was able to make a reservation without any problems.

Akira reserved an average-priced room. The room was pretty big and because it was an inn designed for Hunters, it had a big empty area for Hunters to do maintenance on their equipment or to just keep all the relics that they had on them. The room even had a bath and a bed too. Not to mention, there were also a variety of foods inside the refrigerator. It was definitely safer to sleep here than outside. There was a stark contrast comparing it to Akira's sleeping place in the back alley.

"20,000 Aurum for a night huh… That is simply a robbery…"

Akira fully understood why he had to pay so much money for the room. But, Akira did not look happy, even though he was able to sleep in such a luxurious place that was way better than his sleeping place in the back alley. Instead, he made a rather complicated face.

Understanding why he should pay so much money was not the same as actually paying the money. Akira's hand was shaking as he was paying for his room. Alpha was the one who picked that room. If it was up to Akira, then there was no mistaking it that he would opt for a cheaper room.

Akira let out a sigh, it was clear that he was rather disappointed since he had to spend his money on some needless expense despite the fact that he was against it. Realizing that, Alpha just laughed awkwardly.

"I'm sure there are a lot of things in your mind right now, but how about you relax and take a bath for now?"

“…Bath? A bath?! Yeah, I’m going to take a bath now.”

Akira immediately beaming with happiness the moment he heard the word bath.

There were buildings equipped with baths even in the slum city, but there were only certain people who could enjoy such a facility. Unless it was someone who owned the bath or someone with enough money to pay for the bath, it was impossible to have the chance to enjoy one. For a small kid who was living in one corner of the back alley like Akira, the only thing that he was able to do was to wipe off his body with a piece of cloth using the water not good enough for drinking.

Akira was only able to vaguely remember the last time he went into a bath, as such, he was happily heading to the bathtub.

Akira washed his body while waiting for the bathtub to be filled with hot water. He washed every nook and cranny of his body with a soap that was prepared there and enjoyed the water by using it rather excessively. It was not something that he could do before. He was enjoying such a luxury that was definitely out of his reach when he was living in the back alley. It took sometime before he washed mud and dust off his body and started to make bubbles with the soap.

Once he completely washed his body, he checked the water in the bathtub. He then immediately dipped himself into the hot water tub until the water was level with his shoulder. He relaxed back as he let out a strange moan. He then let the water take over his body as if the hot water just washed all his tiredness. As his face started to ease off, his consciousness melted into the hot water and he could not help but mumble some words.

“How is the water?”

Akira immediately turned into the source of that voice, he could see Alpha was already dipping herself in the bathtub together with Akira. She was sitting in a provocative pose right beside Akira, but the mist prevented Akira from seeing her figure clearly. Water droplets formed on her skin and

were sucked into the valley in her chest. The only thing that hid that wonderful body was the mirage and the mist produced by the hot water.

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Of course, since Alpha had no real body, she could not really dip herself into the water. She was only showing such an image to him. But since it was an image produced through high level calculation, there was not even a shred of strangeness coming from that image. It was an image produced by calculating the distortion coming from the refraction of the hot water. As long as Akira did not reach his hand for her, she would look perfectly normal. The only thing that showed that her beautiful body was not real was the hot water vapour coming through her body.

Akira's mind was still numbed from the pleasure as he answered back.

"…It's heavenly… Why are you naked by the way?"

Alpha giggled mischievously.

"You can't get into the bath with your clothes on, right?"

"…Well, that's true."

He was convinced by Alpha's answer and gave a slight nod without expressing much reaction in seeing her naked. He turned his head and continued enjoying the bath.

Alpha kept staring at Akira and kept giggling, she made sure to remember Akira's lack of reaction.

"Akira, don't you have anything to say after seeing my body?"

Akira looked rather puzzled as he slanted his head. He tried to use his brain, but most of his consciousness had already been melted into the hot water, so he could only answer back in fragmented words.

“…? …Well… You did say… Something about… Computer graphics or something… So like… That’s fake… Right?”

“Yep, you’re correct. But that is not the main point here. It’s more like, do you have a comment, or impression or something after seeing my beautiful body?”

Akira slanted his head again while looking puzzled. After trying to rack his now-shutdown brain, he finally opened his mouth.

“…You have… Huge chest…?”

Alpha giggled awkwardly.

“Well, it’s indeed true. But I was asking for your opinion about my body, or like your preferences and type. But… Your answer just now feels rather bland.”

Although he was just a small boy, it did not change the fact that he was in a bath together with a beautiful girl. But Akira’s reaction there was really weak. It was as if he had no interest in her well-endowed chest, or her glossy skin, or her soft and smooth back. But for Akira who already let the hot water take over him, his eyes were saying that he had no interest at all in Alpha’s naked body.

Before the hot water lulled Akira to sleep, Alpha gave him a warning while giggling.

“You’ll get yourself drowned to death if you sleep here, you know.”

“…Like hell… I would let…Myself die here… What… Should I do?”

“Get up from the bath, wipe your body dry, go to your bed and sleep.”

“…Okay.”

Akira got himself up while wobbling from side to side and slowly dragged himself out of the bathtub. Then he wiped off his body, changed to a pyjama

and dove onto his bed. He was then immediately assaulted by heavy sleepiness.

“Goodnight.”

“Good… Night…”

The good night that Alpha always said in a soft and sweet voice, Akira could only answer back vaguely due to his sleepiness. And then he went straight to his dreamland.

***

On the next day, Akira woke up not too long after sunrise. Compared to his usual schedule, he woke up really late. All the tiredness that had built-up and the bed that was way better than his usual place in the back alley were at fault for making him wake up so late.

And even after he opened his eyes, Akira was more disoriented than usual. The comfy bed dulled his brain. But then Alpha spoke to him while smiling.

“Good morning, Akira. Did you sleep well?”

“…Good morning, Alpha…? Wait?! Where am I!?”

As Alpha spoke to him, his consciousness returned back, but then Akira immediately jumped in surprise as he found himself waking up in an unknown place. He then looked around him in panic. If he was in the back alley and not wary of his surroundings, then it would be a fatal mistake and he would be dead by now. His face turned really pale as he was panicking.

Alpha answered Akira’s question in a gentle voice in order to calm Akira down.

“This is the room inside the inn that you’re staying, don’t you remember?”

Akira finally remembered what happened yesterday as he let out a sigh of relief.

“…Right, I slept in an inn yesterday, huh?!”

Alpha then pointed her finger in a calm manner.

“For now, how about you get something for breakfast? You don’t need to go to the food distribution place today, so you can take it easy.”

The food was included in the rent and there would not be any refund if he didn’t consume the food. With a happy mood, Akira started preparing his breakfast with the food that he usually would not be able to eat.

The food and the utensils were warm and the drinking water was soothing cold. This was enough to make the food here so special compared to the usually distributed food. Not to mention that he was able to savour such food in a private where there was no danger of anyone robbing food from him. Akira could not help but relax as he was enjoying the food that he could not even imagine he would be able to enjoy.

[As expected of the 200,000 Aurum that I got yesterday]

Alpha smiled meaningfully to Akira as if she knew what was Akira thinking.

“Aren’t you glad that you were able to spend a night in such an inn?”

“Yeah, it is nice.”

The cynical side inside Akira was feeling ticklish as he answered so honestly, but he just could not come up with an argument to refute it. He did feel thankful for it, that was why he fixed his behaviour toward Alpha and decided to answer her properly. Alpha laughed satisfiedly and continued their conversation.

“I’ll tell you my plan for the future as you eat. First of all, we’ll go to the ruins looking for relic only once per week. We will spend the rest of the week training and studying. You’re not allowed to complain even if you want to spend more time looking for more relics, okay?”

“Alright.”

“Oh my! You’re so obedient today.”

Alpha was rather surprised to the obedient answer coming from such a cynical boy. Akira then made a serious face as he said.

“Well, after all, I’ve decided to trust you.”

‘Trust’, Akira uttered that word so lightly. But for Alpha, that word was really important.

“I see. Once you’re done, we’ll start right away. So just enjoy your food for now”

Akira nodded lightly and continued his meal while Alpha kept staring at him.

Once Akira finished his meal, Alpha floated in front of him and made a serious face.

“Akira, I’ll tell you something really important. So listen closely, okay?”

Akira nodded with a serious look. The last time he had seen such a serious face from Alpha was when he was in danger of getting killed. Akira remembered the nervousness that he had from back then and his face naturally turned stiff.

Alpha gave him an understanding nod. Immediately after that, her face made a very formal expression as if she was an office worker. The change made Akira a bit surprised.

“Alpha?”

Alpha made a slight shift in response when her name was called. She then started explaining in a formal tone that matched her formal expression.

“This unit will proceed to give high-level support to the subject Akira. Warning! Are you sure you want to execute all kinds of functions regarding Akira without approval? This action will also include extracting and using

Level-5 private information. It's recommended to request for extra explanation on the information that will be extracted."

Akira was confused as to what Alpha was saying and why she was speaking like that.

"What do you mean by that?"

"According to the preliminary approximation, it would take at least 120 years of oral explanation for the subject to fully understand the requested information. The more accurate approximation for the time needed cannot be calculated at the moment. Referencing back to the rules of priority calculation, there's a method to bypass the cognition process rules A887. As such, the time needed to explain such that the subject understands all the points is estimated as…"

"…Uhhh, I don't really understand, but I just need to say 'yes' here, right?"

"It is assumed that the subject agrees with all the items that do not violate the agreement. This includes narrow-sense mind adjustment and broad-range free will interference. Regarding the preservation of the subject's life, the unit will follow the stand alone self-sufficient article 213873. This will also include the areas outside the special unit and at the same time…"

Akira did not understand anything, but he still tried to listen closely to the explanation. But it only ended up with him being more confused. Even if he tried to ask Alpha some questions, Alpha would just ignore that question as she continued giving that long and complicated explanation. In the end, Akira gave up on trying to understand her monologue.

Akira did not fully understand the details, but he knew that Alpha was asking for some kind of approval and that going against her instruction will bring her immense danger. Akira promised in the past that he would build up trust between them. As such, according to the decision that he made back then, his past experience, and his resolve, he finally made a decision after he hesitated for a bit. He answered back with a serious face.

"My answer to your first question is 'yes'."

“Reconfirming. This unit will proceed to give high-level support to the subject Akira. Warning! Are you sure you want to execute all kinds of functions regarding Akira without approval?”

“Yes!”

Once Akira gave an assertive answer, Alpha’s behaviour turned back to normal. And then she gave Akira a happy smile.

“Thank you. It’s okay, I won’t do anything bad. So you don’t need to worry.”

Akira felt relieved when he saw Alpha was back to normal. But then Akira showed a bit of dissatisfaction.

“You could have said that right from the start, you know?”

“There was some annoying stuff to take care. I had to say all of those things in order to say that I won’t do anything bad to you. You’ll need to do some annoying stuff to avoid more annoying stuff, it’s something common in this world. By the way, Akira, about what we discussed yesterday, what do you really think about my chest?”

Alpha asked that question while making a meaningful smile. But then Akira answered back in panic.

“Wh-what the heck are you asking me out of the blue?”

“Yesterday, when I asked about your opinion of my naked body, you said that my chest is huge, you know.”

“…Did I really say that?”

“Yep, you did. Although, you answered back as if you just gave a random answer to my question. But you did vaguely answer me. So as I thought, you really do have some interest in women’s chest. Want to have a touch?”

Alpha giggled mischievously as she was teasing Akira. He was a bit annoyed by that, so he had no intention of answering seriously. But he

remembered that he had made a promise to build trust with Alpha, so it was not like he could lie. As such, he decided to neither deny it nor approve it.

“…But, I can’t do that, right?”

“That’s only for now. But you know, Akira, if you want it, you would be able to do it once you finish exploring the ruin that I asked you to explore when we first met. So what do you think? Does that interest you? Do you want to try touching it?”

“Why can I only touch it if I finish exploring that ruin?”

“It’s rather complicated to explain. But do you want to try?”

Akira was visibly annoyed with Alpha who was pestering him.

“…What the heck are you trying to say, huh?”

Alpha just giggled mischievously.

“I’m just offering a concrete reward to motivate you.”

“So in short, a honey trap, huh?”

“Yep, you can say that. After all, it seems that rewarding you with wonderful scenes is not that effective. So I was wondering how about rewarding you with something that you can touch and feel. You only blush a little even when you look at my body up close, that in itself is a rather serious condition, you know?”

Hearing such a silly answer to his question, Akira let out a big sigh.

“Can you do that after I grow up? Once I grow up, I’ll see them and touch them a lot. So is that okay with you?”

“You’re right. After all, I’m planning to get along with you for a long time. So I’ll be sure to enjoy it when the time comes.”

Alpha answered back with such confidence. And then their conversation just stopped there. Akira had no wish to dig deeper into the subject. As such, all the questions that he had about when Alpha gave him some explanations in a formal manner all just slid away.

The check-out is at ten, Akira did not have much time until then since he woke up rather late. But Alpha suggested him to stay another night here. Akira was a bit surprised when Alpha told him that the training would be done here. So, Akira contacted the staff and completed the booking for another day.

“With this, it means that you can take a bath again today”

It also meant that he had used 40,000 Aurum out of 200,000 Aurum that he got yesterday. Akira let out a sigh trying to hide his regret. But he could not skilfully hide it as he ended up making an awkward forced laugh.

Alpha let out a light laugh, and made a serious face.

“Well then, let’s start the training. Are you ready?”

Akira immediately changed his mood and replied back with a serious nod.

“I’m ready”

Alpha nodded back satisfiedly.

“First of all, I want you to learn to communicate telepathically.”

“Communicate telepathically?”

“For now, I’ll have you learn to talk without making any sound, or at least you can think of it as that. Let’s start our training. After all, accurate and high-speed information exchange is very important in the middle of a fight. Moreover, it will stop making you look like a retarded person talking to himself.”

Akira was planning to do all kinds of training without saying any complaint. But he was rather puzzled to that strange instruction.

“Even if you say so. What should I do exactly?”

“Well, it’s hard to orally explain exactly what you should do. After all, there’s a big difference between each person. For now, rather than listening with your ear and speak with your mouth, think of it like you listen and speak with your heart. I can’t help you with this so there’s no other way but for you to learn to do it by yourself. For the first trial, how about you try calling me using telepathy? You may come up with anything. You can even try giving me easy order like ‘look to your right’ or something. I’ll react to whatever you come up with. So let’s check whether the message is properly sent or not, you can start now”

Although he was rather confused, Akira still started the training just like he was told to do.

For the time being, the training did not show any results. Alpha told Akira that there was no meaning in their training if he continues to whisper to her. So, Akira kept trying to speak telepathically through his mind. He concentrated strongly and strained his mind. He locked his gaze at Alpha while strongly wishing for his message to be set. He then closed his eyes trying to call for her in his heart. He kept doing his training seriously. Although there was no reaction at all from Alpha, Akira kept giving his all in his training in which Alpha instructed only in vague words.

Only after 1 hour of no results, despite Akira desperately trying to tell Alpha to look to her right, Alpha suddenly turned her face to the right. Akira was surprised by that while Alpha just giggled.

“Yep yep, just like that. Let’s continue with the training.”

“Y-yeah.”

Akira inadvertently replied back using telepathic communication, and then he continued his training just like that. Since he was able to do it once, it was easier for him to redo it. He then kept exchanging words with Alpha through telepathic communication in order to increase its accuracy.

“You’re getting pretty good. You also became able to receive my message clearly. With this, you would be able to clearly catch my voice no matter the situation you are in. If I talk with my voice like before, sounds from outside would make it harder for you to hear it, like sounds from the battle and the gunshot would interfere with my voice. But with this, we have nothing to worry about.”

“Ohh, I see. That is indeed nice.”

“It is, right? This is included as a battle training.”

“But we can do this even outside the inn too. So there’s no need to stay in an in like this, right?”

“Well, a person who’s desperately trying to talk with nothingness would stick out like a sore thumb after all.”

“…Well, that’s true.”

Although Alpha answered back laughing, Akira only replied back while making an awkward smile. After a while, Akira was able to talk with Alpha through telepathy without any problem. And so Alpha moved the telepathy training into the next step.

“That should be enough for normal communication, next is transferring picture, I’ll have you learn how to send an image even if it’s only a vague image. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words. If you can communicate something that is hard to communicate with words only with a single picture, we would be able to communicate easily in the middle of a battle with pictures. As the first step of the training, go ahead and try to send me the image of myself that you want to see. I’ll change my clothes to the one you pick. If my appearance matches the image that you send, then it means that it’s a success. Alright then, go ahead.”

Just like he was told to, Akira imagined Alpha’s dress and tried sending it through telepathy. Alpha’s dress immediately changed. But the dress that she changed into was a really bad dress, it looked like a mismatch of cloth

pieces. Looking at that, Akira's face twitched a bit, then Alpha's dress vanished immediately.

Akira panicked a bit, but Alpha who was naked at that time just giggled mischievously.

"That one was a failure. The image was not perfectly transferred. Or is it that you wanted to see me naked?"

"T-that's not it!! Just put something on!!"

"Nope, this is a training. If you want me to put on something, you should work hard and properly send me the image."

Akira immediately tried to communicate the image again in panic. And again, Alpha's dress started to vaguely come together. But since Akira was in a panic, the accuracy of his message was worst. As such, Alpha's dress immediately vanished again.

Akira's trial and error continued. All kinds of strange dresses came together on Alpha before vanishing again and again. It was actually possible to prevent Alpha from being naked by imagining underwear on her, but Akira was so panicked that he did not even think of that method. Alpha knew it but she just kept it a secret.

Even after that, Akira just kept scoring failures after failures. At last, he was only able to make Alpha put on a single piece white dress without any decoration whatsoever. After that, he took a late dinner.

"That will be all for today. I think you did pretty well for your first day."

"Even though I did not step outside this room at all, I'm feeling so tired right now…"

"In that case, you should just take a bath and sleep."

"You're right, I'll do that…"

Although he was tired inside, it was not like he was as tired as yesterday. Akira took a nice long bath and then he just went to bed. He let his body taken by the sleepiness into dreamland. As for Alpha, unlike yesterday, she properly got an approval from Akira to stay beside him and keep staring at him.

Today, Alpha asked for Akira's permission. But Akira who trusted Alpha just gave her his 'yes' without even knowing what she was asking.

Alpha would never lie. Akira's training was indeed designed to increase his basic ability and survival rate. In order to be able to fully explore the ruin that Alpha asked, high level support would be indispensable to him. But that was not the only thing that he would need. For Akira who did not even know what kind of permission that he had given to Alpha at that time, he could not realize that fact.

Silavin: It is interesting to see how this will develop. Since this is sorta real life, that means that the approval stuff might have some caveats like how google does their TNC. Hmm… Just a thought.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 9, Akira and Shizuka

Index

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The next morning, while having his breakfast, Akira asked Alpha about their schedule for the day. He thought that he would do telepathic communication training again. But to his surprise, Alpha told him to renew his equipment and do training outside. It was not that he hated to stay in a comfortable inn like this, rather, it was more like he felt it was wasteful to spend all his money this way.

Once Akira finished his breakfast, he immediately prepared himself and moved out from the inn. He still had some time left before the check out time, but he thought that it was another luxury that he did not need now.

A lot of Hunters made Kugamayama City as their base of operation since there were a lot of ruins around it. As such, there were a lot of shops aimed for Hunters in the lower district.

Among all of these shops, there was a general shop called Cartridge Freak. It sold all kinds of things like guns, ammo etc for new and veteran Hunters. The shop was not bad for it to go down anytime soon, but at the same time it was not prosperous enough to open a second shop. It was common to find such a shop in the lower district.

Shizuka was the manager and the only person running the whole Cartridge Freak. Thanks to the hard work from the management and a good collection of weapons, there were many new Hunters who bought their first equipment there and continued to be its patron. Then some of these Hunters would stop coming to the shop not too long after, there were 2 main reasons for it. First of all, some of them continued raising their rank as a Hunter until the weapons from Cartridge Freak could no longer satisfy them, thus they would become a regular for other bigger shop looking for better weapons. As for the second reason, some of them went to the wasteland and lost their lives there. If you ask which one was more dominant, the latter case was more dominant.

Shizuka is a beautiful girl. There were a lot of people becoming a regular of that shop for wooing her. In her line of business, it was common for her to hear things like the guy who flirted with her the other day to be found dead the next day. Since it was something unavoidable to her as long as she was doing that business, she would just forget it and continue working. But she had decided to never date a Hunter.

Just like always, that day she was sitting alone in the counter watching the outside while waiting for customers, and then someone that she never saw before came in.

It was just a boy. Although he looked like a Hunter, he was wearing a dress mostly worn by people from the slums and he did not look that strong. Judging from his outer appearance, Shizuka was not sure if she should serve him as a precious customer or not.

The boy looked around him as if he found himself in an unknown place. Looking at that, Shizuka just observed him carefully. Only after she decided that the boy was not there to steal anything from her shop that she lowered her guard and gave a friendly look.

That boy was Akira. After he entered the shop, he was only looking at the exhibited weapons. Only after he was sure that a small kid from the slum like him would not be kicked out, did he start to look for other weapons more seriously.

There were all kinds of weapons lined up inside the shop. There was also a catalog spec placed just beside the racks that contained the weapons. But for Akira, forget common knowledge, he could not even read and write. The only thing that he could understand was just numbers written on the catalog, thus he could not understand what the catalogs were explaining at all.

"…What is the difference between this one and this one? Is it only their prices?"

Both guns looked the same for beginners. But for Akira, after seriously comparing both guns, he could only tell that they had a small difference in price. It was visible that Akira was really anxious as he hung his head low. After all, he was about to buy a gun that he would use to bet his life in the future with the money that he got from risking his very own life. If he ended up buying a bad gun, not only would it make his work as a Hunter more difficult, it would also make him regret it to no end.

Alpha then calmed Akira down while smiling gently.

"They have a lot of differences, I don't mind explaining it to you in detail, but let's do that later. Don't worry, even if you don't really understand, I'll properly pick a good gun for you. So leave this to me."

"Okay, I'm counting on you then."

Thanks to the telepathic communication, Akira did not like a retard talking to himself, but his eyes still inadvertently moved toward Alpha.

Shizuka realized that strange behavior as she tilted her head.

[…He's looking to a direction where no one is there. Or is it someone there? An optical camouflage? But it should be deactivated once you entered the shop… Is it just my imagination? I wonder if it's just him shifting his eyes when thinking.]

The shop had a contract with a security company, thus all kinds of security devices were installed inside the shop. The device for nullifying optical

camouflage was one of the devices installed there. Just to be safe, Shizuka checked the log for that device, but the log showed no reaction at all. And so Shizuka stopped worrying about it.

As Akira approached the counter, Shizuka changed to a friendly smile and welcomed Akira.

“Welcome, this is your first time here, right? Welcome to the Cartridge Freak. I’m the Manager Shizuka, how can I help you?”

“Can I please get a maintenance kit, AAH assault rifle and some bullets. And also, I want to sell a few things.”

Then Akira put 2 guns on the counter, those were the guns that he took from Hayya and his friend.

Shizuka checked the condition of those 2 guns, after that, she asked Akira for a confirmation.

“One of the guns is an AAH assault rifle though? Are you sure you want to buy a new one? It is indeed in a bad shape, but rather than selling it and buying a new one, you can still fix it with a maintenance kit. Moreover, this AAH assault rifle is of higher quality, are you sure you want to sell it?”

Just shutting up and continuing with the business as usual would give Shizuka more profit, but she asked for a confirmation out of her kind nature.

Alpha then explained to Akira.

“It’s okay. Sell it and buy a new one. After all, rather than quality and power, it’s more important to get a gun that you’ll have no problem using. As for the AAH assault rifle, I’ll train you to use it from now on. So it’s better to buy a brand new one compared to a gun that someone has used before.”

“It’s okay, please proceed with the selling.”

“Alright then, in that case… Deducting from the guns that you sold, the total will be 100,000 Aurum.”

After he finished the payment, Akira looked at the remaining money inside his envelope while looking rather conflicted. His hands were shaking when he was handing over the money, and now his balance was already down to 60,000 Aurum. 200,000 Aurum was a small amount of money, he made a bitter laugh as he now understood the meaning of Alpha’s words.

Shizuka put all the stuff that Akira bought on the counter, she then made a smile which was a mix of a seller smile and a smile of confidence on her own goods.

“These are the goods that you requested. If you want, I can give you explanations too. There are unexpectedly many people out there who are using these weapons with half-baked knowledge, you know. It’s not like you’ll lose anything by hearing my explanation, and not to mention that I have nothing to do right now, so I can give you a detailed explanation if you want.”

Even if that was just a formality toward a customer, Akira was taken aback by that kindness that was shown to him. And then Akira told himself an excuse by saying that it might be helpful and decided to take that offer.

“Well, uhh, yes please.”

“Alright then, AAH assault rifle is the favorite rifle for the Hunters. Among all the guns circulating in the eastern district, it’s the oldest gun…”

Shizuka smiled happily as she started her explanation. Whether it was because she was so bored or because it was a subject that she was an expert with, she continued giving her explanation skilfully.

The AAH assault rifle was a famous rifle that had more than 100 years of history. It was regarded as a masterpiece of its time when it was released. It was used as a basic model. It is being improved continuously till now and it was a gun that is circulating widely in the eastern district. It had a lot of functions like automatic mode and semi-automatic mode. Moreover, it had

good accuracy for long range shooting too. Continuous improvement for 100 years was able to erase almost all design flaws. It was a cheap gun for fighting a monster. It had good reliability, durability, maintainability, and it rarely had any failure. As such, many people liked this type of weapon.

Many companies expanded the model individually from each other and many people who like that gun made so many modifications so that the gun did not look like its original form at all. All of these guns were called collectively as AAH assault rifle.

Even for Hunters who brought tanks, weapons, or all kinds of personal weapons to fight monsters, they always had at least one AAH assault rifle with them as some kind of good luck charm. That is just how much the Hunters loved the AAH assault gun.

Shizuka was really satisfied when she finished her explanation. Although it was something that most Hunters already knew, Akira listened very closely to that explanation. Thus, Shizuka felt that it was worth the time explaining it to Akira, she then happily continued their conversation.

“Do you need anything else? How about recovery potion, you can never bring too much of it. I recommend you to always have surplus potions. It’s okay too if you want to bring more ammo and equipment instead, but you better plan to get back here sooner if you do that. There are many people who could not get back home just because injuries that they thought to be only light wounds. Fast and adequate healing is very important.”

This made Akira think for a bit. If it was about the healing potion, he still had some medicine that he had found in the ruin. He then guessed how much such medicine would cost judging from its effectivity and decided that it was not something that he could buy with the amount of money that he had at that moment. But then he started thinking of things that he might need and could buy here.

“In that case then, do you have clothes for a Hunter?”

“Do you need armor? Or augmented clothes? I’m sorry. Equipment like that usually need a body measurement of each Hunter, that’s why we don’t sell

readymades. But you can order one here if you want.”

When it comes to clothes for Hunters, it usually means armor for battle. It includes armor with particular functions like slash-resistant, pressure-resistant or bulletproof armor. As for the augmented clothes, these were clothes that augment their user’s physical strength by artificial muscles. Since Shizuka looked like she was feeling sorry, Akira was flustered a bit as he immediately shook his head.

“Ah, that’s not what I meant, uhh, I mean clothes that look sturdy and easy to move with. And also I would take a rucksack too if you have one…”

“Oh, that’s what you meant, huh… I do have some but it’s not for children size, I think it will be alright after I modify it a bit, wait for a sec, okay?”

Shizuka went inside the shop and returned with the goods that Akira asked, clothes and a rucksack. It was just a coat with armor pieces spread in some places, although it had no worth as an armor, he only had nothing but that to use at the moment. While the rucksack was an old dusty rucksack that you cannot put out as an item to sell.

Shizuka included the payment for the cloth and the rucksack in the payment from before. So in short, Akira got them for free. Akira was rather surprised by that.

“Are you really sure?”

“Yep, I don’t mind. It’s just some kind of extra service. If you like them, then please frequent this shop and buy a lot of things.”

“I understand, thank you very much for everything.”

Since Shizuka was smiling gently at him, Akira smiled back and bowed.

Shizuka kept waving her hand at Akira as he was leaving the shop. But once she could not see Akira’s figure anymore, her expression turned worried.

“A kid Hunter, huh. I wonder how long he will survive.”

Working as a Hunter was really dangerous, you could be killed anytime, even more so when you are a kid. And not to mention that Akira did not seem like he had any experience in using anti-monster guns. Shizuka could see that through her experience.

“Seriously though, I really hope he can be a regular to my shop.”

The cloth and the rucksack that she gave were some kinds of send-off gift for Akira.

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Akira went straight to the wasteland to prepare himself for training right after he left Shizuka’s shop. He changed to the dress that he bought, took out his brand new AAH assault rifle and loaded it with the ammo that he bought together with the gun.

Guns made to fight monsters were heavier than Akira thought and it got heavier with the ammo loaded inside it. It reminded him of what was in store for him as a Hunter, i.e. fighting monsters. And so, he strongly squeezed the gun that he would be trusting his life to with a serious face.

Looking at that, Alpha’s face turned serious, she then asked a question to Akira ignoring what he was feeling at that moment.

“Akira, was that girl from before your type?”

“Girl from before?”

“The manager of that gun shop. Her name is Shizuka, isn’t it? You were flustered and all over the place, you know?”

“I was flustered…? I was only buying weapon like usual, was I not? Of course, I was happy that she gave the dress and the rucksack for free, but that was all, you know?”

“No, something is different, I know it.”

“Even if you told me so, I can’t really say for sure. Leaving that aside, I’ve finished my preparations here.”

It was not like Akira was trying to avoid the subject. He only had a faint feeling and he did not realize it himself, so he really did not understand. As such, he only let the conversation slide away while looking puzzled.

As for Alpha, the girl type that Akira liked was important information for her. But she judged that it was useless to pursue that subject further, so she changed the subject.

“I understand. Let’s start, Akira, get your gun ready.”

Akira’s expression turned solemn, but since he had no training in using a gun, he did not know how to properly ready his gun. As such, he could only imitate vague images from his memories.

Alpha told Akira that it was no good while smiling.

“Yep, that’s no good at all. You should stabilize the gun with your body, like this.”

Alpha made an image of AAH assault rifle on her hand and showed a pose on how to hold it.

Akira was rather surprised since he never thought that Alpha could make other images beside her cloth. But then he realized it was not that strange after all and he fixed his pose by looking at Alpha.

After that, Alpha pointed out the important places that were not satisfactory. From adjusting Akira’s arm and hip position, explaining where he should put his power and weight. Then she moved to a more detailed explanation on how much power he should put on his thumb.

Akira was so focused on his training that he did not realize something strange, how in the world did Alpha know where he put his strength in his body by only looking at him?

That pose training took 1 hour, even though Akira did not even shoot a bullet, he already felt so tired. But that was not for nothing, thanks to the detailed explanation from Alpha, Akira's pose was surprisingly better compared to before.

Seeing that Akira no longer looking like a beginner, Alpha nodded with satisfaction.

"Nice, that's good. Remember your pose just now, okay? Next, you will shoot that small boulder over there"

Alpha pointed her finger to the front of Akira. Akira focused his eyes trying to look at what was in front of him. Alpha was actually pointing at a small boulder 100 meter in front of him, but there was no way Akira could see that.

"That small boulder…? Which one exactly?"

Alpha just smiled when Akira protested and looked at her.

"You'll see it soon enough, I'll remind you again just how great my support is. I guarantee that you'll be surprised, now look at where I'm pointing at again."

Akira was a bit puzzled as he looked back to where Alpha was pointing. But when he did that, suddenly a box frame appeared and there was a circle inside that frame. And when he inadvertently focused his gaze on that circle. His vision zoomed in to that point as if he was using a long range vision device. Akira was so surprised and stopped focusing, thus his vision immediately turned back to normal.

"Alpha!? Something strange happened to my eyes, did you do something!?"

Alpha laughed with satisfaction seeing how Akira was reacting.

"I added long range vision support to your vision. So use it to find the small boulder."

A red point appeared in Akira’s vision. When he focused on that point, his vision zoomed in again like before and he could see the red circle around a small boulder, but it was still blurred.

“There’s a limit on how much you can zoom in with naked eyes. Try to do it again with the rifle’s aiming device.”

Akira then tried to look for the small boulder from before through the aiming device of his rifle. But his line of vision through the aiming device was really narrow and the small boulder was outside its range. It was impossibly hard to find that boulder.

But then suddenly an indicator appeared in his vision. When he moved his aim slowly to that indicator, he found the small boulder from before. Moreover, a blue line extended from the gun’s muzzle.

“That blue line is the approximation of the bullet’s path that I calculated. If you align that line with your target and pull the trigger, there’s a good chance that it will hit perfectly.”

The blue line was shaking randomly. Akira tried hard to align that line with the small boulder and pulled the trigger. A gunshot echoed, the kickback from the gun threw Akira’s small body into disarray. The bullet spewed out from the muzzle, flew at high speed tearing through the air.

But then it passed beside the targeted boulder and vanished far into the wasteland.

“…I missed.”

“It was only an approximation after all, not a prediction. So the bullet path would change greatly from external factors. Just now, the biggest external factor was change in your pose. Remember to keep your pose, take a good aim, then pull the trigger. At a real battle, you will take aim on a monster rather than on a small boulder. Do your best to hit your target and kill it in one shot if it’s possible. In the worst case scenario, at least you should neutralize enemy’s movement with that shot or they will shoot you back

and kill you. You'll die if you miss. You should keep that in mind when you shoot."

Akira kept shooting at his target while putting all his focus on aiming. But it did not seem like any of his shots would hit the target anytime soon, or more like, none of his shots landed near his target. Most of his shots missed the target badly. Every time his pose was broken, Alpha would tell him to fix his pose and shoot again.

Only after he was doing that for 1 hour did he start to see bullets land in his field of vision through the aiming device. And also, all the tiredness piled up until that point started to disrupt his focus. Then from all the built up stress, a question came up in Akira.

"Say Alpha, I've been thinking, you know. Things like these telepathic communication and zoom vision, you could've done it sooner, right?"

For Akira, it was just a random question that came up in his mind. But Alpha judged that depending on her answer, it could be a seed of distrust between them. And so she chose her words carefully while still smiling.

"To put it simply, I would've done it if it was possible. I would've done it if it was a better course of action. I guess that's all there is to it. In the case of when we fought those two, I had to ask for your permission first, that's why it was impossible."

"I think I would have given you my approval if you had asked, you know? It's that thing, right? About whether it's okay to give me support thingy."

"Originally, I did not even have the permission to ask for your approval. It is all because of a particular rule that is too long to explain. But, even if I had the permission, I would still not do it. If your vision changed in the middle of a battle, it would instead confuse you and hinder you from maneuvering normally. For example, that approximation line for the bullet's path, if you could see that, you would've taken more time for your aim which would've given a chance for Hayya to shoot back at you."

"Ohh, you're right."

Akira was convinced by that answer as he nodded. After confirming that, Alpha continued her explanation.

“From now on, every time you think that there’s something that I should be able to do easily but intentionally not doing, then this is the reason for it – either because it is physically impossible, or technologically impossible, or it doesn’t agree with the rule, or it will only make the condition worse, it will always be one of these reasons. Even for me, it’s not like I can do everything. If I could do everything, then I would’ve explored the ruin myself rather than asking for your help. I’m bound by a lot of things, that’s why I’m asking for your help.”

“Well, what can I say… it seems that you’re also having it hard, huh?! But again, it was thanks to that condition that I was able to meet you. I do feel bad for you for saying this, but I’m thankful for that condition that you’re in.”

Akira said all of those things without thinking too much, but when he realized it, he thought that he just said something rather rude to Alpha. When Alpha saw that, she smiled mischievously as if she just found another thing to tease Akira. Then she got closer to Akira’s face and said in an inviting voice.

“No need to hold back, you can be more thankful, you know. You may even express it with real action. For example, you can work hard to increase your accuracy, or you can take the bait better when I seduce you, you know?”

“…I’ll try my hard doing the former one.”

Akira pulled the trigger, but again the bullet missed the target so bad.

His training continued until the sunset. Akira had gotten better at shooting. With the help from Alpha’s support, he could at least hit 1 out of 100 shots when aiming for a medium sized boulder 100 meters away from him.

When Akira finished his training and went back to the city, it was already dark. He then stayed in the inn that he previously stayed. When he finished his payment and looked back at his mostly gone money, it reminded him

again just how meager his 200,000 Aurum was. But he just pushed that subject aside as he entered the bath and let the water wash away all his tiredness. As such, all his tiredness was exchanged for sleepiness. After he finished his bath, he just crashed into the bed and fell asleep.

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On the next day, Akira did some maintenance on his AAH assault rifle inside his room, this was also a kind of training for him. Since he did not know how to properly do gun maintenance, he did the maintenance with Alpha's instruction.

"At the moment, this gun is your lifeline. If you take maintenance of this gun lightly, it means that you're taking your own life lightly. You should keep that in mind and take good care of this gun."

"I understand that very well."

Akira was giving his best doing maintenance with a serious look while getting a lot of warnings from Alpha. He disassembled the gun and individually did maintenance for all the small components. But when he assembled the gun that was in pieces, he was left with some leftover pieces. As such, Akira reassembled the gun again in panic. Although the piece that was left last time was properly assembled into the gun, there was another different piece leftover in the end.

As Akira let out a sigh seeing the leftover piece, Alpha just smiled at him and gave him a warning.

"I don't recommend using this gun in this condition."

"O-okay."

Akira then disassembled the gun one more time and reassemble it. This time, he had no leftover piece, but the gun was not functioning. Of course Alpha gave him some hints after that. Akira then continued his hard battle, and when he finally finished his maintenance, it was already afternoon.

“At this rate, if I get a spare gun, I would take 1 whole day just to do maintenance on them.”

“About that, you have no other choice but to keep training so that you can do the maintenance with higher accuracy and speed. After all, we don’t have any money to spare for maintenance. Alright then, we’ll conclude today’s training with this.”

Akira gave a puzzled look.

“That’s all for today? So we’re not going to have a shooting exercise today?”

“Since we met, you’ve done nothing but exploring the ruin and training, after all. A change of pace is important, do you have anything you want to do, Akira?”

“Something I want to do, huh?”

Akira tried to think of something, but nothing came up. When he was in the slum, he used his free time for collecting metal pieces and sold them for money. For his current condition, that would be equal to exploring the ruin.

Up until this point, Akira used all his personal time for surviving. As such, he was rather unfamiliar with the concept of entertainment. Because of that, no matter how hard he thought, he could not come up with anything except for the countless sighs.

Alpha just kept looking at Akira without saying anything, she knew well why Akira could not come up with anything.

“In that case, how about we use your free time for learning to read and write? After all, those are important skills both for studying or for leisure. It is very inconvenient that you can’t read or write, so it might be a good idea to learn them as fast as possible.”

Akira then bought a notebook and writing tools from the inn’s general shop and used them for learning how to read and write from Alpha. Alpha’s

teaching was very effective, it did not take long before Akira became able to write his own name.

Akira then remembered that his name was written wrongly on his Hunter’s ID. So he pulled out his Hunter’s ID and took a close look at it, his name was written as Ajira there.

Akira was finally able to recognize that his name was written wrongly.

“…So I got a little bit smarter, huh?”

Though Akira was being cynical when he said that, he also gave out a hearty laugh.

Silavin: Interesting. It seems that Alpha has a ton more things hidden to her.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 10, Elena and Sara

Index

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Akira was engaged in his shooting training in the wasteland near the Kuzusuhara city ruin.

He was holding his gun close while trying to keep the correct pose. Looking through the aiming device, he was trying to align the Trajectory Prediction Line, in short the TP Line, with a small boulder. But the blue TP Line, that appeared because of Alpha's support, was swaying lightly due to Akira's breathing.

Akira took a deep breath, held it in, and gathered his focus. When the blue TP Line stopped swaying, he pulled the trigger.

The bullet that launched from the gun's muzzle tore through the space in one straight line before hitting the boulder. It blasted the boulder into pieces and threw them into the air.

"Oh! You're doing well, aren't you?"

After hitting his target 3 times consecutively, Akira felt that his shooting skill had leveled up and laughed happily. He understood that he was still completely relying on Alpha's support and it would be impossible to hit his

target all by himself. But it was also obvious that his skill had gotten better compared to when he was only a total amateur.

Alpha smiled back happily.

“It seems that you’ve fully graduated from being an amateur Hunter. You’re doing well and your improvement is pretty amazing.”

If someone gets praised after working so hard for so long, obviously that person would feel happy, and even someone as cynical as Akira was no exception. As Akira smiled at Alpha, she smiled back with a deeper meaning.

“Just like this, let’s work hard for the next training too. Since you are able to hit the target now, let’s move on to the next one. We’re going to change the target, but you only need to do what you’ve been doing up until now. Try to shoot it while thinking that you’re going to be killed if you miss.”

Alpha then pointed at Akira’s next target. He showed a little bit of annoyance as he moved his line of sight to it. But his face immediately turned pale as his sight fell on his next target. It was a weapon dog that almost killed him the other day.

The weapon dog was 2 meters long. It was a monstrously big weapon dog with a Gatling gun growing on its back. Its appearance was very intimidating that it would be impossible for it to sneak around. But even so, Akira did not notice its presence until now.

Akira was stunned for a bit, but he immediately regained his composure and was about to run away when Alpha smiled and said.

“Don’t panic, it’s just an image.”

Akira inadvertently looked at Alpha. As he saw her smile saying there was no danger, he was able to calm down. While being suspicious, he still aimed his gun at the weapon dog. His heart was palpitating at breakneck pace. The weapon dog looked real no matter how he sliced it. But since it was

standing perfectly still and did not show any reaction, he aimed the TP Line at it. He finally understood that it was not real and let out a sigh of relief.

“Don’t surprise me like that.”

Although Akira was looking at Alpha with an angry face, Alpha just kept smiling shamelessly at him.

“You’ll fight a lot of those monsters from now on. So you need to get used to them and know how to react when one of those monsters appears suddenly. If you get stunned just like now, you’ll be killed.”

Alpha gave Akira the signal to continue the training, as such, he got his gun ready without any hesitation.

“Its weakness is the area between its eyes. Kill it in one shot.”

Akira looked at his target through the aiming device. His target was framed in red box with an indicator placed on its weak point. Akira was trying to align the blue TP Line with that weak point, but his hand was trembling, thus making the TP Line shake inconsistently.

“…Calm down, it’s just an image. It’s just another target like that small boulder…”

Even if he understood that, scary things were still scary to him. It was a monster that almost killed him, apart from the fact that it was not moving at all, the image looked surreal. Moreover, since he had to take aim, he had to keep looking at it. It was really hard for him to keep his cool.

Akira took deep breaths a few times and tried to calm himself bit by bit. He put more power in his still quivering arms to suppress the swaying of the TP Line. As he tried to keep his calm, he halted his breathing, gathered his focus, and pulled the trigger.

Akira did all he could, but the bullet didn’t hit the weapon dog’s weak point. It did not even hit the weapon dog at all. Instead, it landed on the ground not too far from the weapon dog.

Right after that, the weapon dog made its move. It shifted its huge body very quickly as if it was reacting to his shot and pointed its Gatling gun towards him. Akira who was looking at it from the aiming device on his gun was frozen in place. The Gatling gun then started to rotate and made a huge muzzle flash.

“I’m dead” that was what Akira thought as he stood there frozen.

But to his surprise, the bullets did not come raining at him and he was far from dead. He was not even hurt. He was very confused until he remembered that it was only an image.

If it was not training, he would have been dead just now. Akira finally understood why Alpha showed him that scene. He let out a sigh as he supported his limp body from collapsing.

“Do tell me beforehand next time…”

When Akira gave a protesting look to Alpha while being meek, Alpha pointed her finger toward the ground. There was a corpse riddled with bullets lying there. And when Akira noticed the face on that corpse, he went pale. It was an image of his dead body.

“If you can’t aim properly at its weak point and kill it in one shot, at the very least, your shot should weaken it to a state where it can’t move anymore. Otherwise, it will counterattack and you’ll end up like this. You’ll be dead if you miss, didn’t I tell you to take aim while keeping that in your mind? Take your training seriously so you won’t end up like this in a real fight.”

“…Roger that.”

Akira’s face twitched as he saw Alpha, who was laughing as usual, and the image of his corpse.

Alpha reset the monster image and the training continued with it as a target. The target was one of those monsters that Akira could defeat given his equipment. But Akira could not land any hit and kept seeing himself getting

killed in so many different ways thus leaving many images of his corpses scattered around his surroundings. As Akira looked at those corpses, he desperately continued his training so that he would not end up like them in real life.

Thanks to the corpses that kept piling up, Akira started to get the hang of it. He kept his calm, aimed carefully, and pulled the trigger while reassuring himself that this one would definitely hit the target. And suddenly, the target monster vanished. Akira was rather surprised as he put his gun down. All the corpse images also vanished from his surrounding.

“Alpha, are we going to end the training for today?”

“That’s not the reason Akira, someone is coming here.”

Akira looked puzzled as he pulled out his binoculars. Thanks to the binocular that was enhanced with Alpha’s support, he was able to find the aforementioned people immediately. There were 2 Hunters riding a vehicle designed for traversing the wasteland.

Akira’s face turned grim the moment he saw them. He remembered the time when he was attacked by a pair of Hunters the other day, so he could not help but be on his guard. Although these two Hunters were girls, there was no reason for him to lower his guard.

“Don’t tell me that they’re here to attack me just like last time.”

“I think they’re there for a different reason. They might just simply on their way to the Kuzusuhara City ruins. But just in case, let’s go to the ruins too. Since they’re riding a car, if they really want to attack you, you won’t be able to run away from them in this place.”

It was not a rare thing for Hunters to meet other Hunters in the wasteland and it was equally not a rare thing for the other Hunters to not have goodwill. As such, both sides would put up their guard and created a tense atmosphere between them, but then this tense atmosphere frequently sparked a fight just because of trivial things.

Akira was already hyper-aware of them. So half of the trigger for a fight had been set. Thinking about how the other hunters would react to him, Alpha decided to tell him to withdraw from the place.

“I understand, let’s go.”

Akira immediately pulled up his rucksack and ran to Kuzusuhara City ruins.

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Both of the female Hunters were riding a vehicle specially made for exploring the ruins. They were also heading towards the Kuzusuhara ruins.

Their equipment was inadequate for exploring the inner part of the ruin, but they were clearly too well equipped for exploring the outskirts of the ruin. Putting aside the special group of Hunters who could kill monsters with their bare hands, most of the Hunters were equipped with the equipment proportional to their skill. After all, it was an indicator that they have the skill to acquire and operate those equipments. So in short, the Hunters who work by exploring the Kuzusuhara ruins, they were not fully amateurs but at the same time, not fully professionals either.

Elena who was driving the car spoke to Sara who was sitting beside her.

“Sara, we’ll arrive soon, get yourself ready.”

Sara who was looking at the ruin through her binoculars made a puzzled look.

“Elena, are you sure this is the place?”

“We already discussed about this yesterday, didn’t we? This is the only ruin that a small kid can reach by foot from Kugamayama city.”

“Isn’t it also possible for him to go to other ruins by using the regular service?”

“Other than this Kuzusuhara City ruins, the other ruins that the regular service can bring you to are dangerous ruins. The rumor says that there was

a small amateur boy who came to the Exchange Centre with a very expensive relic. If that boy was also frequenting other ruins, then such a rumor won't spread, you know. It's not strange for a small boy from the slums to go as far as to the outskirts of Kuzusuhara City ruins and find an expensive relic by pure chance. So it must be this place."

There was a rumor spreading among the Hunters in the Kugamayama city about a ruin near the city where even a small boy could reach and a lot of expensive relics were left untouched.

Obviously, you have a better chance to come back alive from ruins that are not dangerous. As such, Hunters who could not go to dangerous ruins thought that it was a better choice to spend their time sweeping the ruins rather than fighting dangerous monsters. That was why places that might have relics left untouched would get fully explored in no time. There were no more places with low danger level left unexplored near the city. At least, most of the Hunters thought so.

But that was completely refuted. After all, a small boy with poor equipment brought expensive relics to the Exchange Centre.

They did see this boy, and not only once. He was even regularly bringing back relics to the Exchange Centre and had a fight in the slums for the money that he acquired. The rumor was even more exaggerated by saying that Hunters who tailed that boy found an unexplored place and acquired a huge amount of money. Such a rumor was already spreading in the city, as such, a lot of Hunters started sweeping the area with low danger level once again.

Elena and Sara were among those Hunters who heard about that rumor and decided to sweep the ruins again. For them, the outskirts of the Kuzusuhara City ruins was not worth their time anymore. But if the rumor turned out to be true, then they thought that they might hit the jackpot themselves. And even if the rumour was not true, it was not like it was going to dangerous for them. That was what Elena thought as she decided to search around the ruins again, and Sara agreed with her.

But unlike Elena, Sara was not as optimistic.

“Didn’t you thoroughly search that place before? And the result from that search was not really great either. To be honest, I’m not expecting much from that place.”

“Well, there’s no harm in doing this, right? Let’s just search that place again, something might have changed since the last time we came here.”

After Elena said that in an upbeat tone, her gaze moved to Sara’s chest and her expression changed to worry.

“…And also, about your nanomachine, it might be a good idea to replenish it soon. I know that you’ve been cutting your portion since we did not get much money lately, but are you really okay?”

Sara looked at her own chest which lacked contours like when it was in its glorious days. Elena and Sara both very well knew what it meant. That was exactly why Sara smiled as to not make Elena worry.

“It’s okay, there’s nothing to worry about.”

Sara was one of those people who actively enhanced their body using consumption type nanomachine and her chest was where she was saving her nanomachines stock.

Working as a Hunter and fighting monsters are 2 sides of the same coin. Their enemies were either descendants of the biological weapons made by the old world or the machines that functioned as defensive mechanisms. It was not easy to fight those enemies using human body. In order to fight those monsters, some hunters looked for a way to enhance their physical strength; augmented clothes, prosthetics, turning into a cyborg and so on.

The people from the eastern district studied the technology from the old world to fight against those monsters of the old world and came up with a lot of different ways to enhance one’s physical ability. One of those ways was to use nanomachines. It had a lot of different effects like using force field to strengthen the muscle, enhancing cells, or even genetic modification. And when it came to highly advanced nanomachines, they could even replace one’s cells with cells made by nanomachines and turn

their body similar to a cyborg. They might look exactly the same like normal people, but these people would be able to flip a car or become impervious to bullets without using augmented clothes.

Actually Sara almost died because of a certain circumstance and received treatment using the nanomachines. The treatment itself was a success, she was able to escape death and even acquired an enhanced body. But because of that, she could not survive without the nanomachines.

Her body was actively consuming the nanomachines on her daily life and the consumption increased as she was working as a Hunter. But replenishing nanomachines needed quite a lot of money.

She could actually take treatment to get rid of the dependence with nanomachines, but she would need a huge amount of money and she would be left with a weak body. It would also require even more money to treat her weakened body. In short, they were problems that could only be solved with money. And because she did not have an abundance of wealth, she could only maintain the status quo.

One of the reasons why Elena put her bet on the rumor was because Sara needed money to maintain her life. Not to mention that Sara who was their main fire power will be less burdened if they explored an area with weak monsters. The nanomachines that Sara consumed when she fought were replenished by distributing the nanomachines stock in her chest, and now her chest had already shrunk. Since Elena knew how it looked when Sara had full stock of nanomachines, she could not help but worry looking at Sara's current condition.

Elena looked intensely at Sara and said.

"…You know your own body the best, so I won't say too much about it. But if you keep going on like this, I'll sell my own equipment and force feed you nanomachines, you know."

Sara looked back at Elena with an equally intense gaze.

“Please don’t do that. If you do that, we will have less equipment and it will be harder to earn money. How long do you think we took to earn all of these equipments?”

“It is nothing compared to your life. When the push comes to shove, I’ll do that and let’s raise up again together. If today’s expedition goes well, we will spend our money first to replenish your nanomachines, okay?”

She would not accept any objections. That was what her eyes were saying. They had been friends since before they started working as Hunters. Their conversation had led to a situation where one of them should back off or they would not reach any compromise, so Sara just accepted it and made a light smile.

“Alright, I understand. Seriously though, we really can’t live without money.”

Elena smiled back at Sara.

“Isn’t it too late for that? Hunters are just like that, aren’t they?”

“Well, that’s true too.”

With a lot of things in their mind, Elena and Sara headed to the Kuzusuhara City ruins while smiling.

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Akira was still moving around the outskirts of the Kuzusuhara City ruins. He did think of searching for relics since he had come to the ruins, but there were a lot of other Hunters in the ruins. As such, he had to keep moving to avoid bumping into them.

Thanks to the Alpha’s advanced enemy detection ability, Akira was able to avoid bumping with any monsters or Hunters. But there was no way for him to either search for relics or continue his shooting training, so Akira was a bit disappointed.

“Akira, we need to move again.”

“Again? Why this place is filled with people? And also, is it really that common for a ruin to be this crowded?”

“It depends on the ruins, but this ruin should be already abandoned though. When I met you, there was not even a single Hunter other than you. Even after that, the only other Hunters that I saw around this place were those two that you killed the other day.”

Akira’s expression turned grim.

“…Then, doesn’t that mean that they’re tailing me? Are they looking for me?”

Akira was rather worried, he could not help but think that these Hunters were looking for him for the exact same reason that those Hunters were tailing him the other day. But this time, they brought a lot of other Hunters with them.

Alpha then smiled and tried to calm Akira.

“Don’t worry, even if that is the case, you’ll be fine since you have me.”

“Well, I’m counting on you for that part, but…”

“Moreover, I think those Hunters are not specifically aiming for you. I have some inkling on the purpose they are here for. That’s why I’m saying, there’s nothing to worry about.”

Then Alpha proceeded to explain Akira about the rumor that Elena and other hunters had heard, the source of that rumor, and the things that the other Hunters were looking for after hearing that rumor. After listening to Alpha’s explanation, Akira understood that he was the main reason for everything that was happening, and so his face went pale.

“So that’s what’s happening, huh. This is getting troublesome.”

“Well, since it was just a rumor. I’m sure only half of the people who heard it actually believe it. It’ll immediately die down once they know they can’t

find any relics. That’s why I think there’s no need for you to worry about it. Let’s go.”

Akira was feeling rather complicated about these people who flooded the ruin because of what he did, but he did not have the leeway to think about that, so he just shoved that feeling aside. He continued to traverse the ruin by following Alpha.

***

As for Elena and Sara, they still did not get any results yet. Although Sara expected that, she still felt disappointed as she let out a sigh.

“Although I did not expect much, I never thought that it would be this fruitless.”

Elena made a bitter laugh and tried to cheer up Sara.

“If it was that easy, then someone would have discovered it first, you know. Let’s just keep looking patiently.”

“Even if you say so, I don’t feel like we’ll find anything if we keep looking blindly like this. Elena, do you have any leads or something?”

“I’m actually looking for that kid’s footprints. If it’s true that a kid found an unexplored area just like the rumor said, then there might be some small footprints that would lead us there.”

“As expected of you, you always have a unique viewpoint.”

The jobs in Elena’s team were clearly distributed. Elena’s job was to gather information, while Sara’s job was fighting. And they were well equipped for their respective jobs.

The main equipment for Elena was the information collection device. It was a high tech device for reconnaissance consisting motion detectors, sonar map, and advanced scope. She used it for wide range information collection such as mapping the ruin or scanning and locating enemy hideouts. She also

had a gun with her, but compared to Sara’s equipment, her gun was just a light gun.

Sara’s main equipment was a powerful gun. Normally, one would need to use augmented clothes to handle the weight and the kick back from the gun, but she was able to swing it around like nothing thanks to her strengthened body. As for her armor, she was equipped with a sturdy armor to handle the situation when she needed to become Elena’s shield.

Elena would find the enemy, then Sara would take care of it. Sometimes Sara would also go alone without Elena, that was how their team explored a ruin.

Elena who was responsible for gathering information did all she could to answer Sara’s expectations. It was because of Elena’s superb skills that she was able to find footprints in the ruin that was filled with dust flying around. But the result wasn’t as expected. So Elena could only reply back to Sara with a bitter laugh.

“Well, I still could not find any small footprints, but I did find so many adults’s footprints though.”

“It’s still way better than looking blindly. So where do we look next?”

“Let’s look for places where small kid might go. Ah, right, let me tell you this when I still have the chance, Sara. The colourless mist is getting thicker, so be careful.”

“Roger that. If it gets worse, let’s just return back. It will be your call to decide when to return, Elena.”

Elena and Sara then moved deeper into the ruins while keeping their guard up.

***

Akira was moving carefully inside the ruins. In order to avoid bumping into other Hunters, he was hiding inside an abandoned building. He was

watching the situation outside the building with a binocular.

Every time Akira found another Hunter through his binoculars, he would wonder if that Hunter would go back home soon. Alpha was watching his action and spoke to him.

“Akira, since this is a good chance, I’ll explain to you about the colourless mist.”

“Colourless mist?”

“Yep. It’s started to get thicker. Look at that direction.”

Alpha then got into the field of view of Akira’s binocular and pointed her finger.

“Look in that direction and this direction, can you find the difference?”

“…I don’t see any difference, they look the same.”

“Are you sure?”

Alpha was smiling at Akira as if she was urging Akira to look again. So Akira took another look but more carefully this time. But he could only see buildings lining in both directions, a common sight in the ruins. They were exactly the same to him. But since Alpha seemed like she was expecting an answer, Akira tried his best to look for their differences.

“…If I am to be strict, I think the one on the right is somehow more blurred.”

Alpha then smiled and gave a strong nod.

“That’s right. The colourless mist on the right is thicker.”

“…Is that it?”

“This is the most important part. It is fatal for an eastern Hunter to not know this, so listen well.”

To Akira who looked confused, Alpha smiled as if to encourage him and started her explanation.

The colourless mist was the name that the people of the eastern district gave for a certain phenomenon. Unlike usual mist that looked white from light scattering, this colourless mist's range and thickness could only be observed from the blurring of the field of view.

All the area inside the colourless mist would blur. If it only hindered the view up to a certain extent, it might pose some problems but Hunters could easily cope with it by using high tech information gathering devices, but the effects of colourless mist did not stop there. There were a lot of unexplainable phenomena that come together with the colourless mist.

Radio wave, electromagnetic signals, even sound and smell too would be affected in the colourless mist. Both living organisms and machines would have problem in acquiring information about their surroundings. It was as if all kinds of powerful jamming devices were active at the same time. The performance of thermo-optical camouflage would greatly reduce to a point that it became almost useless. Then starting from optical lock, all kinds of locks would be rendered unusable. Wireless communication would be filled with noise and the mist could even affect wired communication some times.

Moreover, all guns would lose their power and range. The trajectory would deviate greatly which worsened the accuracy. And when the colourless mist was thick enough, even the path that the bullet took would be visible.

This phenomenon greatly affected the Hunter's activities in the eastern district. An inexperienced Hunter like Akira, could not fully understand the dangers of this phenomenon even after listening to Alpha's explanation.

"I, at least understand that it will be bad once the mist thickens."

Alpha could clearly see just how badly Akira understood the situation, so she shook her head and explained seriously.

"You don't seem to understand it completely, so I'll only explain the part where it affects you then. First of all, the reason why monsters can't easily

attack people in the eastern district is because of this colourless mist. The monsters are also affected by the mist. Thanks to that, these monsters are having a hard time finding people thus allowing humans to live here. If the mist was not there, even the monsters on the other side of the ruins would be able to detect your presence. The detection function installed in their weapons made by the old world is simply that powerful."

Leaving aside whether Akira really understood the significance of the monster's detection ability, he at least understood just how important it is to avoid the enemy's detection. He nodded as if he was amazed.

"I see now, it is indeed important."

"And one more thing. Once it gets extremely thick, it would affect monsters, humans, and machines, thus lower their ability to detect enemy. In the worst case scenario, you might even be able to find enemy faster than me, you know. That's why for now, if the mist gets thicker, then you'll need to cancel the ruin expedition and go back to the city."

Akira who was amazed listened closely to Alpha, he finally understood the danger of the mist.

"…Wait, doesn't that mean that when the mist is thick enough, there's still a high chance for me to encounter monster even with your support?"

"Yep, that's right."

"…If I meet a monster, what do you think the possibility of the current me to win?"

"In the case where the mist is thick enough, and my support is hindered to the point of uselessness, All your encounters would likely be a close range encounter. At that point, it will be pretty hopeless for you."

"…Just now you said that the mist is getting thicker, right?"

"Yep."

Akira suddenly stopped talking and used his binoculars to watch for enemies around him. Of course, it was very rare for the mist to even get that thick. But Alpha who knew that just kept it a secret while smiling mischievously.

Silavin: Hmm… nanomachines to make the bossom bigger… I wonder if guys…

Oh… nevermind…

But maybe…

Hmm…

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Rebuild World – Chapter 11, All kinds of Prey

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In the ruins, Elena and Sara kept searching for footprints and finally found footprints of a child. The footprint that they found was so light that it would have easily erased if the air blew over it. The reason why they were able to find that slight trace was because of Elena's tenacity and skill. And it definitely was Akira's footprint. So they continued their search in good mood expecting to find the rumoured unexplored area.

But it was fruitless. They followed the footprints into an abandoned building and searched the whole place to find nothing of value inside it. Even so, they continued their search since they found similar footprints in the building. While on the other hand, the colourless mist was getting thicker.

After sometime, Sara realized that the colourless mist had gotten pretty thick and her vision blurred when she looked through her binoculars. Just to be safe, she asked Elena.

"Elena, the colourless mist is getting thicker. Is it okay to continue here?"

Elena answered Sara's question after an unnoticeable pause.

“…It’s okay. Although it’s started to affect the information gathering device. It’s not so bad that we have to withdraw from our search.”

“Is that so? Well, I guess it’s fine if you say so.”

Elena then asked Sara in a worried tone.

“How about you? Are you okay? If the colourless mist starts negatively affecting your nanomachines, we’ll withdraw immediately. So do tell me if it does and don’t hide it, okay?”

“I’m fine. Although I can’t say that it doesn’t affect me at all, I’m still alright for now.”

“Well, if you say so. But don’t push yourself too hard, okay?”

Sara laughed mischievously at Elena to make her stop worrying.

“I’m telling you, I’m fine. When the push comes to shove, I’ll carry you and run away. So I still have a lot of spare power, you know.”

Elena then replied back while smiling teasingly.

“Oh my, are you trying to say that I’m fat?”

“NO! I was talking about your equipment. There’s no other deeper meaning than that. That’s really all. I’m telling you that’s all.”

Elena and Sara were laughing as they were teasing each other. At least they were able to confirm that they were really okay.

Elena did not lie. Although the mist affected the information gathering device, the effect was not that bad. But it would be unfavourable if the mist got any thicker, and by the looks of it, the possibility was very high.

If it were any other day, Elena would have decided to withdraw due to the danger. But she couldn’t do that today. They would not get any money if they went back empty-handed. And if their financial situation got any worse, there was a good chance that Sara would postpone replenishing her

nanomachines, which would be life-threatening for Sara in her present condition. Elena wanted to avoid such a situation no matter what and she unconsciously pushed their search longer.

And Sara did not lie either. Her situation was the same as Elena's information gathering device, it was manageable for now. But if Sara suggested Elena to stop the search because of her little discomfort, Elena would definitely go against it. And she feared that if it was handled badly, Elena might even go to the ruins alone without her, who was the primary firepower in the team. And that was not something that she wished to happen. As such, Sara pushed herself so that Elena would not worry about her.

Elena and Sara were actually having a hard time working as Hunters. Sometime ago, they were able to explore more dangerous ruins to earn money, but after going through some difficult circumstances during which they couldn't earn much, their financial condition rapidly declined. As such, they had less money to prepare for expeditions, which in turn reduced their efficiency when searching in the ruins. They had fallen into a vicious cycle, that instead of earning money, they were actually losing money with each subsequent expedition. It was also the reason as to why Sara limited her nanomachine replenishment. It was also because they were in such a hardship that they believed in the rumour.

Hunters who had fallen to such a vicious cycle would need to either hit a jackpot or push themselves for a gamble, in order to escape from it. If they were to win their gamble, they would be able to raise up again as skilled Hunters who get rich. But if they lose their gamble, they would fall into deeper hardship due to the backlash from pushing themselves too hard.

Elena and Sara were betting on the rumour in order to turn their condition for the better. But due to their desire to get out from their situation, they unconsciously became careless. The fact that they put their bet on a baseless rumour was the proof of that.

Normally, they would have stopped here, but Elena and Sara were already committed in their bet that they forgot to be wary of their surroundings.

***

There were a lot of Hunters other than Elena and Sara who came to Kuzusuhara City ruins chasing after the rumour. But most of them already abandoned the search and returned back. While most of them who stayed also decided to return back due to the thickening colourless mist.

But a small part of these Hunters didn't leave. They were the declining Hunters who were allured by the rumour. Since the danger was comparatively minimal and this was also a chance for them to turn their situation around in one shot, these Hunters remained obsessed in their search.

But they could not find the rumoured ruin no matter how much they searched. As such, they were getting annoyed and irritated. Since such a ruin did not exist in the first place, they would only get more and more annoyed.

They could not just go back empty-handed even after reaching their limit. They started looking for another way to obtain something so that their trip won't be in vain. Rather continuing the search for this rumoured ruin and wasting their efforts and time, they began diverting their attention onto other prey.

***

Elena was traversing the ruin with a grim face. The colourless mist had gotten thicker faster than she expected and its effect on her information gathering device had become severe. The device's detection range had considerably reduced and hence the chance for them to encounter a surprise attack had increased.

(…This is bad. To think that the mist would get this thick in such a short time. What a blunder.)

Then Elena said to Sara while regretting her poor decision to continue their search.

“Sara, we can’t go further, we should head back now.”

“I understand.”

“Sorry, the detection range is already very small, we should’ve returned sooner.”

“It’s alright. There shouldn’t be that many monsters in the outskirts. It’ll be alright as long as we head back carefully.”

Seeing Elena blaming herself, Sara just returned a smile that showed no trace of blame. Elena smiled in return and changed her mood since she understood that there was no meaning in regretting now.

Elena and Sara decided to head back. They were moving through the outskirts of the ruins looking for the vehicle that they parked there. Normally, the outskirts were a relatively safe place, but now that it was blanketed with the colourless mist, it had become a dangerous place.

Since their vision got worse because of the mist, the probability of close encounter with the monsters increased. It greatly lowered the survival rate of the Hunters who relied on ranged attack.

If they met a monster, which boast of great vitality, inside this fog, they would be forced to fight with it in close range. And that would be a very dangerous situation.

Suddenly, a gunshot echoed as Elena and Sara were moving inside the mist. Considering the sound distortion factor due to the mist, they knew that the source of that gunshot was pretty close to them, behind a crumbled ruin. Sara readied her gun while Elena operated her information gathering device and put all its resources on enemy detection.

“Elena, did you find anything?”

“Wait for a sec… I got some signals from where the gunshot was fired. It seems that 8 Hunters are fighting against 1 monster and they are headed our way.”

They could see Hunters running from the source of the gunshot and these Hunters were chased by a giant monster. Although they did shoot back while running away, there was no sign of the monster getting killed anytime soon.

Elena analyzed the situation.

“Looking at them, it seems that these Hunters have no close-range firepower. And also, the monster seems to be pretty strong that those Hunters won’t be able to defeat it with their equipment. We’ll get involved if we leave it be and it seems that it will be able to catch up with us even if we run away. There’s no helping it, we should defeat it in their place instead.”

“Roger that.”

Sara aimed her huge gun towards the monster, then Elena shouted at the hunters who were approaching her.

“Get out of the way!”

The hunters who heard her words acknowledged and stopped shooting back at the monster and kept running toward her.

The monster was so huge that Elena could see it easily even under the thick mist. It was a big carnivorous monster, its muscle line was visible even when it was covered by its thick fur. It opened his big mouth showing its huge fangs as it was trying to devour those Hunters.

Sara, who was aiming at that monster found something strange. Through her aiming device, she could see that the monster was mostly unharmed, even when the hunters were shooting at the monsters as they were running away from it. She thought that it might be because of its superb vitality that the monster was able to chase the hunters while ignoring their gunshots. But that did not seem to be the case.

[…Did the thick fur protect it from the bullets? Or is it that these hunters only have weak guns with them? Or is it that most of their shot missed since

they were shooting while running away? Well, not that it really matters now, I'll take care of it myself.]

Sara just pushed the question aside and pulled the trigger. The huge bullet that shot out from her big gun hit the monster right on its head. Fresh blood splattered from its head and it fell down to the ground. While that happened, the Hunters kept running while ignoring what happened to the monster behind them.

Elena saw something strange about these hunters. They should be showing desperation trying to run away from their certain death situation. But instead, they were lacking any expressions showing their fear of death or happiness that they found someone who would help them.

But she did not have the time to think about the reason. Due to the thick colourless mist, she had allowed a monster and a group of hunters approached them. And because she prioritized in taking out the monster, she was late in reacting to these Hunters.

These Hunters kept running past Elena and Sara without even saying a single word of gratitude. And then one of them threw something towards Elena's feet.

Elena and Sara were so shocked when they realized that it was a type of hand grenade. Sara who was quick to react, immediately grabbed Elena and tried to run away from that place. But they were a bit late and the grenade exploded and threw their bodies into the air.

Sara covered Elena from the explosion and was able to protect her. But the explosion threw her away from Elena before landing hard on the ground. After that, she was in confusion for a bit, but she immediately regained her composure and realized that she was lying on the ground defenceless. She reflexively hid behind wreckage as she got up.

She then immediately tried to confirm Elena's safety, but she could not find Elena around her. She was about to call for Elena when she heard a guy's voice.

“That other girl!! Throw down your weapon if you don’t want your friend to die.”

Sara then heard Elena’s voice from the same direction.

“Sara!! Don’t mind me!! You can freely run away or shoot these bastards!!”

Sara was showing a pained face when she understood how bad the situation was, Elena was captured by those guys.

A lot of Hunters went to the ruins daily looking for valuable relics and then they would fight against the monsters living in the ruins. As such, many hunters were killed in the ruins and left their equipment scattered around the ruins.

Normally, the next person who found these equipments would be their new owner. Although sometimes the dead Hunter would leave a letter asking to accept their equipment as a payment to take care of his or her burial or to send a certain belonging to his or her family, no one would follow through. The finder would keep all the equipment left behind.

But some of these Hunters who had bad personality would change from being a Hunter into being a robber inside the ruins. Rather than looting a dead Hunter, they would kill other Hunters, and take their belongings. Then a bounty would be put on their head and some of them would die as prey of some other Hunters.

These were the kind of Hunters who attacked Elena and Sara. They already coveted for Elena and Sara’s equipment. This was the day when they changed their profession from skilled Hunters to ruthless robbers. It was just bad luck on Elena and Sara’s side. They did not kill that monster on purpose and all these were their elaborate play to trick Elena and Sara to lower their guard.

Guns were pointed at Elena from her back, but Elena looked back and glared at the Hunters behind her. But the sensation of the gun muzzle pressed on the back of her head prevented her from doing anything further.

The Hunter pressed his gun's muzzle harder on Elena's head and shouted.

"You just shut up! Do you want to die?"

But Elena did not show any fear and shouted back.

"Just pull the trigger and you all will be dead!! Sara!! Don't listen to them!!"

"Didn't I tell you to shut up?!!"

The Hunter behind Elena violently smacked his gun onto Elena's head and Elena could not help but let out a scream. Sara who was still hiding behind the ruins clenched her teeth hard while making a grim face.

If she followed Elena's order to just forget about her, she might be able to kill all the Hunters, but in exchange, Elena would definitely get killed.

But if she obeyed the Hunter's order and threw down her weapon. She might be able to save Elena. But on the other hand, it would worsen their situation. They would definitely rape her and Elena, and there was no guarantee what they would do after that.

Sara could not pick either choice.

Then another Hunter shouted as if he was letting Sara hear him.

"Just kill her already!! Then we can just move on and kill the other girl afterwards!!"

"Wait!"

Sara shouted back in reflex and made her decision, she threw down her weapon and stepped out from the ruin with both her hands up.

Elena shook his head. But Sara smiled at Elena, there was a slight trace of bitterness in that smile. Sara then moved slowly toward the Hunter while making a serious face as to not alert him.

Seeing Sara approaching them unarmed, the Hunters were making a nasty laugh. Since it seemed that Sara would listen to them obediently, some of them lowered their guns. But the gun behind Elena's back remained in its position.

Sara moved slowly while measuring the distance between them.

(…It's okay. They're off guard right now… It's still too far… But it's okay. If I can get close enough to them, I could beat them with bare hands.)

If she ignored the nanomachine consumption and raised her physical ability to its limit, she would be able to boost her physical ability and it would be enough to counter attack those Hunters despite the fact that Sara had no previous training in martial arts.

But on the other hand, the nanomachine consumption would also be enormous. In the worst case scenario, she would spend all her nanomachines and die. And even if she could take care of those Hunters without dying, she would only be left with a short time awaiting her death.

If Sara had ignored Elena's safety and shot back with her gun, it would cut her nanomachine consumption to a minimum. Elena's glare at Sara was saying that she wanted Sara to take that option. But Sara could not do that.

Sara had made her resolve and moved forward. It was only a few steps until a chance to retaliate would come to her.

"Stop there!! Stop there and take off your Augmented clothes and armour!"

The Hunter who shouted, laughed as he saw Sara stop just like she was ordered to.

"After all, even without a gun, I don't want to be beaten to death with the physical enhancement from that augmented clothes. We did lower the firepower of the grenade so that your equipment won't sustain any damage, but to think that you would be able to survive that unscathed and even didn't fall unconscious, it seems that you have quite a good equipment on

you. Don’t worry, we’ll use them with care. So you hear me, right? Remove it slowly.”

“…I understand.”

Sara did like what she was told to. She removed her own clothes and armour. She was also glaring at them while trembling in order to make them lower their guard even more. Soon she was only left with her undergarments. Seeing this, the Hunters’ laughter only got nastier.

Sara had to bear with their stare while reassessing her chance.

(Since they mistook my armour as enhanced armour, it means that they don’t know that I use nanomachine to enhance my physical power. It’s okay, this will work well.)

Sara kept glaring at them.

“…I’ve removed them.”

“Is that so?”

Then suddenly bullets tore through Sara’s both thighs and Sara fell down to the ground. Elena screamed and ran towards Sara forgetting the fact that she also had a gun pointed at her head.

The one who shot Sara was the leader of this Hunter group, Bubaha. Bubaha looked at Sara who was on the ground and confirmed their safety. He then looked at his subordinates and pointed at Sara while saying.

“This girl is a nanomachine enhanced girl. She should be a few times stronger than a normal human. The cloth that she removed is just a normal armour, not an augmented one. If you don’t want to get twisted and torn apart, you might want to stay away from that girl.”

“How do you know that?”

“You can tell that from her movements and equipment. It’s because you can’t recognize something like this, you guys are stuck as amateurs. When

nanomachine enhanced person is severely wounded, the nanomachine will prioritize in healing the wound. As such, their movement would be affected during that time. But they're still stronger than a normal human. So if you guys want to toy with them, then just use the other girl."

Bubaha then pointed at Elena, so everyone's attention gathered at her.

Elena who ran to Sara hugged her close as she was writhing in pain on the ground.

Sara smiled meekly. The nanomachines inside her body prioritized in healing her wound and life support, thus she was in no condition for combat. She was in a condition where it was impossible to turn the situation around with her own power.

"…I'm sorry, I made a blunder."

"Why didn't you run away…?"

Elena's voice was trembling as she asked the question that she wasn't expecting an answer for. She thought that if Sara had ran away, then at least Sara would be safe.

"…Sorry."

In contrast to her answer, Sara smiled at Elena. That "Sorry" was filled with so many meanings in it. Sara and Elena looked at the Hunters who were laughing nastily while approaching them. But in the next moment, Bubaha was shot right through his forehead and dropped dead.

The gunshot's sound kept reverberating through the air. The other Hunters were so shocked by the sudden turn of events. And before they could even put up their guard, 10 bullets were already fired at them. Those who got hit dropped into the ground and screamed in pain. As for those who got lucky started cursing at Elena and Sara thinking that they had other friends with them. But with that meaningless action, their luck ran out as well.

"Damn you!! You still have other friends with you, huh…!?"

Elena and Sara were also surprised by the sudden turn of events. But Elena was able to immediately compose herself. She then took the gun from the Hunter who was on the ground near her and shot at the other Hunters who were still able to fight. After that, she looked for anyone who was still breathing and nested 2 shots into their heads each, thus stopping their breath.

The other Hunters, of course, were also thinking of killing Elena, but since bullets were flying toward them, they could not do that and focused more on hiding themselves from the enemy's line of sight. And so in the middle of the confusion, they focused more on looking for ruin and wreckage to hide.

While the Hunters were trying to hide, Elena dragged Sara trying to escape.

"Sara! Can you walk!?"

"I can't !! Elena!! It's okay, just run from here!!"

"I won't! Don't you joke with me!"

Some of the Hunters noticed them and tried to shoot at Elena and Sara, but they were also stopped by the gunshots that came from nowhere.

Sara who was dragged by Elena picked up the gun that she dropped. While Elena who was dragging Sara together with her went towards a building. All the while, the echo from the gunshots did not stop.

Elena and Sara were somehow able to run toward an abandoned building near them, Elena then pointed her gun's muzzle outside and was watching her surroundings carefully.

"…Elena, what do you think just happened?"

"I don't know. Someone who is not from their side suddenly open fired at them. That's all I know at the moment. I want to think that person did that to help us, but there's a chance that person is actually trying to steal those Hunters' prey. Sara, how's your wound?"

“…It’ll take about an hour before I can walk on my own.”

“I see. Just don’t move too much for now and prioritize your nanomachine on healing your wounds. Let’s analyze our current situation from this place… It’s not like we’re already safe, after all.”

And so Elena and Sara bunkered themselves inside the abandoned building while making a grim face.

Silavin: Interesting. So, the author is using another character’s POV as well. I wonder how it will translate to the manga.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 12, Reason to Kill

Index

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Akira was moving between the ruin's shadow as he was shooting at those Hunters. The colourless mist dampened the sound of the gunshot, so the Hunters who were attacking Elena and Sara could not pinpoint his location. Their screams echoed through the wasteland as he opened fire at them.

"Alpha, how many of them left?"

"3 of them are dead. Only 5 people left. By the way, you only killed one of them, the other two were killed by those girls."

"They were able to kill 2 of them in that condition, huh. Those girls are amazing."

"Indeed."

Akira's face constricted after hearing Alpha's answer. Alpha did not hide the fact that she was in a bad mood and it was obvious from her expression and tone.

"…Uhh, do you really hate that we're helping those girls?"

Akira awkwardly asked Alpha trying not to worsen her mood. Alpha only replied with a smile as if she was trying to evade answering. But Akira could feel that she was pouting.

“I’m not, you know? I do think that helping other people is a good thing. Since you took my request while you’re actually not strong, you can’t die until you accomplish it. I wonder if you really should put yourself in danger for helping some strangers. I’m not fully convinced by your action. It will be troublesome for me if you were to die. I did tell you about this before, didn’t I?”

Alpha’s support was not free, it was a deposit payment for accomplishing her request. So if Akira died here without even completing her request, then it would be the same as him running away with her deposit payment. He thought this was the reason why she was in a bad mood. Realizing that he was being glared on by Alpha, he made an awkward excuse.

“Well, about that, you see. I was thinking as long as I have your wonderful support, then it was an easy thing to help these girls. So it would be great if you can think of it as proof of how much I trust your support…”

“To think that you believe in my support this much, I’m so happy, I really am.”

Akira could feel a great pressure coming from Alpha’s smile, as such, he could only smile back awkwardly.

When the monster that was lured by those hunters was still away from them, Alpha already detected its presence. Then she judged that it was not a monster that Akira could defeat. And so she was planning to make Elena and the other Hunters face it and lead Akira to safety.

She also informed that to Akira. She thought that by telling him about their real situation, would make him move faster to avoid getting himself involved, in case a battle really started.

But then Akira did something that she did not expect. Rather than moving away from the area, Akira decided to go towards Elena and the other

Hunters instead.

And when Elena and Sara's situation worsened, Akira's mood was also affected and he was really agitated. He asked Alpha something that she never expected.

"Alpha, if I have your support, is it possible for me to eliminate all of those Hunters?"

"Are you planning to save them?"

"Is it not possible?"

Alpha could see that Akira was planning to do that if it was possible, so she answered that question while being puzzled about it.

"If you ask me whether it's possible or not, I would say that it is indeed possible. But it doesn't change the fact that it's dangerous. I think there's no need to get ourselves involved in their matters, you know?"

"Is it because there's a good chance that I'll get killed even with your support?"

"It depends on the situation. If you prioritize your own safety, I think you'll have a better chance at survival. But of course, the safest choice is for you to not get involved with them at all."

"So in short, it will somehow work out, right?"

If she denied, then Akira would question the usefulness of her support. It would be bad if that happened, that was why Alpha had no choice but to approve it. Since she could not understand why Akira was so persistent about helping them, she asked him with a puzzled look.

"It will. But can you at least tell me your reason? Since there's a need for me to tailor my support actions accordingly."

But Akira just shut his mouth, he was hesitating to tell her his reason.

Alpha could clearly see a trace of hatred, irritation, disgust, and anger from his expression. But she could not understand why.

Moreover, Akira's expression was grimmer than the time when he was assaulted in the middle of the ruins. But now, it was not like he himself was getting assaulted, and the people that got assaulted here were total strangers to him. Despite all of these facts, his expression was really grim. He was lacking in both equipment and skill at that time when he was attacked by 2 Hunters. But he just did not have the leeway of realizing that since he was so desperate. Compared to that time, he was relatively safe here. He was better equipped and more skilled than before. The leeway created from that difference might be the reason why Akira was making this expression. At least Alpha understood as such.

But Alpha analyzed that there was no real reason as to why Akira's psychological condition was so disturbed now.

The silence continued. Akira took that as a sign that Alpha would not help him if he did not answer her, and so he stated his reason.

"…If those guys stayed in the ruins, they might attack me one day. Since I'll frequent this ruin from now on, it might be a good idea to use this chance and kill them all, right? Moreover, you did say that I used my life worth of luck, remember? So If I help those girls, I might get back some of my luck. After all, luck is something that is affected by what you do, right? So isn't it fine if we help them?"

After hearing that answer, Alpha contemplated deeply for a while.

The reason that Akira worded out was only an excuse for him to kill those guys. Akira was not looking for a reason to help those girls, but a reason to kill the guys. He did not say that he should kill the guys to help the girls. But more like he wanted to help the girls in order to kill the guys.

It was possible that Akira was following the vague moral values inside him. And that moral value judged that those people needed to be killed. Alpha was able to understand that far, but she still could not understand why Akira was willing to risk his life to stick to his moral values.

The silence continued and Akira's expression slowly turned pale as if there was no hope for him.

"If it's really something difficult to achieve even with your support, then we can just give up though…"

Alpha felt that if she continued the interrogation, then Akira would consider her to be the same as those Hunters. Moreover, there was a danger that Akira might lose trust in her support.

For Alpha, the life of those guys was of no value at all, so she decided that those guys would die in order to get back Akira's trust. Alpha replied back as if she was a bit insulted by Akira's remark while hiding the cold decision that she made.

"What are you talking about? It's easy as long as you have my support, you know."

"I see, in that case, I'll be counting on you."

"Sure. Let's finish this. We need to move first, come this way."

Alpha had decided to accept Akira's request. With this, Bubaha and his friends' fate had been sealed by someone that had nothing to do with them or with Elena and Sara.

Akira reached a safe place and launched a surprise attack at Bubaha and his friends with Alpha's support. Akira aimed the TP Line at Bubaha's forehead and pulled the trigger without even a shred of hesitation. He kept shooting to cover for Elena and Sara's retreat. Even after he saw Elena and Sara had safely retreated into an abandoned building, Akira's expression did not loosen up. He only felt that he was able to accomplish the false excuse that he made.

"Akira, we have to move, now."

"Roger that."

He moved through the ruins, passed through a building and dove into wreckage before reaching to his next vantage point. He then directed his gun towards the guys who were not even shooting at him, aligned his aim to their head and pulled the trigger with a cold face while feeling a little discomfort. As Akira aimed at them through his aiming device, his eyes showed that he was feeling disgusted more than hatred towards those guys.

The bullet spewed out from his gun, hit the guy right on his head. The bullet, originally made for fighting the monsters that had huge vitality compared to a human, blasted the guy's head into small pieces.

"Akira, we need to move again."

"Roger that."

Akira kept moving from one shooting spot to next to avoid getting discovered by those guys. Alpha's instructions were perfect, those guys did not even have an inkling as to where Akira was shooting from. While he was moving around, Akira felt something weird and inadvertently opened up his mouth.

"…But still, it's weird that they don't know my position although I've been shooting at them from a pretty close range."

"It's because you've been shooting from their blind spot. It's for the best if you can choose positions that will give you a ground advantage. Moreover, the colourless mist is making it harder for them to spot you."

"If it is about the effect of the colourless mist, then we're in the same condition, aren't we?"

"No, not even close. There's a great difference between my detection ability inside this Kuzusuhara City ruins and the detection ability of their cheap information gathering device. For them, it's as if they're fighting with their eyes closed. If it was not because of that, it would be impossible for you to win against them with your current ability. That's why it's important for you to not misunderstand this situation and assume it is because of your ability

that you are able to fight against them. They're not weak opponents. So don't ever think that you can take them out easily."

"I understand."

Alpha gave Akira a strong warning while smiling.

"It's good as long as you understand… So you really shouldn't misunderstand, okay?"

"O-Okay."

Akira nervously answered back. Although he answered that honestly, he was a bit worried that Alpha thought he was getting ahead of himself. So he refocused himself and rushed forward.

Alpha actually knew that when she gave Akira the stern warning.

A guy was trembling in fear, he was the only person who was still alive. All of his friends were already turned into mutilated corpses scattered around the area. He feared that at this rate, he would also join those corpses and it made him tremble.

"…D-dammit… What's going on here? How can they shoot so accurately inside this mist? Why someone so good is roaming in this place?? Isn't that just unfair…?"

The Kuzusuhara City ruins should already be abandoned. The relics in its outskirts were all exhausted and the inner part of the ruins was filled with monsters that it was not worth exploring. If not for the rumour, no skilled Hunters would visit this place. Or at least, the outskirts should not be a place visited by someone with enough skill to easily kill his friends.

"That damn Bubaha, didn't he say that there were only incompetent Hunters around this area?!! That damn bastard spouting such a lie. It's all his fault!! It's all his fault!! Dammit!!"

It was actually his decision that he took Bubaha's invitation to rob other Hunters. Now that they failed, he was blaming Bubaha and spewing out

curses.

The colourless mist was getting clearer. But the guy did not think that it was anything good for him. He thought that the one who was shooting at him and his friends was someone with superior skills, who could shoot accurately even under the effect of the mist. That was why now that the mist was getting cleared, he thought that person should be able to shoot at him more accurately than before.

Since the effect from the mist had weakened. The guy's information gathering device picked up a signal of Akira's position. But he could not rely on that information to seek and kill Akira. The anger from the fact his friends were killed was already completely overwhelmed by the fear of losing his life. His spirit was completely crushed.

The guy thought he would only get killed if he continued. After thinking hard, he made a difficult decision in order to stay alive. His face twitched, then he threw his weapon down and slowly came out from behind wreckage while raising both of his hands. He then shouted.

"You win!! I give up!! So please spare me!!"

He walked into an open street defenceless and looked around.

"I-I was coerced to help that bastard Bubaha! He would kill me if I did not help him!! It's not like I willing to help him!! I had no choice!!"

He looked around nervously.

"I-I'm sorry, okay!! I won't do it again, ever!! I-If you want my money, I still have some! I'll also give all the money that the others have too!! I also have some savings! I'll also give that too!! I-If you kill me, you won't be able to get that money, you know?!"

His face was distorted by fear as he was waiting for a reply, but there was no one, no voice, no bullet, no reply at all.

“I’m telling you the truth!! I’m not lying…!! Y-you haven’t shot at me, so you’re still thinking about what to do, right? Are you doubting me? Do you think that I hid some kind of weapon with me? Or do you think that I’m using an enhancing cloth and that I’m dangerous even when I’m unarmed? Alright then!! I just need to remove my cloth, right?! I’ll remove my cloth! So please don’t shoot!”

After he then took off his cheap enhancing cloth, Akira came out from the shadow behind an alley.

The guy was so surprised when he saw Akira. He never imagined that it would be a small boy, so he felt relieved. The fact that Akira showed himself meant that there was still a chance for him to negotiate with Akira. His fear of death lessened and his tense face loosened up.

[I-I’m saved. I’m saved at the moment, now I just need to make a deal with this boy.]

Then the next second, Akira shot that man. A bullet tore through the middle part of his torso.

Inside the head of that confused man, he remembered a similar scene not too long back when Bubaha shot Sara. On the very last second of his life, he wondered if Akira mistook him for a nanomachine enhanced person as his life and consciousness started fading away.

“I… I… I’m… Not…”

In his last moment before his death, he only murmured Akira’s wrong assumption.

Akira kept looking at that man while confirming with Alpha.

“Did I get everyone?”

“Yes. It’s done. by the way, why did you shoot him?”

Akira made a puzzled face, as such, Alpha gave more context to her question.

“If you wanted to kill him, you could’ve killed him sooner, right? But since you didn’t immediately shoot him, I thought that you wanted to spare him, you know. So I’m asking you why did you suddenly decide to shoot him?”

“Ohh, so that’s what you meant, huh? I was planning to kill him right from the start, but since it seemed that I could kill him more safely if I waited, I decided to wait. Wasn’t you the one who told me that they’re not weak and I shouldn’t misunderstand this part?”

“I indeed said that. You have convinced me now. Anyway, it’s good to be careful. There are dangers that come as you give more time to your opponent, so you should be careful about that too.”

“I understand.”

Akira obediently nodded.

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Akira, Elena, Sara and Bubaha’s party. All these unlucky people gathered in this area. All these people were trying to rise up from ashes. All these people pushed themselves past their limit and gambled their life in this ruins, in order to turn over their bad living condition.

Some of them lost their bets, suffered the backlash from pushing themselves past their limit and their wrong decision. And these people already paid in full for their actions. The mutilated corpses of Hunters were scattered in the ruins. This was one of the common scenes in the eastern district and had repeated again to no end. It was just one of the common happenings in that place.

Some time had already passed since Elena and Sara bunkered themselves in one of the abandoned buildings. The sound of the sporadic gunshot from the outside had already stopped for a while and there was no sign of it returning anytime soon.

Sara lowered her guard for a bit.

“Is it… over?”

Elena used her information gathering device to confirm it.

“Most of the signals from the outside are already gone. There’s only one signal other than ours. Maybe it’s a signal from the one who was fighting against those guys a while ago.”

Elena’s information gathering device had already recovered fully from the effect of the colourless mist. So there was no way for Elena to mistakenly identify the signal between those who attacked them and the signal from other people. But there was no guarantee that the signal came from someone friendly.

“Elena, is the signal from that person moving towards us?”

“It doesn’t seem to be so… But still, what do you think just happened there?”

“If we were to think optimistically, it must be someone who passed there by chance and decided to help us. After all, it was 8 against 3… If we don’t count ourselves, then it was 8 against 1. But even so, that person saved us. That person must be a very nice person… Or so I hope.”

After Sara spoke her optimistic assumption of what just happened. She just stopped talking without telling Elena her pessimistic assumption.

[There’s a limit for how nice a person can be. I do feel thankful to that person, but we don’t know what that person might ask from us as a reward. In case if it was a man and he asked for our body as a reward, Elena might be against it but I hope he would be satisfied with my body alone.]

Elena kept watching the signal of that person from her information gathering device. Then she realized that the signal was moving away from them.

[So that person won’t come here, huh…? If he wanted to demand a reward, he would come here as soon as he could. It doesn’t even seem he wants to

confirm our safety. That might because he wants to avoid having another fight, or he just simply lost interest in us. Or maybe he prioritizes taking those guys' equipment first…]

The signal kept moving away from them as she was thinking. Elena was hesitating for some time, but she then decided to chase after that signal.

"I'll be back in a moment. Sara, you wait here."

"Are you sure?"

"The colourless mist has gotten lighter and looking from its signal, it doesn't seem like that person is hostile to us. So it'll be fine. I will be careful too. After all, I should at least say my gratitude to that person."

Elena smiled in order to reassure Sara, she then packed her stuff and went out alone. Since her information gathering device detected no other hostile signals, she immediately ran towards Akira.

As Elena approached Akira, the signal of her saviour in her information gathering device suddenly started moving faster away from her. It seemed that Akira was trying to run away from her.

But Elena already remembered Akira's position. It was behind a cover. Her voice might reach him but she could not see Akira. As such, she hurriedly called Akira in order to stop him.

"Wait for a second!! You're the one who saved us, right?! I want to say my thanks and I want to talk to you for a bit! Can you come here for a sec? Please!"

But then, suddenly a crumpled paper flew from Akira's direction and rolled to Elena's feet.

Elena took that paper and opened it. There was a bullet inside that paper and a short message saying "Don't come over here" written illegibly.

She could not understand whether Akira put in a bullet inside the crumpled paper to make it easier for him to throw or was it a kind of warning to her.

But at least, she understood that the person who saved her did not want her to come close to him, although she did not really understand the reason. So she stopped chasing Akira and instead shouted at him.

“My friend was shot and she can’t move!! I have a vehicle parked in the outskirts of the ruin, so can you please protect us while I carry my friend to that vehicle?! I’ll give you another reward in addition to the reward for saving us from those guys. I know that I’m just burdening you more, but can you please help us?!”

But of course, Elena actually did not have anything to offer as a reward. Especially, she had no money to give at all. Or more like, she came to the ruins because she wanted to earn some money in the first place. She also needed the money for replenishing Sara’s nanomachine. Elena knew that she would need to negotiate with him and find what he would want as payment. She already resolved herself in case he asked for her body as payment.

But then another thing flew from Akira’s direction to Elena, this time it was a box. When Elena took it and checked the box, she recognized from the words printed on the box that it was a medicine box. There was a piece of paper inside it with instructions on how to use the medicine written in crooked letters.

Elena assumed that the message must be saying something like “Use this medicine to heal your friend” or something like that. She also came to understand that the one who saved them had no wish of accepting her request.

Elena decided to return back to Sara, but before heading back, she added some note on the paper that Akira threw at her and left it on the ground.

“Okay!! Thank you for the medicine!! I’ll return back! I have written my Hunter code on this paper, so contact me when you have time, okay?”

Elena then bowed towards Akira’s direction before running back to Sara.

***

Akira waited until Elena was quite a distance away from him before picking up the paper left by her. There was a series of characters written on the paper, it was Elena's Hunter code, but Akira did not understand it.

"…What is this Hunter code thingy?"

"It's unimportant until you have your own information terminal. For now, you can think of it as something convenient that allows you to contact other Hunters."

"So she even has something like this, huh. By the way, do I have a Hunter code?"

"Nope. But you should be able to get one after buying your own information terminal and submitting an application in the Hunter Office. By the way, Akira, are you okay with that?"

"Yeah, it's fine. It's not like we have any particular reason to meet her anyway. Let's just go back home."

"You're not going to loot them before returning home?"

"I'll just leave them be. It's not like they came attacking me after all."

"I see."

Akira took all the equipment of the 2 Hunters that attacked him the other day. Alpha just could not understand what was the difference between those two Hunters and the Hunters that he killed just now. So Alpha concluded that it must be because of Akira's moral values. Akira put himself in danger without even expecting any reward and he even gave away his precious medicine box. But then he refused to protect them as if he did not care about them at all. He did not even think of meeting the people that he just saved.

In order to give correct guidance to Akira, Alpha was trying to understand Akira's moral values on which he made his decisions. But she understood well from the time when Akira decided to help Elena and Sara, it would be

pointless to pressure Akira for an answer. As such, she decided not to question Akira at all.

Akira kept running as he got out from the Kuzusuhara City ruins.

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When Elena went back to Sara and told her everything, Sara smiled mischievously.

“He saved us even though we’re just total strangers to him. He even gave us medicines and left us without asking for any reward or telling us his name. To think that he would leave all the good parts, it’s not even strange if you fall in love with him, but…”

When Sara put everything out like that, it indeed sounded like he was such a wonderful person. Sara then continued while making a bitter smile.

“…You didn’t see him and you don’t know his voice as well. He won’t let you approach him and his handwriting is bad. I wonder if he did this intentionally so we won’t be able to investigate his identity from his handwriting… He completely turned into a suspicious person now.”

Elena smiled bitterly after hearing about the sudden change of image of the person who just helped her.

“Should we stop using the medicine that we just received? It won’t take too long before your wound is healed, right?”

It was not like Elena wanted to make her saviour bad. But the one who would use it was Sara, so she did not want to coerce her into taking the medicine.

But Sara lightly shook her head.

“No, I’ll use it. After all, it’s bad for us if I stay injured like this.”

The one who would be using the medicine was her and not Elena so there was no need for her to worry, but Sara could not say that as she decided to

take the medicine. Even so, she took a capsule from the medicine box and held it on her palm. The common way of using it was to swallow it as it is. Sara kept staring at the capsule on her palm as she remembered the piece of paper in which the instruction on how to use the medicine was written. It was not a manual that came with the box, but it was a cheap-looking piece of paper with the instruction written on it in bad handwriting.

“In case of emergency or if you need immediate healing, don’t use it normally, but instead apply the content of the capsule directly over your wound. And be careful since it might cause severe pain.”

This was the instruction written on the paper. It was not the usual way to take medicine. In the worst-case scenario, it might even make her wound worse. Sara was a bit confused, but she eventually decided to take the medicine as the paper instructed.

She opened multiple capsules and applied the content directly onto her wounded legs. Intense pain immediately assaulted Sara just like the paper warned. She could feel something forcefully healing the open wounds on her legs along with the pain. Elena was worried as she looked at Sara’s pained expression.

The pain slowly faded and eventually was gone after a minute. Although she could feel slight pain as she stood up, she was able to stand up without any problem. Elena was surprised when she saw that.

“Sara, are you sure you’re okay standing up?”

“I’m fine, it seems that medicine is really effective. It healed me to the point that I feel I can fight normally now. Elena, how about you try using it too?”

Sara then took some extra capsules and swallow them. Since she was no longer in emergency and in no need of immediate effect, she chose to take the medicine normally.

Elena decided to follow Sara’s suggestion and took the medicine too. Although Elena was not gravely wounded, she had some injuries and she was severely exhausted, so she was in need of healing too. Not too long

after she took the medicine, she could no longer feel pain in her head. From her experience working as a Hunter, Elena understood that it was not simply an effect from pain killer but it was because the injury on her head was rapidly healing.

Due to the effectiveness of the medicines, Elena and Sara's evaluation of Akira changed back from a suspicious person to a saviour with a certain circumstance. Although it was reasonable, Sara and Elena looked at each other and smiled bitterly to the fact that they were doubting their saviour just a moment ago.

Sara then smiled as to change the mood.

"Well, putting everything aside, we at least know that the person who saved us is a very nice person. I don't know where he got this medicine, but since it's very effective, it must be pretty expensive, right? Although he helped us this much, it's regrettable that we could not say our thanks."

"I left him with my Hunter code, but I don't know if he will even read it or if he will actually contact us…"

"It's fully up to him whether he'll do that or not. But let's work hard so that we would be able to return this favour in case we ever meet him again."

Elena also smiled in order to change the mood.

"You do have a point. We can't do anything about it no matter how much we think for now. So then, how about we loot those dead Hunters as a start for preparing to return this favour? Since it seems that the person who saved us isn't interested in their equipment at all, so we can sell them for money and use it for replenishing your nanomachine."

"Geez, that stranger really helped us with a lot of things today."

"You can say that again."

Elena and Sara laughed as they were having that conversation.

After that, Elena and Sara looted the corpses of the dead Hunters and safely returned back to the city. They went to the ruins chasing an unconfirmed rumour and placed their bet on that rumour. Then because of their blunder, they almost lost their lives and something more important than that. But the money that they got from selling the equipment they looted from the dead Hunters was more than enough for Elena and Sara to turn over their condition for the better.

In short, Elena and Sara won their bet.

Silavin: I wonder why he helped them. He does not have the responsibility to.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 13, A Proper Hunter

Index

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Akira spent his days by training and exploring the ruins.

The rumour of the unexplored territory filled with priceless relics where even a small kid could go, had already died down. After all, Alpha analyzed the market price of the relics and adjusted the quality and quantity of the relics that Akira brought to the Exchange Centre.

Akira also got better equipment for himself. He no longer looked like an unarmed amateur kid bringing relics into the Exchange Centre. So the rumour died down quickly and the Hunters immediately stopped coming to the Kuzusuhara ruin which was the source of the rumour.

Thanks to that, Akira was able to go relics hunting without any problem. But in contrast, he was not able to earn enough money. After all, in order to avoid the spreading of similar rumours, he was only able to sell half of the relics that he gathered and had to hide the other half.

In order to adjust to his worsened financial condition, he moved from 20,000 Aurum per night inn to a 4,000 Aurum per night inn. He was staying in 4 tatami mats wide room with no other amenities other than a shower.

Even so, it was way more comfortable than sleeping in the slum city's alley. But Akira could not deny that he was also missing the lifestyle where he could take a bath in a bathtub every day. It was not easy to lower his life standard when he had experienced a better one before. As such, Akira frequently wondered when he would be able to get back to that lifestyle.

Alpha only smiled like usual trying to soothe Akira. She also told Akira that once he got enough skill and position, no one would doubt him if he brought expensive relics to the Exchange Centre. Then he would be able to quickly return back to the lifestyle where he could take a bath in a bathtub every day.

Behind her ever-present smiling face, Alpha kept a close watch on Akira.

Akira's daily chores of training and exploring the ruins changed after Akira brought relics to the Exchange Centre for the 10th time. After he finished the transaction as usual and was about to go back home, Nojima suddenly called him.

"Wait for a second. Take this with you."

Nojima gave Akira a map drawn on a piece of paper and a plastic card. It was a map of the city boundary and there was a marker on it.

"There's just a little bit of something that you need to do, but you only need to show this card to whoever is there. Well then, good luck out there, Ajira."

"…My name is Akira."

Ajira was the name that was mistakenly written on his Hunter ID. Nojima laughed when he saw Akira was annoyed.

"Your name was submitted as such in the database, you know. Did you mistakenly submit the wrong name? Who the heck is the guy who did your application, that damn guy! Anyway, you can correct your name there, so get going."

After saying that, Nojima just cheerfully sent Akira off.

The outer wall that surrounded the middle district of Kugamayama City was frequently boasted for its durabilit. It could keep the inner part safe and sound even if it was assaulted. That thick and tall wall which physically, economically and socially separated the inner and the outer side was brimming with power, so much that it would awe anyone who saw it up close.

There was a big tall building along the wall called Kugama Building. It was a checkpoint that connected the inner and the outer part of the city and it was a very important building for the city.

There was a Hunter Office inside that building and it handled a different kind of function compared to the Hunter Office where Akira applied as a Hunter. It was an office that managed all the Hunter activities around Kugamayama City.

Akira looked at the building, its intimidating appearance showcased the authority, financial power and military power that it held. It was just simply too much for a small kid from the slum.

The marker on the map led to the corner where the Hunter Office was located.

“This is the place, right?”

“Yep, let’s go in.”

“Uhhh, yeah.”

Akira nervously followed Alpha who already entered the building. If Akira was alone, he would have hesitated and it would have taken some time before he could enter the building. But it was thanks to Alpha’s presence that he could muster little courage to immediately enter the building.

Akira was frozen in awe by the appearance of the huge hall filled with decorations and the Hunters who were present there. Some of them were carrying a gun bigger than their own body, some of them were using high grade enhancing clothes and some of them even had metallic skin, a

common trait of cyborgs. All of them looked so much different compared to Akira, a small boy who just finished his Hunter application.

“Akira, they’re not your enemies. It’s not like they’re going to attack you, so calm down.”

“O-okay.”

“There’s nothing you can get from just standing there, let’s finish what we came here for. You do know what you should do, right?”

“N-nope.”

“This way then.”

Akira who grew up in the slum had no idea what he should do here, it was thanks to Alpha’s support that he was able to proceed without any trouble. The reception counters of the Hunter Office were located on the first floor. He headed to an unmanned reception machine that functioned as a ticket printer, he used the card that he received from Nojima to registered his name on the waiting list. He then moved to a corner to wait for his turn so as to not bother anyone else. When his name was called, he moved to the counter and showed his ticket and card to the girl who was working behind that counter.

“I was told to show this, but…”

The girl showed a formal smile. Her expression and fake smile were suddenly shaken when she saw the card that Akira was showing. But she immediately remembered her position as an office worker and regained her composure. She then took the card and used her terminal to read the card.

“Please let me confirm it, are you Ajira-sama?”

Akira answered back nervously.

“Ah, yes. Wait, no. My name is Akira, the name submitted into the database was a wrong name.”

The girl then bowed and apologized.

“I apologize. Well then, Akira-sama, congratulations on your promotion to a Rank-10 Hunter. Please allow me to reconfirm the registered information and reprint the card. Shall I give you a guide for the reissuance of your Hunter ID and the steps to correct the wrong information?”

“Eh, ah, yes, please.”

“With pleasure.”

Looking at how Akira was behaving, the receptionist thought that he was not really knowledgeable about the process. As such, following her duty as a receptionist, she politely offered her help to Akira and continued to give an explanation about what he should do.

***

The Hunter Office sorted the Hunters by their ranks. The lowest was Rank-1. People would regard Hunters with a high rank in high regard.

In order to climb the rank, you would need to do business in the Exchange Centre affiliated with the Hunter office or accept quests from the Hunter office or the companies affiliated with it. In short, the more contributions you offer to the Eastern district Corporate government, the higher your rank would be.

If you climbed to a high enough rank, you would be able to access and gather relics from ruins that were restricted under the authority of the Corporate government. The higher your rank, the more priority you will be given in the waiting list.

You would also be able to get your hands on high tech weapons, those that normally would not be offered for sale to low-rank Hunters due to its cost, size and firepower. You might even be allowed to handle forbidden guns.

There were some quests issued by the Hunter office and the companies affiliated to it also had a rank restriction. Only high ranking Hunters were

able to take quests with a high level of privacy and restriction, after all, lower rank Hunters would not even know the existence of these quests.

Other than these benefits, many Hunters were climbing the rank for popularity and honour.

Akira was at Rank-10. It was the starter rank for those Hunters who registered their name with their company employee ID or citizenship ID. In short, it was an amateur rank for commoners.

Slum citizens who did not even have a personal ID would start as Rank-1 Hunter when registering themselves as a Hunter. They usually registered their name using a piece of paper with their name written on it. Then after they brought relics to the Exchange Centre for a certain number of times and earned a certain amount of money from those relics, they would start getting recognized as someone who was motivated and had the skill to be a Hunter. Then eventually the Hunter office would recognize them as someone with potential and rank them up.

And after reaching Rank-10, the Hunter office would finally recognize them as a Hunter.

The card that Nojima gave to Akira in the Exchange Centre was a proof that Akira was already raised up from Rank-1. Not many people could get that since most of the people would just give up or get killed midway. Then among those who were ranked up, some were seen as very potential Hunters and got special treatment. One of them was a free first reissuance for their Hunter ID.

***

After finishing her explanation, the receptionist gave Akira a small booklet, it was made with high-quality paper with the logos of the Eastern Corporate government and the Hunter office printed on its cover. It was filled with all kinds of information about Hunters and everything related to it.

She then continued Akira’s registration process.

“Akira-sama. Since your request was to fix your registered name, can you please tell me your correct name again?”

“It’s Akira.”

Akira answered back with a puzzled look. The girl asked again with a serious face.

“Akira-sama, the registration today is different compared to the temporary registration that you did before, the information registered today will be forwarded as a full registration and basically added as a complement to the missing information. Moreover, we will accept today’s change in the registered data taking into account the fact that we had mistakenly registered your name. From now on, any request for change will need a thorough inspection and depending on your reason, your request might even be rejected, so please remember it. The name registered in your Hunter ID will be the name used to identify you and anything related to you such as your family, land, country, class et cetera. With that in mind, are you sure you want to change your registered name to Akira?”

Akira could not immediately answer that question.

Akira had no relatives at all. He had no family and not even a record about his family. When he first began understanding the world around him, he already found himself in the slums of the Kugamayama city. He even had no love for the slums. He stayed there just because he had no ability to get out from the slum, so it was not like he felt any sense of belonging or anything.

He also did not belong to any faction inside the slum city. He was always alone. If someone asked him to identify himself, he could not say anything else than his name. That was why, when he thought that he could change his name here, he realized that he actually had no restriction whatsoever in changing his identity. Changing his name now would not cause him any kind of inconvenience. After all, there was no one who was using his name for calling him, of course save for Alpha who was a special case.

After a short silence, Akira said with a serious look.

“Akira, my name is Akira. Please register me with this name. If I want to change it, I’ll just change it later. But if my request is refused, then it might mean that I should not change my name after all.”

“Certainly.”

After operating the terminal, the receptionist handed over a new Hunter ID to Akira.

Akira kept staring at his Hunter ID that he just received. It changed from a cheap-looking piece of paper into a card made of hard plastic. There was a deep meaning in the change of material.

“Please be careful not to lose it. Another reissuance would require more money and another inspection. And in the worst-case scenario, all of your past achievements might even get erased and your rank might be revoked back to Amateur.”

Then the girl smiled and bowed.

“That will conclude your registration. I sincerely pray for your success ahead.”

Her politeness was just a formality. But it also meant that he was finally regarded as a real Hunter. Akira smiled back and left the place.

He exited the Kugama building while happily looking at his new Hunter ID. Looking at his action, Alpha smiled and congratulated him.

“Akira, you finally became a Hunter. Congratulation!!”

“Thank you… So I wasn’t a Hunter all this time, huh?”

“You were just a self-proclaimed Hunter all along. Sadly enough, you’ll only get laughed at if you showed that piece of paper and say that you’re a Hunter.”

As Akira was looking at his new Hunter ID, he made an expression as if he just realized something.

“You’re right.”

The name written in this Hunter ID was his correct name, Akira smiled when he read it.

“This means that I finally can actually call myself a Hunter, huh…”

This Hunter ID also functioned as Akira’s ID. Although if he showed that card to the shops, they would only regard him as an amateur, even so, this card was more useful as his ID. Akira felt that it was a huge improvement. At least, he was no longer a denizen of the slum city with no identification.

People would say that one was able to reach success as a Hunter only after they piled up achievements and made their Hunter ID a revered Hunter ID. Having a revered Hunter ID would carry a lot of meaning. And on this day, Akira finally took his first step to reach success.

Noticing Akira, who might just spend all his time staring at his Hunter ID if left alone, Alpha made a bitter smile and warned him.

“How long are you going to keep looking at it, just put it away already, you’ll look suspicious if you keep doing that.”

The area around the Kugama building was well maintained compared to the other places inside the lower district. If Akira got caught here because he looked suspicious, it would be far more troublesome compared to if he was arrested in other places. As such, Akira immediately put away his Hunter ID in panic.

“Now then, you have registered as a common Hunter. So let’s immediately go buy the thing that a common Hunter like you must have.

“A thing that I must have? What am I going to buy?”

“An information terminal.”

Hunters usually bought, sold, shared and exchanged useful information such as the location of ruins, the map of ruins and the details about the monsters who live in the ruins on the internet. It helped them to effectively

work as Hunters, bring back a lot of relics and make the eastern district prosper.

The widely available information terminal was the foundation of the information network. When the Tatsumori Manufacturing finally completed their cheap but advanced product for the livelihood of the Hunters, the information terminal quickly spread among the Hunters. Even now, the market for Hunters specialized goods was monopolized by Tatsumori Manufacturing, as such, the Tatsumori Manufacturing had risen up in power and now is one of the companies in the Corporate government.

Moreover, the information terminal produced by Tatsumori Manufacturing is regarded as an important product in the eastern district because of its influence, as such, for the benefit of the eastern district, the information terminal was mass-produced and sold cheaply. So even someone like Akira is able to buy one for himself.

Since the information terminal had completely assimilated in the Hunters' life, companies and the Hunter office usually sent their request through the information terminal. Even now, they said that the information terminal was an absolute necessity for Hunters.

Akira then went to an information terminal specialist shop near the Hunter office and bought an information terminal by following Alpha's instructions. Akira spent almost all the money he earned for buying the information terminal. And also, the terminal was actually a simple information terminal made especially for amateurs. Akira had no idea to set up the terminal, so he had the shop clerk set it up for him.

While the shop clerk was setting up his information terminal, he said to Akira that he would need Hunter ID to finish the setup. Akira thought that a chance to use his new hunter ID had finally come and happily showed his Hunter ID.

After returning back to his narrow room, Akira started thinking seriously. He had calmed down after getting his new Hunter ID and information terminal. So, he started thinking that he would work hard in the future since

he had become a common Hunter now, but then he suddenly realized something and got worried about his current condition.

“Alpha. I’ve used all my money to buy the information terminal, so I don’t even have any money to pay for the room tomorrow… Are we going to be okay?”

Akira thought that Alpha must have thought of something and expected a reassuring answer from Alpha. But Alpha just smiled and said.

“Nope, we’re not, that’s why we’ll go hunt for relics tomorrow.”

Akira was a bit shocked and looked at Alpha, but she returned back with a smile and they just kept staring at each other for some time. Akira then let out a sigh and ended the silence.

Akira knew that he could not win if he argued against Alpha. Since he spent almost all of his money on the information terminal, he could only assume that the information terminal was worthy of that money. He thought that he would be able to accept her argument if he decided to ask Alpha the reason anyway.

Moreover, exploring the ruin took a lot of stamina, as such, rather than spending his energy trying to argue with Alpha, Akira thought that he should quickly get rest instead. And so, although he had a lot of questions, he just decided not to ask them.

“You still have some ammo left from before, so I think you’re alright for the ammo.”

“…You’re right.”

“Starting from tomorrow, you’ll use the information terminal for exploring the ruin. So give me a hand in setting the terminal.”

“Hm? Didn’t we finish that in the shop before?”

“It’s the setting frequently used by a common Hunter. Now we’re going to set it to suit your need, Akira. We need to completely overwrite the setting

so that it’s easier for you to receive my support. But I can’t operate the terminal, so you’ll have to help me with it.”

“So basically, the information terminal will be set such that it’s easier for me to use, right? I understand.”

“It might take at least until midnight, so give your best, okay?”

“Eh!?”

Akira was surprised and looked at Alpha. He could see that Alpha just smiled as usual but she was not joking. As such, he suddenly felt so tired and his face loosened.

Akira kept working on the terminal setting by following Alpha’s instructions. What he did actually was only operating the buttons on the panel that also functioned as a monitor, inputting information and choosing options, Akira actually knew nothing about what he was doing.

When Akira put in symbols, characters and numbers that he did not understand, other unknown symbols, characters and numbers were displayed. Akira just kept choosing options following Alpha’s instruction as if he was a robot. It was a series of mundane actions that Akira did not know the meaning behind, it was torturous enough to make people lose their minds.

All of these repeated meaningless mundane actions made Akira’s mind wander into strange directions. He had no idea what he was doing, was he really setting the terminal? Or was it one of the rumoured magic from the western district? Or was it some kind of ritual for calling an unknown entity?

Just like what Alpha said, the setting was not finished even after midnight. But Akira just kept doing it with a blank mind. And finally, it was finished.

“Akira, it’s done.”

“…It’s finally over, huh.”

“Actually, there’re still some parts that need adjustment. But it doesn’t look like you can do it now. I’ll do the rest so you can just go ahead and sleep.”

The date had already changed. Realizing that, Akira suddenly felt more tired. He just dove into his bed while leaving his information terminal lying on the floor. Then he let tiredness lead him to sleep.

The information terminal kept working on its own while Akira was sleeping.

The next morning. Akira woke up from Alpha’s voice just like usual. But when he turned towards the source of the voice, he did not see Alpha.

“…Alpha?”

“Over here.”

With a puzzled look, Akira turned to the source of the voice that was somehow different from usual. He saw an image of Alpha smiling and waving at him from inside the terminal that was lying on the floor. He realized that Alpha’s voice came out from the terminal rather than sent directly into him. There was also a limit on the sound that an information terminal could produce, that was why it felt rather strange for Akira.

Akira took the terminal and held it in front of him, he could see Alpha smiling at him.

“What do you think? Impressive, isn’t it? I put myself inside the information terminal, you know!”

“…Eh, ah, yes.”

Akira was still disoriented just after waking up, so his reaction was rather dull. Seeing his reaction Alpha looked rather dissatisfied.

“That was a weak reaction. Are you’re not surprised?”

“Compared to the sudden appearance of a girl who I can see but not touch, which really gave me a paradigm shift, this is nothing. By the way, are we

going to communicate with each other through this terminal from now on?”

“I don’t mind if you prefer either way. So which one do you prefer?”

After taking his time thinking for a bit, Akira answered back casually.

“Let’s communicate like before. It’s too much work if I have to take out my terminal every time I want to talk with you.”

“Okay.”

Alpha suddenly vanished from the terminal and appeared beside Akira just like usual. With the presence and voice which felt so real that they could not be compared to the one from the terminal, Alpha happily made a mischievous smile while coming closer to Akira’s face and said in such a provocative voice.

“As I thought, compared to the small monitor of the terminal. You would rather have me beside you like this, right?”

“Ah, yeah, right, you’re not wrong.”

Akira was flustered and turned his face away as he just blurted out a random answer. Alpha smiled satisfied looking at how Akira’s face turned beet red.

***

Akira was heading to the Kuzusuhara ruin for relics hunting again, he was very excited as he was traversing the wasteland near the Kuzusuhara ruin. The reason why he was excited was not because this was his first relics hunting after he became a real Hunter, but it was because he was expecting to make money on this trip. He almost ran out of money after spending it on the information terminal.

If he returned back from this relics hunt with empty hands, then it would mean that he would go back to sleeping in the slum’s alley again. He who had already gotten used to living in a small cramped room of the inn which was way better than sleeping in the back alley of the slum city would have

to return back to the days when he was sleeping in the middle of the road inside the alley. Akira really wanted to avoid that, as such, he took a deep breath and pumped himself up as he was heading to the ruins.

“Alright then, let’s go.”

“Wait for a second.”

“What?”

Alpha was making a dissatisfied look at Akira who was brimming with excitement. It could be taken that he was able to make that expression since they had that leeway, but it was only until Alpha opened her mouth.

“Since you got better in using guns, we’ll change the difficulty of your training starting from today. To be more precise, I want you to be able to move around without my enemy detection support. We will still keep diving into the ruin, but you should take actions assuming as if you have no enemy detection support from me.”

Akira was visibly shocked, Alpha’s enemy detection was Akira’s lifeline. He could not even imagine what would happen to him if he did not have it.

“…A-am I going to be okay?”

Alpha smiled naturally toward Akira who was filled with anxiety and hesitation.

“You’re not going to be okay. That’s why you have to train yourself.”

“W-well, you’re right, but…”

Akira was thinking of insisting, but he was in so much shock that he could not say anything. Alpha suddenly made a serious face.

“If you get better as a Hunter, you’ll be able to explore other ruins too. After all, you can’t expect to keep looking for relics in Kuzusuhara ruins only. Also, my enemy detection is significantly weakened outside Kuzusuhara ruins.”

“…be more precise, how far it’s weakened?”

“In the worst-case scenario, it won’t even work at all.”

Akira’s face inadvertently puckered. For Akira, that would be simply lethal.

“Of course even in that condition, I’ll still give my utmost support. But it will be limited. That’s why I want you to get used to moving around the ruin while we still have the chance, you understand?”

“…I understand… This is only a training though, so do tell me if danger approaches me, okay?”

Alpha smiled as she nodded to Akira.

“Of course, but you should properly move around the ruins carefully. Otherwise, it won’t be training.”

“Ah, yeah.”

“Basically, you just need to move around as you like. If you do anything dangerous or do something that you should not do, I’ll give you a warning. So then, let’s start.”

Akira took a deep breath trying to calm down. Although it was only a training and Alpha’s detection was still working, but he had to think he had no enemy detection support as he was going to explore the ruins. Now suddenly the ruins became a very dangerous place in Akira’s mind.

Moreover, in reality, the ruins were more dangerous than he thought. It was just that Alpha’s existence made it look safer before. It made Akira realize that he was actually spoiled up until now as he was not used to the feeling that he is feeling now. But even so, he steeled his resolve and stepped forward.

“Stop.”

He got a warning right on his first step.

“Right off the bat, huh?”

“You should confirm the safety of the ruins from here using your binoculars first. Confirm whether there are monsters or not. And if you spot a monster, think whether you can win against that monster or you should withdraw. Think carefully before you make any decisions.”

It was ultimately correct. So Akira could only smile bitterly remembering that he was about to step into the ruins carelessly. So then he took out his binoculars and looked at the ruin. He did not spot any monster. They might be just hiding but it was way better than stepping forward without checking anything.

“It looks alright to me.”

“Before moving forward, look at your information terminal.”

Akira then looked at the information terminal that was attached to his arm. Since it was a product especially made for Hunters, it came with a strong belt that Akira used to fit the terminal in a place where he could easily look at. There was a chibi Alpha displayed on the terminal monitor and it was giving an instruction to Akira. After Akira followed that instruction, a map popped out in the monitor.

“This is the map of the Kuzusuhara ruins. Even if you are only going to hunt for relics, rather than searching aimlessly, you should decide where you want to search and which route you want to take. Although it is important to choose places where the probability of finding relics are more, it is even more important for you to think of an escape route in case you encounter a monster. So plan carefully and adjust your action according to the situation around you.”

“Even if you tell me so much, I still don’t know what exactly I should do.”

“It’s also a form of training for you to think about it.”

Akira kept staring at the map with a grim face. There was a lot of information written on the map but for Akira or even for other people too, it

was hard to analyze that information and plan on a route. But even so, Akira racked his brain and tried his best before moving towards the ruins.

The outskirts of the Kuzusuhara ruins were filled with abandoned buildings. Akira had some memories of calmly walking through this place, but the place was very different from what he remembered. As such, Akira was making a grim face as he walked through it.

He walked slowly and carefully trying to watch his surroundings as much as he could. Although he watched his surroundings very carefully, it did not have much effect on Akira's survivability. Akira who was moving around without enemy detection was like a total amateur, there were so many different places around him where enemies could lay waiting for him like from the windows of the abandoned buildings or from behind the wreckage around him.

But if he kept worrying about his enemies' existence, there would be no end to it and he had no time to check all the nook and cranny around him. And if he failed to check and there were actually enemies hiding, then during a real fight it would spell the end of Akira' life. The ruins were simply such a dangerous place.

But even so, many Hunters put their life at stake diving into the ruins looking for relics. They would either end up reaping profits in exchange for risking their lives or lose the bet and their lives in the ruins.

The training continued. Akira got a warning every time he took a few steps forward. How to move without making any sound, how to check whether a route was prone to surprise attack or not, the posture that would allow him to immediately make a counter attack and how to keep that posture in places with difficult footings, the priority of things that he should check from around him, Akira was lacking all these skills.

Because of that, Akira took about an hour to pass through the place that usually took him just a few minutes. Although he did not encounter any monster, the strain that he got from surveying his surroundings greatly exhausted him.

Compared to Akira, Alpha knew better just how exhausted Akira was. So she decided that it would be dangerous if they continued and stopped the training there.

“Let’s stop your training here today. There’s no danger around so you can rest easy.”

Akira loosened up a bit and let out a big sigh from the exhaustion. He then looked back to see just how far he had come. He could see that he just passed the border between the ruins and the wasteland, he then let out a sigh realizing just how incompetent he was.

“…So I only went this far huh? It seems that I have a lot of things to work on in the future.”

“You’ll be able to move faster with more experience. Moreover, once you get a better information terminal, it would be able to greatly help you in detecting enemies. Keep up with your training, get better equipment and let’s become a capable Hunter. Don’t worry, just leave everything to me.”

Looking at how Alpha was smiling brightly and gently at him, Akira was able to reassure himself.

“…You’re right, I just can’t rush this kind of thing.”

“That’s right. Now then, we should go looking for relics. So let’s continue forward with my enemy detection support. Let’s go!”

Akira just left the enemy detection to Alpha as he delved deep into the ruins. He was able to traverse through the same distance that he took an hour alone, in just a few minutes.

As he moved deeper into the ruins. The road that was actually designed for easy access, turned into a labyrinth due to the wreckages from the buildings that were blocking the roads.

Akira kept comparing his surroundings with the map as he was walking. And then he made a puzzled look.

“Alpha, about this map though, isn’t this map wrong in many places?”

“Of course, it is.”

Akira was surprised when he heard just how casually Alpha answered that.

“So it is indeed incorrect, huh. And it’s to be expected, huh?!”

“That map is download for free from the internet after all. So it was an inaccurate map. As for a more accurate map, you would need to pay money and get it from a source that you can trust. Moreover, the map displayed is from the time when that terminal was produced, so there’s no guarantee in its accuracy. There are cases when powerful monsters went on a rampage and completely changed the contours of the place, there are also cases where Hunters who were trying to destroy a wall for searching relics but ended up destroying the whole building too. There are many other things that happened and changed the condition of the ruins. So with that in mind, you should also train yourself so that you can use the map as much as possible despite all of this.”

Among the Hunters, there were those who were known as map brokers. They used all kinds of methods to make a map of ruins and earned their living from selling those maps. Their maps were filled with useful information containing a detailed map of the inner part of a dangerous ruin, the type and number of monsters that roamed the ruin and the list of relics that were found in that ruin. Sometimes, the value of the map of ruin could even go beyond the value of the relics that you could find in that ruin.

Akira was listening closely to Alpha. He only had a shallow knowledge of Hunters. He had thought that Hunters were people who only explored the ruins, killed monsters and earned money from collecting relics. So he was a bit surprised when he heard that some Hunters earned money through selling maps.

“So you can earn money from doing such a thing, huh?! Is it really that profitable that you can make a business out of it?”

“Rather than charging into a ruin carelessly, your survivability rate will be way higher if you go inside a ruin with a detailed plan. If you can buy your safety with money, then there are a lot of Hunters out there who are willing to buy it, even if they have to pay a big amount for it.”

“So the ability to collect information about a ruin is also an important skill for a Hunter, huh?”

“Yep, that’s right. I’m sure you know it yourself just how dangerous it is to get into a ruin without having any information beforehand, right?”

Akira smiled bitterly as he remembered the time when he hadn’t met Alpha.

“Well, it’s true that I would have died if I didn’t meet you back then. So thank you once again!!”

Alpha smiled with invincibly.

“Please show your gratitude with action. To be more precise, work hard so you can fulfil my request. I’m not rushing you or anything though.”

“Ah, please be patient about that.”

“I have a high expectation from you.”

Akira replied back casually but there were no lies in his words. And it was the same for Alpha who was smiling at Akira. But it was a different problem as to how sincere it was deep inside their hearts.

After finishing their relics hunt for the day, Akira reconfirmed the relics that he was bringing back.

“Alpha, is it just me or did we really bring more relics than usual today?”

“You’re a real Hunter now, so I thought it might be a good idea to increase the relics. I’ll keep increasing the quantity from now on, but of course, I’ll adjust it according to your ability. So let’s work hard earning money for buying better equipment, ammo, training, study and for taking breaks too. Even for you too, I’m sure that you want to stay in a room with a bathtub.”

Akira nodded strongly.

“Yes, I want to. So like, should we get more relics…?”

Alpha just smiled to Akira who got motivated so easily.

“Nope.”

“…Okay.”

Alpha smiled mischievously as Akira hung his head low, disappointed.

Silavin: Hmm… Their hearts are different eh… Seriously. I wonder what her request is. Doesn’t seem to be something good for him…

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Rebuild World – Chapter 14, A Lost Wallet

Index

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Akira just returned from the ruins and went straight to the slum. The rucksack on his back was filled with more relics than usual. People with good eyes could easily discern that Akira was a Hunter who just came back with a lot of relics from the ruins.

The safety of the slum city normally got better closer to the wall and worse closer to the wasteland, especially for the slum area that was bordering the wasteland. The safety in the slum area was really bad.

Hunters who wanted to avoid any troubles would take a detour and enter the lower district without passing through the slum city. After all, there were people who were blinded by their greed for relics and immediately turned violent. Most of them ended up as a new addition to countless dead bodies in a particular area in the slum city. It showed the inhabitants of the slum city the difference between those people who regularly fought against monsters and those who did not.

Akira did not even bat an eyelash and just went straight to the slum city, after all, it was faster for him to go to the Exchange Centre through the slum city. Not to mention that since he grew up in the slum city, he was

already used with the public order here. After all, nothing happened so far when he passed through the slum city so many times since he became a Hunter.

But something was not normal today, Alpha suddenly told Akira to keep his guard up.

“Akira, we’re surrounded.”

Akira stopped and confirmed his surroundings. It did not look like he was surrounded. There were more people around him than usual and that was all. But Akira did not question Alpha’s detection ability and kept his guard up.

“…Is it possible for me to win?”

Even if it was true that he was surrounded, there were many possibilities as to why he was surrounded. It might be just a form of greeting or just light intimidation or maybe he just got caught himself when they were aiming for someone else. But then, Akira immediately understood that he was the target, as such, he immediately took a pose by which he could quickly shoot back if he was suddenly attacked.

Alpha remembered the time when Akira decided to kill everyone when he was saving Elena and her friend in the Kuzusuhara City ruins, as such, she asked Akira.

“Are you thinking of fighting them? How far do you want to go this time?”

“If it doesn’t seem like I can win, then I’ll just run and think about the next course of action depending on the enemies.”

They surrounded Akira and intimidated him. But if the intimidation did not work and it was not worth it, they would just withdraw. Akira did not mind if that happened. But if they tried to extort relics from him, Akira had no wish to give them any.

He had become a real Hunter. He was no longer a small boy from the slum who would just throw his money that he had desperately collected so that they would spare him. That was the last thing he would do.

That was why, it depended on his enemies. If he had to choose to kill them all or not, Akira had already decided he would kill them if he had a chance.

Alpha then gave a suggestion. It was true that he did kill those Hunters down to the last man at that time, although they were not even attacking him. But their enemies this time seemed to be willing to talk with him. It was rather strange considering the situation, but it did not affect his winning chance.

“If you want to do that, then I won’t stop you. But if I decide that it’s getting dangerous, then obey my order and run away, okay?”

“Alright. I too don’t want to die after all.”

As Akira was standing still and was watching his surroundings, the encirclement was completed. All the alleys and escape routes around him were blocked by the slum people. Then 3 men came out from among the people surrounding him. Those 3 men looked different from the other people around him. They were wearing armour that was a bit dirty and damaged and they were carrying an anti-monster gun rather than a simple handgun. Basically, they were Hunters who fell from grace.

Akira knew immediately that these men were the leaders of the people who were surrounding him. Then in order to show that he was not scared, Akira shouted at them casually.

“Unfortunately I’m not rich to be able to pay the toll, so just go and hit someone else instead, okay?”

Those men laughed. Among them, a man called Sibea shook his head.

“Stop lying. You’re carrying a lot of relics on your back, aren’t you? I don’t know where you got them but I’m sure I can find more from where you found them, right?”

Akira tensed up and it was visible from his expression. Looking at that, Sibea just laughed as if he expected that would happen.

Sibea aiming for Akira was half coincidence. He was spreading his net since he started gathering information about his next prey.

There were countless gangs in the slum city and many of them were led by fallen Hunters. These were Hunters who did not have the skill and equipment to earn money in the wasteland but enough to use in the narrow space of the slum city and a touch of violence to earn money there. These Hunters would gather minions and form a gang.

Sibea was one of those Hunters. Although he was not one of the big fish here, his gang was pretty powerful and they had a base in the slum city. Akira was caught in the net that they were spreading.

Sibea imagined just how much Akira had in his rucksack and mocked him.

“You’re a boy from the slum too, right? Then we should help each other, right? I have a lot of people under me so we’re having a hard time surviving here, you see.”

Sibea looked around to the people who were surrounding Akira as if to say that they were his minions and threaten Akira that he could not escape.

“Don’t worry. As long as you give me all your money, belongings and all the information you have, we won’t kill you.”

The two people beside Sibea readied their guns and pointed them at Akira. They were laughing indicating that they thought Akira was weaker than them and had no ability to win against their number. But Sibea could see that there was not even a trace of fear from Akira’s expression.

Akira looked at Sibea with a grim face.

“…If I refuse, are you going to kill me? If you kill me, you won’t get any information, you know.”

“That depends on you. You can just tell us before we kill you.”

Akira knew that Sibea and his friends had no plans on letting him live.

Akira let out a big sigh and hung his head. Looking at that, Sibea thought that Akira had surrendered, so he lowered his guard as well.

Behind the weakness that he was showing to those people, Akira actually already made up his mind.

"…Alright alright, I don't want to die anyway."

Hearing those words, they lowered their guard further as they unconsciously took off their finger from the trigger and lowered their guns.

"Alpha."

"Ready when you are."

With that short telepathic conversation, Sibea and his friends' fate were sealed.

Akira suddenly turned to his side. Sibea and the other men were baited by that and looked to the direction where Akira was looking. The next moment, Akira pulled out his AAH assault gun and started shooting while running as fast as he could toward the direction that Alpha instructed.

Those who had bad luck got shot and screamed in pain. Since they had already lowered their guard, they were late to react. Not to mention that they were surrounding Akira, any shot that they missed would hit their friends on the other side of the encirclement instead, so they ended up aiming more carefully which made their reaction much slower.

There were those who tried to shoot Akira with reflex but none hit their mark. Alpha had already calculated the safest path in case they started shooting at Akira and he was running through that very path. Alpha's calculation was perfect, despite all the bullets that were shot at him, not even a single bullet hit him.

Akira followed Alpha's instruction and dove into an alley. Of course, the men who were blocking that alley were thinking of shooting at Akira, but

they were so surprised that their reaction was delayed. Thus Akira was able to shoot them freely in close range. Those men were only using a simple cloth rather than an armour, so the anti-monster bullet penetrated them without any resistance.

The alley was decorated by corpses and the ground was flooded with blood in an instant. But Akira did not even bat an eyelash on that terrible scene as he ran further and further away without looking back at the people who were trying to kill him.

Shouts and screams echoed in the area. Majority of Sibea's minions thought that Akira was only a small boy who would give away everything with a little intimidation. They did not even imagine that it would turn into a shootout. The people who were coerced to come with Sibea started to fear for their own lives and ran away.

Sibea and his two friends were only lightly wounded, thanks to their armour. Sibea was shot but it did not hinder him in the fight, but even so, the pain from the hit was immense as it was visible from his expression. He screamed in anger because of the pain he suffered.

"That damn boy, looking down on us!! You guys go and chase him! I'll take another route and circle him! You guys!! Stop standing there and chase that boy!! We'll surround him!!"

The two men beside Sibea immediately set off chasing Akira, but the other people were only standing there, scared for their own life. Looking at that, Sibea clicked his tongue and pointed his gun at them.

"Get going!! Else forfeit your lives here!!"

Finally, the rest of Sibea's gang started moving. He clicked his tongue and went to another alley chasing after Akira.

Akira took a turn not too deep into the alley and stopped, he immediately turned back and pointed his gun to the alley that he just passed. The corner worked like a shield that blocked the view. But he could precisely aim at the people who were chasing him because of the detection support that Alpha

added into his vision. To make it easier for Akira to see, Alpha even outlined the enemy with a red border.

Sibea even intimidated his gang members with his gun to make them chase after Akira. They still thought that Akira was desperately trying to run away from them. Due to this, they did not notice Akira as they just blazed through the alley without confirming their surroundings. Akira remained hidden and silently readied his gun.

The moment they ran into the alley defencelessly, Akira showered them with bullets. The few people, who ran into the alley, directly took the bullet and fell into the ground. While the people behind them indirectly took the bullet and screamed in agony which was followed by the people behind them. The ground was painted red with their blood.

“Alpha, how many people left?”

“Most of the people that surrounded you already started running away. So you just need to kill the leader and his aides which means at least 3 more people left. Hide there.”

Akira hid in one side of the alley. It did not take long before the rest of the gang who were still alive arrived there and shot a few shots to check the corner before carefully moving forward.

Because Akira precisely followed Alpha’s instruction, he did not get hit by their bullets. Moreover, thanks to his long history of living in the back alley of the slum city, he could hide so well that a small peek would not be enough to discover him.

The guy who stepped into the alley thought that Akira was not there and stood there exposing his whole body. The moment he did that, Akira’s bullet went through his forehead.

“2 more left. Refill your magazine while you have the chance.”

“Roger that.”

Akira calmed down and changed his gun's magazine while his downed enemies were still screaming in pain.

Sibea was trying to circle Akira. At first, he was running in anger, but he calmed down with time and his anger started to change into confusion.

"…Guys?! What's going on over there?"

He tried to contact his subordinates through wireless communication, but there was no connection at all. He was getting irritated, but he tried to fake courage to replace the anxiety in his heart.

"…Dammit!!"

The gunshot that echoed from the distance had already stopped. Sibea could only think of 2 possibilities, either his minions had a shootout with Akira and finished him, or the exact opposite of that.

He hoped that the former had happened. And as to the reason why he could not contact his minions, it was either because the communication device was destroyed during the shootout or they were injured and could not reply back. Both of these were possible scenarios.

But Sibea also imagined about what would happen to him if the actual situation was outside his expectation.

[…What the heck is with that boy? He isn't just a normal boy, huh?]

Sibea thought that Akira was only a lucky boy. It was a conclusion that he made after hearing a rumour about a small boy who accidentally found a hidden place filled with relics left by some dead Hunters.

If that was true, then even a child with no power would be able to bring back expensive relics. It also fits the fact that no one found any unexplored area despite so many Hunters went looking for it after hearing that rumour.

He thought that it must be an amateur who brought back relics knowing nothing about the worth of the relics that he carried. Then a rumour spread after the relics that he brought back was bought by Exchange Center for a

surprisingly high price. Shocked by that, he must have stayed low until the rumour died down. And if there were still relics left in that place, then he must have bought some equipment while trying not to raise any suspicion using the money that he received from his first expedition. He would be planning to go back to that place once the rumour had died down. Sibea thought that it was around the time for that to happen and ordered his subordinates to watch out for someone that looked like the child from that rumour.

Then he really found such a boy, thus he felt more confident in himself. Not to mention that the boy looked way weaker than he thought. That boy did not look like someone who could survive in the ruins and the wasteland that he himself could not.

But he had lost his confidence now. He thought that he would get killed if he stepped forward, so he was just frozen in place and could not step forward.

[…Is it better if I just run away? If that boy really killed my men, I can just come up with some kind of excuse later and…]

Sibea could not decide what to do and it became a fatal mistake. Whether he would run away or fight back, he should have made the decision faster. After all, if he decided to fight back, then he would have more time to prepare himself, and if he decided to run, then he would have more time to escape. The time was of the essence for his survivability.

Gunshots suddenly echoed in the air. Sibea was hit by several bullets. The high-quality armour that he was wearing saved his life. But the impact from the shots made him drop his gun. Then another round of shots echoed, the gun that he dropped was destroyed and he was incapacitated by his injuries, he lost all his ability to fight back and could only lie on the ground. He could see Akira coming out from an alley near him while looking disappointed.

Akira was disappointed because Sibea was still alive although he shot at him with the aim of killing him. Alpha smiled while looking amazed.

“Good grief, you missed too many shots. You should take a better aim before going for the kill.”

“…I’ll give my best in my next training.”

Akira let out a light sigh and walked to Sibea. He then aimed his gun at Sibea’s head to finish him off.

Sibea panicked, he thought hard for a way to stop Akira from killing him.

“W-wait! It’s your win!! I’m sorry!! I’ll give you my money!! I have a lot of money, you know!! So please just stop!!”

“Why are you aiming for me?”

“I-It’s because I heard that there’s a boy who is not that strong but has a lot of money! But I was mistaken! You’re strong! So please spare me! If you spare me, I’ll even be your minion!! I’ll let you replace my position as the gang leader! I have influence even on the other gangs too, you know! You’ll definitely get more profit if you let me live!! I have a lot of useful information about the slum city too!! It’ll be useful for your survival! I can help you too, you don’t want to get attacked like this again in the future, right? I can talk to other gangs so they won’t attack you ever again! So spare me, okay?!”

Akira just stood there staring at Sibea who was pleading for his life. Alpha just kept observing Akira while smiling.

“I understand that, after all, I don’t want to die too…”

Sibea smiled after hearing those words. But suddenly his face turned pale.

“…Or so I said back then, right? But you didn’t stop, that’s why, you’re going to die here.”

Akira pulled the trigger and shot Sibea’s head from a close distance which instantly killed him.

“Alpha. How about the others?”

“The rest ran away already. Good work out there.”

Akira looked at Alpha who was smiling and confirmed that he won. He then let out a sigh of relief and made a troubled face.

“…For some reason, I feel like I’ve been killing only people lately since I became a Hunter. And here I thought I would start fighting against monsters more often.”

“Well, if you look from your perspective, they were trying to kill you without any good reason. So I don’t think they’re any different from those monsters. If you want to start fighting monsters, you should work harder to get stronger. I can’t exactly recommend fighting monsters with your current ability.”

“It’s not like I want to fight monsters. It’s the same with these guys, they thought that it’s better to fight me rather than fighting against those monsters. That’s why they decided to attack me. In their eyes, I look like a lost wallet that they found lying on the ground. I have to make them stop looking at me like that, otherwise, this kind of thing will just happen again and again, huh… Good grief.”

“And remember that wallet gets thicker every time you sell relics to the Exchange Centre, so let’s be more careful now onwards.”

Akira looked like he did not want to kill any more humans, but Alpha ignored it and just kept smiling like usual.

Bandits would not just go attacking people indiscriminately. Even for those who attack people for money at random, they would refrain from attacking others if they think that they might get shot back instead. So for people in the slum city who wanted to pile up money, they at least had to have the ability to protect themselves.

The thicker the wallet got or the more money that Akira had, then stronger and stronger people would come attacking him for that money, at least until the list of dead people who tried to attack Akira outweighed the money that Akira was carrying.

Akira then left the area and took a big detour avoiding the slum city as he was heading to the Exchange Centre. All the dead bodies that scattered around were added to the list of foolish people who met their ends that day.

***

A few days after that fight, a young girl by the name of Sheryl was standing in the middle of an alley in the slum city. She looked confused.

Sheryl was a member of Sibea's gang. But after Sibea and his friends were killed, the gang was disbanded and some of the leftover members joined other gangs.

But there were also people who could not transfer to other gangs. They were those who helped Sibea attack Akira. But even if they helped Sibea, they did nothing much except for just blocking the way. So it was not like they actually attacked Akira and Akira might not have even looked at them at all. Those people who were able to skilfully make such excuse were able to get accepted into a different gang.

But Sheryl was not able to get accepted to a different gang. Although she was just a little girl, she had a nice figure. And despite her life in the slum city which cast a shadow on her beauty, she was still a beautiful girl. Thinking that she would grow up into a more beautiful girl in the future, Sibea took her in, or if you put in bad words, he had his eye on her. That was why when he was attacking Akira, he put her in a relatively safe position.

No one knew how far the Hunters that got attacked in the slum city would go for their revenge. Sibea might have been killed and the gang might have been disbanded, but no one could guarantee that it was the end of Akira's revenge. There were Hunters who were concerned about their safety and decided to thoroughly finish off their revenge targets.

Sheryl's position was actually pretty close to Sibea both in the gang and during the attack on Akira. As such, there was a fear that she might be included in Akira's revenge list, thus no gangs were willing to let her join them.

Sheryl meekly murmured.

“What should I do from now on…”

It was really hard for a child to survive in the slum. It was not impossible, but it needed a certain level of skills.

As for Sheryl, rather than learning how to survive in the slum city on her own, she was more knowledgeable about how to survive in a group. She knew how to get along and put the right distance with the other people. She was also able to skillfully ascertain and adjust her relationship with other people. If she could not do that, she would get attacked by another gang or be used as an expendable pawn for the benefit of her own gang. And it could be said that compared to her, Akira’s skill in that department was simply disastrous.

Sheryl knew that nothing would change if she just stood there in confusion, but she just could not come up with a way to fix her situation either.

Eventually, the sun had set and the day turned to night. She spent all her time thinking, but no good idea came up in her mind. The desperation that mixed with sleepiness drove her mad.

All the ideas that she would not normally consider started to pop up inside her mind, but she immediately rejected them and tried not to think of those ideas ever again. This cycle kept happening inside her mind which had been dulled by fatigue and sleepiness.

The next morning, Sheryl woke up on the side of an alley inside the slum city. Her mind was clear after having a good night’s sleep and so she remembered what had happened the previous day. Since she kept thinking of stupid ideas right until she fell asleep, she already had some kind of plan in her mind.

[…I’ll be lying if I say that I’m not pushing this too far and the chance for success is not that high either. If I fail, I might even get killed. And even if it is a success, I don’t know how long I can stay safe.]

Sheryl was hesitating. To be more precise, she was lost as to why the stupid things that she thought last night looked like a valid choice to her now. It had become a choice that she was willing to do and put her bet on.

But if she did not gamble with her fate. She would be forced to stay in her current situation which was worsening each day, waiting for her death.

"…I have no choice but to do this."

Sheryl made up her mind and stood up with a serious look. She then set off to find the person that she put her bet on, the person who destroyed the gang to which she was affiliated with, Akira.

***

Akira had visited Shizuka's shop for a few times already. So much so that Shizuka had already remembered his face. Akira visited the shop again to buy some ammo. When he stepped in, he saw Shizuka talking with 2 customers at the counter.

Akira was about to talk to Shizuka, but he stopped when he saw that the 2 customers talking to her were someone that he knew. They were Elena and Sara.

Elena was adjusting the armour that she was using and tightening the belt that locked her information terminal in its place. Although she was a bit skinny, she had a pretty good body contour that was unique only for girls. She was tightening the belts that wrapped her good figure to kept the heavy equipment she was carrying in place which made the contour of her figure more prominent and displayed the beauty of her figure.

As for Sara, she was using a black armour made of an elastic material. She chose that armour since her body would frequently change depending on her nanomachine consumption used for her physical strengthening. It really highlighted her body that had already returned to its glorious state. Her armour tempted anyone who saw to imagine what lies underneath that armour.

Moreover, she had already given up stuffing her voluptuous chest in her armour, now her chest was peeking through the big opening in the front zipper of her armour. A pendant was hanging above her skin. It was made of a reprocessed bullet designed for decoration and half of that bullet was buried inside her chest.

Shizuka was smiling at Sara, it was both a formal smile to a customer and a friendly smile to a friend. Then she said in a voice as if she was somehow already fed up.

"…I already heard that story multiple times. About that mysterious person that saved you girls and how that person just left the equipment of the people that attacked you lying on the ground so that you girls were able to collect all of them and bring them back. Then you girls sold them and earned a lot of money, that you girls are still left with even after using it to replenish Sara's nanomachine. After all, this is the fifth time you are telling me that story!!"

"Is that so? Then, I've told you about the medicine that person gave us, right? Thinking of what just happened back then, I consumed a lot of nanomachines for replenishment just to be safe, but since I used that medicine, my nanomachine consumption rate is strangely low. According to Elena, there's a good chance that it was a medicine from the old world. That's why my chest that I thought would quickly flatten stayed big like this, so the guys' gaze is just…"

Sara just kept talking on and on. Shizuka was a person who loved to talk, but she did not like talking about something multiple times. Even more so if the other person was boasting.

When Shizuka was trying to find a way to make Sara stop or at least to change the subject, she noticed Akira.

"Ah, a customer just came. Let's continue some other time, okay? Welcome, Akira."

Akira then walked to the counter and gave Shizuka a bow.

“Hello there, Shizuka-san. Can you sell me some ammo again?”

“The usual one is okay with you, right?”

“Yes, and also, I’m sorry that I’m always only buying ammo when I’m here. Please wait for a bit before I can buy a new gun.”

“It’s fine. You’ll be able to gather a lot of money bit by bit if you keep selling small goods consistently. Better be sure to come back alive rather than carelessly trying to earn a lot of money at once.”

Shizuka then introduced Akira to Elena and Sara.

“This is Akira. He’s a Hunter just like you girls. Don’t you have something to teach him as a senior Hunter?”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Akira. I’m working as a Hunter.”

Akira pretended that it was their first meeting and bowed his head. Well, it was not like they had actually met before, so it was technically their first time meeting.

Shizuka had been friends with Elena and Sara for a long time. Elena trusted her both as a friend and as the manager of the shop that she was frequenting. Since Shizuka was the one who introduced Akira to her, Elena thought that he must be a good boy and smiled back at Akira.

“I’m Elena. And this is Sara. We’re frequent customers of this shop and we’re working as Hunters too. Wait, doesn’t that make us your senior in both senses, huh? Although we look like this, we’re actually pretty strong Hunters… Or so I want to say but…”

Elena made a bitter smile and just stopped midway. Sara also made a bitter smile and continued.

“…We were so close to getting killed recently, but we somehow got lucky and came out alive. You should be careful out there, being a Hunter you may get killed anytime after all.”

Elena and Sara’s bitter smiles showed how bad was their experience on that day. It was indeed a dangerous situation. But there was a bit of happiness in that smile, after all, they were able to somehow overcome it in the end.

Akira nodded.

“I understand, I’ll be careful out there.”

Elena looked somehow satisfied with how honest Akira was and replied back with a nod. She then turned to Shizuka and spoke in a tone as if she was teasing Shizuka.

“It seems that you have a customer, so we’ll head back. After all, I feel bad making you hear Sara’s story all the time.”

“Well, if you’re going to say that, then you should listen to all her story instead of me. There’s a limit of how much special service I can give to a frequent customer, you know?”

Shizuka replied back with a joke that was mixed with a complaint, to which Elena returned back with a joke too.

“Maybe Sara won’t have much fun talking with someone who was there too. And also, I’m always listening to her story, you know? Not to mention that we also contribute to your shop’s sales, so can you just listen to her story in my place from time to time.”

Then Sara joined in their conversation.

“Oh my, in that case then, I’ll have you listen to my story when we get back.”

Elena returned back with another joke while making a scared face.

“Sure. Let’s talk about it so you won’t ever try doing that again.”

“Shizuka, See you later.”

Sara smiled and immediately ran away from there, Shizuka made a bitter laugh.

“So that’s it, huh. That explains why Sara would rather talk to me instead.”

“I only use that if it seems that it’s going to be a long story. Later then.”

“Alright then, do come again.

Shizuka waved at Elena and Sara as they were left the shop. After that, she immediately turned to Akira.

“Sorry for the wait. Ammos, right? I’ll bring them right away, just wait for a bit.”

Shizuka went to the back room and brought back the ordered ammo. After Akira put it inside his rucksack, he realized that Shizuka was looking closely at him.

“Uhm… Anything wrong?”

Shizuka did not answer Akira immediately. She kept looking Akira as if she was confirming something. She then unexpectedly asked.

“Say, Akira. Why are you keeping secret that you were the one who saved Elena and Sara?”

Akira was about to cough but he was able to hold it in. He then tried to regain his composure as much as possible and said.

“…Uhh, I don’t understand what you are talking abo-“

“It’s not like you have surplus money, right? From Elena and Sara’s story, it seems that the equipment from the bandits that you defeated earned them a big sum of money. Since you were the one who killed them, there’s nothing wrong if you take a portion of it, you know?”

“…Uhh, well.”

“You have some kind of circumstance, right? If you’re not sure whether you can trust them or not, don’t worry, I can guarantee you that they’re trustworthy.”

“…Well, you see.”

“Since being a Hunter is a dangerous job, it’s important to find a fellow Hunter that you can trust, you know? I think this is a good chance for you.”

Akira’s face stiffened as Shizuka was smiling at him as if she was trying to persuade him.

Akira thought that Shizuka was talking under the assumption that he was the one who saved Elena and Sara. But she had no real proof. So as long as he did not say anything, he might have a chance to dodge it. That was why Akira kept quiet. But then Shizuka continued.

“I heard it from Elena and Sara, Akira, you threw a bullet to Elena, right? That bullet, it was among the batch that I sold to you, right? Bullets from my shop have a manufacturing number carved on their shells. It’s for the purpose of tracing back the selling route or returning it back to the manufacturer if a defective product is found.”

After hearing Shizuka’s evidence, Akira decided to give up.

“…I’m sorry, can you please keep it a secret?”

“Aah. So it was really you, huh. I had no real proof, that’s why I was actually asking leading questions, sorry.”

Akira could not hold his cough. He then asked back in panic.

“T-then about that bullet?”

“They do have manufacturing numbers carved on their shells, but it’s not enough as proof.”

After Shizuka answered back while laughing. She looked at Akira with an expression that said she was sorry.

“I’m sorry. I know you must have a circumstance that you can just talk to others. So I promise I’ll keep it a secret. But still, about the thing that I said, it’s still important for you to find fellow Hunters that you can trust. After all, there’re many bad Hunters out there who are also working as bandits. You’ll also have a better chance of survival by working together with people that you can trust… You, Elena, Sara and other Hunters. You guys look like rushing toward your death in my eyes. It’s not like I want to criticize other people’s way of life. But I at least want to give some advice to my friends so that they can survive longer. I know I’ve been saying this again and again, but you can trust those girls, you know. I can guarantee it. If you ever change your mind and want to contact Elena and Sara, you can just tell me anytime, okay?”

“I understand. And also, thank you for worrying about me.”

Akira was happy at how nice Shizuka was to him as he smiled and bowed to Shizuka.

“But, if the bullet is not good enough as proof, how did you know it was me?”

“Call it intuition. I did not have any definite proof. But if I have to say, then it’s from that bullet that we were talking about. You saw that Sara was wearing a pendant, right? I heard it’s made from the bullet that Elena received from their saviour. They said that it’s some kind of a lucky charm for them. I somehow had a feeling that it was a bullet from this shop, you see. Moreover, when I introduced you to them, it seems like you were pretending as if it was your first time meeting them. They were talking about their saviour whose face, name and voice were unknown, then there was you pretending as if it was your first meeting with them. So I just connected the dots.”

Akira looked surprised, he never thought that he would be discovered only because of this.

After that, Shizuka seemed hesitant as she said.

“Aahh, and also, in case you want to talk to them, you might want to do it soon. After all…”

Shizuka hesitated a bit, but then she continued while making a bitter smile.

“…It seems that they’re so happy that they were saved, so they keep telling me about that story, you know. And looking from their faces when they talk about that story… Those are the faces of girls in love…”

Although Akira was listening silently to Shizuka, he felt that their conversation was heading in a weird direction. But then it turned into a more disturbing direction.

“…Every time I heard the story, it keeps changing for some reason. They started calling that person as ‘him’, a mysterious person with unknown age and gender. At this rate, it will only get worse, then in the end… Well, this is only my imagination, so there’s no need to take it too seriously, but… It might turn into something serious, it might turn into a certain son of a rich billionaire who is working as a Hunter out of hobby saved Sara and Elena by chance. The reason why he won’t tell anything about himself is that he doesn’t want any girls stalking him. And the reason why he won’t accept any reward and was able to just gave a powerful medicine like it was nothing because he is a rich boy… It might even turn into something like that… Or maybe I’m just too worried, huh.”

The current Akira had no shred of similarities with that rumoured man, but it did fit the rumour well. So Akira started to get worried.

“I’m just a boy from the slum. I don’t have any money. That image is far from reality… So as I said, please keep it a secret.”

Akira and Shizuka just smiled awkwardly at each other and their conversation just stopped there.

Silavin: Wow. Damn. Harem? Possible? But he is still a kid so…

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Rebuild World – Chapter 15, Akira and Sheryl

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Akira was having a chat with Alpha on their way back to the inn from Shizuka's shop. Without making any noticeable change in their conversation, Alpha casually said to Akira.

"Akira, someone is following us."

"Again?"

Since Akira just got attacked the other day, he was clearly irritated now. But his face turned puzzled in the next moment.

"Wait, it's not like he's planning to attack me in this place, right?"

The safety of a city depended on the power of the organization responsible for maintaining security there. The security of the area outside and inside of the wall was maintained by private security companies and they solved most problems that might disturb the safety using force.

Although the inn was located near the slum city, this area should be pretty safe. Causing trouble, just like the one that happened to Akira the other day, would mean making enemies with all the people who were reaping benefit

from the safety of the place. Safety was an expensive good in the eastern district, as such, people in the area were strict against those who might disturb their safety.

One should carefully choose the place and time to cause a ruckus. Causing a problem here was a completely different matter compared to causing a problem in the slum city. Remembering that he was attacked not too long ago, Akira thought that the one stalking him was planning to attack him too. But even so, he also thought no one was fool enough to cause a ruckus here since it was just simply unthinkable.

As Akira tensed up and became more cautious of his surroundings, Alpha said to him.

“Don’t worry, it doesn’t seem like she’s planning to attack you. She isn’t even armed. She’s just following you. Looking at it, rather than simply stalking you, it seems that she wants to talk with you but is hesitating right now. Akira, you should approach her yourself.”

Akira turned back and searched for the person stalking him. The aforementioned person was clearly marked in Akira’s vision by Alpha’s support, thus he was able to immediately find that person. Akira’s vision zoomed right to the small girl who was flustered since the person that she was stalking suddenly turned back and stared at her. It was Sheryl.

After taking a glance at that girl, Akira judged that she posed no danger. And since he did not feel right if he just dashed and left the girl, he lowered his guard and approached her instead.

While on the other hand, Sheryl was getting more and more nervous as Akira approached her. She desperately tried her best to keep calm although she really wanted to run away as soon as possible from this place.

[…Calm down! This just means that he saved me the trouble of calling at him first! Just think like that! I can’t just turn back now that I’ve come this far!]

Although Sibea was one of those fallen Hunters, he had the ability to manage a small gang. But the boy approaching Sheryl was able to kill them all, moreover, he fought back without any hesitation although he was surrounded by enemies.

It would not be strange if Akira realized that she was one of the people that tried to kill him and decided to kill her immediately without letting her say anything since he was not able to do that last time. Sheryl thought that Akira would not even hesitate to kill her, so she clasped her hand hard in fear.

Sheryl was betting on the chance that Akira would not remember her.

Akira stood beside Sheryl. Sheryl tried to smile, but she ended up making a weird smile since she was so nervous and scared of Akira.

“What business do you have with me?”

Sheryl was more nervous than before. With Akira standing right beside her, she was able to clearly see Akira’s equipment. The AAH assault rifle that caused that tragedy the other day was a rifle for fighting monsters with firepower that could not even be compared to the handgun designed for fighting people. If Akira used that gun to shoot at her, there would be no mistaking that she would be blown to smithereens. She could not help but remember what happened on that shootout and imagined herself ending up as one of those corpses. As such, she could not talk properly.

“I-I-I just want to talk…”

“Talk? About what?”

Akira was puzzled.

Sheryl was so scared that she could not talk at all. But even so, she tried her best to calm down and continue the conversation as not to worsen Akira’s mood.

But before she could do that, Alpha talked to Akira.

“Akira, let me tell you something. She was one of the people that attacked you the other day, you know. She was one of those people who surrounded you. Although, she immediately ran away the moment you started shooting.”

“Is that so? So what does this girl have to talk to me?”

“No idea. I don’t know that far.”

Akira had lowered his guard even more since Sheryl looked genuinely scared. But after Alpha said that, Akira put his guard back up. Moreover, although it was only for a bit, Akira showed hostility and antagonism toward Sheryl as it could be seen from his face and voice.

“So what does a girl that tried to kill me the other day want to talk with me?”

Sheryl’s mind became blank the moment she heard that. Her brain just could not follow what just happened as her vision started to blur. She started to tremble so hard that it would not be strange if she fainted right there. As she was filled with fear, she imagined what would Akira do next. Would he pull out his gun, point it at her, pull the trigger without any hesitation, then blow her head and scatter her flesh around that area? As that image ran through her mind, she was trembling even more.

She was feeling like puking out of fear and nervousness, but there was nothing inside her stomach except her stomach juice.

Akira was dumbfounded looking at the girl in front of him who was trembling and sweating like crazy. She completely went pale like someone who was just given a death sentence, she was in no condition to talk as she started crying profusely. As such, Akira’s hostility and antagonism immediately vanished and replaced with bewilderment.

Alpha then teased Akira who was panicking.

“Oh no.”

“W-was that my fault?”

“No idea. I don’t know what’s exactly going on here. Although this sounds cruel, I don’t care what’s going on with the people that tried to kill you. But we have to think about the people around you though, right?”

It was as Alpha said. No matter what the truth was, it looked like Akira was bullying Sheryl here. If there was someone with a good heart, they would immediately step up to save Sheryl from Akira. And if the people who were maintaining security in that area misunderstood what was happening there, Akira would definitely get roped into something troublesome. Akira panicked and tried his best to calm Sheryl down when he realized this.

“Uhh, well, just calm down for now. I’m not planning to do anything to you, and it’s not like you plan to do anything bad to me, right? So let’s calm down and have a talk, okay? You have something you want to talk to me, right? So take a breath slowly and calm down, alright?”

But Akira’s effort was futile, Sheryl just kept crying without saying anything.

[…Why did this happen to me?]

Akira cursed his fate in secret.

Akira was somehow able to bring Sheryl back to his room with him. He did not just run away and leave her behind because he was interested in what she wanted to talk about with him. After all, she was trying to talk to him despite the fact that she was so scared.

Sheryl did not fight back when Akira dragged her by her hand. Although she was still trembling hard even after arriving in the room, she looked a little bit calmer than before. She already stopped crying, but her tears left a mess on her face.

At least now Akira did not see Sheryl as an enemy. If he had, he would have taken care of her in a much more calm and cold manner. He would have shot her without hesitation even if she begged for her life.

But the girl who was not his enemy was trembling badly beside him, not to mention that she was trembling out of fear of him, it was a situation that was outside of Akira's social ability. As such, Akira could only awkwardly make a suggestion to Sheryl hoping that it would make the mood better.

"W-well, how about you go take a bath? It would help you calm down."

Sheryl made a small nod and went to the bath. The suggestion that Akira made while looking confused could actually be motivated by malice or other ulterior motives, but Sheryl did not have the leeway to notice it. And even if Akira actually tried to do something to her, it was not like she could fight back anyway.

After Sheryl disappeared behind the bathroom. Akira let out a big sigh as if he was trying to push out all his tiredness.

"Alpha, what do you think about this?"

"I can come up with some hypothesis, but it's faster if you ask her directly. That aside, today's training will be cancelled. Just calm down and have a talk with her once she finished her bath, okay?"

"You're right."

And so Akira decided to calm himself down while waiting for Sheryl to finish her bath.

***

Sheryl just let the water take over her body since her mind was still blank. She thought that she was dead meat the moment her very first step of his gamble was turned into a disaster, but she started to calm down. As she enjoyed her bath, all of her tiredness, fear, nervousness and other unnecessary feelings melted into the warm bathwater. It was quite a while since the last time she took a bath, so it really calmed her down.

[…Although it was a failure, I'm still alive at the moment… But I don't know if it's because I'm lucky or not. No, let's think of it as luck. It was

because of my pitiful state that he did not decide to kill me on sight. And about him bringing me to his room… Well, it's not unexpected. I don't like that idea but let's use it… I can only hope that it'll work though.]

She had resolved herself beforehand. But once she stepped in, she realized that she was lacking resolve. So, she could not help but show her pitiful state to Akira.

But after she was able to take a rest, her brain started working again and she realized that it was thanks to the pitiful state that she showed, that Akira lowered his guard and did not kill her. It was the reason why she was still alive now. Moreover, it would have the opposite result if she pretended poorly back there. So she wrapped everything that happened to her as good luck.

She had to immediately tell Akira about her request once she finished her bath. But no one knew if he would accept her request or not. So she thought that she had to increase the chance of him accepting it with whatever she had.

Sheryl looked at the reflection of herself on the water surface. She had a beautiful girly body that would entice any men. The only downside of it was the small plumps on her chest that couldn't grow any bigger.

Sheryl understood that she had a good figure. If she offered it for negotiation, it would definitely possess high value. Although Akira did not show any interest when he was looking at her as she walked to the bath, she thought that it was entirely possible for him to change his mind.

She did not like the idea, but she had no choice but to give it if it was asked. After all, that was the only thing that she had other than her cloth at that moment and she should increase its value as much as possible. Sheryl had decided to use everything that she could use to protect her life. So she diligently cleaned up her body and her hair, she did all she could to polish her appearance.

***

When Sheryl finished her bath and headed back to the room, it was right when Akira just finished heating up some frozen food and was about to eat. Right at that moment, Sheryl's stomach grumbled loudly, showing that she was hungrier than she would admit.

Akira then turned to Sheryl and their eyes meet each other. After a short silence, Akira decided to give the food that he was about to eat to Sheryl and went to reheat another frozen food.

The silence continued as Akira was reheating his frozen food. Sheryl just stood there waiting for Akira without helping him or saying anything.

When Akira finished warming up his meal, he took a seat in front of Sheryl. He looked at how Sheryl was doing. And once he confirmed that she had calmed down, Akira looked relieved as he thought that it was possible to talk with her in her present condition. So he said to Sheryl.

"Uhh, we can talk while we eat you kn-"

Sheryl's stomach suddenly grumbled again and there was an awkward silence between them.

"Well, let's talk once we finish eating."

And so Sheryl and Akira started eating their food.

Once they filled their stomach to the point that it would not disturb their talk, Akira decided to start a conversation with Sheryl.

"Uhh, first of all, my name is Akira."

"My name is Sheryl and please just call me Sheryl. Akira-san, thank you very much for the bath and the meal. And also, I'm really sorry to have troubled you."

( )

Sheryl gracefully bowed to Akira. But Akira just ignored it and said.

“Just call me Akira. We’re both just children after all… So then, what do you want to talk to me?”

Akira made a serious face, so Sheryl also made her resolve and answered back with a serious face.

“I’ll be honest here. Actually, we want Akira to be our boss.”

Akira did not expect this at all, so he made a very puzzled look. Looking at that, Sheryl was becoming more nervous as she continued with her explanation.

There were a lot of people in the slum city who formed gangs in order to survive the hard environment of the slum city. A safe place to sleep and food that you can get regularly helps to overcome the money problem. And there are many other things that one could get from working together with other people. Normally, all of these benefits outweigh the disadvantages of living in a group, even if you are just an underling in a group. The fact that you would be able to help each other out would make your hardest days way easier compared to if you were all by yourself.

Not to mention that the number was power in the slum city. If a gang was doing well, there would be a lot of people wanting to join in to acquire protection and other benefits. And if that gang continued to grow big enough to affect the safety of the area around it, the people who sat on the top of that gang would be able to enjoy a good life. As such, there would be more people seeking to join the gang chasing after a comfortable life and making the gang grow bigger and bigger.

There were cases where the person who stood on top of such a gang was someone who was not from the slum city. Some of them were working as the gang leader in secret while having another job, some were people who wanted to do illegal work in safe areas, some were people with particular circumstances. These were the kind of people who created a gang wanting to get power and a lot of money.

It was also equally common for gangs to be led by Hunters or fallen Hunters. Their ability to fight monsters could be used in the slum city too.

If an experienced Hunter joined a gang and that news went out to the public, that alone would be enough to increase the safety of the members of that gang. And if it was someone with connection with an Exchange Centre, even if you sell scrape metals or any other things that you found around the slum city, it would be less likely for them to think of you as someone from the slum city and try to take advantage from you. As such, these kinds of people were allowed to have a high position in the gang even if they had a personality problem.

There were a lot of reasons why these Hunters joined a gang in the slum city. Some of them gave up working in the wasteland and decided to chase for success in the gang. Some of them were doing that for gathering people to use as expendable pawns to reach success in the wasteland. Some of them were only looking for a secret place to store their goods and money. Some of them wanted to leave a legacy by creating a huge successful gang. And there were a lot of other reasons that drove hunters to get involved with the gangs in the slum city.

Sheryl explained to Akira all the benefits that Akira could get from being a boss and told Akira that Sibea's position as the gang leader was vacant. Sibea's gang was not constructed by leadership, it was a gang made with violence. As such, it would be easy for Akira who killed Sibea to be its leader. Not to mention that Akira was already famous for destroying Sibea's gang as revenge for trying to kill him. There would not be any problem and there were a lot of benefits to reap, that was what Sheryl said to Akira as she eagerly explained everything to Akira.

But Akira made a gesture saying he was not interested at all.

"I get what you're trying to say, but it sounds like it's a pain in the ass. I'm not interested. I'm sorry but I already have my hands full with taking care of myself, so just go and ask someone else."

"W-wait!"

Sheryl desperately said that word as Akira tried to cut their conversation short, but she had no idea what to say next. After all, it was clear that Akira had no interest in it at all. She could not come up with anything more

enticing than what she had explained to Akira. If she kept talking about that, it would only worsen Akira's mood.

It would be really bad if Sheryl annoyed Akira here. Akira had already known that she was one of the people who attacked him, so he was only letting her alive at the moment. So if she annoyed Akira here, it would not be strange if Akira changed his mind and just killed her.

Sheryl who was afraid of making Akira angry finally decided to use the option that she was saving. She really did not want to do it if it can be helped. She used her last option in order to entice Akira and fix his mood.

"…If you accept my request, you may do anything you want to me."

Akira stared at Sheryl body, from her chest to her hip then to her arm.

It was as if Akira was assessing the value of Sheryl's body. To be honest, Sheryl was not comfortable with it, but she had resolved herself and this was well under the range of her resolve. She even felt thankful to her alluring figure since it saved her from getting killed. That was what Sheryl thought and what she kept telling herself.

After he finished scanning her, Akira's gaze shifted back to Sheryl's eyes. He then replied back with a tone saying that he was not interested.

"Even if you told me so. You don't look that strong. I do feel bad for saying this but it doesn't even seem like you're going to be useful as a decoy or as an underling. You'll just slow me down if I take you with me. I'm sorry to say this although you think that bringing someone like you to the wasteland might help. I understand that's why you tried to offer yourself for pleading your life…"

Sheryl was a little bit puzzled after hearing that answer. She was dumbfounded as she understood why Akira misunderstood her offer. Akira did not look at her body as the body of a member of the opposite gender. When Akira scanned her body, Akira was actually only judging her strength and her ability to fight. And he judged that she would be useless to him. As Sheryl noticed that, she was surprised at Akira's unexpected reaction.

Alpha smiled bitterly as she spoke to Akira.

“Akira. Sheryl didn’t mean it that way, you know?”

“What was she talking about then?”

“Well, she’s talking about that, you know. That gender-related thing”

“…Ohhh, so that was it, huh? In that case, I really don’t need it then.”

Alpha looked surprised when Akira did not change his answer even after he understood what Sheryl was talking about.

“Are you sure? She’s quite a cute girl, you know. She’ll definitely grow up to a beautiful woman. Although she won’t be as beautiful as me, she won’t be as beautiful as me, she won’t be as beautiful as me!”

“I can understand your point if you repeat it twice, so there’s no need to repeat it thrice. If you’re talking about a woman who would remove her cloth and push herself on me, I had more than enough.”

Alpha smiled invincibly at Akira as if she was unbeatable.

“So in short, all my efforts of training you against honey trap were not all for vain, yep!”

Akira’s face was saying as if he said something that he should not. And so he immediately tried to change the subject.

“Yeah, you’re right. Not to mention that I don’t want her to get a grip on any of my weakness.”

“I think you both would reap some benefits though. Akira, although you’re just a child, you’re quite a romanticist, huh. Or maybe it’s exactly because you’re just a child?”

Alpha smiled mischievously at Akira who looked a bit annoyed. Her expression then returned to normal and said to Akira.

“Akira. Back to the subject, putting aside whether you’ll do anything to Sheryl or not, how about you go and help her?”

“Why?”

“You said this before, right? That your luck for the day might get better by helping others. You always get attacked both by people and monsters no matter whether you’re in the ruins or in the city. Not to mention that you’re in this condition right now. As I thought, you used all of your life worth of luck for meeting me. That’s why, you might want to help that beautiful young girl that unfortunately ended up in the slum city. After all, you might be able to fix your luck by doing that. So this is a good chance for you, right?”

Akira was hesitating. It was true that he did say that. It was when he decided to save Elena and Sara or to be more precise, it was when he decided to kill all the guys who attacked Elena and Sara. He remembered that he did say that random excuse since Alpha was not interested in helping those girls at that time.

Akira was not sure whether Alpha said that because she was still holding a grudge against him for that time, or was that a roundabout way of Alpha warning him so that he would never ask Alpha to do that again. As such, Akira’s face stiffened.

While at the same time, Akira was at loss for words after Alpha clearly pointed out his bad luck. After all, he knew well that he indeed had a lot of bad luck. But even so, it was not like that was enough as a reason to help her.

“…Well, but still. Helping, looking over her… It’s not on the same scale as when I helped Sara and Elena, right? And it isn’t like you were actually against it at that time too, right?”

“I went against it since it was related to your safety. Moreover, it’s not like I’m telling you to take care of everything and I’m not saying that you should take responsibility for her whole life either. You just need to give her a little push, just a little help, just giving her a little bit of good luck, just

that. If she ended up meeting bad luck even after you help her, it's not like it would be on you. You don't need to worry about it. While on the other hand, if her condition gets better because of your little help, you can even expect some kind of return as her saviour. And if it's too much work for you, you can just go ahead and cut her off too. It's something that simple."

Akira's expression changed as he heard that answer that he did not expect. Something that he thought as too much pain in the ass sounded so simple to him now. The image that he had of helping Sheryl changed to a much smaller scale both for the better and for the worse. It also strengthened Akira's hope, or more like wish, that this would make his luck better.

"…Luck, huh?"

Akira mumbled that word as if it was something meaningful to him. After all, whether it was bad luck or good luck. Both were indeed meaningful words to him.

To other people, Akira talking telepathically with Alpha looked like a silent suspicious boy who changed his face from one to another. But Sheryl did not have the leeway to think about that.

It did not work even after she offered her own body. So she could not come up with anything else that she could add to her offer. And she felt like it was meaningless even if she cried and begged. She was on her wit's end now. As she started to think if she should prostrate in front of Akira, she accidentally heard what Akira mumbled.

"…Luck?"

She tried to think the meaning behind that mumble as she thought it might help her get out from her predicament, but she just could not understand anything. Then in front of Sheryl who was so confused and nervous, Akira took out a coin. It was one of the 3 100 Aurum coins that Akira earned from his first job as a Hunter.

Akira flipped that coin as it flew and spun in the air before it fell down naturally. Sheryl could not help but follow that coin until Akira caught it

with both of his hands.

“Head or tail, pick one.”

Sheryl looked shocked as she stared at Akira and Akira just stared back at her.

She thought that Akira would decide on helping her depending on whether she could correctly guess which side of the coin came up. She was at a loss whether she should be happy since it might give her a chance although she was rejected once, or she should feel sad instead since he planned to decide it using such a manner.

She was at a loss whether she should pick head or tail, but it would not help her no matter how hard she thought. So she just prayed and decided on an answer.

“…Head.”

Sheryl made up her mind and answered back.

Akira peeked at the coin in a manner so that Sheryl could not see the coin. Sheryl’s face tensed up, Akira then closed his hands and put the coin inside his pocket.

“I’ll help you but with some strings attached. I won’t be the leader of your gang. But I’ll help you to some extent. After that, you should work hard and try to help yourself, in other words, I’m telling you to be the leader of your own gang. I don’t mind if you want to be the leader of another gang too. After all, the one that I’m helping is you as an individual and not your gang. So even if you become the boss of any other gang, I still won’t help your gang. If you can accept this rule, then I’ll help you. So what is your answer?”

Of course, there was no way Sheryl would not accept it. She happily bowed to Akira and said.

“I understand, I’ll be in your care, thank you very much.”

With this, she acquired Akira as her shield. But on the other hand, she had to be the gang's boss now. She did not know whether it was a good thing. Akira did not even tell her the result of the coin flip or whether her guess was correct or not. Sheryl was simply filled with worries and so she nervously asked Akira.

"U-Uhm…"

"I don't mind you asking me questions, but if I tell you not to ask me something, then never ever ask me that question again."

"Y-yes."

The reason why Akira gave Sheryl that warning was so that Sheryl who saw his expression change from one to another while looking at nothing would not ask about what he was doing or where he got the medicine that he carried. And Sheryl did not want to worsen Akira's mood, so she only replied back with a nod.

"So then, what is it?"

"Uhh… Did I get it correct?"

Akira immediately answered back with those words right away.

"Don't ask me that."

"…Yes."

But something stuck on Sheryl's heart, she did not know whether she won the gamble or she lost the gamble.

Even for Akira who knew the result of the coin toss, he did not know whether it was a good result or not. After all, the result would only show itself in the future.

All that Akira said to Alpha were actually only excuses. He did not even think for a bit that it would help his luck. But those were not excuses that he made to help Sheryl.

Akira was ruthless when it came to killing people, but his moral base was still unclear to Alpha. To understand the principles that Akira abided to, she pushed Akira to offer his help to Sheryl and so Akira would make more contact with Sheryl. It was a perfect setting to observe Akira as how far he would go to help someone who tried to kill him once in the past.

It was all for the sake of Alpha’s objective, that was all there was to it.

Silavin: I wonder if it is possible that Alpha’s objective would make Akira a better person.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 16, Sheryl’s Gang

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Akira walked through the slum city with Sheryl as she asked him to. She was wearing a dress that was above the standard of the slum city, as such, Akira looked like an amateur Hunter walking together with his follower. It was not a rare scene in the slum city.

But even so, a lot of people were attracted by them and some of those people looked at them with meaningful stares.

Sheryl guided Akira around the city. At first, they started to walk around the old territory owned by Sibea, then from there, they kept walking further away.

The slum city was quite a wide area with big and small gangs scattered around. Each gang had their own rules in their territory. Thus it was dangerous for people who did not know those rules to wander into other gang’s territory. Akira’s sleeping place in the back alley was actually within a gang’s territory. The reason why he was left alone was because he was in a region where there was no need for the gang to maintain order.

Akira also had a certain level of knowledge about this kind of thing. And since he was always steering clear from the places that he did not know,

there were a lot of unfamiliar places in the slum city, although he had been living there for a long time.

“I’ve never been in this place before, it’s quite clean around this area, although it’s still inside the slum city.”

The area was filled with buildings that looked relatively strong. There were stalls filled with all kinds of stuff like a poorly maintained pistol, rusted knife, simple accessories and so many other things. There were all kinds of people roaming the area as well. That scene was proof of how well the economy, safety and public order of that area was. It was also proof of just how powerful the gang that owned that territory had.

As Akira looking around excitedly at the unfamiliar place, Sheryl just smiled and said to Akira.

“The buildings around this area were originally a part of the extension plan of the lower district. But it came to a halt and so the buildings ended up abandoned as the managers of the area left this place.”

“Ohhh.”

It was not a knowledge that a little boy who always slept in the back alley of the slum city would know. So Akira was a bit amazed at Sheryl’s knowledge, he then asked Alpha.

“That thing just now, did you know that too, Alpha?”

“No, I didn’t know.”

“Is that so? So there are things that you don’t know huh?”

Akira thought that Alpha knew everything. As such, he was shocked when Alpha gave him that answer and it was shown on his face too. But his face then changed as Alpha continued.

“I don’t know about what she said just now. By the way, it was expected that they would abandon this place after the expansion. The city actually had no wish to seriously develop this area right from the start. But even so,

it’s an easy thing for the head of government to push the development. So I bet someone took the money for the development and it ended up being abandoned like this.”

“…You do know, huh?”

“What I don’t know is what kind of story that was spread among the people. Although someone owns the place now, I’m sure they’re doing something in the shadows. And even if some of those people who are related to this problem are discovered later, they’re in a position that would let them go unpunished.”

Akira was actually a bit curious as to why Alpha knew things that common people would not know. But he decided not to ask her since he knew that it would be pointless.

Alpha was indeed a special case. Other than the fact that Akira was the only person who could interact with her for some reason, there were still a lot of things about her that Akira did not know. But he intentionally ignored those point.

For him, the important point was that Alpha was not his enemy. There was no doubt that she was a totally unknown entity for him. But for him, it was far more important that she was not his enemy.

No one would extend their hand to a dirty child from the slum city. He always knew that no one would help someone like him. Even after Alpha helped him, he understood that it was a rare exception, so his views about the world did not change at all.

But that was also exactly why he did not dig too deep about Alpha, he would rather choose not to ask if it meant that Alpha would stay as his ally. Or at least that’s what he thought for the moment.

Alpha suddenly smiled mischievously at Akira.

“But still, when you walk side by side with Sheryl, it looks like you’re having a date.”

Akira coughed and turned to Alpha. Of course, it was really suspicious since from the outside, he looked like he just coughed and then looked toward the direction where no one was there. But even so, Sheryl did not react to that at all. It was because Akira already told her not to ask. And if it meant that she would be able to gain safety by ignoring it, Sheryl would definitely choose to just ignore it without any hesitation.

“A date? You know that this isn’t a date, right?”

“Nope, it’s a date. You can go ahead and argue otherwise, but you do know that arguing with me is futile, right?”

Looking at how Akira was making a conflicted face and gave up on arguing, Alpha smiled as she was enjoying it.

“So with that being said, since it’s a date, let’s buy something for Sheryl.”

“…Alright, I just have to buy something, right?”

Akira was also thinking that it would be useless if he argued back. And it was not like buying a present was dangerous anyway. Although it was something unplanned, if it meant that he could satisfy Alpha by sacrificing a small bit of his money, then he would not mind. Moreover, if he prioritized his ego and made a bad argument, Alpha would explain in detail all the benefits that he could get from buying Sheryl a present. Akira thought that it would not be worth it as he headed to one of the stalls. As for Sheryl, she just followed behind Akira.

There were all kinds of goods exhibited in front of the stall, but Akira eyes stopped on a row of broken guns lined up in front of the stall. Guns were indeed an important possession in the dangerous slum city.

[…Nope, not guns.]

Akira lightly shook his head. It would just be bullying if he gave Sheryl a broken gun that might accidentally discharge its bullet. Not to mention that it was not something that normal people would give in the middle of a date. As such, he continued to look for something safer. But since he had no

experience in giving someone else a present, he did not know what kind of present he should get. As he was confused and could not decide on any present, he looked toward Alpha for help.

“Alpha, which one should I take?”

“Think for yourself.”

As Alpha smiled mischievously at Akira, he replied back with a grumble.

“…You did say that you would tell me anything if I ask, didn’t you?”

“But I did answer you, right? You should pick what you want to give, that’s an answer, right?”

“So that’s it? That was your answer? That’s what you meant?”

“Yep, that’s it. That was my answer. That’s what I meant. It would also be a lesson for you if you give her something strange and make her give you a weird look. So give it your best.”

Alpha smiled as if she was having the time of her life. As for Akira, he just gave up and quietly grumbled inside his heart as he continued looking for something to buy.

“What are you looking for?”

Sheryl feebly asked. Akira hesitated for a moment before replying back with a troubled face.

“…Is there anything that you might want in this stall?”

“Eh?”

“Ahh, well, you see, from the explanation yesterday, you’re my patron… No, acquaintance…? What’s the right word, again?”

“Ally?”

“Yep, that’s it. You might need something as a proof, right? We’re in a close enough relationship to give each other present after all. So yep, I’m planning to give you something that you can use as proof for establishing our relationship. But I don’t know what might be a good present.”

Alpha told Akira to pick something by himself, but since he ended up asking the person that he intended to give his present, he decided to use that as an excuse. After all, Akira wanted to avoid giving something strange and making Sheryl look at him weirdly.

Sheryl was surprised, she never thought that she would be able to pick her own present. After all, Akira did not look like someone who would do that at all.

Although in reality, Akira only did that because Alpha told him to, Sheryl could not notice that. As such, it was a very surprising for her.

“…S-so, which one do you want?”

Hearing how Akira was pressing for an answer, Sheryl smiled happily.

“Uh, if I may, I would like to receive a present that you pick. After all, I believe that it’s better that way.”

If she had to be honest, she actually wanted to answer back that the more expensive his present was, the better. After all, the more expensive the present she received meant more important Akira thought of her. And it would also make a better proof of their relationship. Not to mention that she would be able to sell it for money if she needed to.

But she understood that in her condition, it would only make Akira angry if she asked for something expensive. Moreover, she did not know just how expensive the most expensive thing in that stall. As such, Sheryl decided to attack from the other direction.

Sheryl’s face and words meant to say she would be happy for whatever Akira picked for her as long as Akira gave a serious thought for her present.

But Akira did not catch her subtleties. Even after a beautiful girl spoke to him and looked at him with affection, Akira could not calm down, he was instead even more confused.

“…Alright then. In that case, don’t complain if I buy you something strange, okay? This is your chance if you want to pick anything, you know?”

Sheryl was a bit surprised by a reply that she did not expect at all, but she just kept it inside her heart. Being that persistent asking for confirmation was something that was expected for Akira to do, it was a normal thing for him, so it was not like Akira being nice to Sheryl.

But even so, looking at how Akira seemed to be a bit desperate, it showed that he really wanted to avoid the situation where he had to rely on his sense to pick Sheryl’s present. But Sheryl kept that for herself and made a gesture as if she was thinking before she smiled and said to Akira.

“I won’t complain no matter which one you pick. But well, if you insist, can you please pick an accessory? After all, I think accessories would work the best in this case”

“I see, okay then”

It was obvious that Akira looked a bit relieved.

[…As I thought, a gun was a no go, huh]

Akira was relieved since he knew what he needed to look for, as such, he started looking again with a calmer expression. After a moment of hesitation, he finally picked a rather expensive pendant and gave it to Sheryl. He picked that pendant because of 2 considerations. First, because it was an accessory, and second, it could be sold for quite a sum of money in the exchange centre.

“Thank you very much, I’ll treasure it”

“Ah, right, just go ahead and do whatever you want with it”

Sheryl showed as much as gratitude toward Akira, but Akira replied back with such a cold reaction.

They kept walking around the slum city for a bit after that and returned back when the sun set. Sheryl bowed deeply toward Akira as they went to different directions.

“Akira, thank you very much. And also, please take a good care of me”

“Yeah, you should be careful on your way back home”

“Yes, you too, please be careful”

Sheryl looked so reluctant as she said her goodbye and left. She thought that it was really unfortunate she could not score more points from Akira today. But she was satisfied that she was able to get a small token of their good relationship. The moment she turned back, her face changed to a serious expression as she was thinking of her next plan.

Akira just stood there for a while as he was seeing Sheryl off. Seeing how Akira just stood there even after Sheryl had gone from his views, Alpha was a bit puzzled and asked Akira.

“Akira, you’re not going back home?”

“Hm? Just for a bit… It’s her first day, after all, so just to be safe”

After saying that, Akira turned and headed back to the inn that was located in the opposite direction.

After Sibea’s gang was destroyed, its former territory was open for anyone to take. But it was not like other gangs would immediately use force to capture that territory. If any of them made a bad move, it might instead cause a fight between gangs and incur a big loss to them. It was more important for them to negotiate with other gangs and divide the open territory in such a way that everyone would be satisfied with it. A fight would break if they could not reach a consensus during the negotiation and they would eventually try to kill each other after that.

The building that was used as the headquarters by Sibea's gang was the centre of that open territory. All the money and resources that Sibea's gang had were gathered in that building, but almost half of it was already gone as the former members of the gang brought some of them as souvenirs to their new gang. So anything that was left there at that time did not worth that much.

But the building itself is still worth quite a lot. It was a very strategic building for anyone from the slum city who took that building. But it was not a well known building and it was deserted at the moment. If anyone took that building, the other gangs would think that a certain gang had made its move and occupied the building which would be a trigger for war. It was a dangerous place even for someone who was not affiliated with any gang to use it as a sleeping place.

Sheryl was standing in front of that deserted building waiting for someone. It was not like she had a promise to meet there and it was not like she called anyone to meet her there. But it was because there was a good chance that the people she was waiting for would pass through that place. That was what she thought as she was waiting nervously.

After waiting for a bit, the people that she was waiting for finally came. So she buried her nervousness and uneasiness deep inside her heart and said in such a confident manner as if she was invincible.

"Hello there, welcome to my base"

They were the members that were left of Sibea's gang. It was not like all of them had smooth sailing even for those who joined other gangs. Some of them could not get along in their new gang. Some of them were treated badly. Some of them were banished after the souvenirs they brought with them were taken from them. And some of them were not even accepted by any gangs. To put it simply, those people were the members who were stuck in those conditions and having a hard time.

So if those people saw Sheryl walking with Akira, they would definitely come to ask her.

“Your base? What do you mean? Wait, that aside, why were you with that boy? That was the boy who killed Sibea, right?”

As the other person asked her while making a puzzled look, Sheryl just laughed and answered back.

“You heard what I said, it’s my base now starting from today. The reason why I was with Akira was because we had a talk. And from there, we concluded that I’ll be the boss of this place starting from today. That’s why this building is my base now”

“Akira? Is it the name of that boy?”

“Yep, it’s a good name, right? So then, why are you guys here? Are you here to take something that you forgot?”

It was clear that Sheryl was teasing them. Although she knew that it would only antagonize them, it did not stop her from taking that stance. After all, she did that in order to show them that she had a powerful support that allowed her to do so.

It was pretty effective as the other members started to put up their guard.

“…We’re here to ask you that since we saw you together with that boy. So then, what do you mean by, you had a talk with him?”

“Do I really have to explain everything to you? I did say that I’m the new boss of this place, right? So I had a talk with that Akira and he said that he’ll help us. But you see, since he’s working as a hunter, he’s so busy that he doesn’t have the time to take the lead, that’s why I’ll be the one taking the command. You should think of me as his proxy. But like, since Akira has an image that he should keep, so I’ll be the boss in public. But again, since I’m also the one giving orders, that would make me the boss for real, you get that?”

But then one of them shouted.

“But he’s the boy who killed Sibea!! If only he didn’t kill Sibea, we wouldn’t be in this state now!!”

“That guy gathered that many people just to kill one boy but got shot back and killed instead, so what are you talking about? Are you stupid?”

“Oi Sheryl, don’t get ahead of yourself! No matter how strong that boy is, you’re alone right now!”

“Hah? Are you seriously saying that?”

Although the guys were threatening her, Sheryl returned it with a mock instead. Thus the guys started looking around their surrounding thinking that Akira was around

“It’s no use even if you look for him. Like I said, he’s busy with his hunter job”.

“You bitch…”

The guy then walked to Sheryl, but her next words stopped him middle way.

“Do you really think I didn’t tell Akira about you guys? I was waiting here because I predicted that you guys would come here, you know? So do you think I wouldn’t ask him to kill you all if I get killed?”

“…There’s no real reason why he would go that far for you, you know. I bet he’ll just laugh when he knows that we kill you”

The guys thought that half of it was only bluff so half of the guys started to threaten her. But Sheryl’s smile stayed the same.

“He has a particular reason to do that, you know? I’m his favourite after all. See this? I got this present from him. So, do you really think he’ll just laugh it off after knowing his favourite girl got killed?”

Sheryl pointed her finger on the pendant that was hanging on his neck and wiggled it a bit as if to show it off to the other guys. Since she was showing

it while smiling with confidence, the guys could not tell that it was a lie. It was not like they completely believed Sheryl's words. But thinking about the possibility that Akira might take revenge on them was scary enough to convince them.

After the guys debating with each other, half of them clicked their tongue and left the place while the other half followed them not too long after. The only people left there were the small children.

Those children looked at Sheryl with a grim face, but then Sheryl intentionally intimidated them.

"If you have no business here, can you guys just leave?"

"…You do know why we're staying, right? Let us join your gang"

"So you accept me as your boss? And will obey my orders?"

"…Yeah, you're the boss and we'll obey you"

Sheryl lips made a slight upwards curve.

"If that's the case, I'll welcome you guys. But just go back home for now. I'm busy with a lot of things too. I'll introduce you to Akira later, so come here again tomorrow night"

The small children there prefer to sleep in a safe place inside the base rather in the wilderness outside, but it's not like they could go against the words of their boss. As such, they did not have any other choice but to obediently leave the place.

After everyone left that place, Sheryl went in into the base and carefully checked her surroundings to make sure that she was really alone there. After 10 minutes, she finally convinced that no one was around.

Sheryl's expression immediately changed, all the nervousness and uneasiness that she was hiding came out on her face. She felt like she wanted to scream there but she was barely able to hold it in as she took a deep breath trying to calm down.

“…That was close… That was really dangerous, I almost got myself killed back there! But I was somehow able to survive that!”

Sheryl received Akira’s protection, but it was not like Akira could always stay beside her. Thus Sheryl needed something that could protect her even when Akira was not around. It was her first step to be able to acquire it and she was finally able to complete that risky first step.

With that being done, she thought that everything would be okay. After all, she did all she could there. The only thing left was the bet. That was what she thought as she crawled up on her bed. Her nervousness and tiredness drifted her to sleep as she was lying on her bed.

[…I was able to take a bath yesterday, I really want to get one today too…]

That was her last thought before she fell asleep.

As for the outside of the base, some of the guys that did not go back decided to stay there.

“Hey. Are you sure we’re going to do this? If Sheryl’s words were true, this is a terrible idea, you know? The other guy is a hunter, someone who usually spends his days killing monsters, you know? Is this really going to be alright?”

“Even if that’s true, are we really going to give up this place to that girl? If we could get this base for ourselves, it’ll increase our standing too, you know. Moreover, I bet that all her words there were only bluffs. It’s also possible that the hunter kid just said random promises to her too. And although she was showing that pendant, it looked like a cheap accessory that you can buy in the stall over there. I’m sure she’s just getting ahead of herself after being told that he likes her or something. If we can kill her now, no one would give a care”

“B-but still…”

The guys there were planning to kill Sheryl, but there were gaps between their individual opinions. The uneasiness of their own future and their

desperations. They were hiding all of those feelings by showing them as anger and scorn. Although all of them had the same goal, they could not coordinate with each other.

After Sheryl had a talk with Akira, they decided to let Sheryl build up her destroyed gang. As such, their base and the area around that base did not become an open territory. By the common sense of the slum city, a lot of people thought that Akira took Sibea's gang and its territory as revenge. And when it came to whether it would be worth fighting for that place against a hunter, the current consensus between gangs in the slum city was to keep their eyes on him for the time being.

But depending on how far they believed Sheryl's words, they had another choice which was to kill Sheryl and take the base for themselves. And even if what Sheryl said was true, it was still doubtful that Akira would seriously help to build up the gang. There was a good chance that it would cause confusion if they killed Sheryl now.

If they could take over that base, they would be able to get a huge profit. After all, they could get a good position in their gang if they could acquire that base and that territory and handed it over to their new gang. Considering that benefit and the danger from Akira's revenge, half of them were convinced while half of them were against it.

"Shijima-san also wants this territory. We can get a good position if we give this area to him. So there's no way I would let a small girl like her take it from me. Don't you think so too?"

"But if Sheryl was telling the truth and that hunter discovered what we did. It would be the end for us"

"If that hunter was around, Sheryl would've brought him with her back there. So this is our only chance to do this"

"But he might be hiding somewhere…"

"No way he is. Not to mention, that I actually doubt if Sheryl really had a talk with him. It might be just a random promise that boy gave her when he

slept with Sheryl. There's no way a hunter without any money like him can keep that promise"

"W-well, that might be so… But still…"

They could not reach any conclusion. But it was enough to clearly divide them into 2 different groups, those who support the idea and those who were against it. Then, the representative of the group that supported killing Sheryl clicked his tongue.

"Alright, we'll do this ourselves. You guys just standby here and watch this place. You're good with that, right? Just stay here, at least do that"

"Well, if that's all, then sure"

"Alright, let's go"

The people who were going to enter the base nodded to each other and readied their gun before entering the building.

Then on the next moment, they were shot. Some of them got hit on their heads and immediately died there. Some of them got hit on their bodies and escaped death. While some of them got lucky and escaped the building without any injuries at all. All of these people were limping on the ground.

Those who were able to escape from the building quickly looked around while screaming. Then they saw Akira holding his gun under the shadow of one of the alleys. Akira then walked to them and stopped right before them.

Akira looked emotionless although he just killed people. That scene caused the guys who were still alive to start trembling.

"Y-you…"

Akira immediately replied back.

"I'm the hunter that Sheryl had a talk with. I don't think I need to tell you this, but just in case it isn't clear enough to you, don't you dare lay your hand on Sheryl, you get that?"

“O-okay”

Akira then nodded and left the area. Some of those who were still lying on the ground and screaming in pain used their last power to aim their gun to Akira. As such, Akira just walked, pointed his gun back at them, pulled the trigger, and nested a few bullets at them to kill them for good. Looking at such a scene, those who made the right choice and survived without any injuries could not help but screamed a bit.

As Akira walked away from those guys, one of them asked Akira.

“…H-hey, if you did really have a talk with Sheryl, why weren’t you there at that time?”

Akira turned back and pointed at one of the corpses’ face, his expression did not change at all.

“You do understand the answer by looking at this, right?”

Akira then stood up and left that place after saying that.

The people that were left alive winced and then mumbled.

“So he intentionally didn’t show himself back then, huh. What a wicked boy”

Akira intentionally did not show himself beside Sheryl in order to flush out people who were thinking of killing Sheryl. That was what those people thought. Their faces winced even more as they looked at the pile of corpses of their friends. They were trembling in fear thinking that If they followed their friends and entered the building too, they would have joined that pile of corpses.

They could not help but to mumble those words thinking that if their dead boss was a bad ex-hunter who could aim his gun at other people, then his replacement was a worse hunter who could kill people without feeling anything.

“…He just went and killed everyone like that. As I thought, hunters are just scum”

As the guy inadvertently mumbled those words, he looked around in panic and let out a sigh of relief as he could see that Akira was no longer around.

Akira just showed his face to those people and immediately left the place. What was left in that place was only the corpses of those who made the wrong choice.

Alpha asked Akira about what just happened back there as Akira was on his way back to the inn.

“Akira, was that really okay?”

“Yeah, I don’t have the time to be Sheryl’s bodyguard in the first place. If that works well, Sheryl would be safe at least for the time being. As for her future, it depends on her luck… Was that not good enough for you, Alpha?”

From that answer, Alpha thought that Akira would not do anything dangerous with Sheryl as a reason. And so Alpha was able to understand a bit about the person called Akira.

“No. If that was okay for you, then I don’t have any problem with it. That aside, you’ll need to do today’s worth training too tomorrow”

“A-alright”

Alpha smiled invincibly as if she was enjoying teasing Akira. As for Akira, his face stiffen as he could imagine just how hard his tomorrow’s training would be.

Sheryl, who did not know anything was so surprised when she found corpses scattered in front of her base the next morning.

Silavin: Akira is such a softee here. He could have left her, and she would have most likely died. anyways, here is her picture.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 17, The Unlucky People

Index

Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

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Akira finished packing his stuff in the inn. He was about to head to the wasteland when he saw Sheryl waiting for him outside.

“Akira, good morning.”

“Morning, why are you here this early? I’m going to the ruins after this, so make it short.”

“Ah, yes.”

Sheryl was actually trying to make a friendly smile towards Akira, but his reaction was very cold and her smile did not have any effect on him. Akira was a hard nut to crack, that was what she thought as she was dumbfounded by his reaction. But she immediately regained her composure and proceeded with explaining about her business with him. It was about the current condition of the gang’s territory, the location of the base and how to get in contact with him. And also, Sheryl wanted to introduce the new members of the gang to Akira. She asked him to come to the base tonight. After she finished explaining everything, she casually made a gesture showing that she really wanted him to come. At the same time, she was trying to butter up with him.

“Ah, and also, if possible, can you come to the base from time to time? It’s okay even if you come only when you have some spare time.”

“Even if you ask me to come only during my spare time, I’m so poor that I can’t afford to have any free time.”

Sheryl’s smile faded as she understood that Akira was not joking when he said that.

To be honest, Akira actually did not want to lose his already scarce free time by adding an extra schedule to go to the base regularly. Not to mention that he was working as a Hunter which meant no one knew what would happen to him on the next day, as such, it was fully possible that he would end up breaking his promise. Thus he did not want to make any promise that he might not be able to keep right from the start. Although he did not realize it himself, he was very concerned about keeping his promise.

But Sheryl could not read his reason, so she bowed and begged in panic.

“C-can you please spare your time somehow?”

Akira refused her request, although she did not give any detailed time and date as to when Akira had to visit the base. Sheryl would be in big trouble if the people of the slum thought that Akira abandoned her and she would be in great danger if Akira would not come to the base at all. As such, Sheryl understood that his absence might cause a big problem for her gang in the future. She had to do something about it. She gathered all of her experience to make her best expression for begging him.

But even so, Akira’s reaction was very cold. He even tried to cut their conversation short as if he was annoyed.

“…I’ll talk to you about that later. Well, I might pay a visit tonight if I have the time, then we can continue this conversation.”

Sheryl was relieved since she at least got Akira’s word for tonight’s visit. So she ended their conversation in order not to annoy Akira.

“I-I understand. Let’s talk about the details later in the base tonight. I’ll be waiting for you.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes… Ah, by the way, I found a pile of corpses in front of my base though.”

“Corpses? It’s a common thing in the slum city anyway.”

“Ah, I didn’t mean it that way, the corpses were quite a lot so I thought that the area is pretty dangerous right now. I’m sure you’ll be fine, but just to be safe, please be careful when you come tonight.”

“I see, alright then. See you later.”

“Please be careful out there.”

Sheryl saw Akira off with a friendly smile. But once Akira’s figure was gone from her views, her expression immediately changed to puzzlement.

[…I asked Akira since I thought that he was the one who did it but… Did I make a wrong guess? But, it also felt like he was lying to me. So was it really him? But I don’t think he has any reason to hide it from me if he was the one who killed those people who tried to attack me… And if that was really what happened, he should have come to tell me to let me know that I owe him a favour. I really don’t understand… Well, those might also be people who got killed in some random fight.]

Sheryl then looked at the pendant that she was wearing, it was something that she got from Akira.

[…As I thought, this is a cheap pendant. Although I got the feeling that Akira liked this pendant, but I guess it’s really too cheap. Maybe I should’ve asked for something more expensive yesterday even if it meant that I had to help in paying too, huh?]

Although she already received Akira’s words that he would help her, it seemed that there were still a lot of difficulties in stock for her in the future.

Sheryl walked back home while thinking about what she should do next.

***

Akira was continuing his shooting practice using images of monsters produced in his vision support.

His target changed from monsters that were standing still to monsters that were roaming around. Moreover, these monsters would attack if they noticed him. They would shoot at him using the guns growing on their backs and ran towards him trying to eat him. This training was for him to practice being level headed and calm even during such a situation.

With his current ability, it was actually a very difficult task for Akira to accurately aim at those monsters' weak points even though he was allowed to calmly take his aims. In the end, Akira could not shoot those monsters accurately most of the time and ended up getting killed from the monster's counter-attack. As such, the images of him getting killed kept piling around him.

Some of the corpses had Akira's upper half or lower half completely disintegrated. Some of them were the remains of Akira's minced body after being showered by hundreds of bullets. The images of him getting killed in all kinds of gory manners kept piling up.

Akira looked at the pile of corpses and mumbled with a bewildered face.

"Although this is just training and these are fakes, I just can't get used to seeing my own corpses like this."

Alpha then replied with a serious face.

"It'll be troubling if you get used to this. Just because this is a training, don't take this lightly and do this seriously so the same thing won't happen to you during a real fight."

"Yeah, I know. But that aside, there're a lot of those monsters in the eastern district and most of the Hunters can kill those monsters while humming,

right? Ah, but that level of ability is normal for Hunters, huh? I was actually happy after registering myself as a Hunter but I wonder how long it will take for me to have the ability of a real Hunter."

Akira's training continued and it was clear that his ability was growing. But it was also clear that his current ability was still far away from his goal.

Even if the goal was so far away, there were people who thought they would reach their goal as long as they did not stop training. But half of these people gave up midway thinking that the goal was too far off or just simply because of the frustration of not reaching it. It would be troublesome for Alpha if Akira also stopped because of the frustration. As such, Alpha smiled to cheer him up and change the mood.

"There is also the differences from the equipment that you use, so there's no need to be so pessimistic. If you can earn enough money and buy good equipment, they'll help you a lot, you know?"

"Is that so?"

"Yep. If I have to give you an example, Sara and Elena whom we met the other day can defeat those monsters that you just fought even if there were dozens of them. Although, I'm not sure if they can do that while humming though."

Akira was shocked. Although he received Alpha's support, he never thought that those people who would have died if he did not save them would actually be very capable.

"Those two are that strong, huh? So why were they losing that time."

The wrong perception of their skill showed Akira's lack of experience and how bad he thought his ability was. Alpha understood that but she replied back while trying to avoid the subject.

"There are differences in fighting monsters and fighting people. There's also the effect from the colourless mist too. But if I have to say, it was

mainly because of their bad luck. But again, since they were following your footprints, I wonder if they got caught in some of your bad luck."

Alpha said that while joking but Akira looked a bit disturbed by that.

"…Can you please stop saying that?"

"Oh my, my apologies."

Alpha apologized while smiling as Akira was back doing his shooting training without saying anything. He too thought that they were really affected by his bad luck, but he hid this thought behind his silence. He also put more focus on his training in order to hide the fact. As such, he ended up forgetting his goal that he was still far away from.

Looking at that, Alpha smiled with satisfaction.

***

After finishing his shooting training, Akira headed to the ruins to search for relics as well as for his ruin exploration training. First of all, he pulled out his binoculars and watched his surroundings as usual. If there was no problem, he would start moving into the ruin cautiously.

But something unexpected happened. As Akira confirmed the safety and picked a route to explore the ruin, Alpha who usually would not disturb his training said to Akira.

"Akira, connect your binocular to your information terminal."

"Hm? Okay."

Akira pulled out a cable from his binocular and connected it to his information terminal like he was told. Alpha then started operating the binocular through the terminal. The image zoomed in and zoomed out rapidly as the lens moved rapidly up-down left-right. Since Alpha could only move the lens, Akira had to help Alpha moved the rest while following Alpha's instructions.

The image from the binocular rapidly changed from one to another, Akira did not understand what Alpha was actually looking for. Alpha properly confirmed all the images that the binocular captured. She then suddenly shouted to Akira with a grim look.

“Akira! Get into the ruin! Quickly!”

It would be fatal to ask for the reason, Akira understood by experiencing it firsthand and Alpha already warned him about that before. So Akira immediately started running.

“What did you find?”

Originally, they would not be able to talk while running since it would mess up with his breathing. But thanks to the telepathic communication, they were able to have a conversation while running too.

“There’s a trailer inside the ruin that’s being attacked by monsters.”

“Wait for a second. So why are we running to the ruin instead? Shouldn’t we avoid it instead?”

“Akira, you can ask all you want but don’t stop running. There’re a lot of monsters there. The people inside the trailer are fighting back, but it’s only a matter of time before they get killed.”

Akira was puzzled, but he did not slow down at all, or else his life would be at risk too.

“What I’m saying here is that shouldn’t I be running in the opposite direction? I don’t have the duty to risk my life in order to help people whom I don’t even know, you know?”

Although it was out of his own reason, Akira had helped Elena and Sara in the past although he did not know them at that time. But Akira completely ignored that fact and Alpha would have pointed that out normally, but she also ignored it this time.

“Of course your safety is the top priority, so I’m picking the safest route.”

“Wait a sec, so how in the world it ended up with me having to run toward those monsters?”

That question was very logical, but Alpha replied back with a tone that showed how bad their situation was.

“Unfortunately, the monsters already encircled you. Even if you start running back to the city now, they’ll eventually catch up and kill you. If you try fighting against those monsters in the wasteland where there’s no hiding place for you, your chance of winning is basically zero. Those monsters might be focused on those people in the trailer right now, but once they’re done with them, it’ll be your turn next.”

Akira’s face twitched as he was making a grim face.

“So if I don’t meet up with them and help them fight back before they get killed, then we’re all goners, huh?”

“Yep, that’s it. And in the worst-case scenario where you’re the only one still alive, you’ll have to go to the deeper part of the ruin. I can give you better support when you’re in the deeper part of the Kuzusuhara City ruins and it’ll give you a better chance to survive. But that’ll be our next plan if our plan to meet up with the people in the trailer fails. After all, you have a better survival chance if you meet up and fight together with them. So that’s why you need to hurry up, if you’re too late, you’ll be fighting all of those monsters alone.”

“You guys in the trailer! Give your best until I’m there! Goddammit!! Is this because of my bad luck too? Because I used all of my luck?!”

“I don’t know who’s bad luck it is. I would say that those people in the trailer are helping to shoulder some of your bad luck… As I thought, Akira, you used your lifetime worth of luck when you met me. Well, I’ll give you my utmost support in exchange though. So you do your best too, okay?”

Alpha smiled bitterly and her serious face relaxed a bit.

As Akira saw that, he more or less was able to understand his current condition. He was making a bewildered face after hearing that cheering from Alpha as he kept running as fast as he could in order to survive.

***

A trailer was heading to the Kuzusuhara ruin through the eastern wasteland when Akira was in his shooting training. It was a trailer made to traverse the harsh environment of the wasteland and designed for a long journey. It was even equipped with a machine gun on its roof.

There were 2 men in the trailer, Katsuragi and Darris. Katsuragi was a weapon dealer who frequently sold his goods to Hunters. He had been working as a merchant using this trailer which also functioned as a moving shop for years. As for Darris, he's the main fighting power of the duo. He worked as a shopkeeper helping Katsuragi as well as his bodyguard.

If you go further east from the region ruled by the Corporate Government, there was a vast unexplored wasteland. Monsters as huge as mountains roamed freely inside that unexplored wasteland. Because of the harsh condition in that region, the Eastern Government could not explore the area even after exerting all of its power. The region was simply that dangerous. But ruins with advanced technology, enough to even produce those monsters, were located in that region. It was a region filled with knowledge and treasures from the old world that was worth exploring despite all the dangers.

The border that separated the territory owned by the Corporate Government from the dangerous unexplored wasteland was known as the Front Line. The Corporate Government kept pouring a huge amount of money to Front Line in order to get a piece of some treasure and knowledge of the old world.

Of course, only high-level Hunters were there and to work there was the highest point in the Hunter profession. Powerful Hunters were living in that place, some of them formed groups that would even scare big corporations while some of them were lone wolves who could pick a fight against the government all by themselves.

Katsuragi and Darris were on their way back to the Kugamayama city from the Front Line. Of course, the road from the front line was very dangerous, thus a huge amount of money was offered to transport goods. Normally, goods transported by big companies would be accompanied by a lot of bodyguards. The people who did not care about the danger and risked their lives in transporting the goods by themselves could get a lot of money.

Of course, they would only do that if they already had a patron who would buy their goods. The equipment used in the front line were of course of the highest quality suitable for the dangers there. Hunters who only operated around the Kugamayama city could not afford this equipment and few of this equipment were just simply too powerful for the Hunters here. As such, this equipment just would not sell around Kugamayama city.

Being a talented merchant that he was, Katsuragi was somehow able to get a deal. Thus he used his own personal trailer, filled it with high-quality goods and started transporting goods through a long journey from the Front Line. They only needed to go a little further before they reached Kugamayama city, thus their bet was on the verge of succeeding.

But right now, they were driving as fast as they could, trying to escape from the danger that was approaching them from behind. So they prioritized driving fast rather than driving safely. Thus the car was shaking violently.

Darris shouted to Katsuragi.

“Katsuragi!! This is why I keep telling you to get yourself a better escort!!”

Katsuragi shouted back at Darris.

“Just shut it!!! We didn’t get ourselves a good escort because we don’t have enough money!! You too know that, don’t you?! Not to mention that it was your fault for changing our route out of the blue, that’s why we’re in this situation!!”

“You shut up!! The contract for the bodyguard was too short!! If I stayed on the original route, we wouldn’t be able to arrive on time, you know!! If only you had more money, we could’ve taken a better route than this one!!”

“So it’s money, huh!! As I thought, it’s money’s fault, huh!!”

“Yeah, it’s money!! This world runs on money after all!!”

Katsuragi laughed loudly from the driver’s seat, laughing at their own hopeless situation.

The reason why Katsuragi and Darris were feeling hopeless was because of the monsters following their trailer. Those monsters were chasing them with their powerful vigour while letting out howls that reverberated through the air and stomps that shook the earth.

They already used the machine gun on the top roof of the trailer to shoot at those monsters until it ran out of bullets. Although it turned countless monsters into minced meat, it was eventually futile. Those monsters did not even care about their companions’ corpses as they ran over them while chasing Katsuragi and Darris. Not to mention that other monsters along the way joined them on their chase. Thus, the monsters count was snowballing.

The Hunters whom Katsuragi and Darris employed to escort their trailer had already abandoned them when they saw that the number of monsters chasing them were much larger than they could engage.

From the perspective of the escorts, it was because Katsuragi took a route outside of what was decided in their contract, they met those monsters. So, their current situation was a consequence of the employer not upholding the contract, thus the escorts had a good reason to abandon them.

Half of the monsters even detached from the main group and started chasing the escorts. As such, it can be said that their escorts had done their job. And it could even be said that Katsuragi and Darris should even be thankful for their escorts, but it was a different story whether they actually felt thankful or not.

Katsuragi’s and Darris’ laughs slowly died down. They were fully pumped with adrenaline because of the danger that they were facing. But the effect of adrenaline faded away with their laughs.

Darris, who already regained his composure kept telling himself to calm down while making a serious face. After forcing himself to calm down, he recognized how dire their condition was and let out a sigh.

“…So, what should we do? We’ll be dead at this rate, you know?”

Katsuragi then replied with a grim face.

“I know. We should change our location first, that’s why we’re heading to Kuzusuhara ruins right now.”

“To the ruins? But why?”

“If we keep heading to Kugamayama City, we’ll definitely be dead.”

If they were thinking of running away from the monsters by heading to the city and ended up bringing those monsters with them, then the city would definitely use its firepower to kill the monsters together with them. That would be more or less guaranteed to kill them, and even in the unlikely case if they survived that, the city would arrest them for disturbing the safety and have them reimburse the repair from the damage and the resource that it used for the defense. Even with all the money and wealth that they had now, they would not be able to pay the fine. Thus the city would make them pay the fine by working them hard, it would be much worse that they would wish they had died.

But even after knowing that, there were people in similar situations who drove straight for the city looking for a slim chance in surviving. Most of the monster attacks on the slum city that Akira had gone through were because of this.

“Katsuragi, I know that much. I was asking why are we heading to Kuzusuhara ruins?”

“The ruin is the territory of other monsters, those monsters that are chasing us know that too. So they might stop chasing us if we get deep into the ruins. Not to mention that place is very dangerous, so we might even be

able to meet a strong Hunter who can clean up all of those monsters in one go. You've sent the SOS, right?"

"Yeah, I hope someone accepts our SOS request…"

Normally, any request submitted in the Hunter Office would be checked and evaluated first, thus it would take some time before it would get accepted. But in the case of an SOS request, it would be processed as fast as possible and immediately broadcasted. SOS request was frequently used by Hunters who found themselves in a pinch in the middle of the wasteland.

Since the one requesting the SOS would the person in danger himself, the reward would also be relatively big. As such, many Hunters would take such high reward low-risk request. Even if the requester lied about the reward out of desperation, the Hunter Guild would still give a suitable amount as a reward in their place. Thus the Hunters did not need to worry about anything. As such, it was better for them to send SOS rather than making a random wireless broadcast.

Katsuragi clicked his tongue while still making a serious face.

"Well, there's no chance we can go to the city, so the ruin is the place with the best survival chance for us. We can only leave everything to luck after that, let's go!!"

After that, Katsuragi and Darris just dove into the ruin. They chose a route that was wide enough for the trailer to pass through as they kept moving deeper into the run. They did not have the detailed map of the inner part of the ruins, the map that they randomly acquired from their network had a lot of mistakes, thus it was fully up to their luck as to how far they could keep running away.

Unfortunately, Katsuragi bumped into a wreckage that threw their trailer into a small alley, thus they had no other choice but to stop their trailer. But it did not end there, the monsters chasing them ignored the fact that they were entering other monster's territory and kept running towards Katsuragi and Darris.

Darris made his decision and shouted.

“Katsuragi!! We’ll shoot them back!! Quickly load the machine gun with new ammo! Once you’re done, get back to your driver seat and give me support with the machine gun! Given our situation, you wouldn’t complain about the money that we would spend for the ammo, right?!”

“I know! Be careful out there!”

Darris then jumped off the trailer and readied his gun as Katsuragi started loading ammo as fast as he could.

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Akira was already deep into the ruin for him to be able to directly see the monsters. Some of the monsters noticed him and changed their target from Katsuragi and Darris to Akira.

Akira kept running while holding his AAH rifle. He was making a grim face.

“Alpha, they noticed me! Are you sure it’s okay if I keep going like this?”

Akira looked at Alpha with a very worried look, but Alpha did not change her command.

“It’s okay! Just keep running! I’ll guide you!! And also, take the medicine while you still have the chance!”

“Am I going to get injured again in this fight!?”

“That medicine can also relieve your fatigue!! Just keep this in your mind, we won’t get any rest from now on! You just need to follow my orders and shoot just like you practised and it’ll be alright!”

“I got killed so many times during the practice though!?”

“Remember the times when you didn’t get killed, you just need to do it like those times!! Hurry up! They’re coming!”

Akira took some medicines while running. He kept his eyes on the monsters in front of him as he swallowed the medicine. He made his resolve to face the upcoming fight for which he even needed to take the medicine beforehand.

He followed Alpha's order as he stopped and took aim with his gun. His vision was further augmented for battle by Alpha's support. It showed the priority order to kill the monsters that were heading their way and it put on markers on their weak points. It also put TP line from the muzzle of Akira's gun.

Akira took aim on the monster with the highest kill priority and lined the TP line to its weak point before pulling the trigger.

A gunshot echoed through the wasteland. The bullet flew from Akira's gun and hit its target right on. Although it did not hit its weak point, the anti-monster bullet was able to tear off its meat, crush its bones and caused enough injuries in its inner organs that made it a fatal wound. Those monsters that got hit on their legs were significantly slowed down while those that got hit right on their weak points just rolled dead on the ground.

The bulls-eye target on Akira's vision changed into a line and Akira followed that line with his gun as he held its trigger. The bullets that spewed out from its muzzle showered the monsters and those monsters fell down into the ground one by one. Some of the monsters were shocked and stopped moving.

Akira used this chance to run to his next shooting position following the route given by Alpha and started shooting again after he reached that position.

Alpha kept dashing out unusually strict orders. She considered everything inside those orders like the movement range of the monsters and Akira's amateur manoeuvrability. She tailored her order for maximum efficiency.

Akira tried as hard as he could to follow those orders. As such, from other points of view, it seemed as if Akira was performing above his original ability. He himself was surprised at how he was performing. As he kept

fighting through the monsters, he finally arrived in the deeper part of the ruin, but then he thought.

“Alpha, can I ask you a question?”

“This is a good time, so go on.”

“About those monsters that I shot just before, although I remember fighting some of those monsters during my training, aren’t they way too weak?”

“Nope, that’s just how powerful they are.”

“…If that’s true, then why did I get killed a lot of times during the training against those monsters?”

“It’s because monsters in your training don’t get surprised, shocked, confused or try to escape. I set them so they would chase and target you like a machine as long as they can. If I make the monsters in the training so easy to defeat, it might make you less careful when fighting those monsters for real, right? So I did that just to be safe. But thanks to that, you can fight without dying and perform really well just like now. So the training was really useful, wasn’t it?”

Alpha said that while smiling confidently.

“Well, you do have a point.”

He was in the middle of a battle and the training was useful, that was what Akira told himself as he changed gear and rushed forward.

***

Katsuragi and Darris tried their hardest to fight back. Their trailer was already surrounded by heaps of monsters’ corpses. Blood was pouring out from the corpses that were half destroyed after getting showered in the bullets from their machine gun. The corpses were piling up like a hill and made a pool of blood and soaked the area around it in red.

They had to finish their fight before the pool of blood attracted more monsters, if that happened, they would be attacked by monsters from the ruins and the wasteland.

They had killed so many monsters, that they started to hope that those monsters would start running away. But those monsters did not even bat an eyelash on the piled-up dead corpses of their kin as they kept charging forward as if to laugh over Katsuragi and Darris's wish. They trampled on the meat of their dead kin and turned the ground into bloody mush as they were running toward Katsuragi and Darris.

Katsuragi used his machine gun to kill any monster that approached the trailer while Darris kept shooting at those monsters aiming to immobilize them. If they stopped even only for a moment, they would join the corpses littered around. As such, they were fighting as hard as they could to survive.

In case of firepower, Katsuragi and Darris definitely had the upper hand. It was obvious from the corpses that kept piling up around them. But even so, it looked like the end was nowhere near. Katsuragi and Darris' faces started to turn pale.

Katsuragi screamed as he cursed the monsters that kept coming at them.

"Dammit!! There's no end to them! Even if they eat us, they would not even get a sausage worth of meat for each one of them, you know!! So why the heck don't they just go eat those piles of meat on the ground!! There are just mountains of meat sitting there, aren't there? Darris! I ran out of ammo! Can you handle them for a while until I finish reloading?!"

Darris made a grim face. If the machine gun stopped shooting even for a second, they would definitely get swarmed in no time. But he could not say to Katsuragi that it was an impossible request. After all, there was nothing he could do if he lost the support from the machine gun. So Darris shouted back.

"…Make it quick!"

The machine gun stopped for a moment, the monsters that were held back by the machine gun immediately rushed in. As Darris was looking at the number of monsters charging towards him, the rational part of him telling him that it was futile and there was no way he could handle them all alone.

Darris had already given up all hope. But the next moment, the monster that should have delivered him his death rolled over and stopped moving, a bullet had torn through its forehead. Then its corpse became an obstacle to the monsters behind it, as such, the other monsters stopped for a moment. But during that small opening, those monsters were showered by countless bullets and fell limp to the ground.

Darris then snapped back to reality, he started shooting back while looking at the source of that gunshot. There he saw Akira shooting from a window of a building near them.

The tide of the battle changed towards Katsuragi as Akira was providing them with support. Normally, it was not a situation where a single AAH could change the tide of the battle, but as Akira kept targeting those monsters while following Alpha's instruction, he was able to buy enough time for Katsuragi to finish reloading. Since Alpha kept dashing out orders that maximize his efficiency and with Akira strictly following it, his overall shooting efficiency was greatly increased.

Akira's face twitched when he saw the monsters corpses that already piled up in that area, but even so, he himself kept shooting and adding more corpses to that pile of dead monsters.

"That's just fricking lot of monsters, was I about to get attacked by those monsters back then?"

Alpha smiled as she gave a confirmation and proceeded with giving Akira a warning.

"The possibility of that is still not zero, you know. So you can't stop providing them with your support."

“There’s no need to tell me. No way in hell I would let myself be attacked by those monsters.”

Akira squeezed everything that he learned from his training. He put everything he had for providing support while thinking that it would be fatal if he let go even a single monster.

It did not take long before Katsuragi noticed Akira’s help. He mumbled while smiling as he was preparing his machine gun.

“…So the SOS request is already broadcasted, huh? Alright. The future looks bright, we just need to keep at it a bit longer.”

With the machine gun back up, their overwhelming firepower returned. And with the help from Darris and Akira, they laid waste on those monsters. Then after 2 more machine gun reloads, they finally eradicated all the monsters in that area.

After they finished, Darris and Katsuragi were so surprised as they came to know that it was a small boy who was helping them, but even so, they did not belittle him at all. After all, they witnessed Akira’s ability just a few moments ago.

Katsuragi smiled in relief and opened up a conversation with a friendly tone.

“Thanks for the help, are you a Hunter who accepted our SOS request?”

Akira looked puzzled as he answered back.

“SOS request? Nope, I was actually about to get attacked and was running away from those monsters.”

“Is that so? It seems that both of us are not blessed by lady luck today.”

Katsuragi did not say anything about the fact that they were actually the ones who brought that monsters. It was because Akira did not ask them about that. After all, it felt like they involved Akira in their bad luck.

Katsuragi then smiled to relieve the awkwardness between them.

“I’m Katsuragi and that guy over there is Darris. We’re merchants and this trailer doubles as our moving shop. We’re actually in the middle of our way returning to Kugamayama City.”

“I’m Akira, a Hunter, I was just passing through the area by chance.”

“Oh! A Hunter! Then you’re a customer. This must be some kind of fate. Since you saved us, I’ll give you a big discount if you want to buy anything, you know? Darris! At least say your thanks to our saviour.”

Darris, who was doing maintenance on his gun not too far, shouted back.

“I know! I know! I’m Darris! Thanks for the help you provided!”

“Once we’re done doing maintenance on our guns, we’ll be heading back to Kugamayama City. Want to come with us? Since we just faced such a scale of monster attack, you’re not thinking of continuing your ruin exploration, right?”

Akira also thought that he had enough for a day, so he was not thinking of going back to training now.

“Alpha, it’s okay if we go back today, right? No, we’ll go back, I take no objection.”

Looking at how desperate Akira was, Alpha smiled as if she was enjoying.

“Sure, let’s go back for today.”

Although he knew that Alpha would approve it, he still felt relieved after hearing that.

“Yes please.”

“Oh!! He said yes!”

Katsuragi let out a big laugh and let Akira get on the trailer. He then helped Darris in finishing maintenance of the gun and then happily started driving the trailer. Although there were a lot of monster corpses in front of them, it was not a problem to the engine power of a trailer specially made for traversing the wasteland. Looking at how the trailer was crushing the corpses below it, Akira looked a bit perturbed. But Katsuragi just ignored it, or more like, it seemed that he was enjoying crushing monster corpses with his trailer.

Silavin: Hmm… Chance for Akira to get a weapon upgrade?

The Bad Luck thing seems to get getting to Akira. I wonder how it will affect his psyche down the line.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 18, A Chance Meeting Between Lucky People and Unlucky People

Index

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Akira, Darris and Katsuragi were traversing the wasteland in Katsuragi's trailer. Kuzusuhara ruin was not that far from Kugamayama city, but it would still take them some time to reach Kugamayama city. Akira usually covered the distance by running, but most people would prefer riding a car.

Darris and Katsuragi were in a really good mood after their victory in the last battle. They were zealous since they dealt with all the monsters that had been chasing them for most of their journey. They could not help but smile jubilantly as they were talking to Akira about all the problems that they faced on their journey and the situation on the Frontline.

Akira, who spent most of his time in the Slum city, had almost no chance of listening to this kind of story, so he listened closely.

"Ohh. So that's what it's like in the eastern region, huh?"

"Yep. After all, we're talking about the Frontline here, the boundary separating the unknown territory. It's normal for Hunters in that place to own tanks, you know. They bring their tank around like us carrying our

guns. But well, it’s also because the monsters there are so strong that you would have no chance against them without a tank.”

“So you’re transporting goods from such a dangerous place, huh? I can’t even imagine how dangerous it would be to stock up goods. Being a merchant is not easy, right?”

“Well, you can say that. And not just stocking, there’re a lot of things that we need to do like making connections, finding business deals. All of them are just as hard as stocking goods.”

“I see, you are really amazing. There’s no way I would be able to do what you are doing.”

Looking at Akira, who was genuinely amazed, Katsuragi could only smile bitterly.

“But well, I can’t deny that today’s stocking was way harder than usual. So don’t think that it’s normal for us to face something this hard. If you try, you might find that it’s not really hard, you know?”

Akira tried to imagine himself working as a merchant, but he could not see himself being a successful merchant. His thoughts were visible on his face, Katsuragi laughed as he noticed it.

“There are a lot of ways to be successful. You can just be a successful Hunter while we’ll be successful merchants. That’s all there is to it. I might be going around selling goods in a trailer like this at the moment, but I’ll use today’s revenue as a stepping stone and make my business bigger. Then one day, I’ll join the Corporate Government and be one of the 5 greatest companies.”

Akira was very surprised. Even with his limited knowledge as a slum city boy, he knew just how big Katsuragi’s dream was.

“One of the 5 greatest companies, huh. That’s a pretty big dream.”

“Once I join the Corporate Government, I’ll issue money coins and its name will be Katsuragi coins. Then I’ll make people update their catalogue using Katsuragi currency.”

After Katsuragi laughed as he talked about his dream, his face changed to a more serious expression.

“…And this job is my first step towards my dream. That’s why I’m really thankful to you, you know? It’s because of you that we’re able to survive without abandoning my goods.”

“Is that so? In that case, just consider that you owe me a favour. After all, you can help me in a lot of ways if your work goes well.”

“Of course, but go easy on me on the discounts, okay? Just like I said, I really need money right now.”

Although they were taking different routes, both of them were aiming to achieve success in the Eastern district. They were having a good time talking to each other. In the middle of their talk, Alpha who was also enjoying their chat suddenly made a serious face and said to Akira.

“Akira, quickly look through the right window with your binocular.”

Looking at how Alpha’s mood changed so suddenly, Akira immediately tensed up. He quickly grabbed his binoculars and connected it to his information terminal. He then checked his surroundings with Alpha’s vision support. In that direction, he could see a dust cloud in the middle of the vast wasteland.

“…Katsuragi, you’re the one who brought those monsters here, right?”

Katsuragi smiled bitterly and tried to evade the question.

“…Well, about that, you see…”

“I don’t care who brought those monsters here. But tell me something, were those monsters just a fraction of a bigger group?”

Katsuragi immediately understood what was going on from Akira's behaviour. As such, his face immediately turned grim.

"Darris! Put the searching device on the trailer to the Maximum Area Search setting!!"

"If we do that, it's sensitivity in detecting monsters will reduce, you know?"

"Just do it!"

Darris noticed that Akira and Katsuragi looked disturbed, so he quickly changed the setting of the detection device just like he was told to. Katsuragi's face turned grimmer as he looked at the information shown on the detection device.

"Focus it to the 2 o'clock direction and zoom in 60 times."

Darris was confused after hearing that order. If he did that, it would make it impossible for the device to cover other directions, thus it would increase the chance of them getting ambushed. But he immediately followed the order nonetheless. Once he did, Darris and Katsuragi's face turned stiff after checking the result.

Akira then pressed them for an answer while making a very serious face.

"Sorry to ask you this while you're busy, but answer me… How many more monsters are left from that group that was chasing you?!"

The dust cloud that he saw from his binocular was caused by another group of monsters. The result from the searching device showed that monsters were swarming towards them from afar.

The swarm of monsters that were chasing Katsuragi from the eastern wasteland was naturally divided into several groups depending on their type and moving speed, and those groups were moving separately from each other. The group that attacked Akira and Katsuragi sometime ago were the frontrunners of the main group. As for the groups that consisted of slow

monsters, they gave up midway and returned to their original territory. Now, the group with moderate speed finally caught up with them.

Katsuragi and Darris looked very tense as they talked to each other.

“Katsuragi, can we reach the city at this rate? Can we make it?”

Katsuragi shook his head.

“Nope, we won’t make it. They’ll think that we brought the monsters and the city’s defense force will kill us together with all those monsters… Looking at how fast that group is moving, we might be a little bit faster if I push the trailer to its maximum speed. So how about buying time until we can run from them, we’ll head to the city once we put some distance from them.”

This time, Darris was the one who shook his head.

“That’s impossible. We only have little energy left inside the trailer from the long journey. The trailer will run out of energy if we take a detour.”

They rejected each other’s suggestions and let out a sigh not talking anymore, silence prevailed. Since no one was giving anymore suggestion, Akira gave his.

“How about heading back to the ruins? I’ll guide you through the ruins this time. I’m pretty knowledgeable about this area. I think we might be able to survive if we go there. And even if the trailer runs out of energy, it’s easier to evade those monsters or break up that monster group in the ruins rather in the wasteland…”

In reality, Alpha would be the one guiding them. He hid this fact as he gave his suggestion. But Katsuragi flat out rejected his suggestion.

“No, we can’t.”

Looking at how Akira was shocked by his reply, Katsuragi regained his composure. He then told Akira his reason.

“…We just left piles of monsters corpses in the ruin. The blood, meat and bones there should’ve attracted other monsters by now. In the worst-case scenario, it might even attract strong monsters from the deeper part of the ruins. There’s no way we can win against those monsters.”

Akira doubted that reason as he looked at Alpha, asking for a confirmation. Alpha then answered back with a serious face.

“While his reasoning is true, he also doesn’t want to leave the trailer behind. Also, the situation will only worsen if you go back to the ruins now.”

After hearing this, Akira dejectedly let out a sigh.

“Do we have no other choice but to fight in this place…? Ah right, can’t we use the weapon that you carried from the Frontline? It’s some kind of super-powerful weapon, right?”

Katsuragi shook his head.

“No, you can’t use those weapons unless you’re using an augmented cloth adjusted for handling those weapons, and it’ll take at least 4 hours to make preparations. We’ll also need the corresponding special ammo that we don’t have right now. We normally procure ammo from a different route after all… Dammit!!”

Fighting back in this place was their only option. Everyone in the trailer understood this. They accepted this fact on different levels which was shown on their face, none of them looked relaxed at all.

Akira prepared his gun while Katsuragi drove the trailer to a more advantageous position and parked the trailer. He readied the machine gun ammo for easy and fast reload. Akira and Darris stood ready not too far from the trailer. They would make contact with the group of monsters in just a few minutes.

Akira rushed to finish his preparation just like Alpha told him to. He reloaded a new cartridge into his AAH rifle, took out all the cartridges

inside his rucksack and put it out in the open so that it is easy for him to find them. He also prepared medicines in case he needed it in an emergency, he had already put some of them inside his mouth in case if the effect from the last one weakened. With that, Akira finished all the preparation that he needed except for his own resolve.

Alpha was standing beside Akira just like usual. He was feeling nervous but he had a sense of reassurance from making all the necessary preparations, he then asked Alpha.

“Alpha, answer me honestly. Can I win… Or more like, do I even have any chance to win?”

He felt like Alpha would say that there was a good chance he would lose if he asked whether he could win. Thus he changed his question midway.

Alpha just smiled like usual as she answered back.

“You do have a chance to win since I’m giving you my support. So give it your best too, okay?”

Alpha was not lying. But she did not reveal how much chance he had in surviving this monster horde attack. She thought that revealing it would only lower his already small chances. Thus, she did not give an accurate number.

“I see. So I can win, huh?”

Akira also did not ask any further. It was better to not know things that were better left alone. Both of them seemed to agree on this point.

Akira readied his gun and looked at Alpha. He was about to say something but stopped midway, seeing that Alpha just smiled back.

“Akira, I did say this to you before but I’m repeating once again. Since you spent all your luck to meet me, I’ll take responsibility and properly assist you. That’s why you can’t give up no matter what, okay? I give my support

assuming that you have resolved yourself, you know. So don't forget that. If you give up, then I'll also stop providing my support."

Alpha smiled while teasing Akira and he could only smile bitterly in return.

"You're right, motivation and resolve, both are my responsibility. So then, well, since we're in this situation, I'll be relying on your help."

Alpha smiled proudly and answered back with full confidence.

"Just leave it to me."

Akira laughed lightly. He already threw out the feeling of wanting to give up and his will to fight back started growing.

Akira resolved himself, with this, he was finally truly ready.

The monsters were already within the shooting range of Katsuragi's machine gun, but he did not start shooting. After all, there was no point in making a pre-emptive attack in this situation. He also wanted to save his ammo, thus he waited till those monsters were close enough for the machine gun to inflict maximum damage. There was a need to draw the enemy close enough, Akira and Darris also understood that. Thus they only held their guns ready while waiting for the monsters to get close range.

Since monsters that could attack from long-range were already killed by Katsuragi and Darris before, this group only consisted of monsters that could only attack from close-range. Thanks to that, the three of them were able to stand their ground while waiting for the monsters to approach them.

Once they got close enough for the machine gun to inflict mortal wounds on them, the machine gun started spewing bullets. Those bullets tore the monsters on the front of the flock and splattered their blood and meat onto the monsters behind them.

Although the monsters behind them were showering under their companions' blood and meat, they kept charging at Akira and others without even slowing down. Akira took his aim and pulled the trigger on

his gun. The bullet that came out from his gun tore right through his target's forehead and instantly killed the monster. Then he shot the monsters that jumped over that corpse and killed those monsters too.

Then the next one, and the next one and the next one. With the help of Alpha's support, Akira was able to perform way better than his original ability as he kept reaping the life of those monsters. But that only caused a small dent considering the total number of monsters. The monsters just kept pouring at him with no end in sight, and so the hopeless endurance battle had started.

They desperately fought a fierce battle. They already lost count of how many monsters they had killed since the battle started. Akira did not care about anything else other than shooting those monsters and following Alpha's instruction.

Due to the power of the anti-monster bullets, it also had a strong kickback. The powerful kickback scrapped Akira's stamina bit by bit every time he pulled the trigger of his gun. But thanks to the medicines he prepared beforehand, he was able to maintain his fighting strength.

He swiftly reloaded a new cartridge every time he ran out of ammo. And when all the cartridges that he prepared on his suit were exhausted, he grabbed cartridges that he prepared on the ground near him as he ejected the empty cartridge and immediately loaded it into his gun. Although he got more and more worried as the number of leftover cartridges kept decreasing, he ignored it and just kept shooting. After all, hesitating now would spell his death.

Every time he felt pain in the arm that supported his gun, Akira would swallow the medicine in his mouth bit by bit. The medicine would recover his body, without it, he would've already lay limp on the ground by now. He paced himself so he would not run out of medicine quickly while maintaining his optimal fighting strength. He gritted his teeth and kept shooting as he adjusted the dosage of the medicine he was taking.

Alpha's orders were near perfect. She considered the speed of each monster as she gave out orders. She tried to prevent the monsters from approaching

Akira by telling him to target the front row so that its corpse would block the monsters behind it. She gave out orders to maximize everything that might help Akira.

But it was a completely different matter as to whether Akira was able to follow her orders. Not only was his ability still amateurish, but he was also nervous, agitated and tired. Thus his movements were becoming duller as time passed. He could not perfectly follow half of the orders that Alpha gave him. But she would immediately adjust her instructions depending on the previous result.

Then there was a twist of event. A monster that was faster than any other suddenly jumped towards Akira. Of course, Akira focused his shots at that monster, after unleashing a barrage of bullets and confirming that they hit that monster, he thought that the monster was already dead and shifted his focus towards another monsters. Because he was in a panicked state and tired, and had seen monsters dying after getting shot like that, he made a wrong assumption.

“It’s not dead yet!”

Hearing Alpha scream at him, Akira aimed back to where the monster was in a panic. But it was too late, although it was badly injured, the monster was already too close to Akira. Its speed didn’t reduce after being showered in countless bullets as it charged towards him. It then jumped trying to bite him, but it could only push him down while taking bullets from his gun.

The reason why it missed to bite Akira was because it had lost its original form after getting shot several times. Thanks to that, Akira was able to narrowly escape death. But it did not change the fact that his life was hanging by a thread as that monster opened its jaw again and was getting ready to take another bite.

The death that was approaching Akira distorted his sense of time, it felt like everything around him was happening in slow motion. The same thing happened the other day as he remembered when monsters attacked the slum city and he almost got killed. So he did what he did back then as a reflex. He thrusted his AAH rifle into the gaping jaw together with his arm.

As the gun reached the deepest part of the monster, it stopped for a second due to the pain. During that opening, right before its fangs sunk into Akira's arm, Akira grinned and pulled the trigger.

The bullets that spewed out from the gun destroyed its head. It then fell down to the ground with bullets flowing out from behind its head.

Akira shoved the corpse aside. The excitement of his victory was dampened by the stinging pain on his right arm. His right arm was injured when that monster jumped on him.

Alpha immediately shouted at Akira while making an unusually grim face, it helped Akira to stay awake as he almost fainted from the pain after narrowly escaping death.

"Quickly take some medicine!! You should still have some in your pocket!"

Akira immediately reached out to the capsules inside his pocket while trying to withstand the pain and spread the contents of the capsule directly onto his wound. Thus another intense pain assaulted him immediately.

"You can't faint here! You'll definitely die if you faint here! Get a hold of yourself!"

The medicine that he applied to his wound caused severe pain, but Akira was barely able to bear the pain without fainting. He gritted his teeth and stood up. He then took the rest of the medicine orally.

The healing nanomachines inside the medicine detected that Akira was in pain as it immediately gathered on his wound and started healing it. Since Akira pushed himself to keep moving, his open wound only got worse which was immediately healed by the nanomachines. This cycle continued as he started shooting again while enduring the pain. Most of the monsters were able to come close to Akira while he was lying on the ground, one misstep was enough to turn the situation worse.

Akira, Katsuragi and Darris were trying hard to fight back. But the situation was getting worse. The monsters were already close enough that it would be

nigh impossible to fix the situation.

Katsuragi then mumbled from the driver seat.

“…The machine gun is running out of ammo… Dammit, this is the end, huh?”

His words leaked out through the mic in the trailer, hearing which Darris also complained.

“…So this is as far as we go, huh?”

Akira did not say anything because he did not have the time to join them. But inside his heart, he was actually agreeing with them. Eventually, his gun ran out of ammo too.

Alpha then smiled at Akira and said.

“This is the end.”

Seeing how Alpha smiled gently as if it was really the end, Akira could only smile back bitterly.

“…You’re right.”

“We’re saved.”

“…Eh!?”

Akira was surprised after hearing what Alpha said. Then the next moment, explosive projectiles rained down on the monsters around them. Explosions turned most of the monsters into minced meat as blood and meat splattered around the area. Then the area near Akira and the trailer were swarmed with anti-monster bullets, thus further making sure of their safety.

The sudden change of events left Akira confused as Alpha pointed her finger towards the wasteland while still smiling. He tried to stand as fast as he could and looked towards the direction Alpha was pointing. There he

saw familiar faces of 2 female Hunters riding a vehicle while unleashing countless bullets on the monsters in the area. They were Elena and Sara.

Sara was standing on the vehicle while carrying a huge gun that did not suit her size. The gun on her hand kept launching explosive projectiles from its muzzle.

“Elena! The location is a bit different from the request, but those people are from the SOS request, right?”

Elena was also shooting at the monsters using a machine gun from the vehicle, it looked like she was enjoying it.

“That’s correct. The SOS request said that they’re in the Kuzusuhara ruins but I bet they arrived in this place after running away from those monsters. Let’s eliminate them all!”

“Roger that! The requester will pay for the bullets! So let’s not hold anything back!!”

From there on, the battle was overwhelmingly one-sided. Sara and Elena who had surplus money from the last time brought expensive but powerful ammo with them for cleaning the monsters. And their ammo seemed to be working splendidly, worthy of their cost. The explosive bullets that kept spouting out from her gun were like a storm that rained down on those monsters and left the ground clean. Akira was looking at this scene with his jaw dropped on the ground.

After suffering such an intensive attack, the monsters that were troubling Akira and the other two merchants just a moment ago were completely annihilated.

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The insides of the trailer that also functioned as a moving shop was wider than it looked. Elena and Sara then met up with Katsuragi and finished processing the SOS request without heading back to Kugamayama City. As

Katsuragi and Elena were negotiating with each other, Akira talked to Sara who was not too far. He bowed deeply to Sara while saying his thanks.

“Thank you very much for your help. You really helped us in escaping death back there.”

“Don’t mention it. It’s also one of our jobs. It was also thanks to you fighting back desperately and cutting their numbers down, that it was not hard cleaning them up.”

Sara laughed in a good mood. It was obvious that her plump chest did not weigh too much as they jingled when she laughed.

“But I was so surprised to find you here too. To think that you would get involved in fighting those monsters, you do have quite a bad luck, you know.”

“You can say that again. I honestly think the same too… I wonder if I should get myself some kind of charm to increase my luck.”

Akira smiled bitterly while mixing a joke. Sara laughed a bit and followed his joke.

“Well, it’s true that things like that might work. After all, no matter how much information you gathered beforehand, things outside your predictions will still happen. I also had a close call not too long ago… A charm, huh? You can also buy one, but I think it’s better if you keep something that you already had when you got lucky as a talisman. In my case, I have this.”

As she said that, Sara opened the front fastener of her armour and took out a pendant, it was a bullet that was repurposed into a decorative pendant.

“When I almost got killed, someone came and saved us by pure coincidence and gave us this bullet, then I remade it into a pendant like this. It’s to remind me of our gratitude and good luck from back then.”

“I-I see.”

Akira was somehow able to keep himself calm. Sara noticed that Akira was behaving weirdly, but she thought that it was because Akira was still nervous after narrowly escaping death, so she just ignored it. As for Alpha who was always beside Akira, she smiled teasingly toward him.

“Aren’t you glad? The person that you helped not too long ago just came and saved you this time. What’s wrong? Aren’t you happy?”

“No, of course, I’m happy. So like I told you, it was the right choice helping them that day, right?”

“You’re right. Not only you were able to escape death, you got to see a beautiful girl’s plump breast after all.”

Akira was barely able to stay calm when he heard that. Alpha giggled as she was teasing him.

“If you have no plan of groping one, you can also look at mine though. Or is it important for you to know that you can touch them if you extend your hand although you don’t really want to do it?”

“Just shut up.”

Akira stiffened his face as to not change his expression as he said that to Alpha through telepathy. But then he suddenly heard Elena’s voice.

“No money? Are you kidding me?”

Katsuragi nervously replied back as he was overwhelmed by Elena’s pressure.

“Well, it’s not like I don’t have money, it’s a big misunderstanding. I do plan to pay you. But I can’t pay you right now at this moment.”

Elena kept putting pressure while glaring at Katsuragi.

“Isn’t it normal to pay us with cash when you don’t write any particular reward on your request? We even used expensive ammo back there, you know.”

“I-I know. But, it was an SOS request, right? It was an emergency. We were in a dangerous situation that we didn’t have the time to write a detailed request, you know! It’s not like we’re planning to trick you!! I swear!!”

Beautiful girls are scary when they are angry. Moreover, if that girl killed a mountain of monsters not too long ago. As Katsuragi thought that, he tried to calm Elena down.

“Look at this! The trailer is packed with a lot of equipments! If I can sell all of them, I’ll get a lot of money! You do understand me, right?! Just for a bit, can you wait just for a bit! Of course I’ll also give you more money for waiting too! Okay?”

Katsuragi then showed all the goods that he carried inside the trailer. Seeing at how Katsuragi was saying the truth, Elena regained her mood back. She then enthusiastically looked at those goods as Katsuragi squeezed every single cell in his brain for anything that might let him breakthrough his situation.

Akira and Sara then joined them as they looked at Katsuragi’s goods. It was given for Akira, but for Sara too, it was a rare chance to see equipment used in the Frontline. As such, both of them looked really interested in those goods. Not to mention that Alpha also looked a bit amazed.

“I really wish you can start using these kinds of equipment soon, Akira.”

“Please wait patiently if it’s about that thing. By the way, which one that you wish for me to be able to use?”

“If I have to pick one from this place, then it will be this one.”

Alpha was pointing at a huge gun that in no way a normal human would be able to use. It was made of black metal and was as big as a person with the manufacturer’s logo carved on its body.

“No no no, no way I can carry something like this.”

“Of course you can once you get an augmented cloth. So you should get one of those first. But well, no need to hurry, we’ll get there eventually.”

Looking at how Akira was staring at that gun, Sara could not help but look at that gun too. But then she shouted in surprise.

“Elena!! Look at this!! It’s amazing! They have Ragnarok too!!”

Elena who was called by Sara then came there, looked at that gun, and was also surprised.

“…Whoah, they really have one. This is the gun that can shoot Annihilator Warhead, right?”

“Yeah, that’s one of my best goods. It was really hard to get my hands on one, you see… Wait, what are you thinking?”

Katsuragi started having a bad feeling as he saw Elena’s expression when she was looking at that gun. Elena was smiling since she found something that she could use for negotiation as she mumbled.

“…I wonder if Sara can use this gun.”

Katsuragi immediately went into panic mode.

“Wait wait wait wait!! No no no!! You can’t have that!”

“But you can’t pay us with cash, right? In that case, you have no choice but to pay us with your goods.”

“No matter how you look at it, it’s way above your reward money, right?! Please don’t make me do this!”

“I wonder which one of us is asking for the impossible. You can’t even pay our rewards and ammo from that SOS request and you don’t even know when you might be able to pay us. Are you telling us to wait for the reward that we don’t even know if you would even really pay us or not? We also need money to live, you know?”

Elena’s expression turned intimidating as she glared to Katsuragi. That was also a gamble. Katsuragi understood that, but he could not say anything. Katsuragi was a merchant. He could not deny the fact that he could not pay them with cash. Even Katsuragi himself was actually carrying goods that he had not paid yet.

Katsuragi who in trouble then guessed that Akira and Elena knew each other as he looked at Akira, seeking for his help. But since Akira was also saved by Elena and Sara, it was more like he was in Sara and Elena’s side. As such, he could only look away when Katsuragi stared at him.

After that, Katsuragi begged all he could and somehow the negotiation came to a conclusion. Elena and Sara would be employed as Katsuragi’s escorts which of course increased the amount of the reward that Katsuragi owed to them. Then in case if Katsuragi could not pay that money until the deadline, Elena and Sara would take Ragnarok with them. It was also for keeping their eye on Katsuragi that Elena and Sara took the job.

As Elena and Katsuragi were talking about the details of their contract. Akira’s vision suddenly blurred and he lost all of his power in his body as he fell to the ground.

He did not even have the power to get up. As his vision went dark, he could see Elena and Katsuragi ran to him. It looked like they were saying something, but Akira could not hear it. But he understood that they looked panicked stricken.

Although everything looked blurred in his vision, he could see Alpha clearly. She was smiling like usual as she looked down at Akira who was lying on the ground and said.

“Well, I guess you hit your limit. But it’ll be okay, just take a good rest.”

Akira could hear that in his haze and felt a bit relieved as he lost his consciousness.

Silavin: Woah. This novel has won top 3 novel in Japan. Well, to be exact, they won the bunkoubon.

The Athena told me that it is basically the top light novels of the year. More information here. There is a high chance this gets adapted into an anime.

Yup. This story is quite underrated right now.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 19, Gratitude and Debt

Index

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When he regained consciousness, Akira found himself confined in a white space. Everything was filled with white nothingness no matter how far he looked. It was as if the maker of this world gave up midway. But surprisingly, he did not find it strange or uneasy to be standing inside such a world. Inside his hazy mind, Akira somehow understood that he was in a dream.

He saw Alpha standing not too far from him. She was emotionlessly staring forward. It did not look like she noticed him. As he looked at her, it felt like she was just a frozen humanoid doll standing there.

Suddenly, this Alpha spoke.

“First try, failed. Didn’t reach the target. Unable to continue due to the subject’s death. Searching for methods to provide support.”

She then continued as if she was reading a record from her memories.

“Second try, failed. Didn’t reach the target. Unable to continue due to the subject’s death. Searching for methods to provide support in battle.”

She continued giving the same report without any emotional fluctuations.

“15th try, failed. Didn’t reach the target. Unable to continue due to the subject’s withdrawal from the request. The subject is alive. The subject withdrew from the request due to fatal injuries. Adjusting the guidance method.”

“16th try, failed. Reached area 1. Unable to continue due to the subject’s death. Revaluating methods to provide support in battle.”

Alpha just kept continuing to report the status. Akira couldn’t understand what she was reporting about.

“87th try, failed. Reached area 7. Unable to continue due to the subject’s death. Revaluating methods to provide support in battle.”

“88th try, failed. Reached area 4. Unable to continue due to the subject’s withdrawal from the request. The subject is alive. The subject withdrew from the request due to the loss of motivation. Adjusting the guidance method.”

She kept continuing for some time.

“497th try, failed. Reached area 9. Unable to continue due to the subject’s death. Revaluating methods to provide support in battle.”

“498th try, failed. Reached the final area. Unable to continue due to the subject’s withdrawal from the request. The subject has turned completely hostile. Already dealt with the situation. Current location, unknown. Completely readjusting the guidance method.”

“499th try, in progress. Haven’t reached the target area. Confirming the current condition. Finish.”

Once Alpha was done reporting, the white world suddenly turned pitch black. Akira could see Alpha floating alone in the middle of the darkness before slowly blurring and vanishing into nothingness.

Akira’s consciousness faded away together with it. Eventually, everything vanished into nothingness and the dream ended.

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Akira opened his eyes. He was still dazed after that strange dream, but he had forgotten most of the details of the dream. He then realized that he was lying on a bed inside a room that he did not recognize. He was so surprised that he completely forgot about the dream that he just had.

If it was Akira from the past, he would have definitely jumped off and confirmed his surroundings the moment he found himself in an unfamiliar place. But now, although he was surprised, he did not put up his guard. He was only dazed after waking up.

The reason why he lost his sharpness was because he was now used to waking up in a safe place compared to the dangerous back alley. He now woke up in a room that felt safer and looked more expensive than his usual room. But the main reason he didn’t put up his guard was because he saw Alpha smiling at him.

“Morning, Akira. Where you able to take a good rest?”

Akira looked around and confirmed his surroundings. It seemed like he was staying in someone’s place since it did not look like a hotel room. The blood and mud that stuck on his body were already cleaned. He was also changed into a white t-shirt and a long pant. He had fully recovered from the tiredness, having woke up feeling refreshed he did not feel pain anymore. He was completely recovered physically. After he noticed this fact, he completely shook off the haziness from when he woke up. But it was visible from his expression that he was confused.

“Morning, Alpha. Where am I?”

Alpha then pointed her finger to the door to answer Akira’s question. Sara then entered through that door. She looked a bit surprised as she saw Akira.

“Akira, you’ve woken up, huh?”

Sara was only wearing a baggy T-shirt and undies, it was a set of clothes that showed a lot of openings. Her wearing such dress also showed that it was a safe place, thus Akira was able to relax too. But on the other hand, he was also more confused than before.

“How do you feel? If it’s still hard for you to wake up, you can lay back, you know?”

“Uhh, I’m fine.”

Although he was still confused about what was going on, he was physically fine. And in order to show that, he answered back confidently. Sara smiled back knowing that Akira was really fine.

“I see. Thank goodness! This is our place, Elena’s and mine. Therefore, you don’t have to worry, we have kept your stuff in another room. We’ve also washed your clothes and left them there. I’ll bring it to you if you want to change.”

“Ah, I’ll take them myself.”

“Don’t worry, you’re our guest, after all. I’ll bring them to you, just wait here for a bit.”

Akira was swept away by the flow. But once Sara went outside the room and closed the door, Akira immediately went into panic mode.

“Alpha, what’s going on here?”

“For now, you just need to know that this is a safe place. If you can understand, then calm down.”

“Even if you ask me so…”

“Wouldn’t Sara feel weird if you suddenly understood what’s going on although you have just woke up in an unfamiliar place? So just ask Sara first, I’ll give you my explanation after that, okay?”

“Ah, right.”

Akira then nervously waited for Sara to come back. He was feeling strange to not be able to relax although he knew that he was in a safe room. He understood that he should calm down to think clearly but he was unable to do so and as he continued to wait for Sara, it became harder for him to calm down. As such, he looked nervous when Sara came back and handed him his clothes.

Adding to the fact that Sara was looking at him, Akira awkwardly tried changing his clothes. But Sara thought that it was because Akira just recovered that he was moving awkwardly, so then she gently asked Akira.

“Akira, should I help you?”

“I-it’s okay. I can manage.”

“Is that so? You just recovered, so don’t push yourself too hard, okay?”

Since Akira was not used to getting such a gentle treatment, he could not help but feel more nervous. But he realized that Alpha looked amused as she was looking at him who was flustered. So he quickly finished changing his clothes before Alpha could comment on him getting flustered.

After that, Sara started explaining to Akira of what was going on.

“I’ll tell you this first. It has been 3 days since you fainted.”

Akira was very surprised, but then Sara calmly continued her explanation.

When Akira fainted, Elena, Sara and Katsuragi immediately checked his condition. Akira suffered no fatal injuries. Since he had consumed a lot of medicine in a short duration, all his wounds were forcefully and rapidly healed. All the healed areas had strange scars. These scars would have vanished if his wounds were healed naturally. But all his wounds were already completely healed by medicine, so these scars were left behind. Although his clothes were drenched in blood, thanks to the medicine that he took, his breathing and pulse were stable.

In the worst-case scenario, he simply fainted and was far from any fatal condition. As such, Elena and the others were relieved after confirming Akira's condition. So, she immediately told Katsuragi to head to the city and Katsuragi completely agreed with her.

After that, Elena and Sara brought Akira who was still unconscious to their home and laid him on a bed. Although he was in no danger, Akira did not wake up for a few days. Elena and Sara thought that it was because of the overdose from medicine.

The medicine distributed in the Eastern district were mostly a mix of nanomachines and all kinds of different chemical compounds. It was basically like a DIY set to close a hole in the wall. The advanced nanomachines in the medicine could act as substitutes to the cells and close the wound.

Although it was convenient, this medicine also had some drawbacks and side-effects. Repeated healing through induced regeneration might cause premature ageing. Or the nanomachines sometimes misunderstood the injured state as a normal state and stopped healing altogether.

Akira fainted because of a similar reason. It was an indication of medicine overdose after taking a lot of medicine in a short span of time to heal his wounds and rejuvenating his fatigue. It was by no means fatal, but he would stay unconscious until the nanomachines inside his body calmed down.

Then as Elena and Sara predicted, Akira woke up after sleeping for 3 days.

After Akira heard everything from Sara, he bowed politely.

"Thank you very much for saving and nursing me."

"It's fine, don't mention it."

Akira was happy at how Sara was being considerate to him, he was smiling slightly. But his expression immediately changed to be apologetic.

“Uhh. Well, technically, you accepted an SOS request… Right? It’s kinda hard to say this when you have saved me, but to be honest, I don’t have any money at all. So how should I repay you?”

Akira wanted to pay them back for their help. But even if he wanted to do that, he couldn’t. After all, he could not earn any money for the last few days. He was just stating the truth. But as he finished speaking, he wished he could take it back. Akira was ashamed of himself as he hung his head low.

But Sara just casually shook her head.

“As I said, it’s something that we did because we wanted to. You don’t need to worry about it. I and Elena have no wish to ask for any compensation.”

“Are you sure…? Ah, I mean, that is… Uhh…”

That would be really helpful to Akira, but he could not just accept it. Akira hesitated. But even if he hesitated, it was not like he had the money to pay them back. As such, he looked really thankful. Then Sara’s face turned serious.

“…Well then, in exchange for the reward. I have something to ask you. So can you answer it honestly?”

“If that’s all, then of course. What is it?”

Sara was a bit surprised as Akira answered back casually with a smile. Sara then stared at Akira with a serious face. She then let out a sigh and asked him a question.

“You were the one who saved me and Elena in Kuzusuhara ruin the other day, right?”

Akira froze.

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When Akira was still unconscious, Sara went to Shizuka's shop by herself. And when she started talking about Akira, Shizuka smiled bitterly.

"Fighting against those many monsters, that must have been really hard for Akira."

"Moreover, he had to do it twice in a day, you know? Isn't that a very rare experience? Is it because he has bad luck or was it Katsuragi who brought bad luck to him? Or even maybe both of them have bad luck? Since they were able to survive it, we can just laugh it off now. But that Katsuragi and his friend, it seems that Elena squeezed them for rewards. They just can't stop grumbling. Although they were able to transport their goods from the Frontline, they were complaining that more than half of their profit was used to fight back those group of monsters."

"But even so, they were able to survive without any grave injuries. So I don't know if they actually have good luck or bad luck. By the way, where's Elena?"

"Elena is working as Katsuragi's escort not too far from here. I came here alone today."

"Is that so… So then, why are you here today?"

Shizuka who was listening to Sara changed the mood as she made a serious face. She more or less understood why Sara came to her today.

Sara made a bitter smile and was surprised since Shizuka was able to guess the real reason why she came. She then made a serious face.

"I did tell you before that we were saved by someone in the Kuzusuhara ruin, right?"

"Yep. You told me that story so many times. I even remember all the details, you know?"

"By any chance, do you know who it was?"

Sara stared closely at Shizuka. But Shizuka did not make any noticeable reaction to her strong gaze. Shizuka looked at Sara and thought for a bit before answering her question.

“Why do you ask me?”

“You have a good intuition, after all.”

“Is that so? Well, in that case, my answer is no.”

“Shizuka!”

Sara called her name with a strong tone as she kept staring at Shizuka. She was unconsciously leaking her intimidating aura as a Hunter.

But Shizuka did not budge at all. After all, she was working as a merchant who faced Hunters on a regular basis. Moreover, she knew well about the friend in front of her right now. There was no need for her to panic, she knew that well as she calmly answered back.

“I really don’t know and I have no one that I’m suspicious of being that person either. And even if I have a guess, if my guess is wrong, it’ll definitely cause trouble for you and that person. I may have some inklings, but the person asked me not to say anything to anyone. So if I tell you, then I’ll be betraying that person’s trust, thus I won’t say anything. That person didn’t threaten me, but since that person told me to keep a secret, I don’t think it’s a good idea for me to say anything. After all, it would be big trouble for the shop if I do something that might annoy my customers. So I can’t say, no matter what, my answer is I don’t know.”

Sara did not say anything, she just locked her gaze on Shizuka. But Shizuka’s expression did not change as she continued.

“Moreover, it’s not the main problem here, right? You already have a guess as to who that person is and you’re almost certain of your guess. But since it was logically impossible, you’re trying to clear your doubt by relying on my intuition, right?”

After being told so, Sara finally realized that her guess was correct.

The words written on that paper were illegible as if they were written by a small kid. Akira's reaction when she showed him her bullet pendant. And finally, the medicines that Akira was carrying on him. When she found the same medicine that she had received inside Akira's belongings while she was organizing his stuff, it confirmed her suspicion that Akira was the one who saved her.

But even then, she had no definitive proof. Moreover, according to her experience as a Hunter, she made a conjecture that even someone with as much fighting power as Akira, would not be able to save her in that situation.

Sara who was not sure of her own guess then went to Shizuka to rely on her intuition. Even Elena admitted the sharpness of Shizuka's intuition, which was so good that even irrational possibility turned into reality. She believed in Shizuka's intuition to give the final verdict that Akira was the person who had saved her.

Sara was taken aback as she realized this, but then Shizuka continued.

"By the way, how much do you want to know, Sara? Do you just want to know who saved you? Or do you still have a lot of questions that you want answers for?"

"W-well…"

Sara could not answer. There were indeed a lot of questions that she wanted to ask and a lot of things that she wanted to know. But the thing that she really wanted to ask, the thing that she really wanted to know, it was just a small part of it.

"Think carefully before you ask. Decide between what you want to know and what you don't need to know and then ask your question. Ask your question with utmost sincerity, if that person lies to you after that, then that's what it is."

Shizuka said that she did not know. If that was true, then Sara's guess was mistaken. But if it was a lie, then it meant that he did not want to reveal it no matter what or that he wanted to have nothing to do with Sara. Sara understood that and could not reply.

In the end, she could just ask Akira after he woke up. But for some reason, she was hesitating. The moment she realized that she was hesitating, she immediately realized the reason.

Sara did not want to be denied of answer by Akira. That was all. She finally understood that.

Sara who just came to realize a lot of things stared at Shizuka and thought that Shizuka must have understood everything way before herself. Shizuka might have even understood the reason why Sara was hesitating, which she herself did not realize.

But Sara decided not to ask Shizuka any further. It was not something that should be asked to ny others. It was something that she should find herself. That was her thought as she smiled to change her mood.

"Alright then, I'll ask him myself when the time comes. Thank you, Shizuka."

Shizuka replied back with a relieved smile. But it then changed into a teasing smile.

"You're welcome. So then, just a piece of additional information, I'll tell you my guess. Sara, do you know about the people who are connected to the old domain?"

"People who are connected to the old domain? I've heard about them before, but…"

"Go ask Elena for more detail. She should know more than you. But if I have to give you a simple explanation, they are people who are connected to the old network for some unknown reason. I heard that there are even people among them who can pinpoint the locations of individual people,

monsters, ruins and buildings. It might sound very convenient, but I heard they also face a lot of problems because of their ability. I'm talking about those people."

Sara then imagined Akira to be one of those people. If that was true, then someone like Akira would have the ability to save them. If Akira could pinpoint locations of each people inside that thick colourless mist, then he would be the only person who could see clearly whereas everyone else were helpless. It would give him a boost to his winning rate. It would also explain why he wanted to hide his identity. If the people that he saved wondered as to why he could save them, there was a good chance that those people would notice he was a person who is connected to the old domain. And if it were to spread, it might even danger his life.

Sara kept staring at Shizuka.

"…You do have a very good intuition, couldn't you just say that from the start?"

Shizuka smiled as if she was teasing Sara.

"It won't be right if I tell that to someone who hadn't resolved herself, right? So do your best out there."

Sara accepted her answer as she nodded while looking a little bit annoyed.

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On the same day Sara heard about the people who were connected to the old domain, she asked Elena about it just after Elena finished her night bath.

"Elena, do you know about the people who are connected to the old domain?"

Elena then just wiped her body enough to not make any mess before operating the information terminal that was attached to her hand. She wrapped herself in a bath towel without bothering to wear her undies. She was looking so unladylike. Sara had repeatedly reminded her about this But

Elena would never listen and answer back that it was only necessary to keep everything around her dry. So Sara started ignoring her when she looked like that.

Elena then replied back in such a way that was unexpected to Sara.

“People who are connected to the old domain? It’s rare for you to ask something like that.”

“Well, Shizuka told me that you should know better than her, you see.”

“To be more precise, what do you want to know? Since you have come to ask me, it means that you want to know something that you won’t be able to know from a simple search on the net, right?”

As for Sara, she actually wanted to know everything right from the most basic knowledge, but she could not say that as it would annoy Elena. So she changed the way she asked Elena.

“There are benefits and dangers, both to the people around them and to themselves as well.”

“That’s an interesting question, well then, let’s start from the benefits that they can get themselves.”

Elena then started explaining happily.

The benefits coming from being a person who is connected to the old domain extends on a very wide range. The biggest benefit is being able to connect to the network that was built during the time of the old world called the old domain network. Even at the moment, the old domain network was still filled with a lot of invaluable knowledge. But the current technology could not connect to that network. Normally, one would need a terminal that could only be found in the ruins to connect to the old domain network.

But the people who are connected to the old domain did not need such a device to access the old domain network. Their method of connecting to the old domain network was unknown even after rigorous research was

conducted by the government. Moreover, it was thought that such a connection was not affected by the colourless mist at all.

“Is it really something that amazing?”

Looking at Sara, who looked like she could not believe it, Elena’s expression changed to one that was saying that this girl did not get it at all.

“This is something really amazing, you know? The eastern district is constantly blanketed in colourless mist with a certain level of thickness, the only reason why we could use the long-range communication to contact the capital is because it’s using the old domain network.”

“But isn’t that true for your information terminal too? And it’s useless in thick colourless mist, right?”

“That works through a different network. It’s using the same network used by the relay station in the city, basically, it’s a short-range connection. That’s why they stop working in the colourless mist. If a normal terminal can keep its connection even inside the colourless mist, it would be really convenient. That would be really helpful for exploring ruins that are always blanketed in thick colourless mist.”

The old domain was built using old world’s technologies in the communication facilities, but now only a few of these communication facilities are still functioning in the old ruins. Countless invaluable technologies of the old world were saved inside the DB or Database in these facilities. If one could connect to the old domain and extract these technologies and recreate them, it would bring a huge amount of fortune. Or at least that was what people thought.

But there was a worry that a human brain would not be able to withstand the burden of connecting to the old domain. There were records of people getting killed out of the blue in the ruins, leaving a corpse without any injury. It was thought that these people have got the ability to connect to the old domain because of some unknown reason. Their brain was flooded with information as they could not control the connection, finally, they got killed because their brain could not handle the burden.

“Braindead? Is that even possible? Are we in danger too?”

Looking at Sara who got suddenly got flustered, Elena smiled to calm her down.

“Not just because it only happens inside the ruins, also because the possibility of such a thing happening is simply very small, we’ll be fine anyways. Compared to this, there’s a higher chance that we’ll get killed by monsters. Not to mention that if such a thing happens frequently, then no one would dare to explore the ruins, right?”

“Well, you have a point there…”

“Moreover, I heard that people who can connect to the old domain can pinpoint the location of relics and warehouses inside a ruin, you know. There was a rumour saying that the maps sold to the map brokers were made by people who can connect to the old domain. And so big companies would kidnap these people. So those people who can connect to the old world are less likely to get killed, but they’re more likely to face a fate that is worse than dying.”

“Is that so… Well, I guess it’s true if you say so.”

After feeling relieved, Sara’s face turned serious.

“So being connected to the old domain is not always a good thing, huh?”

“To be more precise, it comes with a lot of benefits so there’re many people who have their eyes on them. They might be able to seek a safe haven under the government, but that would mean that they’ll exchange their freedom for safety. But if they get caught by people who do shady work, they’ll face a worse fate. Ah, but if one of the big companies discovers them, it might dispatch a lot of soldiers to capture them in the name of rescue.”

Elena was happy that Sara was really interested in her speciality which was a very rare thing for her, as such, she was more fired up than usual. Thanks to that, Sara was able to understand well about the people who could connect to the old domain.

It also made her understand why it was hard to get someone who could connect to the old domain to trust her. She hesitated a bit whether it was the right thing to ask Akira when he woke up.

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Akira was having a headache now. It was because Sara realized that it was he who saved her and Elena. But to be honest, he did not think that it was that big of a problem. The reason why he was hiding that fact was simply because it was too much of a trouble if he had to explain his motivation and methods. He had only thought about it thus far.

Akira was one of the people who could connect to the old domain, but he did not realize it himself. He did not even know the meaning of those words. The only thing that he knew was that there were some other people who also could see Alpha and he was just one among them.

There was no way Akira could tell them about Alpha. When he was thinking hard of any possible ways to dodge Sara's question, he realized that Sara was locking her stare on him with a serious face. He was so intimidated by that look that he stopped thinking.

Sara thought that Akira still could not trust them. That was why she was desperately begging with that serious face.

"I'm sure you have your own reason. That's why I won't press you with more questions. What I want to know is whether you're the one who saved us or not. That is all. I won't ask you why and how you saved us or any other questions. And I won't tell anyone about anything that you say to me."

Akira who was pressured by Sara was actually panicking inside his heart, but he stiffened his face and stayed silent. Sara could feel rejection from him, so her serious face started to turn sad.

"If you won't answer me no matter what, then I'll just give up. I won't ask this again, so please let me ask you once again for the last time… In the Kuzusuhara ruin, you were the one who saved me and Elena, right?"

Sara sounded like she was begging. She was desperately wanting to know the person who saved them. Akira was able to get her intention.

“Yes, that’s correct, it was me.”

The mood suddenly got way lighter. Sara’s face loosened, Akira then said his sorry.

“Sorry that I kept it a secret. Well, I had my own reason, you see.”

“It’s really fine. As I promised, I won’t ask further. But that aside…”

Sara then shook her head and held Akira hands.

“Thank you for saving me and Elena… Finally, I can say my thanks. I’m sorry for pressuring you. It was hard for me to be unable to say thanks to the one who saved me. I know that was selfish of me and it’s not something that I should do to someone who saved me.”

After Sara said her gratitude with a smile, her expression changed to an apologetic one. As for Akira, he was a bit surprised as he answered back in panic.

“Please don’t mind about me. You saved me too. So both of us were just lucky. Shouldn’t that be enough?”

“Is that so…? Well, you’re right. If you say so, then let’s settle on that. Thank you, we’re really thankful to you.”

“…Ah well, you’re welcome.”

Sara felt very relieved. She smiled brightly. Akira then returned with his smile. But in his smile, there was a little bit of gloom that Sara did not notice.

Akira who heard those words of gratitude from Sara felt like something just gouged deep inside his heart, something other than pain. But Akira did all he could to not show that on his face.

Akira then had a long talk with Sara over a meal. After all, Akira's stomach grumbled loudly after they had that talk, it was because Akira was sleeping for a few days without eating anything. Hearing that, Sara just smiled and prepared some meals. It was something offered by the one who saved him, so it was not like he could refuse her.

The foods that were lined up on the table were on a different level compared to the frozen food that Akira usually ate. Sara took some time preparing those foods and Akira remembered hearing her prepare them. But he simply ignored it. His concentration was focused on the foods that looked so appetizing lined up in front of his eyes. And of course, those meals were indeed delicious.

In the middle of the conversation, Sara brought up the topic about when Akira saved her and Elena. She also told Akira that the loot that they got from those people who attacked them earned them quite a sum of money. Hunters who could not stay in a hotel or other permanent sleeping place would have to travel around while bringing all of their money with them. There were Hunters who got their money legally seized by the bank for paying off their debt. Without any money to equip themselves, some would turn into bandits. The people who attacked Sara and Elena were those kinds of people.

The money problem that Sara and Elena were facing was easily resolved by the compensation that they got from selling those loots. They then used the leftover money to get equipment, thus they had an easier time exploring the ruins which increased their income. From then on, they used the extra money that they got to get better equipment and further increased their income from exploring the ruins. Thanks to the positive cycle, they were able to completely bounce back from being fallen Hunters. They even had a better income than ever before. After telling Akira all of these things and saying her thanks, she said that she wanted to give back the money that she got from selling the loot to Akira, but Akira unexpectedly refused it. Sara who was surprised by that asked him again for confirmation.

"But you're the one who killed them, are you really sure? It's quite a lot of money, you know?"

“Yes, After all, I decided to leave without looting them, so I have no plans to ask them back now.”

“Hmmm, but even if you say so, not only did you save us, it was also thanks to you that we were able to solve our money problems. So it’s kind of frustrating that we could not repay you with anything.”

Looking at Akira’s reaction, there was no sign that he would accept the money. So if Sara pushed the money to Akira, it would defeat its meaning. But even so, Sara wanted to offer something to Akira for saving her, even if it was just a little. That’s what Sara thought as she mumbled, but then Akira came up with another idea.

“In that case then, please take that money as your reward for responding to our SOS request. I don’t know how much a normal reward is, so I don’t know whether that would be enough but… It’s also frustrating for me not being able to give you anything after saving me. So please accept it and think that we’re even now.”

“Well, if you said so, alright then.”

Both of them then looked at each other as their saviour and smiled bitterly.

Their next topic after that was how they spent their loot money, how she immediately suggested strengthening her nanomachines likewise. Following the momentum, their conversation shifted to about Sara’s body, a body strengthened with nanomachine.

“So then, you know? People who use nanomachine to strengthen their bodies will always stock their nanomachine in one part of their body. In my case, that would be my chest. There are also people who save their stock on external cartridges, but it would be a disaster if they lose those cartridges. There’s also a choice to stock a small amount of nanomachine throughout all of my body, but there’s a limit on that too.”

Sara then pointed on her own chest. It was quite a wonderful asset even for a beautiful girl like her and she had quite a stock of nanomachines in there.

“Those people will have their body shape change according to the quantity of nanomachines stocked inside their body. Because of that, the size of their clothes would also change. So I’m sorry if I do not look presentable.”

Sara’s clothing was very revealing. Her bra was modified to be able to change its size through some simple cords and the baggy shirt she was wearing was unable to hide it. It was because she modified her clothes to its limit to fit her changing body size. She was very used to wearing such clothes that she could casually wear them in front of Akira without feeling shy.

But there were people who misunderstood and tried to tease Sara just to end up getting beaten up by Sara’s nanomachine enhanced body. There were already a lot of victims. It was proof of the great body Sara had, but even so, Akira was not affected at all.

“Ah, I don’t really mind…”

But Sara noticed Akira’s strange eye’s movement. She then smiled teasingly.

“…If you’re interested. Well, you did save me, so I might be willing to give you some service.”

“Can you please stop teasing me…?”

Seeing how Akira’s face turned red, Sara laughed as if she was enjoying.

Alpha did not even try to hide her displease as she immediately complained.

“For some reason, your reaction is different compared to when I do that. I think I have a better body, you know? So what’s wrong with you? Are you more interested in erotic clothes? Is that what makes you aroused?”

“Shut up.”

“If your body’s size changes, then what would you do about your armour before going to the ruins? They are augmented clothes that need to be

adjusted before using, right? Do you adjust yours every time you want to use it?”

“In my case, I always prefer armour that is elastic and stretchable. Then I’ll put on more armour on top of it after that. Akira… that thing… is your armour, right?”

“Well, yeah.”

Akira then changed the subject of their conversation by talking about when he got his armour from Shizuka. Their conversation then shifted to the reason why they would use their armour, then a discussion about the monsters.

The monsters roaming in the eastern district were weaker the further you go west and stronger the further you go east. So the monsters that roamed the far east in the Frontline were monsters that could not be defeated without tanks or enhanced bodies. But on the other hand, most monsters in the western part could be defeated easily using a handgun. There were many kinds of monsters sprawling from the far east to the west end. Sometimes, it felt like someone intentionally did that for a prank.

Akira who was listening to Sara looked like he did not completely believe her story.

“…Do those monsters really exist…? Polytanks with legs… Is that even a monster?”

“It is, they’re filled with flammable liquid fuel and they’ll come near tanks and people before blowing themselves up. That’s why they’re categorized as monsters. But if you can neutralize them before they blow up, the liquid fuel inside them can get you quite a lot of money, you know. We used to hunt for them before.”

Sara was reminiscing about her past while telling her story to Akira. It made Akira realize the truth which surprised him.

“I wonder why they even made that kind of monsters.”

“Some people say that it was because the factories built during the old world era malfunctioned after they were abandoned for years. Some say that those monsters would aim for cars trying to refuel them… Well, in that case, I wonder why they would chase humans too? Do they want the humans to take them to a car or something? There were also stories where Hunters who got stuck in the middle of the wasteland survived by harvesting fuels from those monsters too. Although, I don’t know how much of that story is true.”

Then after that, they kept chatting about their work as Hunters. It was a scene where a new green Hunter consulting with a senior and talkative Hunter. Both of them were having a good time with each other.

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After he finished packing up his things, Akira stood at the entrance and bowed his head to Sara.

“Thank you very much, I’m leaving.”

“You just woke up, so please be careful, okay?”

“Yes.”

But then Sara hesitated for a bit before she asked Akira who was about to leave.

“Akira, uhh, may I tell Elena about what we talked about today? Of course, I’ll tell her to keep it a secret too.”

“I don’t mind as long as it doesn’t spread. After all, Shizuka-san already knows about it too.”

“…As I thought, Shizuka knew it, huh?”

“Well, things happened and she discovered it.”

As Sara smiled bitterly, Akira returned it with another bitter smile.

“That’s right, let me tell you something, Shizuka has really good intuition. That’s why, if you ever get lost about which equipment you want to get, you should go ask her. After all, it seems that her good intuition also works on objects too.”

“I understand. Sara-san, thank you very much. Please tell Elena-san that I said hello.”

Akira casually ended their conversation and left Sara’s place.

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After returning back to his room in an inn, Akira hung his head low. It was because he unconsciously compared his own equipment with all the equipment that he saw in Sara’s place and it was also because his room looked miserable when compared to Sara’s place. But that was not all. Akira who was so excited when he was talking to Sara returned back to normal, thus all of the feeling that he was holding back immediately resurfaced.

Alpha look worried as she asked Akira.

“Are you okay?”

“…Yeah.”

Akira replied back with a tone and expression contrary to what he said. So Alpha asked him again with a stronger tone.

“Let me tell you one thing beforehand, you can’t keep a secret from me, you know? After all, I’m always beside you, so I’ll definitely discover your secret… That’s why just give up and confess it to me. That’ll make you feel better, you know. Moreover, I think that’s not something worth locking inside your heart.”

Akira just looked at Alpha without saying anything while Alpha was smiling gently at him. After some time passed, Akira mumbled in low voice.

“…This is my first time feeling bad after hearing someone thank me.”

Akira did not mean to save Elena and Sara. His main motivation was to only kill the people who attacked them. But that was what saved Elena and Sara and they were really thankful to him for saving them.

Akira was thanked for a good deed that he did not even remember, or to be more precise, he felt guilty for being thanked by the people whom he used in accomplishing his own objective.

Alpha understood something, Akira actually had some kind of moral standards inside him. But it was not very distinct. At least with his moral standards, Akira could not accept their help as them repaying his favour. Instead, it even made Akira depressed. It was really hard to understand but in order to know how Akira would react to things, there was a need to understand his moral standards. Moreover, it would also allow Alpha to give more customised support to Akira.

Alpha tried to understand Akira more than anyone else, and it was all for her own sake than anything.

Alpha then gently spoke to Akira.

“I see, in that case, you should help them next time. I think that’ll be good enough.”

“Is that so?”

“Yep, it is. By doing that, you can think of yourself as being even with them, right? It’ll make you feel less guilty too. That’s why I don’t think there’s any problem with that idea, right?”

Akira did not say anything, he gave her idea a deep thought. He then smiled a bit and came up with a conclusion.

“…You’re right, you’re actually correct.”

Akira then nodded strongly as if to reassure himself.

“Thank you, that does make me feel better.”

Seeing how Akira got back to his usual self, Alpha smiled brightly.

“That’s good then. Now, to make sure that you can help them the next time you meet them, you’ll need to get stronger. You at least understand that, right?”

“Y-yeah.”

“Good, you look eager now. Don’t worry, I’ll increase the difficulty of your training progressively. You’ll get stronger in no time, you know. So you give your best too, okay?”

“O-of course.”

Akira did not lie there. He was serious when he said that. But looking at Alpha’s smile, Akira was a bit taken aback by fear. Alpha noticed it and smiled teasingly at him.

Akira who regained his mood suddenly remembered something.

“Alpha, am I not forgetting something here?”

“Something like a few words of thanks to me who gives you support every day?”

“Thank you for all the help. So then, do you have any other guess?”

“Now that I think about it, it has been 3 days since that day, I wonder how Sheryl is doing.”

“…Ah!!!!”

Akira was asked by Sheryl to visit her base and he promised that he would at least pay her a visit. Although he could not go because of the things that were outside his control, he also remembered that Sheryl desperately asked for him to come and he did plan to visit her.

Although he could not keep his promise, a lot of things happened to him, so it really could not be helped. That’s what Akira prepared as his reason as he went to Sheryl’s base.

Silavin: So, Akira is not the first one and most of the others seem to meet their end. He is the 499th. But it is this speech that makes me worried.

“498th try failed. Reached the final area. Unable to continue due to the subject’s withdrawal from the request. The subject has turned completely hostile. Already dealt with the situation. Current location, unknown. Completely readjusting the guidance method.”

‘Dealt with the situation’, either she killed him or not. Especially when she is not aware of his location.

Well, share your thoughts. I think this novel is really getting more and more interesting.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 20, A Hunter Backup

Index

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Sheryl was standing in front of her base with a stern face. She was in a bad mood and was trying to calm herself but she could not, causing her to get more irritated.

No one except those that knew her well could see a trace of panic on her face, which she was trying to cover up with her best facade. An expression that would hide her irritation, bad mood, worries and nervousness that filled her heart.

A boy named Erio came to her, it was obvious that he was suspicious of Sheryl.

“Sheryl, what the heck is going on with that Hunter Akira. He doesn’t visit us at all.”

“Just shut up and wait for him, didn’t I tell you that already?”

“But yesterday too, we waited a whole night for him and he didn’t come at all…”

Sheryl interrupted Erio with a sharp look.

“Just stop yapping! I’m the boss here! So you should obey me! You did promise me that, didn’t you?!”

That sharp gaze was actually an act to hide the panic inside Sheryl’s heart since Akira did not visit this place at all. Her feelings also caused her gaze to turn even more intimidating.

Erio could not help but to stay shut. He then let out a sigh before mumbling.

“Alright, I know, boss.”

The people who decided to stay in the gang had already approved Sheryl as their boss. So Erio just stopped his complaint there. But it could be seen from his expression that his suspicion and displeasure did not go away.

Sheryl let out a big sigh, half of it was just acting. She then continued by uttering some words in order to further intimidate Erio.

“A Hunter is a very busy person, so I’m sure that’s why he can’t come here. Even if I did talk directly to him, it’s not like I’m in any position to order him to come here as soon as possible. You can’t even understand that, huh?”

“You’re right, I’m sorry.”

“If you can understand me, then get back on your job.”

“Roger that, boss.”

Although Erio answered back in a way that raised some questions, he obediently left Sheryl alone. But after he put some distance from her, he mumbled.

“…But like, aren’t you his favourite?”

Sheryl heard that mumble as her face immediately leaked a bit of her nervousness that she was hiding, but she was able to quickly place back her annoyed expression. Only after she looked around and made sure that no

one was near, did she take off her annoyed expression. Her real expression showed that she was filled with panic and nervousness.

[…It's bad if this goes on. What should I do? Should I go look for Akira once more…? No, I should not do that, they'll definitely be suspicious of me if I keep doing that.]

That day when Akira said to Sheryl that he would visit her base, she and all her gang members waited for him. But in the end, Akira did not come. He did not come the day after that and also the next consecutive days too. Now her position in the gang was in peril.

The children who were in Sibea's gang were already operating in the newly revived gang with Sheryl as its head. They searched the area around their territory and the wasteland near them for scrap steel and anything that can be exchanged for money. Since they would group up and go to the food distribution place together, the other gangs already knew about Sheryl's gang.

At the moment, the other gangs had not started messing with her gang yet. That was because the other gangs believed that Akira was behind Sheryl. But Akira had not visited their base yet. So the members of her gang could not help but feel displeased and insecure.

Sheryl was able to keep her gang members under control by explaining to them that being a Hunter was a very busy job. But of course, there was a limit on how long she could keep that up. Soon, her gang members noticed her nervousness and started to distrust her, she became even more insecure because of that.

There were a lot of people talking behind Sheryl's back, some of them were saying she was lying, some of them were saying that she was not lying but Akira was actually tricking her, and some of them were saying that Akira had already abandoned her. Her gang members started to look at her with suspicion and displeasure. They also started to display their feelings in front of Sheryl. It was not as bad that they would stab her on her back, but it was only a matter of time.

Sheryl already noticed about the feelings of her gang's members. But she could do nothing about it. She had no means of contacting Akira and she could not find him even after waiting near his inn. She could not even come up with any good ideas to appease her gang members. She was basically at her wit's end.

But right at that critical time, Akira appeared in front of her.

"Is Sheryl around? Ah, there you are."

"Akira!"

Sheryl who was at her wit's end involuntarily called Akira's name in a loud voice, thus her voice was heard by everyone in her base. And so all the other children came out from their rooms to see what was going on.

Sheryl regained her composure as she dragged Akira to a private room and immediately closed the door the moment they got in. She wanted to just shout at him and ask why he did not come on the day he promised her. But she knew if she did that, it would be the end of her. Thus she desperately tried to hold herself back as she smiled at Akira.

"Thank you very much for visiting our base. I've been waiting for you. By the way, we waited for you that night, you promised you would come. But you never turned up, did something happen to you?"

Sheryl's smile showed that she did not mind him being late, or at least that was what she was trying to express with her smile.

"Sorry, I did plan to come, but I almost got killed that day."

"Almost got killed??!?!"

Sheryl could not help but scream, Akira was a bit taken aback to see Sheryl surprised. But he then calmed down and answered back.

"No need to be so surprised. It's a normal thing in this line of work."

Sheryl was lost for words. She did think that something must have happened, but she did not imagine that he was almost killed. She then regained her composure and showed that she was worried.

“A-are you alright!?”

“Yeah, I’m not injured and I’m in good shape right now.”

“I-I see… Uhmm, May I ask what happened?”

“I got attacked by two groups of monsters on the same day. I was too tired after the battle, or more like, I fainted out of exhaustion, that’s why I couldn’t come. Sorry about that.”

Akira calmly replied that he was sorry. He decided not to say anything about the fact that he forgot his promise since there was no particular reason to tell her that.

Sheryl let out a sigh of relief. She then changed gear and smiled at Akira.

“I see. In that case, it can’t be helped. It must have been hard on you but I’m glad that you’re alright now. I dragged you to a private room because I wanted to have a private talk with you. But since everyone is waiting for you, we can talk afterwards. I want to introduce you to everyone, are you okay with that?”

“Sure.”

Sheryl grabbed Akira by his hand as she led him out of the room. She then quietly complained.

[…Good grief. I don’t mind as to why he was late, but that was really surprising. I’m sure he was only exaggerating, but I really hope he would stop joking like that.]

Although Sheryl was only able to achieve her current position because of Akira’s support, a made-up story like that still rubbed her the wrong way. But of course, she was not in a position to say anything about that. In order not to worsen her own mood any further, she suggested getting everyone

introduced. Her face twitched out of irritation whenever she thought of the made-up story. It was because Akira told her that story in such a casual way that he sounded less believable.

The children gathered in the hall inside the base. Murmurs could be heard in the hall as those children saw Sheryl standing next to Akira in a pleasant mood.

“So he finally really came, huh? I was doubting her, but it turned out to be true, huh?”

“Is that really the Hunter who killed Sibea? Doesn’t he look like a small boy just like us?”

“Thank goodness it’s real. I feel much safer now.”

“I know that she said he’ll help us, but I wonder how far he’s willing to go? I’m really worried.”

“Say, he doesn’t look that strong though, are we really going to be okay?”

Although there were still a lot of questions, all the doubts about Sheryl talking to Akira were cleared.

Sheryl smiled as she confidently introduced Akira.

“This is Akira. I think you already know him. Sibea took some of our members to get him but he was able to fight back. But even so, he decided to help us, so be sure not to be rude to him, okay?”

When Sheryl turned her gaze towards Akira, he unwilling started to speak up.

“I’m Akira. I’m just helping Sheryl and I’m only helping Sheryl alone. I have no plans to get involved with any of you. Sheryl is the boss here, if you have any questions, just ask her. Don’t ask me about unnecessary things. And when I say not to ask something, then never ever ask about it for a second time. That’s all from me.”

It was obvious that the children were flabbergasted and confused. It was because although Sheryl was their boss, the person who was backing her and virtually the person who had reign over their gang and was responsible for taking care of them showed very little interest in them.

Sheryl frowned, but Akira did not care.

“Sheryl. I have something to talk about with you, so come with me for a bit.”

“Eh? Ah, okay.”

Seeing Sheryl was about to leave the hall with Akira, Erio suddenly stopped them.

“Whoah, wait for a sec!! Are you really Akira?”

Akira stopped, he turned back and looked annoyed.

“Yeah.”

“What have you been doing up until now abandoning us?! And what do you mean when you said that you’re not going to join our gang?! Aren’t you supposed to look over us?!”

“Didn’t I say that you should ask that to Sheryl just now? So stop asking that to me.”

Akira’s way of speaking really shocked Erio. When he heard that the hunter who killed Sibea would help them out, he was feeling hopeful but also insecure at the same time. But when that person never showed himself, doubts and displeasure were piling inside his heart. And right when that person showed himself in front of him, he did not look capable at all even when he was armed. It was a huge let down for Erio.

Adding those words that Akira just said to Erio, Erio’s doubt toward Sheryl and Akira peaked.

[…This boy might even be weaker than me, you know? Are we seriously going to trust our lives to this boy?!]

Sibea and his friends might be Hunters who had fallen off grace. But even so, they were strong. Thus the person who killed Sibea and caused his gang to dissolve must be someone stronger than Sibea.

But the boy who was standing in front of Erio did not look like he even had a chance against Sibea.

[…Is Sheryl tricking us? No, it might be him who is tricking Sheryl, right?]

Erio could not help but think that if he charged at Akira, took his gun and pointed it at him. Akira would not have any other choice but to confess the truth.

The view of Akira turning his back at him and heading outside looked so full of openings for some reason. And the way Akira looked so annoyed when he was questioned, it felt like he was mocking Erio. His life was really hard after Sibea's gang was destroyed. And when the gang started operating again, he thought that these hard time had finally come to pass. But then this happened, he was utterly disappointed which gave Erio the final push.

"Damn you!!"

Erio shouted as he rushed towards Akira. When Akira was only a few steps away, he clenched his fist, pulled back and threw it aiming at the back of Akira's head. It did not seem like Akira noticed his intention, it was a surprise attack from his behind. Erio was sure that it would hit Akira.

But then Akira casually stepped to the side and evaded his fist without even turning back.

"…Wha-!?"

Akira then sent a fist straight to Erio's surprised face and dropped him to the ground.

Akira’s fighting ability received a huge boost in such a short time due to Alpha’s training and all the experiences he piled up. He was already strong enough that a normal boy like Erio would not even stand a chance against him. Of course, a surprise attack from an amateur might be able to take him down, but Akira was very cautious of such a thing due to his experience living in the back alley of the slum city for years. In a normal condition, a surprise attack would not work on him now.

Moreover, it was almost near impossible to launch a surprise attack against Alpha. Even for the attack just now, Alpha already forewarned Akira about it. Thus Akira was able to evade it without turning back. So in short, Erio’s winning chance was zero right from the start.

Erio was lying on the ground trying to suppress the stinging pain on his face. But when he glanced at Akira who was looking down on him, he found the muzzle of Akira’s gun was already pointing at him.

Erio’s face turned pale as he was trembling in terror. The other kids took some distance between them in panic. Akira’s expression did not change as he pulled the trigger.

Right after that, a hole was opened on the floor. But Erio was unscathed. Akira missed his shot on purpose, but Erio froze up as if he was shot, he even stopped shivering. Sheryl and the other kids could not even let out their voice.

After that, Akira looked angry as he spoke to Sheryl.

“Sheryl, I don’t mind whomever you want to add into your gang. To be honest, I don’t even give a damn f*ck. But since you’re the boss, at least be sure to keep your leash on them. You better fix this situation before I misunderstand that the people are acting on your order. If that happens, no one will have a good end.”

Akira then left the hall as Sheryl followed behind him in while being flustered. Only Erio who still could not stand up and other kids who were trembling in fear of Akira were left in the hall.

Sheryl walked beside Akira as she cursed Erio in her heart but she did not dare voice it out. She just kept following Akira silently as he took her out of the base and into the slum city. Sheryl did not know where Akira was leading her as she did not have the leeway of asking that question. She kept cursing Erio in silence as she was following Akira.

Akira suddenly spoke to her.

“Was that good enough?”

“…Eh?”

Sheryl was so surprised that she could not give a proper answer. She could only answer that question with a confused face. Akira thought that Sheryl actually was not able to understand what he meant due to her shock and added an explanation to his question.

“Oh, didn’t you call me to do something like that? Was I mistaken?”

Sheryl was finally able to regain her composure as she looked at Akira. The anger that she saw in the base was gone without a trace. Akira was completely calm. She noticed that Akira’s behaviour in the base was only acting. She then smiled at Akira as she was relieved.

“Well, it’s true that I asked you, but I think what you did now was an overkill.”

“I see, I’m sorry but can you take care of the aftermath? I’m not good with handling that after all.”

“I understand. So then, where are we heading right now?”

“You’ll see, we’ll be arrive there soon.”

After sometime Akira stopped and pointed at a trailer. It was Katsuragi’s trailer which also functioned as his moveable shop. As Akira arrived there, Darris who was watching the trailer noticed him and Sheryl.

“Akira, are you alright?”

“Yeah, I’m okay. Although, it was a big surprise to know that 3 days have already passed when I woke up.”

“I see, I’m glad that you’re alright.”

Akira and Darris laughed lightly to each other. Although there were gaps in their age, ability and social status, both of them were close to each other after facing a life and death battle together.

“So then, do you need anything? If you have come to buy something, you can go ahead and take a look.”

“Well, I just need to discuss something with Katsuragi, so can you please call him over?”

“Wait for a bit here then. Katsuragi!! Akira is here!! I don’t know what’s going on but he said he wants to talk with you.”

Katsuragi then popped out from deep inside the trailer and smiled at Akira as soon as he saw him.

“Akira, huh? I heard that you fainted out of exhaustion, but it seems that you’re doing very well since you have come here with a girl. So, what do you need? You came here to have a talk with a businessman, so I won’t listen to anything that won’t bring me money, you know?”

Akira replied a bit provocatively.

“That would depend on your ability as a merchant.”

“Then it’ll definitely be a profitable talk.”

Katsuragi smiled back at Akira.

Katsuragi listened closely and seriously to Akira’s talk. Akira’s suggestion was, in exchange for bringing relics to his shop, Katsuragi had to help out Sheryl’s gang. Katsuragi and Akira proceeded to calculate the possible benefit and loss that it could bring them.

There were many other places that would accept relics other than the Hunter Office, it was because the demand for relics was high and the profit that people can get from it was huge. Although it was only a side job for him, Katsuragi also bought relics.

As for the help for Sheryl's gang, it would be alright as long as they used his name. Most of the merchants would look down on the people of the slum city and raise their price to a crazy level. So it would be a big help for Sheryl and her gang to find a merchant that would not do that. Even for people from the slum city who had zero trustability, a small word from someone like Katsuragi would help them a lot.

Katsuragi knew well about Akira's fighting ability, he then predicted the quantity and quality of relics that Akira would be able to bring back from the ruins. And then he subtracted it with the amount of money that he would need to help out Sheryl and her gang. After all the calculations in his brain, he still ended up with a profit. After that, he looked at Akira with an inquisitive look.

"I still owe you some. Moreover, selling and buying relics can bring me money. It's true that it would bring a profit."

"So do we have a deal here?"

"Well, wait for a sec. Before we decide on that, I have some questions. First of all, what is your relationship with that girl?"

Katsuragi then looked at Sheryl as if he was trying to evaluate her. Sheryl started getting nervous while Akira made an honest puzzled look.

"Why did you ask that?"

"Why, you ask? She's someone that makes you strike a deal with me. So, of course, it makes me want to know. Moreover, you even asked me to help her out and this might become a long term deal between us, you see? So then, what's she to you? Just an acquaintance? A friend? Relative? Lover? Or maybe even wifey?"

“Let’s just say that she and I grew up in the slum city and we’re close enough for me to bring this deal to you. But if she slows me down, I’ll abandon her anytime. That’s all there is to it.”

“I see.”

Katsuragi tried to figure out Akira’s relation with Sheryl through his behaviour, then he just shelved that topic away for now.

“The next problem is about relics. You do know that even if you bring relics to my shop, you won’t be able to get a rank up, right? After all, it means that you’re not selling your relics to the Hunter Office, is that okay with you?”

One could only rank up by bringing relics to the Hunter Office and other shops affiliated with them. There were Hunters who tried to get a rank up by only selling cheap and bad quality relics or even fake relics. There were also cases where a fight broke because Hunters who assumed the shop where they sold their relics to be affiliated to the Hunter Office.

Hunter rank is something that is used to decide the value of a Hunter. Even if he could earn profit from this deal, it was not worth that much to cause a problem with his Hunter rank. At least that what Katsuragi though since he knew well just how good of a Hunter Akira was. That was exactly why he needed to make sure that Akira understood this point.

Akira then answered back calmly.

“I don’t mind as long as you’ll buy expensive relics from me. At the moment, I need money more than a Hunter rank. If I find your price is not high enough, I’ll sell my relics back at the Hunter Office just like usual.”

“I see… Well then, we have a deal here!”

Katsuragi then smiled befitting of a merchant and sealed their deal by shaking Akira’s hand. He then turned to Sheryl and extended his hand for a handshake. But Sheryl was at a loss and did not reach for his hand.

“What’s wrong? Won’t even shake my hand, huh?”

“I-I’m sorry.”

Sheryl reached Katsuragi’s hand in panic and shook it. But suddenly Katsuragi gripped her hand strongly, Sheryl was so surprised that she shifted her gaze to Katsuragi. The moment she saw Katsuragi’s face, Sheryl froze up. He might be smiling but his eyes were glaring at her.

“Don’t you dare betray me.”

It was clear that Katsuragi was threatening Sheryl through his tone, glare, expression and his strong grip. It was as if he was indicating Sheryl what would happen to her if she did not heed his warning.

People got corrupted by riches. As a merchant, Katsuragi knew that very well. Only economic distress could lower the threshold for such a thing to happen. That was exactly why the price of one’s life in the slum city was abnormally cheap. With only the price of a single bullet, one could trample over the life and trust of the other person in the slum city.

When making a deal with someone from the slum city, this much of intimidation was very much necessary. That was what Katsuragi thought.

But he went too far there. Katsuragi usually made such a deal with Hunters who regularly fight monsters in the wasteland. So this level of intimidation usually shown to those Hunters was simply too much to handle for a little girl from the slum. As such, Sheryl was left trembling in fear unable to even answer back.

Katsuragi understood that he overdid it as he lowered his intimidation. But then Akira suddenly said.

“If she gives you too much trouble, then just tell me, I’ll take care of her myself.”

“Oh, what would you do, be more precise?”

“I’ll kill her and throw her somewhere in the wasteland.”

Sheryl shivered while Katsuragi was surprised by those words since it did not sound like Akira was joking.

“Woah, you’re really a straightforward person, huh?”

“We risk our lives by working in the wasteland, so the people in the slum city should also put their lives at stake in order to live. She should understand this. And she is not a fool who thinks she can go against me.”

“You think?”

“There’s nothing for sure in this world. If that’s not true, I won’t accept getting attacked by two groups of monsters on the same day.”

“You can say that again.”

Katsuragi laughed merrily. He then released Sheryl’s hand and showed a friendly smile to her.

“Sorry that I intimidated you, after all, there are all kinds of people in this world. So I have to be careful. Putting that aside, I hope we can get along well.”

“Y-yes.”

Sheryl tried her best to make a friendly smile but she only ended up with a crooked smile.

Akira did not bat an eyelash on that as he continued by asking a question to Katsuragi.

“Ah, by the way, do you sell information terminal? I need something cheap that can be used without complicated setting and I’m fine with the most basic one.”

“Even if you say the most basic one, every person has a different interpretation of that, you know?”

“It’s fine as long as it can be used to contact me. It’s for Sheryl so that she can keep in touch with me.”

“In that case, that’ll be 20,000 Aurum.”

Akira handed 20,000 Aurum to Katsuragi and received the information terminal. He then connected it to his own information terminal to finish the essential settings before giving it to Sheryl.

“You can contact me with this if anything happens. If you can’t contact me for an extended period of time, just assume me to be dead. Remember that I’ll assume the same in case I’m unable to contact you too.”

“I-I understand, thank you.”

“And also, about showing up in the base regularly, as I thought it’s not a good idea to decide the time now. After all, I always spend my time doing what I want to do, so it would be too much trouble if I book my schedule beforehand. I don’t mind if you call me to show up in the base and if I’m in the mood, then I’ll show up. But that doesn’t mean that you can call me every day, okay?”

“Y-yes.”

“Well then, I have work to do so I’m going back home. As for you… you should discuss with Katsuragi about what kind of help that you need from him.”

But Katsuragi then called Akira with a displeased tone.

“Whoa whoa, you came here after all, so why don’t you buy something before leaving?”

“Sorry, I’m a bit tight on money right now, but I’ll buy next time.”

After saying that, Akira left. Katsuragi then turned to Sheryl.

“Well now, Akira did say that too, so let’s finish up on the details, shall we? Do you have some time?”

“Eh, ah, yes. I’m okay, I’ll be in your care.”

Sheryl regained her composure as she politely bowed to Katsuragi.

Katsuragi took a scan of her again trying to evaluate her before he laughed lightly and asked her.

“Well, Akira is gone now so I want to ask you this again. What is your relationship with that boy?”

“It’s as he said before…”

“I see. Let me rephrase my question then. What do you want your relationship to be? Are you aiming to be his lover or even wife perhaps?”

Sheryl knew that it might cause trouble if she gave Katsuragi a bad answer. So instead, she answered back with a question.

“…That is… He’s helping my gang, is there anything more than that?”

Katsuragi smiled still with his merchant expression.

“There’re a lot of things other than that. You see, I’m planning to get along with Akira for a long time, which means that I might need to get along with you too. But that depends on what your relationship with him is, right? So I should at least confirm whether you want to get into a closer relationship with him or will he abandon you instead. So then, what is it? Looking at how he behaved just now, do you think it’s possible for you?”

Sheryl knew well that she was being appraised there, so she laughed confidently and said.

“Of course that’s my plan. Not to mention that I believe Akira likes me, you know? After all, he even did something like this for me, right? I believe that his behaviour just now was to show Katsuragi-san not to think lightly of us, although we’re just small children from the slum city. After all, Akira is also a Hunter.”

She knew that if she pulled back now, then she would be looked down upon. Although she knew that she was saying too much, she still tried her hardest to make an expression full of confidence.

But Katsuragi kept staring at Sheryl while trying to look deeper into her words. He then let out a sigh.

“That sounds like you tried to seduce him with your body only to get rejected.”

Sheryl froze up. Looking at that, Katsuragi just smiled invincibly.

“Ah, that face is saying ‘how in the world do you know that?’, huh? It’s not that rare for Hunters who have a high income to bring their girls to my shop. In due time, I became able to see whether those Hunters are genuinely interested in the girls that they’re bringing or if they’re thinking of abandoning those girls anytime soon. After all, it’s one of the essential skills for a merchant, you see. If it’s the former, then it’s a good chance to sell expensive equipment, after all, they would want to flaunt in front of the girls that they are interested in. To be honest, you’re situation seems more inclined to the latter, you know?”

Actually, it was a bet to draw out the truth from Sheryl. Katsuragi actually did not have any evidence to say that far. But after seeing how Sheryl reacted, he at least knew that Sheryl did try to seduce Akira only to get rejected.

“But still, I think it can’t be helped, you know? Sorry to say this, but someone like you is just… Ah, it’s not like I’m mocking you here. It’s more like I’m talking about the standards, I think Akira’s standards are higher.”

“…What do you mean?”

Sheryl could not help but to make a confused expression. Normally, Sheryl would be able to hold herself back, but now it only showed how much she was shocked by Katsuragi’s words. She was also very interested in knowing about Akira’s standards. She thought that she may be able to reap some benefits from it in future.

Katsuragi smiled as if he found her reaction amusing to him.

“This is only my theory, but there’s a lot of beautiful Hunters out there. Ah, when I say Hunters, I mean like Hunters who properly earn their money from working as a Hunter and not like those who are Hunters in name only. Of course, each person has a different basis on what kind of beauty that would make them think a girl is beautiful. But there’s at least a common ground there for everyone. And I believe that would be their health.”

“Health… Huh?”

“Yes, the complexity of the skin, the shine on the hairs, the amount of meat in one’s body. I think most of the people think that a healthy girl is a beautiful girl. So if you use this point of view, then many of the female Hunters are beautiful girls. After all, an unhealthy girl will have problems with manoeuvring around. In order to survive in the wasteland, a Hunter should keep his or her body in tip-top shape. That’s exactly why they would stock powerful medicine to heal their wounds and recover their fatigue. The healing medicines always heal wounds on the cellular level. Thus it would also heal damaged skin. Not to mention that exploring the wasteland is hard work, so it’s impossible for them to get fat. Moreover, some of the medicines would instantly convert any excess fat into energy. Thus I think that health and natural look are the basis of beauty.”

Sheryl listened closely to what Katsuragi said. And at the same time, she also cursed the things that she could not do anything about.

“The cellular level of healing from the medicines can also be thought of as an anti-ageing process. That’s why some of the Hunters stay beautiful past their prime. But well, you can also say that it’s due to all kinds of beauty products that they can buy from the money that they earn. So then, if we have to compare you with those girls… Well, uhh, you know… the female Hunters that Akira is acquainted with are all beautiful girls.”

Katsuragi then remembered about Elena and Sara, both of them were beautiful girls. Not to mention that they brought Akira to their home when Akira fainted. So he thought that those two girls must be in a good term with Akira. Katsuragi thought that it would not be strange if Akira already

got used to seeing such beautiful girls, thus his standard for beautiful girls would have been pulled higher.

Sheryl's voice trembled a bit as she said.

"So… what do you want me to do? Is there any meaning in telling me all this?"

Seeing that there was a shred of frustration in Sheryl's behaviour, Katsuragi just gave her a meaningful smile.

"What I'm going to tell you after this is for your sake so that you understand this better. I'll give you something good, so just wait here for a bit."

After saying that, Katsuragi went back to his trailer, Sheryl could hear his voice from outside the trailer.

"Darris!! Do you know where those prototypes weapons are kept?"

"You stuffed them back while saying that it won't sell at all and you're going to return them back, didn't you?"

"Ah, you're right!!"

Not too long after that, Katsuragi returned to Sheryl with a big rucksack and then he just put that rucksack in front of Sheryl.

"Sorry for the wait, I'll give this to you, it's a souvenir from me, take it home with you."

That bag was stuffed with foods that were near their expiration date, guns that did not sell and many other things. All of them were valuable things to Sheryl. Thus Sheryl bowed while being flustered.

"T-thank you very much."

From inside that bag, Katsuragi took out a few things and showed it to Sheryl.

“There are soaps, makeup kits and many other things inside this bag. Although they’re just trial products, there are also medicines that were produced for Hunter’s use, so it should be better than those cheap medicines. Remember, you should be at least beautiful enough to make Akira think that he’s lucky when you try to seduce him. Let me tell you this upfront though, this is just an investment. I’m not sure why Akira helps you, but for now, you’re the reason why he’ll come to me to sell his relics. So you should work hard so that Akira would not abandon you, and so that he’ll keep selling relics to me. You get that?”

Sheryl still tried to smile even though she could not make a perfect smile.

“Y-yes.”

“I’m looking forward to us working together for a long term.”

Katsuragi then laughed loudly with a shred of expectation his gaze.

Before going back to his inn, Akira decided to visit Shizuka’s shop to replenish his ammo. The moment he entered the shop, Shizuka immediately noticed him and waved at him. Akira found it strange for the person at the counter to take initiative like that, but even so, he just obediently walked to the counter and went on with his order just like usual.

“Shizuka-san, I have come to buy some ammo again, this time I spent a lot of them. So I’ll be buying more than usu-“

Shizuka stopped Akira’s words and hugged him tightly.

Akira was flustered when Shizuka hugged him. He could feel Shizuka’s body temperature and there was a soft sensation hitting him from the front. He was so embarrassed and confused as he tried to break off Shizuka’s hug. But Shizuka kept her arms tight even after knowing that.

“I heard about everything from Elena and Sara. I know well that being a Hunter is a dangerous job and I understand that you need to go above your own limit from time to time. That’s why I can’t say don’t do anything

dangerous or don’t push yourself too hard. So at least please let me say this, I’m glad that you’re fine.”

Shizuka tightened her embrace for once more before letting off.

Akira smiled while looking a bit surprised, but his expression immediately changed to contentment as he bowed to Shizuka.

“I’m sorry to have made you worry, but I’m okay now.”

Akira’s reply was so well composed that it was not something that would come out from someone who was unconscious for a few days. Shizuka smiled feeling relieved since it looked like it was not just a facade and Akira was really fine.

“It’s all good as long as you’re fine. Ammo replenishment, right? I’ll bring it right away, just wait here.”

While Akira was waiting for Shizuka, Elena suddenly entered the shop. She noticed Akira as she smiled at him and walked to his side.

“Akira, so you’ve woken up, huh? I never thought to meet you here. Although I already told Sara to contact me as soon as you wake up-“

Elena stopped her words mid-sentence as she noticed a notification came up on her information terminal. She then checked the notification and smiled bitterly.

“It just came. That Sara, she must have forgotten about it.”

Akira then bowed to Elena.

“Elena-san, I’m sorry to have caused you a lot of trouble and thank you very much for taking care of me. And also, sorry for occupying the bed for a few days.”

“Don’t worry about that. It’s big enough for us to sleep together, after all. But that aside, Sara used to unconsciously hug you like a pillow though, so are you okay? That girl is an augmented human, you know. Although she

looks like that, she’s actually very strong. She didn’t break any of your bones, right?”

Elena smiled teasingly, to which, Akira could only return it with an awkward smile.

“I-I’m fine.”

[I bet that was just a joke.]

Sheryl dragged her feet to her base. She was on her limit in every sense.

Because Akira did not visit the base for some time, a lot of the gang members started to doubt her, she feared that she would get killed. And when Akira finally came to her base, one of the gang members attacked him, it was just disastrous. She thought that Akira would kill her. And then she met a weapon merchant called Katsuragi and was overwhelmed by his intimidation. She again thought that she would get killed. Finally, Akira said clearly in front of her that he would kill her himself if she did anything foolish.

But when Sheryl returned back to her base, she should behave as if everything was well and she would need to direct her subordinates as if nothing bad had happened. She should keep her poised and confident look in front of her gang members and in front of the other gangs too. At least she needed to keep that up until there was no need for her to fake it. But she was already at her limit now.

Once she arrived in front of her base, Darris who was accompanying her casually put the heavy bag that he was carrying on the ground.

“I won’t carry it inside, you should do the rest yourself.”

The gift that she received from Katsuragi was filled with guns and other useful things, it was quite heavy so it would be hard for Sheryl to carry it herself. Moreover, it would be meaningless if that gift was robbed on her

way back. That was why Katsuragi made a smart move and sent Darris to accompany her.

Sheryl politely bowed her head to Darris.

“I understand. Thank you very much for carrying it all the way here.”

“Well, it seems that you’re having a hard time, so give your best, okay?”

Sheryl left a positive impression on Darris as he thought that she was a girl with proper manners although she was raised in the slum city. Thus Darris left Sheryl with those words before he left the place.

Sheryl was somehow able to carry that heavy bag inside the base. The moment she entered her base, all the children in her gang already lined up there waiting for her. Although it was a correct manner for welcoming the boss, it was obvious that Sheryl looked angry. She thought that she would not see one face anymore as she glared at that person that she deemed unnecessary in her gang. It was Erio.

“And here I thought that you’ll be gone already, but you’re still here, huh?”

Erio flinched back in fear as he tried to calm Sheryl down.

“Sh-Sheryl, I’m really sorry.”

“Sorry? If you have the brain to recognize that you’re at fault, then you should’ve been gone from here.”

“H-He looked like a normal boy. Although he did carry a gun, he did not look like a strong Hunter at all. That’s why I thought that he was tricking you, you see…”

“A normal boy, huh? Normal… Right?”

Erio who was frozen still did not look like he could spout any excuses, while on the other hand, Sheryl had already reached her limit. As such, Sheryl had an outburst now.

“A normal kid, huh!? So for you, a kid who can defeat 3 armed Hunters is normal, huh? A kid who can do this is normal, huh?! So that’s normal inside your head, huh?! If it’s normal for you, then you can do that too, right? In that case, you go ahead and do that too?! Go to the ruins and get some relics then get ambushed on your way back and successfully fight your way out!! You should be able to do that, right? So go and do that!!”

Sheryl who just had an outburst tried to control her breathing. Erio was so scared that he could not move at all and the other children could do nothing but stand frozen there.

Sheryl then turned to the other children and shouted.

“Get that fool out from here!! Quickly!!”

“P-please wait.”

“Get him out of here, right now!! I’m your boss here and I’m telling you to kick him out!! You accepted that I’m the boss, right? If you don’t accept me as your boss, then you get out of this place too!!”

The children around Erio then looked at each other before they grabbed Erio’s shoulders and arms and dragged him outside. Erio just obediently let himself be dragged outside the base while hanging his head low.

Sheryl calmed her breathing. She understood that she had lost her composure just now, so in order to avoid making any mistake, she tried to at least regain her composure as she took a deep breath.

Alicia, a girl who was close to Erio, then spoke to Sheryl.

“Sh-Sheryl… about Erio…”

Sheryl then let out a very long sigh and expelling all the anger left inside her heart. Thanks to that, she was at least able to clear most of the anger left inside her heart and regained her composure to think straight. But even so, she looked at Alicia with a stern look.

“…I know, I know, but we can’t do that now. We can’t let Erio stay in this gang, you know at least that much, right? At least until we have more people in the gang that Akira won’t notice if Erio is mixed up a member of the gang or until Akira has forgotten his anger about him. But until then, we can’t let him in the gang.”

Other children were surprised after hearing Sheryl’s words, then one of them asked Sheryl.

“Increase the members? In this situation?”

“We should at least be able to give some benefits to Akira as soon as possible. Otherwise, he would abandon us, we need to remember that he is not helping us out of kindness. If he abandons us, it would be the end for us.”

“B-but how…”

“Thanks to Akira, we got a connection to a weapon merchant called Katsuragi. We are somehow able to get some help from that merchant. We have no other choice but to use that connection and try a lot of different things.”

Sheryl then opened the bag which she carried. The children who saw the foods, guns and other things inside the bag could not help but let out shouts of joy.

“For now, we were able to get a lot of things thanks to Katsuragi and Akira. So we should come up with a plan before distribu-“

Sheryl caught some children trying to extend their hands to reach inside the bag, she shouted in a loud voice.

“If you take anything from it without my permission, then I’ll kill you.”

The children then stopped from reaching the bag before slowly retracting their arms.

Sheryl glanced at everyone there, thinking about how hard the road ahead for her was to develop the gang, she let out a big sigh.

That day, just like usual, Elena only wrapped herself in a bath towel after finishing her bath while operating the information terminal that was fixed on her head. Looking at that, Sara let out a sigh and said.

(p4553r: Elena's information terminal is on her head, not on her arm.)

"Elena. Just because Akira already went home, are you going to relax around the house like that again??"

When Akira was in their home, Elena knew that it would be bad if she stayed like that. Although Akira was only a younger boy and was asleep, he was still a boy. That was why she always put on her clothes where Akira was sleeping so that it would be fine if Akira woke up anytime. But now that Akira had already gone home, she started to turn back to her old habits.

Elena ignored that question, she then even criticized Sara who was only wearing a T-shirt on her undies.

"It's fine, isn't it? Moreover, I don't want you to preach me while you look like that yourself. Was that what you were wearing when Akira woke up?"

"Yes."

"Sara, what the heck were you thinking? You should at least be more careful."

"It's okay, Akira's reaction was pretty amusing."

"I don't mean it like that, good grief…"

Looking at Elena who looked like she had already given up on her, Sara just laughed lightly and said to Elena.

"Well, it's fine, right? It's just a small service for someone who we owe our lives to."

Elena was shocked when she heard that as she immediately turned to Sara. Sara's face also turned serious.

"It was Akira who saved us back then in the wasteland, you know?"

"…I see."

Elena's reaction was way lighter than Sara had expected, thus Sara looked a bit surprised.

"You don't seem that surprised, huh?"

"I somehow expected that you know. Isn't it the same for you too? But since it seemed like Akira wanted to keep that a secret, I decided not to inquire him about that. I don't think that Akira would say it himself, so I bet you asked him first, right? Was it okay?"

Sara smiled bitterly as she looked a bit apologetic.

"It went fine. He even apologized for keeping it a secret. Although it was me who pressured him for an answer."

"Well, it's fine then, wait, that's not fine. You did say you are sorry for pressuring him, right?"

"I did say sorry, you know?"

"It's all good then. Now that we know that he was the one who saved us, we owe him our lives, so be sure not to cause him too much trouble, okay?"

"I know."

After talking thus far, Sara then looked at Elena with a serious face.

"So Elena, I have a request for you. I'm sure you have a lot of questions that you want to ask him. But please don't ask him anything and don't tell anyone about him. After all, I did promise Akira about that. So please, I'm begging you. I know that you might not be fully convinced, but please don't ask anything and promise me the same."

Sara was desperate because she did promise Akira that. That was why she resolved herself to definitely get her best friend's promise now.

In contrast to Sara who was looking dead serious there. Elena just casually but strongly nodded.

"I understand. I give you my promise. I won't ask anything needless and I won't tell anyone else. So there's no need for you to worry."

"…You're okay with that?"

Sara was surprised seeing how Elena just gave her promise so easily like that. But Elena just smiled and said.

"I told you this, right? I expected this, that was why I was at least able to guess why he was hiding it and what he would not want us to ask him. I bet you asked Shizuka too, right? So don't worry, I'll keep my lips sealed tight about this. And like I said before, I don't want to cause too much trouble to someone that we owe our lives to."

Sara was surprised and then smiled bitterly.

"…You already know everything, huh? Am I that easy to read?"

"After all, you suddenly asked me about the people who can connect to the old domain. Sara, when you want to hide something, you should be careful when you ask your questions, you know? Because the people that you asked would at least think of why you ask that question."

Sara realized her mistake and felt a bit downhearted, but she then decided to just change the mood and smiled.

"…As I thought, it is correct to leave negotiations to you."

"Yep, just leave that to me. Next time we meet Akira, I need to properly say my thanks too."

After saying that, Elena smiled pleasantly and laughed.

“Sara, now that we know the real identity of our saviour, what do you think after realising that he’s not a young man from a rich family?”

Sara looked a bit annoyed and embarrassed.

“Please spare me from the teasing.”

Although Sara was a bit confused about Elena’s remark, she remembered the embarrassing imagination she had of their saviour. She couldn’t help but blush heavily, which was rare for Sara.

Seeing how her best friend looked a bit at loss at first and finally coming to a conclusion herself, Elena just smiled amusingly.

Silavin: Damn Akira. Damn.

BTW, here are the three beauties for you to compare. I’ve already posted Sheryl.

Shizuka Elena Sara

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Rebuild World – Chapter 21, Unnecessary Things

Index

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Akira was dragging his feet within the Kuzusuhara ruins. He was only able to walk at this speed by stopping every few steps to take a breath. But even with all this struggle with walking, he was somehow able to banish the thought of lying down, to continue dragging his feet once again.

The reason why he was walking so slowly was because of the rucksack on his back. It was filled with relics up to its brim and it was so heavy that it made his legs shake while carrying it. He was somehow able to carry it thus far, but he suddenly mumbled a complaint.

“Alpha, I’m thinking, isn’t this a bit too much? Can we like, you know, leave some of the relics behind?”

He knew that if he could bring it back, it would definitely fetch him a huge amount of money. Not to mention that he was the one who previously complained about bringing only a small quantity of relics. But the rucksack he was carrying was heavy enough to make him suggest leaving some of the relics behind.

But Alpha rejected his complaint with a serious face.

“No, we won’t do that. To be honest, I think I underestimated your bad luck. Right when we decided to go out to the wasteland for training for a day, you got attacked by 2 groups of monsters right away. Even I didn’t see that coming, you know. So in order to prepare you to face bad luck anytime, we need to get you better equipment as soon as possible. The money that we earn from these relics will be used to buy that equipment, so you should give your best for a little while longer.”

“I understand your point, but…”

Alpha could see that Akira was not just displeased, there was another complicated expression mixed in his face. So Alpha too made a displeased look as she said to Akira.

“Oh my, are you saying that I should give better support so that you would not need more equipment? Just for your information, I’m always giving my best support, you know?”

“That’s not what I meant. Your support is really helpful to me. Even back there too, I would’ve died if it wasn’t for your support. I’m really thankful and I do trust you. But still…”

Akira’s trust and gratitude were not fake, but there were a lot of other things inside his head.

[For some reason, I feel like I’m constantly in danger since the day I met Alpha. But again, facing dangers is a professional hazard as a Hunter and I met Alpha on the first day I became a Hunter. So it can be said that it’s only to be expected, but still…]

That was what Akira thought but he could not fully convince himself with that reasoning. Hearing his reply, Alpha’s expression changed from displeasure to exasperation.

“Good grief. Although you got such a beautiful lady like myself around for the whole day taking care of a lot of things for you, you are still complaining like this, huh? Akira, aren’t you just too greedy?”

It might be because Akira was so tired that he looked irritated.

“Greedy, huh…”

“And when I thought you had no interest in the opposite sex, you did react to Shizuka, Sara and Elena, right? As I thought, having a physical body that you can touch is a big factor to you, huh?”

Akira coughed and flustered as he wondered whether he really reacted that much to Shizuka and the other girls.

“Since I can’t entice you with touches, I wonder if I can entice you with appearance instead. Maybe being naked works well? No, judging from how you reacted to Sara, I think suggestive clothing works better.”

Alpha then removed all of her clothing and exposed her beautiful skin without anything to hide them. She then put on sexy underwear before layering it with a thin and almost transparent dress.

Her transparent dress blurred into the light showing a beautiful figure, her glossy skin was tremendously charming. The shadow created on the opposite side of the light was captivating. Everything about her was so sensuously inviting.

But in contrast, Akira’s reaction was very dull, he simply lightly blushed before he let out a slight sigh.

“Alright alright, I’m sorry. I won’t complain again so switch back to your normal cloth.”

But Alpha just ignored that as she pointed towards the ruins.

“Akira, there’s somebody over there.”

“Just put on your cloth first. Over there, huh?”

Akira then pulled out his binoculars and scanned towards the direction that Alpha pointed, he could see a young boy running desperately.

“That boy, I’ve seen him somewhere before…”

“He’s the young boy that attacked you back in Sheryl’s base. Is he heading here to kill you for revenge or something?”

“Now that you mention it, he indeed looks like that boy…”

Akira remembered that someone attacked him but he did not remember the face. But for now, that boy did not look like he was following Akira’s footprints. So Akira decided to just keep his eyes on him for a while.

***

Ever since Erio was banished from Sheryl’s gang, he had been looking for a way to get reinstated. He heard the recent development of the gang from Alicia, who he was close with. He came to know that the gang recently got a helping hand from a merchant named Katsuragi. Thanks to that, the economy of the gang developed very well. This fact only made him regret his foolish action. And since he had no connection that could help him join any other gang and he already had someone that he could trust in Sheryl’s gang, he wanted to return back to Sheryl’s gang no matter what.

Alicia told him that although Sheryl would not be able to do it in front of Akira, she was actually planning to let him join the gang again after a while. Thus, Erio spent his days in the back alley clinging onto that hope.

But there was no guarantee that he would be alive until that time comes. Thus, he had to do something before he loses any more time. He thought hard and made a gamble. He asked Alicia to lend him a gun and went to Kuzusuhara ruins looking for relics.

In order to return back, Erio had to talk with either Sheryl or Akira. But it was not a problem that could be solved by prostrating and begging for forgiveness. He will have to bring something of worth with him and bringing a relic from the ruins would be the perfect souvenir. He thought that would be enough as an apology to both Akira, a Hunter who was working by hunting for relics, and Sheryl, his boss, who told him to fetch a relic from the ruins. That was why he decided to look for relics in the ruins.

An expensive relic could turn a normal person into a rich personage in one go. It was the most common dream for the people of the slum. But Erio soon realized that it would just stay as a dream to him. He now knew that another kid from the slum, just like him, had become a Hunter. And he was so close to realizing that dream. So he thought he too might also have a shot at becoming rich. Both their dreams might be different but he hoped to at least be able to grab a fragment of that dream by a lucky encounter. That was why he took the gamble to try his luck in the ruins.

But Erio's gamble easily went to ash. He immediately met a monster the moment he went to the ruins. He did try to fight back with his gun, but since he was in a panic and he had no real skill in using a gun, none of his shots hit the monster. And it did not take very long for him to deplete the low quantity of ammo that he was carrying.

Erio, who had lost his means of fighting then dropped the heavy gun he was carrying as he ran as fast as he could from the monster that was trying to eat him. The ruins filled with debris was not an easy terrain for him to traverse but that was not the case for the monster that was chasing him. Thus it would be very difficult for him to outrun that hungry monster. It was only a matter of time for that monster to catch up with him.

***

Akira was watching Erio with a confused look.

"Going to the ruins without a gun, huh? That guy is really careless."

Alpha smiled teasingly.

"You're right. But he's just like you during that time, right? The only difference between that boy and you is that he, unfortunately, won't get to meet me."

It was true, he was not that different from Akira from back then. But since Akira met a group of weapon dog on his first day, he might have been actually more careless than Erio in a sense. Akira smiled bitterly after

realizing this. The scene of Erio running away from the monster reminded him of himself and Akira's face turned serious.

What Akira was seeing from his binocular was what would have happened to him had he not met Alpha. It was obvious as to how this scene would end, it would only take a few more seconds for that monster to catch up with Erio and another second for that monster to severely injure him. If that happened, then that would be the end of Erio's life. That was also how Akira's life too could have ended in a different storyline.

"…You're right. That's me, huh?"

Akira mumbled those words as he picked up his gun. Seeing his action, Alpha looked surprised.

"Are we going to help him?"

"Yeah, this must be some kind of fate. Let's help him and improve my luck… Moreover, he came at the right time."

Akira laughed lightly as he carefully took aim and pulled the trigger of his gun.

***

After Erio used all of his stamina and power to escape from the pursuit of the monster, he finally hit his limit. The road in front of him was blocked by rubble and he had no path to run. As he turned back in panic, he could see the hungry monster opening its huge jaw showing its big sharp fangs as its saliva splattered around.

It was the end for him. Erio's face distorted in terror as he waited for the impending death to reach him.

And right when that monster jumped towards him, it suddenly rolled over. Then gunshot kept reverberating as bullet splinters ricocheted around the monster. Blood spurted out of the holes that opened up on the monster's body, dyeing the earth red.

But even so, the monster was still alive. Although it was wobbly and unstable, the monster got back on its feet. Then another bullet tore through its limbs and it fell down on the pool of its own blood.

When it tried to stand up again, another bullet tore through it. But this time, the monster shivered and finally stopped moving.

Erio was dumbfounded for a moment. After he regained his composure, he finally realized that he was saved, he then mumbled in a happy and relieved voice.

“…I’m saved…? I’m saved… I’m saved!!!”

Erio tried to calm down his breathing while still looking excited. He then turned towards the direction where he heard the gunshot from, to look for the person who just saved him. But the moment he saw his saviour, his expression froze. The person that he saw in that direction was the same person that he attacked the other day. It was the person that he met in Sheryl’s base who aimed his gun at him as he was lying on the ground and pulled the trigger without any hesitation.

Erio’s face twitched when he saw Akira waving at him.

***

Erio was dragging his feet in the middle of the ruins. He looked like he was having a hard time as he said.

“T-this is so heavy…”

The reason for that was because the rucksack that Akira was carrying was now transferred to Erio’s back. It was an exchange of favour for saving his life. Although to be perfectly honest, he actually had no way to refuse it.

The leg crushing weight assaulted him who was already tired from running away from the monster. He felt like he would not be able to stand back up if he fell over. Thus, he tried his best not to trip as he slowly dragged his feet.

They encountered monsters from time to time but Akira who walked in front of him would take them out easily. From his back, Akira looked like he was just walking normally, but every time they met a monster, Akira was able to detect them and take a pre-emptive shot to kill them. Erio did not even have the slightest idea of how Akira could detect those monsters.

[Was Akira fighting monsters while carrying this heavy rucksack all the time until he met me? Did he also take them out so easily like this while carrying this rucksack? No wonder why he could defeat Sibea and the others all by himself. Did I really pick a fight against this ‘monster’? That explains why Sheryl got so angry at me. Now that I think about it, that was really stupid of me…]

Erio’s fear of Akira just multiplied several times and it made him regret his action even more than before.

After getting released from the burden of his rucksack, Akira was shooting down monsters in a good mood. But he then looked puzzled as he stared at the monsters that he just killed.

“Alpha, do these monsters always roam around this area?”

Alpha then looked puzzled too as she said.

“I guess some of the monsters that attacked Katsuragi ended up staying around this area. Or maybe those are rare monsters that came here attracted by that pile of meat from back then. Or maybe they’re normal monsters that have gone through an evolution.”

“These monsters are dangerous.”

“In the worst-case scenario, the monsters distribution in the ruins will change and it’ll cause ruin exploration to be even more dangerous than before. And even with your ability and my support, we might need to stop exploring the ruins for a while. It was the right choice to bring a lot of relics this time.”

Alpha said that it would be dangerous even with her support, it showed just how dangerous the situation would really be. Akira understood that very well as his face turned grim.

“…They’re really that dangerous, huh?”

“Let’s hurry up and go home for now.”

“Roger that.”

Akira picked up the pace. Of course, Erio who was carrying heavy rucksack suffered more than him, as he desperately tried to catch up with Akira.

Once they arrived at the city, they immediately headed to Katsuragi’s portable shop and trailer. Erio squeezed every little stamina that he had as he went for the last spurt. When they arrived in front of the trailer, Katsuragi who was watching the shop immediately noticed Akira and Erio.

“Akira, huh? This time you’re bringing a boy rather than a girl with you, huh. But that aside, you really didn’t betray my expectations, this time you are here as a customer, right?”

“Yeah, I’m a customer today. Although, I’m only here to sell relics.”

“Ah, selling relics, huh? Well, whatever it is, I welcome any customers. So then, where’s the relic?”

Akira then pointed at the rucksack that Erio was carrying. Looking at that, Katsuragi smiled in a good mood.

“That looks quite a lot, bring it to the back.”

After the three of them went to the back of the trailer, Akira started putting out all the relics that he wanted to sell. At first, he just put out everything from inside the rucksack randomly before Alpha told him to keep the medicines. So then Akira asked Alpha through telepathy.

“Is it a bad idea if I put it out just to show it to him?”

“It’s better to be safe. You wouldn’t be able to refuse if he asks you insistently to sell those relics, right?”

“Depending on the price, wouldn’t it be okay to sell at least one box?”

“Nope. That one box might be the thing that saves you from certain death, you know? So be sure to retain it.”

Since Akira himself did not want to die, he started to carefully put out the relics.

After scanning all the relics that were piled up in front of him, Katsuragi chuckled.

[…I don’t know where this boy got all of these relics. But this amount is pretty impressive. As I thought, this boy will be a successful Hunter. I have to get on his good side no matter what.]

After that, Katsuragi appraised all the relics and did the mental calculation. He then put on his merchant smile and looked at Akira.

“…Hmmm. Well then… How about if I take everything for 5,000,000 Aurum?”

Katsuragi’s face was filled with honesty and sincerity of a merchant. But that sincerity was mixed with some hidden fees that were needlessly added.

Alpha then casually said to Akira.

“Not good enough.”

After hearing that, Akira immediately said to Katsuragi.

“I understand, I’ll take them to the Hunter Office then.”

As Akira went to pick up his relics and put them back inside the rucksack, Katsuragi went to panic mode and said.

“Wait! Wait! Wait! Wait! Well, like, this is where you should haggle, right? Don’t just give up now.”

Akira then looked coldly at Katsuragi who tried to gamble his chance with him there.

“You can go ahead and do that with your other merchant friends. I have no interest in doing something like that. You have one more chance to decide the price, and if I’m not satisfied with that, I’ll just take them to the Hunter Office.”

Katsuragi knew that it was not a bluff when Akira said that. So he did not have any other choice but to rethink his price.

“…I understand!! 8,000,000 Aurum!! How about that?”

“Well, that sounds good.”

(Athena: In the raw, this line was said with feminine inflexion so it can be inferred that this part is Alpha’s.)

“Sounds good to me, you should do that right from the start next time, okay?”

“Aright then, we have a deal here.”

The relics that Katsuragi bought were moved into his trailer. He would eventually sell those relics at a higher price than what he had paid to Akira. After all, that was where his ability as a merchant would shine. No one would complain even if he sold those relics at a higher price since he had to spend more money on the appraisal, getting a quality assurance certificate among many other things.

Katsuragi was in a good mood since he got himself a good deal.

“How do you want me to pay you? Do you want it in cash? It’s easier for me to pay you through bank transfer though…”

Akira had always been living in the slum city up until recently, so he did not have a bank account yet. Although he could easily open a bank account by doing some simple paperwork in the Hunter Office, the reason he did not do that was because up until now, he had no need for a bank account. So he tried to let the subject slide as he casually said.

“There are people that only accept payment with cash. But I’ll do something about it when I need to handle a larger amount of money.”

Katsuragi then glanced at Erio and was fully convinced with that reasoning. If Akira wanted to give money to Sheryl’s gang, it would be better if he did it with cash.

“I understand, so its cash, right? Then wait for a bit.”

Katsuragi went inside his trailer and returned back with 8,000,000 Aurum in big bundles. Seeing this much money shocked Erio, who was lying down out of exhaustion, so much that his eyes bulged like saucers.

Alpha had warned Akira not to overreact. So he just calmly took the money and placed it into his rucksack and closed it.

Looking at how Akira and Katsuragi conversed, Erio realized the big chasm between him and Akira. 8,000,000 Aurum was a huge amount of money to the children from the slum city. Erio thought that even Akira would be shocked, but Akira proved his expectations wrong and received the money calmly without any emotional fluctuations.

Akira noticed that Erio was looking at him with a complicated look. But he could not understand why. Akira was at a loss whether to send Erio home now since he had finished with carrying the rucksack and had no further business with him? Or should he give Erio a portion of the money? Akira did not even know if it was a good idea to ask Erio about that. But then he said.

“That’s it then, I have no other business with you. You can go back home now. I’ve saved you back there so you get nothing from me. Later then.”

Watching Akira as he picked up his rucksack and was about to return on his way, Erio realized that it was his only chance to ask Akira to help him in getting back to Sheryl's gang. But if he asked him poorly, Akira might think that he was trying to ask for a share of the money and get angry at him instead. Thus he desperately tried to be careful as he asked Akira.

"Can you please ask Sheryl to let me return back to her gang? I was banished because of what I did back then. You might have saved me, but without the gang, I would get killed sooner or later! So please help me!! I even helped you carry that heavy rucksack, you know!! So I'm at least helpful to you, right?!! Please help me!!"

Akira looked back at Erio with an expressionless face. It was him trying to act calmly to hide the fact that he was carrying a huge amount of money. But Erio did not understand that and he began sweating in a panic thinking that he had made Akira angry.

Erio realized that he was a bit too forceful when he requested Akira's help, but if Akira refused to help him now, then it would really be the end for him. If Akira thought that he was being rude, it would mean he would have zero chance to return to Sheryl's gang. But on the other hand, he had no confidence if he could live by himself in the back alley of the slum city and he did not have the courage to go to the ruins once again. Thus he prayed hard so that Akira would help him.

"Well, we can go to Sheryl's place right now."

Watching Akira as he immediately turned and started walking towards Sheryl's base, Erio was dumbfounded as he followed Akira. He was still dazed from what he just heard. It seemed that his plea was heard and he now hoped that he would not get scolded by Sheryl later.

Katsuragi who watched this scene unfold in front of him thought that Akira did a great job in taming Erio.

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Sheryl's gang was doing good. After all, her gang members were basically the same gang members that were in Sibea's gang. And the information that Akira who killed Sibea was supporting the gang was already well known among the people of the slum. Not to mention that the gang was able to get a steady flow of money and guns from Katsuragi. Adding up all of those factors together, people of the slum city already recognized that Sheryl's gang was not just a gathering of slum kids, but a proper gang albeit a small and weak one.

When a small but weak gang appeared in the slum city, it was normal to expect that there would be people who wanted to join that gang. People like those who could not join any other gang because of some particular reasons or those people who were treated coldly in their current gang.

But there was also the fact that the boss, Sheryl, and the members who were running the gang, and even Akira, the one who was supporting the gang were all small children. Because of that, there was no adult who wanted to join Sheryl's gang. As such, Sheryl's gang became a unique gang in the slum city where all its members were small children.

Inside the base, Sheryl was talking with Alicia in a private room.

"How's the cleanup in our territory? Is it going well? Did our gang get into any fights? After all, our territory should be a bit dirty right now, so it's to be expected for some people to be displeased with us."

All the gangs in the slum city had one extra job, and that was to clean up their territory with any trash and garbage.

Cleaning up one's territory was very important in the slum city. Not only because it was an unwritten rule in the slum city, but also everything that a gang picked up during their clean up became that gang's property. Although those were trash for the people who dumped them, most of them could still bring money for the people who lived in the slum city.

Anything that still could be of use would be kept, while any metal object found would be gathered together and sold as wreckages. Then anything

that looked like repairable would be repaired and used or sold to other people. And the leftover would be dumped in the wasteland.

More than anything, cleaning up one's territory showed everyone that you owned the territory.

Alicia begrudgingly recalled her conversation with her other friends that were on clean up duty.

"Hmmm. There's quite a lot of people who complained about the number of corpses lying around. That's all, I guess."

"Well, that's to be expected. After all, no one cleaned up around this area until recently."

The slum city was riddled with robbers. Thus, it was common to find corpses of either the victims or the robbers or even both. Of course, if no one took care of those corpses, they would just be left there to rot. It was the job of the gang who owned that territory to clean up those corpses together with their personal belongings.

When Sibea was killed and the gang was disbanded. The territory was left unmanaged for a while. Thus, corpses piled up in the area since there was no one to clean up those corpses.

Sheryl then gave out orders just like usual.

"Just get rid of the bodies like usual. Clear them up from any personal belongings and store their stuff in the warehouse, then dump the rest in the wasteland. Also, give extra guns to the people who're on duty to go to the wasteland."

Carrying dead bodies to the wasteland was not an easy job. Since there was a chance for them to encounter monsters, it was important to arm them with proper equipment. Thanks to Katsuragi, Sheryl was able to obtain the minimum required equipment for traversing the wasteland.

Keeping one’s territory clean from any corpses also brought benefits to the gang. After all, the government only picked a clean area to distribute their free food rations. So keeping the area clean increased the chance for the area to be picked as the distribution place.

On the other hand, if corpses kept piling up in an area. The area would turn unhealthy and the government might decide to sterilize the area with fire. In order to prevent the unhealthy environment from spreading around and affecting the lower district, they would literally set the area on fire. They would burn down everything, the people, the building, simply everything without leaving anything behind.

Although the government always said that they had no other choice but to burn the area since such an environment would attract monsters, there were rumours that it was only an excuse that they used for pruning the population in the slum. Basically, a dirty territory was a likely target for this pruning.

Because of this, all the gangs in the slum city put their complete effort to keep their territory clean.

Alicia then carefully asked Sheryl.

“…Uhmm, Sheryl. About the number of the gang’s members, we got a lot of new members, right?”

“Is that so? I don’t think we have got enough members since we still can’t keep our territory properly cleaned though. But if you mean to say that it’s harder to take care of the gang compared to before, well, yeah, you’re right, we have got a lot of new members.”

It was her first time managing a gang. Although she slowly got used to it, she was not confident if she was doing it well.

“I’m thinking of selecting you and few other people to help me manage the gang, you know. But I’m still evaluating who to pick. I know that it won’t be easy, but do your best, okay?”

It would be impossible for Sheryl to directly manage everything in the gang and it would only get worse as her gang grew in size. But even so, she still needed more people to join her gang. So considering that fact, Sheryl thought that she should hurry up and decide the group of people that would help her manage the gang. And since she was good at managing a group, she did not worry about the problems that might arise from creating such a group.

But Alicia then continued in a vague way.

“Of course I’ll give my best in that too, but… That’s not what I meant… Uhh…”

“What?”

“…Sheryl, do you think it’s okay to let Erio rejoin once we get some more members?”

Alicia was worried about Erio. She did try to stop him back then but Erio said that he did not have any other choice as he set off to the Kuzusuhara ruins.

Although Alicia understood that Sheryl might even banish her if Sheryl came to know that she gave one of the gang’s gun to Erio without permission, Alicia still gave it to Erio, hoping that he would be able to return back safely.

The reason why Alicia volunteered herself to help Sheryl manage the gang was also because it would make it easier for her to give some of the gang’s guns to Erio. Moreover, she thought that if she became useful to Sheryl, she might be able to change Sheryl’s opinion bit by bit.

But Sheryl’s face turned sour.

“No.”

Although Alicia was staring at Sheryl with pleading eyes, Sheryl did not soften back at all as she continued.

“Just no, it hasn’t even been a month since that happened, you know? There’s no way I would let him join back in such a short time! Akira would visit this place regularly from now on, you know. So if he catches the sight of Erio, it might end up worse than having to banish him. And he might even get angry at the other kids too. Don’t you even understand that?!”

There was silence between them. Although she said that, both of them did not yield back. Sheryl then said coldly.

“If that’s all, then get back to work and cool your head off.”

“…Alright.”

Alicia then exited the room while hanging her head low.

Sheryl let out a sigh and stood up as she was about to head back to her work, but suddenly Alicia came running back to her.

“Sheryl! Erio is here.”

Sheryl glared at Alicia and said coldly.

“Kick him out. Alicia, you’re so obstinate. Just give it a rest already or…”

But then Alicia added to her report.

“…He has come here with Akira.”

Sheryl suddenly stiffened.

She then hurried to the room where Akira was waiting for her, but before she entered the room, she stopped near the door to check Akira’s mood. She then hid her sour feelings and entered the room. As she stepped into the room, she smiled at Akira while ignoring Erio who was sitting beside Akira and awkwardly looking at her.

“Welcome. Thank you very much for visiting us again today… Uhh, did Erio bother you again? Umm, please let me say this beforehand, Erio was

banished from the gang since that happened. So if he did something to you, we have nothing to do with him anymore…”

In contrast to Sheryl who was trying to be as polite as possible in order not to ruin Akira’s mood, Akira replied to her casually.

“Yeah, that’s what I heard too. If it’s okay with you, can you let him rejoin the gang? Although, I’m totally fine if you’re not okay with it. After all, you’re the boss here.”

Sheryl was surprised when she heard Akira.

“Well… I don’t really mind if you say so, but… Are you really okay with that?”

“Yeah, after all, he helped me a bit with my work today.”

Sheryl was in no position to reject Akira. If Akira told her to banish someone, she would do it without any hesitation. It also meant that she would accept anyone to her gang if Akira told her to do so. Even if she found it strange or shocking, or even if she actually had some qualms in doing so, she would not do anything to ruin Akira’s mood. Sheryl then smiled fondly at Akira as she said.

“I understand. If that is the case, then I’ll accept him.”

Erio looked relieved as he let out a sigh. Alicia looked very happy when she heard that. While Sheryl was at a loss as to whether or not she should ask for the details. Akira then turned to Erio and said with a serious look.

“Erio, don’t say anything unnecessary to Sheryl. And Sheryl, don’t ask anything unnecessary to Erio. Okay?”

“I-I understand.”

“Okay.”

After hearing Erio answer back nervously and Sheryl who was smiling, Akira lightly nodded and said.

“That’s all for today. Later then.”

Akira then left the building.

Sheryl who was smiling all the time immediately changed to a puzzled look as she turned to Erio.

“So, what happened?”

Erio thought of telling Sheryl what happened, but he knew that he had to be careful not to tell her the complete details of the story. So Erio tried to be very careful with his words.

“…Things happened and Akira ended up saving my life. Then after that… Well, I had to help Akira… After I helped him, I begged him to help me talk with you to rejoin the gang. That’s all.”

Erio then recalled back what he just said to make sure that he did not say anything unnecessary.

“He saved your life, huh… How exactly did he…?”

Sheryl was about to ask for further details but stopped midway as she saw Erio desperately shaking his head.

“Please stop here. I don’t know what I should not reveal when Akira told me not to say anything unnecessary. If you ask me to tell you everything, I’ll just tell you everything from the start. But if Akira comes to know of it, I’ll tell him that you coerced me into telling the details, you know.”

Erio looked scared when he said that. It was so different compared to when he was trying to punch Akira.

Sheryl then asked Erio with a serious look.

“At least tell me this, Akira is not angry at you anymore, right?”

Erio went silent for a while as he seriously thought about the answer before opening his mouth.

“…I think it’s okay. If he wanted me dead, he would have left me to die.”

“I see. In that case, I’ll have you work right away. Make sure to watch over other kids so that they won’t do anything stupid like you. We have guns this time, so if that event repeats again, I’m afraid it won’t just end with Akira punching back.”

Erio replied back with a nod and a serious face.

“Roger that. After all, I don’t want to get into any more trouble too.”

Looking at how Erio’s behaviour changed 180 degrees, Sheryl really wanted to know what happened, but she just shut that feeling off for now. Alicia was so happy that Erio was back in the gang. And with Erio watching around, it was unlikely for anyone to do anything stupid like what he did back then. He could also be useful for telling the new members of his experience as he was someone who did it. That was what Sheryl thought as she stopped herself from digging any deeper into Erio’s story.

Sheryl thought that the same thing happened to Erio back then might also happen to her if she tried to pry further, so she closed the lid tightly on this matter.

Alicia smiled happily as she walked beside Erio.

“I’m really glad that you came back alive, Erio. Not to mention that you got to return back to the gang too. I don’t really understand what happened, but it’s all thanks to Akira, right?”

“Yeah, you’re right, he saved me back in the ruins.”

“I have to thank him properly myself later…”

As Erio looked at Alicia who was talking in such a happy mood, he remembered what happened to him back in the ruins. He was puzzled and thought.

[Now that I think about it, Akira was fighting the monsters back then as if he knew the location of those monsters from the start. He also sometimes

turned to a direction where nothing was present… as if someone was beside him…]

Erio then remembered that Akira told him not to say anything unnecessary. Right when he remembered that, he suddenly felt an unknown terror as he shivered and froze.

Alicia looked puzzled when she saw that Erio suddenly stopped walking.

“Erio, what’s wrong?”

“Nah, it’s nothing.”

“Are you sure? Well, if you say so. By the way, you said that Akira saved you, so you were in danger, right? As I thought, did you get attacked by monsters and then get saved by Akira or something like-“

“Alicia.”

Erio cut her mid-way then looked at her with a serious face. While looking genuinely scared of something, he begged to Alicia who was surprised by his behaviour.

“I beg you. Please don’t ask me anything about that.”

“O-okay.”

Alicia flinched as she answered back and nodded firmly.

Erio finally realized what Akira meant when Akira warned him not to say anything unnecessary.

Erio shivered as he thought about the consequences if he said anything about that to other people. Then he thought about what would happen to Alicia if he told her about Akira. But just thinking about that made a chill run down his spine.

Looking at how Erio was behaving, Alicia worriedly asked him.

“Erio, are you really okay?”

Erio smiled to clear up Alicia’s worry as he replied back.

“…I’m okay.”

Erio then swore to himself to never reveal anything about Akira.

Silavin: Akira basically doesn’t even care about this kid lol.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 22, Ordering An Augmented Suit

Index

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When Akira returned back into his room, he was beaming. He could not contain his happiness. His eyes were locked onto the bundles of money on the floor. It was the payment that he got from selling relics to Katsuragi.

“8,000,000 Aurum…!!! We got 200,000 Aurum just the other day, and I was thinking that the idea of living in a 20,000 Aurum per day room was already crazy enough. But this is just on a completely different level…”

He had to keep his cool outside, but once he returned back inside his room, there was no more need to hold himself back. When he received the money, he did not react much because it did not feel real to him at that time. But now that he looked at the pile of money for the second time, the reality finally seeped in and he was overwhelmed by it.

Although the amount of money overwhelmed him, he had no idea what he would use it for. After all, if he could come up with some useful ideas on how to use this much money, he would not be staying in the slum city. Akira was simply mind blown by it. So for now, he was acting like a person from the slum city who was just lucky enough to get a huge amount of money.

Alpha then calmly warned Akira who was so excited.

“Let me tell you this beforehand, this money will be gone in no time. To be more precise, we will use everything tomorrow’s afternoon.”

Akira was taken aback.

“U-use everything? It’s 8,000,000 Aurum, you know?”

“Yep. That spare money will be used up in no time.”

“Spare money?! No no no, 8,000,000 Aurum is a huge amount of money, you know?!”

With his sense of money, Akira could not understand what Alpha was saying. He remembered that he had to fight to the death against 5 other slum kids a few days ago just over 300 Aurum. The current 8,000,000 Aurum in front of him just could not be compared to mere 300 Aurum. Thus, the number and strength of the people that would be attracted by this money and the level of the danger that it brought would be simply on an entirely different level. But even so, Alpha said that it was only spare money and Akira’s brain could not fully comprehend that.

Alpha then answered back calmly as if to rectify his sense of money.

“It’s just spare money. Do you know about those medicines used by the Hunters in the Frontline? I’m not even sure you can use this money to buy enough portions of that medicine for one battle, you know? That’s the worth of this spare money.”

“…But still, you just can’t compare me with those amazing Hunters.”

“You need to dream big. It’s for the sake of exploring the ruins that I mentioned to you when we first met.”

Akira was a bit shocked but he did not look fully convinced. He flinched a bit when he heard how Alpha wanted him to rethink his standard. He then asked Alpha.

“By the way. You haven’t told me anything about the ruin that you want me to explore. So, what kind of ruin is it?”

Alpha smiled meaningfully.

“It’s a secret for now. After all, it would be a problem if you know how dangerous it is and decide to give up early on. But the least I’ll say is that it’s not a place that you can reach with your current equipment.”

“I don’t really understand it but… That information in itself was enough to discourage me.”

“Don’t worry. Once you get better equipment, it’ll change your perception of danger too. It’ll change your opinion from impossible to possible. That’s why we’ll use that 8,000,000 Aurum to buy new equipment. Just think that your goal, for now, is to upgrade your equipment. By getting better equipment, you’ll be able to explore more dangerous ruins which will allow you to earn more money. Then we’ll use that money to get better and better equipment. So we’ll go with that cycle to improve ourselves.”

Akira tried to imagine what was lying beyond that endless cycle, but he could not come up with anything.

“So, until the day when you become stronger, have equipment suitable for your strength, and have a different sense of money compared to now, you should give your best effort. Worry not, I’ll also do my best to help you.”

“…Well, of course, I’ll do my best.”

To Alpha who was smiling confidently, Akira could only reply back with a smile.

“And it’s as Katsuragi said, top-class Hunters usually don’t buy equipment using cash. It’s because the amount of money that they use in a transaction is enormous. It’s not like they can walk around carrying a large amount of money. Thus, it’s common for them to open a bank account and pay using a card. It might be a good idea for you to open one soon.”

Akira then looked back at the bundles of money on the floor. He could only smile bitterly as he realized that his sense of money had really undergone some subtle changes compared to just a few seconds ago.

“Yep yep, I knew it, you’re messing with my sense of money… Haah, I guess I can no longer live in the slum city.”

“That’s a good development. Do your best.”

Akira smiled bitterly to Alpha who was smiling for a different reason. He then shook it off and said.

“So now, we’re going to buy equipment with this money, right?”

“We’re going to buy equipment that will increase the effectiveness of my support. I guess you should be able to at least buy the lowest level equipment with 8,000,000 Aurum.”

Akira was very surprised as he asked Alpha.

“8,000,000 Aurum only enough to buy the lowest level, huh? What in the world are we going to buy with this money?”

“Augmented suit.”

“Augmented suit? It’s that thing that allows me to carry heavy stuff, right?”

“Yep. But it’s a different story for you. Since you have my support, it’ll allow you to do a lot more things other than just carrying heavy stuff. So you can look forward to it.”

Alpha smiled confidently as she said that.

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Akira went to Shizuka’s shop the next day.

When he entered the shop, he saw Shizuka behind the counter resting her chin on her hand looking bored. But the moment she noticed Akira, she

immediately stood properly and smiled at him.

“Welcome. Are you here to buy ammo again?”

“Nope. I’m actually here to buy equipment, you see…”

Shizuka smiled as if to tease Akira.

“Oh my, it has been quite a while since you bought that AAH rifle, so you’re finally willing to buy new equipment, huh? I’m happy to hear that, you know. After all, it’ll be hard for my shop if I only rely on the ammo trade.”

“I-I’m sorry.”

Akira apologized while being flustered. Looking at that, Shizuka giggled and apologised.

“I was only joking. I’m sorry. So then, what do you want to ask me…?”

“Actually, you see…”

Akira then let out a sigh and explained the real reason why he was there, to buy an augmented suit.

After hearing his explanation, Shizuka whistled.

“…Augmented suit, huh? Well, it’s not like I’m not selling those here, but to be honest, my shop focuses more on guns and ammo. I didn’t put any augmented suits on display, so it’s not like you can browse for the real thing here. And even if you place your order, it’ll take some time before you can get it since I order it from outside. Although I still can do a basic setting for augmented suits, I think it’s better if you buy one from a specialized shop, you know?”

“Is that so? But I don’t know any specialized shop for augmented suits though. And even if I know one, I’m not even sure they’ll let me in. Not to mention that I know next to nothing about augmented suits, so I’m afraid the shopkeeper would swindle me to buying something bad. Sara-san also

said to consult with you if I have any questions about equipment, so I'll be really thankful if you can help me here."

Shizuka smiled happily.

"I can't refuse if you put it that way. Okay then, if you're okay with my intuition, I'll give you a hand. So then, how much money are you planning to spend on this augmented suit?"

Akira was so happy that Shizuka decided to help him, so he answered back casually while smiling.

"It's 8,000,000 Aurum and it's in cash."

Shizuka was a bit surprised when she heard Akira's answer, she then looked at Akira as if she was interrogating him.

"…This much money, where did you get that from? Is it from selling relics? You can't get 8,000,000 Aurum unless you gathered a lot of relics or obtained some high-quality ones, right? Either way, you would have had to go to dangerous areas to get those relics. Although you just got almost killed not too long ago, did you really go somewhere that dangerous already?"

Shizuka was able to immediately pinpoint where to get such relics using her intuition and her ability to analyze. So Akira panicked as he answered back.

"Ahhh, well, I was actually stocking up relics for a while and sold all of them in one go. Because it's common for a small kid like me to get targeted if I go walking around with a lot of money, I was only selling a portion of my relics and hid the rest. Now I just sold all of those relics that I piled up. I'm trying my best not to put myself in danger. And it's as you said, I almost got killed not too long ago, that's why I'm thinking of buying better equipment. The reason I decided on buying an augmented suit is so that I can run faster when I get into a dangerous situation. That's why I'm thinking of spending more money than usual to avoid being in the same situation like back then…"

Shizuka’s gaze was intense, but she did that because she was worried about Akira. When Akira noticed it, he started spouting excuses in a panic that he did not know what he was even saying. He was making excuses as if he was a kid who was desperately trying to come up with any excuses that he could to avoid getting scolded.

Akira was not used to having someone worried about him. Even more so when it was unconditional. Although he did not realize it, Akira was actually feeling happy. So he was actually in a panic because of the embarrassment and the guilt that he was feeling when he realized Shizuka was worrying for him.

But if it was Sheryl who said that to him, he would have replied back with “shut up” or “stop asking that”. There was a crucial difference between them that Akira himself did not realize.

[Although Akira answered back in such a fashion to dodge her question, there was no deceit in his answer. In order not to do anything too dangerous, it was necessary for him to do something with a little bit of risk. There were no lies in those words too. It was not like he did that because he wanted to, he had to do that if he wanted to survive. After all, for surviving in the slum city as a Hunter he had to take some risk.]

That was what Shizuka’s intuition was telling her as she stared at Akira. She then warned Akira with a tone as if she was seriously giving a warning to a small kid.

“Just don’t do anything too dangerous unnecessarily, okay?”

“Okay.”

Seeing Akira sincerely nodding, she replied with a smile and a nod too. She then returned back to her shopkeeper routine.

“Alright then. Shall we hear what kind of augmented suit you want? And since telling me is free, you can say whatever your preferences are.”

As Shizuka was listening to what kind of augmented suit Akira wanted, she looked a bit surprised. After all, there was one thing that she did not expect to come from someone who was buying an augmented suit for the first time.

Akira wanted to get an augmented suit that could operate for a long time. It might still have a limit on how long it could be used, but rather than a suit that would give him enough strength to send vehicles flying with his fist, Akira preferred a suit that he could use to increase his overall strength. He was not looking for a thick strong augmented suit that would give him protection equal to a tank or a mechanized soldier, putting on such an augmented suit would take about an hour and help from someone else too. Rather than that, Akira wanted a suit that he could put on and take off easily, something that would not need too much work to put on. Up to this point, Shizuka had no questions at all.

The thing that Shizuka found strange was because Akira wanted an augmented suit that had multiple control devices in it. So then Shizuka asked Akira for more details.

“Well, it’s true that there are many types of augmented suits. There are mechanized augmented suits with no control device or with a control device. There are also augmented suits that affect the whole body, and of course, there are also those that only affect limited parts of the body. I also heard that most of the augmented suits have its control device embedded into an information terminal or similar devices… But a whole-body control device, huh. Akira, where did you hear that from?”

Akira looked troubled when Shizuka asked him that. He actually heard about that from Alpha but there was no way he could say that to Shizuka.

“…Well, it’s not like I know anything about the details. I only heard that it’s a good type of augmented suit… I’m sorry, did I do something against the norms of picking my first augmented suit or did I say anything strange?”

As Shizuka observed Akira’s behaviour, she inferred that it was not like Akira actually knew any details. He just came up with that after hearing it from someone.

[I guess he consulted with another Hunter about getting an augmented suit and that Hunter must have boasted about the type of the augmented suit that he was using.]

Shizuka's intuition was almost spot on, she was satisfied with that guess and decided not to pry any further.

"It's okay. It's just that you asked something that only a specialist would know. Although it might be just by pure chance, that actually surprised me a bit. Don't worry, I got the gist of what you want. I can now go ahead and choose an augmented suit based on your request for you, but are you really okay with that?"

"Yes, please."

"Now about the payment, since I'll be buying from another shop and being a merchant myself, it would be problematic if I don't pay upfront for the product's full price. So I'll call you after I decide on an augmented suit. You can make sure whether it fits your preference or not before putting in an order for real, then you can pay for it afterwards. Well, if we do this, it'll end up taking more time before you finally get one, so are you okay with the arrangement?"

Akira thought for a bit before asking Shizuka.

"If I pay you now, would it be faster?"

"Well of course. A negotiation with the other merchant would definitely go smoothly if I can pay for the product right on the spot. There are also cases where a 10,000,000 Aurum that you would get next year would be worth less than the 10,000 Aurum that you need now. Cash is pretty powerful, you know. In a negotiation, the buyers want to make sure that they can get their product cheaply and the sellers want to make sure that they can get their money, so cash is really important, you know."

"In that case, I'll pay you now. I made a bank account so you can charge money from there. And also, please charge for my medicines and ammo from the same bank account too."

Akira then pulled out his Hunter ID. He went to the Hunter Office before visiting Shizuka's shop and had opened his bank account. Although it was still new, he was already able to use his ID as a debit card. He only needed to confirm his identity and then all the bills from ammo, medicines and any other bills from Shizuka's shop would be automatically paid through his account.

Shizuka looked a bit unsure as she asked.

"Uhhh, are you really okay with this? Once the money is transferred, It's not like I can return it even if you ask me to, you know? Moreover, I might even pick a subpar product, you know?"

"It's okay."

Shizuka looked a bit troubled, but she then warned Akira with a serious face.

"…Although I'm happy that you really trust me, it's better if you think carefully first before deciding something like this."

There were a lot of merchants who wanted to swindle as much money as possible from a Hunter. But those merchants were nothing compared to those who thought that these Hunters would die soon anyway and scammed Hunters to squeeze all the money they could. If Akira did this in another shop, it would definitely be very dangerous, and Shizuka was worried about it.

Akira also looked troubled for a while before answering back with a straight face.

"…I think the result won't change even if I try to think hard about it. If I could not even trust the merchant recommended by the person who saved my life, then I would never be able to buy anything from any other merchant anymore. So it's alright. Even if something bad happens, I'm sure it's because of my bad luck. After all, I'm someone who got attacked by 2 groups of monsters consecutively in a day. So my luck is already bad

enough. And that’s something that I can’t change no matter how hard I think.”

In the end, Akira just smiled bitterly. Shizuka could only listen to him without saying anything.

Akira was trying his best to find a few shops that he could trust. He then picked Shizuka’s shop and decided to buy equipment that would help him survive in the ruins. Shizuka was so happy when she realized that and smiled back to Akira to give him a peace of mind. She was smiling as the shop manager who had confidence in her own merchandise.

“Well, if you put so much trust in me, then I can’t step back now. Alright then, just leave it to me.”

She then took the Hunter ID from Akira’s hand, held it above the terminal on the counter as she operated the terminal. With this, the transaction should be taken care of. And just like Alpha said, 8,000,000 Aurum was gone from Akira’s account in just one second.

“So Akira has become a Hunter with a bank account now, huh? Just be careful, if you’re not, then you might end up debt-ridden, you know?”

Shizuka gave him that warning as she returned Akira’s Hunter ID. After all, in reality, there were a lot of Hunters who ended up being debt-ridden from buying too much ammo or having to pay a penalty for the damage that they had done after failing a request.

When Hunter’s account went below zero, the Hunter Office would lend them money, of course with interest attached. The Hunter who could not repay their debt would be apprehended by the Hunter Office and sent to explore dangerous ruins. There were also Hunters who could not escape from that loop and ended up spending their life working as forced labour to pay back their infinitely piling debt.

Akira then replied back firmly to Shizuka’s warning.

“I understand.”

“That’s a good reply. So then, I’ll take some measurements for the augmented suit, come over here.”

Shizuka brought Akira behind the counter and to the back room. The back room of the shop was filled with ammo, guns and other goods.

“I’ll need to take precise measurements so take off all your clothes except for your underwear.”

Akira obediently took off his clothes just like he was told to. Shizuka then used a handheld body size scanner to measure Akira’s body size.

“Try not to move since it’ll cause inaccuracy in measurements, okay?”

“Is it important to be that precise?”

“Well, the human body changes daily, so it’s not really that important. But still, I think it’s better to take a measurement that is as accurate as possible. If you go to a specialized shop, they’ll even take a more precise measurement, you know? You’ll have to put on a body measurement suit and get into a huge measurement device to measure everything to the minutest detail. Not just your body and skeleton measurement, it’ll also measure the position of the organs and muscles, neural network, the number of nanomachines inside the body and all the other information to. The augmented suit maker can maximize the effectiveness of the augmented suit by using that information. These custom-made augmented suits are better than the ready-made augmented suits, and of course, their price is also worlds apart.”

Shizuka kept measuring Akira’s body as she was saying that, but she flinched as she saw Akira’s body condition.

Akira’s body was full of wounds. Among all the small and big old wounds, the wound that he got from fighting the monster groups not too long ago was sticking out the most. Since he directly administered the medicine into the fatal wound, the life-preserving and healing nanomachine forcefully closed that big wound in a short time, thus it left a big scar that looked like

a rift. If you think about it, it was not the right way of treating a wound, after all.

That scar was caused by his bad luck, but he was lucky to be able to survive from such a wound. Had his luck been worse even by a bit, he would have died because of that wound. As long as he was working as a Hunter, he would keep getting such wounds in the future.

Shizuka was not aware that she had stopped operating the measuring device after catching a glimpse of that wound. Akira thought that it was strange, so he called her.

“Shizuka-san?”

“…Ah, it’s nothing.”

Shizuka immediately regained her composure and smiled at Akira before continuing with the measurement.

“Alright!! It’s done! You can put on your clothes now. It would take at least 1 week and up to 1 month before you can pick up your augmented suit. I’ll contact you when the suit arrives, please come as soon as possible to pick it up, okay?”

“Okay, thank you very much for all the help.”

“Don’t mention it. After all, if you get your augmented suit, then it means that I can recommend you more expensive and heavier equipment. So I’m looking forward to you to frequent my shop more often.”

Akira returned to the counter together with Shizuka and said a proper goodbye to her before leaving the shop.

Shizuka waved at Akira as she sent him off. Once Akira exited the shop, she smiled excitedly.

“Now then, since he put that much faith in me, I guess I’ll have to give my everything for this job.”

Shizuka immediately headed out to do her job in a good mood.

***

When Akira arrived in his room, he asked Alpha what he should do next.

“Aren’t we going for shooting training today?”

“Let’s spend our time inside the room until you get your augmented suit. After all, I feel like you can do much studying or information collection within these few days. So this is a good time for doing that. If we go to a cheaper room, I guess we have enough money to spend for a month.”

Akira looked like he did not want to do that.

“…Are we going to take a cheaper room? In that case, we can at least go to the ruins one more time…”

Of course, if he rented a cheaper room, then he would get fewer amenities. It was out of the question to rent a room without a bath, that was why Akira suggested going hunting for relics one more time, but Alpha casually rejected that idea.

“Rejected, I did tell you that I underestimated your luck, remember? So you’re not going to step out of the room until you get your augmented suit, you get that? Even you want to be able to read and write as soon as possible, right?”

“Well, that’s true, but…”

Although Akira had been studying under Alpha’s effective guidance and had already understood numbers and letters better than before, he still needed Alpha’s help on a daily basis.

“Let’s immediately start now. If you get a good result, I’ll give you a reward by taking off a piece of my clothes… That will make you work hard, right? After all, you’re a healthy young boy.”

“Stop fooling around and let’s start.”

Akira had a bad feeling about it as he tried to change the subject, but Alpha just would not let it go.

“In that case, let’s do it backwards. I’ll put on a piece of cloth if you get a good result. So I’ll start naked, if you don’t want me to remain naked, you should do your best in studying.”

Right after she said that Alpha’s clothes vanished and she was stark naked.

Alpha showed off her glossy wonderful skin in front of Akira without hiding anything. Her appearance could only be described as flawless. Since that appearance was produced by a very complex calculation, it could be changed at will. Alpha’s body was simply so beautiful that it did not feel real at all and she had adjusted her body to suit Akira’s preference. In the present condition where she was not out in the wasteland, her body was way more charming than usual.

“Stop doing such a stupid thing and put on your clothes already!!”

Looking at Akira who was so flustered, Alpha smiled as if she was having the time of her life while still being naked.

“Yep, it seems that it’s working. Let’s start then.”

After that, Akira really started studying under that condition, and as she promised, Alpha did put on a piece of cloth every time Akira got a good score. But she always chose to put on seducing dresses with bold and exposing design, it was so captivating and charming that it disturbed Akira’s concentration.

In the end, it took a week before Akira could make Alpha put on a proper dress.

Silavin: That learning experience…

Hmmmmm…

Is it a blessing or not?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 23, A Boy Who Is Like a Landmine

Index

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Akira spent his days studying inside his room. It had been 2 weeks since he placed the order for the augmented suit. As Alpha declared in the beginning, he moved to a room without a bath. He tried his best to hold back his desire to take a bath by showering. Also, he did not even step a foot outside the city. He basically spent his days focusing only on studying.

But even so, Akira was actually in a good mood. It was because he was looking forward to getting his first 8,000,000 Aurum augmented suit. His mood got even better when Shizuka contacted him to inform about the expected time of arrival of his order. Ever since her call, he could not contain his excitement.

Alpha's methods were also really useful in teaching Akira. First of all, she started by expanding Akira's views, so that he would notice things that he did not notice before. In order to build up an effective learning environment, she used a flying electronic blackboard and a white notebook which was filled with images and letters for teaching. Akira had bought these learning materials some time back. Her teaching methods were nothing short of perfect.

Not to mention that her method of teaching for every subject was very polished. Her explanation was very easy to understand and highly effective. She was teaching Akira one on one, so she could focus all her attention on him. That small and cheap room turned into an optimal learning environment that normally could not be created without a lot of money. Thanks to that, Akira's growth was amazing.

Then one day, Alpha who was pointing at the writings on the electronic blackboard suddenly pointed to Akira's information terminal.

"Akira, there's a call from Sheryl"

Akira extended his hand to reach for his information terminal. But after he picked up his information terminal, he could not see any call notification from Sheryl. But then suddenly the display showed that there was an incoming call as the call's ringtone rang. Akira looked a bit puzzled.

"How did you know that before it actually came?"

Alpha smiled meaningfully.

"As I explained before, I'm actually connected to that network, so I'm just leveraging it."

Akira was wondering if she was actually saying the truth as he picked up the call. As he answered the call, he could hear Sheryl's panicked and nervous voice.

"This is Sheryl. I'm sorry that I'm calling when you're busy. But may I ask you to come to the base? Actually, people from the other gangs said that they really want to meet and talk to you. Of course, I did not agree, but they started saying that they would personally come to the inn where you're staying, you see…"

Akira immediately got suspicious of something.

"They want to meet and talk to me? But you're the boss of the gang, right?"

“They said that they have nothing to talk with me. It seems those people outside the gang are thinking that you’re the boss of the gang and I’m just your proxy, that’s why they would not negotiate with me.”

Akira took his time thinking. Because he spent days inside his room without stepping out, not even once, the part of him that was unconsciously seeking for a break, made his decision.

“Alright then, I’ll be heading there now. Ask them what they actually want to discuss with me.”

“I understand. Thank you very much.”

After Sheryl replied back nervously, Akira ended the call from Sheryl.

Alpha looked at Akira as if she did not approve it.

“I did tell you that you’re not stepping outside the room until you get your augmented suit, right?”

“Please don’t say that. At least let me step outside once in a while. It’s not like I’m going to the wasteland, after all. So it’s okay, right? I also did tell Sheryl that I’m coming there.”

Alpha smiled as if she was giving permission to a small kid.

“Geez, it can’t be helped then. Be sure to prepare everything before going out, okay?”

“Okay.”

Akira prepared his equipment just like he used to when he was about to go to the wasteland before setting off to Sheryl’s base.

__*__*__*__

After Sheryl ended up her call with Akira, she let out a sigh while still staring at her information terminal.

[…Although it seems that he thinks it’s a pain in the ass, he did say that he’ll come. Thank goodness.]

She then turned to the people in question and looked at them with a stern look. It was a man named Wataba and his companions who sought to see Akira.

“It seems that Akira would come here. And he told me to ask what you want to discuss with him. So I’m asking you this again, what business do you have with him?”

Wataba answered back in a tone as if he was mocking Sheryl.

“I’ll talk when that Akira boy is here.”

“Are you not listening?! I was told to ask you what you want to discuss with him, you know?!”

Sheryl glared at Wataba. But Wataba did not even flinch, instead, Wataba replied back as if to intimidate her.

“You’re so noisy!! I’m telling you that I’ll only talk when that boy is here!! So just shut up!!”

Wataba glared back at Sheryl and her friends. He was actually a part of Sibea’s gang, so he knew pretty well about Sheryl. And since he knew her position back in Sibea’s gang, he was looking down at Sheryl.

Wataba had other business to do the day when Sibea brought some people to attack Akira, that was why he could keep his life till now. For a few days after Akira killed Sibea, he was still wary of Akira. But as time passed by, he started to think that Sibea was killed just because he was unlucky that day.

Wataba thought that Sheryl was merely a girl who could do nothing but entice men and Akira was just a boy who got manipulated by Sheryl and ended up supporting her gang. Both of them were nothing big. His behaviour here was motivated by these thoughts.

Sheryl was on her limit glaring at Wataba and his companions. She could not pressure them to tell her what they wanted to talk about. Although she had a gun with her, it was the same for Wataba too. She had no will to pull the trigger for a fight.

It could also be felt by both Sheryl and Wataba that mockery and superiority feeling was spreading among Wataba's group while nervousness and the feeling of being cornered were spreading among Sheryl's group. And it only got worse the more they waited. Wataba even stopped being wary of Akira. Akira was a hunter, so Wataba had to at least be more careful when dealing with Akira. But that sense of wariness had already been gone from him.

Then right at that time, Akira appeared. Everyone immediately shifted their attention to Akira. Akira was able to feel the mood inside the room and immediately understood that it would definitely turn into a problem. Everyone's attention still focused on Akira as he walked and sat down beside Sheryl. He then looked obviously annoyed as he asked Sheryl.

"So then, what is it now?"

"W-well…"

As Sheryl was stumbling on her words, Wataba laughed and said.

"That girl could not get anything from me, you know! She could not accomplish what you ordered her to!"

Sheryl turned and glared at Wataba, her gaze was filled with despise. But Wataba ignored her.

Akira let out a sigh before asking Wataba instead.

"So, what do you want?"

Wataba then answered Akira's question firmly.

"It's simple, give me this base and its territory."

Sheryl and the other kids tensed up when they heard his demand.

Sheryl's gang inherited the territory from Sibea's gang. But it was hard for them to take care of that huge territory with their current members. An unclaimed territory in the slum city would only attract problem and that would be a bad thing both for Sheryl and for the other people in the slum city.

Wataba's boss, Shijima, thought that it would be easy to at least get those surplus territories that Sheryl's gang could not manage from Sheryl by having a small negotiation with Sheryl's gang. He thought that at most, they would need to use little intimidation during the negotiation to obtain it. Thus he sent Wataba, someone who already knew Sheryl, to have a discussion with her gang. But then Wataba got ahead of himself after seeing how Sheryl's gang treated them, so he changed the demand without asking for any permission from his boss.

Of course, it was not something that Sheryl could accept. Thus Sheryl reflexively shouted back at Wataba.

"Are you kidding me?! There's no way we can accept that!!"

"I'm not asking you, so just shut up."

Wataba shouted back to intimidate her, Sheryl winced and shrunk back when she heard him. Wataba looked annoyed as he was staring at Sheryl with a mocking expression. He then turned back to Akira and asked him in a fashion as if he knew what Akira would say.

"So, what do you say? Of course, you're going to give them to me, right?"

"No, Sheryl also made it clear just now. So don't ask me."

Akira answered back casually and firmly, something that Wataba did not expect.

Wataba was dumbfounded from Akira's reply, but it was immediately replaced by irritation. So pushed by that irritation, he asked Akira.

“I’ve heard about you before, this gang is yours, right?”

“This gang and this base are Sheryl’s. Sheryl is the boss here. It’s not me, so don’t ask me. Go ahead and ask her instead. If you had asked her, I wouldn’t have had to come here like this, you know. Sheryl, don’t just call me for every single thing. So that’s everything, right? Just go back home now, I’m leaving this place after this too.”

The way Akira behaved fueled Wataba’s irritation to anger.

“You! Boy! Aren’t you getting ahead of yourself? I’m part of Shijima-san’s gang, which is on a different level compared to this shitty weak gang filled with small kids. We also have a lot of members and a huge territory! So don’t think this will end well if you refuse!!”

“Hell if I care.”

Wataba was shouting in anger when he said that. But Akira seemed like he did not give a damn and replied as if it was someone else’s problem.

As things did not go as he expected, and seeing how Akira mocked him, Wataba’s mood considerably worsened. His face warped matching his mood. But even so, it did not affect Akira at all which only made him more irritated and angry.

But his face immediately turned back to relaxed expression mixed with mockery. Then Wataba smiled invincibly.

“Hey kid, do you really think that we know nothing about you?”

Akira finally reacted to that as he looked a bit surprised.

“…What exactly do you know about me?”

Wataba’s expression relaxed after Akira finally reacted as he expected.

“As I said, my gang has a lot of members. So it’s an easy thing for us to find where you’re staying, you know?”

Akira called Alpha through telepathy.

“Alpha.”

Alpha got what Akira meant from that short signal.

“This position is not good. So you need to move.”

Akira then stood and walked to the location that Alpha pointed to and he stood leaning against the wall. After that, he replied back to Wataba as if he was mocking him.

“You found out the inn where I’m staying, huh? So then what? Are you going to gather people and attack the place next? Are you stupid? Are you seriously thinking that I’m the only Hunter staying in that place? You’ll make an enemy out of the security people contracted by that inn, you know? Are you even sane? If you want to kill yourself, do that without causing a problem to other people, will you?”

Seeing how Akira did not show even a trace of fear after knowing that they found out where he was staying, Wataba became obstinate and shouted back.

“T-that’s not all!! We also investigated the shop that you frequent too!! Are you really okay if anything happens to that shop and the owner of that shop?!!”

Akira let out a sigh while intentionally hiding the dark feeling that was welling inside his heart. He carefully reached for the gun behind him trying not to get noticed as he warned Wataba and his companions.

“I’ll at least let you know this out of kindness. That weapon merchant called Katsuragi might look like a normal weapon merchant from the outside, but he’s strong enough to even sell his goods to the Frontline. If you underestimate and try to attack him, you’ll only end up killing yourself, you know?”

After hearing that, Wataba smiled vilely. It was enough for Akira to make his decision on what to do next.

“Alpha, I’m counting on you.”

“Akira, you might want to rethink abou-“

Alpha understood what Akira wanted to do and tried to stop him first. But before she could say anything, Wataba laughed confidently and said.

“Not that one. I’m talking about the girl-“

Suddenly a gunshot echoed through the room. As the anti-monster bullet tore through Wataba’s chest, it sent his body flying straight to the wall behind him. Wataba’s face was frozen in surprise as it fell forward and made a *bompf* sound as he hit the ground. He was killed instantly. The blood and flesh that was sent flying when he was shot dyed the wall red and the blood flowing out from his dead body formed a pool on the floor.

No one expected that Akira would suddenly shoot and kill Wataba without even a shred of hesitation.

The other men that were accompanying Wataba were so shocked that they were frozen in place. Then the unlucky guy who regained his composure first tried to reach his gun only to get shot on his leg by Akira and rolled over on the floor. His leg that was shot with an anti-monster bullet was blown to small pieces.

That man was assaulted with intense pain as he was spouting curses while writhing on the floor. Akira then pointed his gun towards the other men to stop them from doing anything foolish.

The small children there finally started screaming. Some of them could only stand frozen there. Some of them ran to the corner of the room. And some of them ran outside the room. The negotiation turned into a fight and there was only a handful of them who knew how to handle a fight.

Alpha then asked Akira with a stern expression.

“Akira. Was there any need to kill him?”

Akira answered back firmly and swiftly.

“Yes.”

Alpha let out a sigh of exasperation and a little bit of irritation before smiling like usual.

“I see, it can’t be helped then. It’s not over yet, so don’t drop your guard.”

“Yeah, I know.”

Although Alpha did not care how many people Akira killed, she wanted Akira to at least avoid any meaningless killing.

Despite the fact that Akira did not like problems, he was actually making a problem for himself here. He thought that it was all because of his bad luck, but the truth was that he kept doing things that attracted bad luck. Akira himself did not realize his contradictory behaviour. It was the vague moral standard inside him that pushed Akira into doing such a thing. Wataba’s remark there was the thing that was deemed unacceptable by Akira’s moral standard and incited the fight.

Alpha thought that it would be hard to predict Akira’s behaviour as long she did not understand that vague moral standard Akira was holding on to. Thus she decided to continue observing Akira for now.

Akira kept his gun pointing at the rest of Wataba’s men to keep them in check as he warned them.

“Throw down your gun…. 5… 4… 3…”

The men who were still standing there threw down their guns. Only the man who was shot on the leg was still writhing on the ground while applying pressure on his open wound. Akira kept counting down while aiming his gun at the head of the man who was on the ground.

“… 2… 1…”

“Wait!! I’ll throw down his gun!! So please don’t shoot!”

The other men tried to stop Akira in panic. He then took the gun from his friend who could not do that because of his injury and the pain. After that, he took his own gun too, dropped them on the ground and kicked them away. Only after that did Akira finally lower his gun.

Silence finally returned to the room. Everyone was terrified and looked at Akira who shot Wataba without hesitation or warning. But it did not bother Akira at all.

Akira then asked the rest of Wataba’s men.

“So then, you guys are also members of that Shijima’s gang, right?”

“Y-yes. Don’t shoot, please don’t shoot, okay?”

“Take me to him. Sheryl, come with me”

Sheryl could not comprehend what just happened and was frozen in place. But once her brain finally caught up with what had just happened, and understood what Akira said, she once again was shocked frozen for a different reason. She finally regained her composure as her face twitched.

“…Eeehhhh!!???”

Sheryl shrieked.

Shijima’s gang was just like Sheryl’s gang, it was one of the many gangs inside the slum city. But unlike Sheryl’s small and weak gang, it was a medium-sized gang with a lot of members and a large territory.

Akira and Sheryl went to the base of Shijima’s gang.

The hall inside the base was filled with Shijima’s subordinates. Akira and Sheryl were able to pass through that hall because they had Shijima’s gang members, who came along with them to guide them through.

Shijima knew of Akira's arrival from one of his subordinates who came to him in a panic. He was still thinking whether to meet them in person or not after hearing the report from his subordinate. After all, his report was hard to believe. But considering that Sheryl, who was the boss of the gang that inherited Sibea gang's territory, coming here together with Akira, who was the Hunter supporting Sheryl's gang, he finally decided to meet them in person.

As Shijima entered the room where Akira and Sheryl were waiting for him, Shijima came to understand the truth of the report from his subordinate.

Akira was standing there with a calm look while Sheryl looking scared beside him. Beside them was his subordinate who was trying to keep the pressure on his shot-wound as his friends supported him. And finally, there was Wataba's dead body that was dragged all the way here as its traces were left on the floor.

Akira dragged that corpse himself all the way here to meet Shijima. Everything that Shijima saw inside that room confirmed the report that he had heard from his men.

The guy who lost his leg was kept there to give Shijima his report. But then Shijima said.

"…That guy may go. Help him treat his wound. Hurry!"

Shijima's men who were supporting that injured man helped him to exit the room. Shijima saw them off before he turned back to Akira and calmly asked him.

"Are you the one who did that? Ah, right, I'm Shijima, the leader of this gang."

Akira answered back in a calm tone.

"Yes, I did that. I'm Akira, and this is Sheryl. Although she did not do anything about killing this guy, she's accompanying me here since she's

still involved in this case. So I think it’s better if she understands the situation too.”

“I see. So then, why are you here?”

“To confirm a few things about the negotiation.”

“I see. Well, have a seat.”

There was a table in the middle of that room, sofas were placed around that table. Akira respected Shijima’s words and took a seat. Shijima also took a seat after him. Thus Sheryl was left standing alone there.

But Akira then casually called her.

“Sheryl, are you not going to sit?”

Akira had real guts that no one would expect from a small kid who was in the middle of the enemy’s territory.

Shijima then followed him.

“Won’t you take a seat?”

He was acting normally although they killed one of his men.

Sheryl awkwardly took a seat beside Akira. Her reaction was to be expected since she was inside the base of a gang that was superior to hers and she came with the person who killed one of his gang’s members.

Shijima looked at Akira. To him, Akira looked like a normal boy without anything extraordinary about him. But in this very room, there was a corpse of the man that the ‘normal’ boy just killed, the boss of the gang that man belonged to, and the other members of that gang who were equipped with guns and looking at him with an unfriendly look. And the ‘normal’ boy was here in the same room with all these people, but he was acting without any care as if all these things did not bother him at all. Thus it was obvious that he was anything but a ‘normal’ boy. Moreover, looking at how Sheryl

nervously sat beside him, it only served to make him look even more out of the norm.

Sheryl was trying her hardest to put on a front, but she could not do that as she was trembling and sweating profusely. She tried to look away from Shijima, only to end up looking at Wataba. Thus, she tried to look away again in panic. She just could not calm down.

As Shijima saw how Sheryl was behaving, he put down his guard on Sheryl but became more wary of Akira.

“Confirming a few things about the negotiation, huh? I don’t know what exactly happened, but well, you can go ahead.”

As he said that, Shijima pulled out his information terminal and operated it. He was trying to show that he had no intention of seriously hearing what they had to say.

Sheryl knew well the strength difference between her and Shijima, thus she did not think that Shijima was rude for doing that. Or more like, she was thankful that the rest of the gang did not kill them even after they saw the corpse of one of their comrades.

Akira then casually warned Shijima.

“It’ll only end up with both of us dead, so you better stop.”

Shijima who was operating his terminal immediately stopped his hand right before he sent a notification to gather everyone in his gang who could fight.

Originally, Shijima thought that Akira had come here to apologize after killing one of his men when their negotiation turned into a fight. But once he met them for real, putting Sheryl aside, Shijima understood that Akira did not show even a trace of sign that he was here to apologize.

Shijima understood what Akira was trying to say. If he sent that notification to his gang members then both sides would be killed before they could gather up. Akira would slaughter everyone in the room. It can be inferred

from his words that he had the ability to kill all the people here. And Akira was not just signalling that to Shijima, he actually said it.

Shijima understood that Akira warned him to stop if he did not want that to happen.

Shijima started thinking while trying not to make any changes to his expression. Even if it was only a bluff or simply intimidation from Akira, there was no doubt that people would get killed if it turned into a fight. Moreover, it was almost a certainty that he would be one of the people that would get killed and he did not want that to happen.

Shijima thought that if he could call for more reinforcement in secret, he would be able to kill Akira without getting himself killed. But Akira noticed it and stopped him from doing that. Although to be more precise, Alpha noticed that and informed Akira about it, but there was no way Shijima would know that. But even so, Shijima's behaviour did not change much. It reminded him again how mysterious this Akira was as he became more vigilant of him.

[…It seems that this boy was able to kill Sibea not because of Sibea's bad luck alone, huh. After all, this boy looks like just a normal weak boy. I bet Sibea was fooled by his appearance, became careless, and then got killed instead. This boy is just like a landmine.]

Shijima slowly and carefully put his information terminal on the table. He then stayed calm as he said with the dignity pertaining to the leader of a gang.

"You're pretty confident in yourself, huh?"

Akira answered back with a firm and strong voice.

"Here's better compared to the wasteland or the ruins. After all, those monsters won't run when their friends get killed."

"I see, only Hunters would come up with this answer."

Sheryl could not understand what was going on, she could only silently listen to their conversation. But she could feel the strange mood welling around her, so she tried to recall what Shijima and Akira had said. It did not take much time for Sheryl to understand what just happened. They almost started shooting at each other just a few seconds ago. As she realized that Shijima decided to just back off from that situation, her face immediately turned pale.

Akira then continued.

“What I want to confirm is something simple. No matter what my reason was, I killed one of your men and injured another one.”

“That’s true.”

“So then, what will you do from now on? Are you going to wrap this up like some stupid guy in your gang did a foolish thing and got himself killed? Or are we going for a full-scale war until one of us is completely destroyed? In case if we’re going with that, how many people should die until you’re willing to end the war? I’m here to confirm that, I’ll give you an example, in Sibea’s case, fortunately, it only took 6 men for the rest of his gang to stop hunting for me. Right, Sheryl?”

Sheryl was taken aback when Akira suddenly asked her in the middle of their cruel conversation. But Sheryl immediately answered back in panic.

“Eh? Ahh, right! No one in my gang would think of killing Akira!! I can guarantee that!”

But then Shijima looked disgusted as he said.

“Just because that shit is dead, no one would ever think of taking revenge on you. Or more like, there are a lot of us who are happy to know that he is dead, including me.”

Shijima then returned to his usual calm demeanour.

“Well, let’s not be hasty here. Of course, there are cases were putting out the conclusion from the start would make further conversation smoother, but there are also cases where properly listening to the back story can change your view on the problem. If we’re going to talk about this in caution, it’s important to know what happened. So let’s hear it, why did you kill him?”

“It’s because he threatened me.”

“…Is that all?”

“If I have to give you more reason, it was because he threatened me and made me want to kill him. We’re not close enough to let his intimidation to pass as a joke, so he should have been more careful with his words. And even if he did try to explain that in all sincerity, there was no guarantee that it would be conveyed correctly. The listener has the right on how to interpret what he or she hears. I’m a cowardly person, you see. If someone said that he or she will kill me, I won’t be able to sleep at night unless I kill that person first. After all, all the people who said that to me really did try to do that, thus I always killed them before they could kill me.”

Akira locked his gaze on Shijima. Shijima took his words as *“I’m being careful with my words here, so don’t you dare threaten me”* and he did not think that Akira was bluffing when he said that.

“To be more precise, it was because he demanded Sheryl to give up her base and her territory. By any chance, was he sent to declare war on us and get killed?”

(Athena13: Basically, someone is sent to declare war to the other side while the person who sent him knows that the person he sent would be killed for sure.)

“…That shit, did he really say that?”

Shijima turned to Sheryl asking for a confirmation, to which Sheryl was flustered but firmly nodded.

“Y-yes, he did say that.”

Although it looked like she said that as if to only match up with Akira’s story, it did not seem like she was lying. That was what Shijima thought as he let out a sigh and rested his head on his hand.

It was to be expected that Wataba’s words might be interpreted as a declaration of war to her gang. Shijima understood that well. Considering the fact that it did not seem like Akira had any misgivings in fighting and killing, Shijima started to think of a way to talk it out peacefully.

“Well, it seems that we’re also at fault here. To be honest, I only wanted to talk about the territory, you see. A territory that is not managed properly will only attract danger. You do know that too, right? I just wanted to avoid such a thing. Considering what happened to that Wataba due to his foolishness, I want to talk this out peacefully, you see.”

Shijima then looked at Akira, waiting for his reply.

“Me too. I want to avoid any needless killing.”

Akira then looked at Sheryl after saying that, Shijima followed that gaze and looked at Sheryl too. Sheryl who was only an outsider in their conversation up until that point panicked since she just became a part of their conversation. Thus she could only answer back while being flustered.

“…Ah!? M-me? O-of course I wish we can solve this problem peacefully too.”

Shijima looked back at Akira and said.

“Now then, since all three of us agreed to solve this problem peacefully, let’s talk about what to do next. No matter what the reason was, you killed one of my men and injured another, so I hope you also put this into consideration. But it’s not like I can shoot some of your people too since it’ll only cause another problem. So how about we solve this with money?”

Shijima took some time thinking for a bit before saying.

“…Let’s see. How about 1,000,000 Aurum. We’ll forget about this incident and even befriend your gang so something like this won’t happen again in the future. I don’t think this is a bad deal since we have to take care of a few things because you killed one of my men. So what do you think?”

Akira casually looked at Sheryl and asked her.

“Sheryl. He said 1,000,000 Aurum.”

Sheryl went silent and looked confused for a while since she could not comprehend what Akira was saying. But after she realized what Akira meant, her face immediately went pale.

There was no way she could pay 1,000,000 Aurum all by herself. But if she refused, she feared that it would end the chance to solve the problem peacefully and it might even turn into a fight. Sheryl was crushed under the pressure, thus she could only answer back in a voice that sounded as if she was screaming.

“No way I can pay that! Ah, but it’s not like I don’t want to pay it, it’s just that we don’t have that much money! We don’t even have a working plan to get that much money!!”

Akira’s expression turned stern.

“I don’t have the leeway to pay that money too, you know? I’m not lying. Buying new equipment and ammo takes a lot of money. I’ll get killed if I cut down the money I spend on those things. so I have no surplus money.”

Shijima then said in a menacing tone.

“We’re also risking our lives here. Just try to think about it, the news would spread that we sent some of my men to a gang filled with small kids and they intimidated them just to get killed, but we let that slide without any repercussions. After hearing this, other gangs would look down on us and attack us. This place will turn into a battlefield. So even if we are to resolve this with money, it’s not like we can let this slide with a small amount of money. We’re already compromising here the moment we said that we’ll

accept solving this problem with money although you killed one of our men, you know?”

After that, no one said anything for a while. Every single person involved in the negotiation had their own reason and could not back down. The tense silence continued for some time. Akira broke the silence first as he let out a sigh and made a suggestion.

“I’ll pay 500,000 Aurum upfront and pay the remaining 500,000 Aurum later. How about that? I can only pay 500,000 in cash right now.”

“When can I get the rest of my money?”

“There’s no guarantee when I can get more money since I’m a Hunter. I’ll only pay the rest if I get some surplus money.”

Shijima went silent as if he was thinking for a while. Half of that was only an act, but half of it was him thinking about what would happen if he refused it. He then came to a conclusion.

“Alright then.”

Akira reached out to his rucksack and put out 500,000 Aurum on the table. It was the money that he withdrew from his bank account in case he needed emergency money.

Shijima nodded to one of his men, he took that 500,000 Aurum and exited the room.

“Until the rest of the payment is done, I’ll put this problem on hold, till then, I’ll assume that we’ve solved it peacefully. So then, you can go back home now. I have to explain a lot of things to my men, so I’m busy here.”

Akira stood up and left the room without saying anything as Sheryl awkwardly followed behind him.

Shijima just silently watched them as they exited the room. He stayed inside that room while waiting for one of his men to report back to him. It did not take long before one of his men entered and reported to him.

“They’ve left the base.”

“…I see… GODDAMMIT!!!”

Shijima screamed furiously.

“What the heck is wrong with that boy?!! He came here expecting a fight, didn’t he?!! Is that boy really okay in the head?! And here I was thinking it was good that damn Sibea is dead. But I never thought someone crazier would take his place like this!! But that boy came up because that stupid Sibea attacked him, right?!! Doesn’t that mean it’s all his fault from the start?!!!”

Some of Shijima’s men who were relatively close to him then asked him as he was trying to calm his breath.

“Boss, are we really going to befriend that gang of kids?”

“Yeah, but only on the surface. As long as that boy is still alive, just act as if we’re getting along with that gang. I want him to pay the rest of the money, after all. And about that Sheryl, there’s no need to be overly hostile to her as long as she’s the one dealing with that dangerous boy.”

“And what if Akira gets killed?”

“If that boy is dead, we don’t need to do anything, Sheryl’s gang will crumble on its own. We can take their territory, men and money after that happens. We also need to negotiate with the other gangs about how to divide the territory though… Even this time too, if that Sheryl did not create her gang, Sibea’s territory would’ve been peacefully divided among the other gangs. It was because that girl aimed for Akira and created her gang that this trouble happened. But that Sheryl was originally from Sibea’s gang too, right…? As I thought, it’s all his fault. Dammit!”

As Shijima tried to calm down, his sight wandered onto Wataba’s dead body. So he burst out again.

“…Now that I think about it. This guy was originally one of Sibea’s men. I only accepted him since he came here bringing some expensive things. But now he brought me something more troublesome than that!! That damn Sibea is still causing me trouble even after he died!! Dammit! What a pain in the ass!! Somebody, just throw this garbage out of here!!”

Wataba’s dead body was dragged out of the room and the room was cleaned up.

People risked their lives in the wasteland. People living in the slum also risked their lives. Anyone who blundered and did something stupid would die first, be it wasteland or the slum. Then they would end up joining the pile of corpses that were thrown away without a single care.

Silavin: I guess growing up in the slums basically made Akira quite indifferent to the value of life.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 24, Revitalised Heart

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After he had a talk with Shijima, Akira accompanied Sheryl back to her base. But their pace was very slow, even slower than when Akira was dragging Wataba's corpse. The reason being Sheryl walking very slowly behind Akira, slow enough that she would get left behind if Akira was walking at his normal pace.

Every time she got left behind, Akira would call her and she would hurry up to his side. But it did not take long before she got left behind again. And every time that happened, she would run slower and slower to Akira's side when he called her name. She eventually walked instead of running, then finally came to a halt. She just would not step forward.

Even for someone as ignorant as Akira, he knew that Sheryl was acting strange. So he walked to her to check on her. But when he reached her side, he was more confused than before, Sheryl was looking down and crying without making any sound.

While looking confused, Sheryl finally realized Akira was standing right beside her. She then slowly raised her head. Normally, Sheryl would say

something as to not worsen Akira’s mood, but she did not say anything this time, raising her head was the only thing that she could do now.

Their eyes met each other’s, Akira was confused seeing Sheryl cry silently. After a brief moment of silence, Akira, who did not know what to do in this situation which was obviously outside his scope of communication ability, finally squeezed out some words.

“W-what’s wrong?”

When he asked that, Sheryl could not hold back and started crying loudly.

Akira remembered that the same thing happened back when he met Sheryl for the first time. He then turned to Alpha, seeking for help.

“It’s not my fault this time, right?”

Alpha smiled teasingly.

“Well, I wonder now. But at least, just like before, it’ll attract people around and might cause a problem.”

Akira’s face twitched as this was the last thing he wanted.

Akira thought that it would cause needless worries if he dragged the crying Sheryl back to her base, but it was not like he could just leave her alone too. Thus, just like the last time, he decided to take Sheryl to his room.

Akira had moved to an inn with a smaller room. In order to avoid attracting other’s attention, Akira somehow brought Sheryl to this room. But he still did not know what to do in this situation where a girl was sobbing in front of him.

Last time, he let her take a dip in the bathtub and she calmed down after that. But this time, he was living in a cheap room with no bathtub, so he did not have that option. He knew that the cheap shower would not be able to substitute a bathtub.

Akira fired up all his cylinders to think of a way to get out of this situation, he then finally came up with something. He slowly approached Sheryl and hugged her awkwardly. He remembered that last time when he was hugged by Shizuka, even though he panicked in the beginning, he calmed down eventually. So he tried to do the same to Sheryl. He decided to just stop and take a step back if Sheryl hated it.

Sheryl did not fight back nor did she say anything as he hugged her. After a while, she slowly hugged Akira back as her cries became louder.

Akira was so surprised as he frantically tried to move away, but Sheryl was clinging to him strongly, he could not break free. He finally gave up and let out a sigh. He just let Sheryl hug him. He too hugged her back lightly. It took some time before Sheryl stopped sobbing. After that, she went to sleep as if she emptied her battery crying.

"…What the heck was that?"

Akira mumbled and looked tired as he did not understand what just happened.

Sheryl had reached her limit.

The gang that she was in was destroyed and she could not join other gangs. After losing everything that protected and supported her life, she had no other choice but to temporarily live in the back alley of the slum city. It was emotionally taxing for her.

It was because of her emotional state that she could not think clearly, as such, despite the fact that Akira was someone that she attacked, she thought that there might be a sliver of hope that Akira did not remember her. Thus, she tried to talk to him hoping that it would be able to help her get out of her current situation.

But that sliver of hope was crushed. Before she could even say anything, Akira noticed her and threatened her, she was trembling and could not say anything from the fear of getting killed. It further crushed her already tired heart and her spirit was broken to pieces.

After that, something unexpected happened to her, Akira agreed to support her, but in exchange, she had to start a new gang in place of Sibea's gang and she had to be the boss of that gang. But that did not mean that she finally got into a safe situation. Some people came to her base to threaten her, but she was somehow able to drive them off with a bluff. But that experience of passing those dangerous bridges, again and again, wrung her heart even more.

Not to mention that operating her own gang was not that easy, it was filled with problems and Akira would not visit the gang regularly. And when he did visit the gang, someone from her gang attacked him. The merchant that Akira introduced to her intimidated her and Akira threatened to kill her if she did anything stupid. Akira might be helping her, but it was not like he was her ally. Sheryl was made to understand that multiple times.

And finally, the latest incident. The negotiation where both sides were more than ready to have a shootout was enough to completely push Sheryl's tired psyche to its limit. It was more than what she was able to handle.

Finally, she was left with no other choice but to think about what to do next right after she went through all of that, Thus her steps back to her base were very slow and heavy. She then realized that she had to face these kinds of situations repeatedly in the future. The moment she realized this, it gave the last prod to her heart that had reached its limit and it broke down completely.

Sheryl was crying unconsciously. She just kept crying without even realizing it herself. She just wanted to lean on someone and she did not care whoever it was. She cried seeking a place to lean on. She did not know for how long she was in that condition, but when she realized it, someone was already hugging her. She did not even know who it was. But one thing for sure, that warm embrace was saying that it was okay to lean on that person.

Thus Sheryl hugged that person back as strong as she could to make sure that person would not go away. Only after she depleted all of her energy, she felt relieved that the person she hugged did not cast her away as she fell asleep.

Akira was sitting on the floor, operating his information terminal. Sheryl was still hugging him. Since it looked like she would not let him go anytime soon, he was doing something else while waiting for her to wake up.

Thus Akira decided to surf the net in the meantime. It was also a form of training for gathering information using the information terminal.

The internet of the eastern district was filled with a huge amount of information. It was so huge that it would be almost impossible for someone with no ability to search to find what he or she was looking for. Of course, there were some searching sites too, but even using that, it was pretty hard to find something for Akira who had lived all his life in the back alley of the slum city.

Normally, any important or highly valuable information was not free. There was a need to buy them directly from people or organizations who were working as information brokers. There were countless paid service sites on the net that provided information tailored for Hunters. They provided information like the locations of the ruins that still had expensive relics, guides to fight powerful monsters and many others.

Then finally, there were countless sites that provided all kinds of information for free due to certain reasons. It was an important skill for a Hunter who wanted to survive and rise to success in the eastern district to be able to extract important and worthwhile information that could be relied on from these sites.

But Akira’s current searching skill was not even enough to get him accurate searching results for the next day’s weather or a restaurant near him. He might be able to find them instantly if he asked Alpha, but now he was trying his best for the sake of his training. He had a lot of experiences where he got baited to chase some unimportant information that got into his eyes or some other things that led him to waste time on the net.

As Akira spent his free time learning trivial knowledge, Sheryl finally woke up.

Sheryl was still in a daze as she was staring at Akira from a close range while still hugging him.

“Can you let me go now that you’ve woken up?”

Akira thought that Sheryl should have calmed down by now as he said that and tried to break off from Sheryl’s hug. But when he did that, Sheryl desperately clung on him and looked like she would almost start crying again.

Sheryl then begged to Akira who looked troubled.

“…Please help me.”

Sheryl looked so weak and her eyes started to get teary as she asked Akira for help because she had no other place to turn to.

“…I beg you, please help me.”

As Akira stayed silent because he did not know what to do, Sheryl took it as a no, so she begged him again as she started to cry.

The short nap gave Sheryl who was in an unstable emotional state enough energy to cry again.

Although Akira was used to seeing irritation, mockery and hostility, he was not used to having someone looking at him with teary eyes while begging him for something. Due to that, Akira could not handle the pressure from those eyes as he reflexively answered Sheryl.

“S-sure, I’ll help you.”

Sheryl froze for a bit before smiling as she felt relieved. She seemed so happy as she closed her eyes. She loosened her hand that was gripping Akira’s hand so hard until that time as if she would die if she had let it go. Sheryl then leaned back to Akira and clung on him as she fell asleep with a happy face.

“What the heck…”

Akira let out a sigh while looking puzzled.

Akira then picked Sheryl up and laid her on the bed before starting the routine maintenance of his gun. As he was doing maintenance of his AAH assault rifle like usual, he once again realised that it was his lifeline, thus he took great care in performing the maintenance.

Since the AAH assault rifle was durable and sturdy, it could handle violent treatment and could last long in a bad environment, it was pretty popular for a gun. It was fully justified when they said that it was a gun beloved by Hunters for the last 100 years.

Akira was also indebted to his gun in so many instances in the past. It was thanks to this gun that he was able to stay alive up until this point. Although he was just a complete beginner not too long ago, Akira was able to proficiently do gun maintenance on an AAH rifle.

“Rather than buying other guns, it might be a good idea to buy one more of this rifle as a spare.”

“That’s right. I can also carry 2 guns with both of my hands.”

Akira then imagined himself marching with 2 guns in his hands.

“…That sounds cool!”

Alpha was able to receive the glorified image of Akira holding 2 AAH guns that Akira unconsciously sent through telepathy.

“If you bring 2 guns like that, most of your shots will miss and it might even rip your arms off due to the kickback.”

Akira realized that Alpha read the image in his mind as he embarrassedly answered back.

“S-so it’s a no, huh?”

“Well, you don’t have the strength to handle 2 guns, after all. So if you handle an AAH rifle with a single-arm, it would not serve any other

purpose other than shooting a warning shot. Once you get an augmented suit, you'll be able to handle the kickback from the guns even in a bad posture. So if you want to carry 2 guns simultaneously, you should at least wait until you get your augmented suit."

"Hearing that makes me impatient to wait for the augmented suit… But until we get that, it's not like there'll be more incidents, right?"

"Can you stop triggering flags like that?"

"…Okay."

Akira returned back to his usual mood and continued doing the maintenance. In the middle of doing that, he glanced at Sheryl.

"Alpha, so what was that exactly?"

Alpha lightly shook her head.

"I don't really understand either. I'm sure that she's too tired, but when she wakes up, it might be a good idea not to ask her too much."

Alpha did not explain Sheryl's psychological condition to Akira since she thought that it might be better this way.

"Akira, how about you take a rest for today too? I think this problem is solved for now, but another problem might come up again tomorrow, so you better take a good rest."

"You're right. I'll go straight to sleep once I'm done with this."

After finishing the maintenance. Just like usual, Akira took a short shower to suppress his feeling of wanting to take a bath before going to bed. Since his guest had already taken the bed, he just pushed her to the side before settling himself beside her. Although it looked as if Akira crept into Sheryl's bed, it was he who paid for the room. Moreover, Sheryl clung on him for quite some time. So he was sure that Sheryl would not mind sharing a bed with him as he slowly fell asleep.

On the next day, Sheryl woke up before Akira. She was still dazed when she looked around, but when she noticed Akira was sleeping beside her, she drowsily hugged him and went to sleep again.

But Akira immediately woke up when Sheryl suddenly hugged him. He then tried to wake Sheryl who fell asleep again.

“Don’t go back to sleep, wake up and let me go.”

After saying that, Akira was afraid that something like yesterday would happen again.

But Sheryl obediently let him go. She still looked drowsy as she let out a big yawn and lightly rubbed her eyes. Akira smiled as he saw that.

“Good morning.”

“…M-morning.”

Akira looked a bit puzzled since Sheryl was acting so differently compared to the previous day. She looked relaxed, there was no trace of her from yesterday. As she was smiling brightly, she looked way more beautiful than usual, which was also scary at the same time.

After that, they ate breakfast together. And just like usual, it was only warmed up frozen food. So in short, it was not very delicious and tasted bland. But they were having breakfast in a different mood than usual.

Akira was overwhelmed by how much Sheryl changed as he kept eating his breakfast. As for Sheryl, she looked like she was in a good mood. In contrast to the breakfast that they were having, their moods were so much different.

Sheryl then stopped in the middle of the breakfast and bowed to Akira.

“Akira, I’m really sorry to have troubled you yesterday.”

“Eh? Ah, it’s okay, don’t worry about it.”

After blurting that out without thinking, Akira remembered what happened the previous day. Although it was Sheryl who started the problem, it was mostly him who blew up the trouble. Although he did not feel guilty about it, he still understood it.

Thus Akira was worried if it was Sheryl's way of saying that she hated him in a roundabout way. But she was actually being honest when she said that she was thankful. And since Akira was a bit bothered by the bad thing that happened yesterday because of him, he answered back in such a way as he was trying not to offend her.

"Well, a lot of things happened yesterday, but if anything comes up again, you can just tell me."

If Sheryl thought that she had unnecessarily involved him in regarding yesterday's incident, it would at least be shown in her behaviour. So, by saying this he tried to ease her thoughts, but Sheryl answered back with something that Akira did not expect.

"In that case, can I hug you again?"

As Sheryl replied back with a happy smile. Akira was a bit taken aback as he asked Sheryl.

"…But why?"

"I feel safe when I do that. Like, you know, I can feel very relaxed."

"No."

"It's not like it'll cause you any trouble, right? And it's not like you'll lose anything too."

"No, I'll lose something. Ah, that's it, I'll lose my mobility. Moreover, we're in the middle of breakfast now, it's hard to eat if you cling on to me, right?"

"In that case, I'll feed you."

“…At least let me eat my own food, will you?”

Sheryl then leaned towards Akira who pulled himself back a bit. She kept smiling as she insistently asked Akira.

“In that case, it’ll be okay if I do it after we finish breakfast, right? Managing the gang is really hard. So I’m really tired right now. Not to mention the incident that happened yesterday. Just treat this as a sanity check for me. If you let me do so, I’m sure I’ll bother you less in the future. So it’s okay, right?”

Akira understood that if he agreed with her without giving it a serious thought, then Sheryl would come up with all sought of reasons so that she can keep on clinging onto him. But if he rejected her strongly, there was a chance that something like yesterday would happen again. When compared to that, it might be better if he just let her cling onto him, after all, it was not like it would cause any inconvenience to him.

“Alright then, you can do that after we finish breakfast.”

Sheryl immediately beamed happily.

“Thank you.”

Although it was only a bit, Sheryl was able to manipulate Akira. Alpha realized that as she decided to be more careful with Sheryl.

After they finished their breakfast, just like promised, Sheryl clung onto Akira. She embraced him from the front as he was sitting, she was in a pose that looked like she was straddling Akira. She wrapped her arms around Akira’s back and neck, she looked very relieved. But she then asked Akira for something more.

“May I ask you to hug me back or pat my head?”

“…Well, I don’t mind though.”

As Akira did what he was asked to, Sheryl started to mumble while looking extremely happy.

[What the heck am I doing here…?]

Akira was making an awkward face as he was asking himself that question. But as he caught sight of Alpha smiling teasingly, his mood immediately soured.

“What?”

“It’s nothing. Seems that she really likes you.”

“What do you want me to do then…?”

“No idea, I don’t have an answer to that question. But if you don’t get away from her, we’ll have to start today’s lesson in this situation, you know?”

As Akira realized that he might really have to start studying with Sheryl clinging onto him, Akira tried to get Sheryl off from him.

“Sheryl, can you let me go now? I have other things to do.”

“…I understand.”

Sheryl replied back in a sad voice as she reluctantly let Akira free. He was relieved since he thought that Sheryl would not let him go.

Sheryl then smiled at Akira.

“I’ll return back to my base. I have to explain yesterday’s incident to everyone in the gang. If I may, can you please accompany me back to my base?”

“Alright, sure.”

“Thank you very much.”

Sheryl looked so happy as she politely bowed to Akira.

After that, Akira accompanied Sheryl back to her base. Sheryl walked happily on their way there. Although Akira looked at her with a puzzled

look, she just ignored it as she walked back with a happy smile on her face.

Sheryl politely bowed to Akira when they arrived in front of her base.

“Thank you very much for accompanying me all the way here. I’ll contact you again if anything happens. And also, I’ll be very happy if you visit the gang even if you don’t have anything to do here. I’ll do my best to manage the gang, but since it’s a hard job, it’s really helpful to have a day like today where I can get a breather.”

“Well, I’ll come again if I have free time.”

“Thank you very much, I’ll be waiting for you.”

Sheryl stood there as he saw Akira off until he was gone from her sight.

***

On his way back, Akira grumbled. He looked back to everything that happened yesterday, like Sheryl’s emotional breakdown and so many other things.

“Alpha, Sheryl really did change, didn’t she? It’s like, she changed so much, I just can’t explain it well though.”

“Well, it’s not like she’s depressed or something, so I don’t think there’s any need to worry.”

“You’re right, but still…”

Alpha looked displeased as she then said.

“Rather than worrying about her. I really want you to be more careful not to cause any problems before you get your augmented suit. The last incident was pretty dangerous, you know?”

Akira smiled bitterly as he made some excuses.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t think it would become that bad, you see.”

Akira was saying sorry because of his inability to see that coming, he was not apologising for making the condition worse. Akira did not realize that. Alpha who noticed these facts was reminded of how hard it was to control Akira. She then gave Akira a warning with a serious face.

“From now on, you’re absolutely not allowed to go outside your room until you get your augmented suit.”

“Yeah, I heard you loud and clear. I’ll obediently stay inside my room.”

***

The children in Sheryl’s gang did not sleep last night. After that incident happened, Akira and Sheryl went out and did not come back even after one whole night passed. Thus half of the children started to worry.

The children thought that Akira and Sheryl were killed and they were already in an all-out war with Shijima’s gang, thus most of them already ran from the gang. And most of the children who stayed back didn’t do so because they believed in Sheryl and Akira having a negotiation with Shijima’s gang but stayed there because they had nowhere else to go.

Thus when Sheryl returned, it raised a commotion in the gang.

Although the children were looking at her with a worried look, Sheryl did not let it bother her as she kept smiling confidently.

“I’m back. Did anything happen since I left?”

The children just swarmed Sheryl.

“What is with that question!? Or more like, how did the negotiation go?!”

Although all the children were making a commotion as they surrounded her, she was very calm.

“It went well. We had a talk with Shijima and sorted out everything, so there’s no problem now.”

The children started to make a bigger ruckus. Although it was a very relieving answer, at the same time it was a very unexpected one too. Thus they simultaneously tried to ask further about it.

“N-no problem, you say!? How about Akira!? He isn’t together with you!? Did he get killed?!”

“Are you for real when you said that you had a talk with Shijima?! But we did kill one of his gang members, you know!? So how did you wrap it up with just a talk?!”

“Do we have to surrender our base and our territory?! How did it end up regarding that part?!”

Sheryl smiled to calm everyone down and to make them feel at ease.

“Akira is unhurt. Shijima’s gang won’t ask us to surrender our base and territory, they might even work together with us. So it’s okay, no need to worry anymore regarding this matter.”

Sheryl looked confident in front of everyone. And from the way she said it, it did not seem like she was lying or trying to trick them. Thus they calmed down although they found it unbelievable.

Then Sheryl’s face turned serious as she said in a strong tone.

“So then, what are you guys doing here? Shouldn’t you guys be doing your job like cleaning the territory, patrolling around or collecting metal wreckages? Or is it like you guys have already completed those jobs?”

“W-well, no. We thought that it’s not the time for doing something like that when we’re in this situation…”

“So then, where are the people who’re not here right now? Did you have a change of schedule or something?”

Then the children looked at each other as they hesitated before telling Sheryl.

“The guys who are not here are… I think they left the gang and ran away.”

Sheryl then just replied back casually.

“I see. In that case, we have to redo everyone’s schedule.”

It was fully within Sheryl’s expectations. Even after she estimated the number of people who left the gang, she was not surprised at all. The only thing in her mind was that it was a good thing she was able to flush out those people who would abandon the gang at the sight of threat. She then gave out a command in a calm tone.

“Erio, take some children with you and search for those who ran away. If you find them with our guns or food provisions, retrieve everything. But you don’t need to bring back those children. Alicia, confirm how many people left the gang and how many people who’re still here. Report to me once you’re done. As for the rest of you, just follow the usual schedule for now.”

Some of the children looked at each other in confusion, some still wanted to ask more questions to Sheryl. Some could not follow what was happening. And some just stood there dumbfounded. But no one started working.

Sheryl’s face turned stern as she shouted.

“Go! Now!!”

All the children immediately scrambled to their own job. Sheryl just stood there watching them scurry off before returning back to her private room.

***

The representatives of the children who remained at the base, Alicia and Erio, were talking to each other. Erio was making a puzzled face as he carefully asked Alicia.

“Say, it’s about Sheryl, though. She’s scarier than before, isn’t she?”

Seeing how Sheryl was able to smile confidently despite what happened yesterday, Alicia had the same impression. But in order not to make Erio anymore worried and in order to keep herself calm, Alicia smiled and said.

“I think it’s just your imagination. She looked in a good mood and full of confidence to me though.”

“Is that so? I see. Well, she did say that there’s no problem now. But since that happened, I guess it was better rather than looking worried, huh?”

“That’s right. But we should go too or she’ll be mad.”

“You’re right.”

Erio and Alicia then changed gear and got on to their own job.

Sheryl was still in a good mood as she was thinking of her next plan.

Sheryl was a smart girl from the beginning. And with her intelligence, she was able to do well in Sibea’s gang and was able to live a pretty comfortable life. In contrast to that, she was not good at anything related to combat. Of course, there were a lot of fights that happened in the slum city, but every time it happened, Sheryl always hid behind someone’s back until it was over.

But after the gang she was affiliated with was disbanded. She was thrown into a world where she could be killed anytime. It was a world where one needed to get used to little by little, but she was thrown there suddenly without any preparation. It was a world that was way too harsh for her.

The endless days of nervousness, terror and the pressure that came from such a world were very emotionally taxing on her. Her heart was somehow able to hold on, but it left her heart with countless cracks. Then finally, the last push crushed her heart into small bits.

As her heart was ground to dust and scattered into the wind, she was looking for a place lean on. Then she found a place to cling and it became

the new foundation that supported her as she gathered her crushed heart piece by piece into a new shape.

The cracks between the pieces that she gathered were filled with something that was flowing out from that new foundation. A safe haven, sense of relief, trust and reliance glued the pieces together and even transformed the pieces.

Sheryl's psyche was rebuilt from scratch when she met Akira. It was rebuilt again and again without changing its name or identity. The Sheryl up until now was not able to give her maximum performance due to her fear. But now that she had perceived a sense of safety and regained her confidence and sense of freedom, all of a sudden the idle gears inside her fit perfectly into the bigger picture.

Sheryl then looked back to her old self where she was careless and full of flaws. There were a lot of points that needed improvement. She reflected back as she decided to do better in the future. She had so many things that she wanted to try inside her head. She was reassessing, reevaluating and improving all of those ideas that she had.

As she was thinking about the future of her gang. She knew that it had to grow bigger and do better both for her own sake and for Akira's as well. It had become something very important to her to make the world where she and Akira could live happily.

As Sheryl imagined the future that she wished for, she let out a captivating smile.

Silavin: Damn. Sheryl has fallen in love with him… Well, Akira is weak to true emotional care for him and I see that as a huge plus. I wonder how he will develop in the future. Right now, he can't really give a good response to such emotions.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 25, Head Equipment, Intuition and Occult

Index

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When Akira received notification from Shizuka about the arrival of the augmented suit that he ordered, he immediately stopped his studying and packed up his things before setting off to Shizuka's shop.

Akira looked excited as he entered the shop. Shizuka saw him and gave him a welcoming smile.

"Welcome, the item that you ordered has arrived. I'll take you there, so just follow me."

Shizuka took Akira to the shop's warehouse. He saw many items and goods lined up inside the warehouse, then his eyes caught the augmented suit that was on the hanger rack.

The greyish black augmented suit hanging there was made of something that looked elastic. There was a metallic part that formed a skeletal frame extending from the backbone of the suit to all the 4 limbs. And it did not come with a helmet or any head equipment.

Akira circled it, his eyes locked to the augmented suit. Shizuka giggled as she watched Akira who was behaving more childish than usual.

“It’s the TLT type C-style augmented suit. Its name is Keilon. It might be 2 generations behind the latest generation augmented suit, but its hardware is not that different compared to the current generation. The basic setting software is already updated to its latest version, so don’t try to increase its capabilities by installing new software. In the worst-case scenario, a wrong adjustment can make it twist to the opposite direction than intended, so be careful.”

Akira’s eyes were still locked into the augmented suit as he listened to Shizuka. He looked just like a small child who was excited about his new plaything.

Induced by his curiosity, Akira extended his hand to touch the augmented suit. The suit was made of synthetic fibres with countless thin but hard wick woven together. As he traced the thin wick, his finger arrived at the metallic skeletal frame.

Akira continued to feel the metallic part. The metallic part was way softer than he thought, and as he pressed it a bit, the metallic part deformed as if it was made of gum. Akira pulled his finger back in panic.

“S-Shizuka-san. It’s softer than I thought though, is this normal?”

Shizuka laughed which made Akira relieved. But a part of that laugh was Shizuka enjoying Akira’s comical reaction.

“It’s alright. That part is elastic and soft when the suit is OFF in order to make it easy for the user to equip it. So then, don’t just stand there, let’s try putting it on. I’ll need your body measurement for the first time setting. So take off your clothes just like when I took your body measurement.”

Shizuka then took Akira’s body measurement like last time. After she finished, she went behind the augmented suit and operated her information terminal to send the data to the suit.

Once the data was received, the augmented suit automatically adjusted itself as it started to wriggle. The sleeves, inseam and body part of the suit readjusted itself to mimic Akira’s body. Akira gasped in surprise when he

saw that. After the adjustment finished, Akira put on the suit with some assistance from Shizuka.

The soft and elastic metallic part of the suit did not impede his movement when he equipped it and tried to move his limbs. But it was a different story for the weight. Although the weight of the suit was distributed across its humanoid shape, it was still quite heavy that Akira would get tired quickly if he tried to move around in it.

Shizuka took a good look at Akira before she nodded lightly.

“Yep, you look cool.”

“Thank you very much.”

Akira answered back while being bashful, but then Alpha interjected.

“Yep, you look really cool!! It’s wonderful!”

“Shut up.”

“Why are you so mean to me?”

“Because it sounds like you were mocking me now.”

Alpha looked offended, but Akira just ignored her. Shizuka then continued checking the augmented suit.

“Well then, go ahead and turn it ON, the switch should be somewhere around your waist. Although I think there should not be any problem, be sure to immediately cancel the start-up process if you feel something is not right.”

“Alright.”

Akira then turned the suit ON. As the augmented suit booted up, he could feel the metallic part woven in its wicks and in its skeletal frame start to harden. And at the same time, Akira could not feel the weight of the suit anymore.

The augmented suit supported its own weight and it moved together with its user, that was why the user would not feel its weight when it is turned ON.

Akira was a bit surprised when he could not feel the suit's weight as he tried to move around. Looking at how Akira was behaving, Shizuka knew that there was no problem with the augmented suit.

"It seems that the suit booted up without any problems. Remember to move around slowly for now until you get used to your enhanced physical ability from the augmented suit. I would have recommended you to pick up some random heavy guns lying over there to test your enhanced strength but it would be problematic if you break them accidentally. So be sure not to touch anything, okay? You can go to the wasteland and pick up some wreckages to test your strength. Also, remember to be careful when you grab your gun. It'll easily break if you use your augmented strength violently. Note that the metallic part of your augmented suit only hardened in order to provide support when you carry a heavy gun or any other object. So remember that you're basically still vulnerable to bullets and monster attacks, okay?"

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Akira nodded firmly.

"I understand. I'll be careful."

"The other items that came along with the augmented suit are inside the box over there. It should include extra energy packs for reserve, maintenance kit and a simple manual. You should be able to find the site where to download a more detailed manual inside the simple manual. So be sure to read the manual… I guess that's all, do you have any other questions?"

Akira took some time thinking before asking Shizuka.

"By the way, do people usually use a helmet with their augmented suit?"

“Armour, augmented suit and basically any other equipment are actually optional. Are you one of those people who prefer to use a helmet? I’m sorry, I should’ve clarified with you beforehand.”

As Shizuka looked sorry and apologized to Akira, he replied while getting flustered.

“Ah no, I’m just wondering if it’s weird if I use a helmet along with the augmented suit. I didn’t mean to complain. I also did say that I’ll tell you if I need anything when I consulted with you. So please don’t be sorry.”

“Is that so? I’m glad to hear that.”

Seeing how Shizuka smiled at him, he felt relieved knowing that she was back to her usual mood. So then he continued asking questions to her.

“Shizuka-san, you did ask me if I’m the type of person who uses a helmet, right? So there are people who prefer to not use a helmet, huh?”

“Yes. It’s actually more common, you know. Some people prefer to use an information terminal on their head, so the helmet that comes as a set with the augmented suit would get in their way. There are also people who prefer not to put anything on their heads too. That’s why head equipment is optional when you use an augmented suit.”

“So there’re people who do that too, huh? To be honest, I think it’s safer to put on a helmet…”

“There really are people who do that, you know. For example, both Sara and Elena don’t use a full-face helmet, right?”

Akira recollected his memory of Sara and Elena’s augmented suit, it was indeed true. He also remembered that the Hunters who attacked Sara and Elena also did not use a helmet. But even so, it was not enough reason for him to not use one. On the contrary, it made him question it more. Thus he asked Shizuka again while looking puzzled.

“That’s true… But why, though?”

“Well, there’s a reason for it, but it’s an occult thing, you know.”

“Occult thing, huh?”

“Yep, you want to hear it?”

“Yes please.”

Looking at how Akira was genuinely interested, Shizuka smiled as she began her story.

“There’re people among the Hunters who don’t want to put any helmet no matter how good the helmet is. For example, there’s this helmet, although it’s a full-face helmet, it is bulletproof, has a wide-angle display so the view with the helmet and without the helmet is exactly the same, can also transmit sounds without any obstruction as if there is no helmet. It fits perfectly and at the same time it does not exert any pressure on your head, and if used with the augmented suit, it’s basically weightless too. But even so, there are people who would not use this helmet, do you know why? Of course, it’s not because of money.”

Akira stood silent for a brief moment trying to think of a reason, but he could not come up with anything. He then gave up and surrendered.

“…I have no idea.”

“For some reason, putting that helmet will reduce their intuition, or so they say.”

“Intuition, huh?”

Akira looked puzzled after hearing an unexpected reason as the answer. Shizuka smiled as if she was enjoying his reaction which was exactly like she expected.

“Yep, intuition. It seems that those people would ditch powerful helmets or any other defensive equipment in order to keep their intuition sharp, you know. Since in my opinion, I’m also someone with good intuition, so it’s not like I can’t understand their reason.”

“Hmmm… I don’t think I understand it…”

“Well, it’s true that it’s very subjective. There are people who doubt it, but eventually, since it’s about their own feelings, there are a lot of people who trust their own gut and do whatever they want. I don’t think there’s any problem as long as they decide that based on their own preference. But it causes some problems in certain situations, for example, when arming people who work in a private military company. There’s a story where someone who was responsible for arming his squad did not believe in such occult and forced everyone in his squad to equip their helmet. You know what happened then?”

“W-what happened?”

“Although they used a high-quality helmet in order to convince his squad, their fatality rate increased, you know.”

Shizuka said that in a mysterious tone as she was watching Akira’s reaction, she then smiled with satisfaction.

“It’s not like there’s any real proof and it’s quite doubtful when you say you don’t want to use a helmet because it impedes your intuition. But a tangible proof like fatality rate did come up. That’s why it’s called an occult thing…”

“…Uhmmm, so, is it better if I don’t use a helmet?”

Shizuka answered back in a way that calmed Akira who looked unsure of what to do.

“I’m sorry but I don’t have a definitive answer to that. After all, there are also people who really like their full-face helmet. There’re also people out there who took this story seriously, didn’t put their helmet on, and got killed because of that. If you want to put on a helmet, then I think you should. If you don’t want to, then you shouldn’t. That’s all I can tell you. Not to mention that I heard good Hunters feel awkward when they’re using equipment that they don’t usually use. So like I said, it’s fully a subjective topic, you should decide that for yourself.”

Akira looked a bit conflicted before he made a decision and smiled bitterly.

“I understand. For now, since I don’t have any money left to buy a helmet, I’ll just assume myself to be one of those people who don’t prefer a helmet.”

Shizuka smiled and said.

“That might be better than staying undecided. You can anyway buy an optional set later, just tell me when you change your mind.”

“Yes.”

Shizuka then changed the subject.

“Remember that just because you got yourself an augmented suit, doesn’t mean that you can do anything dangerous, okay? Contact me if anything bad happens. Just come to me if you find anything faulty, but remember, it’ll take at least one month to get it fixed. Ah, and also, be sure to turn off the suit or put it under daily life mode until you exit the shop else you might damage something unknowingly.”

Akira then turned OFF the augmented suit, thus its weight suddenly returned. He thought it would be impossible to go back to the inn under this condition, thus he turned it back ON and set it to daily life mode. The weight of the suit reduced considerably. Although there’s a slight weight, it would not impede his movements.

Akira and Shizuka then went back to the shop and they started conversing professionally like a customer and a shopkeeper.

“I tried my best in picking an augmented suit that would satisfy you. I’m sure you’ll come up with a lot of things once you actually use it, but I hope you’re satisfied with it for now. If you find anything that you want to complain about, there’s no need to hold back. I’ll help you if it’s something within my boundaries.”

“I think it’ll be alright, but I’ll come again for consultation if anything crops up.”

Shizuka smiled as it seemed that Akira was satisfied. She then added.

“There’s one thing that I forgot to tell you. Don’t forget that you’ll need to buy energy packs and other things for your augmented suit beside the usual medicine, so keep that in mind. It’ll be meaningless if you only buy a new energy pack once you run out of energy. Since you already bought one, you need to maintain it so you can use it anytime.”

“Yes, I’ll be careful. Thank you very much for everything.”

As Akira politely bowed, Shizuka smiled and offered Akira some of her goods while making a joke.

“Don’t mention it. And now that you have an augmented suit, you should be able to wield guns that you couldn’t before, right? I’ll be looking forward to when you order more guns.”

“I want to meet your expectations, but I’ll have to earn enough money before that. So please wait patiently.”

Akira casually replied back with a smile. He then bowed his head and went back home.

Shizuka saw Akira off as she mumbled.

“But that aside. He bought an AAH rifle not too long ago and he already bought an augmented suit now, huh. That’s really fast. Not to mention that he was lucky enough to get rescued by Elena and Sara when he was in a pinch. He might become a great Hunter in the future… Just maybe though.”

Shizuka looked worried for a bit before recovering immediately.

The faster a person is running on the road to success, the more focused he would be, the narrower his vision, and finally, the bigger the damage he would suffer when he meets bad luck.

Shizuka immediately changed the things in her mind before she unconsciously said what she thought and jinxed it.

Akira who already returned to his room smiled seeing the augmented suit that was hung on the hanger rack.

“Now that I already have my augmented suit, I can start looking for relics again.”

There was a need for him to pay the rest of 500,000 Aurum to Shijima and he almost ran out of money too. He only had enough money to stay in this bath-less room for a few more days.

Akira wanted to earn more money and move to a room with a bath as soon as possible, but Alpha just rejected that idea.

“We won’t go to the ruins anytime soon, you know?”

“Eh? But you said that I can go to the wasteland again once I get my augmented suit, right?”

“Of course you can go to the wasteland, but not to the ruins. It’s dangerous and I’ve decided to keep you safe, you know. I’ll do my best to find a solution against your bad luck.”

From the way Alpha said it, it felt like she was exaggerating his situation. Akira winced a bit as he wondered if his bad luck was not something that he could fight back unless he had an equal amount of resolve.

“I-I see. If you say so, it can’t be helped then. So, what should I do from now on? We’re about to run out of money to even stay in this cheap room, you know?”

“It’s alright. We’ll take requests from the Hunter Office to earn money for the time being. Your aim, for now, is to complete requests from the Hunter Office and get your Hunter rank up until you can borrow a vehicle for exploring the wasteland.”

“Vehicle, huh? Hmmm, is there any reason why I should prioritize that?”

“It’s tiring to run away from a group of monsters with your legs, isn’t it?”

Although Akira was convinced by that reasoning, he was making a conflicted face as he realized that the way Alpha worded it out was as if he was ought to encounter another group of monsters in the future.

“Exploring the ruins for collecting relics will come after that. And I’ll be the one choosing the requests too.”

“…Well, if you said so, then I’ll leave everything to you.”

“Just go and take rest for today. I’ll finish the augmented suit’s setting while you sleep. You’ll have augmented suit training for the whole day tomorrow. I’ll have you get used to it so that you’ll at least be able to fight while using it. Then we’ll start taking requests from the day after tomorrow.”

“Augmented suit setting? But Shizuka already did that, right?”

Alpha smiled invincibly to Akira who looked a little bit sour.

“She only configured the most basic part. I’m going to configure the setting tailored for you to maximize my support capabilities. I only need you to connect your information terminal and I’ll do the rest myself, so don’t worry.”

Akira took his information terminal and used the cable from the augmented suit maintenance kit to connect his information terminal with his augmented suit. Once it was connected, the information terminal showed an array of symbols, numbers, images and characters that he did not recognise, but he remembered that something similar had happened when Alpha configured his information terminal too. Thus he did not worry about it and went to take a rest.

As Alpha was busy configuring Akira’s augmented suit through the information terminal, Akira was using the note and the stationeries to study by himself. But he then remembered what Shizuka said.

“Hey Alpha, Shizuka-san said that there are people whose intuition worsened when they used a helmet. Is that true?”

“Yep, that’s true.”

Akira was a bit surprised since Alpha said it as if it was a fact and it was idiotic to doubt that in the first place.

“You put that out pretty clearly, huh. Even Shizuka-san said it herself that it was occult belief, you know.”

“It’s a misjudgement and misinterpretation due to the inability to get the needed accurate information and knowledge. It’s because a mix of inability to empirically translate individual sensation or inability to communicate with such a thing or so many other factors. It’s exactly because it can’t be analyzed with the current technology that it’s called an occult thing.”

Akira looked utterly confused.

“…Can you please explain it in words that are easier for me to understand?”

“Of course. Let’s imagine, you are seeing a low-resolution picture of Kuzusuhara ruin. Although it’s blurry, you can still recognize it. But there’s a difference between the picture and the real scene even if the people who see the picture don’t realize it. Since it is a blurry image you won’t be able to make out all the details in it. It’s the same reasoning with a full-face helmet equipped with a wide-angle display or a high quality binocular. There’s always some information that gets lost. And if some of the information that is lost contains warning for an incoming danger, then you won’t be able to notice it. And this is not limited only to information coming from vision. The same reasoning can also be used for any information received through any part of your head.”

Akira looked puzzled and there were a lot of questions inside his mind.

“Feeling someone behind you and really finding someone there when you look back. There are people who have such a level of intuition. But those people have such intuition, not because of their sight, hearing, touch, taste,

or smell. They, of course, can’t see what is behind them, nor hear, nor smell, nor touch. These people might not be able to directly see the person behind them, but they might have an organ that somehow makes them able to feel the gaze. They might be someone who got such an organ by using technology from the old world or they might be descendants of such people. There’s also the possibility that they got their hands on a relic that allows them to do that and they’ve been using it without realizing as if they suddenly got a superpower. So using a helmet might impede that organ or relic.”

Akira looked confused, he seemed like he could not understand everything that Alpha just said.

“Although you’re talking with me through telepathy, this is something that only happens between me and you. Like I said before, this is possible because of some peculiarities in your brain. But this is not only limited to our case. There are cases where other people could communicate and send information through telepathy with another person or thing too. As an example, some twins can communicate between them through telepathy or like when you somehow notice that there’s danger nearby from the people around you. You might not be able to communicate directly with the people around you, but some information is unconsciously transferred. This kind of information transfer might be blocked by a helmet.”

Akira was barely able to follow through all the new information that was flooding his brain.

“Basically, people who have good intuition are those who for some reason are able to unconsciously receive information and make decisions based on that information. For the Hunters who regularly risk their lives in their job, they’ve always been polishing and relying on their intuition, so having it dulled is like making them fight monsters with their eyes blinded. The more they rely on their intuition, the easier they’ll get killed without it.”

Alpha then stopped her explanation temporarily.

“Did you understand anything?”

Akira was still confused, but he somehow blurted out an answer.

“…So in short, if I put something weird on my head, the things that are hard to notice normally will become impossible for me to notice. And there’s even a chance that it’ll block our telepathy ability, right?”

Alpha looked surprised for a moment hearing his answer, but she immediately smiled happily.

“Even though you didn’t understand everything, I think it’s good enough that you were able to understand this much. That’s why, no matter how good the equipment is, you’re not allowed to use it if it impedes my support.”

“But how will I know if it’ll impede your support?”

“I’ll know it right away and I’ll warn you, so don’t worry.”

“I see, I understand.”

Akira was relieved since he knew that Alpha would warn him when he might try to equip anything strange that would hamper Alpha’s support unknowingly.

“Now then, was that good enough? Or should I explain it to you again with a lower difficulty bar?”

“Nope, that was good enough. You can just tell me the rest of the details while teaching.”

“Is that so? Just ask me anytime when you want to hear the rest.”

“Yeah, sure.”

Akira rejected that offer since he had a feeling that she would continue with a long and difficult explanation if he said yes. But he did not know that Alpha had already guessed his answer.

Alpha smiled as she was watching Akira closely when he tried to evade that subject. By seeing how Akira reacted, how his expression changed and how his mood changed. She was able to infer Akira's tendency, personality, things that he liked, things that he hated, things that shocked him etc, basically, the root of his personality. She had always been observing Akira for this very reason.

Silavin: Haa… the fanbase siding with Sheryl. The best girl is obviously Shizuka. Just look at how he treats her as compared to Alpha!

Tsk Tsk.

Anyways, the issue with the helmet seems to make some sense. I'm not sure about you guys but wearing something external does make it harder to feel things and our senses are not actually classified as just 5. We have more than that but it is common knowledge that we have those 5.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 26, The True Worth of An Augmented Suit

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Akira started going to the wasteland again, but it was for the purpose of training using his augmented suit. He put on his augmented suit in the wasteland not too far from the city while carrying his anti-monster AAH rifle with him. In short, he was fully equipped to fight monsters in the wasteland.

On the other hand, Alpha was donned in a white one-piece, not something that one would typically wear in the middle of the wasteland. The glossiness of the dress further accentuated that it was made of high-quality fabric, and as the light shone on it, it made a drop-shadow effect that traced her body line.

Although Akira wanted Alpha to change to something that better suited the wasteland, he decided to hold himself from saying anything. He recollected her naked self during their first meeting in the ruins and her beautiful pure white dress that she wore during a previous trip to ruins when he was targeted by 2 Hunters. During both these occasions, she had a reason for wearing such a dress. Similarly, he thought that there must be some reason as to why she wore this dress now too. But more than that, he knew that she would only change her dress to something worse if he commented about it.

It was quite a while since the last time he had the chance of going to the wasteland, thus he did not want to do anything that might bring him trouble.

Akira mumbled to himself that it was a thousand times better than her being naked and just assumed that it was a part of his training too.

Alpha smiled and told Akira to start the training.

“Akira, we’ll start the training for using the augmented suit.”

“Okay.”

Akira was about to turn ON his augmented suit when the suit suddenly booted up by itself. Although he was a bit surprised, he immediately realized that it was Alpha’s doing when he saw her smiled meaningfully.

“So then, what should I do?”

Alpha pointed to a location in the wasteland that was 100 metres away from them.

“First of all, walk till you get there.”

As Akira turned to the pointed direction, he could see an arrow pointing to the intended location. It was something that Alpha added to his vision. Akira was already used to it, so he was not surprised. He then started walking towards the location. He was able to get there without any problem. So Alpha gave him the next command.

“Next, over there.”

Once he arrived at his next location, Alpha gave him the next order again. He just kept on walking from one location to another for about 10 times. Thus, he started to find it weird.

“Alpha. Do I need to walk more carefully? Or maybe walk while carrying my gun? Or is it that I should not do any of those at all? Or are we still confirming the functionality of the augmented suit and we will only start the real training after that?”

“Nope, we’re already in a training session and I’ve started gathering your data too.”

“Just by walking?”

Alpha just smiled meaningfully while looking at Akira who was puzzled.

“Yep, after all, you would never realise the usefulness of my support until you try to move around without it.”

“Support? But I’m just walking normally, right? Is there anything more than that?”

Alpha smiled mischievously.

“You’ll know soon enough. Akira, try to walk over there, but this time I’ll turn off my support. Actually, I’ve been adjusting the power output of your augmented suit. So then, go ahead and feel for yourself how great my support is.”

Akira had a bad feeling as he saw Alpha smiling at him. As he tried to step forward, he immediately tripped over. The moment he swung his leg, he accidentally kicked a boulder powerfully and sent it flying, the kickback made him rollover.

He was stunned as it happened. He tried to stand up by thrusting his right hand on the ground, but his right hand went deep into the ground right till his wrist.

He then tried to pull out his right hand by pressing the ground with his left hand, but he pulled so hard that he was thrown back and almost fell on his back, so he tried to readjust his position in panic. But instead, it completely disrupted his balance as he fell down again. And when he tried to get back up on his feet, he pushed too hard and tripped again.

After that, he tried to be careful and moved slowly, so he was somehow able to get back on his feet. But when he tried to step forward, he could not

keep his balance and was about to fall down again and used all of his strength to keep himself standing.

As Alpha watched Akira trying to move so slowly and carefully, she smiled as if she was enjoying it.

“Now you get it, right? If you can’t control your augmented strength, you can’t even walk normally, you know. The reason why you don’t usually fall down when you walk is because your body unconsciously adjusts your centre of gravity. It is a very crucial part of the training to be able to walk wearing your augmented suit, you know. I’ll turn my support back on, so you can go ahead and walk without worry.”

Akira started to walk carefully. But this time, he could walk normally, thus his face turned stern as he smiled bitterly.

“I can’t even walk without your support, huh? Does everyone who uses an augmented suit for the first time go through this? Did all of them go through a lot of training to turn from not being able to move around to be good enough to use it for combat? Until I finish the whole training, I think it’s better if I don’t use this suit, you know?”

“That depends on each augmented suit. Usually, high quality augmented suit can be paired with high-level software enabling the user to adjust the power output of the augmented suit. There’re a lot of augmented suits that can be used normally right from the start. There are also augmented suits that use the installed auto-balancer as their selling point. The higher the power output, the more control you’ll have to exercise when you do a fine movement. For example, even if you have enough power to send a vehicle flying, it’ll also send yourself flying if you can’t control its power. So it’s not just about the output power, but having the function that would help the user to use it normally without any problem is also one of the indicators of how good an augmented suit is.”

Akira looked interested as he listened to Alpha’s explanation. He then realized something.

“So it means that you are adjusting its power output when it moves, right?”

“Yep.”

“That’s amazing.”

Akira looked genuinely amazed. The difference when he had Alpha’s support and when he did not have it while using his augmented suit was crystal clear to him.

Naturally, Alpha was satisfied with Akira’s reaction.

“But that’s not all, you know. In order to make you realise just how great my support is, I’ll have you work hard. Okay?”

“Roger that.”

Then he continued his training and kept following Alpha’s orders. Walk slowly, walk faster, run slowly, sprint, quickly get on feet after lying on the ground, stand on his hands and get back on his feet, sprint and then make a sharp turn. His movement slowly shifted from doing light manoeuvres to those that fully utilized his augmented body strength.

Normally, one would need a long time worth of training with such a low functionality augmented suit before they could do any of those manoeuvres. But Akira did not realize that as he kept moving around normally. He could not even grasp the fact that he was able to do that only because of Alpha’s superior support.

After finishing his morning training, Akira went to have a light meal. He was eating Hunter’s ration that he packed in his rucksack. It was cheap and nutritious, although it had no taste, it was enough to at least fill his empty stomach.

As he was chewing on the hard-to-chew tasteless fried dango-like thing, he unconsciously complained about its taste. And when he realized that he was complaining about how bad it was, he just laughed bitterly.

[Although I’ve always been thankful to even have something to eat until today, now I’m complaining about the taste, huh. It seems that I’ve become

too used to living in luxury.]

Although he was criticizing himself, he was also glad that his life had turned better than before.

“Alpha, what to do for the afternoon? Are we going to continue with the training?”

“We’ll have shooting training in the afternoon and then melee training after that.”

“Melee training? Uhhm, do you mean like training how to kick and punch the enemy in close range?”

“It’s just standard training including how to use your rifle in short range. First of all, I’ll have to teach you martial arts and train you to use it against humans. You’ll also have a mock fight against me.”

Akira looked confused.

“…What are you talking about? I can’t touch you… Wait, I can’t touch you, right?”

Akira was a bit surprised as he wondered whether she got a corporeal body. So just to check, he extended his hand towards her. But just like always, his hand went through Alpha’s body.

As he confirmed that she did not have a corporeal body, he was puzzled as to how they were going to do the training and it was shown in his face. Looking at that, Alpha just smiled.

“You’ll understand when we do that. So just look forward to it, okay?”

Although Akira wanted to know badly, it did not seem like Alpha would tell him now. Thus he continued eating his ration while making a questioning look.

After he finished his food, Akira started his shooting training as scheduled. He could feel a weird sensation coming from the thick gloves that he was

using to grip his rifle. Since he was still in the process of getting used to it, he started by aiming at small rocks rather than images of monsters.

He carefully took an aim at a small boulder 100 metres away from him and pulled the trigger. The bullet flew out of his rifle, hit the small boulder precisely and sent it flying.

Akira smiled as he knew that he did well. He then moved to the next target, aimed carefully and pulled the trigger. This time also it was a bullseye, and the next one too, and the next one too. All of his shots were accurate.

“Oh! You’re doing really well today!!”

Akira was in a good mood due to his unexpected result in the shooting practice. Even Alpha complemented his result while smiling.

“In that case, I’ll increase the distance of the target gradually.”

“Okay.”

Akira then aimed at his next target more carefully than before and pulled the trigger. Then the bullet flew straight and hit that target.

Since then, his consecutive targets became further and further away from him every time he hit the previous target, and he did not miss even a single shot. But suddenly, his good mood vanished.

Akira realized that his targets had become so far from him that it would normally be impossible to hit them accurately. But even so, weirdly enough, all of his shots still accurately hit those targets. He assumed that it might be because the augmented suit absorbed the kickback from his rifle, so his accuracy had increased.

And after he accurately shot a target that was 500 metres away from him, he turned to Alpha and asked her a question.

“Alpha, you’re doing something here, aren’t you?”

Alpha just smiled which confirmed Akira’s guess.

“I’m giving you my complete support.”

“…As I thought.”

Although he already guessed that it was not because his shooting skill suddenly went up, it was still frustrating when he heard it. He could only smile bitterly after realising the fact.

“After you moved your aim around the target, I controlled the augmented suit to make some fine adjustments. And when you pulled the trigger, I also adjusted your stance and centre of gravity. I also make a small adjustment to your augmented suit to completely absorb the kickback too.”

“So you can even do that too, huh.? That’s amazing… Hm? Doesn’t that mean that I don’t even need to do shooting training at all?”

“Nope. The better you can aim, the less adjustment that I need to do to make an accurate shot. Moreover, there may be occasions in the future, where you will have to fight without your augmented suit or when I can’t give you my full support. That’s why you still need to train.”

“Well, that’s true, alright then.”

“Since I can adjust your stance to the most effective one to shoot now, so your training will even be stricter than before. After all, with the augmented suit, you can shoot while being in a variety of positions. I’ll train you so you can shoot accurately even when you’re running, or when you don’t have visual confirmation of your enemy, or when you’re in a tight spot. Don’t worry, even if you’re too tired to walk, I’ll use the augmented suit to assist you in walking, so you can train without worry.”

“…Be gentle, please.”

Seeing Alpha say something so scary with a smile, Akira winced a bit. Alpha then turned serious and said.

“Now then, since you know that I can give you my support when you shoot thanks to the augmented suit, I have something that I need you to know.”

“What is it?”

“At the moment, I cannot do anything more than giving support by adjusting your movement through your augmented suit. Which means that I can help you do what you want to do, but I can’t ignore your wish and make you do something that you don’t want to do. But if you agree, I can configure your augmented suit so that it can give me full control over your body. Thus I would be able to move your body without your will. Of course, I promise that I will not do anything that will bring you harm. But even so, there are pros and cons in doing so, so listen to me closely and think carefully before making any decision.”

Looking at Alpha who was making a serious face, Akira remembered the time when she asked him for permission due to some annoying rules. As he realised that it must be something that she needed in order to give him her full support, he firmly replied back.

“I understand, tell me the pros first.”

“If I can completely control your augmented suit, I can unleash its full power. So you’ll be able to do some superhuman feats. For example, you’ll be able to run along the edge of the rooftop and shoot monsters with guns on both hands with your eyes closed. You’ll be able to fight people who are expert in martial arts. You’ll be able to evade attacks or even counter-attacks from your dead angle as long as I notice it.”

“All of those things sound amazing, so then, what are the cons?”

“First of all, you’ll feel uncomfortable since your body will move on its own. Then since the augmented suit moves your body with it, it’ll cause bigger stress on your body. And because it’ll change our role from me adjusting my movement with you, to you adjusting your movement with me, so when you try to make a different move than mine, it’ll disrupt the fluidity of your movements and it’ll cause bigger stress on your body. In the worst-case scenario, it might even break your bones.”

Akira then thought while making a serious face.

[It sounds like the pros are worth the cons, but since she said to me that I have to think carefully, I wonder if there's something more to it.]

Although Akira tried to think hard about this, he could not come up with anything more than what Alpha just said.

"…Is it possible to try it out?"

"Of course, it is possible."

"In that case, I'll try it out first."

"Alright, I'll be controlling your augmented suit then. We'll start by walking slowly, then I'll increase the speed until you are running. If you feel it is very uncomfortable, you can stop me immediately."

"Okay."

"We'll start now."

Akira's augmented suit started moving on its own and made him walk. He was a bit shocked when that happened, but that was all. Although it felt like his legs were moved by external power, it was not that uncomfortable. Moreover, as he adjusted his movements to match with the movements from his augmented suit, the stress on his body was further reduced. And after he started running, it felt way easier since his augmented suit actively supported his movements.

[Hmm, is this all? If this is all, I don't think there's any need for her to warn me just now…]

As Akira looked relieved, he started to run faster and faster. Before he realized it, he was already running faster than he ever could on his own without her support.

Every time his legs swung forward, he could not catch up with its movement and his legs were forced to swing forward against his will. So his legs started to scream in pain. And every time he kicked the ground, he could feel the impact through his bones which shook his whole body.

Akira was running in the middle of the wasteland while leaving a cloud of dust behind. He was already running as fast as a vehicle. His face twitched in shock, fear and pain that was assaulting him. As he returned to his senses, he immediately asked Alpha to stop.

“Stop!! Please stop!!”

His running speed then slowed down to compensate for the burden that it had caused. And when it was slow enough, Akira was back in control of his augmented suit. When he finally stopped running, Akira was on his knees and breathing roughly.

“If you are able to run a bit faster than this, you would be able to outrun a group of monsters if they come chasing you. It might be hard for you, but it’s a good solution for such a situation. So what do you think?”

Akira understood well as to why Alpha told him to think it through.

“…I’ll only give my permission when it’s necessary. And also, do tell me next time when you want to control my body.”

“Roger that. I will seek your permission every time.”

“…Permission, huh? It’s about that, right? Those annoying rules about permission.”

“That’s right, I need your permission when I want to take any action that is beyond your wish. But don’t worry, I won’t do anything bad. That aside, we’ll do melee training next, we’ll start once you can move around again, so just take a rest for now.”

“…Alright.”

Akira just laid flat on the ground. The stress subjected to his body when it moved without his will by the augmented suit was too much to handle. He always thought that things would be easier since he had his augmented suit now, but that line of thinking was destroyed by the pain that was assaulting him.

But even so, there was no doubt that he had acquired a new power and Alpha's support had also gotten more effective. And it was obvious that he got stronger, that was what he told himself as he was enduring his pain. He was just lying there in the middle of the wasteland for a while, and when his pain had mostly subsided, he was back on his feet.

"Are you finished resting?"

"Yeah, it's not like I can safely sleep in the middle of the wasteland. I'll take a good sleep when I get back to my room."

Akira knew that he would not grow stronger if he stayed lying down. He needed to become stronger in order to rise up as a Hunter. He wanted the power to reach for what he wished. Thus, he got back on his feet.

"I see. In that case, let's move on to melee training."

Alpha smiled as she saw that Akira was really motivated to move forward.

The melee training started, but they did not go straight to martial arts training.

"This dress is no good, I guess. So let me change it."

Alpha removed her dress, became buck naked and then changed to a fighting suit.

Her fighting suit was comprised of something that looked like a high cut bodysuit and a low rise pant. It looked as if it was made of a thin fabric that emphasized her body shape. It even had a hole that seemed to have no other use but to show some skin. It was as if that dress was contradicting its functionality during a fight.

Alpha just stood smiling in front of Akira. Although she was wearing a dress that was much more inviting than being naked, Akira who was looking at her seemed to be genuinely questioning that suit.

"…What is with that suit?"

“It’s one of the fighting suits from the old world, you know.”

“Did they really use that suit?”

“Yep. You can find one if you look for it in the ruins.”

Akira’s misunderstanding about the old world deepened. He thought that even though it was a high-quality suit that was produced using the advanced technology of the old world, since Alpha had no corporeal body, it could not show its full functionality. He asked Alpha another question.

“Should you really wear that suit?”

“If you have any request, I can change it to anything you want. But please pick something that can show my movements clearly. With your current ability, this won’t be good training unless you can see my moves clearly. So anything that reduces the prediction of my movements is rejected.”

There were people who could predict their opponent’s next move from a small shift in their limbs. Thus there were people who used clothes to hide their movements. If they really went down that line of thinking, then the best dress that allowed such a prediction would be the birthday suit. Akira realized that and he changed the topic.

“Alright, let’s start. Now then, what should I do? Even if I attack you, my attack would just go through you, right?”

“For now, just try to attack me any way you want.”

Although Akira was still not sure about it, he just stepped forward to attack Alpha like he was told to. She blocked his fist with her right hand, and strangely enough, when his fist should have just passed through her, he could feel his fist bumping on something.

“…Eh!? It was stopped? No, wait, what is this?”

Akira was surprised at that unexpected turn of events. Alpha saw that and smiled as she started explaining.

“Every time you hit me, I’ll harden your augmented suit on the part where it makes contact with me. It would give you a little feedback as if you really hit something. With this, you can at least get the feel, right? Now then, let’s start for real now, come at me.”

Alpha then smiled as if to invite Akira and made a ‘come-on’ taunt with her fingers. Akira then changed his stance and launched an attack at her.

It was obvious that he was a complete amateur in close combat. Most of his attacks did not even hit Alpha. So even if she had a corporeal body here, she would end up with only some light bruises.

Alpha kept guiding him on how to execute his moves. From how to clench his fist, how to kick, where to attack, how to position himself, what was the correct fighting stance, how to step in, things he needed to be careful, how to adjust his body’s weight, how to prepare himself to evade, how to evade and how to block. She kept firing instructions to Akira through telepathy.

The more accurate Akira’s movement was, the easier he moved due to the support from his augmented suit. And whenever he made a wrong move, the augmented suit would push him in the right direction. Thanks to that, Akira could learn by remembering the feeling and the sensation when he made the correct moves.

The hitting feeling during the fight coming from his augmented suit also recreated the sensation from Alpha’s attack. When he got punched on his abdomen, he would be pushed back. And when he got his legs swept, he would lose his balance and fall down. Even when he blocked an attack, he would feel as if he really did receive that attack.

Before she attacked, Alpha always told him where she aimed, how she would attack and when she would attack. But even so, Akira had a hard time blocking her attacks. Even if he tried to dodge, he would only get hit if he did not evade correctly. And if he tried to block, he would lose balance and get hit unless he blocked correctly. He almost had no chance to counterattack.

Every time Akira got hit on his head, it would be considered as a killing blow and they would restart the fight. If he got attacked on his head by someone using an augmented suit, there was no doubt that his head would be blown away. Depending on the situation, it might even blow his head to pieces. There was no way of predicting how good his block would work against that kind of attack. So Akira was taught to prioritize evading when faced with such an attack.

As Akira was lying on the ground on his back, Alpha just smiled, raised her leg and stomped his head wanting to crush it.

Akira tried to look at Alpha's face that was hidden behind her breasts as he was still lying on the ground. With a little adjustment, he could see her looking down at him while still smiling. He could sense that her smile now was a bit scary than her usual smile.

"There, you died again. Get on your feet. Or do you want me to make you get up?"

"It's okay, I can get up on my own."

Akira dragged his own body up. There were images of his corpses with crushed head scattered on the ground all around him. It was the same as to when he had his shooting training, although they were just images, it was enough to make him wince.

"There you go, another image of your corpse. Let's work hard so that the real Akira won't be added among these images, okay?"

"Yeah, I know."

Akira could again sense something scary hidden within her beautiful smile as he continued his training.

In the middle of his training, Akira realized that something felt strange.

"Alpha, can I ask you something?"

"Yes?"

“Uhmmm, how should I put this out? I’ve been feeling something weird, did you do something to me?”

“Something weird? I’m just operating the augmented suit so I can efficiently teach you how to move, do you mean that?”

“No, not that one. It’s like, I always find my body already moving when I want to do something.”

“Do you mean that your body moved first even before you intentionally tried to move your body and it was not the augmented suit that made you do that?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“Maybe it’s just your imagination. My guess is that your augmented suit received the information of what you were going to do from its sensors, so it moved to match your movement. And what you noticed was that move. I think the reason for your strange sensation is because of the time gap between that movement and your sensation. It’s not like I did anything there, you know.”

“Is that so?”

“But remember that sensation well. If you try to match your body to that movement, it should greatly reduce the burden on your body. Moreover, the augmented suit is set using the movement of someone well trained as the basis, thus if you follow that movement, you might be able to fight well even without my support.”

“I understand, so in short, that sensation was a good thing, right?”

“I think so. It’s not something for you to worry about. Now then, let’s continue the training.”

Both Akira and Alpha took their fighting stance and this time Akira proceeded by following that movement he felt without any worry.

They kept training until sunset. After he finished his training, Akira was so tired that he could not even walk on his own, thus it was thanks to his augmented suit that he was able to return to his room. So in short, it was just like Alpha said, he was able to return back by making him walk using his augmented suit.

With his new augmented suit, Akira's training had become more efficient and harsher than ever before.

Silavin: Poor Akira. Let's pray to his well being. Amen.

I wonder if Alpha did not go in her birthday suit because it might have distracted Akira from his actual training. Hmm…

I certainly would not be distracted.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 27, Recognition of the Young Hunters

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Proofreader: p4553r

A lot of Hunters gathered in an open field near the city, Akira was among them.

The open field was located near the city border right next to the wasteland and since it had a vast area, it was occasionally used as the meeting ground for the Hunters who took certain requests. Many portable shops were also set here. The Hunters gathered here after taking a specific request from the Hunter Office.

It was the duty of the Hunter Office to distribute requests to the Hunters. There were all kinds of requests posted on the net and all the requests had restrictions based on Hunter Rank.

Hunters with Rank 10 were not even considered as real Hunters, it was rank for a complete amateur, as such, the number of requests that a Rank 10 Hunter could take was very limited. The request that Akira took was to patrol around the Kugamayama city. Hunters would join together with other Hunters to patrol the area in a vehicle that the Hunter Office provided. Their main job was to thin out the monsters around the city.

For this request, the pay was guaranteed even if they did not encounter any monster at all. Moreover, they would get more money if they did encounter monsters and eradicated them. So for those who were lacking skills, they could still get paid just by riding the patrol vehicle. And even if they met some monsters, the other Hunters would help them fight those monsters. So in short, they would have a better chance of survival. And for those Hunters who sought glory and money, they just had to kill those monsters faster than anyone else.

As for the new Hunters who wanted to rise up to greatness, this was a perfect request for them. After all, it was not a life-threatening job, so their chance of getting killed was relatively low.

A lot of Hunters completed their request registration through their information terminal. As such, this method of registration became most common among Hunters. But for Akira who was not very skilled in operating his information terminal, it was not as easy. But thanks to Alpha, who was there to operate his information terminal, he just needed to go to the gathering place.

Eventually, a Hunter Office's staff stood up and used a sound amplifier to give instructions to the Hunters who had gathered there.

"Line up and show us your Hunter ID!! After that, get on the vehicle assigned to you! You can do anything you want until the departure, but if you are late in boarding the vehicle, we'll take that as you abandoning the request. Now, form a line!!"

All the Hunters lined up as if they were already used to this kind of thing. Akira joined one of the lines and waited for his turn. When he was called, he imitated other Hunters and just held up his Hunter ID on the Hunter Office staff's information terminal.

After the staff finished reading information from Akira's Hunter ID, he assigned him a vehicle.

"Go to vehicle number 14!! Next!!"

Akira left the line and headed towards his assigned vehicle, midway, Alpha looked a bit curious as she said to Akira.

“Number 14, huh? That does sound like a number for you.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Don’t worry, it’s just a number with a certain meaning.”

“…So what kind of meaning does this number 14 have?”

“It’s nothing to worry about. Just leave everything to me. It’ll be alright since you have my support. So let’s work hard and come back alive!”

At first, Akira just tilted his head in confusion. But he eventually became very bothered by it since Alpha kept telling him to stop worrying about it.

“Seriously though, what exactly does this number 14 mean??”

“That one over there is your vehicle, let’s go board it.”

Alpha just kept smiling, there was no sign that she would explain the meaning behind number 14.

The vehicle number 14 was a big truck designed to traverse the wasteland. Its roofless cargo tray was fitted with cheap long benches on both sides. Hunters were already sitting on those long benches. Some of those Hunters stared at Akira as he was about to board the truck.

There were many armed Hunters gathered in his vehicle. Akira thought that those Hunters were so powerful that he would not be able to win against them in a one on one fight. Thus, he could not help but imagine the worst-case scenario which made him nervous. But then Alpha suddenly flew to his front and changed her dress.

“Akira, this seat is empty.”

Akira was a bit surprised as he sat on the seat pointed by Alpha and locked his face forward. But the scene in front of his eyes made him forget about

his nervousness. He made a puzzled look as he asked Alpha.

“Alpha, why did you change your dress?”

Alpha struck a pose in front of Akira and smiled at him.

“Does it look good on me?”

The truck was designed for traversing the wasteland and its cargo tray was filled with fully equipped Hunters, but in the middle of the cargo tray, Alpha was posing in a sexy swimsuit without showing any embarrassment. It made a very contrasting scene.

Moreover, Alpha should have been attracting a lot of attention in that situation, but no one even batted an eyelash. It was such a weird scene that it reminded Akira the fact that Alpha was indeed an abnormal being.

Alpha’s sexy swimsuit showcased her long legs and her alluring figure. Akira did not want to comment on her fashion sense but he couldn’t resist.

“…All I can say is that it’s not appropriate for this situation. Even someone like myself, who doesn’t know much about common sense, understands that swimsuit is not appropriate in this truck heading to the wasteland.”

Alpha smiled mischievously.

“I bet you’ll be bored since you’ll have to keep looking at the vast and empty wasteland for a long time during this job. So I thought of adding some colours to your views. So what do you think, it’s pretty good, isn’t it?”

It was true that her swimsuit was pretty good and he admitted that. But its aesthetics were spoiled because it stuck out like a sore thumb among those Hunters.

“I don’t really care, just turn back to your normal dress.”

Alpha smiled as she was having a good time teasing Akira.

“If you keep looking at me with that scary face, you’ll look suspicious, you know?”

Akira let out a sigh and decided to stop urging Alpha to change her dress.

All the nervousness and uneasiness that he felt when he was boarding the truck were gone after having this stupid conversation with Alpha. And of course, he was not that stupid to not realise that it was exactly the reason why Alpha changed her dress in the first place.

As Akira was about to forget everything and focus on the present, the Hunter sitting beside him clicked his tongue in annoyance. His name was Hazawa.

“Another kid, huh!! What the heck is going on? It is so unlucky to get assigned to this truck!”

Another Hunter near him then chuckled and mocked Akira.

“What the heck are you talking about? It just means that we have fewer competitors, so we’re actually lucky to get on this truck.”

Although both of them agreed that there were useless Hunters in the truck, they did not agree on their situation. Hazawa looked at the young Hunters around him, especially at Akira, then he shouted.

“I wanted to do a risk-free job, you know!! I heard that new monsters have started appearing in Kuzusuhara ruins and changed the distribution of the monsters there!! That’s why I wanted to do a safe job until things returned back to normal, is that too much to ask?! But even so, to think that I would get assigned to this truck filled with kids, this is just too unlucky!!”

Akira looked around to see other Hunters in the truck, he noticed that there were many around his age in this truck.

Hunters mostly did their job in the wasteland. Caution and cowardice would not help Hunters in earning a lot of money. On the other hand, it would keep them away from doing anything that would endanger them. The other

experienced Hunters only smiled at Hazawa's behaviour, it was obvious that they understood Hazawa's line of thinking.

But there was one young Hunter, named Katsuya, who could not let that slide. He shouted back at Hazawa in anger.

"Are you kidding me?!! My Hunter Rank is 19!! And I'm not using cheap equipment like yours!! Both of our skills and equipment are on different levels, you know!!"

Katsuya was pretty confident with his own skill, and in reality, he was indeed pretty skilled. But since he was a young Hunter, he was frequently looked down upon. Thus Hazawa's remark now rubbed him the wrong way.

Hazawa looked at Katsuya and the other Hunters and mocked.

"Humph. You're just one of those Drankam brats, right? I know you guys were carried through your ranks by the veteran Hunters, like hell I can trust that Hunter Rank of yours."

Drankam was the biggest operational Hunter gang in the slum. It was a relatively big gang with Hunters as its members. A lot of people used the gang to attain success.

The Hunter Office often gave preferential treatment for such big and influential gangs. Whenever the Hunter Office gives out a big request which would consume both time and a lot of human resources, it would allow such gangs to decide on the team's composition, handling the lack of human resource and even distribution of rewards. After all, it was easier to govern the rowdy Hunters when they were affiliated with a gang. Because of this reason, the Hunter Office was actively recommending Hunters to join a gang, which indirectly led to the formation of such big scale Hunter gangs.

The Hunter Office also managed these Hunter gangs. One of the indicators that the Hunter Office used to evaluate these gangs was the average Hunter Rank of its gang members. Thus it was rather common among the Hunter gangs to let the new Hunters tag along with some veteran Hunters to raise

their rank faster, which in turn, would increase the gang's average Hunter Rank.

The Hunter Office had some toleration for such conduct, after all, it was also a method to raise the next generation of Hunters. It was fine as long as the Hunters that got carried, still finished their increasingly difficult requests equivalent to their Ranks in the future.

As such, there were few Hunter gangs which only raised up their average rank in order to get the preferential treatment from the Hunter Office. Those Hunter gangs were filled with amateur Hunters with a high Hunter Rank. But that was not the bad part, the worst part of it was when the new Hunters, oblivious to their real situation, thought that it was all due to their own skill they got ranked up and ended up doing something foolish. And in case they had to work together with another group for a job, the whole group would have to pay the price of their foolishness.

The reason why Hazawa said such a thing was because he himself had gone through dangerous experience because of such kind of Hunters. Moreover, he also noticed that the other Hunter's equipment were better than his, thus he tried to hide his jealousy with hatred.

"I bet you didn't buy that equipment with the money that you earned yourself. It's such a pain in the ass to have an arrogant fool like you around, you know. Hunters like you will only give me more trouble."

Katsuya looked furious as he replied.

"It's people like you that will give us trouble!! You just said that you're planning to sit back and let other Hunters kill the monsters for you right from the start, didn't you?!!"

"What?! I was just saying that I had no plans to clean up your mess!!"

Katsuya and Hazawa were getting more and more agitated as they quarrelled.

Katsuya was sitting next to two other young Hunters affiliated with Drankam, Airi and Yumina. Seeing Katsuya not planning to end their quarrel anytime soon, Yumina started scolding him. She sounded like she had been taking care of him since they were kids.

“Katsuya, stop it. It would be a problem if they say that you were making a ruckus here.”

Airi also tried to stop Katsuya by joining the fray.

“Katsuya, no need to listen to a small fry like him.”

Katsuya turned to Yumina and Airi with an annoyed look. But Hazawa got furious when he was called a small fry and glared at Airi. She just ignored it and continued.

“If we’re only amateurs, then the other Hunters here are also the same. I’ll definitely rise up from this place in no time, so I don’t have the time to listen to small fry like him.”

The whole place suddenly went silent, the moment Airi said that everyone in the truck was also amateurs, everyone looked at Katsuya and his friends with hostility. Unfortunately, Akira also got hostile stares as the other Hunters mistook him as one of Katsuya’s friends.

A Hunter by the name Shikarabe broke the silence with a big sigh and put pressure on everyone with his low voice.

“You three, stop there.”

Shikarabe’s equipment was on a different level compared to the other Hunters in the truck. He gave out an aura of an experienced Hunter too. He was also a member of Drankam and he was here to look over the other children from his gang. In short, he was a babysitter.

Shikarabe looked around him with an annoyance. It was enough to take control of the whole situation that was about to get elevated into a riot.

“I’ll be looking over these brats, so they won’t give you any trouble.”

The other Hunters could only agree since Shikarabe was stronger than them. Looking at the other's reaction, Katsuya and Airi made a smug face.

At the same time, the staff from the Hunter Office shouted from the driving seat.

"It's time!! We're going now!! Anyone who makes ruckus will be kicked out from the truck and considered as abandoning their job!! And also, you from the Drankam!! Be sure to keep your brats in check!! We're leaving now!!"

The other Hunters were relieved when they heard that.

Akira looked relieved when the ruckus died down, but he then complained.

"Why would something like this happen before we even get dispatched?"

Alpha smiled and said.

"Maybe it's because of your bad luck."

Although Akira was somehow convinced by that reasoning, he quickly tried to refute it.

"…But there's a strong Hunter with us in this truck. So it should have nothing to do with my bad luck."

The Hunters in the truck had calmed down as the truck was on its way to the wasteland. The truck traversed the wasteland by surveying its surroundings using the big sensor installed on it.

The rewards awarded to the Hunters in a patrol request was based on the numbers of monsters they defeated during their patrol. As for the monsters, basically it was first come first served. The Hunter Office identified Hunters who killed the monsters based on the information gathered by the devices installed in the truck. In the cases where the monsters were killed during a salvo or when it was unclear who killed a monster, the reward would be divided between the Hunters who were involved in the salvo or even divided among everyone in the truck. It was also mentioned in one of the

clauses in the job request so that the Hunters would not complain during the distribution of the rewards.

As for the corpse of the monsters, they were all sellable goods and the Hunter Office had rights over them. It was for preventing the Hunters from dragging those corpses back home and delaying the patrol. Although there were cases where another group was sent to collect them, most of the time they were just left behind because it was ineffective.

The truck continued patrolling the wasteland. Although they encountered monsters, most were spotted from far away or were just all alone in the middle of the wasteland, thus the Hunters were able to take them out from afar.

The Hunters in the truck were assigned their patrol direction according to their seat. The Drankam Hunters were assigned to watch the right side. As for Akira, he was assigned to watch the left side and he had no luck in spotting any monsters till now.

Hazawa who was sitting next to Akira mistook him as one of the Drankam's member, thus he tried to get Akira to move away from his side with spite.

"You're one of them, right? So why are you here?"

Akira answered back calmly.

"I have no connection with them."

Hazawa looked surprised.

"Is that so? But you're also just a brat."

"Even a small kid like me needs money too. There are not many requests that a small kid with low Hunter rank can take. I only got in this truck together with them by pure chance."

"If that's the case, then what's with your augmented suit? Isn't that something that you borrowed from Drankam?"

The reason why Hazawa was suspicious of Akira was because even the cheapest augmented suit was expensive and it was not something that a newbie Hunter would be able to afford, more so for a small kid.

Hearing Hazawa's question, Akira's expression turned serious.

"I bought it with the money that I saved. It was pretty cheap since it is 2 generations behind. But even so, I had to sacrifice most of my accommodation money to buy it. Thus I ended up staying in a room without a bath and hadn't been taking bath these past few days. I'm planning to move to a room with a bath with the money that I get from this job."

Hazawa was able to feel Akira's resolve and motivation and he was taken aback by it. Hazawa could also see Akira's determination within his eyes.

"I-I see. Sorry that I lumped you with those people. Well, I too want to be able to take a bath every day. I can understand your feelings there."

Although it was weird to be able to buy an augmented suit only by cutting accommodation money, that line of thinking did not even pass Hazawa's mind as he was taken aback by Akira's reaction.

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Katsuya and his friends were shooting at the monsters while exchanging light jokes, they were so relaxed. Whether it was because of their real skill or from their lack of awareness of danger due to their lack of experience was unknown but it was enough to grate the ears of the other Hunters who were still annoyed by their behaviour before they were dispatched.

Katsuya was aiming at a monster from afar, he took an aim carefully and pulled the trigger. But since the truck was rocking and distance from the monster, his shot missed the target.

"Missed again, huh. This is hard."

Yumina looked exasperated as she smiled and told off Katsuya.

“Katsuya, as I said, it’s too far for you. You should bait it to come closer before trying to shoot.”

Airi extended her hand and urged him for the rifle.

“Next is my turn.”

“Wait for a bit!! I’ll definitely hit my next target.”

Even though it was first come first served, only Katsuya was shooting at the monsters. This was because the range of his rifle was superior among the other Hunters. In short, it showed the difference between the equipment that the Drankam Hunters were using compared to the other Hunters in the truck.

No matter how many shots Katsuya released, the monster kept running towards the truck as none of his shots hit it. When the other Hunters readied their gun to take aim, one of the young Drankam Hunters would finally hit their target because of their superior effective range and kill the monster. But thinking about the number of bullets they wasted, it was uncertain whether they would make any profit at all.

Katsuya lowered his gun while looking disappointed since he could not kill all the monsters by himself. Airi extended her hand towards him again.

“Katsuya, it’s my turn.”

“…I know.”

As Katsuya reluctantly handed his rifle to Airi, Yumina just smiled bitterly.

The young Hunters of Drankam monopolized the prey because of their better rifle. It was indeed first come first served, the survival of the fittest. There was no rule saying that they should share their prey. But it was a completely different case whether doing so would anger other Hunters or not.

Looking at how Katsuya and his friends were acting, Hazawa mumbled in a bad mood.

“Those brats getting ahead of themselves… Ahh, it’s not like I’m saying that to you, you know?”

Hazawa remembered about Akira who was right beside him, thus he said that to Akira in panic. But Akira did not seem to be bothered at all.

“It’s fine, I know that I’m also a brat.”

“I see, by the way, your gun is also AAH rifle, huh? Mine is also AAH rifle, you see.”

Hazawa then showed his gun to Akira. It was indeed another AAH rifle. Although Akira’s rifle looked better maintained than his, Hazawa still felt happy to meet someone who was using the same rifle type that he loved.

“It’s indeed a good rifle, isn’t it? It’s a famous gun. Although there are people who look down on it because of its cheap price, it was not like the price is everything. If you suck at shooting, you’ll miss even if you use an expensive gun.”

Hazawa glanced at Katsuya. Although Hazawa did not say that intentionally to let Katsuya hear him, still Katsuya overheard him nonetheless since the truck’s tray was narrow.

Katsuya glared at him and Hazawa who noticed that just chuckled mockingly.

Akira then interjected to say his own opinion.

“We’re trying to shoot a monster from a long-range in a moving truck, so it’s to be expected that it’s not going to be easy.”

Akira sounded as if he was defending Katsuya, thus Hazawa’s mood soured while Katsuya looked satisfied. But it quickly changed when Akira continued wording out his opinion.

“Don’t worry though, I’m not someone who would intentionally miss my shots just to bait a monster and make other people take care of my mess. Not to mention, someone said he would take care of them and make sure

that they won’t trouble other Hunters too. Just leave those guys alone. Don’t mind them as long as they don’t let monsters swarm this truck from their side.”

Akira sounded like he was saying that Katsuya and his friends were just dead weight to them. Thus Hazawa looked satisfied while Katsuya was obviously offended.

Hazawa’s mood turned better as he lost interest in Katsuya. He turned his gaze back to Akira and said.

“As brothers in arms, I’ll let you take the first monster coming out in this direction.”

“…Thank you.”

Not too long after that, a monster was detected from Akira and Hazawa’s direction. It was a big burly carnivorous monster, the moment it noticed the truck, it started running vigorously towards them.

Akira composed himself, let out a small breath, *fuh*, and readied his gun.

“Alpha, I’m counting on your support.”

“How much support do you want this time? Since you’re not in training today, how about trying to shoot it by yourself?”

“Nope, please provide me with your full support. The truck is rocking pretty hard, I don’t think I can hit that monster without your support. I’ll use this chance to see how effective your support is during this kind of situation.”

Alpha returned a smile hearing his challenge.

“Oh my, if you say that, then I have no other choice but to show you how great my support is. So leave it to me.”

“I’m counting on you.”

Akira readied his gun and aimed carefully through its aiming device. The weak points of the monster and the TPLine were shown in his view. Although the rocking of the truck should intensely sway the aim, Akira was able to hold his aim through his rifle's scope on that big monster which was on the very edge of his rifle's effective range. It was possible because Alpha made fine adjustments to compensate for the shaking from the truck.

As Akira was about to pull the trigger, she raised the power of his augmented suit along with her fine adjustments and hardened it to stabilize his aim.

Akira pulled the trigger of his gun. The bullet which flew out from its muzzle was highly accurate thanks to Alpha's support and hit the weak spot of the monster. The same happened for his second shot and third shot. All of his shots hit the moving monster as if it was a miracle. The last bullet went straight through its skull and ripped its brain off. Each bullet shot by Akira worsened the monster's condition from light to severe wounds and finally to fatal wounds. The monster tripped and rolled over before it finally laid dead.

Hazawa was taken by surprise when he saw the monster trip over and die. He never thought that a shot from such distance would even hit the monster.

"Wh-whoah, you're pretty good."

Akira lowered his gun and replied back as if it was nothing.

"Well, as expected from a famous gun."

"Y-You can say that again."

Hazawa was at loss for words when Akira said it in a fashion as if it was to be expected to hit that monster. Akira was sure that his shots would hit, thanks to Alpha who made it possible.

Alpha was smiling meaningfully at Akira.

"So? What do you think?"

“It was amazing.”

Alpha looked a bit unsatisfied with his answer.

“But you don’t seem that amazed though.”

“Is that so? Well, I got to see so many surprising things since I met you. So I might’ve gotten used to it.”

“Really? In that case, I’ll definitely surprise you in the near future.”

After saying that, Alpha smiled teasingly. As for Akira, he tried to keep his cool while reacting to Alpha so as to not make himself look suspicious.

Hazawa was not the only Hunter who was surprised by Akira’s skill. From the point of view of people who could not see Alpha, Akira looked like a powerful Hunter doing such a miraculous feat like it was nothing.

After the truck finished patrolling the area assigned to it, it started its return trip to the city. On their way back home, the Hunters in the truck already lowered their guard and started relaxing. Most of them started talking to each other and the truck became a bit noisy.

Katsuya didn’t take his eyes off Akira. Akira noticed that but he ignored it.

“Akira. He’s looking at you.”

“It’s not like he’s going to challenge me to a fight. So just leave him be.”

“You’re right, he might be just looking at you since it’s rare to find small kids in this kind of job.”

Akira thought that Katsuya and his friends were unsociable and they were the kind of people who would frequently cause problems. As long as they were not the ones taking the initiative, Akira preferred to keep away from them.

But talking about people who would frequently cause problems, Akira was actually worse than them considering the incident that happened in Sheryl’s

base the other day. He also understood that but he was playing ignorant.

“Alpha, in the end, I only got to kill one monster though. Are we really going to keep doing this kind of job from now on? How much am I going to earn exactly?”

“Well, one thing for sure, it won’t be enough to let you sleep in a room with a bath. If only another group of monsters attack you like the other day, would you be able to make a lot of money.”

“Give me a break, I don’t want to face that kind of situation for a second time.”

Akira face twitched as he remembered that he barely survived that fight. But in contrast, Alpha just kept smiling like usual.

“You have an augmented suit this time, so I think you have the choice of running away now.”

“No thanks. What would you do if it breaks my legs?”

“Well, let’s use medicine on your legs before they break. I think that should buy us enough time before your legs actually break.”

“Let me make myself clear, can you please come up with a solution so that I won’t get in that situation in the first place?”

Akira’s face distorted when he said that and he maintained his expression all the way back to the city. Akira thought that he would look like a frowning Hunter who was on his way back from his job knowing that he did not make much money.

Katsuya was looking at Akira with a puzzled face, he then whispered to Yumina and Airi.

“Say, did you look at him when he shot that monster?”

Airi shook her head and answered back.

“Nope.”

“I wasn’t looking at him too, what’s wrong?”

Yumina asked back curiously, to which, Katsuya replied back with a disappointed face and said.

“So both of you didn’t see that, huh?”

“We’re here for exploration training after all. So we didn’t have the time to look at others… Katsuya, that should be the case for you too, right? So why are you watching someone kill a monster? Were you skipping your training?”

Yumina scolded Katsuya. So he panicked and tried to come up with an excuse.

“I-I’m sorry, okay. I just heard some conversation that bothered me back there. So I was curious and kept an eye on them.”

“Get a better grip on yourself, okay? We’re a team here so we have to support each other, but even so, there’s a limit on how much support I can give you, you know?”

Katsuya saw that Yumina had entered her scolding mode again, thus he glanced at Airi, seeking for help. But Airi asked him a question as if she could not read the mood.

“What’s bothering you anyway?”

Katsuya immediately answered back in order to cut short Yumina’s scolding.

“Well, actually…”

Yumina noticed that Airi saved Katsuya from her scolding, so she just smiled since she knew that there was nothing she could do.

As Katsuya told them what he saw when Akira shot that monster, Airi thought for a moment before saying.

“Wasn’t that just pure luck?”

“It was already within his AAH rifle’s effective range and there was a chance that his shot hit by pure luck. Moreover, the shots might have not hit the monster directly too. The bullets might have hit the ground near the monster and the monster was surprised by it thus tripping over and breaking its own neck. Or maybe someone took a shot at that monster at the same time as him. It’s hard to believe that he intentionally aimed and hit all his shots at that monster’s weak points.”

“I see. But it did look like that to me.”

“Since it’s not like I saw it, I can only say that it might be just coincidence, moreover…”

“Moreover?”

“Even if he did hit his shots successfully, it has nothing to do with us.”

Yumina then asked Katsuya in an annoyed tone.

“By the way, why are you so bothered by that?”

Airi also joined Yumina.

“Putting that aside, I think you should pay more attention to the other Hunters who are on the same gang and same team as you.”

The reason why Katsuya was bothered by Akira was because of Hazawa. It was clear that Hazawa was looking down at them, but even so, it seemed like Hazawa admitted Akira’s ability. And that was more obvious after Akira took down that monster.

Although Akira and he were similar-aged Hunters, Hazawa recognised Akira’s skill but did not accept his own skills. Katsuya was just simply

bothered by this fact. But since it pained him to say that, he just came up with an excuse.

“Well, it doesn’t really matter. It’s just that because he’s around the same age as us, it bothered me a bit. Of course, you girls are more important to me than him.”

Yumina looked embarrassed as she said.

“What are you talking about out of the blue…”

While on the other hand, Airi was delighted as she nodded and said.

“It’s fine as long as you understand.”

Although they said that, Airi and Yumina actually knew that Katsuya was trying to evade the real question. But they were swept off their feet by his words and let him get away with that.

Hazawa looked annoyed watching Katsuya and his friends, he then let out a sigh and said to Akira.

“Good grief, these guys are an eyesore right till the end, huh?”

Akira apathetically replied back.

“Just let them be. You’ll only waste your energy reacting to them, and it’ll cause you more trouble if you get in a fight with them. Not to mention that they have brought along another Hunter who looks relatively stronger than anyone here.”

Hazawa glanced at Shikarabe who was sitting near Katsuya.

“Well, you’re correct. But still, there are children like them, and again, there are children like you. I’m just wondering how you guys can be so different from each other like this.”

Hazawa was only trying to engage in a silly conversation. But Akira went silent for a while before answering back in a serious tone.

“I’m not that different from those children.”

“Is that so? But from my perspective, you look very different compared to them, you know.”

“We’re the same. Although we behave differently, both of us are children who’re staking our lives out in the wasteland. That’s a fact, no matter whether someone admits that or not. Our luck and skills to explore the ruins, to fight against the monsters and to get out from a mess are not that different. The more dangerous a request we take, the more rewards we can get. But since we’re out in the wasteland, we’re bound to meet different kinds of people. We were not lucky enough to avoid problematic people this time, but we’re sure lucky enough to get back home, that’s all there is to it.”

After saying that, Akira went silent as if he was trying to hide his emotion.

Most of the things that he just said were actually directed at himself.

The biggest advantage of joining a Hunter gang was being able to get support from the other Hunters. But if he had to compare that point, Akira with Alpha’s support was obviously in a better position.

But even so, looking at the other hunters who were similar to him in age, it was true that Akira felt a bit jealous, especially Katsuya and his friends who were having silly talks and joking around enjoying their trip to the wasteland.

Hazawa kept staring at Akira without saying anything, he was in deep thought.

He got a close look at Akira when he used the AAH rifle to easily kill that monster. Although Hazawa looked calm on the outside, he was actually very shaken deep within.

Hazawa knew that he could not do the same feat although he was holding the same rifle. He had no confidence he could hit a target from such a distance. If he was in that situation, he could only spray some bullets hoping to weaken that monster before firing a killing shot. It was

impossible for him to defeat the monster with the least amount of bullets like what Akira did. He understood this fact very well.

Hazawa's gaze shifted to Akira's gun, it was the same AAH rifle like his. But Akira's gun looked like it was properly maintained. In contrast to that, he could not even remember the time he had done full maintenance for his own rifle.

As expected of a favourite gun, AAH rifle could maintain its performance even when it was not properly maintained. But it was to be expected that the performance of a gun would slowly worsen if it was not properly maintained. When Hazawa looked at his gun, it looked like a shabby gun to him now.

Hazawa then just smiled bitterly.

[…I could return back home safely from the wasteland although I'm using this gun, huh. It seems that I'm pretty lucky.]

Although he took this relatively safe patrol job because he was afraid of dying, he did not properly maintain his own gun and went out to the dangerous wasteland. Even though this job did not seem worth the money at first glance, it looked even more unworthy of the money to him now.

Hazawa did a lot more dangerous Hunter jobs in the past. He explored a lot of ruins, brought back a lot of relics, fought all kinds of monsters and survived all of those. At the same time, he also saw a lot of people getting killed. Some of them were his fellow Hunters who went to the ruins with him, some of them were bandits who tried to rob him and some of them were his friends who suddenly stopped coming to their usual drinking place. All these deaths weakened Hazawa's resolve. Eventually, Hazawa decided to exchange his chance of success with his safety.

[…If I keep doing cheap work like this because of fear, I guess it's given that I would end up being a Hunter with no achievement, huh. Now that I remember it, I was way more ambitious back in the days….]

One of the reasons why Hazawa was so annoyed watching Katsuya and his friends was because he could feel their determination to raise up as successful Hunters. They still tried to chase a higher position despite all the dangers that they were facing. If they did have the ability and the luck, it would be as Airi said, they would raise up in the Rank in no time.

But putting that aside, it was true that Katsuya and his friends were aiming for a higher position, just like he did in the past.

[…I guess this is it for today, I'll go back home after this and do proper maintenance on my gun. Then I'll redo everything again. I'll once again aim for becoming a Hunter that I was dreaming about. After all, I'm a lucky person. I'm lucky that I was able to meet these brats today, it's as if saying that I should retry again.]

Hazawa made up his resolve in silence.

In truth, Hazawa was actually a lucky person. After all, he was able to finish his job for the day and go back to his inn to do proper maintenance of his gun. He was actually luckier than he thought he was.

Silavin: For the last part (about hazama's luck), you will understand more in the next chapter what it means.

For this chapter, we get to see a harem boy :/

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Rebuild World – Chapter 28, A Request From The Corporate Government

Index

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Akira and the other Hunters returned back to the gathering place. It was busier than when they had left. The trucks that were used during the patrol were lined up and the Hunters were offboarding from their trucks.

As Akira stepped down from the truck's tray, the nervousness and tensed up feeling inside him finally cleared. He then let out a sigh to expel all the tiredness within his psyche.

Alpha smiled and tried to cheer up the tired Akira.

"Good work out there. You got back safely without any trouble."

"You're right."

"I'm really glad. But don't forget that this is also thanks to my support, okay?"

"…Yeah."

“To be honest, I thought I had to be more cautious of your bad luck when you got number 14, but it seems that there was nothing to worry about after all.”

When Akira heard that, he looked at Alpha in puzzlement.

“Seriously though, what meaning does this number 14 actually have?”

“It’s nothing to worry about.”

Alpha’s smile did not change as she said that. Although Akira was still suspicious, he was interrupted when one of the Hunter Office staff made an announcement.

“Show your Hunter ID and report in to wrap up your patrol request!! The rewards will be distributed at the counters in the Hunter Office! The payment distribution will start at 18:00 today!! Hunters who didn’t collect their payment within 48 hours since the start of distribution will lose their rewards!! I’ll say it again!! Show your Hunter ID and…”

The staff from the Hunter Office kept repeating this announcement to the Hunters who returned from their patrol. It was in order to avoid any kind of problems that might arise when they distribute the payment for these Hunters.

“Akira, let’s go and formally finish today’s request. It’ll be bad if you forget it. So let’s go now.”

“Alright, alright. Just give me a break and return back to your usual dress, will you?”

“Oh my, do you hate this swimsuit that much?”

Alpha then turned to Akira and made some poses to display her charm while making a displeased expression showing that she was offended by his remark. Akira had calmed down and loosened up after realizing that he was no longer in the wasteland, so he now felt that Alpha’s swimsuit was a bit too aggressive. So he replied back bluntly.

“Just turn back to how you usual dress already.”

“Haah, it can’t be helped then.”

Alpha then changed into something that was less revealing. Although it was still rather aggressive, Akira thought that it was at least fine for now. After all, if he complained too much about it, she might even turn her dress to something worse instead.

After that, Akira joined the line for the report wrap-up. When his turn came, he let the information terminal handled by the Hunter Office staff to read the data from his Hunter ID. The sound made by the terminal when it read the data from his Hunter ID indicated that his job was formally over.

Akira felt like he had accomplished something. Alpha then told him to open his information terminal, connect it to the Hunter Office and check the request history. With her help, Akira used his information terminal to connect to the Hunter Office and opened the page that showed individual data of Hunters. When he checked the history section, he could see that the request he just finished was listed there.

“By the way, what should I do to receive the reward?”

“It would be transferred to your account. The basic reward is 5000 Aurum. Although I don’t know about the data gathered by the Hunter Office’s information gathering devices, you did defeat only 1 monster back there. So don’t keep your hopes too high. When the payment distribution begins, your reward should be transferred to your account from the Hunter Office. As for your Hunter Rank, I can’t really say anything. After all, the rank promotion calculation is not revealed to the public.”

( )

The current Akira was more concerned about the money that he could get for paying his accommodation rather than his rank. Thus he frowned when he heard her explanation about his reward.

“…I still can’t change to a room with a bath with that amount of money.”

“You just finished your first request for this morning, you know. I think it’ll be okay if you sum up all the money that you’ll be making today.”

“I hope you’re correct.”

The patrol request was divided into 3 rounds during the morning and 4 rounds during the evening. Since the ammo expenditure depended on the number of monsters that they encountered during the patrol, it was divided in such a way that they would always have enough reserve ammo to return back as scheduled without any trouble.

Most of the Hunters who took this request were new young Hunters. And even after registering their name beforehand, some of them still did not turn up in the gathering place. There were a lot of possible reasons for the same. Some of them were just simply abandoning the request. Some of them took multiple requests, got attacked by monsters on their previous request and were too afraid to proceed. And of course, some of them were rendered unfit to fight or even got killed by monsters. These were common happenings among new Hunters.

But the Hunter Office did not differentiate between these reasons. After all, these kinds of things only happened because these Hunters were lacking in their resolve and skill.

The next request that Akira took would start at 11:00. Since he only used 3 bullets during his last patrol, he did not need to restock his ammo before proceeding to the next request. So he decided to have a small talk with Alpha while waiting. But suddenly, Elena who was passing by that area by pure chance noticed Akira and smiled at him.

“Ah, as I thought, it is Akira. Long time no see, Akira.”

Akira politely bowed his head.

“Long time no see.”

“I thought that I would frequently see you in Shizuka’s shop, but it seems that you haven’t been visiting her shop lately. Did anything happen?”

“Ah, it’s just that after I placed my order for an augmented suit, I temporarily stopped doing any Hunter requests and was spending most of my time inside my room. My augmented suit arrived not too long ago and I started taking up Hunter requests again today.”

“I see, I’m glad that it wasn’t because you were bedridden after getting injured from back then.”

Elena then looked at Akira’s augmented suit.

“Is that the augmented suit you were talking about…? Yep, it looks good on you. You look really cool in it.”

“Thank you for the compliment.”

Akira was a bit bashful when he said that. Looking at his reaction, Elena felt it rather cute. But right after that, her face turned serious.

[…When I look at him like this, he looks like just your normal everyday boy. But…]

Akira noticed that small change in Elena’s expression and looked at her in puzzlement. But then Elena politely bowed at Akira.

“I know that this might be way too late, but I want to say it properly. Thank you very much for saving me and Sara back then. I’m really thankful to you.”

Akira looked like he was at a loss for words but then Elena continued with her still serious face.

“Sara has already said this to me and I too promise you that I won’t ask anything unnecessary and I won’t reveal this to anyone.”

Akira looked conflicted for a second, but he immediately covered it up with a smile.

“…Ahh, right, please don’t tell anyone.”

As Elena saw Akira's reaction, she felt a little disappointed.

[…As I thought, it's not like he can trust us right away, huh. Well, it's only to be expected though.]

Elena's heart hurt a little when she realized that Akira still did not fully trust her, but at the same time, she understood his reason too.

She thought that Akira might be someone who could connect to the old world domain and that he knew it was dangerous if other people discovered that. Thus it was only to be expected that he did not trust her. After all, there were cases where getting killed was better than getting discovered. Elena understood that as well, that was why she tried to give her best sincere smile to Akira in order to make him feel more at ease.

"Even if I look like this, I'm a Hunter with quite some accomplishments under my belt, so I know well about the importance of trust. And not to mention that I don't want Shizuka and Sara to hate me, of course, I don't want you to hate me too. So don't worry."

"Ah, it's not like I can't trust you or Sara-san. It's just that… You know…"

"Is that so? Thank you for believing in us, I'm really happy that you do."

Elena then smiled fondly at Akira. Akira was embarrassed seeing her being so sincere to him, but then he started to blush and started to get flustered for a different reason.

Elena was happy and it was shown in her face. Judging by Akira's reaction, it seemed that he was indeed not lying. But then she looked reluctant and said.

"To be honest, I still want to talk with you for some more time, but I have some other things to do for now. Let's meet up again somewhere else like in Shizuka's shop and have a long conversation next time. Since you're here, I bet you're taking that patrol request, right? Because this is your first Hunter job after a while, be sure to not let your guard down and be careful out there, okay? See you around then."

“Yes, I’ll be careful. Elena-san too, please be careful.”

Elena waved at Akira before she left the place. After Elena was gone from his views, Akira hung his head and let out a big sigh. Just like that time with Sara-san, Akira felt a strong and heavy emotion crawling inside his heart.

Alpha noticed that and immediately called out to him.

“Akira.”

Akira then remembered what Alpha said to him back then.

“I know, it’s alright.”

Akira had made his resolve and decided that next time he would save Elena and Sara for the sake of saving them and not as a pretence for killing other people. And he would get stronger both for Elena and Sara’s sake and for his own sake as well.

Looking at that, Alpha smiled at him and said.

“It’s all good as long as you get it. It’s about the time for the next request, so let’s move.”

“Okay.”

Akira raised his head and firmly stepped forward.

As the time for his next job came closer, Akira got assigned to a truck just like before. While he was walking to his assigned truck, Alpha who was beside him frowned a bit.

“…This number again, huh. I wonder if this number has some kind of connections with you or something.”

Akira got assigned to the number 14 truck again. Looking at how Alpha frowned and said that as if it had some kind of meaning behind it, Akira also frowned.

“Seriously now, if you’re going to say something like that, you should just tell me the meaning behind that number.”

“It’s nothing much. It’s just that according to my experience, it was a rather unlucky number.”

“…Oh, I see, it’s indicating that I have bad luck, huh?”

“Yep, it is.”

Akira was convinced by her answer as she would not explain anything more than that.

As the next patrol was dispatched, Akira looked around to check the faces of other Hunters who were in the same truck as him. Although he saw some familiar faces, he did not see Hazawa or the Drankam Hunters who were with him in his last patrol.

This time, Akira was the only young Hunter in the truck. Although it did not become a ruckus like the last time, there were still some Hunters who looked at him as if he was a dead weight. But after he got to kill some monsters with his accurate shooting thanks to Alpha’s support, other Hunters stopped looking at him like that.

Due to his highly accurate shooting, some of them even thought that Akira was a cyborg. After all, it was not an impossible thing to execute such a highly accurate shot if he was a cyborg with a preinstalled accuracy support device and software. Moreover, it was not rare for a Hunter who just got a new body modification to be taking low-level requests until he or she got used to it.

The patrol continued without any problem. The strength of the monsters and the number of encounters they had were all manageable for a normal Hunter. And for those Hunters who expected to make quite a sum of reward money, this time’s patrol was a productive one.

Akira did kill a lot of monsters together with other Hunters, thus he could not help but smile and look forward to his reward money.

After they finished their patrol and were on their way back to the city, some of the Hunters who were expecting to get a good amount of reward were laughing and talking to each other on how were they planning to spend their money. Some of them were planning to go to the entertainment district in the city and some of them were planning to splurge their money buying things.

Akira was also in a good mood. Although he had no idea about how much rewards he would get, judging by how the other Hunters were acting, it seemed that he could get his hopes high up for this time's reward.

"It seems that I might be able to stay in a room with a bath after all. I'll take a good long bath today."

Akira was very relaxed after he finished his second patrol. Alpha saw that and warned Akira with a smile.

"Remember that you also have a patrol job in the evening too, so don't get too relaxed yet, okay? Let's work hard so you can keep staying in a room with a bath from tomorrow."

"I know. But it'll be fine as long as it's only at this level. Or is it that the next patrol will be harder than this one?"

"Although the difficulty of both requests is the same, it's common to find that the real difficulty is different compared to what was mentioned in the request information. And this is more prominent in case of eradication requests such as the one we're taking. But I bet you know this very well already, right? After all, you experienced it yourself where you got attacked by 2 groups of monsters on the same day."

"Yeah, you're right, I'll be more careful."

Akira smiled bitterly and readjusted his psyche which he let loose just a moment ago. He understood well about his unluckiness since there were cases where he had to face it in the past.

After he returned, he completed the job wrap-up and accepted the request for his next patrol. Akira then sat in the gathering place to eat his Hunter's ration. His next truck was also number 14.

"I wonder if they assign Hunters to the same truck always."

Akira looked conflicted since Alpha told him that number 14 was unlucky, but in contrast to that, Alpha seemed like she was no longer bothered by that.

"That seems to be the case. But it's nothing to worry about. So then, we still have some time before the next patrol starts, what's your plan for now?"

"If you ask me so… I still have quite a lot of reserve ammo so I don't think there's any need to refresh my reserve… And I've also finished my meal too… I have no idea what to do next."

"In that case, how about heading to the truck and taking a nap? You might be feeling the rush after finishing the last patrol, because of that there's a chance you are not feeling the fatigue now. So just to be safe, it's better if you take rest. Even a short nap will really make you feel better."

"Is that so? Alright then, let's do as you say."

Akira then headed to the truck assigned to him, there was no one in the truck. He boarded the tray, sat on one of the seats, put his rucksack down near his leg and prepared to take a nap.

Alpha smiled and said in a gentle voice.

"I'll wake you up on time for the request, so don't worry about that."

"I'll be counting on you, so I shall go ahead take a nap now."

Akira gave a light nod and closed his eyes. He immediately fell asleep. It was as Alpha said, he was building up fatigue that he himself did not realize. He was lulled to sleep as soon as he relaxed his body.

For Akira who had been living in the back alley of the slum city for years, it was unthinkable to be able to sleep in such a condition. Normally, he would have thought that sleeping in the middle of an open place filled with armed people roaming around would be the same as a suicide. But the fact that he could sleep here was because of his trust in Alpha.

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The gathering place for the patrol job was filled with Hunters and merchants. Sara and Elena were also among them. It seemed like they were waiting for someone, but they were also attracting glances from the people around them. The reason for that being the big opening in Sara's suit near her chest.

Sara made a mistake when she replenished her nanomachine stock and completely filled her reservoir. Thus her suit could not fully cover her nanomachine reservoir, which is her chest, so she had no other choice but to let a big opening on her suit's fastener.

In order to prevent the opening from getting any bigger, Sara used a sturdy looking fastener belt below her chest. But because of that, her attractive and alluring chest became even more prominent. Moreover, because she was not wearing her inner suit today, the gap in her suit revealed her bare skin valley of paradise.

Elena smiled bitterly.

"As I thought, it might be better if you put something on top or wear something under."

Sara just smiled and rejected that suggestion.

"If I put a random thing on top of it, it might obstruct my movements. As for the inner suit, all of my inner suits are torn. None are suitable for me now. Moreover, I have no reserve inner suit as well, and the clothes made of fabric that can handle the body movement of an augmented human are expensive. Well, it can't be helped, I'll just have to endure this for now."

“Your defensive suit also has a function to increase the performance of the nanomachine inside your body, so the inner suit should be compatible with that too, right? Undies made using the technology from the old world are sturdy, but we don’t have the leeway to buy them yet, huh. Well, it can’t be helped.”

Sara laughed mischievously as she made a suggestion.

“Elena, I think some of the attention will be shifted to you if you also make a big opening like mine in your suit. So can you please do that too? Just think of it as helping me out.”

Elena smiled and gave Sara a short answer.

“No thanks.”

“That’s just too bad.”

Sara then made an exaggerated gesture to show her disappointment.

Right after that, a young boy came running and stopped in front of Elena and Sara before giving them a big smile. He looked like he was very excited. It seemed like he was the person Elena and Sara were waiting for.

“Elena-san!! Sara-san!! I’ll be in your care today.”

That boy was Katsuya. Airi and Yumina followed behind him.

Yumina looked exasperated as she smiled bitterly and said to Katsuya.

“Katsuya, don’t go ahead alone like that… You’re too excited.”

Yumina said the last part in a small voice that no one could hear as it was mixed with a little bit of jealousy and annoyance. But she immediately returned back to her usual self and politely bowed to Elena and Sara.

“Elena-san, Sara-san, I’ll be in your care today.”

As for Airi, her expression did not change much as she said.

“I’ll be in your care too.”

Katsuya idolized Elena and Sara. Although there were a lot of other feelings mixed in, it was still a form of his admiration towards other Hunters that he recognized to be above him. Of course, there were a lot of Hunters in Drankam who were well above him, but because most of them were always looking down on a young Hunter like him, so he did not really like them. In contrast to them, even after doing several jobs together with Elena and Sara, there was not even an instance where they looked down at him or mocked him or insulted him or showed that they hated young hunters like him. There were even times when they were being considerate of his inferior skill, but that was to be expected. As a matter of fact, he was actually happy when Elena and Sara were being considerate to him.

Because of his past experience, Katsuya was excited when he knew that he was going to do a Hunter request together with the strong, gentle, admirable, and on top of that, beautiful Elena and Sara.

For Airi and Yumina, as fellow female Hunters, Elena and Sara were their idols who they aspired to be. That was why they understood that it could not be helped when Katsuya got excited and so they held themselves back.

Shikarabe followed behind Katsuya and the girls. He glanced at Katsuya showing this contempt for being so excited but then he immediately returned back to his usual expression and turned to Elena and Sara.

“Are we late?”

“Nope, it’s fine.”

“I see. Well, I’ll be leaving them to you. Just check on them from time to time”

Drankam made a special appeal to Elena and Sara to take request along with Katsuya and his friends. Although it included a lot of details, the bottom line was, they wanted Elena and Sara to take care, train and protect Katsuya, Airi and Yumina. So in short, Drankam wanted them to watch

over the young Hunters. Elena and Sara understood this when they accepted the request.

All the young Hunters belonging to Drankam were stipulated to work under other veteran Hunters until they piled up enough experience, abilities and achievements. This was required in order to increase the survivability of young inexperienced Hunters in this line of work where their chance of survival was already low. It was also a method to attract more Hunters into their gang.

Katsuya was deemed quite talented, thus he was assigned to work under Shikarabe who was regarded as a skilled Hunter in the gang. This was also because it was Shikarabe who found the hidden talent in Katsuya.

But even so, Shikarabe did not like Katsuya, thus he was pretty annoyed when he got to watch over Katsuya. This was also one of the reasons why Shikarabe made an individual request to Elena and Sara to look over Katsuya and his companions.

Seeing Shikarabe look relieved because he would not have to watch over Katsuya and his friends for some time, Elena felt sorry as she said to him.

“About that request though, I’m really sorry to say this so suddenly, but can you please cancel it?”

Katsuya was surprised since he was looking forward to doing this request.

“Eeeh?! W-what’s wrong?”

Shikarabe was also shocked, he then asked Elena for the reason while looking a bit displeased.

“What do you mean by that? You’re asking me to cancel the request right before it starts, you know. I hope you have a good explanation for this.”

“Of course, a work request was sent to us from the Hunter Office. I’m really sorry but we’ll be prioritizing that request.”

After hearing Elena's explanation, Katsuya was very upset and displeased. But that was not the case for Shikarabe. As a Hunter from Drankam, he only showed a bit of displeasure to Elena who was trying to refuse his request, he then continued to pressure her with a little intimidation.

"So you're cancelling a request from Drankam just because of that, huh? Do you really think that we will allow you to do that? There will be consequences, you know?"

But Shikarabe's behaviour instantly changed with Elena's reply.

"Even if that request comes from the Corporate Government?"

"…The Corporate Government?!!"

Shikarabe was surprised, this reason was enough to completely erase his displeasure towards Elena and Sara.

The Corporate Government was a huge association of multiple big companies that ruled over the eastern district. The Hunter Association which runs the various Hunter Offices was nothing but one of the working partners of the Corporate Government. Thus for the Hunters, any request made under the name of the Corporate Government was very important. If they refused a request without any good reason, in the worst-case scenario, it might even turn the whole eastern district into their enemy.

"The request is to patrol around a dangerous region near Kugamayama city, but the request was made under the Corporate Government. Although, to be honest, work like this should be made by the city. I don't know the reason but since the request was sent formally from the Hunter Office, I don't think there was any mistake. I'm sorry but it's not like I can refuse this request just because I'm planning to explore around with some of my acquaintances. As for the cancellation fees, the Hunter Office will directly transfer it to Drankam. You're okay with this, right?"

Elena then smiled as if she was challenging Shikarabe after giving that explanation.

“Or maybe Drankam wants to take responsibility and negotiate with the Corporate Government? Of course, I’ll rethink about your request if you are able to do that much.”

Shikarabe smiled bitterly and shook his head.

“Don’t be stupid, I get it. I’ll tell the people in the Drankam… But still, a request from the Corporate Government, huh? What’s going on?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. So there, you have it, I have a lot of things to prepare. I’m sorry but we’ll be leaving. Tell the Drankam’s side that I did meet you directly to cancel the request.”

When the Hunter Office sent a request from the Corporate Government, they usually only sent that request to first-class Hunters who usually worked near the Frontline. Although Elena and Sara were recognized as pretty strong Hunters in Kugamayama city, they were not that strong for the Corporate Government to take notice of them. Shikarabe, Sara and Elena knew this fact well, that was why they had a lot of questions regarding this request.

Sara turned to Katsuya and the other kids.

“Well, so there you have it. I’m sorry for today, see you again next time.”

“….Ah, okay. It’s unfortunate but it can’t be helped.”

Although Katsuya was still not fully convinced, he had no other choice but to accept it. At the same time, his gaze was sucked into Sara’s cleavage, but he immediately looked away. Sara just smiled seeing that.

Soon, Elena and Sara left the place. Shikarabe then used his information terminal to contact Drankam and discuss this.

Katsuya let out a sigh.

“A request from the Corporate Government, huh…? That is amazing, but it’s too bad that Sara-san and Elena-san had to cancel today’s request because of that… I wonder when I’ll get my next chance.”

As for Yumina and Airi, they both also felt that it was indeed too bad. But after seeing how Katsuya reacted, they felt a bit conflicted and it was shown on their face.

In order to change the mood, Yumina made an awkward smile and said.

“I don’t think there’ll be next time, after all, you were staring at Sara-san’s chest just now. She might hate you for that, you know.”

Katsuya coughed and panicked.

“Did I stare too hard?”

Airi made a short remark that confirmed what Yumina said.

“You did.”

Katsuya started making excuses in panic.

“…Well, it’s just that I was captivated. It can’t be helped, you know. Any guy would agree with me after seeing that. So I’m sure Sara-san would understand…”

Yumina looked amused as she kept teasing Katsuya.

“I think Sara-san won’t understand since she’s a girl.”

Airi also followed Yumina but with a flat expression.

“Curiosity killed the cat, it might be better if you give up.”

Unlike Yumina who was obviously teasing Katsuya, Airi just stated out a fact, hearing which, Katsuya panicked even more.

“T-that’s not it. It’s just that Sara-san was wearing a pendant although she usually doesn’t wear any, and that pendant was made of a bullet which is uncommon. The pendant’s top was sucked into her chest, so I couldn’t help but get curious when I noticed that, you know.”

Yumina and Airi let out a sigh at the same time.

“Now that you mention it, that was unusual for Sara-san to be wearing a pendant like that. It looks crude though, I wonder if someone gave her that as a present?”

“I don’t think Sara-san or Elena-san would buy something like that themselves, so it might as well be a present from someone.”

“That might be a present from her boyfriend.”

Katsuya was lightly shocked.

“B-boyfriend… B-but I heard that Sara-san and Elena-san only work in a team of two. So it’s hard to believe if she has a boyfriend…”

“Her boyfriend doesn’t have to be another Hunter, you know. Moreover, it’s not too unbelievable.”

“It might even be another Hunter who could not join her in Hunter requests since it’ll disrupt his relation with the other Hunters. If that’s the case, then it won’t be strange at all. Or they might have already started negotiation for transfer.”

Yumina and Airi were having their time of life teasing Katsuya who seemed to have a crush on Sara. Thus Katsuya’s torture kept on continuing.

Shikarabe ended his call in a bad mood. He was annoyed that the negotiation did not end up well. He pushed his displeasure aside and turned to Katsuya and the other kids to inform the result of the negotiation.

“You guys can go back home if you guys want, but if you want to take up more jobs, you’ll have to take the patrol work just like the one that you took this morning with me, so what do you want to do? Today’s work with Elena got cancelled anyway, so I think it’s fine if you guys just go home for today.”

Personally, Shikarabe wanted them to just go back home for today, but as someone who was taking care of them, he could not say that outright. As

such, he could only send a stare saying that he hoped they would just disband.

[…Just go back home. You should be able to understand that I can't order you to disband. You should also get the hint that something bad might be happening right now from the earlier conversation with Elena. I know that you don't want to go to a patrol job with me either. Your next chance to go with Elena will come again sooner or later. There's no need to work hard under me, so just go back home.]

Shikarabe's silent prayer did not reach them as Katsuya turned to Yumina and Airi and asked them.

"What to do now? I did prepare my stuff to go for a job and not to mention that I want to raise my Hunter Rank as soon as possible too. After all, with our current Hunter Rank, we can't take other requests on our own and we can't go for exploring ruins either."

Either way, they would still need Shikarabe's permission. Katsuya wanted to break off from this situation as soon as possible. If he did, then there would be fewer people looking down on him.

"I don't mind if you say so, how about you Airi?"

"No problem."

As for Yumina and Airi, they only followed Katsuya most of the time. Their budding love for Katsuya in their heart pushed them to do so.

Shikarabe just looked at them with a cold gaze, showing his intense hatred towards Katsuya.

[…Going with majority rule again, huh? Don't you know that those two won't oppose if you make a suggestion? Are you doing this intentionally after knowing that fact?]

Originally, there were 5 kids under Shikarabe. Every time they wanted to decide on something, they would always go with majority rule and Katsuya

always won, that was why the other two made a request to be transferred to another team. And so Shikarabe was left with Katsuya and these two girls.

Looking at how Katsuya was forcing his opinion using this majority rule, Shikarabe's hatred towards Katsuya intensified.

Katsuya then turned to Shikarabe to tell him their decision.

"We'll take another patrol request."

"…Alright."

Shikarabe then turned his back to Katsuya and took out his information terminal to contact Drankam and take care of the registration for the patrol job. As he was operating his information terminal, he let out a sigh looking annoyed.

"Dammit, if only I didn't have to look over these brats, I would've been able to investigate that request from the Corporate Government by now. I know that we should invest in training the young Hunters, but we're the ones working hard to pay for their equipment and sacrificing our time doing cheap work together with them for the sake of their training. I really hope the people in the management would pay more attention to this."

Shikarabe understood that it was Drankam's policy and not Katsuya's fault, but he did not understand that it was normal for hatred to be created between the people who had to make sacrifices and the people who benefitted from other's sacrifice.

***

Elena and Sara reached home and were preparing themselves for the request inside their vehicle. They checked their ammo reserves, the condition of the vehicle, the big information gathering device and the machine gun installed on their vehicle. They also installed more armour just to be safe and filled the energy tank. This was pretty excessive preparation for a simple patrol in the wasteland.

Normally, Elena would do the information gathering and driving, while Sara would peek out from the vehicle and shoot monsters down. So they were preparing themselves in the area that they were responsible for.

“Say, Elena, about this request though, what do you think about it?”

“I did a bit of investigation, but I couldn’t get anything of worth. But it seems that the same request was also sent to other Hunters near the ruins. Since Hunters like us got this request sent to us directly from the Corporate Government, I think it’s fully expected that there are other Hunters who got the same request as well. Maybe they’re trying to call all the Hunters back to the city.”

Sara looked puzzled.

“Doesn’t that mean that there would be another big-scale monster attack? Hmmm, but again, it’s weird that the Corporate Government would send out a request just because of that, huh? If that’s really the case, then the Defense Squad of the city should be enough to handle them. Not to mention that it would be a perfect chance to show their worth to the people who keep saying that the Defense Squad spends too much money. So I don’t think they would go out of their way to call the Hunters back to the city just to snatch the role from the Defense Squad.”

Elena looked conflicted as she agreed with Sara.

“That’s true. It’s because of that, I just can’t understand the reason behind this request. It would be great if it’s just a form of insurance, but that might not be the case. Let’s just prepare everything so that we can stay safe even if anything unexpected happens.”

Elena said that last part with a firm voice as if to psyche themselves up, but then she continued with a soft tone.

“But well, I bet it’ll be alright. After all, we’re doing very well lately. Thanks to that, we got quite a lot of money and we were able to upgrade our equipment. It is as if our time when we were on a slump were nonexistent

in the first place. Although I said it as if it were nothing, we were really facing a hard time back then."

Sara replied back in a small voice.

"It was really bad indeed… And what made us rise back up from that situation was Akira saving us. Not only did he save our lives, he even turned over our situation… I can't thank him enough for everything that he did for us."

Elena agreed with her as she smiled and nodded.

"Speaking about Akira, I met him today by coincidence. I was finally able to say my thanks to him and I feel much better now. But don't worry, just like you, I also promised him about not asking anything unnecessary or telling anyone else about him."

"You met Akira? Although I thought that I would meet him in Shizuka's shop sooner or later, I didn't see him lately at all. Where did you meet him?"

"It was in the gathering place where we met Katsuya. It seems that Akira was also taking the patrol request. He told me that he locked himself inside his room after placing his order for an augmented suit in Shizuka's shop. That makes sense though, after all, it would be unfortunate if he went out to the wasteland before getting his augmented suit and got injured."

"So Akira started to get better Hunter equipment for himself, huh. We should work hard too."

"Yeah, let's give our best out there."

Elena and Sara giggled as they continued with their preparation. Although they could not understand the reason behind this request from the Corporate Government, they were confident that they would be able to do it just fine.

Silavin: OMG. The Flags! The goddamn Flagsss!!!!

Well, they left us at a cliff hanger. see you guys next week 😀

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Rebuild World – Chapter 29, Impossible, Reckless And Futile

Index

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Editor: Silavin

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Akira who was taking a nap in the truck suddenly heard Alpha's voice inside his head.

"Akira, it's time. Wake up."

Since Akira was the only one who could hear her voice, she was free to wake him up by blasting him with a loud voice. Akira immediately opened his eyes and looked up. He saw Kibayashi, a staff from the Hunter Office, standing in front of him.

Kibayashi was the truck driver and he was responsible for maintaining the truck. His job also included taking care of the Hunters who were in his truck's tray. He smiled when he saw Akira wake up right before he started cleaning the tray, it was as if Akira woke up on an alarm clock.

"Right when I was about to throw you out if you don't wake up, huh. It seems that you're using a pretty good alarm."

"Yeah, I'm using the best one out there."

Akira just smiled lightly while Alpha looked a bit offended.

“Wait for a second, I’m not an alarm clock.”

“Sorry.”

“Good grief…”

Kibayashi then shouted to all the Hunters in the tray.

“It’s time!! We’re going now!! Anyone making ruckus will be kicked out!! You understand?!!”

As Akira looked around at the other Hunters who were in the same truck, he saw Katsuya and his friends too. Judging from Kibayashi’s words, Akira thought that another problem had occurred when he was sleeping, thus he looked away from Katsuya as to avoid getting involved with him.

Not too long after that, the truck started moving, and that marked Akira’s third patrol job for the day.

Although the patrol went well without any trouble, for the Hunters who were aiming for rewards, it was a bad run. After all, they did not encounter any monsters at all.

The truck that was outfitted for the patrol job was equipped with a wide range detection device. The main aim for the patrol was only to cull the number of monsters around the city, thus it would only take a route with a low possibility to encounter a monster. So it was completely normal not to encounter any monsters at all from time to time.

Everyone in the tray had already relaxed and started making silly talks. And thanks to the wide range detection device, they could relax without fearing any surprise attacks. As for those Hunters who were already used to doing the patrol, they had completely put their guards down.

Akira was looking out to the wasteland with a stern face.

“Nothing, huh?”

“You’re right.”

Alpha looked indifferently when she replied back. She didn’t even look at Akira and spoke in an apathetic way. After hearing Alpha’s reply, Akira understood that she was not in a good mood.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know that it would bother you this much.”

As Akira frankly apologized, Alpha quickly changed her behaviour. But there was still a trace of indifference on her face.

“…Don’t worry, it’s nothing. It’s good that you’re acting all friendly with me, but you did call me an alarm clock back then. So just be more careful next time, okay?”

Although Akira was curious as to why Alpha was in such a bad mood, he was afraid to worsen it further by asking her any unnecessary questions, thus he just stayed silent.

The awkward mood between them continued, but Alpha just smiled at him and said.

“If you really want to fix my mood, it’s a good idea for you to say something nice to cheer me up.”

After saying that, she made a teasing pose in front of Akira and smiled provokingly.

Akira thought for a bit. He then fixed his pose and made a serious face.

“It’s all thanks to you that I’m alive until this point. Thank you very much for guiding me through the ruins while avoiding any encounter with monsters, thank you for helping me search for relics, thank you for helping me fight monsters. You even helped me to get this augmented suit and to improve my accuracy. Thank you very much for everything, I’ll be counting on you as always.”

“You’re welcome. I’m happy to help you. I’ll be counting on you too.”

Alpha became happy when Akira was honestly being grateful to her. But there was still some awkwardness floating in the silence right after that as

she was smiling faintly and awkwardly.

“…I’m happy with what you said, but there’s something else, you see.”

Although Akira did expect that it would be pointless to say his thanks this late. But he saw something strange in Alpha’s behaviour.

“Something else? Is there anything strange?”

“Yep, for example, is there anything you want to say about my appearance?”

Alpha changed back to her swimsuit when Akira was sleeping. It was an aggressive swimsuit with a high level of exposure showing her beautiful skin and limbs, and at the same time, it was very alluring and captivating.

Akira took another good look at Alpha. He then decided to word out his candid opinion that he thought to be meaningless even if he said it.

“As I thought, it looks really weird. If you can, please return back to your normal dress.”

Alpha let out a sigh and changed her dress. She erased the swimsuit, became naked for a blink and put on a fully armed battle suit. It had fasteners running from around her neck, down to her chest and to the back of her hip. But the fastener was not zipped all the way and it showed her alluring bare skin.

Although it was not that exposing, it was clearly an alluring appearance to the opposite sex. After Alpha changed her appearance, Akira voiced out his opinion again about her outfit.

“This one is better than before, but… this does not help at all since you’re already floating around, so you still look weird to me.”

In order to make him look less suspicious to the other people, Akira was looking out to the wasteland which also doubled as him looking out for monsters too. And Alpha was floating as if she was standing on an invisible platform.

Alpha just smiled bitterly.

“That’s not what I meant, I was expecting some compliment about my appearance, like if it’s beautiful, or it looks great on me, or simply whether I look dashing in it.”

“Ohh, I see.”

Akira looked surprised when he said that, but he then immediately turned back to his normal self.

“I think you’re very beautiful and all the dresses that you usually wear are wonderful and charming. It is just that your last dress was very inappropriate for the current situation, but it was still very charming and wonderful to me.”

“Really? But your reaction was pretty weak, you know.”

“Even if you tell me so. Well, although it’s weird for me to say this. Maybe I somehow already got used to it, or something like that?”

Alpha’s appearance was basically a CG produced through an advanced and complicated graphic calculation. Because of that, Alpha could freely change her expression and body proportion. Alpha took advantage of this freedom to create an extremely beautiful and alluring appearance that was rare to be found naturally.

Akira remembered the first time he saw Alpha, it was so shocking and captivating as if his soul was sucked out from his body. But it was no longer the case now and he thought that it was because he already got used to her beauty.

Alpha was almost always beside him 24/7, and there were a lot of occasions where she would pose her naked body or wear a dress that was close to naked in front of him. She even went into the bath together with him. That was why Akira thought that he should have gotten used to it.

Alpha at least accepted Akira’s explanation for now.

“…Got used to, huh? I guess I’ll need to think about it.”

“You’re not thinking of anything bad, right?”

“Nope, not at all.”

Akira looked at Alpha with suspicion, but Alpha just smiled it off.

***

When Akira was sleeping, Katsuya noticed him as he boarded the tray.

“That’s him…”

Yumina looked around and checked people that she knew.

“There are also other Hunters who we met in our last patrol job. But it seems that man who picked a fight with you is not here, that’s good.”

Although Airi was also one of the people who caused trouble in the last patrol, she intervened as if she was telling Yumina to just forget about that subject.

“Katsuya, don’t make any trouble this time.”

“I know… That guy is sleeping though, is that really okay?”

“Just leave him be. Try not to get involved with other Hunters who’re not members of Drankam. They’ll just throw him away if he’s still sleeping when the time comes. So just take your seat.”

Katsuya just obediently boarded the tray and took a seat. He was only talking with his friends while waiting for the truck to move, but he unconsciously made a stern face and was staring at Akira. Remembering what happened during his previous patrol, he just could not come to like Akira.

And when the time came, Akira was still sleeping. Katsuya was actually looking forward to seeing Akira getting kicked out from the truck. He even

grinned in an ill will when Kibayashi stood in front of the still-sleeping Akira.

But Akira just woke up right before Kibayashi kicked him out and Kibayashi just chuckled when that happened, thus Katsuya's mood got even worse.

Their patrol finally started. Katsuya was thinking of taking a closer look at Akira this time, but they did not meet any monster at all during this patrol, thus he did not get his chance. So his mood worsened even more.

As everyone in the truck started to relax, Katsuya let out a sigh, he could not focus on today's training because he was in such a bad mood. He could not see any monsters from his binocular and the detector did not pick any monsters at all, so he had lost all of his motivation. Katsuya then asked Shikarabe while making an annoyed face.

"Say, there's no monsters though, do we still have to do this training?"

Shikarabe answered while trying to suppress his annoyance.

"Whether there are any monsters or not, it'll still be training for detecting monsters. You should already know that in a thick colourless mist, you would not be able to detect monsters using binocular or other information gathering devices. So you have to spot monsters by using your eyes. You guys should have been taught where to watch, points to be careful about and how frequently you should change the person keeping watch and so on."

"But will this training be useful without any monsters around?"

"…I won't force you. At the moment, this is just voluntary training since our original plan was changed after Elena and Sara got that sudden request. So you're free to do what you want."

Although it was also one of his duties to train Katsuya and his friends, he had no wish to force them to do training. After all, it was outside his main duty. Shikarabe did not even care if Katsuya just skipped his training and

got into trouble later. That’s what Shikarabe thought as he clicked his tongue.

After that, Katsuya decided to just keep doing his monster detection training for the meantime, but he eventually started talking with the other Hunters. Looking at that, Shikarabe just let out a sigh and thought that it would be a waste of energy to think about him, so he just ignored Katsuya.

The truck kept running on its patrol route in the middle of the wasteland although they did not encounter any monster. But it suddenly stopped, the Hunters in the truck immediately picked up their guns and put up their guard. Kibayashi then got on the tray and shouted.

“I just got a call, the patrol job is finished here and now. We’ve taken care of all the administrative processes for you. And now, I’ll tell you about the current situation. According to the information that I got, a large group of monsters is heading to the Kugamayama city from the Kuzusuhara ruins. The defense squad is already preparing themselves to intercept that group of monsters.”

Hearing this announcement, restlessness spread among the Hunters in the truck in an instant.

“The city has issued an emergency request and is asking for help from this truck. All the Hunters around the ruins had been called to gather up and be sent later, the content of the emergency request is for us to help those Hunters.”

Kibayashi looked at the shocked expression of the Hunters and did not know what to do, thus he shouted to urge them.

“Decide now!! If the majority of the Hunters decides to accept this request, we’ll be heading to the nearest battleground, but if the majority of the Hunters want to return back home, we’ll immediately go back to the city! The rest can just walk to the city or to the nearest Hunter group on their own! Decide in 5 minutes!!”

After Kibayashi finished his explanation, most of the Hunters immediately decided to go back home. After all, the truck was only fit for the low-risk patrol job and most of the Hunters in the truck did not have the ability nor the equipment to take this emergency request. Even if there were some Hunters who wanted to accept the emergency request, it was only a handful of them. None of them was foolish enough to take the emergency request when it meant that they would be left behind. While some of them were thinking of taking the request after returning back to the city and arming themselves with proper equipment.

The Hunters looked at each other and quickly confirmed each other's decisions. Just to be safe, Alpha also asked Akira.

"Akira, we'll return back to the city first, okay?"

"Of course, no one would want to face a group of monsters out of their own volition."

Akira's face turned grim, he remembered the time when he was attacked by a group of monsters, got saved by Elena and Sara, and was barely able to survive the fight.

Most of the Hunters had made their decision to go back to the city. But there were a few exceptions like Katsuya.

Katsuya was having a fierce debate with Shikarabe, their voices were heard by the other Hunters and attracted a lot of attention. Shikarabe thought that Katsuya's decision was not a good idea and so he did not allow him to go. Although he was really angry, he was still holding himself back.

"No! Give me a break, already!! You're being a pain in the ass, you know!!"

"The Drankam is famous for taking in any emergency request!! You're the one being a pain in the ass here!! We can do this!!"

"Drankam only takes emergency requests that they can safely accomplish! And also!! Don't put me together in that "We"!! I'm not a member of your

team!!”

Kibayashi shouted wanting to end the debate.

“It’s time! Raise your hand if you want to take the emergency request!! … Then those who are against it!! Alright then, we’ll go back to the city!! Those who want to stay, get off from the truck now!!”

Katsuya mumbled when he saw Kibayashi returning back to his driver seat.

“…The request that Elena-san received must be about preparing for this monster attack… Even I would be able to help them out somehow…”

Yumina and Airi then tried to cheer Katsuya.

“…Katsuya, I can understand your feelings, but it’s impossible for us.”

“It’s plain recklessness.”

There were people in this world who proved their silly talks and hollow optimism as reality using their skill and luck, they were those who turn their big talks into reality. Such feats were usually done by great people, heroes and champions. Katsuya had done such a thing in the past. From time to time, he would make a decision that he knew to be impossible and turned it into reality.

It was one of the reasons why Yumina and Airi were attracted to him, and that was why they could understand some of the crazy decisions that he made.

But of course, there was a limit to that. They too did not want anything bad to happen to him. But if they just left Katsuya alone, he might become obstinate and decide to stay even if he should get off from the truck. Thus they were worried and tried to stop him.

Katsuya understood Yumina and Airi were worrying about him, so he decided to back down. But it was not like he could just let go of his displeasure. Not to mention that Shikarabe was glaring at him with hatred.

He then mumbled to vent out all of his displeasure while locking glare with Shikarabe.

“I bet you’re just scared of fighting against those monsters, the heck calling yourself a Hunter. You’re nothing but a coward.”

Shikarabe’s anger reached its peak and burst. He had been holding himself back up until now. Due to that, the way he looked at Katsuya and his friends changed from just a mere pain-in-the-ass into hostility. At the same time, he mocked Katsuya as if he was challenging him.

“Scared? Yeah, you’re right, I can’t help to get scared if I have to bring complete amateurs who are not even full-fledged Hunters like you to fight a group of monsters. Bringing dead weight like you into such a fight is equal to suicide. Just go ahead if you want to go. I won’t stop you. But leave all the equipment that you borrowed from Drankam here. They’re not your own equipment. As a part of Drankam, I’m the one making decisions here. If you won’t listen to me, then you’re out from Drankam. So you can go ahead and fight those monsters unarmed and die for all that I care. Or do you want to try taking that equipment with force? Do you want to kill me and take them? I don’t mind if you want to try, you know? Come here. I really don’t mind. You’re not a coward, right? Make your decision now.”

Shikarabe had recognized Katsuya as a hostile entity. He was ready to kill if Katsuya made any aggressive moves.

Yumina and Airi could only stand frozen overwhelmed by the killing intent and anger exuding out from Shikarabe. Katsuya was barely able to stand against it, but of course, it did not make the situation any better.

“What’s wrong? Go ahead and choose. Whether you go back obediently or fight those monsters with your bare hand. Dropdown your weapon if you’re not going to fight me. But if you want to fight me, then let’s do it. I don’t mind even if you bring Airi and Yumina to assist you.”

Shikarabe pressured Katsuya, Airi and Yumina for their decision. So it was not only Katsuya making the decision now.

Katsuya finally realized that he was also getting Airi and Yumina involved. And that made him back down. It can be said that he backed down as to not get others involved, but looking at it from another point of view, it can be said that he was using that as an excuse to back down.

Katsuya then dropped his gun, Airi and Yumina followed suit after him.

Shikarabe finally suppressed his killing intent and expressed his scorn as he said to Katsuya.

“Then just shut up and take your seat.”

As Katsuya and the other two obediently took their seats. Shikarabe let out a big sigh and said.

“Bunch of cowards.”

Katsuya looked frustrated, Yumina and Airi worried for him when they saw that.

Shikarabe then looked at the other Hunters and said.

“Sorry for making a scene!! Please get the truck moving again!!”

Shikarabe thought that the reason why the truck was still not moving was because they were waiting for them to end their ruckus, that was why he shouted to let Kibayashi know. But the truck was still stuck in its place.

Shikarabe and the other Hunters found it weird and peeked into the driver seat. But instead, he caught the sight of Kibayashi outside the driver seat with Akira who was straddling a small-sized bike.

***

Akira heard everything when Katsuya was arguing with Shikarabe. That was when he came to know that Elena and Sara were going to intercept that group of monsters.

Akira was deep in thought for a bit before he stood up and picked up his rucksack. Alpha somehow understood what Akira was about to do and so she tried to stop him.

“Akira, why don’t we think about this one more time? I don’t think I need to tell you this, but this is very dangerous, you know?”

“I know.”

Akira then jumped out of the truck’s tray.

“It’s not like we know for sure that Elena and Sara are going to be in danger too. And with your current ability, you might even be a dead weight to them.”

“That might be true too.”

When Akira knocked at the truck’s door, Kibayashi stepped out.

“What’s wrong? We’re about to leave now, you know?”

“What should I do to accept the emergency request?”

Kibayashi was surprised when he heard Akira, he then asked him again for confirmation with his still-surprised face.

“Eh? You’re still planning to go? By walking?”

“I’ll be running.”

As Akira answered back promptly with that short answer, it only made Kibayashi even more confused.

“Wait wait wait wait, I’m not talking about that, you see. It’s true that I did say the Hunters who want to go should go by feet, but I didn’t mean it literally, okay?”

“I have my augmented suit with me, so I can do high speed running. Of course, it’s still slower than directly taking a truck, but I believe it’s still

faster than going back to the city and looking for another truck to take me there.”

“When I asked you back then, you didn’t raise your hand, right?”

“I changed my mind. But it’s not like it would change the end result anyway.”

Kibayashi was completely dumbfounded as he kept staring at Akira, he then mumbled in a small voice.

“…Is this boy being serious now?”

Kibayashi suddenly smiled, he looked as if he found it very amusing deep inside his heart, he then asked Akira in a good mood.

“Say, can you ride a bike?”

Alpha confirmed immediately.

“Akira, it’s not a problem.”

“Yes, I can.”

Akira never rode a bike before, but since Alpha said that it was not an issue, he just replied back with that. He only thought that it would be fine as long as Alpha said that it was okay after he gave his answer.

“I see!! Then wait here for a bit!!”

Kibayashi looked very excited as he went back into the truck.

Alpha frowned and asked Akira again.

“Akira, you can still rethink about it now. We don’t know if we can meet Elena and Sara even if we go and I don’t think having you there will change the situation by much.”

“Even if you’re saying to me that it’s futile, I still want to know for sure whether it’s completely meaningless for me to go or will I be able to help out by doing something there, so that I won’t regret it later. Even if it’s futile, I’ll still be picking this option.”

Akira picked this option because of his feeling of guilt and obligation towards Sara and Elena. They thanked him for saving their lives. He owed them a favour for saving his life too. And he used them in the past as a pretense to kill the people that he wanted dead.

Of course, Akira understood very well that there was no guarantee he would be able to meet up with Elena and Sara even if he took the emergency request, and if he did, there was a good chance that he would be just dead weight like Alpha said.

But even so, Akira still decided to accept the emergency request. It was not solely because he was trying to help Elena and Sara while they were fighting. It was also for his own self-satisfaction as well. That was exactly why Akira did not hesitate at all when he accepted the emergency request although it might be futile and he might as well get himself killed.

Akira thought that his life was his own, thus he had no trouble deciding to futilely go and fight that group of monsters on his own accord. Moreover, for him who spent most of his life in the slum, he had nothing else other than his own life that he could put on stake. He could not completely get over that line of thinking due to all the years that he spent there. Thus for him, it was natural to put his own life on the line for his selfishness.

Alpha who, to some extent, understood the moral principles Akira was obeying, knew that it would be meaningless trying to stop him. Although she did make an exasperated look and let out a big sigh, as she expected, it did not change his decision at all.

Kibayashi grabbed a foldable small sized bike and stepped out from the truck.

Although it was only a small bike, it was specially designed for exploring the wasteland. When it was folded, it was barely enough to fit the seat

beside the driver seat. He had that bike there to call for help if in case the truck got attacked by monsters and was unable to move. Most of the Hunter Office staff would put their foldable bike on the driver seat since the other Hunters would use it without permission if they left it in the truck's tray.

Kibayashi then quickly unfolded the bike and assembled it. When he was finished, he looked at Akira while lightly patting the bike's seat.

"Get on this bike. It's at least faster than running, and also, give me your Hunter ID."

Akira gave his Hunter ID to Kibayashi who then used his terminal to read information from Akira's Hunter ID.

"This will finish the registration for the emergency request. If you use your information terminal to access the Hunter Office's site, you'll be able to see the area assigned to you. At the moment, you should be assigned to the nearest battlefield. And also, this bike is just an upfront payment for accepting the emergency request. Be careful out there, okay? If you try to abandon the request, the Hunter Office will chase you even to the end of the world."

Although Kibayashi said that with little intimidation, Akira just replied back as if it was nothing.

"If that's my plan from the start, I wouldn't be taking this emergency request alone like this."

Kibayashi laughed and looked amused by that answer.

"Well, you have a point! Alright then! Good luck! Impossible, Reckless, Futile!!! Using their own lives as a chip in a gamble is what the Hunters love to do, am I right? Whether you'll die or come back alive, keep stepping forward!! After all, there are not that many Hunters who are like you these days, you know!!"

"Although, to be honest, I think I'm more of a cautious Hunter though."

Akira was honest when he said that, but Kibayashi thought that it was a joke, so he just got along with it and laughed loudly.

“Stop with the jokes. No careful Hunters would go running towards a group of monsters on their own volition, you know!! You should be able to see the precise coordinates in your information terminal, it’s basically north-west from here, so it’s that direction! If you get close enough, you should start hearing gunshots from the Hunters who are fighting against the monsters! So good luck out there and I hope you have a good hunt!!”

Akira got on the bike and went out alone as Kibayashi was seeing him off in a good mood.

All the Hunters in the truck’s tray were having mixed feelings as they saw Akira off. Amazement, praise, envy, shame, jealousy and mockery. All these feelings were present as they were staring at the back of the Hunter who chose a different option than them.

Shikarabe was honestly amazed as he mumbled.

“That boy went alone huh, not bad at all.”

Shikarabe acknowledged Akira’s courage and praised him a little.

Katsuya looked frustrated as he watched Akira disappear in the distance with a shred of jealousy in his gaze.

Silavin: Honestly, I was a little confused about his motive here but after thinking for abit, I sorta get it. I initially thought that it was to help them. It is true to an extent but Akira’s form of help is: so long as it helps them a tiny bit, it’s help. That means, indirectly or directly.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 30, The Arrival of Reinforcement Boy

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Editor: Silavin

Proofreader: p4553r

Akira was on his bike heading to the nearest battlefield for his emergency request. Although he had not even ridden a bike before, he was now riding one at a high speed despite the fact that the ground in the wasteland was not suitable for a high-speed driving.

Actually, it was Alpha who was driving the bike by controlling Akira's augmented suit. Because of that, Akira was able to ride the bike that he just got as if he had ridden it numerous times before.

Alpha was floating beside Akira. Or to be more precise, Alpha was projecting such an image in Akira's vision. She was producing a highly realistic image through a complex calculation right to the flailing of her hairs, thus she looked like she was floating to Akira.

"Although this is a small-sized foldable bike, it's equipped with a lot of features since it is made for exploring the wasteland. And one of them is that it has a control device that can be connected to your information terminal, thanks to that, it's pretty easy to control the bike. Akira, you got a pretty good bike, you know. Although, if I were to be greedy, I wish that it at least had a machine gun equipped."

Akira looked surprised.

“A machine gun on a bike, huh? I do understand about the control device though, it’s a device to help me control a vehicle or a tank, right?”

“That’s right. But it’s not only limited to helping you drive them. It can also work together with other installed devices and equipment to help in aiming and reloading. A control device is very important even for a bike, you know. It also has a lot of other functions like preventing a sleepy rider from falling off, autopilot mode to run and stop safely. It can even prevent the bike from getting flipped over when driving on rough ground. Although, all of these functions depend on the type and quality of the installed control device too.”

“That’s not the point, I’m talking about the machine gun. Isn’t it impossible no matter how you see it? What would you do about the kickback?”

“As for the kickback, while you’re riding, an advanced control device would be able to handle it just fine. Not to mention that it was common during the old world era, I believe that there are a lot of Hunters who fit their bikes with machine guns too. Although, it’s still better if you can get a vehicle or a tank, at that point, you’ll only use your bike out of hobby and preference.”

Akira then imagined a scene where machine gun mounted bikes were common and so his understanding of the old world was greatly changed once again..

“So it’s a normal thing in the old world era, huh… It sounds scarier the more I hear about the old world.”

“And those Hunters are really brave frolicking in the ruins of such a world.”

“You can say that again.”

Akira just smiled when Alpha said that sarcastically.

They kept on talking through telepathy to avoid Akira biting his own tongue because of the shaking from the bike as they were rushing towards their destination. Being able to communicate even in such a condition was the greatest advantage of using telepathy.

When they finally came close to the battlefield, the advantages of said telepathy shone the brightest.

As Alpha was handling the bike control and talking with Akira through telepathy, she was also trying to analyze the reason behind Akira's action.

Akira once saved Elena and Sara, who were strangers to him and he was depressed when they thanked him. He then accepted the emergency request that he once ignored when he heard that Elena and Sara might be involved in that request. And at this moment, he was heading to the battlefield where he did not even know if Elena and Sara were there or not.

This was a weird behaviour, which at a glance ignored all logic. If Alpha had to say anything about the reason behind it, the best answer that she could give would be that he did it out of a whim. But one thing that she understood for sure was that Akira did not decide to do this at random.

Alpha kept observing Akira, trying to understand the set of moral values that Akira abided. It was so that she could extrapolate, manipulate and eventually control Akira's action skilfully.

The mood around the area started to change. Akira started to hear echoes from gunshots and explosions, he could see smoke rising from afar and his nose picked up the smell of raw blood, burnt meat and metal. He realised that he had already entered the battlefield.

As Akira tried to focus on the direction of the battle, Alpha helped him by zooming-in his views. She also provided extra information on the zoomed part of Akira's vision. In his vision, Akira could see the Hunters and the monsters fighting each other.

Akira tried to calm himself and prepared his mental state for an arduous fight.

“Over there, huh? That’s pretty close.”

“Akira, this will be your first real battle in this augmented suit, so I’ll be giving you my full support. Just keep in mind that I’ll be actively operating your augmented suit from now on.”

“So you’re saying that my augmented suit will move on its own from time to time, right?”

“Yep. You might find it a little bit confusing, but try to keep your calm. Just remember the sensation you had when we were having our Close quarters combat (CQC) training. It’s basically the same as that.”

Alpha was talking about their CQC training when she controlled Akira’s augmented suit to help him remember the correct way to move. At that time, Akira was only matching his movements with his augmented suit’s movements. He remembered the feeling from that training where it was not clear whether it was him or Alpha who was controlling the augmented suit. It was that weird feeling when the augmented suit felt like it moved before Akira actually tried to move it.

“That feeling, huh? Okay.”

“In order to take out those monsters in the most effective way, I’ll be controlling your augmented suit rather forcefully. To be honest, it’ll put your body under an immense burden. If you’re not going to back down, then just grit your teeth and endure the pain. Are you ready now?”

Akira answered back with a serious face.

“Okay, after all, resolve is my responsibility.”

Alpha smiled to embolden Akira’s resolve.

“Alright then, let’s go.”

Akira grabbed his AAH gun with his right hand as his left hand was still on the handle. After that, Alpha took total control of the control device and

accelerated the bike to its maximum speed. The bike blasted through the wasteland and quickly reduced its distance to the battlefield.

Akira lowered his gun and aimed its muzzle at the monsters that he could see from afar. Of course, he was not in a condition where he could aim properly, but since Alpha was adjusting his aim through his augmented suit, he was able to shoot accurately as if he was on stable ground.

Akira pulled the trigger and held it, countless bullets flew out from the gun's muzzle. Sound of gunshots echoed throughout the area. All the bullets that Akira shot hit the monsters in front of him, not even a single bullet was wasted. And so one by one, these monsters fell down and died.

The kickback from the continuous shots shook Akira, and so his augmented suit exerted its power to keep Akira in place and preventing him from falling off the bike. Because of that, the shaking from the kickback was transferred into the bike and Alpha adjusted its 2 wheels to absorb the shakes. With that, Akira continued blazing through the wasteland while shooting. He just kept on riding, passing through the corpses of dead monsters on his right and left.

"Whoah, this is amazing."

Akira voiced his amazement towards all the sensations that he was feeling. His ability to ride the bike and his accuracy when shooting, all of them felt like impossible feats to him.

Alpha smiled smugly.

"It seems that you once again got to experience just how great my support is. Akira, be sure to follow my movements."

"Roger that!"

Akira and Alpha charged right into the battlefield just like that.

__*__*__*__

There were 2 trucks that stopped deep in the battlefield. The trucks were surrounded by corpses of biological monsters and wreckages of dead mechanical monsters. It was a proof that the Hunters were trying to fight back desperately, and those Hunters were still in the middle of the battle.

Normally, a big group of monsters that came out from the Kuzusuhara ruins would head to the city in a straight line. The centre part of the group would clash with the main defense force of the city. Compared to that area, this area was away from the main group, thus the number of monsters around here was smaller. So just to be safe, the Hunters in the truck decided to meet up with another truck to boost their fighting power. The Hunters thought that they should have enough fighting power at that point.

But their luck was not all that great. Among the monsters that they encountered, most of them were mechanical monsters that housed powerful firepower inside their body frame.

Those mechanical monsters looked like big cannons that grew countless small legs. It was as if someone made them just to screw around. These monsters then used those small legs to hold the kickback. They shot rounds at the truck with the appropriate firepower for those legs to handle the kickback.

Although their shots were not that accurate, most of the cannon rounds managed to hit the truck. Even worse, it destroyed the control device and driving device of the truck. So these Hunters were stuck in the middle of the wasteland while frantically trying to repel the incoming monsters.

But it was worth it so long as they were able to somehow repel all the mechanical monsters. Unfortunately, the Hunters could not be sure if they managed to destroy them, or if the monsters just left them alone, or if the monsters only temporarily withdrew to refill their ammo.

And thus, at this point in time, they were fighting the monsters that had left from the group that previously attacked them. They were also not in a situation where they could leave the truck and walk back to the city. It was because the trucks were their cover from monsters with long-range attacks and they were a good landmark to notify any incoming reinforcements.

Other than strategic placement, they already had heavily injured Hunters who just could not leave that place.

Every time they spotted a ferocious and strong monster charging at them, they would concentrate their shots at that monster and kill it. Although they were only fighting the leftover monsters, some of those monsters would creep under the corpses of their fellow dead comrades or circled the trucks while slowly closing in on the Hunters; as if they were looking for an opening. The Hunters were having sporadic battles against those monsters while keeping their eyes peeled open for any monsters creeping close. But these Hunters were slowly getting cornered.

One of the Hunters, who took cover in the truck, was watching his surroundings. He looked pale and very tired as he asked his friend.

“Hey, how many monsters have you already taken down?”

His friend said with exhaustion.

“No idea. But I should’ve taken down quite a lot of them. Dammit!! They better properly record this battle!!”

“Well, they should, that is if the information device inside the truck is not destroyed yet. But if it did get destroyed, then the reward will only get shared equally among all the other Hunters. Of course, that is if we can get back home safely. I wonder what’s going on with the reinforcement?”

“Like hell if I know anything! The Hunter Office staff was blown to pieces by those damn small legged mechanical monsters. Let’s just hope that guy did his job properly before he got blown to pieces.”

The Hunters were trying to hide their fear by complaining. Though, having the time to complain like that also showed that they were not that cornered yet. But there was no guarantee for how much longer they could stay like that. There were still a lot of monsters surrounding them. They were in constant fear of more monsters appearing as they were stuck in that place with zero possibility of breaking out from the encirclement. All the Hunters there understood that they were in dire straits.

At the heat of the battle, the Hunters suddenly heard gunshots coming from another direction. Thus they carefully approached the source of the sound to check if the small legged cannon monsters were back, but instead, they saw Akira riding on a bike while shooting at the monsters.

After arriving at his marked location, Akira stopped his bike and looked around. He saw the flesh of dead biological monsters and wreckages of the dead mechanical monsters scattered around in a circle with the truck stopped in the middle of it. He also found that there were a lot of monsters still alive.

Akira was taken aback and frowned after looking at the number of the corpses lying around.

“That’s really a lot. Although they killed so many, there’s still this many left, huh?”

In contrast to him, Alpha looked calm and relaxed.

“I wonder if they’re a part of the bigger group. The trucks are even surrounded by so many corpses. I wonder if this is just a small breather after they had such a fierce battle.”

“So, even this is considered a small breather, huh? Not to mention that I encountered quite a lot of monsters on my way here too. I can only wonder just how fierce the battle was which created these pile of corpses.”

“It seems that the Hunters here already took out all the monsters with a long-range attack capability. Let’s keep our distance and clean up the rest.”

“Roger that.”

Akira readied his AAH gun again while still on top of the bike. Alpha then controlled Akira’s augmented suit to adjust his pose and centre of mass into the best position.

As for the Hunters who were in the area, the corpses and wreckages of the dead monsters became obstructions and made it harder to shoot at the

monsters. That was why Akira could easily snipe those monsters from his position. Akira took an aim at the monsters while still riding the bike and pulled the trigger of his rifle.

His sniping shots were highly accurate due to Alpha's support and he kept shooting at the monsters in front of him. All of his bullets hit the weak points of the monsters like the gaps between their scales, the fragile parts of their armours, their joints and their connecting edges of their armour plates. The biological monsters would howl loudly when they got hit on their weak spots while the mechanical monsters would make weird sounds when a part of their bodies was blown to pieces and they both would fall down to the ground and die.

Some of the monsters changed their target from the Hunters near the trucks to Akira. They judged that Akira as a bigger threat to them than those Hunters.

Akira kept a safe distance from those monsters that were charging towards him and shot them down one by one.

"Although some of them have started charging our way, we can still keep our distance using the bike, so I don't think they would be able to swarm us with numbers. Compared to when we were together with Katsuragi, this is way easier."

"After all, there were some monsters that were living further to the west mixed in that group of monsters that attacked us back then. We'll move away if they get too close to us. Since you have a bike now, we should use it to the best of our advantage."

"Roger that."

It was a one-sided fight with Akira shooting at those monsters while keeping his distance using the bike.

The Hunters who saw the scene that was unfolding in front of them were astounded.

“A reinforcement!? How many!? Do they have a vehicle?!”

“Just one person!? Where are the others!? Is he just a forward scout or something!?”

“Just a single boy!? What kind of joke is this?!”

Among the Hunters who started making a commotion, one of them took up his gun and shot one of the monsters that were chasing Akira. His shot tore right through the monster’s head and killed it instantly.

“Stop making a ruckus here!! Take your gun and start shooting!! You should be able to hit the monsters easily now!!”

“But still, is that boy our reinforcement?!”

“It doesn’t matter if our reinforcement is just a single boy!! We just need to kill the rest of the monsters. I don’t care whatever it is so long as it can help us go back home alive!!”

The other Hunters hurriedly picked up their rifles as they heard such fierce encouragement.

The Hunters started to help Akira. And due to Akira’s position, he got a clear shot at some of the monsters while the Hunters got a clear shot at the rest of the monsters.

The Hunters shot and killed the monsters that went out from their cover to chase for Akira who was moving on his bike, while on the other hand, Akira could get a clear shot from behind the monsters that were charging towards the Hunters. All of those monsters were eradicated in this pincer attack. The Hunters had powerful firepower, thus they were able to make quick work of the monsters.

As Akira rode his bike towards the trucks, one of the Hunters stepped up to welcome him. When that guy got a closer look at Akira, he was obviously surprised by the fact that it was a single boy who helped them, but he did not look down at Akira at all. Age had nothing to do in Hunter’s profession.

Or at least, he thought that only amateurs would judge other Hunters by their age.

There were cases when Hunters disguised themselves as a small kid to lower their opponent's guard. Some of them used their child-like figure to disguise themselves while some of them used medicine from the old world to turn back their appearance to their younger self. Either way, only good Hunters would do something like that. After witnessing Akira's skill in bike riding and monster shooting, that Hunter assumed Akira to be one of those skilled Hunters.

"Thank you for the help, you really saved us. You came as our reinforcement, right?"

"Yeah, I came here because I accepted the emergency request."

"I see, I'm sorry but can you sell me some of your healing medicines if you have some? We have some badly wounded Hunters with us."

There were badly wounded Hunters lying inside the trucks' trays. They were in such bad shape that the floor of truck's cargo tray was covered in blood and blood was also dripping down to the ground from some corners of the tray. And in one corner of the tray, there were already 5 bags filled with dead bodies.

Akira lowered his backpack, took out some medicines and handed it to that man. It was the medicines he found in the Kuzusuhara ruin that he saved for himself.

After receiving the medicine, that man's face turned stiff, he knew that the medicines he received were of high quality.

Those medicines were of better quality compared to what Hunters would usually trade in the middle of a battle, after all, they would not be able to use them for themselves if they sold them. It was the same as selling the lifeline that might save their lives. That man was afraid that he did not have enough money to be able to pay for those medicines.

“…You have pretty good medicines with you. Well, I’m sorry but…”

As the man was about to start a negotiation about the price, Akira quickly interrupted him.

“We can do the negotiation later. In the worst-case scenario, you can just take them for free. Since I’ve come all the way here to help out, it would leave a bad taste if I leave you, the very people that I want to help, to die.”

“Thanks, you’re really great help.”

After the man thanked Akira, he went to heal the injured. He administered some of the medicines orally and the rest were administered directly onto the wounds by opening the capsule of the medicines. When he did that, the injured Hunters were assaulted by severe pain and started cursing.

“Endure it. This will save your life.”

That man knew well about the healing power of the medicine, so he just ignored the curses and kept giving treatment to the wounded Hunters.

Another man then approached Akira and asked him a question.

“Say, are you the only reinforcement? Are there any other Hunters coming?”

Akira hesitated, but he knew that it was pointless if he stayed quiet or lied to him. Thus he calmed himself down and answered back.

“I was close by when I accepted the emergency request. I don’t know if there are any more Hunters dispatched to this place.”

“…I see.”

The man reacted much calmer than Akira thought he would. Akira was both surprised and amazed by that.

“That’s pretty amazing, he’s not surprised although his reinforcement is just a single boy.”

Alpha smiled and voiced out her opinion.

“I guess he’s someone with an iron will and getting almost killed won’t even scare him. He’s not like most of the other Hunters. You should aim to be a Hunter like him, you know.”

“You’re right.”

Akira then asked the man.

“Can you ask the Hunter Office staff about the reinforcement?”

“The two of them are dead. But since you came, it means that they did send the SOS request before they got killed. Although, it’s too bad that the SOS senders are already dead when you arrived.”

“Is there any reason why you guys can’t move from this place?”

“It’s because the truck got badly damaged due to those monsters. And of course, we could not fix the truck when we were fighting against the monsters. Or more like, no one here knows to fix the truck. So we were planning to get back home by riding the truck that comes with the reinforcement or have that truck tow ours, you see…”

That man smiled bitterly at Akira, thus Akira replied back with a bitter smile.

“I’m sorry. I tried to come here as fast as I could by riding a bike, so I arrived here faster than scheduled. You wouldn’t believe me if I said that I was about to come here by running. So let’s just focus on the brighter side since you’re in a better position now.”

“Don’t get me wrong, I really am glad, you know. It seems that we still have some luck left with us, after all.”

That man thought that Akira was joking as he laughed. Akira realized that but he had no plan on correcting him. After all, if he was in that man’s position, he would have also thought that was a joke.

Silavin: It’s kinda insane that a young boy like him needs to do so much.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 31, Cannon Insect

Index

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Akira was having a quick rest beside the truck together with the Hunters that he just saved. Then, something suddenly came up in his mind.

“Alpha, now that I think about it, what should I do to complete this emergency request?”

“The subject of the emergency request is the city defense. I think it’ll not end until the city is completely safe. Of course, it depends on how the situation develops, but I don’t think it’ll be the end of the request even if more reinforcements come to this area. I think they’ll just send back the injured Hunters to the city and send the rest to another area.”

“So it depends on how the situation develops, huh?”

Alpha then smiled teasingly and said.

“Not to mention, you did receive that bike as an upfront payment, so I bet they’ll make you work hard.”

Akira looked doubtful as he said.

“I did save the Hunters here though. Is that not enough?”

“Unfortunately, it’s not for me nor you to decide whether it’s enough or not.”

“That’s true. I need to make sure that they won’t tell me to pay them back because I didn’t work hard enough.”

Although the truck was bombarded to a point where it could not run anymore, the detection device installed to it was still operational. The Hunters would take turns to monitor their surroundings using that device. Thus the rest of the Hunters could rest easy without fearing any surprise attacks. Akira had also lowered his guard as he was talking with Alpha.

Suddenly, the Hunter who was on watch duty shouted.

“We got incoming signals from the 2 o’clock direction!!”

The tension in the area suddenly raised. No one knew whether it was from monsters or from reinforcements, thus Akira and the other Hunters turned their attention to that direction while looking both hopeful and uneasy.

The Hunter who was beside Akira prayed to God as he was looking through his binoculars, but his face suddenly turned grim, his prayer was not answered. What he saw from afar was a swarm of mechanical monsters that he remembered well. His face turned stern as he let out a sigh and cursed.

“Those damn bugs again!!”

“Damn bugs?”

“I’m talking about those monsters that broke our trucks. So they didn’t run away from the area, huh? Did they go back for an ammo refill or something like that?”

It was a swarm of mechanical monsters that looked like a small bug with tiny legs, their bodies were mounted with a big cannon and an automatic machine gun. Akira was a little bit slow in recognizing it, but when he did, his face immediately turned grim.

Alpha then added some explanations to what Akira was seeing.

“Those things are called Cannon Insects. I believe that they are produced in an old world’s automated weapon factory that’s still active somewhere till this date. It consists of a moving device in the form of those small legs. It is attached with a gun and an anti-vehicle cannon. That moving device part should be their main body part. Although their firepower varies, their main firepower comes from that tank cannon. But with that being said, they don’t have much reserve ammo, or more like, they can only bring a few warheads for that cannon. So, to deal with that, they would refill their ammo with help from another accompanying refilling robot.”

“If they are produced by a weapon factory, why do they have that insect-like form?”

“I think their information receiver malfunctioned and received weird data instead. Or maybe, the AI was so bored that it decided to make something weird.”

“Bored…? Is that even enough of a reason?”

Akira looked puzzled the moment he heard such unexpected reasoning.

The cannon insect was a separate machine from its weapon. Some of them were equipped with a big cannon not suitable for its size and some of them carried a small cluster of countless tiny cannons. There were also differences in the size or the number of their legs.

Despite all the differences, all the cannon insects were effective soldiers. They came close enough to the truck, stopped and then used all of their legs to support their body as they blasted their cannons.

The swarm then released a volley of cannons together with banging sounds. Cannon warheads showered the area around the truck like rain, they exploded and blasted all the monsters’ corpses in the area into small bits and pieces. Charred and in pieces, smoke rose up from the aftermath.

Of course, the Hunters started shooting back in retaliation. But due to their guns' effective range, it did not do much damage to the monsters.

"Dammit, although they attacked from a closer range last time, those bugs are keeping their distance from us this time…"

The cannon insects were keeping their distance from the Hunters. They stood right outside the Hunters' shooting range. By sacrificing their accuracy, they continued bombarding the Hunters with warheads from afar, and it soon turned into a one-sided fight. The Hunters also noticed that these monsters would not run out of ammo anytime soon since they were accompanied by other machines that refilled their ammo.

Alpha then turned to Akira with a serious face.

"Akira, let me reconfirm this, you have no plans of running away from this place alone, right?"

Akira firmly answered back while still making a grim face.

"Of course, that's until I'm the only one alive."

"In that case, I have no other choice but to do this. Your AAH rifle can inflict enough damage to them, but you need to move close enough to get them into your shooting range. Of course, I will give you my support, but you'll need to do something pretty reckless. This will subject your body to immense stress, thus I recommend you to take your medicine beforehand so that it'll immediately heal your body in case your bones start cracking or your flesh starts tearing. After all, if you don't take your medicine now, your body won't be able to hold out what you're going to do from now on. But we will only do this if we really have no other choice. Are you okay with that?"

Seeing how Alpha was giving out a warning with a serious face, Akira remembered when she used the augmented suit to forcefully move his body during the augmented suit training. He remembered that he could not move for a while right after that due to the fatigue and the pain.

Akira knew well that his body would be subjected to something worse compared to that. He completely realized that fact as he reached deep into his rucksack, took out the medicines, readied his resolve and swallowed a big dose of medicines.

Alpha who saw that just let out a small sigh before smiling invincibly.

“Are you ready now?”

Akira smiled back and replied in a firm tone.

“Well, maintaining resolve is my responsibility.”

After he finished all of his preparations, Akira took his gun and got on his bike before shouting to a guy near him.

“I’ll go and shoot them from up close, give me some support.”

The guy was surprised when he heard that, but he understood that the situation would only get worse at this rate, thus he did not stop Akira. Instead, he asked Akira while making a serious face.

“Are you sure you’re going alone?”

“I’m the only one with a bike here, so I think it’s better if we don’t make any clumsy move. This will at least divide their attention and reduce the pressure from their bombardment. Moreover, if I keep moving, they won’t be able to hit me… Maybe… Well then, I’ll be counting on you for the follow-up support.”

After he said that, Akira blazed out on his bike.

As he passed by and made eye contact with the other Hunters, they immediately understood what Akira was thinking and moved.

“We should scatter out and approach those bugs too!! Put down the injured Hunters from the truck’s trays and use the truck as a shield!!! To everyone with grenades, reserve your grenades!!!”

In the middle of the raining warheads, the Hunters too made their resolve and started running towards the monsters as well.

Akira rode his bike and cut through the wasteland as he was heading straight towards the monster swarm. Although he was fast enough to be considered as attempting suicide, he accelerated his bike even more.

The area was littered with wreckages and bloody corpses of the dead monsters. Even with wheels specially designed for exploring the wasteland, it was dangerous as muddy ground filled with obstacles were enough to flip Akira's bike. But thanks to Alpha's advanced support, Akira just blazed through it with no problem at all.

The violent shaking of the bike did not stop Akira from pulling the trigger on his AAH rifle. Although some of the bullets hit the monsters, they just ricocheted off the monsters' bodies. It was a common characteristic among mechanical monsters like the cannon insect to have a very hard body, and not to mention, Akira was shooting outside AAH rifle's effective range, so it was not surprising.

But as those bullets hit them, some of the cannon insects changed their focus from the other Hunters to Akira. Due to their big cannons that were too large for their legs to support, the cannon insects had to turn their whole body to aim their cannons at Akira. Then they were thrown back by the blasts when they shot warheads from their cannons.

The warhead landed 10 meters beside Akira and blasted the flesh, blood and metal wreckages in the surrounding area.

There was no doubt that it would instantly kill Akira if one of those warheads hit him directly. Akira could feel a shiver running through his spine as he started sweating.

"Well, they mostly miss anyway, so it's going to be okay, right? I won't get hit, right?!!"

"Their accuracy is pretty bad since their huge cannons are unsuitable for their size. I bet it's because the factory that produced them received

corrupted data or something. So don’t worry, you won’t get hit that easily.”

“Alright then!!”

Akira sounded elated when he heard that. But his mood immediately changed when Alpha continued her explanation.

“But because of such level of randomness, it’s kind of hard to accurately predict their trajectories. Even with my superior computing skills, I can’t guarantee that they won’t hit you at all. So in the end, it’ll still depend on your luck.”

Akira frowned.

“Don’t say something scary like that!! I’ve used all of my luck, you know?!!”

“Just hope that your luck is only bad to the point that I can offset it with my support. That aside, remember that you got into this situation because of your own decision, okay? And it does not depend on luck.”

“I see!! If that does not depend on my luck, then it’ll be your fault if I get hit, right?!”

Akira laughed sarcastically, to which, Alpha just smiled invincibly.

“Are you sure you’re going to say that? In that case, I’ll increase the level of my support so that you won’t get hit. So you should give your best too, okay?”

“What do you mean by that…?”

In order to avoid getting shot at, Alpha increased the speed of the bike and made a slalom move. But because of that, Akira’s body was subjected to even more stress.

Akira thought that he should not have said something like that. He instantly regretted what he said and gritted his teeth as he endured the pain while making a grim face.

Akira was closing in high speed with a rifle in his arm, aiming towards the monsters. The insect cannons started to take notice of him and reacted. Most of the cannon insects already changed their target to Akira and showered him with warheads.

And when he got close enough, the cannon insects stopped shooting in curved trajectories and instead aimed at him in a straight line. The cannon warheads travelled along a straight line and hit about 1 meter away from Akira as rumbles echoed through the wasteland. He was filled with fear when the vibration and the shockwave from the explosions reached him. But he then just gritted his teeth and crushed the fear.

When Akira had gotten close enough to cannon insects, Alpha smiled and said to him.

“This might be a bit painful!! But just endure it!!”

“Alright!!”

There was a trace of desperation in his voice when he replied.

Alpha made the bike turn 90 degrees. It tilted so low that Akira’s left leg grazed the ground in order to resist the leftover momentum from throwing him off the bike. As for Akira himself, he was held in place by the augmented suit. The reason why the bike did not flip over or get thrown off was because Akira was applying an optimal amount of pressure with his right leg to keep the bike’s wheels on the ground. Thus he was able to decelerate rapidly without falling over or getting thrown off.

Akira gripped his AAH rifle tightly in that leaning position as he pulled its trigger. The augmented suit helped him stabilize his arm as the kickback sent by the rifle transmitted through his body and into the bike.

Akira’s body was subjected to an intense force. His bones started to crack and his flesh started to tear open, thus the medicines that he consumed beforehand immediately activated and started healing his micro-wounds and injuries. But even before his body could be completely healed, he was

subjected to even more burden and new wounds started to open up again. He had to endure the pain as his body went through that cycle again.

When his bike suddenly decelerated to make a sharp turn, all the cannon insects around the area immediately turned to Akira. But when the bike decelerated enough, it suddenly accelerated again while still keeping its tilted position before the cannon insects could shoot at him. As countless warheads hit the ground where Akira was just a moment ago, he just kept pacing his bike alongside the swarm in a tilted position while keeping his finger on the trigger of his AAH rifle.

Since the cannon insects had no pivot to rotate their guns, they had to readjust their whole body when they aim at something. As they were reorienting their position, Akira released countless bullets towards the swarm.

The bullets spewed from Akira's AAH rifle hit the robots that were resupplying the cannon insects. If he was able to destroy the machines resupplying the cannon insects, then all the cannon insects would only turn into moving target practices once they depleted their ammos. That was why Akira prioritized destroying them first.

Due to Alpha's advanced target support, most of the bullets hit the weak points of the mechanical monsters. The monsters that got their leg connections destroyed, struggled to keep standing. While the resupplying robots that had a magazine-like body exploded when they got hit and took out the monsters within its explosion radius.

The cannon insects pushed the ability of their small legs to their maximum as they turned with a speed that was not befitting of their size and immediately blasted their cannons. Warheads flew past Akira's side and landed not too far from him throwing rocks and dust into the air.

Akira puckered his face from the pain assaulting his body and the shockwave from the explosions.

"Alpha!! That one was really dangerous, you know?!!!"

“But thanks to that, you didn’t get hit at all. And that’s all that matters, right? That aside, is your left leg okay?”

“It hurts like hell, feels like my bone will break or my flesh will tear off if I do that again.”

“Then that means we have to do it with your right leg next time.”

“Is there any options where I don’t have to do that?”

“Of course there is. You just have to buy a bigger and better gun. Now that you have an augmented suit, you should be able to handle those guns easily.”

“So in short, I don’t have any other choices at the moment, huh?”

Akira looked annoyed as he sent his gaze at Alpha, but she just smiled.

“Of course I’ll try to avoid such a situation as much as I can, but you’ll have to do it when you are left with no other choice. Remember that it was your decision now that we’re in this situation, right? So don’t start complaining, okay?”

“Yeah yeah, I get it already!!”

Although Akira did not regret his choice, painful stuff was still painful to him. But he tried to forget the pain by answering back in an annoyed tone.

After that, Akira used his AAH rifle to prioritize shooting down the resupplying robots. Although the AAH rifle did not inflict much damage to the cannon insects, it was able to somehow destroy the relatively weaker resupplying robots.

The resupplying robots looked like a big magazine with small legs attached to it and they resupplied the cannon insect by connecting to their backside. Akira realized that and noticed that they would blow up together with the cannon insects if he shot them. Akira’s mood got better and better every time he blew up one of those monsters.

“Alright then, next! We already took down most of them!”

“This is going very well. The other Hunters are also working hard, we can win this battle at this rate.”

Once most of the resupplying robots were taken out, the bombardment from the cannon insects started to weaken. The Hunters had also closed their distance to the swarm. Since most of the Hunters had bigger firepower than Akira, they wiped out the swarm in no time.

The last few cannon insects were only standing in their place without doing anything. They already ran out of ammo and there were no more resupplying robots around them. The Hunters just walked to them and crushed them in order to vent all of their pent up frustration and stress. Eventually, all the cannon insects turned into wreckages and the battle had come to a closure.

Akira let out a big sigh, he was very tired.

“…It finally ends, huh. Avoiding warheads while shooting at monsters… Although we somehow pulled it off, I don’t want to do that ever again.”

“That would have been a hard fight if it was not for this bike. As I thought, it’s still too early for you, Akira.”

“Is it because of my equipment? Or my skill?”

“Both. Or more like, you lack everything.”

“…Although I have an augmented suit now and your amazing support, I’m still not that good, huh?”

Akira was a bit depressed. He thought that he got a big power-up ever since he got his augmented suit. But now it was as if his incapability was thrown right at his face.

Alpha smiled and tried to cheer him up.

“If you can get strong in one night, then we won’t be doing all of those training up until now. So let’s keep on working hard in the future too.”

Akira just changed his mood and faintly smiled back.

“You’re right. There’s no other choice but to work hard, huh… That aside, I wonder how they are going to distribute the reward from this. We worked really hard this time, so I’m looking forward to a big reward. Although to be honest, I don’t really know how they are going to decide on my reward.”

“Well, I suppose it’ll be at least enough for you to stay in a room with a bath. So you can look forward to having a good rest today.”

“That’s true, I guess I’ll just do that.”

Akira took a short rest before returning back to the truck. When he arrived, the other Hunters who went back to the truck before him welcomed Akira.

“That was amazing. I thought you were planning to be a decoy since you went out only with an AAH rifle. But that was really something.”

“Well, it’s the famous AAH rifle after all.”

Although Akira was half-joking when he said that, the guy looked convinced with the answer.

“Are you, by any chance, an AAH fan? Is that gun a modified AAH rifle?”

“AAH fan? Well, I do like the rifle though. After all, I bought it from my acquaintance’s shop, but I didn’t particularly put any modification on it.”

“In that case, that would mean your acquaintance is actually selling modified rifles without telling you. Fans tend to do that in order to get more people loving their favourite gun. Well, if a Hunter like you really like that rifle, I bet there’ll be more people liking that gun in the near future. As expected of a famous rifle.”

Akira did not fully understand the reasoning, so he asked Alpha.

“Alpha, what is this AAH fan thingy?”

“I think it refers to the people who really like AAH rifle.”

“Well, I can at least understand that much though, but still…”

“If you’re curious about it, you should investigate it later by yourself. It’s also a type of training, after all.”

“…Alright.”

As Akira was still wondering about the meaning of those words, another Hunter came up to him. He looked hesitant when he spoke to Akira.

“I’m sorry but we got more injured Hunters. We already used all of our medicines. If you have some to spare, can you sell some to us again?”

“Sure, I should still have some left…”

As Akira lowered his rucksack and gun, pulled out a box of medicines, and was about to hand it over. He suddenly had a really bad feeling, as a matter of fact, it was the worst one that he felt that day. Suddenly a monster appeared near Akira and the other Hunters and it was running straight to them.

It was a relatively big sized biological monster with a powerful and durable body. It ignored bullets that were flying towards it as it shoved aside corpses and wreckages when it ran towards the truck before it was knocked down by a powerful blast.

The Hunters thought that it was dead, but it actually was only knocked unconscious. During the fierce battle that just happened, they did not have the time to check if all the downed monsters around them were really killed. Thus they left this monster alone thinking that it was dead.

Once the monster regained its consciousness, it followed its bestial instinct to attack the nearest human, and the nearest human was Akira.

Akira moved to shoot that monster, but he realized that he had no gun in his hands. He quickly tried to reach for his gun that he dropped on the ground. But that sequence of thinking made his reaction slow down even more.

Akira's late reaction turned his situation for the worst as the monster was already right in front of him with its big mouth wide open.

[I won't make it in time!!! I'm really dead now!!]

As the world felt like it was running in slow motion, Akira could feel the death that was creeping onto him.

In the next moment, Akira's augmented cloth moved on its own. His whole body rotated with his left leg as a pivot as Akira raised his right leg at the same time. The augmented suit ignored its user's safety and mustered all of its strength, thus for a spare second, Akira's strength and ability broke through the limit of a mere human and transcended into the realm of a superhuman.

Akira's right leg sliced through the air and drove into the head of the monster that was right in front of him with enough power that it would be able to easily send metal wreckages flying.

But even with that much power, it was not able to kill the monster. Although it recoiled back from the kick, it did not fall to the ground. The strong shock on its head only stopped its movement momentarily.

During that opening, Akira's arm quickly reached for his AAH rifle on its own. Although he was still very confused, Akira quickly regained its composure as he immediately shoved his gun into that monster's mouth and pulled the trigger. As he held the trigger of his gun, the bullets spewed out from its muzzle tore through the monster's head from the inside.

But even so, it was only enough to fatally injure the monster and not enough to kill it. Akira firmly held the trigger and emptied his magazine into the monster's mouth. There was a moment of silence after which the monster's large body fell down to the ground and never moved again for the second time.

Akira was breathing roughly.

“W-was that you who moved my body, Alpha?”

“Yep. You should quickly treat your wounds before your augmented suit stops working.”

“Stop working? Is it broken?”

“It’s running low on energy. Although I was able to increase its power output above its limit for a few seconds, it consumed a huge amount of energy in that short amount of time. I didn’t have any other choice back then, you know. But since I pushed it past its limit, it might be broken, we should make a thorough check later.”

Akira sat down. His whole body was pulsing in pain, especially his right leg.

“…My right leg, I wonder if it is broken.”

“Well, I did harden the augmented suit as hard as it could, but since it’s not designed with user protection as one of its main functions, there was a limit on how hard it can go. If you don’t heal your leg, you won’t be able to walk back home you know. So you should quickly treat your leg.”

Akira quickly picked up his rucksack and took out some medicines.

“I just need to swallow them, right? Since it’s a broken bone, it’s not like I should open up my leg to apply the medicine directly onto my broken bone, right?”

“In the worst-case scenario, you have no other choice but to do that, you know? For now, you just need to straighten your broken bone and swallow the medicine. It might take some time to fully heal your broken bone, but I think that will be fine at the moment. So, should I help you straighten the broken bone?”

“…Yes, please.”

After that, Akira's hands started moving on their own and grabbed his right leg. Alpha then partially turned off some parts of the augmented suit, thus the augmented suit regained its elasticity and weight. And with that, the whole augmented suit forcefully straightened Akira's broken bone.

Intense pain immediately assaulted Akira, he gritted his teeth and endured the intense pain. After that, Akira took his medicine box and poured all the medicines inside that box into his mouth. As he swallowed all of those medicines, the analgesic inside the medicine immediately dulled his pain, but even so, he could still feel the healing nanomachines quickly gathering around his right leg.

As he strongly squeezed the empty medicine box, Akira's eyes met with the eyes of the guy from before. He quickly grabbed his rucksack and confirmed that he did not have many medicines left with him. He hesitated for a bit before he decided to hand over one box to that man. That Hunter received the box, stopped for a moment and then returned the box back to Akira. Akira looked puzzled when that Hunter did that, but he just smiled and said to Akira.

"There's no way I can accept that box when someone who's as good as you make that face. Not to mention that you already gave me a box before."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, the Hunters are not that badly injured anyway. They'll be okay if we just let them rest."

The other Hunters came running as they heard gunshots, then the guy in front of Akira shouted at them.

"There was a monster that just lost consciousness and was not dead yet!! Go and check the other monsters, if you find any of them with their head intact, shoot them a few times in the head as a precaution!!"

The other Hunters quickly picked up their guns in panic. All of the Hunters there, including Akira, had lowered their guard as they thought that the

battle was over, thus it took some time before the Hunters were able to return their guard back up.

The Hunters who just repelled the assault from the cannon insects swarm were once again waiting for reinforcement.

Akira used his injury as a reason to take a rest as the other Hunters kept monitoring the surroundings. The reason why none of them complained when Akira was resting was because they acknowledged Akira's hard work.

Akira started to prepare himself for another fight. Of course, he hoped that there would be no more battle, but the world did not care about his wishes. Thus he had no other choice but to prepare himself.

He replaced the power source of his augmented suit with a new energy pack before his augmented suit ran out of energy and turned into a mere dead weight heavy suit. He then took a full magazine and inserted it into his AAH rifle. He also attached some spare magazines around his augmented suit. When he finished, his right leg was almost fully healed. With this, he was ready to go for another round.

Akira stared inside his rucksack and let out the biggest sigh of the day. He only had a spare amount of reserve ammo and healing medicines.

"…I don't have much left, I need to replenish my ammo reserve when I get back… I'm going to get a reward from this, right?"

Alpha smiled and tried to cheer him up.

"I don't know for sure how much that bike is, but you fought quite a lot today, so I'm sure the reward will be enough to cover it. So don't worry, it'll be fine."

"Is that so? Well, I guess you're right."

Akira decided to just accept her explanation. Although he remembered Alpha once said to him that she did not know for sure how much reward he

would get, Akira just decided to forget that part for now. After all, he would feel better this way.

As the day turned darker and the sun was about to set, reinforcements finally arrived.

They decided to tow back the broken truck back to the city. As they were preparing to tow back the trucks, Akira just sat on his bike and waited for them to finish. Suddenly, Kibayashi waved at him. He looked like he was in a good mood.

“Yo there! So you’re still alive, huh!! I heard everything from the other Hunters, you did a crazy thing back there. To be honest, I thought that you’d be definitely dead by now. It seems that my ability to judge people has gone bad, huh. But at least, I was correct when I said that you are a Hunter who would challenge a reckless, impossible and even futile things.”

Akira frowned a bit when Kibayashi said that he thought Akira was definitely dead by now. But he was able to understand Kibayashi’s opinion, thus he controlled himself and didn’t retaliate.

“…The bike was really useful, so thank you for the bike.”

“I’m glad to hear that. It was the right choice to give you that bike. And that’s doubly true if it helped you do those crazy things.”

“Ah, right. About the emergency request that I accepted, what should I do before it’s considered finished? Is it until these Hunters return safely back to the city?”

“Ah, about that, wait for a sec.”

Kibayashi pulled out his information terminal and operated it.

“Alright, I’ve finished registering your accomplishment for the emergency request. You can do whatever you want now.”

“Is that it? Is it really okay not to escort those Hunters back to the city?”

“Yeah, after all, we came here because of another aid request. The monster group that headed to the city from Kuzusuhara ruins was already annihilated by the defense squad. So that emergency request has ended. Because of that, we have the leeway to send some people to help other Hunters now.”

“Ohh, I see.”

“Now that you mention it, do you want to take the aid request too? If you want to accept that request, I’ll help you with the registration here and now.”

Akira looked so tired as he shook his head.

“…No thanks. Since I’m done with the emergency request, I’ll go ahead and return back to the city first. After all, I already used most of my ammo reserves and not to mention that I’m really tired now.”

“Well, that’s just too bad. I was actually hoping to see what kind of crazy things you would do if we get attacked on our way back, you know.”

“…Hahaha, give me a break already. Well then, I’ll head back first.”

“Be careful on your way back, okay? If you’re going to die, make sure that you die doing something really crazy. So don’t drop dead because of something lame like tripping off your bike, okay?”

Akira felt even more tired as he saw Kibayashi so excited and in such a good mood. He then let out a sigh and went ahead to the city.

As Kibayashi was seeing Akira off with a big smile, another Hunter Office staff came to him and reported.

“Kibayashi-san, I’ve checked the history log data from the battle. It seems that the damage on the truck was mostly done on its driving function, thus we were able to easily retrieve the data, but… There’s this one weird data…”

“Weird data?”

“For some reason, there’s this one Hunter who made a strange move, or more like, a reckless move. There’s this ridiculous data saying that this Hunter charged right into the monster swarm all alone and started shooting at the swarm. It might also be because of some kind of a malfunction in the information gathering device though…”

Kibayashi burst out in laughter when he heard that report. He then said to the other staff.

“Ask the other Hunters to check whether that data is correct or not. No, wait, I’ll do that. Don’t go ahead deleting the data even when you think that it’s from a malfunction, okay? Aaaah, or more like, just send the data to me and I’ll check it later. I’ll go and ask the Hunters in the tray, you just go ahead and start driving once the preparation is complete.”

“Yessir.”

That staff then returned back to his job of preparing the truck for moving out. As for Kibayashi, he smiled and mumbled.

“…That boy, he was crazy enough to even make the staff doubt the data huh. That’s really nice!! It’s been so long since the last time I met a Hunter with this much zest!!!”

Kibayashi was in a really good mood that day.

Silavin: God. It seems like his body is falling apart. I wonder if this was what caused the others that Alpha had dealings with to break down?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 32, Even 10,000,000,000 Aurum Is A Small Amount Of Money

Index

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The gathering place for the patrol request was now filled with the Hunters who came back from the emergency request. Some of them were celebrating with their friends who returned alive; even if they were injured. Meanwhile, some of them grieved for their lost friends. The scene showcased that it was not only Akira but all the Hunters involved had also gone through a fierce battle during the emergency request.

But for now, Akira was just glad that he was able to return back alive.

“Everything is fine as long as it ends well. Although a lot of things have happened, it is finally over.”

Alpha smiled and said to Akira.

“Good work for today. Let’s take rest for the remainder of the day.”

“You’re right, I’ll take a good long bath today, after all, I couldn’t take one recently at all.”

Akira was beaming as he was looking forward to his bath time. But Alpha just smiled bitterly and destroyed his joy as she said.

“Akira, I have bad news.”

“…What is it?”

“The reward is still not transferred yet, so we don’t have any money to rent a room with a bath for today.”

Akira looked surprised and confused at the same time.

“W-what do you mean?”

“It seems that since there were a lot of Hunters who took the emergency request, it’ll take some time before they finish calculating the reward distribution. You can check your request history to see all the details.”

Akira grabbed and operated his information terminal in a panic to access his request history and opened the reward tab. He found out what Alpha said was really written in his terminal monitor.

“But I worked super hard in this request…”

Looking at how Akira was so dejected, Alpha smiled and tried to cheer him up.

“I bet they’ll transfer it by tomorrow. And even if you take a long bath today, there’s a good chance that you’ll fall asleep in the bath which is really dangerous. So with that in mind, let’s refrain from taking a bath today.”

“…Alright.”

Akira knew that it would be pointless to complain, thus he decided to just obediently accept her reasoning.

“Akira, putting that aside, what will you do with this bike? We don’t have enough money to rent a room in an inn with a parking lot, but if we just

leave it in a random place, someone will steal it. Or do you want to sleep on the bike tonight?”

Akira frowned at Alpha’s logical suggestion. He was exhausted and wanted to avoid having to sleep in the back alley at all cost. But he also did not want someone else stealing his bike. And if he folded the bike and brought it back to his room, he might get scolded at by the innkeeper. Akira took some time thinking about his options before he came up with an idea.

“…Alright then, let’s leave the bike with Sheryl. She told me to visit her from time to time. She could lend me a parking spot. So I can visit her every time I go there to take my bike.”

Akira then rode his bike to Sheryl’s place.

***

Sheryl was trying to sleep in her private room when she heard someone knocking on the door of her room. She could not help but quickly get out of her bed and run towards the door, annoyed. Since she was about to sleep when she heard the knock, she shouted with irritation.

“What? I’m about to sleep here, you know!!”

“Boss!! Akira is here!!”

Sheryl immediately woke up from her half-sleepy state, she also understood very well why the other members of her gang woke her up. All the children there were too scared of talking to Akira without her around.

Sheryl immediately tidied up herself and hurried to meet Akira. She stopped right beside Akira who was waiting on top of his bike near the entrance and took a deep breath before speaking.

“I’m sorry for the wait, come in.”

“Thanks but it’s okay. Sorry for coming in this late, I have something that I want to ask you.”

“Please feel free to ask anything. I’ll do anything so long as it’s something that I can help with.”

Akira felt weird as Sheryl was smiling at him the whole time. He thought that her behavior should have gotten better since the last time he met her. But looking at this, it seemed that Sheryl’s behavior had actually gotten worse. Or this might be her real personality and this was how she would behave in front of Akira from here on out. As he was pondering about that, he decided to just drop the subject and go straight to the real reason why he came. He was already exhausted to think about anything else.

“Can you keep this bike here for me? I’ll come here again to take it when I need it.”

“I understand, I’ll take good care of the bike. Is there anything else? If there’s nothing else, would you please come in for a bit? You can go back after having a cup of coffee at least.”

As she spoke, Sheryl casually reached for Akira’s hand and stared into his eyes. She looked very happy for some reason. From her smile, the way she looked at him and grabbed his hand, how casually she invited him in… Akira thought that she was being a bit pushy. So he immediately pulled his hand back while being flustered and said.

“Nah, it’s already late today so I’ll return back to my room. A lot of things happened today and I’m really tired right now.”

Sheryl looked disappointed as she said.

“I see. Although I wanted to talk a lot with you because it has been quite a while since the last time you came, it is really unfortunate.”

“I’ll come again soon.”

“I’ll be waiting for you.”

Sheryl smiled as she saw Akira off, there was a shred of loneliness in her face.

Akira was a bit taken aback by what just happened, but he thought that it was still better than the last time. Plus, he was very tired at the moment, so he just decided to forget about it and headed back to the inn.

Sheryl told the young boy who was on the guard duty to put the bike inside the base.

“I don’t think I even need to tell you this, but be really careful when you move the bike. Tell the other kids not to mess around with the bike and also tell them that it’s Akira’s bike. I’m sure they know what would happen to them if the bike is stolen or broken. So be very careful with it, okay?”

“Okay, I understand.”

The young boy answered back nervously as he imagined the worst-case scenario.

Sheryl just smiled bewitchingly at that young boy.

“I’ll go and take a rest now. Good luck with your job tonight. Good night!”

The young boy was mesmerized for a few seconds, his face went beet red and looked flustered. Sheryl noticed his reaction before she went back to her room.

When Sheryl got back to her room, she looked at her smiling face in front of a mirror. But after that, she immediately stopped smiling.

[…It’s actually working. But why is it not working on Akira? Or is it that I just didn’t notice it?]

Sheryl knew that she had a good face and body. And she understood how to use it to coax other people. Smiling, holding hands, staring right into other person’s eyes, she knew that all of these would increase the effectiveness of her coaxing.

But it hardly affected Akira, that was why she tested it on the young boy who was on the guard duty. And just made-up gentle smile full of charm caused the young boy to react as she expected.

Her execution should have been flawless, but even so, Akira did not react at all and she was extremely disappointed by that.

“…I still have to work hard, huh?”

Sheryl mumbled those words before she prepared herself to go back to sleep.

***

On the next day, inside a cheap small room without a bath, Akira was sleeping like a log. He was dead tired after what happened the day before. Eventually, he opened his eyes. He was still in a daze as he looked around and saw Alpha smiling beside him.

“…Alpha, good morning.”

“Good morning, Akira. Reward from yesterday has already been transferred. You can check it if you want.”

Akira was still sleepy, but he immediately got up when he heard the word “reward” and operated his information terminal while still being half-asleep. But when he clicked the reward tab in the request history page and looked at the notification, all his sleepiness was blown away.

“12,000,000 Aurum!?”

Akira could not believe his eyes as he took another good look at his information terminal, he finally understood that it was indeed 12,000,000 Aurum. He was so surprised that he felt like he would faint.

The details of his reward payment were written on the page. It included the basic reward for the emergency request, plus a reward for fighting against 2 swarms of monsters, plus the money from the number of Hunters that he saved, plus the payment from the medicine box that he gave to the other Hunters, minus the price of the bike that he got as an upfront payment. But Akira did not read all the details.

“Well, this amount of money might not be that much when compared to the risk that you had to take for earning it.”

When Alpha spoke, it was as if she was not fully satisfied with the amount of the reward. This caused Akira to quickly come back to his senses.

“…But still, well, it’s true that I risked my life for the request and I almost got killed back then. Not to mention, we spent a lot of ammo just like the other Hunters, but still, you know…”

Akira started to doubt the worth of the reward money. But he was not familiar with both the difficulty of yesterday’s battles and the amount of money, thus he could not make any conclusion.

But his confusion was cleared when he heard what Alpha said next.

“I guess we should get some equipment with this spare change for today.”

“S-spare change!?”

“Akira, stop getting surprised for every single thing.”

“Ah! Even if you tell me not to get surprised, that is just impossible in this situation!! If 12,000,000 Aurum is still just spare change, then how much does it take for it to not be considered spare change?!!”

“As long as it’s in Aurum, even 10,000,000,000 Aurum is nothing but spare change.”

Although Akira was confused and did not understand the meaning of Alpha’s words, he calmed down and asked her.

“…What do you mean?”

“It will take a lot of time to explain everything. When you go to Shizuka’s shop to restock ammo and buy new equipment later today, you can ask her about the equipment that you can’t buy using Aurum. I’m sure she’ll tell you about the equipment that you can’t buy with spare change. We’ll go

there once you finish preparing yourself. But for now, how about you eat your breakfast?”

The moment Alpha mentioned breakfast, Akira immediately noticed that he had an empty stomach. He then remembered that he went straight to sleep without eating dinner last night because he was tired.

“…You’re right.”

Filling an empty stomach took the highest priority. So Akira just put aside all the questions he had and started preparing his breakfast.

Once he finished all of his preparation, Akira headed to Shizuka’s shop. And as usual, Shizuka was waving at him from the counter and welcomed him when Akira entered her shop.

“Akira, welcome, how’s the augmented suit? Is it useful to you?”

“Yep. It’s better than I imagined.”

Shizuka looked glad as she saw Akira in a good mood. The press reported news about a huge swarm of monsters heading to the city, a swarm that was big enough for the city to gather and send the defense squad to intercept it. The report also said there were Hunters who joined the battle. Shizuka had a feeling that Akira also joined that battle, so she was worried about him. But looking at how he was doing fine today, she thought that it was a needless worry.

“That’s good to hear. I was worried that you would get killed because I picked up a bad augmented suit. You’re a prime candidate for becoming this shop’s regular customer after all. So it would be bad if you get killed, you know.”

Akira smiled proudly in reaction to Shizuka’s light joke.

“And I’m here today to take another step towards becoming your shop’s regular customer. I want to buy one more AAH rifle, as I thought, it would be bad if my rifle breaks when I only have one. And also, is there a type of

rifle that works well against mechanical monsters? Since I have an augmented suit now, I don’t mind a heavy rifle.”

“So one AAH rifle and one more rifle to fight mechanical monsters, right? Well, there are a lot of rifles that you can use though, and all of them have a different price range. So how much is your budget?”

“Including the AAH rifle, I’m planning to spend no more than 10,000,000 Aurum.”

Shizuka, who was smiling at Akira, looked so surprised that she stood in a daze for a while. She then looked a bit troubled as she said to Akira.

“…I’m sorry to ask you about this, but how are you going to pay for it? I do want to sell you the rifle, but since I’m a merchant, I can’t accept credit payment, you know? Or is that you’re planning to use the credit card from the Hunter Office? Although you might be eligible to pay it in instalments, it’s no different than taking a debt, so you should rethink it.”

“I’ll pay it in one go, so it’ll be okay.”

Akira answered back in a normal tone almost immediately, but that caused Shizuka’s expression to change.

“…Is that so? You got your augmented suit 3 days ago, right? And you said that you didn’t do any dangerous work until you got it, right? In short, you only had 3 days, so how did you get that much money in such a short time?”

Although Shizuka was smiling gently at him, Akira could feel pressure radiating from her smile. He then remembered that he had promised Shizuka not to do anything too dangerous. So Akira tried to come up with an excuse in panic.

“W-well, about the money, you see.”

“Yep.”

“I-I encountered a group of monsters during yesterday’s patrol request. I didn’t expect that to happen, thus I got some unexpected extra reward too, and it was way more than I thought. Even I’m too surprised by that.”

“So in short, you went to do a dangerous request yesterday, right?”

“W-well, about that, I was only trying my best to survive…”

“And so you did something dangerous, right?”

Shizuka’s voice carried a strong pressure.

“Yes…”

Akira looked down and confessed. Shizuka’s worried face then turned stern.

“Are you alright? Did you get injured? I heard that yesterday’s battle was quite fierce.”

“As you can see, I’m okay. And it’s not like I’m using this augmented suit now because I’m injured and immobile.”

Akira was not lying, it was all true at least up until this point. But Shizuka locked her stare at him and he could not endure it and he confessed.

“W-well, my right leg was injured. But it was not that bad, my healing medicine was enough to heal it and it’s already completely healed now.”

But even after he confessed, it still looked like Akira was hiding something important and Shizuka noticed that.

“Come over here for a bit!!”

Shizuka then pulled Akira to the back room behind the counter without saying anything.

“Take off your augmented suit and let me check what’s under it. It’s not like you’re hiding bandages under that augmented suit, right?”

“I’m telling you it’s already completely healed.”

“In that case, there’s nothing to worry about, right? So take off your augmented suit now!”

Akira was overwhelmed by Shizuka’s pressure, so he obediently took off his augmented suit. There were no bandages on his body and it did not seem like he had more scars compared to the last time. The huge amount of medicine that he consumed was able to completely heal his broken leg and all the small injuries that he got from the crazy manoeuvres of his augmented suit.

Shizuka finally looked relieved as she tightly hugged Akira.

“There’s no need to try and hide it if you’re really okay. It only makes me more worried, you know.”

“I-I’m sorry.”

Akira did not reject Shizuka who was hugging him. But he was flustered because she buried his head inside her chest. He was also relieved that there was no need for him to tell her about the fact that he took the emergency request that he did not have to and how he was planning to go to a battlefield even if he had to run till there. After all, it would cause a bigger ruckus if she came to know that.

Akira and Shizuka then went back to the counter and she put one of the rifles that he ordered on the counter.

“First of all, this is the AAH rifle. As for the anti mechanical monster gun… You want one because of yesterday’s battle, right? Can you tell me how the battle was? I’ll think of a gun that might suit you after hearing that.”

“Alright.”

Akira then told the story about his battle against the cannon insect swarms while omitting most of the details. He said that to be able to shoot down the

resupplying robots with his AAH rifle, but he had to come close to the swarm while dodging the raining warheads. Shizuka was surprised when she heard that.

“…I see. That’s a pretty dangerous thing to do. But since you had no means to run away from them, I guess that was your only choice, huh?”

“Yes, well, so I was wondering if there’s a gun that works well against monsters like them.”

“In that case, I recommend you to get CWH anti-material rifle or DSS sniper rifle. Both can be used with most of the anti-armour ammo sold in the market and they’ll work well against strong armoured monsters. So, accuracy or firepower, which one do you prefer?”

“Since I’m planning to use it mostly during a ruin exploration, I’ll pick firepower. After all, there’re many places where monsters can hide inside the ruin, so I don’t think I need a gun that has high accuracy.”

“Alright then, in that case, I would recommend you to get CWH anti-material rifle with anti-armour ammo. Of course, you can load it with normal anti-monster ammo too, but if you’re thinking of using it in tandem with the AAH rifle, I recommend you to only load the CWH anti-material rifle only with anti-armour ammo. Although it’s a bit expensive, you can also buy the specially designed ammo too as insurance, this ammo should be able to make short work of big and strong monsters. It might be a good idea to buy a few magazines of this ammo just to be safe.”

“Well then, I’ll take that gun with those ammo, some normal ammo to replenish my reserve and some energy packs for my augmented suit too. Is there anything else that you think I should get?”

“Let’s see. Well, of course, it’s nice to have everything in case you suddenly need anything… But if you ask me, then how about buying a charm or a talisman?”

Although Shizuka was actually just joking, Akira unexpectedly took her suggestion seriously.

“I’ll buy one of those.”

Shizuka shop mainly focused on ammo and guns for Hunters, but it was also selling some other goods too. Hunters could also place an order for an augmented suit and pick the order from her shop. But Shizuka did not sell charms at all.

But seeing how Akira reacted, it was not like Shizuka could say that she was actually joking there. He looked at her with a serious face and a gaze full of expectation, he also sounded like he really meant it when he said that.

“…Wait here for a bit.”

Shizuka made an awkward smile before she went to the backroom as she rushed to the shop’s warehouse.

The warehouse which doubled as the loading area for the goods delivered to her shop housed all kinds of guns and medicines. Shizuka was searching for the object that she was looking for inside the warehouse.

“…Where did I put that thing again…? Or more like, I’m not even sure if it’s here or not. But I don’t remember ever throwing it away. So it should be collecting dust somewhere around here… Oh, here it is!!”

What she was looking for was a cardboard box that was left deep inside the warehouse. Looking at how much dust was blanketing it, it seemed that it was left there for a very long time. Shizuka lightly blew off the dust and opened the box. Inside, she found a collection of small objects.

There were small objects like an aiming device or medical products that could not be recreated using the current technology. Those were goods that were created using old-world technology. But among them, there were also other goods that did not hold any financial value. For example, there was an artistic painting, a bunch of inks and papers; these things did not have any technological value at all. Thus the hunter office deemed these goods as worthless.

Those goods were normally thought as worthless in the market, so the Hunters who came back with them would bring them to other places hoping that they could sell them somewhere with a high price. Some of them would be given to their acquaintances as a souvenir from the ruins, some of them were used as a chip in negotiation and some of them were given to random people thinking that it was better rather than just throwing them out. Shizuka got quite a lot of these goods.

She gathered the goods that did not interest her and put them in the warehouse; that was the origin of the goods inside this cardboard box. She went to look for the box since she remembered that there was something that could be used as a charm inside it. She then picked some small objects and went back to Akira.

“Sorry for the wait. I don’t have much though, but do you need any of these?”

Akira was looking at the small goods that were lined up on the counter with a serious face. But he did not know which one was good as a charm and which one was not.

“Do you have any recommendations which one is good?”

“Well, charm is outside my speciality. But all of these goods were found in the ruins. I have no plan of restocking them and I can’t guarantee their effectiveness. In the end, a charm’s just an object to make you feel calmer after all. That’s why I think it’s best if you choose one yourself.”

Akira nodded while still looking confused, but then Alpha suddenly pointed to one of the objects on the counter.

“I think this one is good.”

“Is there any reason why you picked that one?”

“It has a lucky number carved on it. I think it’s some kind of a charm to increase luck used by someone during the old world era. After all, exploring

the ruins also relies a lot on your luck. So I think that one will be a good choice.”

Akira then pointed at the object that Alpha recommended.

“I’ll take this one.”

“Alright. Since I can’t give you insurance for its quality, I’ll give it for free. Wait here for a bit, I’ll bring the rest of your order here.”

As Shizuka was gathering all the goods that Akira ordered, he was staring at his new charm. He looked genuinely interested in that small object.

“Alpha, you said it has a lucky number, right? So what exactly does this number mean?”

“People usually get a load of money when this number comes up. That’s why it’s a lucky number.”

“I see.”

Akira thought that people in the old world also needed money so much that they would even get a lucky charm like the one he was staring at. It made him interested in the fact that there were actually more similarities between the old world era and the current era.

Shizuka returned back with all the ordered goods.

“Sorry for the wait. If you have the time, I can explain the details of the goods if you want.”

“Yes, please.”

“Alright then. The CWH anti-material rifle is mainly used to fight thick armored mechanical monsters…”

Shizuka started her explanation in a good mood.

Among all the types of the gun, the CWH anti-material rifle was made specifically to fight mechanical monsters.

Most of the mechanical monsters were autonomous battle robots or facility guardian drones. They were much harder to kill compared to the biological monsters. Their thick armour and hard metallic body were the reason.

If anti-armour ammo could pierce their thick armor and destroy their control devices, these monsters could be defeated with the least effort. And for those Hunters who were aiming to get their hands on the parts of these monsters, defeating these monsters while inflicting the least damage possible could earn them more money. Thus it was doubly beneficial for them to use anti-armour ammo.

Some of the Hunters who loved this CWH anti-material rifle earned their money by hunting tanks in the middle of the wasteland. They would load the specially designated ammo to their gun and destroy only the control device of a tank, then they would take that tank to the repair shop to install a new control device before selling it.

Of course, there were other types of guns that the Hunters would use for fighting big mechanical monsters. But the CWH anti-material rifle was a staple gun for such situations. That was just how good this gun was.

“The specially designed ammo for the CWH anti-material rifle might be expensive, but I can guarantee its efficiency. If you have enough knowledge about the inner part of the mechanical monsters and have the confidence to snipe their inner part, this ammo will work very well. It can be used to turn the table in one shot when you get into a pinch fighting a monster with thick armor. I don’t think I have to say this since I think you understand it very well, but you shouldn’t look forward to being in such a situation, okay?”

“Ah, of course.”

Akira nodded firmly, to which, Shizuka looked satisfied as she nodded in return.

“Good. Now then, don’t try to use its specially designed ammo on some other guns just because it looks similar, okay? In the worst-case scenario, it might cause an explosion that would take your whole arms off. So don’t even think of trying to do something like that. Do you have any questions? You can ask me about the other guns too, you know? If it’ll make you buy more guns, I can tell you everything I know.”

Akira thought for a bit before replying.

“In that case then, please tell me about the AAH rifle fans.”

Shizuka went silent since she did not have much to say about it. But she then smiled and looked at Akira with a gentle gaze.

“AAH rifle fans, huh… Akira, you’re too young to become an AAH rifle fan, you know?”

Although he did not understand why, he realized that he just asked something weird. Thus he tried to give more explanations about his question.

“Ah, it’s just that one of the Hunters who I was with yesterday said that. So I was just curious. That Hunter said that either I or Shizuka-san must be an AAH rifle fan after he took a good look at my AAH rifle…”

“Is that so? If that’s true, then that means you did a pretty amazing job back there.”

“Do people get misunderstood as an AAH rifle fan if they did something amazing?”

“Well, what can I say here… It’s complicated, you see.”

Akira looked confused, thus Shizuka smiled bitterly as she started explaining about the AAH rifle fans.

There were a lot of types of guns circulated in the eastern district. Some of them stayed around for years while some of them were popular for a short time before vanishing. The AAH rifle had survived such strict competition

for more than 100 years. Thanks to its high performance to price ratio, the AAH rifle was a popular rifle even now.

And among the Hunters, there was this group of people called the AAH rifle fans who really loved this rifle. They loved it so much that they tended to get their priority backwards.

They would try to defeat every monster using the AAH rifle because of their love for the rifle. They would even try to kill monsters that normally could not be defeated with AAH rifle's firepower just to showcase the greatness of the rifle. Some of them would heavily modify their AAH rifles to increase its performance and firepower. In short, these people would do all kinds of things for their beloved guns.

There were a lot of factions among the AAH rifle fans. Some of them despised any form of modifications and aimed for effective tactics using the basic AAH rifle. Some of them allowed modifications as long as it kept its basic design. Some of them allowed modifications as long as the core parts of the AAH rifle were still kept intact. Some of them would add extra functions on the rifle by adding extension parts. And finally, some of them did not really care about the inner parts as long as it still had the appearance of an AAH rifle. They would fight and help each other and spread the popularity of the AAH rifle.

One thing in common among the AAH rifle fans was that they were very zealous people. Although some of them were great Hunters, one might get swept and turned into an AAH rifle fan if he or she was not careful. That was why some people have trouble handling them.

"There were a lot of AAH rifle fans among the merchants too, but I'm not one of them, okay? I heard that people like them would strongly recommend buying the AAH rifle and they secretly sell modified AAH rifles with increased firepower. And among all the guns that they sell, some of them were jackpot guns. I'm sure that's the reason why that Hunter said that to you."

Akira then remembered what he did yesterday. He did say that the AAH rifle deserved its popularity and he destroyed the mechanical monster

cannon insects using only his AAH rifle. So it was to be expected if that Hunter mistook him as an AAH rifle fan.

“Once they get a jackpot, these Hunters would buy a big number of AAH rifle hoping that they would be able to get another jackpot. Although, normally, they would not be able to get the same amount of firepower unless they use a gun that is sold in Chrome. Some people even say that its level of firepower comes from the old world technology that is utilized in the rifle. But seriously though, I wonder who would spread such a rumour.”

There were cases where Hunters who mistook a merchant as an AAH rifle fan ordered a huge amount of AAH rifle. It might give that merchant a temporary financial boost, but if that merchant ever got obsessed with it and by chance had bad luck, he would end up with a warehouse full of unsold guns which might even cause their business to crumble.

There were times when Hunters came to Shizuka’s shop because of something similar. But Shizuka always made them pay the full price of the guns upfront before placing their order for the guns. There was once a time where someone bought a truck full of AAH rifle from Shizuka, and of course, Shizuka was dumbfounded when that happened.

“Shizuka-san, what is that Chrome? Is it something different from Aurum?”

Shizuka was a bit surprised when she found out that Akira did not understand what Chrome was. She looked sorry for a split second, but she immediately replaced it with her usual smile.

“Akira, do you not know what Chrome is?”

“No. This is the first time I heard that word.”

“It will take some time to explain everything. Is that okay?”

“It’s alright.”

Shizuka then started explaining about Chrome to Akira.

There were 2 kinds of currency in the eastern district. The currency issued by the Corporate and Chrome. Aurum was a currency issued by Sakashita Heavy Industry, one of the 5 biggest corporations in the eastern district.

The corporate currency was mostly used in the regions under the management of that corporation. Aurum included, there were 5 types of corporate currency, each issued by the 5 biggest corporations in the eastern district. And anyone who bought and sold stuff using one of the corporate currencies could be thought of as someone who was under that corporation. The spread of the currency depended on the sphere of influence of that corporation and it was the pillar that supported that corporation.

The very act of trying to counterfeit the corporate currency could be treated as a declaration of war against the Corporate Government. There were cases in the past when such a thing happened and the Corporate Government always obliterated them without mercy.

Besides the Corporate currency, there was Chrome that was used everywhere in the eastern district. It was called the currency of the old world, a type of electronic currency discovered as a relic in the ruins. It cannot be reproduced using the current world's technology. There were many methods to get this Chrome, and one of them was from an object called a Chrome card. It was some kind of an electronic wallet that contained Chrome.

Chrome had an absolute value in the eastern district. One could go to the Corporate Government to exchange a Chrome for a large amount of corporate currency. One might also exchange corporate currency to a Chrome which is sold at a very high rate. This was also one of the factors that raised the price of Chrome in the eastern district. Most of the transactions between big companies were conducted in Chrome.

And because of all of these, Chrome was able to hold its value and used as the currency from the old world.

Among the ruins of the old world, some of the factories were still operational. Of course, there were operational guardian drones patrolling these factories, and most of the time, even great Hunters or the Corporate

Government military could not fight against these drones that were manufactured using the overwhelmingly advanced technology of the old world. As such, it was near impossible to collect relics from such ruins.

But it was possible to negotiate with the advanced AI that managed such a facility to get the extremely invaluable and extremely hard to create goods that were manufactured in such a factory. And this Chrome would be used in such a transaction. Although it was originally a secret, the truth slowly spread among the residents of the eastern district.

Not to mention that with Chrome, one could use the vending machines scattered in the ruins to obtain medicines that could even regenerate severed limbs in a short time.

Some people did try to force their way to get hold of such medicine from the vending machines in the past. And when that happened, they had to fight the security system of the vending machine. Most of the time, they would not only end up destroying the vending machine but also increase the piles of corpses that were already scattered around it.

Rumour had it that some of the companies in the eastern district would use their Chrome to buy military goods manufactured in the old world factories. This caused a shift in the sphere of influence among the Corporations in the eastern district.

Because of that, the Corporate Government was trying to collect Chrome. And in order to do that, they would sell powerful and advanced equipment which could only be bought using Chrome.

Shizuka then finished her explanation with a summary.

“So there, you have it. There’s also a rumour about a super-advanced AAH rifle that can only be bought using Chrome. I really want to see one if it really does exist.”

After knowing there was equipment that could not be bought using corporate currency, Akira finally realized the reason why Alpha said even

10,000,000,000 Aurum was just spare change. He then bowed politely to Shizuka and said.

“Thank you for all the explanations, that was really an eye-opener.”

“Is that so? I’m glad to hear that.”

For those Hunters who already had an augmented suit or were planning to buy one, it was common sense for them to know about Chrome, but Akira did not know about it. Shizuka’s heart hurt a bit when she discovered this, but she was trying to be considerate to him by not showing that in her face as she smiled to Akira like usual.

Silavin: lol. Reminds me of Inflation to the point where they had to change the currency.

We also hit our goal! At long as we don’t slip, starting from next week, 2 chapters a week!

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Rebuild World – Chapter 33, Shijima's Evaluation

Index

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Akira immediately shifted to a room with a bath after he returned from Shizuka's shop. This room was pretty wide compared to his previous room. He put down his stuff in this room and said to Alpha with a serious tone.

"Alpha, I want to make sure of one thing, we're resting today, right? No, we're going to take a rest today, I'll take no complaints."

Alpha smiled and replied.

"Don't worry, we'll take a rest for today."

"Alright then, I guess I'll go and take a bath."

Akira looked happy as he was heading to the bath, but Alpha suddenly stopped him.

"If you want to take a good long bath, you better finish all of your leftover business for the day."

"Business? Is there still anything I should do?"

“You placed your bike at Sheryl’s place yesterday, remember? Since you didn’t say how long you are going to leave your bike with her, she might misunderstand and think that you’ll take the bike back soon. So I think it’s a good idea if you go there and explain it to her. Not to mention that you still have 500,000 Aurum debt to pay. If you postpone paying that debt, the peaceful situation that we’re having at the moment might crumble. So I think it’s better for you to pay that debt soon.”

Akira, who already decided on taking a bath, hesitated.

“…Can’t it wait for some more time?”

“I won’t force you, but it might cause some problems if you keep postponing it, you know?”

Alpha said it lightly while smiling as if it was nothing to worry about. But Akira got worried instead and decided to do them immediately.

Akira was dragging his feet as he was walking through the slum city. It was because he had filled his bag with more medicine than usual, plus he was carrying 2 AAH assault rifles and 1 CWH anti-material rifle.

The augmented suit, of course, helped him in carrying all of those equipment, but carrying that much stuff made it harder for him to control the augmented suit. Although it would be easy to do that with Alpha’s support, he was training to walk without her support at all. Because of that, Akira was having a hard time walking.

“Walking is hard enough already. Maybe I should’ve left the CWH anti-material rifle behind.”

“No, you shouldn’t. You’ll fight more battles in the future where you’ll need to use that rifle, so you should get used to it from now on. You don’t want to fight those mechanical monsters with AAH rifle again, right?”

Akira remembered all the hardship that he had faced the other day and smiled bitterly.

“You’re right. Well, I went and bought it anyway. So I guess I’ll work hard until I can at least use it proficiently.”

He then continued walking slowly through the slum. An inexperienced Hunter who was having a hard time handling his new equipment, it was a common sight among the Hunters. But even so, most of the people in the slum city would step aside and make a way for Akira. After all, for commoners, picking a fight against someone who is equipped with an augmented suit and carrying a big anti-monster rifle on his back was the same as doing suicide.

In order to avoid getting people’s attention, Akira walked through the slum city’s back alley. But he did not realize that the people around him were actually avoiding him.

When Akira arrived at Sheryl’s place, she looked very delighted and invited him to her private room. She then casually closed the door. As they were the only ones inside her room, she nonchalantly hugged Akira from the front the moment he put his stuff down.

Akira who somehow expected this just let out a sigh and said.

“Can you just get off me for now?”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? Yesterday you left as soon as you arrived, so it’s from yesterday’s portion too.”

“I don’t understand what portion you are talking about, but I’m here because I have something to tell you. So put this off for later, will you?”

“I understand, but I can continue after that, right?”

Sheryl then got off from Akira and stared at him, she looked contented as she got Akira’s promise.

As Akira realized that he might have to keep dealing with this behaviour of Sheryl from now on, he started to look at her as a troublesome girl.

After resetting the mood, Akira took a seat across the table from Sheryl. He reached out for 500,000 Aurum from inside his rucksack before casually placing it on the table.

“This is the rest of the payment for Shijima. So take this money and give it to him.”

Sheryl looked surprised. For her and the other children, it was a huge amount of money. She was worried whether he had to do dangerous stuff in order to get this money, so she could not help but ask Akira.

“Uhmmm, are you alright? They haven’t asked us to pay the rest yet, so I thought there’ll be no problem delaying the payment for later.”

“I got quite a lot of money from yesterday’s work. Compared to the total reward, this is just a small amount, so there’s no need to worry.”

Akira felt a bit strange when he said that so casually.

According to Alpha, even 12,000,000 Aurum was just a spare change. Thus 500,000 Aurum was, even more, a spare change to that. So, Akira felt that the money in front of him right now was not a big amount.

Akira realized that the boy inside him who was shaken at the sight of 12,000,000 Aurum had disappeared completely. But whether it was a sign of growth or a sign that his sense of money had dulled, or whether it was a good or a bad thing, Akira did not know for sure.

Sheryl smiled while still looking surprised.

“I understand, I’ll give it to Shijima.”

“And also, about the bike, since the inn that I’m staying has no parking spot, I can’t bring my bike over there. So like, for the time being, is it okay for me to leave the bike here?”

“You can leave it here anytime you want. We’ll keep it safe for you no matter how long it is. Not to mention that if it makes you come to this place more often, it’ll help with the security of this place too.”

“Is that so? Well, thanks.”

Sheryl looked very happy from the outside, but inside, she was thinking a lot of things. The last time she met Akira in his room, it was a small and cheap room, and now, Akira even called 500,000 Aurum a small amount. But even so, he was staying in an inn where he could not bring his bike with him. Sheryl tried to deeply analyze Akira’s words.

“That’s all I have to tell you today. Do you have anything you need to report to me?”

The moment Akira said that Sheryl just shelved all of her questions for now.

“I have nothing to report for now. Will that be all?”

Sheryl made an alluring smile to Akira, Akira who saw that was taken aback and did not know how to react. As he was still at loss on what to do, Sheryl already changed her seat beside Akira as she snuggled to him and circled her arms around him. She looked like she was having the time of her life as she said.

“…That’s quite a hard cloth.”

“It’s an augmented suit after all. So it’s normal that it’s harder than a usual cloth.”

“I see… Won’t you take it off?”

“No thanks.”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? It’s not like you’ll lose anything anyway.”

“No, I will, if I take the augmented suit off, my physical ability will decrease.”

“But at this rate, we will have to stay like this longer, you know?”

“Hah? Why?”

“Because this cloth will reduce my satisfaction.”

Akira frowned looking annoyed and a bit troubled, on the other hand, Sheryl locked her gaze at him while smiling brightly. There was an unusual awkward mood between them as both of them were staring at each other’s eyes. But then Akira broke his gaze first.

Akira let out a big sigh and took off the upper part of his augmented suit. Sheryl looked happier than before as she was still clinging on him. Her face was filled with all kinds of expression like bliss, peace, happiness, pleasure… It made a mess on her beautiful face. She even let out a strange sound from time to time.

Sheryl felt like something within her was getting satisfied.

Akira thought that it was not like he was losing anything, or more like, he actually just did not care, not to mention that it seemed Sheryl would let him go if he just let her be for a while. Thus he just shut up and let her clung on him. But then he noticed that Alpha was smiling teasingly at him, so his face immediately frowned a bit.

“…What?”

“It’s nothing. I don’t know why though, but it seems that she really likes you. As I thought, you’re interested in this kind of thing too, aren’t you?”

“Why does it even come to that…?”

Akira then let out a sigh.

“Sheryl. You should stop soon. I’m still tired from yesterday so I’m planning to relax and take a good long bath for today, you know?”

“If it’s a bath, we also have one here, you know? Do you want to try the bath here?”

“Eh? You have a bath here?”

“Yes, it’s quite a wide bath so I think you can really enjoy taking a dip.”

“Although this building looks abandoned, it even has a bath, huh? But even if you have the facility, how about the bill for the hot water? Are you sure they haven’t stopped the hot water?”

“From what I heard, in order to prevent the residents of the slum city from causing a riot because of water shortage, and their own concerns that the slum city might become a source of disease and spread to the lower district, the city management decided to keep supplying the slum with water. You didn’t know about this?”

“I too know about this since I used to clean my body with water even when I was living in the back alley of the slum city. But I didn’t know that they also provided the slum city with hot water though, ahhh, so that’s why you can make hot coffee, huh?”

(p4553r: Can’t they just boil water to make hot coffee?)

The data of the landowners in the slum city was never clear. Thus there was no clear address where the city should send their bills for the water usage. But even so, the manager of the city kept supplying the slum with water to avoid any dissent, not to mention that they could also estimate the number of the residents in the slum city and their jobs from the water usage.

But then, depending on the situation, the city could stop or limit the water supply anytime. The free water supply was adjusted with reputation and profit in mind to prevent the slum from growing any bigger than it should or even to cull the population in the slum city.

“Since there are not that many buildings in the slum that have a bath facility, this base is pretty famous, you know. Sibea and his friends took this building by force and made it their base before we inherited the place from them. If it was not because of your support, we would have been kicked out from this building by now. That’s why, since it’s thanks to you, you can use the bath here anytime you want. I’ll tell the children to prepare the bath if you want to get in, so, how about it?”

“Nope, I’ll go back to my room and take a bath there.”

“I’ll also help you wash your body, you know?”

“…I did rent that room because of the bath, so I’ll be taking a bath there. Not to mention that I want to relax in my own room too.”

“Is that so? That’s such a shame.”

To be honest, Sheryl was really planning to get into the bath together with Akira. But she noticed a small shift in his behaviour which triggered her wariness, thus she stopped pressuring him. Akira refused her offer simply because he could not trust her completely. After all, he could not get into the bath in his augmented suit or while carrying his rifles. Even right now, the reason why he could take off the upper part of his augmented suit was only because he was sure that he could handle if a fight suddenly broke out here. Sheryl understood this, that was why she backed off.

[…He still can’t fully trust me, huh?]

Although Sheryl understood that it was only to be expected, she was still a bit frustrated as she tightened her arms around Akira.

Suddenly someone knocked on the door of her room. Sheryl looked annoyed and answered the knock.

“What?”

Erio flinched when he heard Sheryl’s annoyance in her voice. He then answered Sheryl’s question while still looking scared.

“Boss. Shijima has come here with his men. He said that he wants to meet you.”

“…I see, I’ll go and meet him.”

Sheryl thought that she had to properly do her job as the Boss in order to win Akira’s trust. So she reluctantly separated from Akira.

Although it was hard to call it a meeting room, it at least had a table and some chairs. Inside the room, Sheryl, Akira and Shijima were sitting

together. The two bodyguards behind Shijima were fully armed and looked serious but relaxed at the same time. While Erio and Alicia who were behind Sheryl looked very nervous.

A small kid from Sheryl's gang came in and placed the coffee on the table before quickly retreating out of the room thinking that his job was finished. Erio and Alicia felt betrayed as they were glaring at that kid.

Sheryl smiled at Shijima and said.

"I'm sorry that we can't bring out any snacks, after all, we don't have the resource to do so."

"No problem."

"So then, what business do you have with us?"

"What? It's nothing serious, just paying a visit. After all, we could not find a chance to really sit down and talk after that incident."

"Is that so? As you can see, Akira is okay."

"It's all good that you're doing fine."

Sheryl was trying to look dignified in front of Shijima. Both of them were smiling at each other and their smiles were saying that both of them understood why the other party was here.

On the other hand, Akira still did not notice the real reason why they were here as he made a puzzled look.

"Alpha, what's with this conversation?"

"It seems that Shijima came to visit Sheryl by himself to check how you are doing. After all, there were a lot of dead Hunters after the big battle yesterday. I bet he thought that you were killed in that battle. If Sheryl was in a panic right now, it could be inferred that you were killed yesterday, which would mean that she had lost her only support. That's why she just

said that you're doing fine. And I think that's the reason why Shijima replied back as he did after confirming that you're really alright."

Akira understood the situation a bit after he heard Alpha's explanation.

"That's really sly, or more like, isn't that just too much work?"

"It's one of the responsibilities of a gang's Boss."

Sheryl placed the 500,000 Aurum that she received from Akira not too long ago on the table.

"This is the rest of the money."

"Very well then, this means that the previous incident is resolved now. I wish we can get along in the future."

"I hope so too."

Shijima was observing Akira and Sheryl while talking to them.

Shijima took a good look at Akira. Most of the Hunters who could not move up the rank could not equip themselves with augmented suits due to their economic situation. But even so, Akira was already using an augmented suit, and he even was carrying a big-sized gun that only people with an augmented suit could use effectively. Shijima assessed the total worth of Akira's complete equipment and approximated his ability to earn money, and thus he became warier of Akira.

[…I thought that he was just a normal boy, but he got all of this equipment in such a short time, huh? I guess I should give myself credit for not antagonizing him back then or maybe I should despise myself for not killing him back then before he could get all of his current equipment… Well, either way, I guess it's useless to think about that now.]

Shijima then looked at Sheryl. She looked calm as she was smiling at him, she looked like a completely different person compared to the last time he met her. The little girl who was trembling and looked so nervous when she visited his base together with Akira had completely vanished. Even when

she put the 500,000 Aurum on the table, she looked completely calm. This accompanied with that fact that it was a big amount that would normally warrant some raised eyebrows when shown in front of the residents of the slum city. And she was also very calm even after seeing his fully armed men. It would be much more understandable and much more normal to be very nervous just like Alicia and Erio. But in contrast to them, Sheryl's smile did not even waver.

[…Why is she this calm? Is it because she understands that Akira who's supporting her is actually a skilled Hunter? It's understandable that I can't mess with her gang, but that doesn't explain her calm reaction towards such an amount of money. The two kids behind her are nervous in this situation and shocked when they saw the money. So why in the world can she be this calm? There's no way someone could change that fast, seriously though, what's going on with her?]

Shijima then reassessed Sheryl's gang considering the future prospect of her gang, its power, the region under its control and the new information that he just discovered about Akira and Sheryl. After he finished all the calculations inside his head, he looked at Sheryl with a smile that he would never use to someone under him. He had recognized Sheryl as someone that he needed to seriously negotiate with for the future of his gang.

"Well now, I want to talk about our future. We might be able to come to some deals that bring profit to both gangs. This might take some time though, are both of you okay with that? Since I'm the one who is suddenly asking for negotiation here, if my timing is bad, feel free to say no."

Sheryl noticed that Shijima suddenly changed how he was treating her. If he did not look down on her, it meant that he might come full force at her to crush her instead. But even after knowing that, her smile did not waver at all.

"It's alright, we can do that now."

"Then, about the area under your management which is also the real cause of the last incident…"

Suddenly Akira interjected.

“Ah, can I say something before we start? Do I really need to be here for this negotiation? It seems that this will take quite a long time, and to be honest, I want to go back home now…”

Everyone in the room immediately shifted their gaze towards Akira who just said something that was really out of the blue, it was as if he could not read the mood inside the room at all.

Sheryl kept smiling at Akira without showing even a shred of surprise or panic.

“You’re right. We don’t know how long this will take and I’m sure no one would want to be forced to attend a long negotiation. Please don’t worry about me, you can go ahead and leave.”

Then Shijima also replied back to Akira with a serious face.

“Well, considering the topic that we’re going to talk about, this is a discussion between two gang bosses. It would be great if everyone unrelated leaves this room.”

Erio and Alicia stared at Akira’s back hoping that he would not leave. But unfortunately, Akira could not pick their cue since they were standing behind him.

“I see. Well then, I’ll go back home. Sheryl, just tell me in case anything happens.”

“I’m really sorry to have bothered you. Please feel free to come over here again anytime.”

Akira then exited the room as Sheryl sent him off with a smile. But, on the other hand, Erio and Alicia got more nervous now that the main fighting power that protected them had left the room.

Sheryl noticed that as she said to Erio and Alicia without turning back.

“Don’t worry, everything will be fine even without Akira here. And it’s not like we’re talking to a fool like the last time.”

Shijima also joined in to reassure Erio and Alicia which also doubled as a warning to his own bodyguards.

“We won’t do anything that might offend you. You guys did pay that 1,000,000 Aurum to resolve that incident peacefully, after all. So even if the negotiation turns sour, we won’t cause any ruckus here.”

After being told that, Erio and Alicia finally calmed down. But looking from the other perspective, it only made them calm down a bit.

Although Erio and Alicia wished that the negotiation would not take too much time, it did take quite a long time to finish.

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Akira already returned back to his room and got inside the bath. He dipped his whole body in the warm cozy water up to his neck. He looked relaxed as he enjoyed the warm water and let it take over his whole body. It felt like all of his tiredness was melting into the warm water.

Akira’s consciousness got completely taken over by the warm water, it was only a matter of time before he would not even be able to answer simple questions. But before that happened, Alpha asked him.

“Akira. I’m sorry to bother you while you’re enjoying your bath. But there’s something that I want to talk about with you, is that okay?”

Akira was still in a daze as he turned his gaze at Alpha.

Alpha was also inside the bath just like the last time. The warm water caused her rosy alluring skin to look even more enticing. Her perfectly proportional limbs would sway together with her reflection in the warm water because of the wave on the water surface, it was as if it was playing with the reflection on the hot water surface to hide some parts of her body. Sweat and hot water droplets would form and slide down her beautiful skin

before getting sucked into the valley between her glorious chest. It was an image of an extremely beautiful girl produced through an immensely advanced and complicated calculation.

But Akira showed a very small interest in all this. It was because he was already used to it and not to mention that Akira was completely absorbed in enjoying his bath.

Akira felt that he sooooo did not want to talk about anything annoying at the moment.

“…Is it about tomorrow’s request?”

“Yep. To be more precise, it’s about getting yourself ready to take that request.”

“Getting myself ready, huh? Do I have to do anything else other than doing it carefully and with vigilance just like usual?”

Alpha made a serious face as she warned Akira.

“You have a lot of preparations to make. From now on, you need to be very careful, try to think that even the slightest injury will kill you. Not to mention that we already used most of the medicines that we got from the ruins, so we don’t have many left. Thus it would be difficult to do a crazy stunt like last time. So you really need to be careful, okay?”

Akira realised the seriousness of the situation from the way Alpha warned him. He then asked her.

“Is the medicine that we bought from Shizuka-san not good enough?”

“Their healing ability is completely different. Remember that you broke your leg yesterday? With your usual medicine, you can completely heal in 5 minutes, but with the medicine that you bought yesterday, it will even take 2 hours, you know.”

Akira was obviously surprised.

“…Their healing abilities are on a completely different scale, huh? In that case, I should just buy the same healing medicine as the one that I usually use, right?”

“That will be extremely difficult. Even if you can find a place to buy it, it’ll at least cost 1,000,000 Aurum per box, you know?”

Akira was blown away by this new information.

“I was chucking something that expensive all this time?!!”

“Although it saved you so many times, it was indeed very expensive medicine.”

Akira understood the gravity of the situation. If he kept getting himself injured like usual, he would have to spend a lot of money on the medicines that would greatly affect his daily lives. There was a limit on how much he could use the augmented suit to help him move with broken bones, and in the worst-case scenario, he might even get killed.

“Ah, that’s right, we can go to the ruins to gather more of those medicines, right? I think there should still be more of those medicines scattered in the ruins.”

Akira looked proud as he thought that he came up with a very good idea, but he quickly returned back to his usual self as Alpha shook her head and shot his suggestion down.

“Because of the big battle from yesterday, I believe that the distribution of the monsters in the ruins has changed greatly. The monsters that you would normally find deeper in the ruins might have come out to the outskirts of the ruins. If the current you go to the ruins now, you might end up dead even with my support.”

“…So it won’t work, huh? Alright then, I’ll try to be cautious.”

“That’s good. I’ll also give my best support too.”

Akira tried to get into his serious mood, but the warm bath was too strong to fight against. And so he could not help but let out a long moan.

Akira's eyes met Alpha's.

"…I can't help it, you know."

"Well, it's your way of doing things carelessly and getting hurt, after all. I'll force you to walk even if both of your legs are broken, you know. So you should be extra careful that you don't have to go through something like that."

"That sounds very painful. So I'll definitely be extra careful."

This time Akira was able to answer back seriously.

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After Shijima finished his negotiation with Sheryl, he went back to his private room in his base.

The result of the negotiation was that half of Sheryl's territory that her gang could not manage would be passed over to Shijima's gang. As an exchange, Shijima would transfer 1,000,000 Aurum to Sheryl's gang, and so their cooperative relation had been set.

[…The result is not that bad, not to mention that I got more territory now, but…]

Shijima's face was filled with an unknown uneasiness.

[…As I thought, Sheryl's change is something to worry about. It's more worrying than Akira. Where exactly did she get that courage and confidence from? Is she getting ahead of herself thinking that she is completely capable of controlling Akira now…? But I don't think that's the only reason.]

Shijima thought that Sheryl might have come to realize something annoying and he just could not shake off his worry.

Silavin: It’s called Wifu Powerup. XD

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Rebuild World – Chapter 34, Various Outcomes of the Battle

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Drankam's base was located near Kugamayama city's lower district. It was a huge complex sitting on a wide ground, complete with huge warehouses and buildings lined inside. It even had a large shooting ground inside it. The Hunter Office also built a branch in the complex. This displayed the power and influence of the gang.

Katsuya was undergoing his shooting training inside the indoor shooting ground while making a serious face. His face was clearly showing the frustration he was feeling due to his lack of strength.

He kept on training without even taking a break. He was already strained both physically and mentally, because of which, his accuracy was declining.

He understood that it would be meaningless even if he continued. But he felt like all the bullets that missed its target were mocking him. This made him obstinate as he continued his training in order to shake off that feeling.

Yumina and Airi were worried as they looked over at Katsuya. They were watching the heartbreaking scene where Katsuya continued his training despite the uncountable reminder of failure. They couldn't stand it anymore and called out to him.

“Katsuya. You should take a rest.”

“It’s better if you take a rest, continuing this way will only make you more tired instead of making you better.”

But even so, Katsuya kept on persisting in his training. Yumina then walked over to Katsuya and placed her hand on his gun, as Katsuya turned and met her eyes, she shook her head.

Katsuya finally placed his gun down, he hung his head low and mumbled in frustration.

“If only… If only I was stronger…!!”

“…It’s not your fault.”

“We did the best we could. Just like you, everyone else was also prepared for it, it was not your fault.”

For Airi and Yumina, watching the current Katsuya was much more painful than the incident that happened yesterday.

Drankam dispatched a lot of its Hunters during yesterday’s big battle.

It was a compulsory request for veterans like Shikarabe unless they were injured, or had any other reasons that made it impossible for them to accept the request. But most of these Hunters thought that it was a nice chance to earn a lot of money, thus they took the request voluntarily. Even Shikarabe was excited as he prepared himself and left for the request together with the other Hunters.

Young Hunters like Katsuya may join the battle, but it was not compulsory for them. As for Drankam itself, the gang wanted to avoid sending inexperienced young Hunters to a battle against a swarm of monsters that even warrant the city to send its defense squad. But of course, the city welcomed any extra firepower, and it was also an emergency request coming from the Corporate Government. But, because of that, the Hunter gangs could prohibit the young Hunters from taking the request. In the end,

they took a stance where young Hunters were allowed but not forced to join the battle.

But the young Hunters thought that it was a nice chance to make other Hunters recognize their ability since they were often despised due to their young age. So a lot of young Hunters opted to take the request. Katsuya was the first one to raise his voice and so did a lot of young Hunters, who were sent to the battleground.

The young Hunters were sent in groups of 10. They were stationed a bit further away from the main battleground where the city's defense squad clashed fiercely against the main monster swarm.

Katsuya and the other Hunters had a hard fight against the smaller groups of monsters that detached from the main swarm. They were able to test their ability in that battle. As a result, 7 of them were able to return home with the glory and money that they earned from that fierce battle, while the other 3 were claimed forever by the wasteland.

All the dead Hunters in his group were Katsuya's close friends. They had gone through the hard training together and shared the dream of becoming great Hunters. But after that fierce battle, Katsuya was only able to return back with their dead bodies.

Katsuya blamed himself and drove into a corner, thinking that he could have saved them if only he was stronger.

Yumina gently hugged Katsuya from behind.

"…Let's grow stronger so that we can protect everyone next time. I'll also help, so let's take a rest now, okay?"

Airi also conveyed her will to help Katsuya.

"I'll help too."

Because of that, Katsuya was finally able to cheer up a bit, although he was still in remorse. He then tried his best to put up a smile as a gesture of

gratitude towards Yumina and Airi.

“…You’re right. Sorry to make you worry. The three of us were at least able to return alive. I’ll give my best so I can protect you two next time.”

“I’ll be looking forward to that.”

“That would be great.”

Seeing how Katsuya was finally cheering up, Airi and Yumina were finally able to smile again.

While at another site, Shikarabe was called by his friend Arabe, who was also one of the officers in Drankam.

“It’s kinda rare for you to call me like this, do you need anything? If it’s about that debt from the battle, I should’ve repaid that with my contribution in the Frontline. Or is it that I’m here for another lecture?”

The defense squad that clashed with the main monster swarm consisted of a private army equipped with tanks, humanoid weapons, heavy-armed cyborgs and Hunters with a powerful augmented suit. In short, each of the monsters in the swarm was so powerful that only soldiers with those kinds of equipment could stand a chance against them.

In the last battle, Shikarabe’s squad was positioned near the main battleground. Despite the danger, he was able to earn quite a lot of money. So it was not like it was a bad thing for him, but he did not like the reason why he was positioned there. Although he only got to know it later, he was actually positioned in such a dangerous place as punishment after making that ruckus arguing with Katsuya during the patrol job.

In such a dangerous place where he could be blown away by the shockwave from the main battleground, he did so well that it would definitely bring fame to the gang. So if he got another scolding after doing so much, he was planning to give Arabe a piece of his mind.

Arabe smiled bitterly and tried to calm him down.

“I was not even included when they made that decision, you know. So don’t vent it on me, will you? Well, due to the gang’s policy, we prioritize getting more young Hunters. So, it’s understandable for something like that to happen. Although it’s not like I did this as a form of an apology, I just adjusted the assignment so you don’t have to look over those children again. So calm down and cheer up, okay?”

“…Very well then, sorry I was venting on you.”

“Don’t worry, I can understand. I too don’t want to get assigned to watch over children anyway.”

Shikarabe cheered up after the friendly banter.

“So then, if it’s not for small talk, then why did you call me here?”

“Ahhh, well, it’s about those children that you don’t have to watch over anymore. Those guys were assigned in a group of 10 and sent into a quite dangerous place, but then I heard they did very well, you know. Even without someone to watch over them, only 3 of them were killed. Looking at their achievements, they are pretty competent. Not to mention that they already had some brushes with death and returned back alive. Don’t you think they’ve graduated from being conceited young Hunters?”

As Shikarabe heard those words that sounded as if Arabe recognized their abilities, he replied back with strict critiques.

“Well, I’m not really sure. Looking from the other perspective, it can also be said that they had to sacrifice 3 people to be able to get back alive. I think it’s too fast to approve their abilities. I’m sure Katsuya’s thinking that he would have been able to protect everyone if only he was stronger. That’s just stupid. Even if he gets 1,000,000,000 times stronger, he’ll just get sent to a place that’s 1,000,000,000 times more dangerous and he’ll lose some of his friends there again. What he really needs is the ability to know his own capability.”

“So, does that mean that he has no talent for being a Hunter?”

Shikarabe went silent for a moment after hearing that before he answered the question with a serious face.

“Talent-wise, he’s more talented than me or you. It’s extremely rare to be able to find someone as talented as him. He’ll be a great Hunter if we train him well. If we keep polishing him and sending him to dangerous battlegrounds, there’s no mistaking it that he’ll be an extraordinary Hunter.”

Arabe looked very surprised.

“That was quite a compliment. I thought you hated him.”

“I’m not a fool that I would let my personal feelings cloud my evaluation. Even you know just how talented he is, right? Isn’t that why you’re prioritizing him? Am I wrong?”

“Well. I wouldn’t assign you to watch over him otherwise, you know. I originally thought of having you to train him, but it seems that you can’t get along with him. Can you at least endure it for a bit more? It’s worth making him indebted to you while you can, you know?”

Shikarabe looked annoyed as he lashed back.

“No thanks. First of all, that’s only true if he’s really going to be a great Hunter in the future. I did say that he would be one if we keep training him, but there’s no way I would be his grinding stone. I have no plans of becoming a stepping stone for his bright future. Not to mention that there are already 3 people that died because of him, you know? If he did not stir them up, those young Hunters would not even think of going to that battle in the first place, right? Having people close to him dead would make him more disciplined and make him grow up as a man. But it is all over for the people who died. So what I’m saying here is that I have no wish to die just to make him grow as a Hunter.”

As Shikarabe’s mood turned worse, Arabe let out a big sigh.

“You always find something to critique about, that’s exactly why we can’t decide the next young Hunter to be assigned under you.”

“Yeah, I can understand that. I don’t want to be assigned to watch over any young Hunters after all.”

Arabe was originally thinking of assigning Shikarabe back to Katsuya’s group after letting him off for a while so that he could calm down. But seeing how much Shikarabe despised Katsuya, he completely scrapped that plan and changed to another.

“Do you know anyone that might happily watch over him?”

When he said that, Arabe meant for Shikarabe not to pick someone out of grudge. But with that being said, Arabe thought that Shikarabe would never intentionally pick someone bad anyway. And as expected, Shikarabe answered back seriously and even came up with some names.

“Elena and Sara, how about those two? It seems that he really likes them, if I’m not mistaken, Drankam is also trying to recruit those two, right?”

“We’re still in negotiation about it, but it doesn’t look good.”

“Then just make them watch over him through training requests. They’ve been doing some requests together lately, right?”

“Having them accompanying him and actually training him are two completely different things. The amount of the reward will also be different. Not to mention that it’s not that simple to employ someone from outside the gang, you know?”

Looking at how Arabe frowned while racking his brain, Shikarabe smiled teasingly since his friend had completely changed from doing Hunter work into running the gang.

“That’ll be your job together with the other officers, so good luck with that.”

“I know that. So, about those two, are they skilled enough?”

“I can’t really say much about their teaching ability. But as Hunters, they are extremely skilled. I don’t think there are many Hunters in Drankam who

are on par with their skills. I saw them during yesterday's battle, they were able to completely annihilate the camouflaged monsters. Although they had some hard time, they were able to quickly regain the upper hand."

"Is that so? I'll offer more rewards and see how it goes from there. I'm sure those people in the management would shut up if I say that I'm doing it as an initial step for inviting them to join Drankam."

Shikarabe pulled back his head and grumbled.

"The people in the management, huh? I really hope they would try to understand the difficulties that we're facing in the field."

Arabe laughed bitterly.

"Well, it'll be troublesome if they're not around too. It's just one of those disadvantages when the gang grows this big."

"And we're the ones suffering from that, you know."

"In that case, how about you join the officers too? You can help me fix this problem, you know?"

Arabe smiled, challenging Shikarabe, but Shikarabe just smiled back and said.

"No thanks, I'm not suitable for working behind the desk like you."

"Geez, and so you threw that job to me, huh."

After that, Shikarabe and Arabe laughed together at their displeasure with Drankam.

Elena and Sara were buying ammo and medicines from Shizuka's shop. They looked tired, but among those two, Elena looked especially tired.

"Shizuka. We're taking the usual, but triple the amount."

“That’s a lot. And you look very tired too, was the battle so worse?”

Shizuka shifted her gaze from Elena to Sara’s face before sliding down to Sara’s breast. Sara’s suit could not hold back her glorious breasts the last time Shizuka met her, but this time, her suit was able to hold them in.

“…Yep, it seems that it was a hard fight, huh?”

As Sara was the main firepower among the two, she would spend quite a lot of nanomachines when she used the heavy and powerful gun which had a strong kickback even if it was used only for a short period of time. Not to mention, Sara would die if she depleted the nanomachines inside her breasts. Elena understood that well, that was why she always strategized such that Sara would not use too much of her nanomachines. But, even so, Sara spent a huge portion of her nanomachine reserve in the last battle. It showed just how brutal and chaotic the battle was. Shizuka was able to understand that just by looking at Sara’s breast size.

Sara just smiled bitterly.

“I really hope you would stop coming up with such a conclusion from my breast size though. Well, the reward was worth all the hard work. I think they distributed extra rewards for the Hunters who came back alive in order to avoid any complaints.”

Elena joined the conversation and grumbled.

“There were monsters which could camouflage, you know. All the Hunters with investigative devices were suddenly sent near the main battleground, it was hell, you know. So it’s not my fault for complaining.”

Shizuka gently smiled.

“If they gave you enough reward to stop you from complaining, you should use it to buy some stuff from my shop. Let’s see, if it’s for you, Elena…”

Shizuka, who was about to recommend some of her goods to Elena, looked closely at Elena’s equipment and found something weird.

“Now that I think about it, Elena, you don’t use an augmented suit, right? Even Akira who just became a Hunter bought one not too long ago, you know? So how about you buy one too?”

“…Augmented suit, huh? Hmmm… Well…”

Elena let out a long “Hmmmmm” before she smiled faintly and said.

“…I thought that I can still go on for a while without an augmented suit though, but I guess it’s better if I buy one soon, huh?”

Those from the eastern district had higher physical abilities than most of the common people. Although there were individual differences, they were able to attain superb physical ability with enough training.

But from time to time, some people with abnormally high physical ability would appear. There were also people who had gone through long and hard training in order to have a strength equal to the people with an augmented suit even without equipping an augmented suit themselves. These people were called super-human and they were able to destroy a tank with their bare hands.

Even right now, no one knew for sure why such a thing happened. There were many theories floating around like they were descendants of the people from the west who could slay numerous monsters with their bare hand or just a sword. Some even thought that they were descendants of physically enhanced humans using the technology of the old world.

The reason why Elena was able to carry all of the heavy information gathering devices without an augmented suit was because of her training and not because she was a super-human. For Sara who nearly had the same power as a person with an augmented suit, Elena was relatively weak.

There was no precise way to measure the physical strength of a person. Those who aimed to be superhuman had no other choice but to believe they were superhuman and keep on training. Not to mention, there was a rumor saying that using an augmented suit would stop your physical ability from improving because training would be meaningless at that point.

Because of that reason, plus they were in an economical problem until recently, Elena did not have the leeway of buying an augmented suit. But the money problem, or to be more precise, Sara's nanomachine reserve problem was already solved. Thus Elena thought that it might be a good chance to renew her equipment and give up increasing her physical ability through normal training.

"Well, it's true that this is a good chance to do that. Shizuka, can you pick something good for me?"

Shizuka looked troubled, both she and her shop were not specialized in an augmented suit, after all.

"Stop that, you should go to the right shop for it. Go ask an expert about it and buy an augmented suit from them. I'm sure you can buy one with the reward money that both of you received, right?"

"Well, it's fine, isn't it? I heard that you picked Akira's augmented suit, you know. So you're already experienced in choosing one, right? I want to buy all my equipment from the same shop. Not to mention, I don't like the measuring device in the speciality shop. I just don't feel comfortable with that measuring device which measures my body up to the tiniest detail. I can understand that if one wants to get a custom made augmented suit that fits perfectly on their body, but it's not like I'm planning to buy something that expensive."

"In that case then, you pick an augmented suit then I'll put the order for it. Gathering and analyzing information to come up with a conclusion is your speciality after all, right?"

"I'm asking you to choose one since you usually have a good intuition, you know. And not to mention that nothing you suggested has gone wrong up until now. So, won't you do that for me? Just think of it as a service for your frequent customers. Since you did that for Akira, you can at least do that for us who have been coming to this shop for a longer time, you know?"

Shizuka finally gave up and let out a bitter smile. She then answered back jovially as she was smiling.

“It can’t be helped then. I’ll make you buy a very expensive one, so you better be ready for it.”

After hearing Elena wish to buy an augmented suit, Shizuka suddenly remembered something.

“Augmented suit, huh? Just a question though, but do you turn super strong just by equipping one?”

Sara answered Shizuka’s question.

“Of course not. An augmented suit is nothing more than a piece of equipment, you can’t be strong unless you train. It’s not a rare occurrence for a Hunter to have difficulties in performing simple movements because of the sudden increase in strength, you know. But well, if we’re talking about an augmented suit from the old world, I guess it’s to be expected for you to suddenly become strong without any additional training. Although I’m enhancing my strength with nanomachines, I still had to go through hard training to be this strong, you know?”

“…Well, I thought so too.”

There was no mistaking that Akira got that huge amount of money from yesterday’s big battle. But even so, it was still not normal. He should not have had much time to train himself properly, not to mention that he fought against the mechanical monsters only with his AAH rifle that was not an effective rifle against such an enemy. It was hard to believe that he would return alive from that battle with 12,000,000 Aurum.

Shizuka was still bothered by it, that was why she clarified with Elena and Sara. And Sara’s answer confirmed that it was indeed a weird situation. But as she was looking at Sara, she remembered what she talked about with Sara not too long ago. And suddenly, everything made sense.

[…As I thought, Akira is someone who can connect to the old world domain. But his augmented suit should have nothing to do with it. After all, I was the one who picked that augmented suit for him. Ah, now that I think about it, he did ask for some specific functions. I wonder if those functions are very useful to someone who can connect to the old world domain.]

As Shizuka was about to dig deeper, she suddenly decided to stop there.

[Well, it's not like I can ask him about it. I guess I should stop trying to dig any deeper.]

Curiosity killed the cat. If she pried too deep, it might rub Akira the wrong way. As Shizuka thought of that, she decided to stop thinking about it.

In the middle of their silly talk, Elena suddenly asked.

"On another subject though, Shizuka, what do you think about the battle?"

"Even if you ask me, I don't know much outside what was reported. Is there anything strange in the report?"

There was a big wall display in Shizuka's shop. It was set to mainly show information about the Corporate Government, the City, the Hunter Office, or any other Hunter related information. As Shizuka turned the display on, it was showing the news about that attack. A woman from the Corporate Government was delivering the news.

"The Corporate Government had come into conclusion that yesterday's monster attack from the Kuzusuhara ruins was a terror attack instigated by the nationalists. There were already a number of confirmed statements from some terrorist groups. They were saying that this is a holy war against the eastern district ruled by the Corporate Government that's treating them unfairly. The Corporate Government immediately took action in response to this statement in order to protect the people from the terrorist group which disrupted the peace in the eastern district…"

Sara then worded out her opinion about the news.

“The nationalists, huh? I bet that’s the reason why the request dispatcher was the Corporate Government. If they had that information before the incident happened, I really hope they would do something about it. Well, it’s not like I have anything to complain about the reward though.”

It was a big thing in the eastern district when the Corporate Government was the one issuing the request, not to mention that the reward would also be abnormally huge. After all, if the reward was too small, it would hurt the Corporate Government’s reputation, and it was even more important when it came to requests regarding the nationalists.

The nationalists aimed to form a nation. There were a lot of them in the eastern district so the Corporate Government could not afford to just ignore them. They also received help from the Federation of Nations in the central district which worsened the situation in the eastern district. These nationalists often invaded and occupied a city and declared independence from the Corporate Government. When that happened, the situation often developed into a full-blown war. Because of that, a lot of cities had turned into a mountain of wreckages which ended up as a big expenditure for the Corporate Government.

Elena could not agree with the news.

“To be honest, I don’t think this city holds so much influence that the nationalists would aim for this city. Baiting monsters from the deeper part of the ruins like that would definitely need a lot of sacrifices from the nationalist’s side. Not to mention that it would affect their current standing among the other nationalists. It’s questionable how much of that news is the truth. What do you think, Shizuka?”

Shizuka spent a bit of time thinking before answering.

“They’re not lying. The story fits the situation. But there’s something that still bothers me. But again, about that part… It’s not like we can do anything about it, right?”

No matter what was actually happening behind the scene, it was not like it would cause any loss to them. At least that was what Shizuka’s intuition

was telling her.

Elena and Shizuka changed the subject of their conversation.

“That’s true. Since they gave us such a huge reward, I don’t think it’s something for us, the Hunters, to worry about. Rather than talking about that, let’s focus more on how we are going to spend the reward money. Shizuka, with that being said, I’m counting on you for the augmented suit, okay?”

“Sure, remember that you’re the one who told me to choose, okay? No matter what I pick, you’ll have to use it, okay? Don’t come running at me crying later, alright?”

Shizuka smiled fearlessly while teasing Elena.

Shizuka’s intuition that day was on point like usual.

An armed squad was marching to the deeper part of the Kuzusuhara ruins. Their guns were on a different level compared to the common Hunters around the Kugamayama city and their coordination showed that they were trained soldiers.

The squad was commanded by a guy who goes by the name, Yanagisawa. He was marching at the front of his squad, leading them deeper into the ruins.

“Captain Yanagisawa. Are you sure that this is alright?”

Yanagisawa laughed as he replied.

“As I said before, it’s not a problem. The Corporate Government has given its permission.”

“But still, to bait a swarm of monsters to the city… Not to mention that the news blames the nationalists for the incident too. In the worst-case scenario, they might think that we’re one of those nationalists, you know?”

“The one who really baited the monster to the city and died doing that was really a nationalist. He was a member of Alford’s squad. So it’s not wrong to say that the nationalist did it. That guy did fulfil his goal in exchange for his life, so I bet he has nothing to complain about anyway.”

“That guy is one of the Alford’s squad, huh? And here I was wondering where you got that guy from. I never thought that you had some connections with the nationalists.”

“Well, information is crucial. If you have a lead, you would be able to find them in no time with a little digging.”

Another guy joined in.

“Although the defense went well, I still wonder if it was really alright. This kind of thing would normally warrant a death penalty, you know? I don’t know what you are planning, Captain. But please don’t abandon us, okay?”

“I did properly ask the Corporate Government to stay quiet about that part too, so don’t worry. Well, the defense squad did not get any chance to spring into action lately and those rich people living inside the inner wall started complaining about the expensive maintenance expenditure for the defense squad. Maybe it’s because they spend their life leisurely inside a safe environment that they have forgotten this place is also a part of the eastern district. This area filled with monsters is also a part of the eastern district, you know. Safety is an expensive commodity. It’s important to remind the people in the inner wall not to get too comfortable with their easy life.”

But then another guy joined them and asked.

“In that case, wouldn’t monsters from the other ruins work just fine? There was no particular reason why we had to bait those super strong monsters roaming in the deeper part of the Kuzusuhara ruins, right?”

“It has been quite a while since the last expedition was sent to scour the outskirts of the Kuzusuhara ruins. So the Corporate Government must be thinking that it might be the time to send a real expedition to the deeper part

of the ruins. That's why we thinned out the number of monsters in the deeper part. We baited them out into the wasteland since if it's over here, we could use tanks and other weapons with huge firepower to annihilate them. That method is much safer than sending soldiers into the ruins, you know. But with that being said, it's not like anyone would volunteer to be the bait, right? That's why I went through all of these troubles."

"So that's why you brought Alford's squad, huh?"

"Yep, that's the reason. And luckily, that guy said that he would happily sacrifice his own life for something like that. And since I don't want to die, so everyone got what they wanted. Well, if they had asked for more explanations, I would have explained everything truthfully. But since we're originally enemies, I have no duty to tell them everything."

Some of his squad felt disgusted, some were laughing and some just ignored it when Yanagisawa said that with a big smile. They had different reactions and opinions about it, but no one there doubted his skill and ability.

Another of his men then asked him.

"But some Hunters were harmed and even killed, right? If they come to know that it was Captain who was responsible all along, the dead Hunters would come back and haunt you, wouldn't they?"

The man who asked Yanagisawa that question was originally a Hunter who was scouted into the squad. His face looked stern since he felt a kind of camaraderie with the other Hunters.

Yanagisawa just brushed it off as he said.

"The Hunters also earned a lot of money from that battle. I bet some of them just got rich in one go. But well, I don't deny that some of them also got killed in the battle, but those people decided to be Hunters even after knowing all the dangers. Not to mention that those Hunters who have no luck or skill would eventually die sooner or later anyway even if that battle didn't happen. Working as a Hunter means that they have to risk their lives

for money. I don’t have the time to listen to their complaints just because they lost their gamble and died.”

“…Well, it’s true that’s what it means to be a Hunter.”

“The city management wanted to shut the people in the middle district, the defense squad wanted to see more action and have more meaning in its existence, Alford’s squad wanted the renown, the Corporate Government wanted to explore the deeper part of the Kuzusuhara ruins, and finally the Hunters sought rich and fame. Other than for the people who were killed, that battle was a good thing for everyone, don’t you think so?”

Some of his men felt ridiculous seeing how Yanagisawa boasted about himself.

“But you did all the hard work there. So, what did you get from that? What is your plan? Is there something you need to do in the deeper part of the ruins? Since you called for us, it’s not like it’s going to be a normal search expedition, right?”

Yanagisawa deliberately laughed invincibly.

“It’s a secret. If I have to say it, it’s to pave the way for the future of humanity. Don’t worry. I won’t do anything bad. We’re simply going to search the ruins, it’ll earn us quite a lot of money too. After all, if it doesn’t, we won’t be able to pay back for all the equipment that we borrowed. These are the latest equipment used in the Frontline, you know? I even went to get that Ragnarok too. It’s also loaded with the annihilator warhead. Of course, I’m not saying that you can go trigger-happy with that, but it really kicks a punch, you know. It’s exactly because we’re on this occasion that I decided to get one. That’s why I want you guys to understand that I’m serious here.”

The normal equipment for this squad was advanced enough. But this time, they brought even better equipment than usual. And it was Yanagisawa who prepared all of the equipment.

Yanagisawa was having silly talks with his men and he seemed to be in a very good mood. But once they reached a certain area, his mood suddenly

turned serious as Yanagisawa said to his men.

“The silly talk stops here, let’s go.”

And with that, Yanagisawa’s squad continued venturing deeper into the Kuzusuhara ruins.

Silavin: This chapter has a ton of moving parts. I believe they are foreshadowing something really big.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 35, Information Gathering Device

Index

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Akira was riding through the wasteland on a bike. He was in the middle of an individual patrol request.

The bike was equipped with an onboard information gathering device that Akira borrowed from the Hunter Office. This device would record everything around him, the route that he took, the type and number of monsters that he encountered, and how many of those monsters he defeated. All of this data would be then exchanged for money, deducting the rent fee of the information gathering device and the rest would be paid as Akira's reward for this request.

If Akira patrolled around an area filled with dangerous monsters, his reward would shoot up. On the other hand, if he only patrolled around a relatively safe area just to kill time, his reward would be so less that it might not even cover the rental fee. And if he got unlucky and encountered another swarm of monsters alone, he could monopolize the reward all for himself. Even if he decided to run away from that swarm of monsters, no one would have any complaint against him. Compared to the group patrol from the last time, an individual patrol request like this had its advantages and disadvantages, but for the current Akira, the advantages outweighed the disadvantages.

Akira was speaking to Alpha through telepathy while on his bike. It was to avoid the information gathering device from recording him talking alone.

“I was really afraid that I might meet another swarm of monsters. But now that I’m here, I don’t even see that many monsters. It’s a bit disappointing.”

“A lot of monsters were killed in yesterday’s battle. But it can also be said that there are that many monsters left even after we killed so many of them yesterday. I’m sure it won’t take that long before the population of monsters in the area returns back to normal.”

Akira frowned.

“So right now is like a moment of calmness before a storm, huh? But if I think like that, it feels like there are a lot of monsters today. I wonder where all of these monsters come from. Although we periodically thin them out, they always return back to normal in no time, right?”

“I bet there are undiscovered production facilities somewhere out there or production facilities guarded by powerful defensive devices, which makes it impossible to subjugate them. These keep producing monsters endlessly. The monsters in this area might come from a production facility near the area or come from a faraway place.”

“That might explain the mechanical monsters, but still…”

“That’s also the case for the biological monsters too.”

Akira looked surprised and confused at the same time.

“The biological monsters are also produced in factories? They don’t multiply from breeding?”

Alpha smiled, boasting her knowledge.

“That’s right. It’s an easy task to produce biological organisms using technology from the old world. Livestock, pet, bodyguard, biological soldiers, you can use old-world technology to produce all kinds of biological creatures. But a high-quality creature can only be produced by

synthesizing everything from scratch. Well, of course, it was properly maintained back in the days, thus these monsters would not randomly attack people. Moreover, some biological monsters can multiply by using their reproductive abilities. So even if the factory where these monsters were originally produced are no more, they would still multiply."

"…The more I hear about this old world, the crazier it sounds."

"And you'll be exploring the ruins filled with this crazy old world technology many times in the future, you know? So be sure to work hard to get yourself proper equipment and skill to survive these deadly ruins, okay? As for training, how about you try fighting a monster on your own? There's a monster right over there, Akira."

"Roger that."

This patrol request also doubled as training for Akira. As he spotted and confirmed his target, he stopped his bike.

It was a small carnivorous monster. The burly fur hid its limbs and it did not look strong. As a matter of fact, it was a relatively weak monster.

But it was strong enough to actually attack and kill a human. And since it was roaming in the wasteland, it showed that it had enough strength and ability to survive in such a harsh environment. This quality alone was enough to make anyone run away from it out of fear.

Akira held his CWH anti-material rifle with the help of his augmented suit as he took an aim at that monster. But since he was still inexperienced in using an augmented suit and still not that familiar with CWH anti-material rifle, the TPL extended from its muzzle was swaying left and right.

Akira took a deep long breath while making a stern stance, he gathered his focus and pulled the trigger. A bang reverberated as a bullet flew out from the muzzle and cut through the air before landing near the ground where the monster was standing.

"A miss, that was close though."

“I still couldn’t hit my target even with the help from TPL, huh? It seems that I still have a long way to go before I can shoot accurately on my own.”

“It might also be because you always shoot from a safe range during the training. No need to be nervous and do your best. That monster is heading this way now.”

“Roger that, next shot.”

The monster noticed Akira and immediately ran towards him. Its huge limbs kicked the ground as it closed its distance to Akira. Through his aiming device, he could clearly see that the monster really wanted to take a chomp off his flesh.

The fear that was bubbling inside Akira was telling him to either take his bike and escape or ask for Alpha’s support. But Akira stood his ground and suppressed his fear. Although it drew closer for every shot he missed as that monster was charging towards him, he continued shooting at the monster.

Then finally, one of his bullets hit the monster’s body. The monster immediately slowed down. Akira then calmly took an aim and delivered the killing shot.

Alpha smiled and praised him for his performance.

“You did well, that was pretty good.”

“Thanks. Well, I guess this much shots against a monster won’t put me on red, right?”

“Yep, maybe.”

“Alright.”

Akira firmly nodded and smiled lightly.

As he returned back to patrolling the wasteland, he asked Alpha.

“Alpha, about the patrol request though, we’ll keep doing this request until I reach a certain Hunter Rank, right? Although my Hunter Rank went up to 17 from the last battle, until what rank do I need to keep doing this?”

“Your goal is to reach Hunter Rank 20. You’ll need to at least reach that level to be able to borrow a custom made vehicle to traverse the wasteland. Although a lower Hunter Rank is actually enough if you just want to borrow a vehicle, you also need to think and find a balance between the vehicle specification, the rental fee and the insurance fee.”

“A vehicle, huh? But I already have a bike. So, do I still really need to hurry up to get a vehicle?”

“Yes, you should. There’s a limit on how much supplies you can bring with you on this bike. Although you’ll need to get all the required equipment before going to explore the other ruins, a vehicle specially designed to travel in the wasteland is quite expensive. So you’ll just have to rent for the time being.”

“The other ruins, huh? Is it okay if I take a peek into those ruins for a bit with this bike?”

“We’ll only do that once you get yourself the proper equipment and a vehicle. If it’s possible, I want you to get an information-gathering device at least. We’ll only visit other ruins after you have all of that, okay?”

“Hmmm. To be honest, I want to at least collect some medicines though. Is the bike really not enough?”

“Oh, I haven’t told you this, huh? My detection ability deteriorates outside Kuzusuhara ruins, you see. That’s why it’s crucial for you to get an information-gathering device. Or do you still want to go without one?”

“Alright, let’s not do that.”

Akira immediately backed off. He understood that it would be futile to challenge a ruin relying solely on his own power without Alpha’s detection

support. After all, he would not want monsters to swarm him from all directions.

“So besides a vehicle, I should get an information-gathering device too, huh? That would require a huge amount of money. Although I just got 12,000,000 Aurum, it has gone in a puff, the CWH anti-material rifle is pretty expensive after all.”

“That’s what it means to be a Hunter. If it requires more money than what you can earn right now, then it means that it’s still too early for you to get it. That’s all there’s to it.”

“…You’re right.”

It was not a rare occurrence where a Hunter who got ahead of himself challenged a ruin that was outside his ability and then was claimed by the ruin. It was the same for Akira too, he would have died if he did not meet Alpha in Kuzusuhara ruins.

Akira understood that lucky coincidence had kept him alive up until now and let out a bitter smile.

“That’s right. But even so, Elena always says that she’s just a weak girl, you know? Don’t you think that’s just unreasonable?”

“Eh, Ah, no…”

Akira could not immediately agree to that as he was at loss for words. Elena who had just gotten teased there quickly retorted.

“I don’t want a girl who carried an A4WM Automatic Grenade Launcher saying something like that to me. That gun is crazy heavy, you know. And even more so when it’s fully loaded.”

“That’s normal for me. After all, I’m a nanomachine enhanced human. But of course, without the nanomachines, I’m just your normal weak girl.”

“And without the nanomachines, Sara’s glorious chest will turn back into its original pitiful size.”

Elena and Sara smiled at each other. Although Akira was just an observer, he could feel the immense pressure in the air.

Shizuka was enjoying the show, but when she noticed Akira looking uncomfortable, she tried to mediate between them.

“You two should stop there. Akira is scared, you know? What are you girls doing letting out veteran Hunter’s intimidating aura in this place?”

As Elena and Sara heard Shizuka and turned down their intimidating aura, both of their gazes shifted to Akira.

Akira, who was still at loss for words, tried to squeeze out everything he had to change the mood. He took a standpoint between Elena and Sara with his narrow knowledge of vocabulary.

“Ahh, well, I don’t know about being a weak girl, but I think Elena-san is a pretty girl with a beautiful slender body.”

Although Elena immediately understood from her experience that those words were just flattery, she also understood that Akira was being honest

when he said that. Thus she was pretty happy with his compliment.

Sara just smiled and stared at Akira as she asked.

“Akira, how about me?”

There was obviously some pressure emitting from her smile. So Akira could only answer back in a panic.

“Of course I think that Sara-san is also a beautiful girl.”

And with that, Sara’s mood immediately turned better.

Shizuka who was only watching them as an observer suddenly joined in.

“Akira, then how about me?”

“Shizuka-san is also a beautiful girl.”

Akira answered back casually since he understood that Shizuka knew he would answer with that when she asked him that question. But it was obvious that Akira was a bit bashful when he said that.

Of course, Alpha could not help but join in as she smiled and asked Akira the same question.

“Akira, how about me?”

“Yeah yeah, you’re beautiful too, are you satisfied now?”

Alpha looked displeased with Akira’s answer as she retorted.

“Why are you always so mean to me?”

“Because I know for sure that you did that only to tease me. I’m trying my best not to look suspicious here, so can you please stop interrupting me?”

Akira was trying to be careful not to look at Alpha, who was invisible to Elena and the other girls there.

Shizuka was a bit surprised when she found herself happy from Akira's words, thus she tried to hide it by teasing Akira.

"Akira, did you say that just to change the mood?"

"No, I'm not a person who can say anything if someone tells me to say that because it's more profitable that way. So, although we are in that kind of situation, I didn't lie. Everything I said is true."

"I-I see."

The mood in the room suddenly turned embarrassing. Shizuka, Elena, and Sara looked at each other and noticed that their faces had turned reddish. Since they all noticed that, they stayed quiet hoping that no one would point out the fact.

Akira then came up with a new subject as he was trying to change the mood again.

"Now that I think about it, Sara-san doesn't use an augmented suit, right?"

"Me? That's because I'm a nanomachine enhanced human. If I use a common augmented suit, my physical strength might reduce instead. Moreover, it has to be an augmented suit suitable for someone with a nanomachine enhanced body. Of course, I can get such an augmented suit that solves all of these problems, but it's soo expensive that I can't afford to buy one. So until I have enough money, an armour that increases the efficiency of my nanomachine consumption works better than a common augmented suit."

"I see. So there's a lot of things to consider, huh? So then, Elena-san, what kind of augmented suit you're planning to get?"

Elena looked a bit flustered.

"Eh? Well, uhh, it's basically an advanced augmented suit. Just like in your case, Shizuka is picking one for me."

“I see. I’m sure an advanced augmented suit will look completely different compared to my augmented suit, right? So what kind of augmented suit is it?”

“Ahh, well, about that…”

Elena answered back vaguely. Akira did not mean to ask anything strange, so he was puzzled by Elena’s answer. His confusion was shown on his face as Shizuka smiled.

“It’s something hard to explain with words, so instead, you can see it for yourself, you know? It should be here by next week so you don’t need to wait that long.”

Elena panicked.

“W-wait!!”

“Is that so? Alright then.”

Akira was confused as to why Elena panicked, but since Shizuka suggested that herself, he just casually accepted the offer.

Shizuka just pushed that promise to Elena. She was in a panic since she could not say that she did not want to show her augmented suit to Akira at this point. Shizuka noticed that and understood the reason why Elena was in a panic as she smiled teasingly at Elena. Sara could not help but join Shizuka and tease Elena.

Akira caught a glance of Elena’s information gathering device and thought.

“By the way, about that information-gathering device, did you buy that from this shop too?”

Elena quickly answered back to change the subject.

“Nope, I don’t really remember where I bought it, but I didn’t buy it from here. Shizuka doesn’t sell information gathering device, you know.”

“This shop specializes in ammo. It will only bring trouble if I sell stuff that I’m not familiar with, that’s why I don’t sell them. But you can still order them from this shop.”

“But your shop sells everything that’s related to Hunters, right? Since you also sell a lot of guns that can be operated in tandem with an information-gathering device, I think it’ll be fine if you sell information gathering devices too, you know. Don’t you think so too, Akira?”

Both Elena and Shizuka turned to Akira. He looked panicked as he tried to run away from having to choose any side.

“Uhmm, I’m actually thinking of buying an information-gathering device soon. I just thought that it would be a great help if Shizuka-san has some recommendations.”

Shizuka shook her head.

“I’m sorry, but information gathering devices are outside my expertise. If you want to get some recommendations, I advise you to ask Elena.”

“Me? But even if you ask me… Enemy detection, ruins mapping, relics identification. There are so many different options depending on what you want to use it for…”

Since she did not want to recommend anything bad to Akira, Elena was a bit at loss because of the number of options that she could go for an information-gathering device. As she was humming while thinking, she suddenly remembered an information-gathering device that was only gathering dust back in her house.

“That’s right. I have an information-gathering device that I bought in the past but I’m not using it right now. You can buy that from me if you want. Although it’s a generic type, I think it’s actually perfect for a beginner. I was thinking of dismantling it and scavenging some parts off it, but if you want to buy it, I don’t mind selling it to you, you know? I actually don’t really like that type, so how about you give it a try?”

“But you said that you don’t use it. Is it because it is faulty?”

“It’s not that it’s faulty or anything bad, well, to explain it simply…”

Elena then explained everything in detail so that Akira did not misunderstand her as selling something faulty to him.

The information-gathering devices sold to the Hunters were mainly categorized into two types, specialized and generic. Specialized type focused on one kind of function like movement detection, sound detection, image analysis, etc… While on the other hand, the generic type was an amalgamation of different functions. It could compile all the information that it gathered into a map or an image. Furthermore, the generic type could process all the analysis on its own.

Both of them had their own pros and cons. If a specialized type information gathering device broke, it only needed a small part replacement to fix it. It could also be combined with parts or devices from the other companies to add extra functions. In short, it had great flexibility. But on the other hand, the gathered information needed more processing before they could be used. Although there was a standardized output for each type of information, each company tended to use different formats. Because of that, it needed advanced processing technology to transform all the information into a usable form.

A generic type information gathering device did not need any of that. But in exchange, it was not as flexible as a specialized type. Most of the generic type information gathering devices produced by the companies would need a total replacement even if only one part was broken. Moreover, the information output from the on-board program in a generic type information gathering device was not interchangeable.

Elena preferred to use an information-gathering device that she made herself by combining multiple different specialized type information gathering devices. But lately, the generic type was getting famous as a lot of new generic type products went on sale, thus Elena decided to buy a device from one of the popular series. But after she used it for a while, she found

herself not liking it at all. It simply felt like a half-baked device to her. In the end, she just left it to collect dust.

“…So that’s why I don’t use it. If you form a team, it’s a good idea to get at least one person who specializes in analyzing information. But if you go alone, then I recommend you to get a generic type information gathering device. Since the series specialized for the solo Hunters are pretty small-sized, they won’t get in the way of your movement too.”

Alpha then interjected.

“I think that’s a good idea. The problem is whether you can afford it now or not.”

“Uhmm. If it’s alright, I want to buy it, so how much would it be?”

“Let’s see, it’s basically a second-hand for you, and even if I sell it, it’ll only sell for a low price. Not to mention that it’ll be just sitting in my house if I don’t sell it, so how about 2,000,000 Aurum?”

Relatively speaking, it was actually pretty cheap. But even so, it’ll take most of the money that Akira had with him now. So if he bought it, he would have to return back to sleeping in a room without a bath. Akira hesitated for a bit, but since Alpha, Elena and Shizuka recommended it, Akira decided to push his hesitation aside.

“Okay then. Is it okay to pay through bank transfer?”

“Of course.”

Akira operated his information device and transferred the payment to Elena and she confirmed his payment.

“I have already confirmed the payment. This will conclude the deal then. I’ll give you the device right away, so let’s go to my house now. Shizuka, see you around.”

Elena and Sara smiled at Shizuka and left the shop. Akira bowed and followed suit.

Both from the inside and from the outside, Elena and Sara's house was much more different compared to the room where Akira slept. As he was waiting for Elena inside one of the rooms, he looked around and thought that Sara and Elena were really on a different level as Hunters compared to him.

Elena then returned with a box covered in dust.

"This is it. It's the whole package…I think. Well, if it's missing anything, I'm sorry. It's second-hand goods after all. It's an information-gathering device made by Senva Electronics. If I'm not mistaken, its name is Midnight Eye. I don't use it only because I don't like it, but it's actually a pretty good device."

"Thank you very much. Do I need to do the initial setting too?"

"Since the last setting is still installed from when I used it, you should be able to use it as it is. But if it's hard for you to use, feel free to change the setting."

Akira looked genuinely interested in that box. Elena smiled as she watched Akira's behaviour, but the alarm in her information device suddenly rang. Elena looked apologetic as she said.

"I'm sorry, I actually wanted to serve you some snacks and tea, but looking for that box took me more time than I thought. I need to go soon for my next request."

"Please don't be. I'll leave right away. Thank you very much for everything."

Akira politely bowed while carrying the box. As their guest, Elena and Sara saw him off.

As Akira left Sara and Elena's house, he passed by Katsuya by chance. Although their eyes met, Akira just ignored him and went on.

When Akira arrived in his own room, he immediately opened the box that housed his new information-gathering device. It was a rectangular tool equipped with a terminal and all kinds of extra parts sticking out from it. As he picked it up, his eyes stuck to it without blinking, completely engrossed in it. It was only when Alpha suddenly spoke up did he finally snap out of his state.

“Akira. Connect that tool to your information terminal.”

“Do we still need to do something with this tool?”

“Yep, I need to rewrite the whole software so that it’ll work together with my support.”

“I see. Well, it’s a good thing if it helps me use it afterwards. So, I’ll be in your care.”

Akira then picked the information gathering device out and connected it into his information terminal. Once the two were connected, Alpha immediately took control of the information gathering device through the information terminal.

“There’s some data left from when Elena used it. Is it okay if I erase it?”

“What kind of data is it?”

“There are some blueprints of old-world ruins around Kugamayama city, some data from the scanned monsters, there might be some other data compiled from the other information gathering devices too. There’s also individual output power setting for its parts, it seems that it’s a leftover data from when Elena was tinkering with it.”

“I see. I don’t really understand it, so I leave it to you.”

“Alright. There’s also some data about Elena and Sara’s body measurement. I think it’s from when they did a test run on this device. It seems like a highly accurate data since it was taken from a close range. Want me to make an image reconstruction using this data?”

“Eh?”

In the next moment, Alpha used her advanced computing ability to reconstruct images of Elena and Sara based on the data and showed those images to Akira.

Akira was shocked and froze up. Especially after realising that those 2 images were naked.

For Elena’s image, rather than just being simply slender, it was a flawless image with fats in places just where it should be to enhance her sexuality. Her skin was smooth and glossy with a healthy complexion. The elegance of a functional body and the beauty of a sensual body existed together without disturbing one another.

As for Sara’s image, her body was well endowed and simply gloriously voluptuous. The perfect combination between her curvy waist, her firm skin and her glorious chest only served to enhance her beauty.

Both of these images were considered jaw-dropping, although they came from 2 different kinds of beauty. The two beautiful bodies were fully exposed in front of Akira, and top of that, Alpha put an enchanting smile on their beautiful faces directed at Akira.

Akira was captivated by the naked images of the girls who saved him in the past, but he immediately returned back to his senses and shouted.

“Erase it right now!!!”

Those two images immediately vanished from Akira’s vision. Alpha who was floating beside him looked surprised.

“You don’t have to be that annoyed, you know?”

As Akira used one of his hands to hide his reddened face, he glared intensely at Alpha.

“…Why were they naked?”

“It’s because the data is from their body measurement. Putting clothes on them would need extra data.”

“…Just don’t ever do that again. It would only make me feel awkward the next time I meet them.”

“I thought you’re already used to something like that. Or was I mistaken?”

“It depends on the subject and the situation!!”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, it is!”

Alpha looked doubtful.

“Very well then. Don’t worry, I won’t do it again since you told me not to. That aside, we’ll go to the ruins tomorrow, so be sure to do proper maintenance on your guns.”

Akira asked Alpha with a reddened face.

“Didn’t you say that we won’t go to the ruins before I can borrow a vehicle?”

“This information-gathering device is better than I thought and there are still some leftover data about the ruins from when Elena was using it. Moreover, we’ll go to a relatively safe ruin tomorrow. Not to mention, we need to get you familiar with using this information gathering device.”

“…I see, alright then.”

Akira then picked his gun and started his usual maintenance. 2 AAH assault rifle and 1 CWH anti-material rifle, these 3 guns were Akira’s lifeline right now.

Akira was still not used to CWH anti-material rifle maintenance. Thus he was more focused than usual to make sure that he did everything correctly. But the image of naked Elena and Sara stuck to the back of his mind,

because of that, he spent more time trying to calm himself down and he just could not focus on his job.

Alpha kept observing Akira closely as she was working on his new information-gathering device.

Silavin: Damn. As a cultured man, I do believe, with some level of experience, that the manga should deliver what we need. So, Gentlemen, I think some screenshots are in order.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 36, The Rules of Engagement

Index

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There was a residence complex ruin near Kugamayama city that could be reached by vehicle. That area was called Higaraka Residence Ruin.

The Hunters from the city already regarded it as an exhausted ruin since most, if not all, worthwhile relics from that place were already brought out due to the years of expeditions. But for the Hunters who already had vehicles, it was still more profitable to search for relics in this ruin.

Elena and Sara brought Katsuya and his friends to this place. But it was not for searching relics, the request that Elena and Sara accepted from Drankam was to train Katsuya and his friends.

Elena turned at Katsuya and said with a serious face.

“We’ll have you guys look for relics in the Higaraka Residence Ruin. This is ruin exploration training and we’re here as your instructors. With that being said, I’m sure you guys are not complete amateurs, so we’re not going to instruct you in each and every step of the way. You’ll make your own decision and move accordingly.”

Sara was smiling as usual when she said.

“The monsters roaming this area shouldn’t be that strong, but in the end, it’s just based on the latest information. So keep in mind that the possibility of encountering a strong monster is not zero. We’ll still be watching over you from a distance and we’ll immediately come to help if we judge that the situation is too hard for you to handle. And don’t worry, I don’t think monsters in this area can give us any trouble.”

“But try to decide and move assuming that we’re not around. Once you’re done exploring the ruin, we’ll give you our evaluation. Normally, we’ll also evaluate the time when you decide to end the exploration and go back home. But for this time, you have 4 hours at most. So, any question? If not then we’ll start right away.”

Elena looked over Katsuya and his friends, and suddenly, Yumina opened her mouth.

“I know that you are telling us to freely search the ruin, but what exactly should we do?”

Sara answered the question.

“It’s also a part of your training, try to think about that yourself. But well, you can just think that you’re here for a usual ruin exploration.”

“…But, if I’m not mistaken, there’s no more valuable relics in this ruin, right?”

“You can assume that your training for today is to confirm that. After all, it’s not like you can have training in a ruin with valuable relics since powerful monsters would also roam that area. The request that we took is also to make sure that you guys return back alive, you see.”

Elena then added.

“We know very well that there’s no more valuable relics in this ruin. That’s why, even if you guys can only come back with cheap relics, we won’t give you a bad evaluation. So there’s no need to worry about that. We’ll evaluate your performance based on other factors like how long you spend searching

an area before moving on or are you properly watching your surroundings and keeping your guards up etc. So please just continue like how you usually search for relics. Of course, if you can find any valuable relics, it'll give you a big boost."

"Alright."

Yumina nodded and ended her question. Airi was the next one to ask.

"Is there any passing grade for today's training? We might have to change the way we move according to the passing grade."

Elena answered that question.

"Nope, but if I have to say anything, then it would be to get the biggest result from the least amount of work. Basically, we'll also test whether you can accurately predict how much you can earn from doing something dangerous. It's important to make the best possible choice in our line of work as Hunters, you know. Originally, it's as Yumina said, you should start from deciding whether you would search for relics in this place, but since this is only training, so let's just say that you picked this place because of a certain reason. With that being said, you can also decide to immediately go back home after a brief search. And if you do that, you just need to explain to us why you made that decision and we'll evaluate you based on your reasoning."

"I understand, I'll aim to do an effective exploration rather than just going back home."

After Yumina and Airi finished asking questions. The last one among the three of them, Katsuya, made a stern face as he asked.

"Uhmm… Who was that boy that I saw coming out from Elena-san and Sara-san's house?"

Sara and Elena turned and looked at each other. While Yumina looked worried and Airi didn't make any visible reaction.

Elena then smiled at Katsuya, there was a strong intimidating pressure of a veteran Hunter emitting from her.

“It seems that our explanation was not enough. I meant questions about the training.”

“Uhm, it’s just that it’s really bothering me. So I think it might disrupt my concentration during this training.”

Katsuya still stood with his question though he was under pressure by Elena’s gaze. So, Sara replied back with a smile.

“In that case, you should experience it yourself how dangerous it is to not maintain your focus. This might also double as training to keep your mind clear of anything unnecessary during dangerous work.”

“If there’s no more question, then let’s start the training.”

As Elena’s smile marked that she would not take any refusal, Katsuya and his friends scrambled into the ruin in a panic.

Sara then turned her bitter smile that she just directed to Katsuya to Elena.

“I think it’s fine if we tell them. We can just keep the fact that we know him as secret and just say that he’s someone who bought your unused information gathering device.”

“What if he has a lot of questions cropping out from that statement and starts probing further instead? I don’t want to deal with that, you know. He might even ask questions that we need to answer very carefully. That’s why it is fine like this. Since we promised Akira not to say or ask anything unnecessary, we also have to be careful not to reveal anything that might make other people probe about him.”

“…Now that you mention it, that makes sense. Guess I need to be more careful too.”

Sara’s face stiffened a bit as she remembered that after she asked Elena and Shizuka just a bit about Akira, she was able to make a pretty detailed guess

about Akira.

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As Katsuya and his friends continued the training, they were able to find some relics albeit just cheap ones. They were also able to successfully take out the monsters that they encountered. But because the exploration went smooth, it gave enough room for Katsuya to start thinking about Akira again.

“Say, about that boy who came out from Elena-san and Sara-san’s house… He’s the same Hunter that we met back then, right?”

“Is that so?”

“I don’t really remember.”

Yumina and Airi did not really remember Akira. After all, to them, he was just a fellow Hunter who coincidentally was in the same truck as them during one of their patrol jobs. And it was not like he left any memorable impression on either of them.

But for Katsuya, Akira left a deep negative impression on him. Although he was just another young Hunter who was more or less of the same age as Katsuya, a Hunter who was looking down on other young Hunters recognized his skill. And when Katsuya did not have any other choice but to sit quietly on the truck to head back home after Shikarabe challenged him, Akira, on the other hand, headed to the battlefield alone. On top of it, Shikarabe seemed to recognize Akira’s guts when he saw that. All of these things were burned into Katsuya’s memory and left a deep impression inside him.

The image of Akira from those memories somehow stuck in the back of his mind. Then he saw Akira coming out from the house of the Hunters that he looked up to. So he just could not shake it off from his brain.

Seeing how Katsuya was acting, Yumina got annoyed.

“Katsuya. I don’t know exactly why you’re so bothered about that boy, but just like Sara-san said, you need to straighten up. It’s dangerous to lose your vigilance here, you know. Or do you also want to make Sara-san and Elena-san think that they’re only here to protect us?”

Airi also joined as she gave a strict warning.

“If you keep troubling Sara-san and Elena-san, they might really think like that. So get a better hold of yourself.”

Yumina and Airi thought that their warnings were just a little bit harsher than usual. But they did not expect Katsuya to suddenly pick himself up and make a solemn expression.

“You’re right, I’m sorry. I need to get a better grip on myself.”

If they made Elena and Sara take care of them, it would feel like they made Elena and Sara clean up their mess. It was something that Katsuya wanted to avoid no matter what. Because of that, Katsuya immediately renewed his resolve.

Airi and Yumina saw Katsuya’s serious expression, he looked so reliable and cool. But on the other hand, thinking of the reason why Katsuya changed his attitude so quickly, Airi and Yumina felt a bit of displeasure.

***

Elena and Sara were watching how Katsuya and the other kids were moving around as they were looking for relics. They told Katsuya and his friends to stay within their detection range, while at the same time, they kept their guards up in case a monster that the kids could not handle appeared.

“Elena. When we took this request, you said that this might be their first step for recruiting us into Drankam, right?”

“Yeah. But that might be only me reading too much into it. After all, Drankam seems to be looking for Hunters to teach their young Hunters.

That also might be the reason why they sent us some requests to work together with Katsuya and his friends lately.”

“Recruiting us, huh…? Although we always refused their offer until now, what are we going to do from now on?”

“It doesn’t seem that they would let us go easily once we join them. If they rush us for a decision, we’ll refuse them again. I think Drankam also knows this well, that’s why they won’t rush us for a decision. So let’s take our time to properly think about it before making any decision. Sara, what do you think? If you think that it might be a good decision, I’ll try to be more optimistic.”

“To be honest, I’m not really sure yet. But are you okay with that?”

“There are pros and cons if we accept their invitation, after all. If we join Drankam, there’s no mistaking it that we’ll have an easier life. We will be able to get better equipment and all kinds of help from them. I’m sure they would help us if we ever get into a similar situation like back then when we couldn’t even refill your nanomachine reserve.”

Sara smiled bitterly and made a stern face as she said.

“When you say it like that, it does sound pretty enticing…”

“But if we join them, we’ll lose some amount of our current freedom. We’ll have to do the job assigned to us even if we don’t want to do it, and not to mention that there’ll be a lot of other problematic stuff we need to take care in order to get along with the other members.”

Sara’s nanomachine reserve was basically her lifeline, thus she usually welcomed any money that she could get as an insurance in case anything bad happened. But there was also a chance for Drankam to basically hold her life hostage because of that. There was also a very good chance that they would slip a clause in their contract that would limit Sara and Elena freedom in exchange for gang’s support.

Whether it was for the better or for the worse, Sara and Elena were already used to living freely as a team of two Hunters. Thus it would greatly affect them if they lose their freedom.

Although she knew that it was important for her to stay alive, Sara also did not want to cause trouble for her best friend or make her worry. Looking at Sara who was at loss on what to do, Elena firmly but gently smiled at her.

“I’m sorry that it seems like I’m pushing the decision to you, but I think that you’re the one who will be affected the most. That’s why I want you to decide first. But don’t worry, you can take as much time as you need. And no matter what decision you come up with, I won’t complain.”

“Thank you, Elena. I’ll think about it carefully.”

Sara smiled back at Elena as she was delighted to hear that her best friend was genuinely worried about her.

***

There was not much time left until they reached the time limit that Elena had set. And during this time, Katsuya and his friends kept looking for relics seriously. Although they were still a bit amateurish, they tried their hardest to show their promising potential to Elena and Sara, who were watching over them from afar.

And it was worth it, Katsuya and his friends were able to gather a good amount of relics from Higaraka Residence Ruin. But Katsuya was not satisfied with the result. Thus he could not help but grumble as he found a relic when he was searching a certain abandoned house.

“There is really nothing but cheap relics here.”

“Well, that can’t be helped. Elena-san and Sara-san did say that there’s no valuable relic left in this ruin anymore.”

“Ah, the time limit is near, I think it’s fine if we just finish here. So how about we stop looking for relics now? Katsuya, what do you think?”

“…Say, how much money do you think we can get from all the relics that we gathered today?”

“Only a small number of them have any technological value as the old world relics. So I’m sure it won’t fetch us a good amount of money.”

After hearing that realistic but expected answer from Airi, Katsuya let out a sigh and seemed pretty disappointed.

Although he did get motivated by Airi and Yumina’s words from before, deep in his heart, he also hoped for a better result.

Despite the fact that they gathered quite a lot of relics considering that they did it all by themselves, their result was still not satisfactory. And if they used Elena and Sara’s abilities as a standard, their results were not worth all the hard work. Not to mention that Elena and Sara were contracted to keep Katsuya and his friends alive, so in short, they were there as paid bodyguards. Thus if the reward that Drankam needed to pay to Elena and Sara was included, there was no mistaking it that they would end up in the red.

Looking at it pessimistically, it would seem like they made Elena and Sara watch over them using Drankam’s money. Although Katsuya might not be aware of it himself, those thoughts had already taken roots deep in his mind, that was why he was unconsciously hoping for results enough to cover for that. And now that the time limit was closing in and he still had not gotten the desired result, he started to panic.

***

Suddenly, Elena’s face turned grim when she was monitoring the area. It was because her information gathering device detected a big sized monster not too far away from Katsuya and his friends. The signal appeared from a place that was not directly visible from Katsuya’s location.

Elena adjusted her detection device to gather detailed information from that signal and tried to make a guess from the shape of the image that she got.

But her face turned grimmer after she got a good guess of what kind of monster it was.

“Greedy Crocodile… So they’re also here, huh?”

Greedy Crocodile was a type of monster that looked like a crocodile. It had two tails and strong metallic scales, and its big and strong jaws could easily tear through mechanical monsters. Its diet was clearly reflected in its appearance. All the mechanical monsters that it ate caused it to grow guns on its back and all the tanks that it ate caused tank cannons to grow from its body, even some of them had tank wheels under their bellies.

Elena could confirm the size and the shape of the greedy crocodile and guess its firepower from the data that she got from her information gathering device. Fortunately, this monster had no guns growing out of its body. But even so, it still had its powerful jaw that could easily rip metals, powerful hard scales, and a strong vitality like the other biological monsters.

“Sara. I think it’s not heading this way, but just to be safe, be sure to prepare yourself if it does. I don’t think Katsuya and his friends can handle it.”

“In that case, should we go there and kill it?”

“Let’s just leave it alone so long as it doesn’t come here. It seems that it had not noticed Katsuya’s group too, so it should be fine if we leave it be.”

“Well, there’s no need to kill it if it doesn’t attack us, huh?”

And so they decided to just keep their eyes on the crocodile for the time being.

Katsuya and his friends were about to end their relic search and go back to Elena and Sara. He suddenly noticed a faint signal from his information-gathering device. It was so faint that normal people would not notice, but Katsuya was able to notice that due to his rare talent as a Hunter.

Because of that, Katsuya put up his guard and turned towards that direction. What he could see on the far end of his view was a greedy crocodile creeping out slowly from behind wreckage.

Katsuya then thought.

[That's a greedy crocodile… The relics that we gathered today are not great. But if I kill that monster, then it might leave a good achievement for today's training as a monster subjugation rather than a relic search. If I remember it right, the reward from killing a greedy crocodile should be pretty high. It's at least higher compared to all the relics that I've gathered today. And if I defeat that monster… Maybe Elena-san and Sara-san will recognize my skills, right?]

He was in a position where he had the first strike against a monster that would give him a noticeable achievement if he could kill it. Not to mention that in reality, the Hunter job was mostly about hunting monsters rather than hunting relics. Plus it was the perfect chance to overturn their result. These reasons pushed Katsuya to make his decision.

Katsuya asked Yumina and Airi while making a serious face.

"Yumina, Airi. Do you think we can kill that monster?"

"…Greedy crocodile, huh? It's still far away from us and it doesn't seem to have noticed us yet. It doesn't seem that it has any guns growing on its body either. I think we have a good chance of winning against it if we ambush it…"

"We might be able to focus on its head and kill it before it notices us."

As Katsuya looked seriously at Yumina and Airi, their answer encouraged Katsuya's decision to attack that monster. Yumina said that they had a good chance against it and Airi came up with a strategy to kill it.

After hearing their answers, Katsuya judged that they had enough of a winning chance.

“In that case, I want to kill that monster. Our relic search did not go so well. Although it is not relic hunting, I want to at least leave this place with an achievement. Tell me if you’re against it.”

As Yumina looked at Katsuya’s serious face, she remembered him desperately training in the shooting range while making a pained expression. With the thoughts of all his dead friends, he continuously swore to himself to not let anyone die anymore. Watching that expression for hours was enough. She never wanted to see him in such pain again. So, she made her decision.

[If we can defeat that greedy crocodile and make Katsuya feel better about himself, it should stop him from doing that reckless training. And even if we can’t handle it, Elena-san and Sara-san will help us, this is going to be okay.]

The fact that Elena and Sara were there to watch over them if anything bad happened gave her confidence.

“If you say so, I don’t mind helping.”

Airi looked at Katsuya as she thought.

[Our equipment is better compared to before. And I don’t think Katsuya would make a suggestion that he knows to be impossible. If he thinks that it’s possible, then it should be possible for us. Not to mention that he had trained himself hard since then and I didn’t miss any of my training too. Shikarabe also recognized his talent. As long as we’re together, it should be possible to defeat a greedy crocodile.]

Her trust in Katsuya and her confidence in her own skill gave Airi the last push.

“I’ll take the first shot, after all, I’m the best here when it comes to shooting.”

Katsuya smiled and felt so happy from gaining all the trust of his companions.

“Thanks. Well then, let’s go.”

It was the moment when Katsuya was the most motivated in the whole day.

Elena and Sara quickly noticed that Katsuya and his friends were thinking of killing that greedy crocodile. Elena frowned a bit and Sara looked surprised when they noticed it.

“Sara, get yourself ready to help them. We’ll quickly kill that monster the moment it looks dangerous, but we won’t join the fight until then. Although I’ll also keep my aim on that monster, don’t assume that it’s safe just because I didn’t shoot. You can go ahead and shoot when you think that it has gotten out of hand.”

“Roger that. But still, we should’ve killed it back then, so this would not have happened.”

“We’re not here as their bodyguards, after all. Not to mention that I did tell them to make decisions as if we’re not around. Moreover, they might do that because they know that they have a good chance of winning. And if that’s true, then we shouldn’t get in their way.”

Although Elena said that, the grim look on her face revealed that Katsuya’s group only had a slim chance in winning the fight. Looking at that, Sara could not help but let out a faint smile.

“…Well, even if it was the wrong decision, having a hard fight can also serve as good training.”

Sara used her nanomachine enhanced body to swiftly move behind a wreckage not too far from their location. After making sure that Katsuya and his friends would not get into her shooting trajectory, Sara readied her CWH anti-material rifle.

In order not to get too much in the way of Katsuya and his friends, but to be able to quickly help them when the situation turned worse, Sara loaded highly explosive piercing ammo that could take that monster out in one shot into her rifle and took an aim on the monster. She just had to pull the trigger

to kill that monster now. Sara then calmed her breathing and stayed there to watch how the situation would develop.

As for Elena, she kept checking her information gathering device as she readied her DSS sniper rifle. The rifle was connected to her information gathering device to increase its accuracy and it was modified to increase its firepower.

She loaded a bullet with high piercing power into her rifle. Although it had less destructive power compared to the bullet that Sara was using, the information gathering device connected to Elena's rifle allowed her to accurately aim for the monster's weak points. Thus she would be able to quickly take out the monster by shooting at its weak points like its brain.

Elena then sent the data to Sara to increase Sara's accuracy too. With that, they were ready to take out the greedy crocodile anytime.

***

Airi was crouching on the ground and taking her aim on the greedy crocodile. The crocodile had not noticed Katsuya yet as it slowly dragged its body along the ground.

When Airi was confident enough with her aim, she pulled the trigger. And as she expected, the bullet hit the crocodile's head.

But the bullet just bounced off its hard scale and only chipped a small amount of flesh off the crocodile's head. For a monster with a high level of vitality like that crocodile, such a wound was just a scratch. It noticed Katsuya and his friends as it quickly turned its badly balanced body and charged toward them.

Airi kept shooting at that monster as it was running fast towards her. It quickly closed their distance. Yumina joined and started shooting at the crocodile's head too. Katsuya also followed suit as he set his rifle on full auto and started spraying bullets at that monster.

Even when it was receiving a volley of bullets from 3 people head-on, there was no sign of the monster slowing down at all. It was showered with countless bullets but none could pierce through its big and strong scales. The bullets could only strip off a small amount of meat under its scale as they bounced off it. But even so, the crocodile kept charging with vigour. It charged straight toward Katsuya and his friends without showing any sign of evading or escaping.

They originally had the upper hand since it was a one-sided fight when the monster was far away. They could shoot at the crocodile but it had no means of fighting back from that distance. But as the crocodile got pretty close to them, Katsuya and his friends started to panic. Katsuya gritted his teeth and kept on shooting while Yumina and Airi desperately tried to help him defeat the monster. But the crocodile seemed unfazed.

Sara thought that it was getting dangerous and was about to pull the trigger of her rifle when suddenly one of Airi's bullet hit an open wound in the head of the crocodile by pure coincidence. The bullet shattered and wreaked havoc inside the crocodile's head and tore its flesh. But even so, it was not a fatal wound for the crocodile, but at least it was enough to make it stagger and slow down.

Noticing this, Katsuya and his friends grabbed the chance as they kept on shooting at that particular part of the crocodile. The crocodile finally stopped moving when half of its head was mutilated.

Katsuya and the other two did not notice that the crocodile had become immobile and they kept on shooting it. But eventually, they realized it and looked at each other with a smile of victory.

Katsuya then shouted in joy.

"We did it!! We killed it!! It's our victory!! We were able to defeat it ourselves!!"

Yumina let out a sigh of relief and smiled happily.

“Although it was a close win, a win is still a win. I’m glad we were able to kill it.”

Then Airi smiled proudly and said.

“We were able to defeat it because of our skill. Now that we’ve defeated a greedy crocodile, I won’t let anyone call us amateur Hunters anymore.”

Katsuya, Airi and Yumina looked at each other and praised each other for their victory.

Sara returned back to Elena and found Elena looking at the greedy crocodile with a puzzled look.

“That was a bit dangerous, but they were able to defeat it on their own in the end. They’re pretty good… Elena, what’s wrong?”

“Sara, I feel like that greedy crocodile suddenly slowed down back there, what do you think just happened?”

“Isn’t that because one of their bullets hit its weak point by pure chance? Since they shot that many bullets at it, it’s not strange if one of their bullets hit its weak point.”

“So they were lucky, huh… Well, luck is a part of their ability too.”

“Oh my, Elena, is there anything that bothers you about their performance?”

“That’s not what I meant. It’s just that there’s something else that bothers me a little.”

Unlike Sara who was smiling like usual, there was a strange disturbing mood around Elena.

Katsuya and his friends returned back to Elena and Sara in a good mood.

“Good work. Well then, let’s take your result for today and bring them back home. We’ll be on the lookout for monsters on the way back, so you all can

rest easy. But remember that normally you should not relax until you're back in your base, okay?"

And so Elena and Sara headed back to Kugamayama city together with Katsuya, Airi and Yumina.

__*__*__*__

Katsuya and his friends were waiting inside a room in Drankam's base for Elena and Sara to return. Elena and Sara were submitting their reports on their request to the Drankam's officer who sent them that request. Elena and Sara would also provide their evaluation for today's training in that report and they were told that Sara and Elena would tell them the evaluation after that. Thus Katsuya was very nervous as he was waiting in the room.

After some time, Elena, Sara and a Drankam officer entered the room. Elena and Sara sat across Katsuya and his friends while Arabe was leaning on the wall near them.

Elena then started talking.

"I'll give you my evaluation of today's training. First of all, you did well defeating that greedy crocodile on your own. To be honest, I thought that it would be a bit hard for you, so I was surprised when you actually did it. So I have to start my evaluation by mentioning that point."

"Thank you very much!!"

Katsuya looked happy as he immediately replied back, Airi and Yumina also looked delighted.

Elena then continued while still looking at them.

"Other than defeating that greedy crocodile. Your ability to search for relics while monitoring your surroundings is mostly satisfactory. As for the evaluation from Drankam, they'll evaluate your performance from our report, but we don't know how that will come out, so let's just put that aside

for now. But for us, it doesn’t seem there’s any problem. Basically, I think you guys are full-fledged Hunters now.”

Katsuya, Airi, and Yumina’s expression loosened after Elena said that they did well as Hunters. Up until now, other Hunters used to handle them as if they were dead weight. Thus they were really happy as they felt that they had broken away from that view.

Elena then continued.

“Now then, I’ll move on to the overall performance evaluation. But before that, I want to ask you one thing, tell me again the aim of today’s ruin exploration.”

Katsuya and his friends were a bit taken back by that question. But Yumina then quickly answered back.

“Our aim was to gather relics. To be more precise, as training to gather relics. The aim was for us to be able to effectively gather relics. This is my understanding.”

“So it’s okay to assume that you did everything with that in mind, right?”

Yumina was confused when Elena said that. And so she added more explanation to her answer.

“…Well, of course, that’s if we ignore the fact that we already knew there were no more valuable relics left in Higaraka Residence Ruin and still decided to search the ruin despite that fact..”

“It’s okay to take that out of the equation here.”

“If that’s the case, then yes, that’s my answer.”

Elena then looked at Katsuya and Airi to confirm Yumina’s answer. Katsuya and Airi nodded at her.

“I agree with her.”

“Me too.”

“…I see. All of you have the same opinion, huh. It’s a good thing to have the same aim when you work together.”

Elena paused a bit. Arabe who already listened to Elena and Sara’s report beforehand just smiled bitterly. Katsuya was confused when he noticed Arabe’s bitter smile.

Elena then continued.

“This is just my evaluation though, so you need to judge it for yourself whether it’s indeed correct or not. After all, every person has different indicators for their evaluation. If your performance agrees with these indicators, then you’ll get a good evaluation, and vice versa. I just want to make sure that you know it. So, with that being said, for me, I can only say that your performance today was terrible.”

Katsuya, Airi and Yumina were really surprised by such an unexpected evaluation from Elena. Katsuya panicked and asked.

“B-but why?! We should’ve done well during the training, right?! We might be not really that good in your eyes, but I don’t think we’re that bad either! You also praised us when we defeated that greedy crocodile, right?”

“That’s the point, that’s where my evaluation comes from. You guys did an awesome job defeating that greedy crocodile. But was there any reason why you should have done that?”

“It was because we recognized that we could defeat it!! And we did defeat that greedy crocodile!”

Elena waited for a bit after Katsuya said that. After confirming that Katsuya finished giving his explanation, she then asked him.

“Is that all?”

“What do you mean…?”

“You killed it because it seemed an easy target for you. Is that all? Do you really need to kill all the monsters that your detection device picks? You even had to focus all of your firepowers on it to be able to defeat that monster. You could have evaded the fight if you had just left it alone, but you decided to fight it although it could have easily killed you if you’re not lucky. So, is that really all the reason you have for doing that?”

Katsuya could not give any answer. Elena then shifted her gaze from Katsuya to Airi. Airi paused for a bit before answering back.

“…Our original objective of gathering relics did not end up well. So we thought that we can improve our situation by defeating that monster, and I think we did well by defeating that monster.”

“I see. So then, what exactly did you get from defeating that greedy crocodile? Is it the reward money and points for your Hunter Rank? If you put that in scale with the danger, was it worth it? Or is it that you thought you should be able to defeat it easily but it turned out that it was more difficult than you thought? Or that you knew that it would not be easy and thought that the reward you might get from defeating it was worth the risk?”

Airi could not retort back after Elena said that.

Elena then shifted to Yumina, Yumina hesitated before speaking up.

“…We used to get despised just because we’re still children. So, I thought that no one would look down on us if we can defeat a greedy crocodile and it might make us more confident in ourselves too.”

To be more precise, it was actually for Katsuya. Yumina thought that it might help him, that was why she did not stop him. She did not want to see him getting depressed because of his own weakness again.

“I see. Well, I’m sure you have your own reasons. But even so, when you decided to do that, can you say for sure that you didn’t include us in your calculation and didn’t expect us to help you when the situation got really

bad? And even if that's true, are you sure that the people who look down on you would stop after hearing what you did back there?"

Yumina could not say yes to that as she shut her mouth and did not answer back at all.

Elena looked at the 3 children who could not say anything to her and continued.

"For me, it looks like you put yourself in needless danger. And I don't think the reward from that action could justify the danger. That's why my evaluation of your performance is as I said. As a Hunter, I wouldn't want to work together with you and if I'm assigned to watch over you, I wouldn't want to do that unless we get a lot of money from it. That's all from me. Sara, do you have anything you want to add?"

Katsuya and his friends looked at Sara with pleading eyes. But Sara just smiled bitterly and looked sorry at them. Sara basically agreed with what Elena said.

"Well, it's as Elena said. This is about the basics. Hunters basically work by putting their lives at stake, so it's important to make sure that whatever they might get, it should be worth risking their lives for. But of course, it's different from person to person on what kind of reward would be worth risking their lives for. So it's not easy to work together with the other Hunters who don't agree on the same principles or guideline. And our principles are somehow different from the three of you. That's why our evaluation of your performance is bad. I want you to at least understand that. It is true that you were able to defeat that greedy crocodile and I'm sure there are other Hunters who agree with your decision. If you can't accept our evaluation, you can just laugh it off and ignore it, you are even free to think of us as just cowards."

Sara's words did not cheer them up at all.

After that, Sara and Elena exited the room. Then Arabe walked to Katsuya, Airi and Yumina.

“Well, although a lot of things happened there, we from Drankam think highly of you for defeating that greedy crocodile. And so, we judged that you don’t need a veteran Hunter to accompany and look over you like we usually do for young Hunters. After all, we don’t have the manpower to assign veteran Hunters to watch over Hunters who can defeat a greedy crocodile on their own. From now on, you can pick requests on your own as a full-fledged Hunter and you’re free to recruit other Hunters into your team. So I hope you will work hard as the role model for the young Hunters in this gang.”

“…I understand.”

Katsuya pushed himself to give his answer. Meanwhile, Arabe just smiled bitterly watching how the three of them were acting.

“Well, you can take a rest for the day. As a Hunter, you’ll be facing many more failures in the future. You won’t be able to continue for long in this line of work if you get depressed every time you fail. Later then.”

Arabe just left them with those words before exiting the room. Just as he was walking in the hallway, he remembered what Shikarabe said to him and clicked his tongue.

“It turned out exactly as what Shikarabe predicted, huh. It seems that it’s impossible to use them to recruit Elena and Sara now. I need to rethink my plan…”

Originally, he was planning to ask Elena and Sara to watch over Katsuya’s group. But Elena and Sara already knew about it.

Of course, Elena and Sara would not want to watch over other Hunters who did not know their own limits and always drove headfirst into dangers. After all, they would be roped into the dangers too. Arabe understood that and let out a big sigh while trying to think about his next move.

Even after Arabe left them in the room, Katsuya, Airi and Yumina stayed inside while hanging their head low for a while.

“…Dammit.”

Katsuya whispered that word under his breath that he himself could not hear. And he himself did not know the real reason why he swore.

Silavin: Honestly, they tried so hard but for the wrong reasons. Hopefully, they will grow. Though, I don’t think their decision was wholly their fault. The pampering nature of the Gang goes a little bit too strong in my opinion. Especially for a line of work that they are preparing children to risk their life for.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 37, People Who Are Connected To The Old World Domain

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Akira went to Higaraka Residence Ruin using his bike to test the information gathering device that he bought the other day from Elena. Relics in that ruin were hidden among the wreckages and the monsters that roamed the area were relatively weak. It was the perfect place to get himself familiar with his new information-gathering device.

It was his first time visiting a ruin other than Kuzusuhara ruins. Thus, Akira could not help but get a bit excited. He was looking forward to seeing a ruin with a different scenic view. But he was only half satisfied when he arrived there.

“It’s… Somehow different to Kuzusuhara ruins.”

Akira looked a bit disappointed as he walked through the ruin. Although it was true that it had a different scene compared to Kuzusuhara ruin, all the crumbling and abandoned buildings that were packed close to each other in the area reminded him of the Slum city. Thus, it was a huge letdown for him since he was looking forward to a ruin filled with advanced technologies.

Alpha smiled at Akira and explained.

“Higaraka Residence ruin is from a different era compared to Kuzusuhara ruin, you see. That’s the reason why it looks different.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just like the people of the current era who are trying to rebuild their civilization using the technology that they retrieve from the relics of the old world, the people in the past also did the same. So the people who built Kuzusuhara ruin and the people who built Higaraka residence ruin are from 2 different eras. Even the Kugamayama city where you live right now might be called Kugamayama ruin and regarded as a ruin of the old world 100 years from now.”

“…I see. So it’s like the civilizations in the eastern district were annihilated not only once but many times, huh?”

“Yep, that’s correct. That’s why don’t expect to find the same kind of relics that you found in Kuzusuhara ruin here. But since our main aim here is not to collect relics, let’s take it easy for today. I’ll be adjusting the information gathering device, so you can just walk around randomly the area.”

Akira then pointed his finger at a small-sized binocular-like visor that he was using.

“Do I really only need to put this on?”

The visor was a part of the information gathering device set that he bought from Elena, it was basically some sort of an information display device. The visor part was made of a clear and transparent material so that it did not reduce Akira’s ability to see. Akira was also able to just lift it up if it was blocking his view. It might be because it was originally Elena’s that it was relatively small, making it a comfortable fit for Akira.

“You can take it off if it bothers you. After all, I can just display my scan result of the area directly to your vision even without that visor. But you can also keep it on to avoid people from getting suspicious about where you get

your information from. Even if you remove it, you can just say that you're using contact lens-type information display."

"Well, it's not really bothering me, so I'll keep it on. Not to mention that I don't want to deal with all the suspicion, so I think I need to get used to it. Alright then, let's go."

Akira stopped his bike under the shadow of an abandoned building in the outskirts of the ruin and put a camouflage sheet over his bike. He then started walking deeper into the ruin.

This would also double as ruin exploration training for Akira, thus he carefully stepped into the ruin and explored around the area. While at the same time, he would also look for relics in the abandoned houses as part of his relics hunting training. As he explored a random house, he found utensils and other small articles. Although these were still old-world relics, the technology of the current era was able to produce their substitutes, that was why these were considered cheap relics. These were not relics that Hunters would risk their lives in bringing them back to the city. Akira hesitated for a bit before eventually returning them back from where he found them.

As Akira looked at the outward appearance and the insides of the ruin, he mumbled.

"These buildings are pretty sturdy, I wonder if there are people who live here in secret."

"As long as they can secure enough food, water and ward off the monsters, I'm sure there would be a lot of people who want to live here."

"…So the slum city is still better, huh?"

"There might be people who can find a solution for the food and monster problem and cannot live in the slum city for some reason. So they might have decided to live here, you know. There might be traps that are left by those people, so you should be careful."

As Akira moved deeper into the ruin, he found a dead greedy crocodile corpse lying on the ground. It was pretty big, it was even bigger than the monster that Akira kicked and killed the other day. It was obvious how scary it would be if it was alive. Akira would have approached it carefully had its head not been half destroyed.

Looking at the greedy crocodile from a close distance, Akira let out his honest opinion.

“This is a huge monster.”

“This is the greedy crocodile. This type of monster evolves by eating other mechanical or biological monsters and turning the metal that they eat into their scales. They would even process guns and other weapons that they eat inside their body and make them grow on their body for their own use, you know. There were a lot of cases where greedy crocodiles had evolved its body so much that people would mistake it as a mechanical monster, but this monster is actually a biological monster.”

“So it’s like those weapon dogs, huh? But this one has no gun on its body though.”

“It’s a type of monster that greatly varies individually after all. I think this one hasn’t eaten that many monsters with guns. Or the Hunter who defeated this monster might have cut off its guns and took them home. After all, many of the guns growing out from this kind of monsters are good guns, so there’s a chance that the one who killed this monster was actually aiming for its guns from the start. That’s also the reason why only its head is badly damaged, it might be to make sure that its guns are still intact after killing it.”

“I see, I wonder if I can kill it too.”

“Since I’m with you, I’m sure you can do it. But it’s a different story whether you can take its guns home or not. After all, that will be impossible with a bike, unless if you’re planning to carry them yourself back to the city.”

“No thanks. So it’s impossible until I either buy or borrow a vehicle, huh.”

Akira then left that area and continued his exploration. In the midst of exploring the ruin, he thought of something and asked Alpha.

“Alpha, it seems that you’re very knowledgeable about the monsters. I wonder if you know the origin of these monsters.”

“Only a part of it. And I only know it as a second-hand knowledge. It’s not like I’ve investigated it myself and there are a lot of guesses embedded in it. But my information source is a secret, okay? It’ll be too much trouble to explain it, so don’t ask about it. But of course, I don’t mind telling you if you’re ready to hear 100 years of oral explanation with a lot of permissions and confirmations.”

Alpha smiled invincibly at Akira while he just smiled back bitterly.

“I won’t ask you where you get that information from. So then, why do monsters like that greedy crocodile exist?”

“They might originally be test specimens that ran away from some experiment. I bet they were planning to make some kind of cyborg for military purposes. Or it might be from an experiment where they tried to make a machine that has the same regeneration ability as a biological creature. Or adding an organ that would allow it to regrow its own body parts so that they didn’t have to do any maintenance and then planning to install that organ in a human. I think they were trying to create a nanomachine that would make that possible. It’s common sense for such research to be tested on animals like a dog or a crocodile first before testing it on humans. It’s also possible that a war broke, and these test subjects managed to escape from the lab. This could have happened when they just finished the nanomachines and were about to test it on humans. But well, of course, there’s a chance that someone released it to the wild as a horrible prank.”

Akira imagined a lot of stuff as his face frowned.

“…Whatever it is, it gives us a lot of trouble. What the heck were the people of the old world thinking?”

“Compared to the technology of the current era, the technology of the old world was abnormally advanced. Since they had the means to do a lot of things, it made them want to try everything. I believe that part of humans stays the same whether it’s for the people of the current era or the people of the old world. And if they make a blunder because of their curiosity, their current civilization will be wiped out and become a part of the old world civilization.”

“So you’re saying that someone might just make a big mistake and destroy the whole civilization tomorrow?”

“Yep.”

“…I at least want the current civilization to not get wiped out before I die though.”

Akira just mumbled out his real opinion, but there was nothing in this world that would guarantee that.

As Akira continued his exploration, he found a mansion that looked completely different from the other abandoned buildings around it. Although, just like the other buildings, it was abandoned and was deteriorating for years, it gave off a look that someone rich had lived in that mansion in the past.

Akira thought that he might be able to find some expensive relics inside it as he entered and searched that building.

But his expectation was immediately shot down. Although there were many rooms inside the mansion, all of them were more or less empty. Most of the other Hunters also thought the same and had fought each other for the relics inside this building, that was why it was left with nothing. They even took all the relics that they would have normally ignored. The mansion was left with nothing but dust and dirt.

Akira just could not give up that easily as he continued searching the mansion. But he found nothing at all. Thus he started to get sloppier and sloppier every time he checked a room. Then, right when Akira almost got fed up checking the empty rooms, Alpha suddenly called him.

“Akira, wait, go to that room.”

Akira then entered the room that Alpha pointed. Since Alpha even told him to go inside that room, he thought that there must be something there. But he was bound to get disappointed after he scanned the room, it was indeed empty.

“Is there anything in this room? I can’t find anything.”

“It has a secret door. I believe that the door leads to a secret room in the basement.”

Akira then looked down onto the floor. Any openings on the floor were already filled and covered with dust and dirt. But suddenly he saw a green frame on the floor, with vision support provided by Alpha.

Akira walked to that frame and crouched to take a good close look at it. There was a groove on the floor that wasn’t completely covered with dust. He then slipped his finger into that groove and moved the tile. He could see a hidden knob under that tile.

“Is this it? How did you find it?”

“I just used my high calculation ability to analyze the image data from the information gathering device. Ain’t I amazing?”

Alpha smiled after she said something that sounded like “you can go ahead and praise me now”.

“That’s amazing.”

“…Oh my, that was pretty straightforward of you.”

“Eh? But like, that’s really amazing, right?”

“Yep, I’m indeed amazing. I’m glad that you find my support amazing.”

Alpha looked a bit surprised when Akira praised her straightforwardly, but she quickly returned back to her usual smile.

She thought that Akira would ignore her just like always, that was why it was rather surprising for her. A different outcome from her prediction showed that she had not observed Akira enough and that she still had not fully understood this person named Akira.

Alpha concluded that she needed to observe him more in order to make a more accurate prediction of his behaviour. But as she thought of that, she did not show it on her face which was smiling like usual.

Akira grabbed the secret knob, pulled it up and entered the basement. No sunlight was able to reach the basement, making it completely pitch dark. The faint light that entered the room from the opened door was not of much use either.

Akira thought that since it was a secret room, he could hope to find some unclaimed expensive relics and used a portable flashlight to check the room.

As the light filled the place, Akira could see the 4 concrete walls that were surrounding him. The room was empty, there was nothing but the floor, walls and ceiling that was covered in dust, there was not even that much dust down here.

Akira turned to Alpha with a dumbfounded face, seeing which she smiled to cheer him up.

“Yep, there’s nothing here, someone must have found and emptied this place before us… But it’s not my fault.”

Akira actually was not planning to blame Alpha at all, thus he felt a bit sorry when she awkwardly tried to make excuses to him. So, he casually replied with a little bit of joke.

“…Ah no, I was just wondering if there’s another secret door.”

“According to my search, I don’t find anything though. But, do you want to try looking around a little more? If you can find another secret door that I didn’t detect, then it means that the information gathering device is faulty. Try to check the walls and the floors as closely as you can.”

Since Alpha’s answer sounded hopeful, Akira decided to check the room one more time. He checked the walls and the floors very closely that his nose was almost touching them. He was looking for any grooves like the one from before. But he could not find anything in the end.

“…Nope, nothing. Alpha, do you find anything?”

“Unfortunately, I don’t find anything too.”

“…I guess I’ll just go back home now.”

Akira then turned off his light and was about to climb up the ladder when he suddenly stopped. He then extended his hand outside and pulled the trap door close. As the only source of light in the room was gone, the whole room went totally dark.

Akira then scanned the whole room, but he could not see anything.

“That didn’t work, huh. I thought that if there’s any groove, there should be some light leaking out from that groove. But now that I think about it, we’re in the underground now, so I guess that’s to be expected, huh.”

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Akira looked like he had given up this time for sure and was about to return back outside. But right when he was about to go, Alpha suddenly called out to him while smiling.

“It did work, I found something. Although, it might be a little different than what you are expecting.”

Even inside that completely dark room, Akira could see Alpha clearly. After all, she was actually some kind of image data that was displayed directly into Akira's vision, thus her image was not affected by the brightness in the place. In the next moment, the room which had nothing but Alpha and darkness was projected as a black and white image into Akira's vision.

"I've expanded your vision, this is an image made from the data gathered through the information gathering device. Although it has no colour, it should be enough, right?"

In his vision, Akira could clearly see Alpha who was bursting with colours inside that black and white world. It was weird for him to see how only a small part of his view was coloured.

"…Well, it's true that I can see better now. So, what did you find?"

Alpha then pointed her finger to the floor. When Akira shifted his gaze there, he could see a circle with something that looked like a footprint in the centre of it.

"It's painted using fluorescent material. Although it's painted with such material so that it's easy to see, but since we're in total darkness and there's a limit on how sensitive the information gathering device can be, it's still rather hard to notice its glow."

"…Is it telling me to stand there? Who painted such a thing in this basement? Is it a cultural thing from the old world?"

"I don't know that far. There's nothing like this in my knowledge about the old world."

"Well, since we did find it, I guess I'll try to stand on it."

As Akira stood on the place that was painted on the floor, suddenly, a girl in a maid uniform appeared out of nowhere inside that basement where there should not be anyone else other than Akira and Alpha. But even so, Akira was only a little surprised, after all, his first meeting with Alpha was far

more surprising. As he thought that it was one of Alpha's jokes, he quickly shifted his gaze to Alpha.

But Alpha reacted as if she had nothing to do about it at all.

"So, it's nothing, huh? Akira?"

"Alpha, what kind of joke is this now?"

"Joke? What are you talking about?"

Akira glared at Alpha, but it seemed that she genuinely did not know what he was talking about.

"What do you mean by 'what'? That girl in front of me-"

Before Akira was even able to finish his sentence, Alpha suddenly took control of his augmented suit and forcefully pulled him away from where he was standing.

"Whoah, what was that for?!"

It was really out of the blue when Alpha suddenly moved his augmented suit. Thus Akira could not follow its movement and his body was subjected to intense stress which left his body in stinging pain after that. He looked annoyed because of her sudden move and his pain as he glared at Alpha.

But Alpha looked back at Akira with a stern worried face as if his annoyed glare was invisible.

"Do you have any headache?! Do you feel like puking at all?! Do you feel dizzy?! Can you clearly hear my voice?! Can you clearly see me?!"

Akira was taken aback by that barrage of questions.

"I-I'm okay. I don't feel any headache, I don't feel like puking, and my mind is clear. Only that my body is feeling stinging pain."

"I see, thank goodness."

Alpha let out a sigh of relief as she smiled at Akira.

“Akira. Can you still see the person that you saw just now?”

Akira shifted his gaze to where that maid girl was standing, but she had completely vanished.

“…No, I can’t see her anymore. So, what was that exactly? Why were you so panicked?”

Alpha made a serious face as she started her explanation.

“Akira, I’ll explain it to you. You almost lost your life just now, you know.”

“L-lost my life? What do you mean?”

“There’s actually some kind of wireless receiver inside your brain. I’ve told you about this before, right? That’s the special power of the people who can connect to the old world domain, and someone tried to abuse that power just a moment ago that it might even kill you.”

Akira was taken aback when Alpha said that he almost got killed, she then continued her explanation.

The network of the old world facilities that were still connected and working even in this era was called the old world domain. Normally, people would need to use an old-world terminal relic in order to connect to the old world domain.

But among the people of the eastern district, there was a very rare type of people who could do that even without using any special relics. These people were known as the people who were connected to the old world domain.

“…So basically, you’re someone who is connected to the old world domain. I know that you don’t recognize it yourself, but the reason why you can see me or receive my support is because you’re connected to the old world domain.”

Akira was both surprised and puzzled.

“So then, how is it connected to why I almost got killed just now? Even if what I saw just now was something that only people who are connected to the old world can see, that doesn’t explain why that would kill me, right? If I’m going to die because I see one, then I should’ve been already dead after seeing you so many times, right?”

“Everyone who is connected to the old world has a different threshold of how much information and what type of information he or she can process. And in your case, fortunately enough, you have a high level of compatibility with me. The person that you just saw might be someone from the old world domain. People of the old world used to get help from those entities with no corporeal bodies to expand their vision and sense of hearing or to provide them with other kinds of support. They might also exist as a part of a facility as a guide, to provide explanations about that facility. Some might even be sent to gather information or other kinds of jobs. I bet there were a lot of people who were connected to the old world domain during the old world era.”

“It sounds nothing but good things though, so, what’s so dangerous about them?”

“The person that you saw was invisible to me, so what kind of person was it?”

“It was a girl in a maid uniform. She didn’t look dangerous at all.”

“Well, they were originally not dangerous after all. The problem is that she was an entity from the old world, thus she was created for the people with old-world equipment. In short, they might be not compatible with the people of this era. But since you were able to see it, it meant that you could receive information sent by her without any trouble. Hypothetically speaking, if that girl was the manager of this mansion and asked you if you need any information about this mansion, then what would you answer?”

“Something like *okay, sure,* or maybe even *yes, please*.”

“You might be killed the moment you answer back with that, you see.”

“That’ll be enough to kill me?!!”

Akira was shocked by that unexpected answer, Alpha continued her explanation while giving him a warning.

“As I said, they might not be compatible with the people of this era. Thus she might send you all the information about the mansion into your brain in one go. She might even send the complete blueprint of this mansion down to its molecular level and that amount of data will be enormous. It would be fortunate if your brain filters it as noise and ignores it, but if you’re not lucky, the part of your brain that allows you to connect to the old world domain might try to receive all of that information, and that would likely leave you paralyzed for the rest of your life or even fry your brain and kill you. After all, there were people who were connected to the old world that met their ends just like that.”

Akira was completely shocked. It took sometime before he came back to his senses as he tried to calm himself down by taking a deep breath. Alpha just waited for him until he finished.

“Are you feeling better now?”

“Y-yeah… Alpha, about that question, what should I answer back if I’m asked?”

“Let’s see, I think you should say no in that case. Either that or you should request the information to be displayed in the simplest form so that you can process it through your vision, maybe something in the form of blurry images. Or you can also ask the information to be sent to your information terminal and then ask it to explain the details through that method. There are many methods that you can request so that it won’t overload your brain. But even so, I still can’t say that you’ll be safe for sure. It might be alright if they ask you for permission for every information that they will send, but there are cases where they don’t, you see.”

“…If I meet one like that, then what should I do? Can I do something about it?”

Akira’s face looked grim. It was because he was just told that he was someone who was connected to the old world domain. But there was a danger of sudden death that came with it and there was no way to avoid that sudden death.

Alpha suddenly started talking in a monotonous voice with an expressionless face. It was completely different compared to her usual self.

“Are you sure you want to allow downloading information from the old world domain through this unit, Alpha, in order to avoid harming the subject, Akira? To be more precise, the downloaded information will contain the following topic. First-”

Akira remembered something similar had happened to him before, thus he swiftly answered back without waiting for Alpha to finish.

“You have my permission.”

“Permission confirmed… Well, this will do the trick.”

As Alpha’s voice and demeanour turned back to normal, Akira felt a bit of relief.

“That was the same thing, right? Something like you needed my permission for stuff, right?”

“Yep.”

“The reason why you didn’t do that back then was because you didn’t have the permission to ask for the same, huh?”

“That’s correct. Although I got your permission to help you with all kinds of support, this wasn’t included in that permission.”

“Will this happen again in the future?”

“Of course, there are still a lot of things that I need to ask for your permission. But it’s not like I can tell you all the details, but you do know the reason, right?”

“Yeah. Because that’ll take 100 years of oral explanation and you don’t have the permission to ask for the same, right?”

“It’s great that you’re a smart boy.”

Alpha smiled at Akira and he returned with a bitter smile. Deep down, he felt relieved now that he was at least safe from that sudden death.

Akira then turned off his flashlight once more and stood on that place again. The room was immediately filled with colours as the maid girl from before appeared again.

That beautiful girl was smiling gently at Akira. The black and white maid uniform focused more on beauty rather than functionality. It was made of very beautiful fabric and it had an elaborate design all the way up to her neck. Her black shoes were peeking out from her long skirt and both her hands were enveloped in snow white gloves. The ribbon that she used to tie her hair was extremely long. She was floating above the ground ignoring the gravity.

Akira knew that the thing he was seeing was not real, it was just like Alpha. He was looking at that maid girl full of curiosity.

“Alpha, you can’t see her, huh?”

“It’s okay, because of the permission that you just gave, I can see her just fine now. But it’s not like we know for sure if she can see me or not. So be careful.”

“Alright. But that means to her I might look like I’m just talking to myself, right?”

“That is if she can also see you. If it’s only a video data, then it’s the same as those holographic human-type signboards.”

“Now that I think about it, she’s not moving at all. Uhmm, can you hear me?”

When Akira spoke to her, the maid girl bowed politely and gracefully.

“Nice to meet you. Are you here to register yourself as a new user?”

Akira did not understand what she was talking about. But he remembered what Alpha just told him not too long ago, so he decided to refuse it for now.

“No. I just want to ask you some questions…”

“Very well, we’ll be waiting for your next visit.”

That maid girl bowed gracefully once more to Akira before vanishing completely.

“…What in the world was that?”

“It has no real body, it could react when you talk to it, and it vanishes if you refuse its offer. Try to step out from there and then step back in again, but this time try to be more positive and ask for an explanation from her.”

“I guess I’ll try that.”

Akira took a step out of the circle before stepping back in. That maid girl immediately appeared in front of him again.

“I want to ask you something.”

As Akira tried to talk to her again, the maid girl gracefully bowed just like before and said.

“Nice to meet you. Are you here to register yourself as a new user?”

“We need some information first before we can decide about that. So we have some questions we want to ask if it’s okay with you?”

Alpha suddenly interjected, but the maid girl did not respond at all.

“It didn’t work. Akira, take your information terminal out.”

After Akira took out his information terminal, Alpha’s voice then came out from the terminal.

“We want to think about it first, so, is it possible to send your information to this terminal?”

Alpha said that not through telepathy but from the information terminal as her voice echoed inside the basement. But the maid girl still did not respond back.

“Even this doesn’t work, huh? Akira, you go ahead and try asking it.”

“I want you to send your information to this terminal, is that possible?”

The maid girl finally reacted.

“Certainly. Thank you very much for considering using our product.”

Akira then looked at his information terminal, but nothing happened. Alpha also confirmed the same.

“There’s nothing in the terminal. Unfortunately, it seems that the data is sent in a format that this terminal can’t receive. So let’s just give up and go back home.”

“Is there anything else that I can try?”

“We can try to download the data to the terminal through you. Since you can see it, it means that you can receive information broadcasted by that maid girl. But as I explained before, it’s an extremely dangerous thing. I’ll try my best to keep you safe, but I still can’t guarantee your safety. So what will you do?”

Akira hesitated before answering.

“…Let’s do that. It will bother me if we give up and return back without understanding anything like this, not to mention that facing danger is quite normal in this line of work.”

“Alright then. Be sure to tell her to only transfer the data bit by bit, okay? If you feel nauseous, quickly step away from that place. I think the data transfer will stop if you step away from where you’re standing now.”

Akira made his resolve and said.

“…Send the information to me rather than to my information terminal, but do it in small amounts.”

The maid girl bowed politely.

“Certainly. Sending the information now.”

Akira prepared himself to step away from that place in case anything bad happened. But unlike what he expected, he felt nothing at all. He did not feel nauseous nor any headache at all, and his mind and vision were still clear like usual.

“Akira, it’s finished, it’s alright now.”

“That was fast. I was so prepared but I didn’t feel anything, you know?”

“I intercepted and received the data straight to me without passing it through you. The amount of information that went through you was kept to a minimum. To make it simple, I immediately took over the line after you exchanged address and established a connection with that maid girl.”

“I see. So in the end, what exactly was that girl? Not to mention that she already vanished too.”

“It’ll take a long time to explain everything. Let’s just go back home for now. Although it’s not like it can be exchanged for money right away, we have received good results for today. That was rather an unexpected result since we originally came here just to test the information gathering device.”

“Is that so? Well, I guess it’s fine for now. You can explain it to me later.”

Akira agreed with her and decided to end his exploration. And since his bike was alright, he did not have to go back home on foot.

Silavin: Hmm… was hoping there was a second Alpha. That would be an interesting development.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 38, A Help Request for Temporary Base Construction

Index

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Akira was talking with Alpha about what happened back in the Higaraka Residence Ruin while doing maintenance for his guns inside his room.

“So, what exactly was that girl?”

“It seems to be some kind of holographic worker from a company. I think there’s some kind of device inside that basement that connects it to the old world domain. But judging from the fact that you had to stand on a certain location to activate it and its limited connectivity, I believe that the device is unusable for the general public.”

Akira was puzzled.

“…Worker, huh? But they’re only holograms, right?”

“In this world, there are various types of work that would open up if you can see and accept their existence.”

“Is that so?”

“Yep, it is. If you want proof, you’re seeing one right now.”

Alpha then smiled and pointed at herself. Akira immediately understood her point and nodded.

“You’re right.”

Inside the secret room in the basement of that mansion, he clearly saw a maid girl appear out of nowhere, though it was only an image. But Akira, who was lacking in knowledge about that subject completely ignored the fact, or more like, he did not notice that fact at all.

Alpha also did not tell everything to Akira. If he showed some sort of reaction to that maid girl, Alpha might start putting on a maid uniform from tomorrow, but that did not happen.

Alpha then continued.

“Akira, I’ll at least warn you about this, don’t tell anyone about the device inside that basement which can connect to the old world. And don’t ever think of taking and selling it, okay?”

“Why? Isn’t that an important device? It might earn me a lot of money, you know?”

Alpha made a serious face as she strongly warned Akira.

“Don’t do that no matter what.”

Akira was surprised when his simple question was answered with a firm warning. But looking at Alpha’s expression, he understood that there was definitely a valid reason for it.

“Alright, I won’t tell anyone and I won’t try selling it. But can you at least tell me the reason why?”

“Anything that can help you access the old world domain is a highly valuable object. Because of that, they might ask you how and where you got it. And so there’s a chance they might discover that you’re someone who is

connected to the old world domain from your answers to those questions. I thought that such a thing would be unlikely to happen if you don't know that you are someone who is connected to the old world, and that is why I didn't tell you up until now. But now that you know, you have to keep it a secret no matter what. If someone discovers it, you'll die a painful death."

After that, Alpha explained to Akira the dangers of being someone who was connected to the old world domain. In the worst-case scenario, people would keep him alive as a test subject for all kinds of experiments, and even if he died, people would carefully remove and dissect his brain. Akira's face turned pale when he heard that.

"…To be honest, I would choose to not know it if I had the choice. Wait, no, I guess it's better now that I know, right? Wait, screw that, it's better if I don't know!"

"It is actually pretty safe if you keep it a secret, you see. I'll also give my support too. And not to mention that there are people who keep lying by saying that they are connected to the old world domain. So I think it's going to be alright as long as you're careful."

"I don't understand why people would lie about being one of them?"

"The connected people tend to be very effective in analyzing information. So there are people who want to market their name as a skilled hacker by lying so. Although, I think the real connected people would never do something like that."

Akira let out a big long sigh as he hung his head. He looked depressed for about 10 seconds before he suddenly raised his face.

"Alright then! It's because I'm connected to the old world that I was able to meet Alpha and survive up until now!! I'm a lucky boy!! That's my take of the situation!!"

Akira said that out loud in order to convince himself. After that, he looked way more positive and enthusiastic than before. Although it looked a bit forced, he just pushed it out with pure determination.

Alpha smiled as she watched Akira.

“Akira, it’s a good thing that you got over the shock so fast, but your voice was too loud. It’s okay for now, but it’ll be bad if someone heard that, you know? So be more careful in future.”

Akira who just got back on his senses trembled as he asked Alpha.

“…T-that was really dangerous. B-but it was okay, r-right?”

“It’s alright. No one should have heard that and I don’t detect any eavesdropping tool. I’ve checked everything, so don’t worry.”

Akira let out a sigh of relief. Judging from it, Alpha knew that he understood the seriousness of his situation as she smiled in satisfaction.

“Now then. Let’s just stop talking about scary stuff here and talk about our today’s result.”

Alpha then started explaining about the result from today’s exploration.

The maid girl that Akira saw was from a hologram worker company that was advertising its service through the old world domain. It showed that even now some of the relics of the current era were still connected with the old world facilities. Any facilities that could be accessed through relics were of great importance to the people of the eastern district. After all, they would allow them to extract knowledge, technology and products of the old world from such a facility.

Anything that allowed access to the old world domain was regarded as an invaluable object in the eastern district. There was no mistaking that selling it to the Hunter Office or to the Corporate Government would earn you a huge amount of money.

Akira also understood its worth from hearing Alpha’s explanation. But he did not think that it would give him any kind of profit.

“…I understand that it was a great find, but I don’t see how that would earn us any profit though. After all, if I tell anyone about that place or that

device, they might notice that I’m connected to the old world, and that would be really bad, right?”

“There are plenty of ways on how to safely use our findings. That device was connected to the Lion Steel Corp, although it was an old-world corporation that had ceased to exist, it still has facilities that are active even now. It seems that the Lion Steel Corp sold their service through information terminals installed at different places and I was able to extract the locations of these terminals and the branch offices owned by the corporation.”

Now that Akira could see clearly how it would benefit him, Akira looked less tense.

“…I see. So we’re going to look for relics in those places, right?”

“Yep, that’s it. Of course, these locations are in the old world ruins. If the other Hunters haven’t found them yet, you might be able to find a huge amount of relics there.”

“Nice!! Let’s go then!!”

“Stop there, at least wait until you have a vehicle specialized for exploring the wasteland. Since you will need to go to a faraway ruin, it would be dangerous to go on a bike, not to mention, it would be hard to bring back home all the relics that you might find with a bike.”

“So I still need to wait, huh. But well, it’s better now that I have a clear goal in mind. I guess I’ll work hard so that I can get a vehicle soon.”

If he could find an unexplored ruin, he would be able to find a pile of relics that no one had ever touched before. Akira was excited by that possibility as he was doing his gun maintenance in a good mood.

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Akira was on a bus that was heading to the Kuzusuhara ruin. There were a lot of other Hunters inside the bus, some of them were amateur Hunters like

him, while some of them were radiating the aura of a veteran Hunter. All of them were on the same request from the Hunter Office.

The Kugamayama city management decided to build a frontline base in order to effectively explore the deeper part of the Kuzusuhara ruin. They first planned to build a base near the outskirts of the Kuzusuhara ruin before constructing the communication line into the deeper part of the ruin.

As the construction of the base went underway, they would also use the heavy equipment to remove the wreckages that blocked the way to the deeper part of the ruin. Once the wreckages were removed, it would open a way to send in transport vehicles and tanks. Of course, the monsters roaming inside the deeper part of the ruin were powerful monsters, but if they could send in tanks and humanoid soldiers, it would help them fight against those monsters and carry relics that were difficult for the normal people.

Exploring a ruin would accelerate the development of a city and bring profit to that city. That was why they would do all of these preparations for exploring a ruin.

The request that Akira took was to help protect the construction of the said base. It basically consisted of protecting the workers and securing the area. After all, constructing a base was not Hunter’s job.

Akira was listening to the explanation given to the Hunters inside a temporary base. After that, the hunters would be assigned to their jobs depending on their ability and interest.

The staff distributed rental terminals for the work and explained how to use them.

“We’ll give our instructions through this terminal. This terminal also contains a transmitter so you can check the other Hunter’s whereabouts if you open them from the terminal. So be careful not to mistake another Hunter as a monster and shoot each other. And also, although we’re in a ruin, refrain from searching for relics. I won’t tell you as far as to not take any relics that you accidentally find, but we’re not here to gather relics. We

would be in trouble if you guys focus more on searching for relics, and don’t forget that we always track your location too. So make sure not to stand in the same location for a long period of time or do anything that might cause suspicion. Finally, there should be a number behind the terminal, we will call you based on that number, so be sure to check that too. That’s all. You may go to the ruins once you finish your preparation, you just need to follow the map’s navigation in the terminal.”

Akira then turned his terminal over and checked his number. Akira and Alpha immediately smiled bitterly the moment they saw the number.

“It seems that this number is really fond of me.”

“…You’re right.”

The number taped behind his terminal was 14.

As Akira followed the navigation from the terminal, he arrived at an opening surrounded by countless crumbling buildings. He then pulled out his terminal to answer a phone call from the Hunter Office staff.

“This is A2 division HQ. Number 14, can you hear me?”

“This is number 14, I can hear you.”

“Take control of the building in front of you. Explore and make a map of that building, don’t forget to take out any monsters that you find. The terminal has an auto-mapping function, so you just need to check all the rooms inside that building. There’s also a good chance that if you leave corpses of dead monsters, they might attract other monsters, I know it’s a pain in the ass, but carry them all the way to the building entrance.”

“What if they’re too big or too heavy for me to carry?”

“In that case, let us know and we’ll send a special team to help you.”

“Roger that.”

Akira then ended the call and went inside the building in front of him, but Alpha suddenly stopped him.

“Wait, this is a good chance for exploration training, so let’s do that too.”

“But, won’t it make me slower?”

“That’s why you would have to do this carefully but not too slowly. If you don’t have that much level of skill, you won’t be able to survive in a colourless mist, you know? After all, my detection ability reduces inside the colourless mist. So you would have to rely on your own skills when that happens. We can use this chance to prepare for such a situation.”

Exploring without Alpha’s detection ability and support from an information-gathering device would be a nightmare for a beginner like Akira. Thus he could not help but frown at that possibility.

“…The colourless mist, huh? Alright, tell me how to do this.”

Akira made his resolve and entered the building.

Akira started exploring the ruin from the first floor. Some of the floors in that building were covered in dust while some of them were not. It was because of the Hunters who had searched the building and the monsters which roamed inside it. He noticed that some walls inside the building were already crumbled.

Akira proceeded carefully as he tried to walk without making any sounds. He explored the building by moving from one cover to another. He would stop from time to time to listen to his surroundings. He then readied his gun as he quickly slipped into a room. He was exploring the abandoned building as if he was stepping into a monster’s nest. While doing so, he regularly received warnings from Alpha, so he would quickly correct the way he moved every time Alpha warned him. Because of that, Akira moved slowly but was surely improving.

Akira finally finished exploring the first floor. And of course, it took him longer than usual.

“I know that it’s to be expected, but I did take a lot of time. I can see now why they told the Hunters not to go looking for relics.”

“It’s an important skill for a Hunter to be able to safely and quickly explore an area. And the only way to learn it is to train and improve your ability bit by bit. Especially when you’re facing a monster with camouflaging ability.”

“Camouflaging ability?”

“It’s an ability that would let monsters stay undetected. There are some monsters that have optical camouflage skin or armour. They can become one with their surroundings or stay undetected in the shadows.”

“…Those optical camouflaged monsters, how can I detect them?”

“There are actually a lot of methods to detect them, you can look for optical anomalies or analyze the surrounding sounds. An advanced information gathering device or someone who specialized in information analysis would be able to detect them without any problem. It would allow you to evade needless fighting or to get the first shot in case you want to kill them, so you can safely and quickly search for relics.”

“That sounds like Elena-san’s duty. I’m sure Elena-san is very skilled in it.”

“Yep, that’s true. But even the skilled Elena-san will have trouble inside the colourless mist. After all, the colourless mist would render the information gathering device useless.”

Akira remembered about the time when he saved Elena and Sara. At that time, the colourless mist did not affect him much thanks to Alpha’s support. While on the other hand, the guys who ambushed Elena and Sara could not detect Akira at all due to the colourless mist.

“The colourless mist is really dangerous. Is there any way to cope with it?”

“You can buy advanced information gathering devices that could still barely work inside a colourless mist. But I heard that it’s very expensive and it’s less powerful compared to a normal information gathering device at the

same price. Other than that, you can instead rely on your exploration skill rather than relying on your information gathering device. So there you have it, that's why you better work hard from now on, okay?"

"Roger that. Next is the second floor… By the way, how many floors are in this building?"

"8 floors."

"…I still have a long way to go now."

Akira mumbled as he proceeded to the second floor.

It took about 3 hours for Akira to finish exploring the whole building. After that, Akira went to the rooftop and took a break. But suddenly he heard cannons from faraway. It was coming from Hunters who were fighting some monsters. Akira did not find any monster in the building because of pure luck.

Suddenly his terminal rang again.

"This is A2 division HQ. Number 14, can you hear me? Tell me about your situation there."

"This is number 14. I just finished taking control of the building."

"Confirmed. Follow the navigation in your terminal and move to the next building. Now then, number 14, you took more time than we expected for taking control of that building. Did you meet a powerful monster or was there any other unexpected situation?"

"I didn't meet any monster at all. It's just that I searched all rooms carefully, I think that's why I took more time than usual… How long is your approximate time by the way?"

"We approximated that it should take you only about 1 hour. I won't tell you to rush things up, but do it faster next time. That's all."

"…Roger that."

Akira ended the call. He was a bit depressed after being told that he was less skilled than expected. Looking at that, Alpha just smiled trying to cheer him up.

“Don’t worry about that, let’s just continue like this. There’s no reason to get yourself in more danger just to rush things up.”

“But what if it causes me to fail this request?”

“It doesn’t really matter. It’s way better rather than getting injured badly. Your safety is number one priority. So if you try to rush your exploration, I’ll force you to stop, you know.”

Since Alpha told him firmly like that, Akira cheered up feeling lighter.

“You’re right, I understand. Let’s continue carefully.”

“Yep, that’s good. But you need to remember that you have to enhance your detection and stealth abilities as soon as possible, you know? So you need to hurry up to improve in that aspect.”

“…Please be gentle on me.”

“Nope, I’ll work you hard.”

Akira and Alpha smiled as they exchanged jokes. He then changed his gear and headed to the next building.

Akira took control of so many other abandoned buildings after that. Eventually, his navigation map led him back to the temporary base. So he went back and gave his terminal back to one of the staff there. With that, his job for today was finished.

Akira felt tired as he let out a sigh, though, he was not tired to the level of exhaustion. He only met some monsters during his exploration and his augmented suit greatly reduced the stress on his body, but it did not help in reducing his mental stress at all.

“This will be all for my today’s request, huh…? I’m tired. As I thought, since I always rely on your support during my exploration, it’s really tiring when I do it myself.”

Alpha smiled and complemented Akira.

“You did very well. Let’s take a rest for now. Since we’re here, how about we look for something to eat? After all, you’ll only get to eat that frozen food if you’re back in your room, right?”

The construction site was surrounded by many trailers, they were owned by the merchants who were selling their stuff for the Hunters and the workers from Kugamayama city.

There was a bus in the construction site that travelled regularly from here to Kugamayama city. But since it took time to go back and forth, these merchants catered to the Hunters who wanted to get ammo refills and food but did not want to take the bus.

Some of them sold ammo and guns, some sold food. There were even some renting their camping trailer as a portable inn. The construction area was bustling with people.

Seeing how the Hunters were eating soft and warm food rather than their usual hard Hunter ration, Akira felt hungry out of nowhere.

“You’re right, I guess I’ll buy something to eat too.”

Although Akira went and browsed the trailers, he did not know which food was tasty and which one was not. He felt like he would end up picking up something bad if he just chose randomly, so he observed other Hunters. Although there was no queue close to him, he spotted a relatively long queue nearby.

After adding himself in that queue, Akira peeked at the price and the food that the trailer was selling. It was a hot sandwich, 980 Aurum per portion. With Akira’s sense of money in his current situation, he felt it was quite

costly for a meal. But it would not feel right if he just left after lining up, so he ended up deciding to buy the hot sandwich.

As Akira's turn was about to come, he heard a familiar voice coming from the transaction between the seller and the buyer in front of him. Akira tried to remember whose voice it was, but before he could come up with any conclusion, his turn came and he stepped forward. He immediately realized that it was Sheryl.

Sheryl looked surprised for a moment, but she quickly returned back to her usual smile.

"Welcome. The hot sandwich is 980 Aurum per portion."

"…I'll take one, please."

"Certainly. If you are going to pay with card, please place your card over the terminal."

Sheryl operated the terminal at the counter. The upper part of the counter showed 980 Aurum, as Akira put his Hunter ID on it, it made a beep sound and the payment was completed.

Sheryl then took a warped hot sandwich and gave it to Akira, but as she handed it over, she leaned towards him and said.

"I'm happy to see you here."

Sheryl indeed sounded very happy when she said that, but she returned back to her normal smile almost immediately after.

"Thank you very much, please do come again."

Sheryl then smiled at Akira with a smile that she directed towards other customers.

After Akira left that trailer, he quickly noticed that Katsuragi's trailer was also present.

Katsuragi spotted Akira who was standing not too far from Sheryl's shop.

"Akira! So you're here too, huh?! Good timing! I have something to talk about, come in! Darris!! Watch the shop for a bit!!"

Darris' voice echoed from inside the trailer.

"Your break is still later, you know!!"

"Akira is here!! There's something I want to talk to him about!! So just watch the shop while I'm gone!!"

Darris appeared out from inside the trailer while looking annoyed. But the moment he saw Akira, he was taken aback by Akira's equipment. Akira looked completely different compared to the boy that he met not too long ago.

Darris looked at Akira's equipment and understood what Katsuragi meant when he said he had something important to talk about with Akira that he would even ask him to watch the shop. Thus he went to watch the shop without complaining any further.

Katsuragi went into his trailer with Akira. He and Akira then sat on a table together, Sheryl was there too. She had also left the shop to one of her subordinates. There were 3 hot sandwiches served on the table.

Akira and Katsuragi looked a bit troubled while Sheryl was smiling very happily since she was able to meet Akira again.

Akira and Katsuragi looked at each other and noticed both of them looked a bit worried about Sheryl's behaviour.

"So then, Katsuragi, what do you want to talk about?"

"Well, it's not something that big. I just wanted to know how you are doing lately. To be honest, I'm just wondering why you haven't brought any relics since that time. I thought you were injured or something so you couldn't do any Hunter job. But since you're here, it means that it's not the case, right?"

“I’m focusing more on taking monster-hunting requests lately. I do hunt for relics in the Kuzusuhara ruin usually, but I’m sure that you know it’s not the right time for that, right?”

“Well, it’s true that it’s not a good idea to explore Kuzusuhara ruin in the current situation. I heard that the distribution of monsters in the ruin changed greatly after that battle and strong monsters started roaming the outskirts of the ruin. And since there’s no expensive relics left in the outskirts, I guess it isn’t worth the danger, huh. But on the other hand, I heard that battle greatly culled the number of monsters. So this is a good chance if you want to grab some relics from the deeper part of the other ruins, right? Isn’t that the reason why the manager of the city would even spend a huge amount of money to build the frontline base like this?”

“It’s kind of difficult to go to the other ruins since I don’t have the means of transport. I can’t rent a vehicle with my current Hunter Rank, you see.”

Katsuragi took another look at Akira’s equipment. An augmented suit, AAH assault rifle, CWH anti-material rifle and an information-gathering device. Akira did not look like someone who would have a problem with transportation.

“…You have pretty good equipment though. I don’t think anyone would refuse a Hunter like you if you want to rent a vehicle for your Hunter job, you know?”

“It’s because I’m selling my relics to you, so my Hunter Rank doesn’t go up much. I only got the augmented suit from the money that I earned back then, and for my information gathering device, Elena-san was nice enough to sell it for cheap to me. I put all of my money into my equipment, that’s why I don’t have much left, and not to mention I need money to rent a vehicle after I get my Hunter Rank high enough. It’s because I promised to sell my relics to you, I have to do monster-hunting jobs to increase my Hunter Rank now. So there you have it, I can’t do much even if you say that to me.”

“Well, it can’t be helped if that’s the case.”

“Just wait for a bit more. It’s not like you’re in trouble just because I’m not bringing any relics to you, right?”

“Well, yeah.”

Katsuragi actually just wanted to make sure whether Akira had abandoned Sheryl or not since Akira did not bring any relics to him lately.

Akira then shifted his gaze to Sheryl and she smiled happily at him.

“So then, Sheryl, what are you doing in this place?”

“I’m managing the children from the gang who are working for Katsuragi-san. And I’m also managing a simple shop with help from Katsuragi-san. That hot sandwich was made by us, you see. This is also thanks to Akira, so thank you.”

Katsuragi then added some more explanation.

“I’m basically just doing my part of the deal with you. I’ve also offered Sheryl and her gang some jobs like helping us load goods or stuff like that to help them earn some money.”

Katsuragi pointed at some children who were moving his goods around when he said that. All of them were the children from Sheryl’s gang.

“I still buy metal wreckages from them, but at least this work should earn them a bit more compared to that. You do know what to do if you want me to give them a better job, right?”

“I know, I’ll sell relics that I find to you.”

“Well, I’m looking forward to that.”

Katsuragi finished the hot sandwich that he had been eating while talking.

“…That wasn’t enough. Sheryl, bring me one more.”

“Of course. Akira, how about you?”

“You should contribute to their sale too. Although you say that you don’t have much money, you at least have enough money for another sandwich, right?”

Akira had finished his own sandwich too, and since he also felt that he was not satiated, he decided to ask for one more. He then gave his Hunter ID to Sheryl while telling her to bring one more sandwich, so she went to process the payment.

When Sheryl left Katsuragi alone with Akira, Katsuragi suddenly asked Akira while making a puzzled look.

“…Say, Akira. Did you do something to her?”

Akira shook his head.

“When I noticed it, she was already like that… As I thought, it’s weird, isn’t it?”

“She’s completely different now compared to the first time I met her. I would even believe you if you say that she’s Sheryl’s twin, you know. Well, the current Sheryl is better as a business partner though. She’s good at handling people and she’s pretty smart as well. That hot sandwich was originally her plan, you see. And it’s selling pretty well too.”

“So that’s not your shop, huh?”

“Nope. I want to attain success by staying in my field of expertise, you see. So I have no plans to do any food business. Although I helped her to get that shop running, that shop is Sheryl’s own.”

“Is she going to be okay?”

“Hm? I’m the one who procured the ingredients. I’ve told her to make sure that the children who would help her are bathed and cleaned properly. I prepared them cheap but clean clothes and told them to properly use the food-grade disposable plastic gloves too. Moreover, they basically just need to heat up stuff and put sauces on it. So they should be okay.”

Akira thought that Katsuragi would make him pay and take care of the aftermath if anything bad happened to Sheryl's shop, that was why he wanted to make sure the possibility of any trouble happening later was low and it was not like he was concerned about its hygiene. But since Katsuragi answered back with that, Akira thought that it did not seem there would be any trouble later anyway, thus he decided not to try digging deeper into the subject.

Sheryl came back with the extra hot sandwiches and placed them on the table. Akira took a second look at the hot sandwich that he just received. It had a thick sauce and the bread was soaked in the meat juice as if it would not even let a drop of that goodness to getaway. The meat was pretty thick and had a good texture when he bit on it. Strangely enough, it did not feel rough despite its appearance. But it was not strange enough that it warranted a complaint.

If someone asked him whether it was good or bad, Akira would answer back that it was a delicious sandwich. But if asked whether he would spend 1000 Aurum daily to eat that sandwich, Akira would hesitate to say yes. After all, the sandwich's price was not affordable in a normal situation, it was only acceptable because they were in the middle of the wasteland.

But for the Hunters who were in that area for the construction help request, they did not mind paying such an amount for that sandwich. There were even people who would gladly pay for another portion after feeling that one sandwich was not enough. The price and the size of each portion of that hot sandwich were actually tuned very well to match the demand in such a situation.

Akira then asked Sheryl.

"Who decided on the price of this hot sandwich? Was it Katsuragi?"

"No, I did… Is it not a good price?"

Sheryl enquired, sounding a bit worried, but Akira replied as he shook his head.

“Nope, it’s good and I think that the price is acceptable for food in the middle of the wasteland.”

“I’m glad that you find it satisfying.”

Sheryl smiled with relief. Katsuragi then added while smiling.

“Well, it’s basically the wasteland price. It’s because an extra price is added since we took the trouble in bringing them all the way to this dangerous wasteland. So I hope people would not get offended by its price.”

“About that though, did you teach it to Sheryl?”

“Nope, I only helped her procure the ingredients and the equipment. I didn’t tell her anything about how to run her business. I only did what she asked me to do… Don’t take this wrongly though. I have no plan pushing it to you if it fails, you know? I’m serious here, okay?”

Katsuragi mixed his joke when he said that, but it could also be interpreted as a subtle warning. He was making excuses for something that Akira did not ask about. But Akira just simply ignored it and instead he shifted his gaze to Sheryl and looked genuinely impressed by her.

“…I see. That’s pretty amazing of you.”

Sheryl blushed as she smiled happily.

“Thank you very much. But it’s all thanks to Akira and Katsuragi-san too.”

Akira and Katsuragi looked at each other, although he could not talk telepathically with Katsuragi, he understood what Katsuragi wanted to say to him. Katsuragi was really questioning whether Akira really had not done anything to Sheryl.

The stare that Akira directed to Katsuragi was saying that he really did nothing. But it was rather doubtful whether his thoughts were properly conveyed to Katsuragi or not.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 39, Yarata Scorpion

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Akira was on his bike, heading to the Kuzusuhara ruin. His face looked grim as he was rushing due to the bad situation he was in.

Alpha, who was flying parallel to him, gave him more information but it only caused his face to turn grimmer.

“Akira, you’ve got another rescue order. This is already the third order.”

“Another one, huh!! I haven’t even arrived at my next destination, you know!? Isn’t that just a bit too many?!!”

“Even if you tell me so, I can’t do anything about it. Let’s just look forward to the reward that we can get from all the monsters that you’re going to hunt today… Since it’s not a normal rescue request, they might even pay you back in the form of Hunter Rank points.”

Akira could not help but make a face saying that he so did not want that to happen.

“Seriously though, I don’t want to lose money after working this hard, you know!?”

Akira, who once again took forward base construction help requests, was assigned to rescue other Hunters rather than taking control of buildings like the last time. It was because he took too long taking control of buildings yesterday that he was assigned for another job today.

The rescue job was a very tiring job. Although he did not have to do much for each order, the rescue orders kept flooding in like crazy.

Akira was planning to do his job seriously. After all, it would not be a laughing matter if he got scolded since he took too long during yesterday's request and failed miserably in today's request. Thus he sped his bike as fast as he could to the next location.

The ruin was filled with all sizes of debris and wreckages. With the help of Alpha's superb control support, Akira would blaze through them, evading them left and right, and sometimes even jumped above them as he was closing in onto his destination.

He got to face all kinds of situations during his job. Sometimes the people in the site already took control of the situation when he arrived, some other time, the monsters had already died when he arrived, and sometimes the rescue request dispatcher had already escaped from the scene after requesting for a rescue, thus leaving the monster for Akira to take care of.

Akira worked really hard and somehow was able to take care of all of the orders until finally, his remaining order came down to only 1.

After he took care of the monsters in one of his orders, Akira could be seen exiting a building while breathing roughly and looking very tired. He then took out medicine that he bought from Shizuka's shop and gulped it down. Although it was just some cheap medicine, it should at least be able to help him recover from the exhaustion.

Akira managed to grumble.

"…It doesn't feel like it actually works."

“You can’t compare these with the medicines which you gathered from the ruins, you know. Both their potency and price are so different. You can try to take a huge dose of this medicine to see its immediate effect, but that would need you to consume a huge load of it, you know?”

“I guess this is why most Hunters become dependent on medicines.”

There were all types and kinds of drugs for Hunters sold in the eastern district, this medicine was one of them. There were Hunters who consumed a huge load of medicines daily. Bad medicines could cause bad side effects or bad after effect. But the Hunters were desperate to survive to see the next day, so they had no other choice but to consume a huge amount of medicine daily.

“The next order will be a good place to stop for a while. Once you’re done with it, let’s take a rest for a bit, you can just say that you need an ammo refill at HQ.”

“What should we do if they say no?”

“Like I said before, my first priority is your safety. So I have no plan letting you continue fighting monsters without getting an ammo refill.”

“…You’re right. Alright then, let’s go and finish the next rescue order.”

If Alpha got angry and refused to help Akira in this request, then it would be disastrous for him. He used that as an excuse and decided that he would take a rest after finishing his next rescue order. He felt more at ease with that reasoning and that was all according to her plan.

Akira arrived in front of an abandoned building which was the location for his final rescue order. As he parked his bike in front of the building and looked up, he could hear gunshots and explosions coming from the 5th floor of that building.

“Over there, huh?”

“It’s good that they’re still alive. It seems that they’re having a hard fight up there. Let’s go before they run out of ammo. I’ll provide you with the route.”

“I’m counting on you.”

“Just leave it to me.”

Akira could see the indicator within his enhanced vision, he ran and followed the route shown by the indicator as he charged into the building. The guiding line for the route was calculated by Alpha, it showed the shortest and safest route to Akira’s destination; after she scanned the area for monsters. Akira knew that it was why he felt at ease as he blazed through an area where he normally should move carefully and slowly because of the monsters that might be lurking around.

Akira could see the aftermath of battles between Hunters and monsters scattered inside the building. At the moment, he did not see any Hunter corpses, while on the other hand, he found a lot of biological monsters’ dead bodies as blood and flesh were scattered around.

Akira took a glance at the monster corpses that were still retaining their original form. They looked like a mix of spider and scorpion with an exoskeleton.

This so-called Yarata Scorpion had a habit of attaching objects from its surroundings onto its exoskeleton. Thus they were able to become one with its surroundings and camouflage itself.

Their exoskeletons looked like metal wreckage or debris to Akira. There were countless bullet marks on their corpses, and the bullets that did not even penetrate their exoskeleton were left around these corpses. Those were a testament to their super hard exoskeleton.

Alpha then ordered Akira.

“Stop. Some of those Yarata scorpions are still alive. It will be dangerous if you go deeper without making sure that they’re dead. It’ll take too long if

you use AAH rifle, so use CWH anti-material rifle to finish them in one shot.”

“Roger that.”

Akira immediately stopped and readied his CWH anti-material rifle, but the Yarata scorpions did not move at all even after he did that. It was hard to discern whether they were really dead or not. Some could not move because of a fatal injury, while some might just be playing dead while waiting for their prey to come close enough.

Suddenly, Akira could see some of the Yarata scorpion bodies had turned reddish. Those were scorpions that Alpha judged to be still alive. Identifying all of the scorpions that were still alive among all of these unmoving scorpion bodies in an instant was an impossible thing for a normal human. But Alpha could do that like it was nothing.

It would be extremely dangerous to just ignore these scorpions and continue forward. But shooting each and every single one of them just to be safe would consume a lot of ammo. But of course, it was a whole different case if it was possible to discern the alive scorpions from the dead ones.

Akira aimed his CWH anti-material rifle at the scorpions that were outlined in red and nested one shot for each scorpion. The bullet that was spewed out from his gun’s muzzle penetrated the scorpion’s hard outer shell, wreaked havoc inside their bodies, and instantly killed them. After Akira killed a dozen of scorpions, suddenly one of them sprung up and attempted to attack him. But his bullet reached it first and instantly killed it.

“That should be all.”

“Alright then.”

Akira then blazed through the corpses of the dead scorpion and rushed forward.

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The Hunters were holding up in one of the rooms on the fifth floor. They were directing their guns at the only door into their room as they were shooting the monsters coming at them while making a grim face.

One of them pulled out his rental terminal and shouted.

“This is number 157!! HQ!! Answer me!!”

“This is A4 division HQ. What’s wrong?”

“Don’t give me that again!! Where’s my rescue?!”

“The rescue order has been dispatched and he’s heading your way now. Just hang on there.”

“How much longer should I wait?!!! We’ve been waiting quite a while and no one is coming, you know!!”

“The rescue Hunters are responding to the rescue orders in turns. There are too many rescue orders, we’re basically flooded with them, you know. If you want to get angry, then you can curse those Hunters who dispatch rescue requests although they are only fighting weak monsters. You’re actually getting the short end of the stick because of those Hunters. So just try to hang on, that’s all.”

“Wha- Wait!!… Dammit!! They just cut the call!!”

He was about to slam the terminal on the floor, but another Hunter stopped him. It was the last still functioning terminal. The others were already destroyed during the fight.

The door to their room was piled up with dead Yarata scorpion corpses. Some of them could also be found inside the room.

The Hunters did not even bother to check the bodies if they were really dead or not. But they also did not have the leeway to shoot them to make sure that they were really dead.

In order to make sure that they were dead, the Hunters would need to spend their precious ammo to crack open their exoskeleton before delivering the killing shot. They also had used all of their grenades and other explosives when they ran away from the monsters to this room. They had no other choice but to hold their position using their regular ineffective bullets until rescue came. Thus, they could not afford to waste any of their ammo.

The Hunters had no other choice but to wait for rescue. They did not have the guts to try breaking through the monsters and getting out from that room. After all, they did not know what was the situation outside that room. In the worst-case scenario, there might be a huge number of Yarata scorpions waiting outside the room. Because of that, they could not work out the courage to get out of that room.

It did not take long before the Hunters there heard gunshots from outside their room. And they noticed that the gunshot's sound was approaching closer and closer.

"A rescue?!"

"W-we're saved!"

The Hunters cheered in happiness. But their cheering was immediately stopped. The Yarata scorpions inside that room which were faking death started moving again because of those gunshots. This caused the Hunters inside the room to fight desperately.

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Akira tried to reach his rescue target as fast as he could, but he was interrupted by the scorpions that were pretending to be dead. Every time he found a pile of dead monsters, he could always find scorpions that were faking death mixed among the corpses. Among them, there were scorpions that were still alive even after losing their heads. Akira would destroy their legs or tails, although it would not kill them, it would be enough to at least render them unfit for battle.

Akira grumbled as he changed the magazine of his CWH anti-material rifle.

“There are just too many of them!! What the heck is up with these monsters?! How many did I kill until now?”

“That last one was your 54th scorpion. This is indeed too many.”

The usual CWH anti-material rifle’s ammo was much more expensive and had higher piercing power than normal ammo. They were normally used for fighting mechanical monsters, thus it was a bit of an overkill using them on Yarata scorpions. But since his normal ammo would not work against the hard Yarata scorpion’s exoskeleton, so he had no other choice but to use the expensive CWH ammo.

Akira frowned every time he pulled the trigger of his gun, it felt like he shot money out of his rifle’s muzzle.

“I have to pay for the ammo with my own money, you know!! If the reward from this request is bad, I won’t do this request again, okay?!”

“This request is basically not a monster-hunting request. So unlike a usual monster-hunting request where the reward is decided based on the type and number of monsters that you kill, we wouldn’t know how much reward we will get until we receive it. Not to mention that from yesterday’s request, the basic pay is only 20,000 Aurum.”

“I already spent more than 20,000 Aurum worth of ammo, you know!! Just how big is my ammo expense today going to be??!”

“Let’s put that aside for now until you finish the rescue order. You’ll get killed if you’re too frugal with your ammo right now, you know?”

“I know!!”

Akira rushed forward while closely gripping his gun. After killing about 20 more scorpions, he finally arrived near the room where the Hunters were holding up. Gunshots echoed endlessly from inside that room.

As Akira carefully stepped into that room with his gun ready, he saw the Hunters fighting 2 Yarata scorpions. The normal ammo that the Hunters

used could not deal much damage, they were only able to barely hold those 2 scorpions off from coming closer.

Akira quickly aimed at those scorpions and destroyed their heads and tails. Their limbs were blasted and scattered all over the room. The Hunters only noticed Akira after those two scorpions stopped moving.

“Are you the rescue Hunter…?! T-thank goodness.”

The Hunters slumped on the floor, they were relieved and glad. A Hunter who had not lowered his guard came and asked Akira.

“Are you alone?”

“Yes. Did someone else come?”

“No, you’re the only one.”

Akira was surprised to know that he was the only rescue sent to a Yarata scorpion nest. But before he complained to the HQ, he asked the Hunters.

“…What did you say to the HQ when you requested a rescue?”

“I told them that we encountered a group of insect-like monsters, but then they told us to hold our ground. To be honest, it was really dangerous. You really saved us, you know.”

Akira thought that the HQ might have misunderstood and thought that they were attacked by some small-sized insect-like monsters. It was important to inform the HQ with the correct information.

Just like the other Hunters, Akira also wanted to get out of that building as soon as possible. So he shouted at the other Hunters.

“Let’s get out of here before more of those monsters comes. The route that I took to come here should be still safe.”

“Y-you’re right. Hey!! Hey, we’re leaving the place!!”

Akira prioritized escorting the Hunters out as soon as possible. The Hunters would suddenly stop every time they saw a pile of Yarata scorpions' corpses in the middle of their way out. Only after seeing no movement from those piles after Akira, who was leading the group, approached them, they would finally feel safe to walk past those piles.

After leading the Hunters out of the building, Akira contacted the HQ.

"This is number 14. HQ, answer me."

"This is A4 division HQ. What's wrong?"

"I've rescued the Hunters and will be returning back to the temporary base now."

"Don't return, just send the Hunters to go back by themselves. You should go to the next rescue order."

Akira's face turned grim and shouted at the terminal.

"Are you crazy? That building was filled with Yarata scorpions, you know!! I won't go to the next rescue order without an ammo refill first, okay?!"

Akira waited for a response, but there was no reply from the HQ. He could hear a little bit of ruckus from the other side of the terminal. He then asked for a response while making a puzzled face.

"…HQ? Answer me. What's wrong?"

When he did that, the HQ staff asked him back slowly and carefully.

"Let me reconfirm. Were they really Yarata scorpions? Is that building a Yarata scorpion's nest?"

"I don't know if it's a nest or not. But it's true that the building is flooded by a type of monster with a super hard exoskeleton that would even bounce off a normal AAH rifle bullet. If you doubt it, you can go ahead and send someone to check the corpses."

“Forget what we just said. Go back to the temporary base as soon as possible. The terminals that we gave you are still functional, right?”

“Mine is alright. But as for the Hunters… They are broken except for the one that they used to contact you… Or so they said.”

The HQ staff suddenly shouted.

“Don’t lose them no matter what!! Come back here as fast as you can!! And make sure to not damage the terminal even further!! That’s all!!”

Then the HQ staff ended the call. Akira and the other Hunters looked at each other with a puzzled and worried look.

Akira was obviously confused, but Alpha then said to him with a smile shaking Akira off from his confusion.

“Akira. There’s no need to think about the things that you don’t understand right now. Let’s just head back for now. Just see it from the bright side, it’s a good thing now that you have a reason to go back.”

“…You’re right.”

There was no mistaking it. There was something going on. But since Alpha was not making a solemn expression, Akira thought that it should be alright. So he decided to just push that aside for now.

And so, Akira and the other Hunters headed back to the temporary base. The Hunters were walking in front while Akira followed behind them on his bike. Since his job was finished the moment he evacuated the Hunters from that building, Akira could just directly go back. But the other Hunters pleaded with him to accompany them on their way back.

Akira was tinkering with his information gathering device to correctly detect the Hunters in front of him in order to get himself familiar with it. But it did not go well. Although the Hunters were not too far in front of him, the output from the information gathering device could not display the

correct information. Akira mumbled as he was playing with the information gathering device's setting.

"This thing is difficult. The output goes crazy every time I make even the slightest change from Elena-san's setting. Maybe I should just stay with Elena-san's setting."

"Elena's setting is basically an ideal setting after all. If you change it randomly, the accuracy of the information gathering device will fall greatly. But you should play with its setting to understand the setting parameters and get familiarized with it."

"Now that I think about it. You're also using this information-gathering device to detect monsters, right? If I play with its setting, wouldn't it disrupt your detection ability? Is that really alright?"

"It's okay. I'm directly using the raw data from that information-gathering device and analyzing it myself. The data that you're seeing right now is produced by the software inside that information-gathering device and it has nothing to do with my detection ability. So no need to worry, you can play with it."

"I see. In that case, I'll just keep on tinkering with it."

Akira was viewing the scanning result through his visor type display. There was a separate area on his upper right visor showing the scan focused around Akira. Although there were Hunters walking in front of him, the signals coming from those Hunters were rather wacky and unclear. It was because the setting on the information-gathering device was incorrect.

The search results would vary greatly every time Akira changed the individual setting of his information-gathering device. If he could optimize the setting to focus only on the important information, the information-gathering device could be effectively used in many different situations. By adjusting the values in the settings, he could focus on a vague signal, which only showed that something was detected, and get a better set of information that would let him extract shape, size and any other information.

Alpha then explained to Akira the basics of adjusting the setting.

“Normally, you would just expand and contract the search area. And when you find a signal, you would focus on where the signal comes from and try to analyze it. It’s important to set the interval between wide-range and close-range scan, the power output ratio between the image, sound and movement processor, and the type of analysis that you would use for each data. For example, when you’re in a place with a lot of obstacles, it’s better to decrease the power output of image analysis and increase the range of the scan. In case when you can see your target, it might be better to focus the image sensor to only detect images from behind you. There are basically a lot of things you can do with it.”

“Yep, it’s not easy.”

Akira was listening to Alpha as he was having a hard time adjusting the setting of the information-gathering device. Not too long after that, Alpha suddenly said to him in a serious tone.

“Akira, you should either go ahead and leave those Hunters behind or tell them to start running to the temporary base as fast as they can. A swarm of Yarata scorpions is closing in on us.”

Akira immediately shouted to the Hunters in front of him.

“Hey!! Run to the temporary base as fast as you can!! A swarm of those monsters from before is coming this way!!”

The Hunters were shocked as turned towards Akira. Akira made a grim face as he continued.

“I’ll try to slow them down!! So run as fast as you can!!”

The Hunters looked around but they could not see any Yarata Scorpions. One of them asked Akira in panic.

“Are you sure?! Where are they?! I don’t see them at all, you know?!”

Akira started to get irritated since the Hunters would not start running.

“Just go now!! If you keep standing here, I won’t help you, okay?! I’ll just go ahead on my bike, you know!!”

The Hunters started running in panic. Akira then looked around, but he could not find any scorpions.

“Alpha, where’s the swarm? I can’t see them and I got no signal from the information-gathering device, you know?”

“Akira, I’ll enhance your vision now, so stay calm, okay?”

After giving Akira a warning, Alpha enhanced his vision. Because of that, Akira was able to see the Yarata scorpions around him. His face turned grim the moment he saw the scorpions.

The other Hunters were running desperately towards the temporary base. They were running on an open ground with little to no wreckages, thus they were able to run quickly, but on the other hand, there were not many covers in case they got attacked. In short, they had no winning chance in case a swarm of Yarata scorpions attacked them here. The Hunters understood this fact, and that was why they were running so desperately.

The Hunter who was running at the front suddenly stopped, so all the Hunters behind him immediately stopped too.

“What’s wrong…?!”

The Hunter who stopped because the one in front of him stopped did not even need to wait for an answer to understand the reason why.

There were multiple wreckages scattered not too far in front of them. Although they looked like nothing but normal wreckages, they were actually Yarata scorpions waiting for their prey to come close. The Yarata scorpions anticipated the Hunters’ movement and already laid an ambush here.

The Hunters picked up their guns in panic, but even before they were able to do so, a scorpion quickly jumped into action and ran toward the Hunters.

But at the next moment, a gunshot echoed and that monster was sent flying. The Hunters immediately turned to where that gunshot came from, it was Akira aiming his CWH anti-material rifle at that monster while still on his bike.

“Don’t stop!! Run!!!”

The Hunters immediately started running again, passing the dead Yarata scorpion that Akira just shot.

Akira was able to see the scorpions with the help of Alpha’s support as all the scorpions around him were outlined in red. Some of them were camouflaging themselves as wreckages, some of them hid behind the wreckages and some of them were still on their way from afar. He could clearly see their positions and shapes thanks to Alpha’s support.

Akira did not find any signal from his information-gathering device that indicated the existence of the Yarata scorpions around him. Or at least, Akira could not recognize if there was such a signal.

Thus Akira looked confused since it was as if Alpha summoned those monsters out of thin air.

“There are so many of them around but why is my information-gathering device not picking anything up?”

“The sensors installed in that information-gathering device do receive signals from the Yarata scorpions. But even if it can receive those signals, it is a whole different story whether it can recognize it as Yarata scorpions or not. It’s just like you, you can see all those pebbles scattered around you but it’s not like you always recognize that those pebbles are there, right? It’s not an easy thing to segregate a big amount of information. That would simply drive you crazy. And if you take all of them seriously, you won’t be able to differentiate noise from useful information. It would be pointless if you try to compare my powerful information-gathering ability and superior information-analysis ability with the result from that information-gathering device, you know. But if I have to say anything about it, you should be able to notice those scorpions had you retained Elena’s setting.”

“So in short, because I changed the setting, I messed up the setting that Elena-san left with it and so it doesn’t work properly, huh?”

“If I have to be honest, then yes, that would be true. But If I have to say anything else, then it just means that you should be thankful for Elena-san’s setting.”

“So, it’s basically pointless to have a good tool if I can’t use it, huh? This shooting skill is basically because of your support too. I really wonder now if I am actually getting stronger or it is just all because of your support all along.”

As Akira stated his own weakness and berated himself, Alpha smiled and tried to cheer him up.

“If you have anything to complain about your own strength, then you should work hard to train yourself from now on. But at least I can guarantee you that you’re stronger now compared to before you started training.”

“You’re right. I’ll definitely do that.”

Akira kept on aiming and shooting at the Yarata scorpions while smiling bitterly.

Akira might not realize it himself, but his skill was actually improving at an incredible speed. It was all thanks to Alpha’s super effective training. It was the reason why, although he had bad luck, he was able to survive after he encountered 2 swarms of monsters on the same day.

But Akira looked down on his own skill. It was because he understood that compared to Alpha’s support, his skill was basically not even worth mentioning. That fact had greatly caused him to develop a biased evaluation of himself.

People who had absolute confidence in their own skills usually were indeed skilled people. So in contrast, Akira’s low self-confidence made him look weaker than how he really was.

Because of that, there were children who looked like a completely different person when they were in battle. People used to mistake them as pebbles and stepped on them, just to find out that they were actually closer to land mines.

Akira shot down the Yarata scorpions one by one. The piercing ammo that he used, pierced through their strong exoskeleton and destroyed their nervous system. It then either killed them on spot or at least rendered them paralyzed. But there were still a lot of Yarata scorpions there. Akira thought that there was no end to them as he shifted his aim to his next target. But Alpha suddenly said to him.

“Akira, that was your last bullet.”

“…Do you mean I’ve already run out of piercing ammo?!”

“Unfortunately so. Change your gun.”

Akira quickly changed into his AAH assault rifle while making a grim face. He knew that his rifle was only loaded with normal ammo, so it would be difficult to kill a Yarata scorpion using this ammo.

He suddenly heard a scream from the Hunters. When he quickly glanced at the direction of that scream, he saw Yarata scorpions standing in front of the Hunters.

“Hold on!”

As Alpha said that, she controlled Akira’s augmented suit and moved his body to grab onto the bike. At the same time, his bike suddenly accelerated, passed beside the Hunters in front of him, and headed straight to those Yarata scorpions.

Akira tried to follow the movement of his augmented suit. When Alpha gave him the signal, he quickly leaned his body sideway to make the bike slide on its wheel. He used one of his legs to prevent him from falling over, as he slid on his bike and slammed its wheels onto the Yarata scorpions.

Alpha accelerated the bike when its wheels got in contact with the scorpions and sent the scorpions flying into the air.

One of the scorpions that were sent flying crashed into wreckage not too far from Akira. Although it did not kill it, it was enough to stop it from moving for the time being. While the other scorpion was sent flying upward. Akira got off his bike and kicked the scorpion as it fell back to the ground with his augmented suit enhanced strength. That scorpion was blown away on its side and bounced further away as it landed onto a wreckage.

The other Hunters were dumbfounded watching such a scene unfolding right in front of their eyes. Akira then shouted at them.

“Go!! Now!!”

The Hunters got back to their senses and started running again.

More and more scorpions joined the swarm that was chasing Akira and the Hunters. As the other Hunters were running away, Akira protected their back as he carried two AAH rifles and showered the monsters with bullets. But as expected, the normal bullet could not do much damage on the scorpion’s exoskeleton.

Due to Alpha’s accuracy support, Akira was able to land multiple shots at the same spot on Yarata scorpion’s hard exoskeleton which eventually destroyed that exoskeleton and injured them, thus slowing the scorpions down. But even if he managed to kill some of them, it was only enough to slow down the whole swarm.

“That thing is freaking hard!! And there is no end to them!! This is getting pretty bad!!”

In contrast to Akira who started panicking, Alpha was still calm. But even so, she suddenly made a decision that fit the situation.

“It might be a good idea to consider abandoning the other Hunters behind and heading to the temporary base soon.”

“T-that’s a little bit… You know… Can we ask for rescue from the HQ instead?”

“Those Hunters already did that while running, you see. And it seems that the reply was not positive at all.”

“…I’ll try to hold on until the last moment.”

Since he had worked so hard to help them, Akira wanted to save these Hunters. But he had no plan to die with them. That was his thoughts as he kept on shooting at the scorpions while making a grim face.

The situation just kept getting worse as the Hunters started to reach their physical limits. The Hunters pushed themselves to keep running although they were already short on breath. While on the other hand, the scorpions did not show any sign of exhaustion as they kept closing in. It was only a matter of time before the scorpions reached them.

“This is not good at all.”

“Tell the Hunters to hole up in the building near them and wait for rescue from the HQ. If we’re lucky, we might be able to survive this swarm.”

“There’s no other way, huh? Do you have any recommendation about which building should we pick?”

“Let’s see, how about that… Oh, there’s no need to do that anymore.”

When Alpha was about to point at a building near them, she suddenly turned and pointed at the direction of the temporary HQ. As Akira turned to that direction, he could see multiple armed vehicles heading towards him.

Akira then moved his bike aside to make a way for them. After those vehicles passed Akira, they scattered the scorpions away with their huge guns. Explosive warheads showered the scorpions and quickly turned the whole swarm into minced meat.

The armed vehicles then continued to decimate the rest of the scorpions as they headed straight to the deeper part of the ruin. One of the armed

vehicles stopped beside Akira, a guy then came out from it and said to Akira.

“Are you number 14?”

“Yes, why…?”

“I’m the Captain of Kugamayama defense squad. We’re here by the request from HQ. Give me your rental terminal.”

Akira handed his rental terminal to that man.

“Alright. With this, your job has ended. You can go back home now.”

“Wait for a second. What’s happening here?”

“The ruin is flooded with Yarata Scorpions. So we’re here to eradicate those scorpions. There’s a good chance that a big nest is around here somewhere and it seems that the exploration around this area has stirred up the nest. I heard that they’re re-sweeping the area around the construction site now. The HQ is trying to identify the location of that nest from the information terminals that they lent to the Hunters, but it seems that a lot of Hunters were killed, you see. So it seems like they’re having a hard time pinpointing the number and the locations of the nests because of the lack of information. They also told us to retrieve the terminals from the dead Hunters too. Ahh, in any case, do you want to help us collect the terminals? You came all the way here escorting those Hunters, so you’re a pretty good Hunter, aren’t you?”

Akira shook his head and refused.

“No thanks. I thought I came here with plenty enough bullets but I’m all dry now. I simply don’t have enough resources right now. I’m not even sure they would cover for the ammo that I spent, you know.”

That man laughed lightly at Akira’s complaint.

“That’s too bad. You should at least make a contract to make sure that they would cover for your ammo next time. Later then, kiddo.”

After he said that, the man went and joined with the rest of the armed vehicles.

Akira looked at the other Hunters. It seemed that they were talking with the people from the other armed vehicles. Akira could not hear what they were talking about, but Alpha could as she used the information-gathering device to analyze the faint voice that reached it.

“It seems that they asked for a ride to the temporary base but got refused. It has nothing to do with us, so let’s just go ahead and go back home.”

“Alright.”

Akira then got on his bike and drove past the other Hunters. Some of them tried to call him but he just ignored them.

The other armed vehicles continued deeper into the ruin after taking the rental terminals from the Hunters. The Hunters that were left behind could not help but grumble.

“That boy and the defense squad won’t even give us a ride…”

“There’s no helping it. Let’s just go back home now. Although the defense squad had cleared the way to the temporary base, it’s not like it will stay safe forever, you know.”

“You’re right. Let’s go then… But still, who was that boy? He is really strong.”

“No idea. But all I know is that he’s strong enough to charge at that swarm all by himself. I heard that there’s a strong boy in Drankam, that boy might be him. I also heard that boy from Drankam did well in that big battle not too long ago.”

“Ahh, right, I heard about that too. But I heard that he’s just an above-average but a little arrogant boy with some good equipment though. I don’t really remember what his name was, was it Ka… Ka… Ka… Kazuya?”

“I don’t care about that. Let’s just hurry up and return back.”

The Hunters sounded dead tired as they were talking. But even so, they managed to drag their feet back to the temporary base.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 40, About Shizuka's Shop

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Akira went to Shizuka's shop to buy ammo. But as he placed his order, Shizuka looked at him surprised and asked with a puzzled look.

"Akira. You're buying a lot of ammo this time. Are you planning to use these anytime soon?"

"Rather than a plan, it's more like I've exhausted all of my reserve ammo. That's why I want to stock a lot of ammo so I won't end up running out of ammo when in the midst of a battle again."

His answer hinted that he had fought against a big swarm of monsters that could not be killed using normal ammo. Those monsters were so big that he had spent all of his ammo reserves. Either that or he fought some super strong monster and ended up using all of his ammo. In the worst-case scenario, it might even be both.

Shizuka wondered if Akira did something dangerous again. Although she asked him with a worried voice and gaze, her smile somehow gave pressure as if warning Akira not to lie.

"Is it okay if I ask you what happened?"

“Uhh… When I took the request to help the forward base construction in Kuzusuhara ruin, I met and fought with a lot of Yarata scorpions…”

Akira explained everything to Shizuka without trying to hide anything. Since Akira explained it without making any suspicious behaviours, Shizuka thought that there was nothing to worry about and patted her chest in relief.

In reality, Akira actually was in such a dangerous situation that he even thought of abandoning the Hunters that he had saved. But with that being said, he knew that he could easily escape if he just abandoned the other Hunters and not to mention that the other Hunters were also saved in the end. So he thought that it was not so dangerous and left off some details from his story. Thanks to that, Shizuka could not tell that Akira actually had a brush with death.

“…Because of that, I could not use my usual AAH rifle’s ammo, you see. That’s why I thought that I should stock up piercing ammo.”

Shizuka felt relieved and smiled gently at Akira. She then came up with a recommendation considering both Akira’s safety and the shop’s revenue.

“Stocking piercing ammo is a good idea. Though, there is an alternative. In the case you’ve described, I recommend you to add a modification to your AAH rifle. If you add a modification to increase the firepower of the rifle, you should be able to use it to fight against Yarata scorpion. It will give quite an increase in firepower even when you use normal ammo, but of course, there’s a limit on how far you can increase its firepower using modification.”

“Modification, huh? But like, isn’t that a complicated procedure?”

“Even if it’s called a modification, you actually just need to replace a part of the rifle. You should be able to do it if you know how to do standard maintenance for an AAH rifle. You’ve heard about those AAH rifle fan, right? They even usually make their own parts, you know? Some of them would even spread their modified rifles around to get more AAH rifle fans. I also have some modified AAH rifles here. Modifying your AAH rifle

should be cheaper rather than stocking up piercing ammo for CWH anti-material rifle just because the normal AAH rifle ammo doesn't really work against some of the monsters. So, what do you think?"

Akira would take Shizuka's recommendation if he had no problem with money, and as a matter of fact, this problem has been solved from the reward from his last request. Unlike the building scouting job that he took the other day, his rescue job yesterday scored him quite a huge reward. Because of the surplus money, he immediately decided to take her recommendation.

"I understand. In that case, I'll take your recommendation."

"Thank you for your patronage."

As Akira smiled with a smile that only an independent Hunter could give, Shizuka found it rather interesting and smiled back.

Shizuka put all kinds of AAH rifle modification parts in front of Akira. A magazine extension to increase the ammo capacity, a port to connect the information-gathering device with the rifle, a gun barrel to increase the firepower. Although there were still other kinds of modification parts, Shizuka only had these parts in her shop at that moment.

Akira looked at these parts with wide eyes while listening to Shizuka's explanation.

"There are so many different modifications, huh."

"There are still many other types of modifications out there, you know. Some of them don't even look suitable for AAH rifle. Although it would be cheaper just to buy a new gun, those AAH rifle fans would forcefully attach those parts to their AAH rifle. I guess those people are really zealous."

"So there are even those kinds of parts too, huh. That aside, about this gun barrel to increase firepower, I wonder how much increase it would give when I use normal ammo."

“It’ll give quite an increase, you see. It would even lessen the kickback too. Although, to be honest, I don’t really understand the reason behind it and the kind of technology it uses. I only know that it uses some kind of complex technique to produce such an effect, I guess it’s a technique from the old-world technology.”

“The old world technology, huh…?”

Akira understood well just how out-of-common-sense the old-world technology was. It was already obvious by looking at the monsters. Even for Akira who had very limited knowledge, he knew well that it would be impossible to reproduce those monsters even by using all the knowledge of the current world. But the old-world technology was able to accomplish such a feat.

Although Alpha was teaching Akira about basic scientific knowledge, she prohibited him from asking about the monsters.

The out-of-common-sense technology of the old-world could create things that were close to magic. If Akira wanted to understand the knowledge behind it, he would need to spend his whole life studying. That was why Alpha told him to not think about it for now.

“The technology of the old-world, if all kinds of mysteries in this era can be solved with those 3 words, it would take one’s whole life to understand it. I bet those researchers who are working under the Corporate Government are devoting their entire lives to do that, but I heard that even they still don’t fully understand the old-world technology.”

A gun’s barrel that could change the velocity and mass of a bullet, or a magazine that allowed stocking impossible amounts of bullets in such a small space. All of these things were made possible due to the old-world technology and the people of the current era still did not understand the working mechanism behind it.

“If it still bothers you that much, you can try becoming one of those researchers and research it yourself. So what do you think? Want to give it a try?”

He would be lying if he said that he was not interested. But Akira still had a heap of other stuff that he had to learn and do. He just did not have the time nor the money to indulge himself in studying the old-world technology.

“I’m a Hunter, so I won’t be digging too deep into that kind of stuff.”

Akira smiled mischievously when he said that.

After that, Akira followed Shizuka’s recommendation and bought some modification parts plus an aiming device that he could connect to his information-gathering device. And with that, half of the money that he earned yesterday was gone.

Hunters had 2 choices, to use the money for updating equipment or to increase their quality of life. Focusing more on the former would help to earn more money. But neglecting the latter would ruin their health and affect their performance as Hunters. It was important to be able to maintain the balance between these two, after all, all the Hunters who could not do this end up dead.

But for Akira who had spent his whole life till now in the slum alley, his current lifestyle was actually lavish for him. Rather than ruining his own health, it was actually an upgrade from his previous living condition. So even if he splurged on equipment, it would not disturb his balance.

Suddenly, Akira could hear Elena’s voice from inside the shop.

“Shizuka!! Come here for a bit!”

“Akira, wait for a sec here, okay?”

Shizuka just smiled at Akira before she went to the back room.

Akira waited for Shizuka while making a puzzled look. Not too long after that, he could hear Elena’s panicked voice and Shizuka’s voice which sounded like she was teasing Elena.

“…Eh?! Akira is here?!!”

“Yep. And remember that you did promise him to show it when it arrived, right? So let’s go.”

“I never said yes to that, you went and made that promise without my permission, didn’t you?!!”

“But you didn’t say no either, didn’t you? Let’s show him, it’s not like you’ll lose anything anyway.”

“Whoa- stop pushing me…?!”

Elena appeared from behind the back room with Shizuka pushing her from the back. Akira was frozen when he saw Elena, who was wrapped in a thin bodysuit-shaped augmented suit.

Her augmented suit was made of glossy material. It fit tightly on her body that it fully showed her bodyline. It was obvious that the augmented suit was made of very thin material. There were thin lines that were just a few centimetres wide running on the surface of her augmented suit. It ran from her shoulder to her elbow and extended to the tip of her fingers, some of it ran down from her neck to her chest and down to her lower abdomen, and also from her hip to her knees and reached her ankles.

Seeing Elena wrapped in that thin body-tight augmented suit which showcased her bodyline in a suggestive way, Akira could not help but to remember the naked Elena’s image that Alpha reconstructed using the data left inside his information-gathering device. Elena’s image from back then was so breathtaking that it was enough to make Akira lose his cool.

As Elena’s eyes met Akira’s, she could see him flustered and blushing. Because of that, her face started turning red too.

Shizuka who was the only person who wasn’t flustered, smiled teasingly as she explained about Elena’s augmented suit.

“The augmented suit that Elena is using is the B3CSD augmented suit. Unlike Akira’s augmented suit, this augmented suit is not equipped with exoskeleton support. It might be all baggy before being turned on, but once

you turn it on, it will fit tightly on its user's body. Because of that, it would feel like it's not even there and it won't disturb the user's movement. It has enough air permeability that the user would even be able to feel the breeze as if it was blowing directly over the user's skin. And of course, it also augments its user's physical power too."

Just like Shizuka said, Elena felt like she was actually naked. Although she did not feel cold nor hot because of the temperature control function in the augmented suit, she could feel as if the air was blowing directly on her skin. It felt like she was walking naked had she not confirmed that she was actually using an augmented suit.

Her augmented suit was so baggy earlier, but it completely shocked her as it fit tightly on her body when she turned it on. Elena knew that her augmented suit would show her body line. So she still couldn't believe that she came to meet Akira with her augmented suit on.

Elena glared at Shizuka while still blushing.

"…Shizuka, this thing is just too much, you know."

Although a Hunter with a powerful physical ability was glaring at her, Shizuka could not feel the pressure from her glare at all because Elena was flustered and still blushing. Thus Shizuka could maintain her smile as she replied.

"I want you to still use an armour if it's possible. I picked this augmented suit since it would be hard to operate your information-gathering device if it has baggy gloves, right? I wouldn't want your augmented suit to become an obstacle when you're using your information-gathering device. That's why I picked an augmented suit that you can use comfortably and can be used along with your information-gathering device. I also considered your request for an augmented suit that enhances your physical strength and it can be finely adjusted by yourself. You don't like it?"

Elena could not argue back, her augmented suit fulfilled all the requirements which she originally thought to be a bit impossible. So she had no complaints about it.

“…To be honest, I thought it would be impossible to get an augmented suit with all of those functions with my budget, you know?”

Elena tried to come up with any arguments that she could find, but Shizuka calmly and quickly answered back.

“For the sake of her precious friend, Sara also contributed for the budget, you see. You should thank her properly later…”

“So that’s why, huh?”

It was true Elena felt really happy that Sara helped her to pay for her augmented suit. But looking from the other perspective, it meant that she would not be able to get her hands on this augmented suit had Sara not helped her pay for it. Elena understood this as she smiled bitterly.

Shizuka who was smiling at Elena suddenly turned to Akira and asked him.

“By the way, what do you think after seeing Elena’s augmented suit?”

Akira and Elena looked at each other. Akira’s face turned red, he then answered back while trying to avoid looking at Elena’s body.

“…I think it’s a bit too extreme, I think it’s a good idea to wear something over it.”

Akira tried his best not to get too flustered, but that was rather impossible for him.

Elena immediately realized that she could just put on her usual armour on top of her augmented suit. She was so flustered up until now that she did not realize that at all.

Elena smiled awkwardly.

“…Y-you’re right! Erm. W-well, I’ll be back soon!!”

Elena went to the backroom in panic. Akira just saw her off without saying anything while Shizuka giggled mischievously.

Akira took a deep breath and calmed himself down. He thought that he would not be able to talk normally with Elena once she returned if he was not calm enough. So in order to change the mood, he asked a light question to Shizuka.

“…Shizuka-san. Do all advanced augmented suits look like that?”

“Nope. Not all of them look like that, but that type is not rare either. After all, there’s a demand for that type of augmented suit.”

Akira was surprised when he heard her answer. He wondered if some of the girls actually wanted to buy that kind of augmented suits, or that it was just because the people who bought them were not very concerned about that “feature”.

Shizuka looked at Akira’s expression. Since he could not come up with a reply, she took note that he was misunderstanding something, so she explained to him.

“It’s not like they would go out with only that augmented suit, you know. It is originally designed as a support-type augmented suit that was meant to help you when you use a heavy augmented suit or other types of equipment that you can’t use without any physical enhancement. It is designed to reduce the stress on your body when you use a heavy augmented suit or to add functions that you can’t normally find on a heavy augmented suit. Then it expanded from there, some of them are used together with armour, some of them can be used under normal clothing, and some of them are redesigned to be used in daily life. I’m actually using one too, you know, although, it’s a cheaper one compared to Elena’s.”

“Shizuka-san too?”

“Yep. Without it, I won’t be able to carry around heavy guns and ammo after all.”

Akira had seen Shizuka carrying around heavy guns and ammo as if they were nothing, but he never really paid attention to it before. After hearing her explanation, he quickly realized it.

“Now that you mention it, that must be the case, huh. I didn’t realize it although I’ve seen you carrying heavy stuff around.”

“Most of the people won’t notice it. Some people intentionally use simple clothing while hiding an augmented suit under it in order to catch their opponents off-guard. It’s an important skill for a Hunter to be able to discern that, so you should be careful, Akira.”

“I understand.”

Akira could feel that he was really lacking in both knowledge and skill as a Hunter.

Elena then returned after putting on her usual armour on top of her augmented suit. As she and Akira looked at each other, she just smiled trying to gloss over what happened not too long ago.

Akira once again threw out a new subject to change the mood.

“Elena-san, thank you very much for the information-gathering device from the other day. It is really useful.”

Elena understood Akira’s intention and immediately answered back.

“I’m glad to hear that. As I thought, a general type information-gathering device is more suitable for beginners. Not to mention that I heard the power of the general type information-gathering device has been increasing lately. I guess the trend for information-gathering devices really leans towards that direction nowadays…”

Akira and Elena continued their conversation awkwardly, trying to forget what just happened. Shizuka was just silently watching them while enjoying their reaction.

__*__*__*__

Akira borrowed a car from the rental shop and was traversing the wasteland.

“Alpha. How long before we arrive?”

“At this pace, we should arrive there in about 30 minutes.”

“I see… So then, Alpha, why are you in that uniform?”

Alpha who was sitting in the assistant driver seat was wearing a maid uniform. It looked very non-practical since it focused only on aesthetics.

It was made of glossy luxurious fabric with a snow-white apron above it and it had zero skin exposure below the neck. The skirt extended down to her ankle, thus completely hiding her long legs. It had long sleeves that covered her arm and her hands were wrapped in snow-white gloves. Alpha looked graceful and refined.

She then let out a bewitching smile.

“Oh my, do you want me to put on something else instead? If you have any request, I’ll change to any dress you want, you know?”

“Well, it’s not like I have any request though. It’s just that I feel like you always use dresses that don’t fit the wasteland, you see. So I’m just curious why you always do that.”

“The reasoning behind my dresses, huh? You can say that I have a lot of reasons behind it, but you can also say that I’m just picking dresses randomly.”

“A lot of reasons, huh…?”

Akira remembered the other day when Alpha was using a provocative swimsuit in the middle of a request. Although it was better compared to when she was naked every time she took a dip in the bath together with him. Unlike in a bath where it was to be expected to get naked, wearing a swimsuit in the middle of the wasteland in a normal condition was completely abnormal. Thus he could not help but get distracted by it.

[…Well, I guess it’s still better than a swimsuit, huh.]

Alpha might change into something worse if Akira prodded too much. That was why he decided to not pursue that subject.

“It might be a little bit too late asking about this, but, is this vehicle really okay? A wasteland vehicle for Hunters usually has guns attached to it, but this vehicle has no guns, you know? Well, it’s not like I want to rent a vehicle with a huge cannon, it’s just that we can get a better vehicle if I spend a little more money for the car, right?”

The vehicle that Akira borrowed was the cheapest vehicle for Hunters that were available in the rental shop. So there were many other better vehicles in that rental shop if he was willing to spend more money on it.

“This one is good enough. Thanks to the previous request, you are Rank 20 Hunter now, and this vehicle has the best price vs. performance ratio that you can get for now. Although it’s true that this vehicle has no weapons attached, it’ll be fine as long as you can take out the monsters that you meet. It will also work as a test for your newly modified AAH rifle after taking Shizuka’s suggestion. Not to mention, I can’t control the guns attached to a vehicle because they are controlled by the control device on the vehicle. After all, it’s not like I can just hijack the control unit of a rented car, right?”

“Ohh, I understand now.”

“The control device also doubles as an information-gathering device used by the Hunter Office to decide your reward from the monsters that you kill, you see. So if you mess with it, they might cut your reward. But even so, do you still want me to do it after knowing that?”

Alpha smiled teasingly, while in contrast to that, Akira’s face turned pale.

“Please don’t touch the control device.”

“Roger that.”

Akira looked annoyed since it seemed like Alpha was enjoying herself by bullying him.

“Putting that aside, what would you do if I suddenly tell you to do that?”

“I’ve explained to you all the risks that might come from doing that, so if you tell me to do it even after knowing that, I’ll do it, you know? Like when you saved Elena and Sara, I’ve told you to stop but you still decided to help them and I still gave my support to you when you did that, remember? And also when a big swarm of monsters came out from Kuzusuhara ruin, I told you not to go but you said that you would go even if you had to go alone on foot, but even so I didn’t use the augmented suit to forcefully stop you and I even gave my support too, right? I always try to respect your will, you see? That’s why, Akira, you should think carefully before deciding on something, okay?”

“Aaah, you’re right.”

As Alpha gave off a pressuring smile to Akira, he thought that he should not have asked while making a stern face.

They continued talking while heading to their destination. Akira who was bothered by the content of his request this time suddenly asked Alpha.

“By the way, the request that I took this time is a normal monster hunting request. But it seems that I can still get the reward if I just submit the scan information that I collect around the destination area even if I don’t kill any monsters, right? But it’s a monster hunting request, so why is that? “

“It’ll be used as data for monitoring the monster distribution in the area. I think they’ll send an eradication team if they find an area with a lot of monster signals. So it’s basically a reconnaissance request, but since they don’t know the exact location to send the Hunters, they also combined it with an extermination request for convenience. Basically, you won’t get any money if you just waste your time loitering around the city, but you can get some money if you loiter around a bit further away from the city, you see.”

Akira thought that it was something interesting, thus he continued asking about that matter.

“Doesn’t that mean that the Hunters can just run around in the wasteland in a high-speed vehicle without fighting any monsters and still get money?”

“Some Hunters do that too.”

Akira was half-joking when he asked that question since he thought that no Hunters would do something like that. So he was surprised when Alpha gave that unexpected answer.

“…They do, huh.”

“They’re called as the runners. They use vehicles specially designed for enhanced speed and equip it with a very powerful scanning device as they just roam around the wasteland. But of course, they won’t be able to do that if they don’t have the ability to escape from the monsters. Else they might gather a huge number of monsters chasing them around while trying to run away from them, you know. Since they know that the city defense will take them out together with the monsters chasing them if they bring those monsters to the city, they have no other choice but to desperately try to break off from the monsters chasing them.”

“So there are Hunters who earn money by doing something like that, huh? I thought that Hunters only earned money by hunting monsters or relics.”

“You’re not 100% mistaken, hunting relics and hunting monsters are the primary income sources for the Hunters. I’m just saying that it’s not the only income source for the Hunters. But well, I guess it has nothing to do with you, Akira. What you need is basically polish the most fundamental skill for a Hunter, the skills to explore ruins.”

As Alpha was smiling at Akira showing her expectation of him, he just returned back with another smile.

“I know. Please be patient until I have enough skills to explore the ruin that you requested me to.”

“In that case, let’s see how good you are now so I can plan your next training schedule.”

Alpha smiled and pointed her finger forward. There was a monster running towards the vehicle in front of them.

Akira stopped the car, got off from it, and readied his AAH rifle that already had the modifications that he bought from Shizuka's shop installed on it. When he took his aim through the scope, it worked together with his information-gathering device to calculate the distance to the monsters and to show the scan result from the area around him.

At the moment, Akira received no support from Alpha. He wanted to test his own skills as he carefully took his aim and pulled the trigger.

The bullet that flew out from the rifle's muzzle did not even scratch the monster. It flew past not too far to the right from that monster.

"That was close. It missed 2 metres to the right of that monster."

Alpha enhanced Akira's vision so that he could see the trajectory that the bullet took. He confirmed the trajectory and immediately took another aim.

He adjusted his aim and aimed carefully. He then used his augmented suit to hold his aim so it would not sway before pulling the trigger again. This time, the bullet passed through the left side of the monster.

"You missed 1 metre to the left this time. Just a bit more and you'll hit it."

As the monster kept running towards him, Akira slowly took a long deep breath to calm himself down and took another aim at the monster. He knew well that he would die if he panicked, and getting nervous would only put him in a worse situation.

He kept himself calm and aimed carefully before pulling the trigger again. This time, the bullet hit the monster. But it did not hit the weak point of the monster nor was it able to deal severe injury. It was only enough to stagger the monster as it continued charging towards him.

Akira kept trying to snipe the monster continuously. Although all of the bullets that he shot hit the monster, he was not able to stop it. The monster

was already in a dangerous distance from him.

Akira lightly sighed as he changed his stance from sniping to just standard shooting. He changed the rifle's mode from semi-automatic to fully automatic. He sacrificed precision for damage as he shot out countless bullets with enhanced firepower thanks to the modification that he had installed on his rifle. It was no longer important to aim for the monster's weak points, Akira now just showered the monster with bullets and slaughtered it; without giving it any chance to escape.

Akira thought back. With Alpha's support, this fight would have ended with the first shot. He cursed his own weakness and lack of skills.

"As I thought, most of my shots missed. What should I do to be able to shoot accurately as if you're helping me?"

"My extremely accurate aiming is based on a complicated trajectory calculation with my superior processing ability. That's why even if I teach you how I do it, it won't help you much. So just try to imagine the TPLine that I usually show you before you shoot. I'll train you hard until you can make an accurate judgement of the bullet trajectory. But that aside, you're actually getting better, I can guarantee you that much. So be patient and let's keep doing our best."

Seeing how Alpha smiled when she said that, Akira decided to trust her. After all, it was not like he could do anything about it even if he doubted what she just said.

"I know. Well, if it's that easy, I guess people won't be having a hard time like this, huh."

"Yep, that's true. So let's patiently polish your skill."

Akira changed his gear, returned back to his vehicle and drove to his destination, leaving the dead monster corpse behind.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 41, A Request For Akira

Index

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Akira traversed the wasteland in his car and finally arrived at his destination. After he looked around his surroundings, he seemed uncertain.

“…Alpha, is this really the place?”

“This should be the place according to the data that we got from Higaraka Residence Ruin.”

There was a weird silence between Akira and Alpha.

“In order to find an undiscovered ruin, we’re trying to look for Lion Steel Corporation’s branch office or any facility with a terminal. If it is located in an area that is not widely known to the public, there is a good chance that there’s an undiscovered ruin there. This place is one of such an area, am I right, Alpha?”

“That’s right.”

There was an endless wasteland laid in front of Akira. Buildings that were abandoned would slowly become decrepit before crumbling down. The wind and rain would then shave the debris into fine particles. As for the

dead human and monster corpses, they eventually returned back to be one with the earth. Then, new life would bloom out from where they were. However, only small traces of civilization were left in this place, it was too barren to be called as a ruin.

“…I guess I got my hopes up too high, huh. But it’s only to be expected though. If finding an undiscovered ruin was an easy thing, the other Hunters would have found dozens of them already.”

Akira tried to cling onto his faint hope.

“Is it possible for you to get more precise data? Even if you tell me that it’s around here, this place is vast. We might be able to find something if you can come up with a more precise location.”

“Wait… Look over there…”

When Alpha pointed her finger towards a location that she extracted from the data set, Akira quickly turned towards that direction. With his vision that was enhanced by her support, he was able to see an arrow that was pointing at a specific location. But unfortunately, it was pointing at an empty space.

Akira tilted his head when he saw where the arrow pointed to.

“Are you telling me that there’s a building with some kind of optical camouflage over there….?”

“Nope… Alright then!! This one is a bust! Let’s go to the next one!”

Alpha answered immediately in a fashion as if she was trying to just gloss it over. Akira found that a bit funny as he smiled bitterly.

It was not like Akira was blaming Alpha. Even old-world cities that spanned over a very wide area could not resist the might of time and had turned into a barren wasteland. The so-called ruins were basically nothing more but a part of those cities that, for some reason, were able to withstand

the withering of time and were preserved till now. They were exceptions but not the rule.

Akira and Alpha just left that place and headed to the next one. They then checked all the places that they could extract from their data, but they did not find anything interesting.

Akira could not help but let out a sigh since he kept finding the arrows pointing at empty spaces. Frustration kept piling every time he headed to a different place. His motivation was slowly shaved and his original expectation was crushed.

Looking at the discouraged Akira, Alpha tried to cheer him up with a bright voice.

“It’s all busts, huh. What do you want to do now? Want to stop looking for an undiscovered ruin and go back to exploring already discovered ruins? Those data are also useful even in an already explored ruin, it might help to navigate through confusing areas or dangerous places. With that data, we might even be able to find undiscovered hidden places filled with untouched expensive relics, you know.”

Akira hesitated before answering back.

“…I think I’ll stay looking for this undiscovered ruin for some more time. Since we got that data, I want to make use of it as much as possible.”

“Alright. I hope we hit a jackpot in the next place.”

“You can say that again. Although it would totally suck if it’s overrun with monsters.”

“Well, no one knows the number and type of monsters roaming in an undiscovered ruin. They’re called as undiscovered ruins because Hunters haven’t discovered them, so there’s no information about the monsters that roam there. If there’s a monster that you can’t handle, then you have no other choice but to give up on it. So I hope there will only be monsters that you can easily handle.”

“About that though, can’t I rely on your support to evade fighting them?”

“Of course I’ll help you. But there’s no guarantee that you’ll be completely safe. I can only give you my best support in the Kuzusuhara ruin, I can’t give you the same level of support in another ruin. I’ve told you about that too, remember?”

Akira’s face turned grim.

“Ahh, you’re right. I remember it now.”

“To be more precise, my detection ability will fall outside Kuzusuhara ruin and there’s a limit on how much the information-gathering device can supplement my detection ability. The monsters might even be able to discover you before you discover them. You can’t explore the other ruins as easily as when you’re exploring the Kuzusuhara ruin.”

“I understand, I’ll be careful.”

Alpha’s support was the reason why a child from the slum such as Akira could survive in the ruins. Akira understood that well, that was why he tensed up, knowing that Alpha’s support would drop outside the Kuzusuhara ruin.

Alpha then continued.

“And also, even if you find an undiscovered ruin, it’s not like you can bring the rental vehicle to explore that ruin. After all, there’s a possibility that other Hunters can find out the location of that newly found ruin from the route history of the vehicle. And it won’t be strange for them to sniff the existence of an undiscovered ruin by checking the vehicle’s record if you stop the vehicle in one place for an extended length of time and linking it to a big relics sale of its borrower not too long after that.”

“So my only choice is to go there with my own vehicle, huh. But borrowing a vehicle is the best that I can do for now.”

“There’s also the problem of your parking spot once you buy one. You’re still living in an inn after all. So you’ll need to rent a house with a parking lot first before buying a vehicle, and if you have some extra money, it’ll be a good idea to install a wide range information-gathering device on it too. With that, you’ll be less likely to be tailed by other Hunters and you’ll be able to avoid the monsters also.”

“And just when exactly would I have enough money for all that? Working as Hunters really needs a lot of money, huh. But in the end, it will still be a gamble whether all the money that I spend on the equipment was worth it.”

Reminded by how hard was working as a Hunter, Akira let out a sigh. Alpha then smiled at him trying to cheer him up.

“That’s why you have to make sure you have a solid preparation so that it won’t be a gamble. Of course, I’m talking both about your equipment and skill. Moreover, you have my support too, so it’ll be alright. It has been like that up until now, hasn’t it?”

Akira looked back into his memories and noticed that it was indeed true, thus he was finally able to get over it and lightly smile.

“You’re right. I’ll be counting on you.”

“Just leave it to me.”

Alpha gave a confident smile to Akira.

Akira had been gambling since the day he met Alpha. As a Hunter where he had to gamble using more than his own life, he had been winning all his bet.

But there was no guarantee that it would continue from here and on.

As Akira and Alpha continued to roam the wasteland in search of undiscovered ruin, they also continued to find empty spaces.

Akira thought that he should head back to the city soon, so he decided that the next place will be the last stop before returning back to the city. The last

place he checked was also a vast empty wasteland, but there was a cluster of completely buried debris in a certain area not too far from there.

As Akira thought, it was another bust. He asked Alpha to reconfirm the location from the data as she had always done.

“Alpha, do that thing again, please.”

“It’s over there.”

Just like usual, Alpha used the data as a reference and pointed at the direction of the location. Akira then could see an arrow pointer with his enhanced vision.

Akira was surprised when he saw the arrow, it was pointing below the ground.

“…Underground?”

“That seems to be the case.”

Akira scanned his surroundings one more time, but he did not find anything that resembled an entrance to the underground.

“Is there any gate mentioned in that data?”

“I was only able to extract the location. I thought that location data would be enough since you can decide the route through simple research. It might have completely collapsed and buried underground, but if that’s not the case, then you’ll be discovering a new ruin.”

“But even so, I can’t go in without any entrance.”

“So, what do you want to do? Want to look for an entrance?”

“…No, let’s go back home for today. I’m here with a rental vehicle. So even if there’s really an undiscovered ruin here, I just can’t stay in one place for long looking for an entrance, the record left in the vehicle will be suspicious

after all. So yep, I'll have to get my own vehicle first before searching for an entrance here."

"That's true. We'll have to wait until then. Let's just go back home for today."

Although he could not find an undiscovered ruin, he was able to find hints of one. Akira was at least satisfied with that as he decided to go back to the city.

—*—*—*—

Akira was taking a good dip in the bath inside his inn. He looked completely relaxed as he let the warm water melt away all of his tiredness.

As usual, Alpha was also there taking a dip in the same bath as him. The only thing that hid her wonderful body was the hazy steam and the ripples on the water surface. But even so, her body was utterly captivating.

Akira did not seem bothered by that at all. Although there was an unreal beauty in the same bath as him, as always, he was just wasting that luxurious scene.

A notification message reached Akira's information terminal that he left inside his room. But since it was connected to Alpha, she also received that message's information.

"Akira, there's a request for you from the Hunter Office."

"Request?"

"Yep, you've become quite a Hunter now that the Hunter Office would even send a specially designated request to you, huh… Well, normally, you should be delighted, but the content of the request is rather concerning."

Akira quickly understood that there was something bad going on. He quickly tensed up as all of his consciousness that was melted into the warm water was snapped back into his body.

“So, what it needs me to do?”

“To put it simply, they’re thinking of taking out all the Yarata Scorpion’s nest in the Kuzusuhara ruin and they want you to help them out.”

“Nice, let’s refuse it.”

Akira immediately refused it. Normally, any Hunter would have welcomed any specially designated request from the Hunter Office. But as he remembered the hard battle he had fought in that abandoned building and how he had to fight a swarm of Yarata scorpion while trying to run away from that area, he did not hesitate when he decided to refuse this request.

But Alpha then lightly shook her head.

“It is concerning because you can’t just refuse the request, you see. The requester is the Long-term Strategic Division of the Kugamayama city. It would be simple if it was from the city guards since their duty is to maintain the safety around the city. But this one is from the Long-term Strategic Division, if you refuse it without any good reason, they might paint a bad mark on you thinking that you have no motivation in helping with the city’s growth. It would be very troublesome if they see you in a bad light as long as you’re living in this city, you know. Well, in the worst-case scenario, you can just move out to another city though, but I don’t think it is worth all of that troubles for just refusing this request.”

Akira groaned, even he would not want to be put in a bad spotlight in the city.

“…Is there any way to politely refuse this request? Maybe I can put extra conditions if they want me to take this request, but what should I put so that they would retract the designated request?”

“Well, it is indeed a hard question, a condition that is not impossible but enough to make them retract this request, huh…”

After Akira had a long consultation with Alpha about what condition should he demand from the requester. He understood that simply asking a big

reward would not work, even if that might be able to let him evade the designated request, there was no mistaking it that it would buy him animosity from the city. So, they decided to ask for a big reward for his next request as his last option.

In the end, they came up with 3 conditions. Because of his lack of skill, he would be using a lot of the special piercing ammo for his CWH anti-material rifle, and so they will be paying for the ammo upfront. And although he would be working as a part of a team, he was to be allowed to make his own decision and move alone separated from his other team members from time to time. That also included the time when he decided to return back home. The reward would be paid based on the number of monsters killed. And lastly, his reward would not be deducted from any passive actions such as going back home first.

He had a hard time fighting the Yarata scorpions yesterday because of his lack of skill. Thus, he would not take the request unless he was entitled to get this much exemption. This was what he added to his reply mail before sending it.

“I wrote a lot of stuff there, but I wonder if I’ve asked too much.”

Akira could not take back his reply mail since he had already sent it, so it was a little worried.

Alpha smiled at him to calm him down.

“It can’t be helped. If it was too easy, then they would just accept your conditions. Let’s just hope that they would retract their request without getting too angry.”

Akira let the warm water take over his body as he wished for this matter to be resolved peacefully.

__*__*__*__*__

The next morning, Akira was shocked when he read the message that reached his information terminal.

“…You got to be kidding me…”

All the conditions that he put out for the Yarata Scorpion’s nest cleaning request were accepted.

Akira visited Shizuka’s shop right when it was just opened, he looked grim as he asked Shizuka.

“Shizuka-san, how many CWH anti-material rifle’s specially designed ammo can you sell to me if I ask you for everything you have?”

Shizuka tilted her head when Akira asked her that question.

“How many, huh? To be more precise, how many do you exactly need?”

“As much as I can carry. Since I have an augmented suit, I’m thinking of stuffing my rucksack with as many bullets as possible. Then I want to buy some more as reserve ammo too.”

Shizuka felt something bad was going on, thus she worriedly asked him.

“Why do you suddenly need that many CWH anti-material ammo? What exactly are you planning to fight?”

“Yarata scorpions. Things happened, you see…”

Akira then explained everything to Shizuka. After that, she frowned and said.

“…Yarata scorpion’s nest, huh. It’s true that their exoskeleton is very hard, so it’s understandable that you would use expensive ammo to make sure that they are really dead. With that in mind and considering the strength of the swarm that attacked you the other day, it must be quite a big nest.”

“And I’m going to fight those monsters, huh… Maybe I should’ve given them a crazier demand…”

Shizuka felt a pang in her heart as she saw how dejected Akira was. But she prioritized herself as a shopkeeper as she said to him with a serious face.

“Alright. I’ll help you as much as I can with the ammo. But there’s one thing that I want to make sure first, about the ammo expense that will be paid by the requester, how exactly are they going to pay it? Ordering a big amount of CWH anti-material rifle’s special ammo cost a lot of money, so it would be troublesome if you don’t pay me upfront. Business is a business after all.”

Personally, Shizuka wanted to sell the ammo even if Akira could only pay it on a later date. But if she did that and other Hunters heard about that, it would be very problematic for her. As the manager of her shop, she wanted to avoid that situation no matter what.

But Akira answered back swiftly.

“Don’t worry about that. I heard that the requester will pay for the expense when you deduct the ammo expense from my bank account. So please use this request’s unique code when you charge me for the ammo.”

After Akira finishes his payment, all of the money that he spent will be considered as a loan to the Hunter Office in case if he ran away from the request. But the collection of that debt would be done in a quick and violent manner, simply put, only a bad ending would be waiting for him if he did that.

Akira already resolved himself. Because she already knew that, Shizuka decided to do her best as a businesswoman who was dealing with a Hunter to make sure that Akira would return back alive. She then gently smiled at him to cheer him up.

“Alright. I’ll bring them to you right away, so wait here for a bit, okay. And also, you’ll be bringing your AAH assault rifle too, right?”

“Yeah. I did modify it after all and I’m sure I’ll meet other types of monsters too.”

“In that case, you should replace the normal AAH rifle’s ammo to piercing ammo. I’ll bring you the strongest piercing ammo that can be used for AAH rifle. It’s okay if I put it on the same payment account, right?”

“Yes, please.”

“Its firepower is pretty high, and so is its price. I don’t usually recommend using it since it will bring down the gun’s durability. But it’s not like you can worry about it this time, right? So, when are you going to need them?”

“I already received the dispatch order, so I’ll immediately go after I get the ammo.”

“…I see, I’ll bring them here right away.”

Shizuka went to the warehouse to look for the ammo after she said that.

Akira finished his preparation, bought as much CWH special ammo and AAH piercing ammo as he could carry from Shizuka’s shop, made sure that his rifles were in top shape, and stuffed his rucksack with as many supplies as possible. Then with the help of Alpha’s support, he adjusted his augmented suit so that he could walk normally with all of his heavy loads.

Shizuka stood in front of Akira and gave him a warning.

“I don’t think I need to keep telling you this, but don’t do anything reckless, okay?”

“Of course.”

Shizuka gently but tightly hugged Akira. Because of their different “builds”, Akira’s face was buried inside Shizuka’s breast. But rather than being surprised, the warmth and the sound of Shizuka’s heartbeat calmed him.

Shizuka tightened her embrace, but it was not like she could stop him now. She looked very worried when she gently said to Akira.

“…Be sure to come back alive, okay?”

“…Okay.”

Akira sounded rather happy when he said that.

—*—*—*—

Akira was listening to the explanation about his new request from the staff inside the temporary base in the Kuzusuhara ruin.

“Your request is to take out Yarata scorpion’s nest. The details about the request have been sent to you, I’ll assume that you’ve all read it, so I’ll skip that part. Just read the instructions in the terminal that we lend you and go to your designated place. After that, listen to the commander in the field.”

“How about the road there? Is it safe? It would be troublesome if I meet another swarm of Yarata Scorpion, so I don’t want to go alone. I did include that in my demand, right?”

“Don’t worry, we have taken out all the swarms out there. But you might still encounter some small groups that separated from the main swarm. Since you’re here for taking out their nest, you should at least be able to handle a small group, right? Well, if things get dicey, just contact us through the terminal and you can always withdraw.”

“Alright.”

Akira stepped out the base with a terminal that the staff handed to him. Alpha suddenly gave him an order.

“Akira, connect that terminal with your information terminal, I’ll modify it so I can work with it.”

“It’s just a borrowed terminal, you know? Are you sure?”

Akira did not mind if Alpha wanted to hijack or even falsify the data inside his information terminal. But he hesitated to allow her messing with a borrowed terminal. So he could not help but ask her with a puzzled look when she told him to connect his information terminal to that borrowed terminal.

Alpha smiled to assure him.

“It’s alright. It’s easier to use one’s own information terminal, so of course, I rather use that one. It is just that it can be connected to other information terminals for Hunters, so I just want to make use of that feature too.”

“I see, I guess it’s fine then.”

Akira was convinced by that and connected his information terminal with his borrowed terminal. With this, Alpha was able to access the information inside the borrowed terminal.

Akira arrived at his destination, he was standing and looking at a half-destroyed tall building in front of him. It was not rare to find such a building in the outskirts of the Kuzusuhara ruin. His face frowned imagining such a building being overrun by Yarata scorpions.

“Is this building a Yarata scorpion’s nest?'”

“Not this one.”

“Wait, no? But I was told to come here though.”

“This is just an entrance. I picked signals from other Hunters inside the building, so let’s go.”

Akira could see some Hunters together with the staff from the city defense division inside a big hall on the first floor. The staff who was taking command in that area waved at Akira as he noticed him entering the hall. But he obviously looked disappointed when he saw Akira up close.

“Let me confirm this, are you here for the Yarata scorpion’s nest extermination request?”

“Yes.”

“Another child Hunter, huh?! I guess I really need to ask those people in HQ to only give me real Hunters next time.”

That staff did not even try hiding his displeasure.

Akira was not there because he wanted to, so he really hoped that anyone who wanted to complain would not word it out. But he also understood that it was not like that staff asked for him either, so Akira tried to just ignore his spicy remark.

“Well, that’s fine. You want to join the defense team or the exploration team?”

“Please assign me to the easier one.”

His answer made that staff flare up as he glared at Akira.

“Are you f*cking kidding me?”

Akira face turned stern as he firmly replied back.

“I’m being serious here. If you tell me to choose, I’m picking the safest and easiest job. But I don’t know which one of those two is easier, that’s why I’m asking you as someone who knows the current situation here.”

That staff kept glaring at Akira, but since Akira glared back at him without even flinching back. That staff changed his stance and mocked Akira.

“Humph, very well. I’ll leave you with the defense team. You just have to guard the buildings and points that we have taken control of, it’s an easy job that children like you should be able to do.”

That staff operated his information terminal and started processing Akira’s assignment. He was obviously annoyed when he saw the data that he read from Akira’s borrowed terminal.

“Name, Akira. Hunter Rank 20, huh. That’s pretty high for a small kid like you. Do you have another Hunter behind you that you’re piggybacking?”

“I’ll leave that to your imagination.”

He was extremely annoyed by Akira’s apathetic attitude. But since he just finished processing Akira’s assignment, he decided to stop thinking about it.

“Humph, your station will be in the defensive point number 14. The location should be shown in your terminal. So there, now go.”

“Roger that.”

Akira then left that place.

After Akira was gone from his views, that staff mumbled.

“Good grief, that little turd. I have no idea which gang sent that brat here. But I really wish they would send his guardian Hunter too when they send a brat like him for a request like this. I bet he has nothing interesting in his record anyway…”

He then used his information terminal to open the Hunter Office website to see the Hunter related information about Akira. Although it did not show Akira’s history, it did not take that much of tweaking around to open the history page that he normally should not be able to see.

The Long-term Strategic Division, as the one who ordered for this request, had a close relationship with the Hunter Office. Because of that, some people in certain positions in the organization were given the rights to access information about the Hunters.

Some Hunters hid the requests that they failed and only showed the requests that they had succeeded. The city staff found such a thing so many times in the past as they laughed at those Hunters. He mocked Akira since he thought that it must also be the case for Akira. He believed the boy was also hiding his request history.

But the moment he saw Akira’s request history, he was completely blown away and reactively turned to Akira’s direction.

Although Akira was just a small boy from the slum who started from Rank 1, it only took him a few months to climb up to Rank 20.

There were several records saying that Akira responded to Kugamayama defensive squad’s emergency request and came back alive. Then he went

against a swarm of Yarata Scorpions during the forward base construction aid request while saving the other Hunters.

And to top it off, he did all of that by himself. There was no record of him working in a team with another Hunter nor that he ever joined a Hunter gang like Drankam.

Akira’s request history did not agree to what he expected from a young Hunter who he just mocked. It even made him suspect Akira for falsifying the information.

“W-who in the world is that boy…”

What that staff felt was not amazement after seeing a mind-blowing Hunter record that attested for Akira’s strength, but it was more like being spooked from seeing a boy who defied all common sense.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 42, The Children of The Defensive Point 14

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With Alpha's help, Akira could see an indicator in his vision guiding him to his station in the defensive point number 14. As he followed that indicator, he eventually arrived in front of a building in the middle of a plain opening, there was a shutter in the wall of that building. He could see a stairway leading underground. When he peeked behind that shutter, the indicator was pointing downwards.

"…It's underground?"

"It seems that the Yarata scorpion made their nest in the underground city of the Kuzusuhara ruin."

"I didn't know that Kuzusuhara ruin had an underground city."

The person leaning beside that shutter noticed Akira and immediately operated a control panel near him, the shutter creaked and slid open.

Akira found it weird, so he asked that man.

"This shutter is also an object from the old world, right? How did you move it?"

“This one can be opened and closed with a button, you see. Although, we still need an expert hacker to be able to control it. But then again, it’s an old-world relic made using old-world technology, so it’s not like having an expert hacker guarantee that you can take control of the control panel. Since we are on that note, be sure not to mess with the control panel that you find in the underground, in the worst-case scenario, it can trigger an alarm and this place will be overrun with monsters in no time. Get in, I need to close it again quickly.”

The shutter shut after Akira stepped through it. The sound of the steel shutter echoed as it collided with the floor, it was reminding him that he was no longer ‘outside’ in the wasteland.

When Akira walked down the stairs, he suddenly stopped as he saw a huge load of explosives lined up in front of him.

The man from before noticed Akira’s expression, so he explained.

“Those explosives are just insurance in case anything bad happens. If the monsters underground push us up to this point and it’s obvious that it’s impossible to defend this point, we’ll blow those explosives and stop them here. Don’t worry, it won’t explode if you step on it, though, don’t kick or step on them on purpose, okay?”

Akira looked stern and glared at that man.

“…What will happen to us in that case?”

The man laughed as if he was joking.

“If you guys do your job properly, then you guys will be either dead or have fully withdrawn from the underground by then. Work hard if you don’t want to be among the former.”

Akira sighed and continued walking deeper into the underground where the gathering place was located. Although that man said it as if he was just joking, Akira knew that he was serious.

The underground city was illuminated by lightings installed by the people who went down there before Akira, it showed its real appearance after being warped in total darkness for years. Ruins of crumbled shops piled up over one after another, this showed that it was once a bustling place filled with people.

But instead of people, it was filled with monsters right now. The underground city consisted of complex hallways filled with monsters, it caused the underground exploration to be extremely difficult.

The people who had explored first had cleared and installed illumination in certain points in the underground. Although they were able to secure those areas, the underground was still more dangerous compared to the surface above.

As Akira was walking past the already secured hallway, Alpha explained to him the details of the request. Although he had heard a simple explanation from her beforehand, he wanted to confirm the duties of the defense team in detail, so he asked Alpha about it in the middle of their idle banter.

During this Yarata Scorpion Subjugation request, the Hunters were mainly divided into 3 teams – the exploration team, the extermination team and the defense team.

The exploration team was responsible for exploring the underground city when it was filled with total darkness. They had to map the underground city and mark the locations of any nests that they found. The team mainly consisted of the Hunters who were proficient in using information-gathering devices.

The extermination team’s main duty was, simply put, hunting and exterminating monsters. Basically, they had to hunt and exterminate Yarata Scorpion’s nests, expand the secured area and provide support to the exploration and defense team if needed. It mainly consisted of Hunters with excellent fighting skills.

As for the defense team, looking from where Akira was sent to, it seemed that its main duty was to protect non-crucial communication relay stations.

Akira looked happy when Alpha explained that to him.

“In that case, then it’s really an easy job that even a small kid like me can do, right? I’m glad I asked.”

“Akira, I’m sure I don’t need to tell you, but stay vigilant, okay?”

“I know, I know. I’m just glad that it’s not as hard as I expected. I thought it would be some kind of super-hard request since the requester even accepted all of my demands.”

“I really do hope that’s the case.”

As Alpha said that as if she was hiding something, Akira looked slightly worried while making a puzzled face.

“…Alpha. If you’re only scaring me to keep me on my toes, can you please stop it? I’ll properly do my job. Or is it that you’re expecting something to happen?”

“If I have to say anything, I guess it’s a certain someone’s bad luck that made him encounter monster swarms twice in the same day, or got him chased by a swarm of Yarata scorpion after getting dispatched for a rescue request, or made him run alone in the wasteland for an SOS request.”

Akira hung his head low without saying anything back. He knew that he had bad luck and he understood that Alpha was warning him not to do anything that might worsen it.

“…I’ll do my best to avoid any situations where I can only rely on my luck.”

“Yep, you should do that. Let’s hope that your bad luck won’t go so bad to the point where I can no longer compensate it with my support.”

Akira could only smile bitterly to Alpha, but she smiled back teasingly at Akira.

There was an opening in a junction where the hallways met, illuminations and communication relay were installed in that big opening. 8 Hunters who looked bored were guarding the area. It was the defensive point number 14 where Akira was stationed. One of those Hunters noticed Akira who was coming from the hallway, he then laughed and tapped the other Hunter's shoulder.

"That's my replacement, so I'm out."

"Wait!! Isn't this just another brat?!!"

"Don't worry, it just means that this job is so easy that they think it's okay sending children here, you know? Later then."

That Hunter then smiled mockingly and waved at Mimata, his Hunter friend. He passed beside Akira and left the defensive point.

Mimata watched in jealousy as his friend left and proceeded to the surface. After his friend had gone from his view, he shifted his gaze to Akira. It was obvious that he was so disappointed having Akira there, he didn't even try hiding it as he exasperatedly asked Akira.

"So, what is your Hunter Rank?"

"20."

Mimata frowned, his face was saying that he was annoyed and displeased.

"Another piggy-backing brat, huh. Why in the world does this station keep getting children…? Just be sure not to get in my way, okay?"

'Piggy-backing' was a derogatory term used for the Hunters who got support from other better Hunters and borrowed powerful equipment to get a high rank. They did not have real ability and skill suitable for that rank. Most of the young Hunters from Hunter gangs were piggy-backing Hunters and the whole gang was often mocked for letting young Hunters do that.

Akira did not know the meaning behind that mocking term, but he could somehow feel the meaning behind it from how Mimata said it. Akira also

fully understood that he was able to gather all of his achievements thanks to Alpha's support, so he just ignored it as he asked Mimata.

"Are you the one in command here?"

"There's no one in command here. We're just a mismatch of random Hunters, deciding on the person in command would only cause a fight. I have no plan watching over you little brats. If you're looking for someone to help you, then get along with those kids over there."

"…Alright."

Akira turned at the direction that Mimata pointed when he said that. But he suddenly turned around, walked away, and sat not too far from both Mimata and the group that Mimata just pointed, isolating himself from the rest of the Hunters.

The other Hunters looked at Akira, wide-eyed. But he was not bothered at all.

"Akira, are you sure you don't want to join that group?"

"Yes. I think I'll just cause a fight if I go over there. But Alpha, if you tell me to go, I'll go."

Alpha looked at that group of Hunters once again before she turned back to Akira and smiled bitterly.

"You're right, let's not do that."

The group that Mimata pointed at was Katsuya's group.

The Hunters in the defensive point number 14 were divided into 3 groups, Mimata's group, Katsuya's group and Akira alone.

Katsuya's group consisted of Katsuya, Yumina, Airi, a young girl by the name Reina and an adult woman by the name Shiori.

Mimata's group thought that Katsuya's group was filled with piggy-backing Hunters because of such a composition. A group of young Hunters with one adult Hunter, he bet it was a group of amateur Hunters with one veteran Hunter, he assumed that Shiori was there to watch over the other green Hunters. Though in reality, that was not the case. But, it was also understandable that Mimata made that assumption.

Both Mimata's group and Katsuya's group spent their time by having silly talks. As time passed by without anything in particular happening, it slowly shaved their vigilance. But they also kept their information-gathering device to focus on a small range scan, thus there was a minimum possibility of facing a surprise attack.

Up until this point, no one doubted it was an easy job that even a small kid could do.

Akira was chatting and studying with Alpha. As a kid who had grown up in the slum city, he was not good with letters and he lacked common sense. In order to learn the knowledge needed to be a successful Hunter, he needed to study the basic knowledge first. He still had a lot of things to learn, that was why he used any idle time he had for studying.

Alpha suddenly turned her head, Akira noticed that and followed suit. He found Katsuya and Reina walking towards him.

Reina pulled Katsuya and dragged him to Akira. She then looked down at Akira who was sitting on the ground and said.

"You, your name?"

"It's Akira."

"Why are you sitting here alone? Come with us."

"No thanks, I'm good here."

Reina frowned.

"Why? Is it so that you can play hooky by yourself here?"

“I have no plan playing hooky here.”

“Don’t lie, you’ve been just sitting here quietly doing nothing.”

Both Katsuya’s and Mimata’s groups were at least still watching their surroundings, but Akira did not seem like he was monitoring his surroundings at all. Or at least, that was how it looked from outside, so it was understandable why Reina thought he was playing hooky.

But Akira just answered back swiftly but casually.

“I keep my eyes on the scan result of my information-gathering device. That was why I noticed when you guys came over here.”

To be more precise, it was Alpha who was keeping eyes on the scan result and not Akira. Alpha just smiled at Akira but he ignored it.

Reina was obviously annoyed, but she was convinced by what Akira said and decided to stop pursuing that line of thinking, instead, she tried to come up with another excuse to make Akira listen to her.

“Akira, what is your Hunter Rank?”

“Rank 20.”

Reina looked smug as she stated her rank.

“Mine is 23.”

There was a moment of silence between them. Akira showed no change in his behaviour and did not say anything back to Reina, she was very upset by that as she yelled to Akira.

“Are you listening to me?! I’m Rank 23! I’m above you, you know!!”

“So?”

“Don’t give me that! I’m above you, so you should listen to what I say!! Just get on your feet and come with me!!”

“No one told me to follow the orders from the Hunters who are ranked higher than me and the request description doesn’t say anything about that too. So I don’t have any reason to obey you.”

“…No reason? That might be true, but!!”

Reina raised her voice when she said that.

As Katsuya saw Reina getting heated, he thought that it would be bad to let her continue, so he interrupted her.

“Well, uhh, what can I say, although she said all of that, she’s actually just worrying about you. Isn’t it safer to be in a group than being alone if something bad happens?”

“I’m not worried about him!! Not even the slightest!!”

Katsuya was actually not trying to help Akira, he said that in order to calm Reina down. But in the end, Reina vented at him too.

Akira then casually said.

“I’ll take care of myself if anything happens. When the push comes to shove, you can just abandon me to die.”

Katsuya was surprised by what Akira just said, but he somehow tried to continue the conversation.

“Even if you tell us so, it’s still safer to be in a group, right?”

“Just leave him alone!! Brats like him can just go ahead and die all by himself!!”

Reina immediately turned and walked away, she was even half running. It was completely visible even from behind that she was livid.

Katsuya actually wanted to ask Akira about his relationship with Elena and Sara. But if he kept standing there, Reina would get angry at him too and he

wanted to avoid that. Not to mention, Akira also did not seem to be in the mood to talk. So he had no other choice but to return back following Reina.

Alpha just smiled as she was watching Katsuya and Reina walk away.

“Well, they’re very lively, aren’t they?”

“You can say that again. I bet they were so lively that they even got into a fight with the other group before I came here.”

Mimata’s group was looking down at Katsuya’s group, it was obvious from how they were behaving. The Hunters here already broke into 2 groups when Akira came, so he thought that it must be right after they had a fight between them. And his guess was spot on.

It was doubtful whether they would even help each other if they were attacked by a swarm of Yarata Scorpions at this moment. It could be considered lucky if they were just abandoning each other. In the worst-case scenario, they might even “accidentally” shoot at each other.

Akira planned to run away alone if the situation turned from bad to worse. He was given the right to do so in his contract. Other than the right to withdraw alone, he was also given the right to move alone. So just to be safe, he wanted to avoid any needless fighting.

Akira frowned and sighed.

“…And here I thought I was assigned to a safe place where I can take it easy.”

Alpha smiled mischievously.

“Just give your best so that you can wrap up today’s request as a lucky hit since you’re assigned here.”

“Yeah, I know.”

Akira grumbled, he was forgetting to count himself in his consideration. But in contrast to that, Alpha knew well that Akira was the biggest threat

here who might worsen their situation.

Forget about accidental shots, he shot and killed the person who threatened him without even a trace of hesitation. He was probably the most volatile person in this place in case a problem arose. Alpha judged that she needed more observation data to understand the principles behind Akira's actions.

Alpha was observing Akira while still smiling like usual, but she has always been watching him closely.

Nothing in particular happened after that. Akira had no complaints about it, but that was not the case for the people who were seeking a big reward. As the calmness continued, those people started complaining and talking about what they could do to solve the problem.

Mimata's group started talking more specifically about their complaints.

"We really have nothing to do, huh? Nothing is happening. I bet those Hunters in the exploration team are also collecting relics while exploring the underground ruin, but we're in the defense team right now."

"Even if you want to look for relics, there're only cheap relics left in the outskirts of the ruin, you know?"

"That might be true on the surface, but I heard that might not be the case down here. There are not that many Hunters who would come to the underground city to look for relics since this place is always filled with total darkness. I also heard that the shockwave from the explosions used by the defense squad during that big fight not too long ago had opened a path to an undiscovered area inside the ruin, you know? It seems that the Yarata Scorpions used that new route connected to the unexplored area to come to the surface."

"Wait, doesn't that mean that the exploration team can have all the relics in the unexplored area for themselves?"

"Yep."

“It’s not that strange to find a big load of untouched relics inside an unexplored area. I bet they’ll get a whole lot of money from the relics that they bring back from here. Dammit, I should’ve joined the exploration team.”

As Mimata heard his friend complaining, he joined in their conversation.

“About that, you see. It seems that they can’t bring home relics that they find during this request. It’ll be an infringement to their contracts, after all. And if they are found out, the city staff would seize their relics and the penalty is pretty harsh too. But with that being said, it’s not like they would leave the relics that they have found, so what do you think they will do in this case?”

“…If it’s me, I would hide the relics somewhere safe where only I can find them.”

“Exactly, I’ll do the same too. So in short, there might be relics hidden around here by those people. So, want to try searching the area?”

Mimata and his friends made greedy smiles as they looked at each other.

As Mimata’s group was trying to sneak away from the area, Reina saw them and rebuked.

“Hold it! Where do you think you’re going?!”

Mimata answered back apathetically.

“…Where, you ask? We’re just going to patrol around the area.”

Reina could feel that Mimata was mocking her from his random excuse.

“There’s no need to patrol the area if you’re in stand-by here!! Moreover, that’s the exploration team’s job!! Our job is to guard this area!! So don’t go wandering around without permission!! That’ll only bring us trouble, you know!!”

Reina shouted at Mimata's group, her voice echoed deep into the underground city. But Mimata did not show any concern at all as he replied back.

"Don't worry, we'll be back in no time. It's not like there are any monsters coming here anyway, and if there's any movement, I'm sure the people in the HQ will inform us."

"That's not the problem here!"

Reina was yelling at Mimata's group but they were ignoring her. It did not seem that any of them were trying to find a middle ground. As their unproductive argument continued, everyone's attention was on them. Suddenly Mimata turned to Akira who was neither a part of his group nor Katsuya's group. He then laughed lightly and asked for Akira's opinion, trying to get Akira involved.

"What do you think?"

Everyone there shifted their gaze to Akira. Mimata was looking at him with the eyes showing that he's looking down at Akira while Reina was glaring intensely at him, both of them were waiting for his opinion.

Akira who was suddenly pulled into the conversation thought for a bit before answering back.

"…Just go and return back quickly if it's just for the toilet, after all, we wouldn't want you to do that here. If you take too long, I'll assume that you met some monsters and ask for confirmation from the HQ."

Akira was basically approving Mimata on what he was going to do. Reina looked surprised and angry at the same time, while on the other hand, Mimata smiled victoriously.

"It's great to have someone who is so understanding. Yeah, I'm just going to the toilet. I'm about to burst to be honest, later then."

After saying that, Mimata took his whole group together with him and left the area.

Reina was glaring intensely at Mimata's group, but once they were gone from her view, she turned her displeasure and intense glare towards the next target that she was furious at. She then yelled at Akira while walking towards him.

"What was that?! Are you taking their side?!"

Akira looked a bit annoyed as he answered back casually.

"I bet they won't listen to what I say anyway, so it's faster to let them go do whatever they want and have them return back here after that. That's all."

The way Akira said it as if it had nothing to do with him rubbed Reina in the wrong way, she then exploded in anger.

"That's not the problem here?! Are you saying that it's really okay to let them do what they want?!!"

"I have no right to stop them. If you want to complain, you can just report them to the HQ. Or do you want to point your guns at them and tell them to stop? Well, I won't stop you though, but I won't get myself involved either."

Not to mention that Akira was planning to act alone depending on the situation, so he was not in a position where he could complain about what they were going to do. Moreover, if there were any important notifications like an order to withdraw from the HQ while they were still gone, Akira was not planning to wait for them to return back before withdrawing. To put it bluntly, he did not give a rat's ass if they were left behind to become the monster's meal. Akira thought they left that place fully knowing about this fact.

So, relatively speaking, Akira's status and position here was closer to Mimata's group rather than to Reina's group.

Reina was still yelling at Akira after that but he just ignored her. He thought that it would only worsen the situation if he said anything back to Reina.

As Reina realized that it would be pointless to keep yelling at Akira, she just glared at him with rage before returning back to Katsuya's group.

Akira sighed.

"I guess the only time when they don't cause a fight is when they die or something similar to that happens, huh?"

As Akira did not seem to realize that he was also at fault, Alpha just smiled bitterly at him and said.

"Some people just don't get along with other people. It might be just that your way of thinking doesn't fit well with theirs."

"I guess that must be the case."

If they always picked a fight with other people no matter who they were, they would not be able to work as a group. But Katsuya and his friends formed a group and worked together in their group. So Akira thought that it must be that they were not compatible with people like him or Mimata. After coming to this conclusion, Akira decided to just stop thinking about them.

Silavin: Haha. Akira is so precious in his own way.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 43, Battle Record and Real Ability

Index

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Akira and Katsuya's group were standing on guard inside the hall while Mimata's group left to search around the area and return back for a few times.

Reina tried to call the HQ in order to stop Mimata's group, but the HQ did not take her seriously, thinking that it was not a crucial thing. The defensive point number 14 was not an important position, that was why the HQ did not even bother giving them specific orders.

It did not take long for Katsuya's group to realize that Mimata's group did not leave the hall only to take a break.

Reina was getting more irritated each passing second. They had to watch the hall and shut their mouth while the other group was not taking their job seriously and going around the area looking for relics.

"Katsuya. Why don't we go around looking for relics too?"

"No."

Katsuya answered back swiftly and without any hesitation, but it only worsened Reina's mood. Since it was an order from Katsuya, who was the leader of the group, so as a member of his group, she had the duty to obey him. She understood that well, but her piled-up irritation gnawed at her.

"But why? Why should we stand guard while they don't?"

"I know how you feel, but hold yourself back. We've decided from the start that we'll always move in a group to ensure our safety, remember? Moreover, if 5 out of 8 people in this place, 7 if you count them too, leave their station, I'm sure the HQ will not be happy about it. They'll send their complaint to Drankam and we'll be penalized because of that. That's why we have to stay here."

Reina stayed shut, she could not deny Katsuya's logic. But even so, it was not like it could clear her displeasure, she obviously was still annoyed. Katsuya who noticed that looked at Reina's eyes, his stare was filled with seriousness and with a hint of affection.

"But more than that, I don't want you to do the same thing as those scum."

As Katsuya kept staring at Reina, she looked a bit intimidated but then she relaxed, her expression turned from being irritated to slightly embarrassed.

At first, Reina did not acknowledge Katsuya's ability. But after hearing that Katsuya and his friends took out a greedy crocodile with their own power, Reina offered to join their team herself to confirm their ability. Around the time she joined Katsuya's team, she still did not recognize their ability, but it did not take long before she recognized their real ability. And since then, she somehow got interested in Katsuya.

Even for this request too, it was originally taken by Katsuya, Yumina and Airi. But Reina went out of her way to bring Shiori with her and joined Katsuya's team, and Katsuya gladly welcomed them.

Shiori then gently scolded Reina.

“Milady. Please don’t bother Katsuya-sama too much. I don’t agree with that idea too. Please keep in mind that I’m here to make sure of Katsuya-sama’s and Milady’s safety.”

“O-Okay…”

Reina was weak against Shiori. Shiori was Reina’s servant. She served Reina for quite a long time and Reina trusted her. As a requirement, when Reina left her house to work as a Hunter, Shiori was to act as Reina’s bodyguard. So she decided to give up and stop being persistent.

Shiori then continued.

“And as I’ve said to you before, please refrain from making unnecessary contact with other people. There are many other things that you have to be careful of other than the monsters. Since I’m the only person here assigned as your bodyguard, I know it’s rather pathetic but I cannot guarantee your safety. So please refrain from making contact with other Hunters outside Drankam. Your fiery nature is prone to cause unnecessary fighting, as such…”

Reina felt that it was going to be a long lecture, so she interjected trying to stop Shiori.

“I know, I know. But like, aren’t you being too overprotective?”

“Milady, I believe I don’t need to remind you but we are in the wasteland. It’s an extremely dangerous place compared to the area inside the city walls. The moment you think that I’m overprotective shows that you are still too naive, please understand this, Milady.”

The people of the eastern district had different opinions about where the wasteland started, but most of the people thought that the area outside the city wall was already the wasteland. The barren plain, the desert, the ocean, the skies, the ruins, all of them were described as the wasteland and they were all dangerous places. For some of the people who spent their lives inside the city wall, everything outside the city wall, including the lower district, was all considered as a part of the wasteland.

Despite all the differences in opinions, one thing in common was that the wasteland was the opposite extreme of the inner wall where people could live their lives peacefully. The wasteland was a very dangerous place where a person's worth was judged by his or her ability to kill both monsters and other people.

Reina understood that she was in the dangerous wasteland, but her resolve was still too naive.

With Shiori around to protect her and being in the same group as Katsuya and his friends who were level-headed and had relatively good judgement, made Reina feel safer while also made her less competent in recognizing the real dangers of the wasteland.

Shiori understood that very well, but it was not like she could leave Reina open to danger either. That was why she did not have any other choice but to teach Reina through long lectures.

Although Reina had enough of Shiori's long lecture, she did not try to resist at all. Reina was actually happy that they were thinking of her safety, but at the same time, she worried that this request would end without anything worth noting at this rate; that was why she was a bit anxious.

Reina was always accompanied by Shiori when she was out for her Hunter's job. Not only did she have to face the other Hunters who looked down on young Hunters, but she also had to bring someone to watch over her no matter where she went. Because of that, her evaluation in Drankam was pretty low. Although her Hunter Rank went up smoothly, more than anyone else, she was the person who doubted her own ability the most.

Katsuya and his friends were able to prove their strength after killing a greedy crocodile, the other Hunters in Drankam also stopped looking down at them just because they were only small children. Although Yarata Scorpions were not as strong as greedy crocodiles, Reina thought that if she joined Katsuya's group and contributed in wiping out Yarata Scorpion's nest, other Hunters would stop looking down at her.

Since Katsuya’s group was able to kill a greedy crocodile, they were sent from Drankam to join this operation. The HQ originally accepted their team and was planning to send them to the extermination team. But after knowing that they were a group of children, the HQ decided to assign them to the defense team instead. Reina found it vexing, she was annoyed that people were still looking down at them.

Being in a defense team did not mean that there was zero possibility for them to encounter monsters, that was why the HQ sent Hunters to do that job. Reina tried to suppress her irritation thinking that her chance would eventually come. But unfortunately, the defensive point number 14 was a very safe position.

[…We’ve been here for quite a long time now. The reason why those people would leave this place is because they don’t think anything will happen even if they are not here. I bet that’s also the reason why the HQ won’t tell them to stay here either… Will this request really end up without anything interesting happening?]

Reina started hoping that something would happen soon. She completely forgot that safety was the first priority in the wasteland as she was getting impatient.

Suddenly, a voice came out from the communication relay device installed in that place.

“This is the HQ, defensive point number 14, answer me.”

Everyone there quickly gathered around the communication device, Mimata who was the closest one answered back.

“This is defensive point number 14.”

“Do you notice anything out of ordinary over there?”

“Nothing, everything is normal like usual.”

“…You’re… Number 147, right? It seems that you’ve been leaving and returning to your station a few times, are you sure that nothing is out of ordinary?”

“We were just going to the toilet. After all, it’s dangerous to go alone and it’s normal that we don’t go to urinate at the same time, you know. So don’t be that uptight.”

Everyone there thought that Mimata and his friends had been unnecessarily leaving their station, so he assumed that was why the HQ complained. After making that excuse, Mimata thought that it was the time for them to stop leaving their station, but the next answer from HQ refuted their assumptions.

“I don’t care about that, did you encounter any Yarata Scorpion when you left the hall? Or at least, did you notice any Yarata scorpions in the area?”

“No, nothing. Is there anything wrong?”

“Defensive point number 15 was overrun by a swarm of Yarata Scorpion. They were able to repel the swarm back with no injury, but the real problem is the direction where the swarm came from. It seems that they came from somewhere inside the area that we had secured. The exploration team might have missed blockading some tunnels or the swarm might have opened a new tunnel. They might have dug through the crumbling wall or tunnelled a small opening into a hole big enough for them to pass through.”

“Are you saying that we have to be careful since we might also get attacked?”

“No. We want you to explore the area one more time. Bring some people with you to explore the area and check if there’s any change in the area compared to the map made from the previous exploration. If you find any new tunnels, immediately inform the exploration and the extermination team.”

There might be a lot of untouched expensive relics waiting to be found in an undiscovered area connected to that new tunnel.

Mimata and his friends looked at each other, smiled, and then answered back assertively.

“Roger that. We’ll immediately send some people to explore the area.”

“No, you guys stay there! Just shut up and guard the area! I bet you guys are planning to look for relics rather than exploring the area.”

“…Of course, we won’t.”

“You guys just stay there!!”

Mimata clicked his tongue and obviously looked annoyed. Looking at that, Reina snickered and said.

“Serves you right.”

Mimata turned to Katsuya’s group and looked at them, he then answered the HQ back in a fashion as if he was mocking Katsuya’s group.

“Humph. Who should we send then? Other than us, there are only children and a Hunter assigned to watch over those children, you know?”

Katsuya, Airi and Reina glared at Mimata, Yumina seemed annoyed by Mimata’s remark too. Shiori stood quietly beside Reina and Akira looked like he did not give two shits at all.

The HQ staff then answered back.

“Number 27 should go. You can pick anyone else but you can only take two other people, max. It’s fine if you want to go alone too.”

Mimata’s group and Katsuya’s group only knew the number of people in their own group. So they did not know who was the number 27 as they looked at each other, puzzled.

“This is number 27, roger that.”

Everyone turned their gaze at the source of that voice. It was number 27, it was Akira.

“Akira. They said that you can take 2 other people if you want, so, who do you want to take?”

“Nah, Alpha, I’ll go alone. I don’t want to cause any needless fighting, after all.”

“That’s true, but it’s dangerous to go alone, you see. Although you got permission to go alone, it’s meaningless in this situation, isn’t it?”

“You can say that again. If I get another request like this, I’ll need to rethink about my demands.”

Akira grabbed his rucksack and left the hall. The other Hunters there were shocked and stared at Akira’s back as he was leaving that place. Some of them were simply surprised, some of them were displeased, but Akira did not bat an eyelash as he kept walking away from that place, disappearing into the tunnels.

Mimata snapped back to his senses and immediately asked the HQ. He sounded puzzled.

“Why that boy? Is this some kind of mistake or something? You’re not mistaking number 27 for someone else, aren’t you?”

“There’s no mistake, it is number 27.”

After the HQ denied Mimata’s suspicion, this time Katsuya was the one asking a question.

“Any particular reason why you picked number 27? If you picked it at random, I want you to let us choose instead.”

If the HQ randomly chose the people to send, it might cause a problem afterwards. That was Katsuya’s thoughts, so as the team leader, he asked HQ to rethink its decision.

But HQ denied that too.

“It’s no problem, we picked number 27 because of his record. But you can go ahead and pick the other two.”

Katsuya was shocked. He remembered the time when he was looked down upon and got assigned to the defense team instead of the extermination team by someone from the HQ, that person might be the same person who he was talking with right now. But that man sounded as if he recognized Akira who was also a young Hunter like him, it was just like the time he first met Akira.

This time Shiori joined the conversation.

“What do you mean by his record? Katsuya-sama and his 2 other friends took out a greedy crocodile on their own. If it’s picked based on the record, shouldn’t you pick them instead?”

“Katsuya? Ohh, the leader of the Drankam team, huh. Fighting Yarata Scorpions is not like fighting Greedy Crocodiles. The situation that you are in is also different, so based on the record, number 27 is more suitable in this situation. Stop complaining about every single little thing, or is it Drankam’s way of working to question the decision of your superiors?”

Drankam used its powerful influence to send some young Hunters for this request. But because there were numerous cases where the Hunters that Drankam sent did not have the ability or skill to handle the request, this staff had a bad impression about Drankam.

And even after that, he was questioned 2 times in a row by Hunters affiliated with Drankam about the decision that the HQ made, that was why he sounded annoyed and snappy when he gave his answer.

The staff’s answer made the Hunters in that place wonder just how strong this Akira actually was. But Mimata was not fully convinced as he asked.

“What exactly is his record like?”

“He was able to evacuate and rescue a group of Hunters from a building filled with monsters and was able to fend off a swarm of Yarata Scorpions that attacked them while evacuating those Hunters. Moreover, including the Yarata Scorpions killed in that building when he saved those Hunters and the Yarata Scorpions from the swarm that chased them, number 27 took out at least 60 Yarata Scorpions. He did all of these alone. The underground city is similar to an abandoned building filled with monsters and he had once fought against a swarm of Yarata Scorpions in such a situation. I think these are good enough reasons to pick him. Compared to that, shooting and killing a big greedy crocodile from afar with some help from an external party is nowhere nearly as good as his record. Or is it?”

Mimata mumbled out his amazement showing what the other Hunters were thinking after hearing that explanation.

“…Y-You gotta be kidding me, right?”

“It’s the information from the Hunter Office. At least you understand that it’s not some kind of joke. I don’t care if you believe it or not, just stand guard in that place, that’s all.”

The call from HQ ended soon after. Mimata, Katsuya and the other Hunters were dumbfounded as they looked at each other.

Although the shock had subsided from Reina’s head, she still could not get Akira off from her mind.

But she was better compared to Katsuya who felt some level of rivalry towards Akira. And after hearing about Akira’s record, he felt that his assumption about Akira was actually correct.

Katsuya was seeking for Akira’s strength, and Akira was the one who fuelled his competitive spirit. So Reina thought that if she followed Akira, she might be able to gain something. Something that would make her proud of her own strength, a trigger, an opportunity, a chance, anything.

As Reina thought of that, she ignored the fact that safety was the number one priority in the wasteland and there was a high chance that she might

bring danger to herself.

“…We can still send 2 other people, right?”

Shiori quickly understood the meaning behind Reina’s question.

“Milady?!”

“We’ll go after him, so get ready.”

Reina made her decision. Whether it was a decision that she carelessly made or it was a decision she made fully knowing its repercussion, she had to take full responsibility for her decision. But she was only a naive girl who did not fully understand this point.

Not only did the underground tunnels form a labyrinth, but the walls of the tunnels could also crumble anytime, which made it easier for anyone exploring it to get lost. Akira used the terminal lent to him to browse the map made by the exploration team and combined it together with the communication relay device to check his location. But of course, this kind of map was not available for the exploration team. After all, this map was made by them through their hard work. This map was really useful for the HQ to predict the routes used by the monsters and to decide the placement of the defensive points.

But if the scorpions were able to dig holes through the walls and open up new tunnels, the areas that were already secured were once again turned into dangerous areas. Although it was only a guess at the moment, it was enough to make exploring these areas extremely dangerous. And Akira was about to step into this life-threatening zone.

Even if he had to explore the area, it was not like Akira could just wander around without any objective. After he walked not too far from the defensive point 14, he stopped and asked Alpha what to do next.

“What should we do? Should we go to the defensive point 15 for now?”

“Any reason why you would do that?”

“If there are any scorpions withdrawing back from defensive point 15, they might be injured and leave some blood marks or other traces on their way back to where they came from… And also, in case if I meet another swarm and get overwhelmed, I would be able to run to defensive point 15 which would be closer than defensive point 14, right? They said that the Hunters there were able to fend off the swarm without any injuries, so it should be safer than defensive point 14.”

“That’s excellent judgement. Especially that last reason, it’s a very good reason.”

Although Alpha was smiling happily at him, Akira felt a slight of annoyance.

“Alpha, do you also think that defensive point 14 is dangerous?”

“The Hunters there are too relaxed and have completely split into 2 groups. I doubt they can fight well if they get ambushed, and of course, it’s more assuring to go to the people who had fought against that swarm before.”

“Yeah, exactly…”

Although, as the person who split off from the other 2 groups and basically made the third faction, it was not like he was in a position to say anything about it. Akira understood that, but he just could not help but grumble. Although he would not go as far as to tell them to get along with each other, Akira hoped that they would at least try not to get in each other’s way or even cause harm to one another like shooting the other group from behind their back. He basically did not want to worry about anyone “accidentally” shooting someone else.

“We should go soon. As training, try to explore the area without my support.”

“Training even in this situation, huh?”

“It’s exactly because we’re in this situation. Of course, I’ll keep scanning the surroundings as a training for myself too.”

“Your training?”

Akira was surprised, he thought that Alpha was an ultimate existence who did not need any more training. She just smiled and said something that he could not ignore.

“That’s right. I’m training myself to see how far I can give you my support only using your current equipment and to find the most effective way to do so. To be honest, even right now, my detection ability has been significantly lowered.”

Akira was frozen in place. When he came back to his senses, he started to panic. He desperately tried to stay calm, but he just could not do that.

“W-what do you mean?”

“It will take a long time to explain everything, so I’ll only explain to you the reason. First of all, I can’t use the same detection power in the underground city as when I’m on the surface. There are certain materials and facilities in the ruins that reduce my detection ability, and this place is filled with those things.”

“…So, just by how much exactly is your detection ability affected?”

“That’s a secret. But at least, compared to you or the other Hunters, my detection ability is still very high. As a matter of fact, it’s relatively very very high. But since I can use your detection ability as a comparison, it means that its range and sensitivity have been reduced significantly.”

Akira thought that it would have been better if he did not know this secret. He started to feel fear that he had not felt in a while. The fact that he might find a monster waiting for him right at the next corner and the fact that he was exploring an unfamiliar ruin gave him goosebumps. But he then clenched his teeth and made his resolve.

“It’s alright. Resolve is my responsibility, let’s go.”

If that was enough to stop him, he would not be able to survive as a Hunter. Thus Akira made his resolve and swung his leg forward.

“Akira. I’m sorry to disturb you when you’re already resolved yourself, but we have some guests.”

Alpha pointed behind Akira. He looked puzzled, but judging from her reaction, it did not seem like it was an enemy. So he slowly turned around while lowering his gun. He was so puzzled because of a different reason as he saw who his guests were.

“That girl…”

He saw Reina and Shiori walking towards him.

Reina and Shiori confirmed that it was Akira almost the same time when he turned back.

But to be more precise, Akira was slightly faster. Shiori noticed that and put up her guard against him.

There was no way Akira could see what was behind him. They were not close enough for him to hear their footsteps. He might be able to notice them using an information-gathering device, but she did not think Akira had such a good information-gathering device. Despite all of that, Akira turned back as if he knew well about their position. Shiori just could not think of that as a mere coincidence.

In the far east of the eastern district where the frontline was, there were some Hunters who could feel other’s gaze or presence and precisely pinpoint their position only from that which could not be explained with common sense or anything else. Shiori thought that Akira was one of those people, or at least he had a fraction of the talents of those people. Thus it would be extremely dangerous to antagonize him. Because of that, Shiori asked Reina to rethink her decision.

“…Milady, would you please rethink this?”

“No, it would be very suspicious if we ran away the moment he saw us. It would be bad if he misunderstands and thinks that we’re here to ambush him.”

“We have no reason to ambush him, so I’m sure he’ll understand if we explain.”

“Akira seems to be waiting for us, so let’s hurry up.”

Reina started running towards Akira, Shiori just gave up trying to convince her and followed behind her.

Akira thought that it might cause fewer problems if he just quickly moved away from Reina and Shiori. But inside that unknown ruin where Yarata scorpions might be hiding behind the wreckages that were scattered around the area and with Alpha’s lowered detection ability, Akira thought that it was too risky, so he just gave up on running away from Reina and Shiori.

And since he stopped where he was standing after seeing them, he had no other choice but to wait until they joined him. When Reina reached him, Akira curtly asked her.

“What’s wrong?”

Reina answered back in a serious tone.

“We’re here to explore the area too.”

“I see. I’ll be exploring around that area, so you can explore the other area.”

“We’re coming with you.”

Akira was actually trying to indirectly refuse her offer, but it seemed that Reina did not catch that, or maybe she did but ignored it. Unfortunately, he did not have enough social experience to discern it. So then he shifted his gaze to Shiori as if he was blaming her.

“…Milady, it seems that he has no wish to form a team with us. I believe it’s best if we withdraw ourselves here.”

Reina’s face immediately turned grim. She seemed like she was about to say something but she stopped herself as she sighed and calmed down, or at least she was trying to calm herself down. She thought that it would be a very bad idea to annoy Akira in this place. It was obvious that was the reason why she was trying to hold herself back.

As Reina was telling herself to calm down, she continued to try negotiating with Akira so that she could go together with him.

“…We’ll come with you, we’ll be useful to you… Well, at least Shiori will be useful to you.”

“In that case, I can just bring her but not you.”

“Shiori will only return back if I’m not with her.”

“If that’s true, then both of you can go back.”

“We’ll come with you.”

“No thanks, go back.”

After Akira yelled at them, he just turned around, ignored Reina and Shiori, and continued his exploration. He was carefully moving deeper into the ruin. After a few minutes, he turned around since it was bothering him, and as he expected, he found Reina and Shiori still tailing him. Moreover, they kept a pretty close distance to him as if they were exploring the area together with him.

Akira walked towards them, he then sighed exasperatedly and said.

“…Is that it? Are you not going to leave me unless I point my rifle at you and threaten you to leave me alone?”

Shiori answered back swiftly with a serious face.

“In that case, I’ll do all I can to fight back. Since it’ll cause an unnecessary loss for both of us, I hope you would reconsider.”

Shiori eyes were saying that she was serious. Akira could feel her strong will to protect Reina no matter what even if she had to sacrifice herself.

Akira was frankly amazed by her strong will, but he thought that this was not the right place to show that resolve, so he exasperatedly glared at Shiori.

“If you would even go that far, then you should do all you can to drag this girl back, right?”

“My position is under Milady, thus I have the duty to respect Milady’s will as long as it’s acceptable. The only time when I’m allowed to ignore Milady’s wish is when her life is in danger.”

Akira sighed again and was tearing his hairs out.

“Alpha, is there anything I can do about this?”

“It can’t be helped. Let’s just give up and don’t let them bother you too much.”

“Why in the world should I bring something that might bring me trouble in the near future?!!”

“Because it’ll only worsen the situation if you use force to make her go back.”

“…That’s true, but still…”

“You can at least use them as decoys or shields. I’m sure they’ll return back on their own if they get injured. So let’s just give up making them leave you alone. After all, it’s not like you can really point your gun at them and tell them to go back home, right?”

“…You’re right.”

Akira gave up and continued exploring the area.

He just ignored Reina and Shiori who were tailing him and carefully continued exploring the area while heading to the defensive point number

15. He periodically checked his information-gathering device to confirm if there were any monsters around him. Even if his information-gathering device did not pick up anything, he still remembered what happened the other day when he was ambushed by a swarm of Yarata Scorpion. So he did not drop his guard down and kept moving carefully.

Of course, Alpha would tell him if he missed anything, but since the Yarata Scorpion might camouflage themselves among the rubbles and wreckages around him, he could not help but move carefully. Because of that, he was moving rather slowly.

“Alpha, now that I remember it, is there any problem with my information-gathering device’s current setting?”

“Yes, there is.”

“… Yep, thought so.”

“The optimal setting changes with your surroundings or the aiming device of your gun if you use it in tandem with the information-gathering device. There are some types of monsters that specialize in hiding themselves, so you need to adjust your information-gathering device to be able to detect those monsters. It’s also important to adjust its scanning range. If you make it smaller, monsters might be able to notice you before you notice them, but if you make it wider, its sensitivity will fall and you might get ambushed. So you need to consider all of these factors and carefully readjust your setting.”

“So in short, it’s not something that the current me can do, right? So Alpha, can you do that for me?”

“Certainly. Yep, it has been readjusted. But you’ll have to do it yourself eventually, okay?”

After Alpha’s readjustment, the sensitivity and effectiveness of Akira’s information-gathering device increased exponentially. Because of that, the information displayed in Akira’s visor suddenly changed.

Signals coming from Reina and Shiori who were behind him became clear and the blurry map that was showing his current position was updated. It even showed and indicated the differences between the current condition and the map made by the exploration team down to even the precise locations of the crumbled rubbles. It used echolocation and other means to widen the detection range to detect what was behind wreckages, rubbles and corners.

Akira was very surprised.

“Whoah, that was a huge change. I would only get the previous level’s of information had I not asked you to readjust it, huh?”

“You need to learn to question yourself whether it’s showing the correct information or not. Or that it needs adjustment or not.”

Akira hung his head low.

“…I’ll give my best.”

“Yep, you should.”

Alpha smiled at Akira just like always as she replied.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 44, Facing Conflicts

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Reina refused to back down as she obstinately followed Akira, but she found it strange that Akira was moving slowly even for someone who was exploring an extremely dangerous underground city.

“Shiori, why is he moving so slowly?”

“Every person has a different speed, principle and judgement during a ruin exploration. I believe that he’s the kind of person who prefers to make a full check even if it slows him down.”

“But even so, he’s still way too slow, isn’t he? There are 3 people monitoring the area here, you know?”

Reina actually understood the importance of scanning the area. The underground city hallway was filled with wreckages and rubbles, places where monsters might hide. Not to mention, Yarata Scorpions could camouflage itself and blend with the wreckages. Thus, she could understand why Akira would want to proceed very carefully.

But even with that in mind, if Akira’s skill was the same as what she heard, there should be no problem even if he moved faster. Or at least, with 3

people here keeping watch, Akira was moving way too slow and she found it vexing.

Shiori hesitated to answer that question. After all, she knew that the real reason was something which might annoy Reina. But again, keeping that as secret would be against her duty, thus she tried to explain the reason to Reina in her own way.

“It’s not 3 people, but 1 person.”

“Eh? There are 3 of us here, right?”

“He doesn’t expect nor rely for our support, and that’s also the case for scanning the area too. He always rescans the places that we’ve scanned. Not to mention, he always proceeds carefully while taking positions where he will be able to deal with the enemies using his own firepower in case we are ambushed by a swarm of Yarata Scorpions. In short, he’s exploring the area as if he’s still alone.”

Shiori’s guess was correct. Akira was doing that as his training and he did it with the assumption that Shiori and Reina would leave him as a decoy in case they were overrun by monsters.

Reina’s face twitched in anger, she thought that Akira was looking down at her. It was as if she was just a total amateur Hunter and a dead weight to him. She was about to yell but was somehow able to hold herself back. After all, if she yelled, that would not only be her admitting that she had forced herself onto Akira, she would also be attracting the monsters. It would just be her admitting she was nothing other than dead weight.

Reina was trying to hold herself back. Although she whispered in a calm voice, it was obvious that she was angry and was even trembling slightly out of said anger.

“…Are we really that bad, to the point that he doesn’t even trust us?”

Shiori answered back with a soft voice in order to calm Reina down.

“He just doesn’t know our ability yet. For someone who does not judge another Hunter’s ability by his or her Rank, his actions are understandable. Just think of it as he’s trying to remove the risk coming from trusting his life to someone that he doesn’t know well. It’s very difficult to judge someone’s abilities. Even someone as strong as Katsuya-sama is still looked down upon as a young Hunter. Thus, it’s doubly true for us.”

“That might be true, but still…”

The Hunter Rank is supposed to show the ability of a Hunter. But it is rated using accomplishments, thus it cannot be used as proof of one’s ability when it came to fighting against monsters. There were Hunters who got high rank because of their combat skills despite being terrible when it came to collecting relics or exploring ruins. And of course, it was also true for the opposite case. In the end, those two types of Hunters would have the same Hunter Rank as if they produced the same result.

After Shiori’s explanation, Reina calmed down for a bit and thought that if what she heard back in the station about Akira was true, that would mean he might be a Hunter who focused on hunting monsters. He might also have seen other Hunters with higher rank despite being weaker than him. If that was the case, then it was only to be expected for him to treat her and Shiori like he did.

Reina was able to calm down after she thought about it, but it was not like it could completely erase her displeasure.

“Milady, as I thought, we should return back. Even if were to accompany him, I don’t think it would bring any benefit for us.”

“…No, I refuse!”

Reina felt that if she turned back here, it would only mean that she came all the way there just to bother Akira before turning back and returning without producing any results. She simply could not stand the thought of that so she refused Shiori’s suggestion. But more than that, Reina was hoping to find something that could make her proud of her own skill, something like a trigger, a chance, anything.

Shiori reassessed the situation. Even if Reina persistently wanted to stay here, it did not seem like Akira would count her as his ally. If they got ambushed by a swarm of Yarata Scorpions, in the worst-case scenario, Akira might even see her as his enemy. He might even shoot her and use her as a diversion in order to save himself.

Shiori understood that if Reina would not change her mind, then she must try to change Akira's mind. At the very least, she needed to make sure that he would help them if they were in a pinch. As Shiori decided on that option, she started thinking about how to approach Akira.

Akira suddenly stopped and made a long "Hmmmm". He had ventured quite far while keeping watch for any traces from the Yarata Scorpions that just attacked the defensive point number 15, but even so, he could not find any noticeable traces.

At this rate, he would reach the defensive point number 15 without finding anything. He wondered if he missed anything on his way here, so he asked Alpha to confirm it.

"Alpha, I know that I'm in the middle of training to look for signs and traces. That's why I'm trying my best to be careful not to miss anything, but in case if there's something that I miss, be sure to tell me, okay? We're here for a job, after all."

"Don't worry, I'll properly inform you. After all, it would be really bad for me too if you get ambushed by a swarm of Yarata Scorpions because of that."

As Alpha smiled at Akira, he returned back with a bitter smile.

"Well, thank you for that, but that would mean that there were really no traces that I missed, huh… If I don't find anything worth noting, I feel like the HQ would complain again about me taking too long."

Akira frowned a bit. Alpha who saw that understood that he did not say that to whine about the HQ, but he was actually complaining about his own lack of ability. She then smiled gently at him.

“When that happens, just let them say everything they want to say. If they wanted to make a proper search of the area, they should have dispatched an exploration team instead. So it’s only to be expected for someone from the defense team to take longer when exploring the area. There’s nothing for you to worry about, so let’s not rush ourselves and continue exploring the area carefully.”

In a sense, Alpha was also Akira’s employer. She was really happy that he took his job very seriously, but it would be bad if he got killed by that virtue even before he could finish her request. Thus she really wished that he would not take this job too seriously, for her sake.

“…Well, that’s true. Alright then, I understand.”

After saying that, Akira renewed his resolve and was about to continue the exploration. But Shiori suddenly called him.

“Akira-sama, I have something I want to talk about, could you please listen for a moment?”

Akira was thinking of ignoring her, but her next words made him inadvertently turn around.

“I want to make a request for Akira-sama to act as Milady’s bodyguard. I want to negotiate about the details and the rewards for the request.”

It was really out of the blue and Akira could not immediately process what Shiori just said. It took some time before he came back to his senses. He was totally dumbfounded and looked confused as he instinctively said.

“…Hah?”

Shiori knew that at least Akira was not ignoring her, so she immediately proceeded to explain what she just said to clear up his confusion.

“Please let me explain the details of the request. The period of the request is until we’re finished with this Yarata Scorpions extermination request, during this time, I want you to stay in the range where you can protect

Milady. The reward will be 5,000,000 Aurum that will be paid once you've finished the request. This reward will not be reduced if the HQ assigns you with a job that would make it impossible for you to stay around Milady, but if you ask for such a job by your own volition or lead Milady into danger, we'll have to negotiate the amount of the reward deduction…"

Reina was also shocked and frozen, just like Akira when she heard that sudden suggestion from Shiori. But when she was back to her senses, she immediately protested.

"W-wait for sec!! What the heck are you saying out of the blue?!!"

"I'm requesting for Milady's bodyguard. If Milady has no wish of returning back to defensive point 14, I have to look for another way to guarantee Milady's safety. But if Milady decides to return back, then I shall take back my request."

"B-but, even if you want to employ an outsider, there's no way Drankam would let us pay him 5,000,000 Aurum!?"

"Please don't worry, I'll pay him with my own money. It might be a huge sum, but Milady's safety takes the utmost importance."

Reina understood from Shiori's serious expression that she was really planning to pay that using her own money.

Reina also understood well that it would be futile even if she told Shiori to rethink about it. After all, it would be the same as telling Shiori to rethink about her own safety, which obviously, she would not take any chances on.

Of course, even for Reina, she felt bad making Shiori go that far for her own selfishness. She knew that everything would be resolved if she decided to go back, but she really wanted to stay there until she could leave a notable achievement, and not to mention, she had a stubborn personality. Because of that, Reina was confused and did not know what to do.

An unwavering heart and a wavering heart, Reina and Shiori looked at each other with gazes full of meaning, their respective wills contradicted with the

available options.

Akira was unconsciously sucked into the mood while still being stunned, but Alpha suddenly spoke to him.

“Akira, if you leave them alone, you would not be able to rectify whether you are going to take that request or not, you know?”

Akira quickly snapped back and said in a panic.

“Wait for a sec. Leaving aside whether you’ll return back or not, I can’t take that request.”

“…I’m willing to negotiate if the reward is not enough.”

Shiori was thinking of increasing the reward, but Akira just shook his head.

“No, I’m not saying that the reward is not enough, the real problem is my ability. I have my hands full protecting myself, so I don’t think I can guarantee other’s safety. That’s why even if you increase the reward, I still can’t accept your request.”

Reina was surprised.

“But you have saved a group of Hunters from a swarm of Yarata Scorpions all by yourself, right? The HQ staff said that himself, you know. But even then, you’re still saying that you don’t have enough skill?”

“I barely survived that, you know. I even exhausted all of my ammo and was so close to getting killed back then. I’m definitely not going to do that again even if someone told me to.”

“Then why did you do that?”

“It was because the Hunters who I saved didn’t convey the right information to the HQ. At that time, it seems that they only told HQ they were ambushed by insect-like monsters. I only knew that they were stuck inside a Yarata Scorpion nest after arriving there. What happened after that was nothing more than me trying to deal with what I was facing.”

“If it was really that bad, then why did you take this request to eliminate the Yarata Scorpion nest?”

Akira started getting annoyed, it was not like he took this request because he wanted to.

“There’s no way I can just refuse a request from the Kugamayama city Long-term Strategic Division, you know!! Of course, I would have refused this request if I could!!”

“I-I see, I’m sorry to hear that.”

Reina was taken aback when Akira yelled at her, but she tried to hide it with a smile. She then pushed her courage to ask the last thing that was still bothering her.

“…S-so in short, you’re actually not that strong, am I right?”

“Yeah.”

After hearing the explanation from HQ, Shiori and Reina imagined Akira as a very skilled Hunter who charged right into a Yarata Scorpion’s nest alone, saved a group of Hunters, and protected them all the way back to the HQ without getting anyone injured. But Akira just denied that so straightforwardly that it crushed their image of him into dust. As they looked at him again, he just looked like a normal young Hunter to them now.

There was an awkward silence between them, all of them were dumbfounded.

Shiori looked a bit flustered as she was looking at Reina and made a new suggestion to Akira.

“In that case, please let me change the details of the request. I want to ask you to provide support to Milady. The duration of the request is until Milady returns back to the defensive point, the reward will be 100,000 Aurum. So, will you accept it?”

“Shiori?”

Reina could not understand what Shiori was trying to convey as she was making a puzzled face, but Shiori returned it with a gentle gaze as if she was trying to calm her down. It was like a gaze from an older sister who was worried because of her troublesome little sister.

“I’ll retract that request if Milady decides to return back, but Milady has no wish of doing so, right?”

“…Ughh.”

Reina stubbornly followed Akira thinking that he was a very skilled Hunter. It would be pathetic if she immediately decided to go back the moment she knew that her assumption was not true. She would go back if she was told to, but she really did not want to say that herself.

Shiori understood Reina’s thoughts and decided to make a new suggestion to Akira instead. If Akira refused that request, Shiori was planning to use that as an excuse to return back. And if Akira took that request, she would pay him some money for roping him into this awkward situation and build a good relationship with him. Both outcomes were not bad so Shiori decided to make that request.

Shiori looked back at Akira and waited for his answer. Akira was at loss on what to do, but Alpha suddenly said to him.

“It would be troublesome if it caused another fight if you refuse it, so how about you accept their request instead? This request can also be used as an excuse so that we won’t be fighting against each other while we’re exploring the ruin together, and it was not like you have to proactively protect them. So let’s just accept the request and end this argument here. But of course, you can say no too, if you want.”

“…You’re right, I guess I’ll do that.”

Akira thought that it was not like Shiori and Reina were expecting something from his ability, he could just provide them with some help while

still focusing on his exploration. He thought that if it was only that much, then it might be okay to take their request.

“Alright, I’ll take that request. My name is Akira.”

“I’m Shiori. Over here please.”

Shiori handed out 10 sheets of 10,000 Aurum notes to Akira. With this, their negotiation had come into a conclusion.

Akira put that money into his pocket and turned to Reina.

“So then, what do you want to do?”

“What to do?”

“I’m asking what you are planning to do from now on. The request is to provide you with my support, I want to hear what you want to do so that I can give you proper support. You should decide what we are going to do.”

“Well, uhh…”

Reina had no idea what to say. After all, when she chased Akira, she only thought that she would try to be useful if anything happened, so it was not like she had any concrete ideas on what to do. Moreover, she usually only followed Katsuya’s order, so she was not used to thinking about strategy. Because of that, she could not come up with an answer when Akira suddenly asked her that question.

Shiori then answered that question in Reina’s place.

“At the moment, let’s continue exploring the area just like what Akira-sama was doing until now. Of course, that is if Milady is okay with that. There’s no need to unnecessarily make any changes when it’s not required, will that be okay?”

“Y-you’re right, let’s do that!!”

“Okay then.”

They continued exploring the area. Reina was watching the flank while glancing at Akira from time to time. The scan area was divided among 3 people this time, thus they moved faster than before. But even so, Reina thought that it was still relatively slow.

The biggest reason as to why they were moving that slow was because Akira who was in the front took too long scanning for monsters. There was no mistaking that it was Akira who was slowing them down. It was only to be expected since they were assigning a young inexperienced Hunter like Akira to lead in the front.

But Reina found that very strange, if Akira's ability really only amounted for this much, then his battle record did not make any sense at all. And it was unthinkable for him to go exploring the ruin alone just because the HQ told him to.

Moreover, there was no way Kugamayama city's Long-term Strategic Division would send a designated request to someone like him. Unlike Reina and the other young Hunters from Drankam, who got that request by using Drankam's connections. Since he worked alone, he would not be able to hide his lack of skill as a young Hunter behind a team and so the Long-term Strategic Division must have sent an individually designated request to him. There was no mistaking it that Akira got that request because of the evaluation of his individual skill.

Looking at how Akira so straightforwardly introduced himself as someone who was actually not that skilled, it was enough to convince Reina that he was actually saying the truth. But after she calmed down and thought about it once more, it still felt weird to her. Even if she assumed that Akira's ability was completely tilted towards his fighting skill to make the story fit, he looked nothing but a young inexperienced Hunter to her. It just did not make sense for her.

In the end, it was still a huge mystery as to how good Akira's fighting ability was. Reina just could not help but to wonder.

Shiori noticed Reina's behaviour, so she rebuked Reina since she was so deep in thought that she started losing focus.

“Milady, is there something that’s bothering you?”

“Ah, sorry, it’s nothing.”

Reina snapped back to reality, but it did not take long before she started losing focus again.

It could be said that Shiori understood better than Reina herself about what she was actually thinking. The reason why Reina wanted to know Akira’s ability was that she wanted to use it as a reference to evaluate her own ability. So strictly speaking, it was actually not that important for her to know Akira’s real ability. But Reina did not realize that as her thinking veered away from her real intention.

Shiori thought that Reina would keep getting distracted unless the real source of her distraction was resolved. And so Shiori asked Akira.

“Akira-sama. From your point of view, how will you evaluate Milady?”

Akira looked puzzled and asked back.

“Even if you ask me, I don’t really know her so I can’t really answer that question, and it’s not like I can judge her ability just by looking at her. Why do you ask?”

“If I do it, it would be biased. And evaluation from Drankam is mixed with her evaluation from working in a team. Since we’re together, I thought that this is a good chance to ask for someone else’s opinion. Please think of it as a kind of support for Milady and tell us your opinion.”

“Even if you tell me so…”

Akira looked confused. Since Shiori said that it was also a type of support for Reina, he had to answer it seriously. Unfortunately, he did not know what to say, so he turned to Alpha for help.

“Alpha.”

“Try to think about it yourself. It’s also an important skill for a Hunter to be able to judge others abilities only by looking at them. Just think of it as training. So Akira, squeeze your brain and answer that question yourself, okay?”

Alpha was giggling when she said that, she told Akira to do that himself so that he would be more careful before picking a fight against people that he did not know well. She hoped Akira would calmly evaluate other people’s strength before deciding to pick a fight or to avoid conflict in case if it was someone that he could not handle.

Back then when Akira killed someone from a gang in the slum city, or when he saved Elena and Sara in the ruin, he quickly registered those people as his enemies from the start and then asked for Alpha’s support to take care of the rest. As for her, in order to avoid any needless fighting, she hoped that he would ask for her support first before deciding on fighting. She wanted him to calmly evaluate his opponents’ strength first before deciding whether to fight them or not.

Though, this also proved that Alpha still did not understand the moral principles behind his actions.

Akira, who was at a loss since Alpha would not help him, asked Shiori instead.

“Hmmm. Even if you ask me, what are the indicators to judge someone’s ability? I’m sure it’s not like you can judge Hunters who focus on hunting monsters with the same standard used for judging Hunters who focus on hunting relics. And there are also many different methods that can be used to judge a Hunter too…”

“That’s indeed true. In that case, if you’re going to ask Milady to help you in doing a Hunter job, how much would you be willing to pay? If you need to know her battle record or any other information, I’ll answer as far as I’m allowed to.”

How much a Hunter would be willing to pay other Hunters to help him or her doing a Hunter job, that was the easiest form of evaluation. It was a

clean-cut evaluation where Hunter Rank was nothing but one of the many things that affected it.

Reina was also interested in the evaluation of her real ability. But she did not want to make her evaluation worse by giving any unneeded remarks, thus she was planning to answer honestly while trying not to look too pretentious in case if Akira asked her something.

But Akira quickly concluded.

“Oh, I see, in that case, I won’t ask for her help.”

Reina was so surprised by that unexpected answer, she was more surprised rather than furious. That answer was basically saying that Akira would not want her help even if Reina would help him for free. That evaluation was very close to the worst possible evaluation.

Akira said it so casually that he did not sound like he was joking or teasing Reina. There was no particular intonation in his words. But that only made it much more shocking for Reina, she even felt a bit dizzy after hearing his answer.

Shiori could not hide her displeasure as she voiced it out.

“…Akira-sama, I think you went too far there… Ah, let me rephrase it, please give me an explanation so that I can accept your answer.”

Although Shiori said that with a calm tone, it clearly projected out her feelings. Reina immediately snapped back to her senses when she heard Shiori.

Akira did not even flinch when he heard that, he just answered back with a casual tone.

“It’s just that it would be a huge pain in the ass. Hypothetically speaking, if you were to get ambushed by a swarm of Yarata Scorpion, let’s say 50 of them, and you can easily defeat that swarm plus the rest of the Hunters in the defensive point 15, I would change my mind.”

Reina looked bewildered as she answered back.

“W-well, of course, I can’t say I’m that strong, but still…”

“That guy, number 147, was it again? When you picked a fight against him, how much did you think about its possible consequences? Did you think that you can easily handle any possible dangerous situation in that place so much that you would be okay if you guys started shooting at each other? Or like, did you have any proof that they would not start shooting at you no matter what?”

Akira silently waited for Reina’s answer. But Reina could not answer back. Although she decided that she would answer any question without putting up air, she already got stuck and could not answer back right from the first question.

Reina and her friends were only irritated by Mimata when they picked a fight with his group, she did not think any deeper than that. But she could not say that to Akira. So instead of answering his question, she tried to bury the shock from his bad evaluation of her by yelling back in anger.

“In that case then, what should we do instead?! Are you saying that we should have let them say everything they wanted to say and just stayed quiet when they were mocking us?!!”

“Not really. It’s up to you, you can just let them be, or you can also kill them if you can’t take being mocked like that. There are cases where it would be fatal if you look down on your opponents, and there are cases where it’s better if you point your gun at your opponents and threaten them. Basically, you can do whatever you want as long as you can accurately calculate the consequences and you’re sure that you can handle them. So, what kind of outcome did you imagine back then?”

Akira answered back casually before throwing another question, he then stared at Reina and waited for her answer.

But Reina could not answer back. After all, she did not think about the consequences at all and she could not say that to Akira.

Shiori, who was just listening to them in silence, interjected. She was already regretting her decision of asking that question to Akira.

“Akira-sama. If the situation worsened up until that point, I would do everything that I could to calm the situation. As such, I don’t think that you can use that assumption as an evaluation.”

“If you did that knowing that Shiori would handle the rest no matter what would happen, then that is okay too. But it means that I need to rectify my answer, I misunderstood and thought that you were asking an individual evaluation instead of an evaluation of your team of two.”

“But, why does it have anything to do with the other Hunters and that 50 Yarata Scorpions?”

“I was just wondering if you thought that even after having that fight and completely antagonizing the other group, would you be able to handle both the swarm and the other Hunters too in case if they start attacking you simultaneously.”

“…Aren’t you just being too paranoid?”

“That might be true.”

It was obvious that Shiori was getting angrier every time Akira answered back so casually, but he did not falter as he was locking gaze with her.

“That was indeed a little bit too paranoid, after all, it is highly unlikely for something like that to happen. Normally, there’s no need to go that far. In short, I just want to know how you handle different situations. From how you were behaving back in the defensive point number 14 and how you talked with me or that number 147, I just thought that I would not want to use my own money just to bring someone who tends to pick a fight needlessly. That’s all. It’s not like I’m going to say that my evaluation is correct. If you don’t like it, just ignore it as a trivial opinion from a stupid brat.”

Shiori and Reina did not retort. Although both of them stayed silent, they were silent because of different reasons. Reina was dejected. While on the other hand, Shiori, who obviously angry, had something darker and more sinister welling up inside her, replacing her anger.

“…Leaving the fact whether that explanation convinced me or not, I already listened to your explanation for that evaluation. But then, may I ask you one more thing?”

Shiori paused for a bit and sent a cold gaze to Akira.

“Do you not think that you would anger me with that answer?”

Akira should have known that Shiori was there in order to support Reina. If he told Reina to think about the consequences before doing anything, then he should have also thought of the same before he said that answer. Shiori signalled that to Akira and used it to threaten him.

Shiori was basically already threatening Akira there, but she then immediately dropped it.

Akira resolved himself before answering back.

“You told me to answer it as a form of support. Since I took your request, I thought that I should give my best to answer your question. So I thought that it would be better if I answer it honestly rather than lying, even if it might anger you.”

Basically, Shiori was asking Akira if he fully understood that it might cause a fight between them when he replied with his answers.

And Akira basically answered that with a yes.

Both of them were ready to jump into a fight. If any of them made the slightest move, it could be the trigger for a fight. They stood still while watching each other, looking for an opening, they were already assuming that it would definitely turn into a fight.

Both of them were not even thinking of pointing their gun at the other person and asking the other person to drop their gun, both of them were thinking of immediately pulling the trigger to at least render the other person unable to fight. They would decide later whether to kill the other person or not after judging from the situation after that, but it was highly unlikely for them to have that leeway and both of them understood that very well.

Was it because Akira accepted Shiori's threat, or was it because Shiori took Akira's provocation. But as long as none of them would take a step back, the situation there would not change.

The mood tensed up. It was only a matter of time before both of them started shooting at each other.

"Shiori… Stop there…"

Reina suddenly stopped Shiori.

"M-Milady…"

"…It's fine… Just stop there… Please."

Reina said with a meek voice while still hanging her head low. After that, Shiori lowered her guard and Akira followed suit.

They just avoided a fight here, Akira eased himself and sighed. While Alpha who was floating beside him let out a bigger sigh while locking her gaze at Akira.

"Although you said all of that while ignoring a lot of things, in terms of causing trouble, I don't think you're losing out at all, you know."

"I-It's not like I was the one picking the fight, you know."

Akira himself thought that it was a bad excuse as he slightly frowned. Alpha kept staring at him and smiled.

“It’s true that I suggested that you take her request, but I also told you to think well about it, right? But you know, there’s no need for you to try so hard to overturn my prediction calculated using my advanced calculation ability. It’s okay, I understand what you’re trying to prove.”

“…I-I’m sorry.”

Akira tried to run away from that subject by apologizing and Alpha just smiled back at him.

If Alpha had told Akira to give a good evaluation although it was just an empty compliment, they would have been able to avoid this conflict without causing any trouble.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 45, The Power Of Special Ammo

Index

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After a short argument with Reina and Shiori about his evaluation of Reina, Akira quickly turned back to continue exploring the underground city. He thought that Shiori and Reina would leave him alone after that fight, but unlike what he expected, they both decided to stay there rather than returning back to the defensive point 14.

Reina was extremely dejected, but she did not allow her feelings to affect her current work. As a matter of fact, she was performing better than before their argument, it might be because she was no longer bothered by any unnecessary thinking. Shiori who noticed that felt hurt.

Akira could feel the mood behind him and felt rather uncomfortable.

“I know that it might be too late for this, but like, is it better if I say something to them since cheering them up might be included as my duty in the request that I accepted?”

To be honest, this mood was the result of Akira trying to take his job, which was to give Reina his support, too seriously that it caused a fight instead. So looking at the outcome, Akira wondered if he had actually done a bad job back then.

Alpha smiled bitterly.

“If you think that you should’ve prioritized avoiding a fight from the beginning, then your actions were wrong. Or at least, you should have told them your opinion using gentler words. So in short, that fight was basically because of your lack of skill.”

“Well, that’s true…”

“But putting that aside, I think it was more important that you’re taking your request very seriously. To be honest, I was happy to be able to confirm that you’re someone who takes requests very seriously since I’m also someone who made a request to you. And also by doing that, they’ll be more careful when they want to get involved with you next time. So looking from this point of view, what you did back there was not entirely bad. So, there’s no need for you to be this much bothered.”

People in the Slum city were forced to beg with all they had if they did not want to die. Although it was not like he had to go that far, Akira lived a difficult life for years. The reason why he became a Hunter was to gain power so he could escape from living in such an environment.

And then Akira became a Hunter, gained a small amount of power and finally was able to struggle against the environment he was in.

That was exactly why he refused to do the same thing that he always did if he was faced with the same situation as before. He was actually scared if he did the same thing as before, it would mean he returned back to his previous self. He was so afraid of that happening, that he would rather risk his life than beg for it.

Akira himself did not realize it, that was why he was troubled with the way he was acting. And in order to take advantage of it, Alpha smiled gently to Akira and encouraged him.

There was a dead corpse of Yarata scorpion scattered in the underground hallway. It had bullet holes in its torso and some of its legs were blasted to

pieces. Bloods flowed from its wounds and left traces that formed a straight line.

Akira checked that corpse and its location in the underground city map.

“Looking at the direction of the traces left by this corpse, it seems that this is one of the Yarata scorpions that attacked defensive point number 15, huh. Assuming that it was dead on its way back to its nest, I might be able to find more dead scorpions which died the same way around here. If I tracked their traces, I might be able to find their nest, but… Alpha, do you notice any other Yarata Scorpions around the area?”

“I can’t find any alive or dead Yarata scorpions around the area.”

“I see… It’s not like I can finish the exploration just because I found one dead Yarata Scorpion. I guess I have no other choice but to keep looking for more, huh?”

“Of course I can even help you find traces that normally would be very hard to notice, but they might think it is unnatural if you discover traces that are extremely hard to find. If they ask you how you found them, you’ll need to come up with some logical excuses, you know. So, what do you want? Want me to look for any traces?”

Akira thought for a bit before answering back.

“…Let’s see… Please do that. With all the things that have happened, I want to finish the search as soon as possible. If they ask me how I found the traces, I’ll just tell them that it was just pure luck.”

“Although I told you to come up with an excuse, that’s a lame excuse.”

“It’ll be fine. Not to mention that the HQ told me to do this because they evaluated my skill when I had your support. If they ask me to explain all of my previous achievements, I can’t say anything more other than just being lucky. So it’s too late to complain about that now.”

Akira already made up his mind, Alpha who was watching how he behaved smiled at him.

“Alright, I found it.”

“That was fast!!!”

“Well, that’s just how good I am.”

As Akira looked surprised and instinctively turned to Alpha, she replied by smiling mischievously and pointed her finger towards a different direction than where the defensive point 15 was located. And at the same time, she enhanced Akira’s vision so that he could see faint traces that he would normally have missed. He could even see an indicator on the floor showing the route that he should take.

Akira started walking following the indicator in his vision. Reina and Shiori found it strange that he suddenly changed route although they were heading towards the defensive point number 15 up until now. But since Reina still had not recovered from her dejection and with Shiori’s hesitation in asking him, they just followed Akira without knowing the reason why he suddenly changed direction.

Although the hallway looked exactly the same even after Akira changed direction, he could see small traces had started popping out in his enhanced vision as he followed the route that Alpha indicated. Small scratches on the floors. Marks of wreckages and rubbles shoved aside to make way. Tiny blood marks scattered around the place. Putting everything together, it was obvious that a huge number of Yarata scorpions passed through this place.

As Akira could see those small traces thanks to Alpha support, he started to unconsciously move following those traces. Shiori, who noticed it, started to feel that it was strange how Akira was moving. He was moving as if he knew exactly where he was heading, or at least, he was moving as if he was following a guide. When Shiori felt that, she just had to ask him about that sudden change of his movements, Akira who was leading the team suddenly stopped. He was standing in front of a big hole in the middle of the hallway.

The hole was big enough for multiple people to pass through at the same time. The inner part of the hole looked completely dark since there was no illumination installed inside it. And the biggest problem of all was that hole was not present in the underground city map.

When Akira shone his torchlight into the hole, he could see a man-made floor about 20 metres below. It was obvious that it connected the underground city to a different area. But the map also had no information about the area that hole was connected to.

Akira quickly picked up his terminal and contacted the HQ.

“This is number 27. HQ, you there?”

“This is HQ. What’s wrong?”

“I found a hole that is not on the map. It seems that it’s connected to the other underground area. It might be the place where the Yarata scorpions that attacked defensive point 15 came from.”

“Wait for a sec… Can you turn the rental terminal towards that hole?”

Akira then turned the rental terminal’s camera towards the hole just like he was told to, the terminal then sent the image and the other data to the HQ.

“…We’ve confirmed it, that hole leads to an uncharted area. I bet there are Yarata Scorpions down there.”

“So like, there is more than one Yarata Scorpion nest down here?”

“Yes. There are countless Yarata scorpions’ breeding grounds located in the underground city. At the moment, we already took out 17 nests. I’m sure there are still other nests out there. I think it’s not an exaggeration to say that the whole underground city itself is their nest.”

Akira remembered the building he was in when he was ambushed by a swarm of Yarata Scorpion, he frowned as it looked similar, just that this was inside the underground city.

“…I see. With this, my job to search the area is finished. I’ll be heading back to the defensive point 14.”

“No. We have to build another defensive point there. Stand by over there and wait for reinforcements to arrive. Stop any monsters that try to come out from that hole.”

“Wait for a sec. Only with the three of us? Isn’t that a bit impossible…?”

“Whoah there, you decided to go out alone so it means that you have enough confidence in your own ability, right? Not to mention that among the 2 people that came with you, one of them is a skilled Hunter among the other Hunters in the defensive point 14. I think you have enough firepower there. Securing the safety of the area is also the defence team’s job. So just do it.”

“…This is number 27, roger that.”

Of course, Akira could not tell the HQ that he was so close to killing the other 2 Hunters who were with him, so he just obediently accepted that order from HQ.

They started installing temporal illumination around the hallway, although it was not that bright, it was still better than the total darkness that wrapped the underground city. The big hole on the hallway peered into the darkness. The dim light that illuminated the area around its entrance seemed as if it was showing the people who looked at it about the danger it housed. Compared to when you were in an explored area, the possibility of meeting monsters in an uncharted area was far higher.

In the middle of the current scene, Akira was seen sitting in front of the big hole staring into the darkness. Normally, one would only be able to see total darkness inside that tunnel, but due to Alpha’s support, he could see shapes and distances within his monochromatic vision.

“This vision is really useful. You did this when we were in the Higaraka Residence ruin too, right?”

“Yep. It’s better than total darkness, right?”

“Yeah, it is. With this vision, I wonder if I can recognize a Yarata Scorpion from afar if one of them decides to crawl out from this hole?”

“When that happens, I’ll let you know before you can see them, so don’t worry.”

“Then I’ll be relying on you.”

Akira chatted with Alpha and did some studying too while waiting for the arrival of people who would properly secure the area.

Reina and Shiori were watching Akira’s flank, they stood facing the opposite direction while watching the hallways. There was no guarantee that monsters would only come attacking from that hole. As Akira was monitoring the hole, Shiori and Reina were monitoring other places.

While keeping watch on her side, Shiori occasionally glanced at Akira. Now that she was calm, she tried to reassess the person who she was about to fight not too long ago.

Shiori had been sharpening her skill to judge other people’s real ability in order to protect Reina. On the basis of that skill which she developed through her devotion, she could only see Akira as nothing more than a common young Hunter, just like the other young Hunters who she had met. Or at least, Akira did not look like someone who could accomplish the achievements listed in his battle record.

But Shiori somehow was still doubting her own judgement and tried to observe Akira more closely. At least for now, she admitted that his resolve was not something to scoff at. But she did not expect that he would even go as far as to risk a fight where he might get killed just to stick to his principles. While on the other hand, she also had a feeling that it was not just a foolish action taken by an amateur who did not know the real power of his opponent.

So, was Akira really the skilled Hunter given his battle record? Was he just only acting in order to hide his real ability? Did he do what he did back there because he knew for sure that he would have won if they really tried to kill each other? So many questions were floating inside Shiori's mind as she kept glancing back at him. But she immediately rejected those possibilities and cleared up her mind.

After going around in circles, she tried to wrap up a conclusion. It was still not clear whether he was a strong or a weak Hunter. Although so many things about him did not make sense at all, one thing for sure was that he was not someone who would step back when threatened. Something unexpected or even unwanted might happen if he fought beside Reina, thus she thought that she had to be cautious not to do anything careless.

[It was a big blunder that I unconsciously looked down on him and threatened him thinking that he would back down. I bet it would have gone really wrong if Milady didn't stop me, I should have been more careful.]

Shiori reevaluated her loyalty and reflected on how she should act, while on the other hand, she also became more cautious toward Akira.

Reina was extremely dejected, but as the time passed by and with Shiori trying to cheer her up, she started to calm down. She was in a place that had a low risk of getting ambushed, there were 2 good Hunters with her, the area around her was very silent, and there were some illuminations installed in the area, it was a perfect place to calm herself down. The leeway created after she calmed down made her think back.

[…I couldn't answer back there whether I properly thought about the consequences before picking a fight or did I pick a fight knowing that it might turn into a shootout…]

She just saw one of the possible consequences not too long ago when Shiori and Akira were so close on trying to kill each other. If Mimata's group did not laugh it off when she picked a fight with them, something similar or maybe even worse would have happened.

[He wouldn’t want to employ someone who picks needless fights even if it’s for free, huh… Well, that’s to be expected though.]

Reina calmly looked back to what she did until now. This was not the first time she picked a fight against someone else. There must have been so many instances in the past where she crossed through dangerous bridges, she might have trod all the way here through landmines without realizing it.

Nothing went horribly wrong up until now, but it was not like everything went smoothly either. There were cases where she mistakenly crossed the limit when she got into an argument with someone else just to force her opinion on that person and stepped on each other’s feet, although no one wanted for that to happen.

Reina thought that Shiori must have done all the work to make sure that she did not mistakenly step on any landmines. But today, Shiori herself almost stepped on one. Although they were able to barely avoid it, Reina imagined what would have happened if Shiori had completely stepped on that landmine. Just thinking of that possibility made her dejected again.

Shiori noticed Reina expression and gently said to her.

“…Milady, please don’t let it bother you too much. It’s important to be able to let it go and move on. Moreover, that was because I made a mistake of provoking Akira-sama. Let’s use the experience that we got today to be more careful next time.”

Reina thought that Shiori provoked Akira because she was angry on Reina’s place, she felt both grateful and apologetic for it.

“…Now that I think about it, I haven’t properly said my thanks to you lately. I’m sorry that I always put you in trouble and thank you very much for always helping me out. I’m sure I’ll be giving you more trouble in the future, so, is it okay if I keep relying on you?”

“…O-of course! Just leave it to me!”

Shiori was so moved and surprised when Reina said that, but she quickly pulled herself together with willpower and was somehow able to hold back her tears. She understood well that she was in the middle of a battlefield, and there was no way she would be able to perform well in a battle if she did not pull herself together.

“Thank you, Shiori. I’ll be in your care.”

Looking at Reina who got cheered up, Shiori tried her best to make a smile to let Reina feel at ease.

Akira was watching his surroundings with his information-gathering device. While doing so, he was also watching Reina and Shiori who were behind him. He knew that he had a big fight with them not too long ago, so he was watching them in case they suddenly shoot him from behind.

“…What are they doing?”

As Akira mumbled that question with a puzzled face, Alpha just smiled and answered.

“I think they’re deepening their friendship.”

“I wasn’t asking about that… Well, never mind…”

Akira quickly lost interest in what was transpiring behind him, thinking that it did not matter what they were doing so long as it would not cause him any trouble.

Alpha kept her smile as always while watching Akira closely. She was always observing, watching and trying to understand the main principles behind his actions.

Her ideal beautiful body generated by advance calculation was giving a calculated perfect smile, but her smile did not reflect the meaning behind it.

That big hole looked perfectly quiet from the outside, but Akira, who was keeping his eyes on it, suddenly looked grim. He quickly stood up and

kicked the rucksack beside him, scattering the ammo that was inside it onto the ground. He then pointed his CWH anti-material rifle into that hole.

Reina and Shiori who noticed that quickly put their guards up and came closer to Akira. They then glanced towards the hole expecting to find some monsters, but they could not see any monsters.

Reina was puzzled as she checked her information-gathering device and did not find any signals that indicated monsters presence either. So she turned to Akira and asked him.

“…Did your device find something?”

“I’ll take care of this side, you girls take care of the other side.”

Akira already finished his preparation to shoot, he already had his finger ready on the trigger.

“Alpha, how many?”

“I picked 124 signals within my scanning range and I’m still counting. The swarm that attacked defensive point number 15 might be just scouts.”

“…Ughh, well, what can I say… I always get myself tangled in this kind of situation.”

Akira looked slightly exasperated, while Alpha just retained her smiled.

“Well, I guess this is to be expected for your level of luck. It’s just like the usual, so let’s calm down and just deal with it like always.”

Akira smiled bitterly.

“You’re right. Well then, I’ll be counting on your support to win against my bad luck today. Since I spent all of my lifetime worth of luck to meet you, I expect to get good support from that, okay?”

“Just leave it to me.”

Alpha stood beside Akira and smiled confidently.

Rather than watching her surroundings, Shiori paid more attention to Akira who was aiming into the hole as if he had a clear target. She readied her rifle, loaded it with a flare bullet that could be used to increase the accuracy of the information-gathering device, and pointed her rifle into the hole. She then shot a few flares with the same interval between each shot into the hole. The flare bullets shone brightly, it scattered off the darkness that filled the hole and revealed the earthen tunnel and the human-made floor under them. But there was no sign of enemy at all. Even after she rechecked her information-gathering device, she still could not find any enemy signals.

"…Akira-sama, you might have mistaken something."

Akira ignored Shiori's question. Shiori and Reina started getting more suspicious of him.

But suddenly, darkness crept in again into the illuminated hole, making it impossible to see anything inside. The flare that was the furthest away suddenly dimmed and stopped shining. The flare bullets were made so that they would at least keep shining for about 15 minutes, so it was obviously too fast for the flare to die out naturally. Reina and Shiori also noticed the anomaly, but then, the flares inside the hole suddenly died one by one until the hole was filled with total darkness again.

Seeing what was happening, Reina and Shiori quickly got themselves ready for a fight. Sounds echoed from deep inside the hole as if a lot of big living things were coming closer towards them. The rumble grew louder and louder. Multiple big objects that blocked the light charged towards Akira. They did not even need to check their information-gathering device to know what it was.

Alpha kept her smiled as she counted down.

"They're coming… 5… 4… 3… 2… 1."

At the same time, all the light from the rest of the flares suddenly died out.

“Zero.”

Akira pulled the trigger of his CWH anti-material rifle. Muzzle-flash flashed from his rifle, the light from that flash temporarily illuminated and revealed what was inside the hole. Akira and others caught a glance of a swarm of Yarata scorpions gushing out from the hole.

The bullet flew out from Akira’s rifle and hit the scorpion that was leading the swarm, it blasted that scorpion to pieces thanks to the bullet’s overwhelming destructive power. It even pierced through that scorpion and turned other scorpions near it into minced meat. Akira was able to literally destroy a dozen scorpions with just one shot.

It was because Akira was using specially designated ammo for CWH anti-material rifle. Normally, people would not use such a bullet to hunt Yarata scorpions since it was too powerful and too expensive for that. But Akira did not hesitate to use this ammo. Of course, it was also because the requester paid for his ammo, but more than that, he was not in a situation where he could hesitate using that bullet.

“Whoah, amazing!! As expected of designated ammo! No wonder they’re so expensive!!”

“It’s also great that it has a long effective range. Let’s defeat as many scorpions as we can before they can get close.”

“Roger that.”

Akira’s body shifted backwards every time he pulled the trigger. The kickback from the designated ammo was actually relatively small considering its firepower, it was thanks to its complex design made using advanced technologies. But even so, it had enough kickback to blow one’s body all the way back to the wall. Akira was only able to maintain his shooting stance thanks to his augmented suit and Alpha’s support.

All the scorpions that were blasted to pieces by that shot looked like paper sheets scattered by the wind. Akira was amazed by that scene, but he did

not think even for a bit that it was because of his skill as he kept shooting while making a grim face.

The Yarata scorpions just ignored the pieces of their dead brethren that showered down at them as they continued marching toward Akira. They trampled on the corpses of their dead friends, and the same thing also happened to the scorpions that were badly wounded and could not move. There was no sign that they were slowing down at all.

“…But still, it doesn’t seem like they’re withdrawing back at all, don’t they feel fear or something? They’re biological monsters, right?”

“Maybe they don’t.”

“But the scorpions that attacked the defensive point 15 withdrew, right?”

“That is… Maybe they returned back to report their enemies’ locations and firepower to the rest of the swarm. I don’t think they withdrew out of fear. They might have been just scouts after all.”

“… And so this is the main swarm?”

“Its possibility is not zero.”

“If it’s really the main swarm, there should be a limit on how bad my luck can be, you know!!”

“Stop the silly talk and get back to shooting, more of them are coming.”

“Dammit!!!”

Akira kept on shooting at the scorpions desperately. Thanks to his high ground and specially designated ammo, he was one-sidedly laying waste on the scorpions that were gushing out from the hole. When he ran out of ammo and reloaded a new magazine, the swarm would quickly close their distance, so he would immediately start shooting again in panic and push them back until he ran out of ammo again. This cycle continued as he held the swarm back all by himself.

Reina and Shiori readied their gun and were watching the other angles just like Akira told them to, they were ready in case they were ambushed by more monsters from the hallway. Of course, they would jump to help if Akira requested their help. But he did not request for any assistance. Although he looked a bit desperate, he was able to properly hold off the scorpions all by himself.

Reina and Shiori were taken aback by Akira who was desperately holding back the scorpions on his own. This scene was the very proof that his skills and his battle record were genuine.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 46, Calculating the reward

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Reina noticed that Akira was using CWH anti-material rifle's specially designated ammo. All the magazines scattered on the ground were of the same type too.

Reina was surprised since she knew how powerful and just how expensive those bullets were.

"Why are you even using CWH anti-material rifle's special ammo?! It's overkill to use that ammo against a Yarata scorpion, isn't it? Are you here planning to hunt a tank or something?!"

"I'm just using them to complement my lack of skill!! Like hell, I would fight a tank!!"

"How in the world did you get this many ammo?!! You would have had to pay a huge amount of money for all of these bullets!! Or like, have you been earning that much money?!!"

"The requester paid for them and they approved it when I told them I'll be using loads of specially designated ammo for CWH rifle!! If you have any complaints, you can go ahead and say that to the requester!! I thought that

they would refuse when I made that demand, you know!! It's exactly because they accepted my demands that I'm here right now!! Now that I think about it, those people in the HQ must have predicted that something like this would happen huh, dammit!!"

Akira was lamenting his situation, he vowed to himself that he would make good use of this experience.

Reina turned to Shiori, she was wondering if Shiori also predicted this situation. By the way, Reina did not expect it at all.

"…I thought that something like this might happen, but the possibility was too small. I believed that the swarm would not be this dangerous if we faced it using all the facilities installed in the defensive point and with the help of all the Hunters stationed there."

Reina's eyes started getting watery when Shiori pointed out that hurtful fact. After all, Reina had nothing else to blame other than her own selfishness now that she was in this place. If only she had stayed together with Katsuya's group, she would not be in this situation now.

Shiori suddenly turned her gun towards the centre of the hallway in a swift motion and started shooting. Reina inadvertently turned toward that direction and saw countless scorpions creeping out from the hallway showered under the flying bullets.

There was not even a single scorpion that passed through Akira. So Reina was taken aback when she saw those scorpions.

"Where are those scorpions coming from?!! Are there more holes other than this one?!!"

"Milady!! More are coming!!"

Although their number was not too many, the new scorpions closing in from the left and the right sides surrounded Akira and the girls. Reina and Shiori started shooting at those scorpions coming from the direction that they were facing.

Akira shouted.

“Their number is too small for them to come out from another hole!! They might be the scorpions that are coming back after exploring the area other than the defensive point 15!! Both of my both hands tied right now, so you girls need to deal with them yourself, okay?”

“Okay!!”

After Reina answered back, Akira sounded really desperate when he continued.

“I’m leaving those scorpions to you, alright!! I’m really counting on you girls, okay!! I’m really leaving those scorpions to you girls!!”

Akira was obviously so desperate as he yelled that. At the moment, he had to deal with the swarm gushing out from the hole in front of him, so it was impossible for him to deal with the scorpions coming from his flank. He really needed Reina and Shiori’s help in this situation.

Reina looked amazed, but she quickly pulled herself back together and smiled confidently.

“…Just leave them to us!!”

Since Akira was a Hunter who was skilled enough to quickly spot that swarm of Yarata scorpions and hold back that swarm all by himself, Reina was so excited that someone like him asked for her help. After all, Reina was dejected and felt inferior when Akira told her about his evaluation of her. But now, Akira relied on her. It basically meant that he recognized her skill and this fact greatly encouraged her. It cleared up her feelings of inferiority that was swelling inside her. The irritation and the impatience that had been slowing her down and causing her to make rasher decision were gone now.

Reina quickly started shooting the Yarata scorpions that were coming at her. More and more Yarata scorpions were appearing in front of her. In the middle of the battle, her rare talent started to shine, she herself noticed that

her psyche was heightened and sharpened as she started to smile confidently while shooting at those scorpions. Because of that, she was able to quickly shoot down the scorpions in front of her one by one.

Shiori, who from time to time checked how Reina was doing in the midst of the battle, was taken aback when she noticed Reina fighting so skilfully and accurately that she even looked elegant.

[…To think that Milady was this skilled. I guess I really misjudged Milady's skill, but still, why so suddenly…]

Although she was happy with the unexpected sudden growth, Shiori also found it strange that Reina suddenly got this good. Although it was totally unexpected, it was a welcomed surprise, thus Shiori did not try to think too deep about it. After all, she was not in a situation where she had the leeway to do that.

Reina and Shiori were showing that they had the skills to cover Akira's back as he continued shooting desperately at the Yarata Scorpion swarm.

Akira had emptied so many CWH magazines, he kept on using those expensive bullets without a trace of hesitation. If the requester had not paid for the ammo, Akira would have already gone bankrupt a long time ago. It could be said that he could perform this well only because of Kugamayama city's economic power.

Akira was having a hard time holding the swarm from coming closer. Both Alpha's support and the economic power of the city that allowed him to survive the swarm were not of his own. And even with both of those things, he was only barely able to hold the swarm off.

"Alpha!! No matter how you slice it, aren't there just too many of them?!!"

"You're properly holding them back, so let's keep calm and hold the ground. Even if you complain, it won't reduce their number after all."

"At this rate, I'll run out of ammo in no time, you know?!"

“Let’s run as fast as possible if that happens, I believe you’ll be able to run away from the swarm if you’re willing to sacrifice both of your legs.”

If Alpha took control of his augmented suit and made him run as fast as possible while ignoring the stress that it put on his legs, he might be able to run away from all the scorpions. But of course, it will put his body under immense stress. Akira also understood that very well, that was why he wanted to avoid that situation as much as possible.

“W-well, let’s do that only if we really have no other choice, okay?!”

“Of course. Let’s hope that you can take out all the scorpions or the reinforcement from the HQ arrives here before we run out of reserve ammo.”

“That’s right!! The reinforcements!! They’re coming, right?!! Are they already somewhere close?!!”

“I still can’t find their signals within my scanning range.”

“Dammit!!”

Even Akira did not want to get both of his legs torn off. He continued to fight back the scorpions while also trying to retain his fighting spirit.

Their hard work was not for naught, the swarm finally stopped coming. They squeezed their leftover energy to clean up the rest of the scorpions.

Alpha smiled and cheered the tired Akira for his hard work.

“Good job there. It’s finished. That was rather lucky, wasn’t it?”

“I-It’s done, huh…”

Akira dropped on the floor right where he was standing, he let out a long sigh as if he was expelling all the tiredness that had built up inside him.

“But Akira, in the end, the reinforcements didn’t come at all. I wonder if something happened to them.”

Akira quickly reached for his terminal and contacted the HQ.

“This is number 27! HQ!! You there?!”

“This is HQ. What’s the matter?”

“Where are my reinforcements!? They’re not coming at all, you know?”

“We’ve told them to go to your location. They’re not there yet?”

“I don’t see anyone else here!! Thanks to that, we had to deal with a swarm of scorpions just with the 3 of us, you know!! Tell them to hurry up!”

“Roger that. Before that, I’ll need to access the record from that battle, so wait for a bit.”

The monitor of Akira’s rental terminal changed. It seemed that it was sending some kind of information. But once it was done, the HQ did not immediately answer back. He was about to say something to the HQ, but suddenly the HQ staff gasped.

“What the heck is this!? W-wait for a sec!”

Right after that, Reina and Shiori’s terminal rang, those were calls from the HQ.

Reina answered the call and yelled.

“This is number 17, what’s going on with the reinforcement?”

“This is HQ. Can you tell us what’s happening there?”

“We just finished fighting against a swarm of Yarata Scorpions.”

Shiori then interjected.

“This is number 18. Let me give a more detailed explanation. We just encountered a huge swarm of Yarata scorpions. Most of the scorpions came from the hole, it can be assumed that there’s a big scale nest down that hole.

With that in mind, please dispatch a search team and an extermination team this way."

"…I see, we're just wondering if number 27's terminal is malfunctioning. Wait for a bit while we access the record of that fight. We've contacted the reinforcement, so just wait there until they arrive."

"Please wait, what do you mean by malfunctioning?"

"It's the record from number 27's terminal. The number of scorpions that he took out doesn't make sense. So we need to check the record from both of your terminals to confirm it."

"I believe that his terminal is not malfunctioning. We saw it by ourselves how he took out the scorpions that were gushing out from that hole all by himself."

"…Seriously? Once you confirm the safety of that area, can you snap a picture of the hole and send it over? And also, it would be great if you could put some illuminations too."

"…I'm not happy to do it, but I guess I have to, huh."

"Well then, that's all."

The HQ ended the call after that.

Akira was picking up the magazines that were scattered on the ground and putting them back in his rucksack.

CWH anti-material rifle's special ammo was expensive already, and it was even more expensive to buy them in the form of a magazine rather than as individual bullets. Akira had used dozens of those magazines and the empty magazines were scattered on the ground.

While Akira was picking up the magazines that were still loaded with bullets back into his rucksack, he imagined the money that he would have spent on those ammo if he had to pay them by himself. It did not take much

time for him to figure out that there was no way he would be able to pay for it as he looked all gloomy.

Akira then turned to Alpha, he sounded worried as he asked.

“With all of these ammo that I used, it’s not like they would tell me to pay them myself, right? It will be okay, right?”

Alpha smiled bitterly as she said.

“Don’t worry, it will be okay… Maybe.”

“M-maybe?!”

“I’m not a staff member of Kugamayama city’s Long-term Strategic Division after all. So I can’t say for sure. But don’t worry, it will be okay, I think, maybe, probably, I hope so…”

“You should’ve stopped at ‘it will be okay’…”

Alpha was only teasing Akira and he too knew that, but his face twitched as he imagined what would happen if the unlikely case turned real.

As for Shiori, she started scanning the inner side of the hole just like the HQ told her to. She first installed some illuminations near the entrance of the hole. When she finished, the illumination shone brightly and showed the scene inside of that hole.

Reina could not help but express repugnance as she caught a glance of that scene.

“Ughk…”

Due to the powerful bullet that Akira used, he blew the scorpions into tiny bits. Those tiny bits mixed together with the dead corpse of the scorpions as both of those things were trampled by the countless scorpions that were gushing out from the hole. They were mixed together and kneaded into a single humongous pile of meat.

Limbs and other parts of Yarata Scorpion were sticking out and formed a huge pile of flesh, it made anyone who looked at that pile of flesh wondered how the heck that terrifying thing ended up there. Looking at that pile of flesh, there was no way they could count the number of Yarata Scorpions that Akira had taken out. They could only approximate the number by calculating the time Akira spent fighting those scorpions, the number of bullets that he shot, and the width and height of that pile of meat.

Both Shiori and Reina did not have the leeway of checking Akira in the middle of that battle, but still, they did not expect it to be this intense. Shiori regretted that she accepted that order from HQ.

Shiori stopped Reina who was about to come with her.

“Milady, please wait in the hallway. This is not a place for Milady to step into…”

Reina winced as she replied back.

“I-I’m okay. I can handle this.”

“I believe there’s no need for Milady to push yourself too hard. I was the one who accepted that job from the HQ, So please wait in the hallway.”

“It’s okay. I’ll help too. Since I also took this request, I might get to see this kind of thing more often from now on. So I might as well get myself used to it while I have the chance.”

Reina still looked scared as she squeezed out a smile and stepped forward to look into that hole. All the pile of meat that covered the ground from the dead Yarata Scorpions felt so squishy as it absorbed the impact from Reina’s step. Reina could not help but to twitch when she felt that, but she did not step back and kept pushing forward.

Reina and Shiori proceeded deeper into the hole while installing the illuminations. There were Yarata Scorpions’ meats scattered on the walls of the tunnel too. Every time they took a step, they could feel the soft squishy

meat on the floor. They tried their best to endure the situation while continuing to install the illuminations.

After Akira finished picking up all his magazines, he peeked into the hallway, it was the place that he trusted Reina and Shiori to defend. It was filled with Yarata scorpion corpses, it showed the fierce fight that Reina and Shiori had while defending the place. Although there were corpses scattered not too far from him, the area around him had no corpses at all as if it was deliberately cleaned beforehand.

It was not like Reina and Shiori had Akira's extra powerful ammo, because of that, more than half of the scorpions that they killed retained their shapes. The hallway was pretty wide, so unlike a narrow hole, they could not just randomly shoot at these scorpions just like what he did.

The scene in that hallway was proof of Reina and Shiori's skill. Akira was a bit surprised when he saw it. Although he could not make an accurate prediction of their skill from that scene, he at least knew that it was amazing.

Alpha then explained to Akira what he was seeing.

"There are not that many traces of meat or blood splattered on the wall and the floor. It shows that they did not just randomly shoot at these scorpions, they properly aimed and shot at the scorpion's weak points. Moreover, to think that both of them could defeat these many scorpions, it seems that they are pretty skilled."

"Is it possible for me to do something similar?"

"It's perfectly possible as long as you have my support. You can even just run around freely without a care while carrying piercing ammo loaded AAH rifles on both of your hands with my support."

"So in short, I can't do that myself, huh. After all, if I do that, it just means that you'll be controlling both of my arms, and I'm sure it will leave both of my arms broken too, won't it?"

“I’m glad that you’re a smart boy. It’s a good thing that you can accurately evaluate your own ability. You’re mostly correct, although it might break both of your arms, it’ll at least save your life. But don’t worry, it’s not like your arms will be completely torn off from your body. It will only cause some lacerations and you should be able to recover with some medicines.”

Akira sighed.

“…As I thought, it’s too soon for me to take this request. This is a big mistake.”

Akira was actually asking if he could perform just like Shiori or Reina. Basically, he was trying to compare himself with one of them. But Alpha answered back assuming if he had to face all of those scorpions that the girls faced all alone. Because of that, he was actually misunderstanding Alpha’s answer.

Of course Alpha knew that when she gave Akira that answer.

Not too long after that, the long-awaited reinforcements finally arrived. It was the rest of the Hunters in the defensive point 14 and some Hunters from defensive point 15.

When Akira saw Katsuya, he turned to Shiori and said.

“Although this is a little bit different to what we agreed to, would it be okay if I assume that I already finished your request here?”

The request that Akira accepted from Shiori was to provide support to Reina until they returned back to the defensive point. Although it was not like they returned back to the defensive point, their current situation was more or less the same as if they returned back.

“Of course, thank you for your hard work.”

Shiori lightly bowed to Akira and told him that he had officially finished the request from her. Akira lightly bowed back to Shiori and left the group as the girls went to join Katsuya again.

Katsuya and the other Hunters who did not understand what was going on looked puzzled. Watching Akira step away, Reina looked a bit disappointed. Shiori noticed that, but she felt like it would only cause unnecessary trouble if she asked her the reason, thus she decided to just ignore it.

Shiori finally looked relieved.

[That was really dangerous but I guess it's alright now. After this, I just need to warn Milady not to move separately from Katsuya's group again… Moreover, since Katsuya-sama is the group leader, he should have properly stopped Milady… Ah, no, that would be me just venting at someone else, it was me who should have properly stopped Milady. Yes, that's it, I should properly evaluate my own action rather than blaming it on someone else.]

And so Shiori reflected on her actions once more.

Akira and the other Hunters were keeping watch on that place for not too long before more reinforcements came. It was the exploration team and the extermination team. The place then turned into a proper defensive point and the chain of command shifted to the leaders from both teams and the HQ.

The area suddenly became busy with Hunters as the exploration and the extermination team were preparing themselves to explore the hole.

Akira was told to clean the dead scorpions around the area, after all, those corpses were obstructing the Hunters there. Not to mention that some new scorpions might conceal themselves among the corpses.

But it was not like they could carry those scorpions to the surface, so these corpses were only gathered in a safe place in the underground city.

Akira was carrying the scorpions one by one, although they looked heavy, the scorpions were pretty light for their size.

"These scorpions are lighter than I thought, is it because of my augmented suit?"

Akira thought that Alpha increased the power output of his augmented suit while he was carrying the scorpions. But Alpha shook her head and denied his guess.

“Nope, they’re actually pretty light. They’ll grow lighter if you leave them for a while.”

“That’s weird, why is that?”

“There are various theories, but it’s not like there is any definite proof which confirms any one of them as correct. So just take it as it is and don’t think too much about it. One of the theories says that the nanomachines that were spread during the old world era accelerated their decomposition process. Some of the theories even say that it has something to do with the colourless mist. Just think about it, although the Hunters regularly kill a lot of monsters, you don’t find that many corpses in the ruins, right? But with the number of the monsters that the Hunters kill every day, it should be normal to find some rotten corpses from time to time, right?”

“Now that you mention it, that’s indeed weird. I sometimes find bones and skeletons but I don’t find rotten corpses at all. I see, so they were decomposed at an accelerated rate, huh… Wait, then how about that greedy crocodile corpse that we found not too long ago? Isn’t it weird that we found it still retained its shape when it should be quickly decomposed?”

“The outer skin does not get decomposed, so instead, it might be empty under its skin. Or maybe its skin has some kind of preserving function that makes it decompose slower. Different species of monsters decompose at a different rate after all. Not to mention that the location also affects the decomposition rate. But then again, like I said, there are many theories trying to explain it. Well, this underground city is basically the old-world territory too, so the cleaning-nanomachines density might be higher than usual down here. That might also be the reason why this place is so clean even though it’s a huge amalgamation of monsters’ nests. Had these monsters created a stench from their natural processes, then this underground city that’s filled with those monsters would have created a stench, right?”

“You’re right… Well, it’s good that this place is kept clean. It’s just that I can’t help but get curious about it, you know.”

There were a lot of weird things in the eastern district. Most of the people in the eastern district blamed the old-world technology for those weird things. And it was true that most of it was because of the old-world technology. For better or worse, Akira and the other people of the eastern district had already gotten used to it.

But if you look at it from another perspective, it meant that there were a lot of old-world relics in the eastern district. These relics contain knowledge and technology that might cause irreversible damage and chaos or maybe even destroy the world if they were misused. The people who were alive in the previous era could not fight back the destruction that these relics brought and became ruins. It could be expected that the civilization of this era would also be wiped out and become one with the ruins if the old-world technology was mismanaged.

As he continued talking with Alpha about the strange things in the eastern district while cleaning the monsters, Akira thought that the meat pile that he just created would also not stay for long as it should be quickly decomposed into dust particles and vanish.

After he finished his job, Akira took out his reserve ammo to confirm how many magazines he had left.

Akira frowned as he noticed that he did not have much reserve ammo left. He would not be able to fight another swarm of monsters with the amount of reserve ammo that he had now. He would have no other choice but to run away if he encountered another swarm. He would have to let Alpha take over his augmented suit to help him run away, which, of course, would cause him to go through excruciating pain on both of his legs.

But that was only half the reason why he frowned.

Akira’s rental terminal suddenly rang, it was from the HQ. Akira hesitated a bit when he answered the call.

“…This is number 27.”

“This is HQ. We’ve finished examining your battle record. We have some questions regarding the same.”

“I won’t pay for the ammo, okay?! I just won’t!!”

Akira quickly said that first. He sounded desperate when he yelled at his terminal.

Akira used a lot of CWH anti-material rifle’s special ammo to fight the scorpions. It could even be said that he was wasting more ammo than needed and Akira himself knew that fact.

It would not be strange if Akira was told by the HQ to pay for the ammo that he wasted with his own money, but unfortunately, he did not have the ability to pay for them.

The HQ staff understood what Akira was worrying about, he chuckled and said.

“Don’t worry about that. The requester will pay for those bullets, there’s no change regarding that. Even if they thought that the amount of the bullets you used don’t fit the result, they would only cancel their contract and reduce your reward.”

Akira let out a sigh of relief. He calmed himself and asked again.

“I see, so then, what do you want to ask me?”

“There are no information relay stations around where you are and you took out those scorpions when they were far away from the terminal, because of that, we could not accurately calculate the number of monsters that you took out. And so we will only calculate your reward based on the approximated number of monsters that you killed. Do you have any request as to how we should calculate your reward?”

“As long as you don’t count it as zero since you can’t calculate the number of the scorpions that I took out, you can just use whatever calculation you

want for the reward and then just divide it equally among 3 people.”

“…Are you sure you’re okay with that?”

Akira believed that he did not say anything weird. So he was confused when the HQ asked for his confirmation and decided to ask the HQ.

“Did I say something bad?”

The HQ staff was so surprised that he went silent for a moment, he then replied back.

“…Nope, there’s no problem. It’s just that most Hunters would usually complain that they should have gotten more reward the moment they see the amount of the reward distributed to them in their terminal. That’s why I just wanted to make sure. So let me get this straight, we will do the calculation and the result will be divided equally between 3 people, okay? I already got your confirmation from this conversation, so don’t complain afterwards, alright?”

After saying that, that HQ staff ended the call.

Silavin: Ahhhhh! My god! Akira! You bloody imbecile! Oh well, that just means we will get to see the other two more often. It is highly possible they form a team in the future.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 47, Katsuya's Complaint

Index

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Akira looked like he was in a good mood as he was stuffing his magazines back into his rucksack. He was happy that the HQ said the requester would still pay for the bullets that he used. Reina awkwardly approached Akira, Shiori and Katsuya's group followed behind her.

Akira only glanced at Reina before returning back to stuffing his magazines. Although Shiori looked calm from the outside, she was actually pretty shaken up inside.

Reina hesitated, she looked like she wanted to say something to Akira. But she went silent to think about it. Once she had thought enough, she said.

"Uhmmm, I heard about your call with HQ regarding the reward distribution and if I'm not mistaken, it seems like you told them to divide the reward equally for 3 people, is that correct?"

"Yeah, they asked me what to do and I did say that."

Reina looked a bit troubled. Looking at her made Akira uneasy too. Both of them were staring at each other, trying to understand why the other person said what they just said. But since their way of thinking was totally different

from each other, neither could not catch the meaning behind their short conversation.

But before they could clear up the misunderstanding, Akira quickly drew a conclusion and looked annoyed as he said to Reina.

“Are you thinking of telling me to give you all the reward from that battle since I was in the middle of your support request and what I did was just a form of support for you? Just to let you know, I won’t do that, okay?”

Seeing how Akira’s mood worsened, Shiori quickly put her guard up, the same happened with Katsuya and his team.

Reina could not immediately understand why Akira said that, but the moment she did, she shook her head in panic.

“Ah, no! That’s not what I meant!! It’s the opposite!!”

“The opposite?”

“You took out more than half of the scorpions that we defeated, right? So if the reward is divided equally, it would mean that my reward will be way bigger than it should, are you okay with that?”

“We stopped them together, so it’s only to be expected to divide the reward equally, right? Well, if I had to pay for my own ammo, I would like to divide it equally after covering for my ammo expense. But since the requester paid that for me, so I’ll just divide it equally with 3 people. To be honest, I don’t want to argue too much about that, or is that you have any complaints about it?”

“W-well, not really, but…”

“Then you have no problem dividing it equally with 3 people, right? If the reward from the extermination request is only divided according to the number of monsters that you take out, won’t the Hunters who focus on scanning enemies only get a small amount of reward? It’ll definitely cause a fight, you know?”

If not for Reina and Shiori, Akira would have found himself surrounded by scorpions back there. Reina and Shiori did work well. Akira seriously thought so.

Moreover, it was not like Akira had discussed with them beforehand as to how to divide the reward. He could not think of any better way to share the reward other than dividing it equally among the members of the team that was formed on the spot.

Although Reina understood what Akira was saying, it was not like that was enough to convince her. It was true that she did not want to be a deadweight for him, but she also understood that she could not produce the same result as him.

“Milady, since he is okay with it and it doesn’t reduce the amount of reward that we receive, I believe we should just accept it. Arguing might only cause a needless fight.”

Shiori was signalling Reina that continuing it might cause another fight with Akira. Thus Reina quickly decided to stop arguing and said in a panic.

“Y-you’re right. It’s not something worth fighting about.”

“So, is that all?”

Reina was about to answer that question, but Shiori suddenly interjected.

“That would be all, we’re sorry to have troubled you. Milady, let’s return now.”

Shiori immediately suggested Reina to consider withdrawing from the conversation. Reina looked a bit troubled with her sudden request before awkwardly leaving that place together with Shiori.

After they walked away from Akira, Reina asked Shiori.

“Uhmm, I was trying to be careful back there. Did I do something wrong?”

Reina was actually trying to be careful not to cause a fight, but then Shiori suddenly pulled her away from that conversation. So she thought that she did something that she should not have done.

Shiori frowned as she answered.

“Well, it’s true that you caused a misunderstanding which worsened Akira-sama’s mood, but I believe it was because of Milady’s clumsiness. But again, with that being said, you can’t blame your clumsiness. It’s wrong to assume that the other person will always understand what you’re trying to say. There’s always a possibility where the other person misunderstands and their misunderstanding might not get cleared up or even become worse.”

“But I just wanted to talk with him, you know…”

“Milady, you yelled at him once that he can just die alone somewhere. So, I believe that you should not rush into a conversation so quickly, you should give him some time to cool himself before talking to him again. He’s not like Katsuya-sama, he would not just laugh it off if you make a spicy remark about him.”

“Y-you’re right. I understand.”

Reina wanted to know how well she performed, she wanted to know Akira’s opinion about her performance, that was why she wanted to talk more with Akira. But it seemed that she had to postpone that for now. Reina looked depressed since she understood that it was all because of her own action.

Reina and Shiori had left Akira to his own devices, but Katsuya and the other two girls were still there. Katsuya looked hesitant as he asked Akira.

“Uhmmm, there’s something I want to ask you, what do you mean with that support request?”

Akira answered back apathetically.

“Just ask Reina.”

Katsuya was a bit annoyed by Akira's behaviour, but he held himself back and asked Akira once more.

"We're Hunters from Drankam and she's one of my team members. Well, I'm basically the leader of our team, so I wanted to know what she did when she was away from the team. I need to give a full report to the gang, you see. It has something to do with the reward, so, can you please tell me?"

"Just ask her."

Akira answered back again, apathetically. It was as if he did not care at all.

Katsuya raised his voice and pressed for an answer again.

"Is it something that you can't tell or is there anything that you're trying to hide?"

"You can get all the details from her, can't you? Or is it like you're someone who doesn't mind leaking the request that you took from others without asking for approval?"

Akira was someone who took his request very seriously. Although he was not told to keep it secret, it was not like he was told that he could freely tell other people either. Not to mention, he got so close to trying to kill them. Thus he thought that it was for Reina and Shiori to decide what to tell and what to hide.

Akira thought that Katsuya could just go ahead and ask Reina instead. If Reina and Shiori told Katsuya everything, then it must be something okay to tell others, but if they refused to tell Katsuya, then it was indeed something that he should not share with others. Akira concluded it as such and that was why he told Katsuya to just ask Reina and Shiori instead of him.

Akira's behaviour was rubbing Katsuya the wrong way. He just went silent and continued packing his magazines as Katsuya was glaring at him.

Yumina looked worriedly at Katsuya.

Katsuya had a bad habit of taking actions thinking that he was correct. He was simply worried for his teammates and he was only thinking of doing his duty as the team leader. One thing for sure was that Reina and Shiori fought with some monsters when he was not around, he just wanted to know what happened. That was all.

But the person who knew what happened would not tell him anything, rising Katsuya's anger. But, even so, Yumina thought that it was not enough of a reason to cause a fight.

At this rate, Katsuya might start yelling at Akira or even use force to make him talk. Yumina decided to calm him down before that happened.

"Katsuya, let's just go back. It's faster if we ask Reina."

"Yumina!?"

Katsuya was shocked, believing that Yumina took Akira's side rather than his own.

Looking at how Katsuya reacted, Yumina was able to immediately predict what he was thinking, so she quickly tried to explain it to him.

"It's not like you can fully trust an explanation from a random stranger, right? So I think it's much faster and more reliable if we ask Reina, who's in our team."

Yumina smiled gently at Katsuya when she said that.

Yumina worded it out as if she was mocking Akira. This was something that she would never do normally. This was done not only to calm Katsuya down but also so that Akira would blame her instead if anything bad was to happen.

"I agree. It'll only cause you more trouble if he gave vague or even fake answers."

Airi stated that straightforwardly.

Katsuya finally calmed down after hearing Airi and Yumina.

“You’re right. I guess it’s true that it’s meaningless to ask him, huh. Let’s head back then.”

After saying that, Katsuya turned and left that place. Airi did not say anything and followed behind him. Yumina, who was the only person remaining, stood there looking at Akira.

Akira did not seem like he was bothered by how they treated him, as a matter of fact, he did not even look at them. But even so, Yumina bowed politely to him as if she was saying sorry before following Katsuya.

Alpha smiled intrepidly and said.

“Although 3 of the 4 people here were prone to causing a fight, it ended peacefully. That girl is pretty good.”

“You’re exaggerating.”

“Is that so? Katsuya and Yumina. Those two seem to be in good terms and have been together for a long time. I’m sure this is not the first time she interjected to defuse the situation.”

“If that’s true, I guess she’s having it hard, huh.”

“I bet she’s doing that happily on her own volition, but Katsuya might have become like that because he’s been unconsciously relying too much on her. Well, it has nothing to do with us though.”

“…You’re right.”

Although he felt sorry for Yumina, it was not like he wanted to get involved in troubles that Katsuya and his team caused. He wished good luck for Yumina in case she was really doing that on her own volition.

Akira was talking with Alpha while watching his surroundings. Although he looked like he was seriously keeping watch from the outside, he was actually supporting his posture with his augmented suit while relaxing his body.

Akira, Shiori and Reina were able to deal with a swarm of scorpions with only the three of them. It gave them an amazing accomplishment but left them dead tired. Because of that, Alpha decided not to tell Akira to watch his surroundings as a part of his training.

One of the staff who had a good intuition noticed that Akira was relaxing and not watching his surroundings properly, so he yelled at Akira and asked him a question that he would not be able to answer if he did not properly keep watch of his surroundings.

But Akira was able to answer him just fine. Of course, it was all thanks to Alpha.

That staff looked surprised and said to Akira.

“Ohh, so you’re properly keeping watch, huh? Sorry I doubted you.”

“It’s okay. It’s true that I might look like just daydreaming and it’s also true that I’m very tired, so I might be in a bit of a daze right now.”

Akira answered back straightforwardly. Although that staff could not see her, Alpha was floating beside him while smiling.

“Ah, I see, you’re the one who found that hole connected to the uncharted area, huh. I also heard that you went through a fierce battle too. I’m sorry but it seems that you need to work for a little longer.”

“I understand.”

The staff then went back to continue his work. Alpha turned and smiled at Akira.

“You did well dodging him.”

Akira smiled smugly.

“Well, it’s fine, isn’t it? Since I can do all of these things only because I have your support, it’s all thanks to you. Not to mention that I would not be able to do this request if I don’t have your support, so if that much of lying is not allowed, then I shouldn’t be here in the first place. I’m 100% relying on your support after all.”

“You’re not wrong there.”

If Alpha stopped her support, Akira would just turn into a deadweight. So he was planning to keep on relying on her so as not to slow the other Hunters down.

Although in the end, it caused a staff to doubt his own intuition when he noticed Akira relaxing, it was an acceptable sacrifice looking at the bigger picture. It was way better than getting ambushed by a swarm of Yarata Scorpions.

After the small conversation, Akira kept watch of his surroundings as time passed by without anything interesting happening.

The Kuzusuhara underground ruin exploration and Yarata Scorpion nests extermination went on for 24 hours. After all, the monsters in the underground city kept active regardless of whether it was night or day. Thus the Hunters had to stand watch 24 hours to secure the area.

Akira’s shift lasted for 8 hours. It was the shortest working shift available. The Hunters who wanted to earn more money could stay in the underground city for 24 hours. But of course, Akira was planning to immediately return back home after 8 hours.

Alpha told Akira that his shift was almost done, so he pulled out his terminal and contacted the HQ.

“This is number 27. HQ, are you there?”

“This is HQ. What’s wrong?”

“My shift is almost over, so please send another Hunter to take my place.”

“Oh? Wait for a sec, let me check again, number 27, huh… You do fulfil the minimum working hours quota. And there’s no problem with the number of Hunters present there, so you can just go ahead and return back home. Thank you for your hard work.”

“What should I do with my rental terminal?”

“You can carry it around as long as you’re taking this request. If you’re afraid of losing it or breaking it, you can come to the temporary HQ and hand it over to our staff. If it’s too much work to do, you can just carry it with you back home. For tomorrow, you just need to go to the first floor of the HQ with that rental terminal. Even if you lose it, you’ll just get your reward subtracted. In the end, it’s just a cheap mass-produced terminal and we have a lot of reserves left. After all, they often break in battles.”

“Roger that. I’ll return back home for today.”

“Be careful on your way back, remember that you won’t get any reward from the monsters that you kill if you get attacked on your way back home. That’s all. Once again, thank you for your hard work.”

The HQ then ended the call. Akira’s work for that day was completed.

Akira took the request for 1 week, so there were still 6 days to go. Although his bad luck was rather worrying, it would be great if he could finish his shift just fine like today for the remaining 6 days.

Alpha smiled and hoped that would be the case.

“Good work for today. You survived another day, we just need to do it 6 more times. Let’s give our best.”

“We’re not done yet for today. It’s not safe yet until I’m back in the city, or at least, I should not put my guard down before I’m back to the surface. Your detection ability will turn back to normal once we’re out from the underground, right?”

“That’s right, let’s head to the surface as soon as possible. It’s a good thing that you didn’t immediately drop your guard just because the situation has calmed down. It’s proof that you’ve grown.”

Alpha was honestly praising Akira’s growth and he felt that it did not feel too bad to be praised.

As Akira was thinking of going back, he caught a glimpse of Katsuya’s team. Katsuya’s team was already underground when Akira came, so if they took the same shift as Akira, they would have headed to the surface before him.

“Those guys are still staying down here, huh?”

“They’re really hard-working Hunters. Or maybe, their contract is different compared to your contract. Well, whatever it is, whether they stay here or not, it’s none of our business.”

“You’re right, let’s return back as fast as we can, I can’t wait to take a bath.”

As Akira was about to excitedly depart, Alpha suddenly reminded him.

“Be sure to finish the rifles’ maintenance before taking a bath, okay? Judging from how tired you are, I’m sure you’ll fall asleep before cleaning your rifles if you take bath first.”

Akira tried to negotiate although he knew it was futile.

“Can I do it tomorrow instead…?”

“Nope.”

“Okay…”

Akira hung his head low after Alpha rejected him. He sighed and then dragged his feet back home, Alpha just smiled as she looked at him like that.

Reina’s eyes followed Akira’s back as he left that place. It was not like she had any particular reason why she did that, or at least, she herself was not aware of any.

Though, Katsuya noticed Reina’s action.

“Reina, what’s wrong?”

Reina looked like she was somehow in a good mood when she answered back.

“Hm? Ah, it’s nothing.”

Katsuya felt a bit annoyed by Reina’s answer, he thought that she was trying to hide something from him.

He cast aside his displeasure and asked Reina for the second time.

“…Really?”

Reina was puzzled since it was rare for Katsuya to do something like this. She then decided to say what she just thought.

“…Well, I just thought that he went back first although he came here after us. By the way, what’s going on with the people who have to take our place?”

When Reina said that, it reminded her that she was trapped there even though she also wanted to go back home. That was why she asked that question to Katsuya.

Katsuya answered back in panic.

“I-I’ve asked them to send someone. So just please wait for a bit more.”

Katsuya immediately thought that it was a big mistake when he said that to Reina. According to the contract between the city and Drankam, the Hunter replacements for the Drankam Hunters would be from Drankam. Because

of that, they could not go back home yet like Akira who was able to go back because there were enough Hunters to take his place.

“But still, it’s already been 3 hours, you know. Don’t you think you should at least check with them?”

Reina’s mood was getting worse. She was checking the current situation while talking with Katsuya, and the result from that made her mood worse.

Reina was only temporarily forgetting her exhaustion from when she fought at full power. Now, all the accumulated tiredness weighed down at her. Although they were taking turns in resting, in the end, they could only sit on the hard floor, so it was not like they could recover much. Her tiredness only caused Reina to get even more annoyed.

Katsuya lamented what he just said to Reina. He looked remorseful as he tried to cheer her up.

“They said that they had some unexpected trouble when dispatching the Hunters. But they’re already heading this way, so let’s just wait for a bit more, okay?”

Yumina then tried calming Reina down too.

“Reina, calm down. It’s not like he can do anything about it even if you’re blaming him, right? So just be patient.”

Airi also joined in.

“It’s not Katsuya’s fault.”

Reina’s face twitched. If it was the usual Reina, she would start throwing a tantrum and yelling right there, and after that, Shiori would try to calm her down while reprimanding her. Katsuya and the other two also thought that would happen as they frowned.

And as they expected, Reina tensed up and looked like she was about to start yelling.

But unexpectedly, she stopped and immediately tried to calm herself down. Reina was gritting her teeth as if she was holding back something, she then let out a big sigh.

“…I guess you’re right, I’m sorry.”

Katsuya, Yumina and Airi were surprised by the unexpected turn of events.

Reina was a bit displeased when she noticed how the others reacted.

“What’s with that face? Do you have any problems with what I said?”

“Ah, nope, nothing, right, Yumina?”

“Eh? Ah, yeah.”

“It’s good that you won’t cause a ruckus at every single thing.”

The last remark that was from Airi caused Reina’s face to twitch, but that was all. Reina sighed while trying to calm herself down. It did not take long before she returned back to her usual mood.

Akira judged that he would not employ Reina even if it was for free which was the second-worst possible evaluation, he did not take back that evaluation even after he was about to get into a fight with Shiori.

Then Akira asked the HQ to divide the reward from that battle equally among the three of them. It showed that he judged she deserved to get the same amount of reward as him. Reina thought that he made that evaluation after seeing her skill, that was why she was in such a good mood.

Shiori looked at Reina with a conflicted gaze. It was obvious that Reina’s skill had grown, but the trigger of that sudden growth was because she met with Akira. Shiori actually hoped that trigger was her. After all, she stayed beside Reina in order to help and support her.

Katsuya looked at Reina who was talking with Shiori. The usual fiery Reina was no longer there, he thought that might also be the reason why she was able to hold herself back from yelling.

Katsuya knew well when Reina changed, it was after she followed Akira.

Back then, Reina broke off from his team and chased after Akira. And when they met again after that, she had already transformed.

When Katsuya asked her what happened after she left the group, Reina proudly told him that she fought against a swarm of Yarata Scorpions. She told him how she fought valiantly and Shiori who was with her confirmed that it was true.

By the way, both Reina and Shiori decided to hide the fact that they were so close to getting into a fight with Akira. Even for someone like Reina, she knew well that it would only cause needless trouble if she told Katsuya about that.

Reina was mostly in a good mood after she met up with Katsuya's team. Many would think she was in a good mood because she went through a good battle, but Katsuya did not believe that was the only reason.

Although he did not realize it himself, he actually found it rather displeasing that one of his friends went together with someone who he hated only to come back later with better skill and better mood than before.

Silavin: Gosh. Katsuya, you need to have better self-esteem here man. Your complex about Akira is showing…

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Rebuild World – Chapter 48, Exploration Team 9

Index

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On the next day, Akira went to the first floor of the building that was connected to the Kuzusuhara ruin's underground city. That building was the forward HQ for the Hunters who went to the underground city.

Akira already fully refilled his ammo in Shizuka's shop yesterday. Shizuka looked worried when he came to her shop and bought all the CWH anti-material rifle's special ammo, although he already did that the day before too.

In order to reassure Shizuka, Akira said that he always kept his distance and shot the monsters from afar. It was exactly because he was thinking of keeping his safety that he bought all of the special ammo. He was somehow able to convince her after explaining it to her as such.

Akira was not lying. To be more precise, he knew that he was doing such a dangerous thing which left him with no other choice but to do this to ensure his safety.

Shizuka's intuition picked up something suspicious, but she just told Akira to be careful and to be sure to return back alive while smiling gently at him.

She did not say anything more than that. After all, it was not like she could tell him not to go.

As Akira entered a room inside the HQ, the HQ staff inside the room immediately noticed him. He was the same staff who assigned Akira to defensive point 14.

“Number 27, you’re finally here. Exploration team or extermination team, pick one.”

Akira looked puzzled. Yesterday, he was given the choice to either join the defense team or the exploration team, but this time, he was not given an option to join the defense team.

“Can I join the defense team again? If it’s possible, I want to join the defense team again just like yesterday.”

“No can do. Exploration team or extermination team. You can’t pick the defense team. It’s because of the skill that you showed yesterday, the HQ thinks that it would be a waste to assign you to the defense team. Aren’t you glad that we think highly of your skill?”

“…Wait for a sec, if you’re going to evaluate me from my performance yesterday, you should evaluate it as a part of the defense team.”

“Well, it’s not like I can do anything about it anyway. It was the people on the top who decided that. There’s nothing I can do about it no matter how much you complain. So just give up and choose either of the two… Well, although the level of danger varies, I believe that there is not much difference.”

Akira hesitated. If he did not want to travel around an uncharted area, he should join the extermination team. But if he hated the idea of fighting Yarata scorpion swarms or charging into their nest, then he should join the exploration team.

Since it seemed that Akira would not be able to decide on anything soon, Alpha made a suggestion to him.

“You might be able to avoid fighting monsters if you join the exploration team, but on the other hand, you might be thrown into unexpected battles. As for the extermination team, they should have better firepower to fight the monsters, but there’s no mistaking it that you would have to fight monsters. After all, that’s the main job of the extermination team. If you want to make sure you have enough support in case you get to face something like yesterday again, I recommend you join the extermination team.”

Akira made his decision and said to the HQ staff.

“I’ll join the exploration team.”

“…Alright… That’s it, it’s done. Follow the instructions on your terminal and go to the defensive point 19. Then follow your next order there.”

“Roger that.”

As Akira turned around and headed to the defensive point 19. That staff looked at Akira’s back while making a puzzled face.

The terminal on that staff’s hand was showing the data about Akira.

“…This’s the boy who Kibayashi endorsed. He is also the one who signed the ammo waiver. Lastly, the one who’s assigning this boy’s post is also him… This must be the same Kibayashi, huh. In short, it’s him who sent that boy here. To think that reckless guy really took a liking to this boy… I’m not sure if this boy is actually lucky or not…”

Kibayashi was affiliated with both Hunter Office and Kugamayama city. He was in a position where he had the veto right in this underground city exploration joint operation. This Kibayashi guy who had met Akira in the past was pretty infamous.

To go out in the world and return back alive, or to go out in the world and die, Kibayashi loved such lifestyle and he believed that the Hunters who considered this as their way of life shone the brightest. He was famous

among his peers for proactively pushing the Hunters who he was interested in and helping them live such a way of life.

There were Hunters who had the skill but not the opportunities, these Hunters wished for a chance to overturn their lives. When Kibayashi found these Hunters, he would gleefully offer them high-risk high return requests. To these Hunters, his offer was very attractive. There were only 2 possible outcomes for those Hunters, either win big or lose big.

Most of the Hunters who took such offer from Kibayashi ended up dead. Even those Hunters who had the potential to grow successful if they were given more time. Some of them went out searching for glory and returned triumphantly, while some of them died in pursuit of greater glory.

“I don’t know if he should be happy with this chance or should he hate it. He might still be alive if he did not take this request. After all, when it comes to gambling, it’s easier for him to lose his bet the more he gambles.”

That staff looked like he felt sorry for Akira as he mumbled.

On his way to the underground city, Alpha asked Akira.

“Akira, is it okay if I ask you why you chose the exploration team? If you want to avoid unexpected fights like yesterday, it’s better if you join the extermination team, right?”

“But in exchange, I would have to use a lot of CWH special ammo. I want to retain as much ammo as possible, you see. Moreover, if I join the extermination team and something like yesterday happened, they might think that I’m a very skilled Hunter and force me to fight monsters that I can’t fight without special ammo. I want to avoid that no matter what.”

Akira and Alpha stared at each other.

Akira’s answer somehow sounded like an excuse to her.

“What? It’s true that I can get more experience if I join the extermination team, but it would be meaningless if I die, am I wrong?”

“You’ll be contributing to her revenue if you buy a lot of CWH special ammo from Shizuka’s shop, but on the other hand, it’ll make her worried every time you do that. You prioritized the latter, didn’t you?”

Akira could not answer back, Alpha then continued.

“It’s not like I’m blaming you for picking that option. But if you ask me, I would rather you get yourself better equipment and get strong enough as soon as possible so that you can take out Yarata Scorpion’s swarms like they’re nothing. That way, you don’t have to worry about anything.”

“…Well, you’re right.”

Akira replied back swiftly and bluntly.

__*__*__*__

Akira arrived at defensive point 19. The defensive point 19 was located in a big hall in the underground city. It was placed there in order to secure the uncharted area around it.

There were multiple Hunters stationed here in order to protect this important defensive point. It was also used as a place for the exploration and the extermination team to rest. Because of that, the hall was bustling with Hunters.

There were some staffs from the HQ in the middle of the hall giving orders to the Hunters. Akira followed the instructions on his terminal and headed to the centre of the hall, one of the staff noticed Akira and called him.

“You’re number 27, right? The exploration team that you’re going to join is in the midst of an exploration right now. Wait here for a bit until they’re back. You can do anything you want as long as you stay in this hall. If you have nothing to do, you can at least help us watch the place and clean up any Yarata Scorpions that you see.”

“Roger that.”

Akira looked for an empty space and moved there, leaving the staff alone.

That staff took out his terminal and contacted the exploration team.

“This is defensive point 19. Exploration team 9, answer me.”

A girl’s voice was heard from the terminal.

“This is exploration team number 9. Isn’t it a bit too soon for the regular report? Is there anything wrong?”

“The extra Hunter that you requested has arrived. Come back here if you want to pick him up.”

A guy’s voice suddenly interjected it, inquiring about that new Hunter.

“It better be someone useful, alright? We have enough people for scanning the area, what we need is more firepower, you know?”

“Don’t be picky. Well, he took out a whole load of Yarata Scorpions yesterday. I’m sure he’ll be useful. If you don’t like him, you can just choose the same guys that you chose before. Don’t you realize that we went through all the hassle in picking him because you didn’t want to go with those previous guys?”

That guy then replied back in annoyance.

“I would rather go alone than bringing those guys along.”

Then the voice returned back to the girl from before.

“We’ll head back to the defensive point. Be ready to receive the data that we gathered. That’s all.”

The staff ended the call. He then turned to another staff and said.

“Exploration team 9 will return soon. Be ready to send the data to HQ. Even if the data conversion from the previous one is not over yet, be sure to at least properly receive the new data!”

“Yessir!!”

The other staff saluted him and left to make the preparations. That staff looked at his terminal and mumbled.

“Well, looking at that boy’s battle record from yesterday, I’m sure it will be alright.”

His terminal was showing the Hunter data for Akira. But the thing that worried him the most was Kibayashi’s name there.

Akira did not look that strong from the outside, but even so, he got recommended for this dangerous request, and the one who recommended him was the reckless-lifestyle-lover Kibayashi. His name made that staff doubt Akira’s ability, but he then decided to trust Akira’s battle record from yesterday.

Akira looked around and checked the area around the defensive point.

The route that he took to that place was very well illuminated, but the other areas around that place were still pitch black. The underground city was wrapped in darkness without any lighting. Akira did not know whether they did not install illuminations in the other places because they just ran out of illuminations or because those areas were not safe yet.

Among all the Hunters who were guarding or just resting in that hall, Akira found some familiar faces. It was Katsuya’s group.

“So those guys are also assigned here, huh.”

“It seems to be so. But Akira, now that we know they’re here, let’s put more distance from them.”

“Why should I do that?”

“It will only cause trouble if they approach you again.”

“…Alright.”

Akira could not refute Alpha’s words, so he moved to the opposite side of the hall from Katsuya’s group. He then just stayed there while watching his

surroundings.

As Akira was wondering if he could get lucky such that he would just have to stay in that place until he finished his shift, all of a sudden someone called him from behind.

“Akira!”

Akira turned to the source of that voice and saw Sara walking towards him while lightly waving at him.

Akira went to meet Sara. He made a slight bow and asked.

“Sara-san, are you taking this request too?”

“Yep. Although to be more precise, we took the request to guard the temporary HQ, but we somehow got assigned to explore the underground city instead. But that aside, so you’re the extra Hunter, huh? That was a bit of a surprise.”

“Me? Wait… That means the exploration team that I’ll be joining is…”

“Yep, you got that right. It’s the team in which Elena and I are. The team leader is Elena, come with me.”

Sara then took Akira to the centre of the hall, where Elena, the HQ staff and other Hunters were. Elena immediately noticed Akira and waved at him as he was walking toward her.

“Welcome to the exploration team number 9, I’m the leader of the team, Elena.”

“I’m Akira, I’ll be in your care for today.”

Elena jokingly introduced herself, Akira followed through with that joke and introduced himself politely. Then both of them giggled.

“But still, I didn’t expect that the extra Hunter would be you, Akira. Of course, I’ll help you as much as possible, but it’s still dangerous out there,

so be careful, okay? We're going to explore an uncharted area, so we know nothing about the monster distribution in that area. It won't be strange to find something unexpected there. So be sure to be really careful, alright?"

"I understand. I'll be careful not to drag Elena-san and Sara-san down."

"Nice, you're a good boy… You can rely on us if things get dicey. After all, Shizuka too will be sad if anything happens to you."

"Okay, I'll be relying on you when that happens."

Elena was happy with Akira's answer as she smiled at him. Akira did not show any excessive excitement nor nervousness, he was completely calm and composed. Elena who saw that thought that he should be fine.

Elena then went to hand over the data that she gathered during her previous exploration. She operated her information terminal to send that data to the city staff.

Although the rental terminal that Elena carried could also be used to gather data, Elena mostly used her own information-gathering device.

The data accuracy from Elena's information-gathering device was on a different level compared to the data gathered by the rental terminal from the city. But since the data format from Elena's information-gathering device was different compared to the one that the city staff used, there was a need to convert the data first before the HQ could use it. Normally, the city would not accept non-standard formatted data in order to avoid having to convert them.

But the data that Elena gathered was so valuable that the HQ made an exception for her and went as far as to convert the data themselves.

Akira looked genuinely amazed as he listened to Elena's explanation.

"So the data that Elena-san gathers even gets special treatment, huh. As I thought, Elena-san is amazing."

Akira was genuinely praising Elena, to which, Elena blushed a little. She felt happy that he praised her. She then proudly said.

“I’m really happy to hear that. There are Hunters out there who don’t appreciate the usefulness of this kind of data, you know? They think that they just need to defeat any monsters that they see, some of them even say that they never get lost in a ruin no matter how complicated the layout is and even if they get lost, they always find the exit. There are many Hunters who go to the ruin thinking like that, you know.”

Akira sounded surprised as he said.

“Is that true? Well, for me, I rather avoid fighting any monsters and I definitely don’t want to get lost inside a ruin. I can’t believe there are Hunters who make light of Elena-san’s job…”

Although every Hunter had different opinions on what it meant to be a good Hunter, most of the Hunters evaluated others’ abilities based on whether they could easily defeat a powerful monster or not. It was true that as long they kept working as Hunters, fighting prowess was indeed an indispensable skill. It was also the easiest way to show how good they were to the other Hunters.

Because of this reason, some Hunters looked down on other Hunters who did not focus on polishing their firepower. Elena had experienced such an unpleasant thing so many times in the past.

When Akira was exploring Kuzusuhara ruin, he realised that he was only able to survive because of Alpha’s ability to gather information about the enemies and the topography around him. That was exactly why he understood how important Elena’s job was.

Elena somehow could feel that Akira genuinely understood her role and its importance. She was actually very happy deep inside her heart, so she gleefully continued talking.

“Surprisingly enough, there are quite a lot of Hunters who think like that, you see. But it does not end there, some of them would encounter some

monsters, attract more monsters from that fight, waste a lot of ammo before starting to curse and run away, and then to finally get lost inside the ruin. Not only do they waste ammo and time that could have been used to search for relics, they even have the guts to complain saying that it's because we didn't do our job properly, you know?!! Those Hunters are just the worst!"

Elena realized that she was about to start complaining endlessly, and of course, Akira would not be happy to listen to her endless complaint. So she decided to end her complaints and came up with another topic.

"Ah, let me tell you this beforehand, even though it's true that I rely on Sara for firepower, I'm pretty good at fighting too, you know? I can use my information-gathering device to increase my rifle's accuracy. Moreover, I bought myself an augmented suit not too long ago. Thanks to that, I can use heavy rifles that I couldn't normally use before. So just because my main duty is to gather information, it doesn't mean that I'm bad at fighting."

"Now that I think about it, Elena-san, you're now using that augmented suit from before, huh…"

"Well, my information-gathering device is pretty heavy after all, so I can only use a lighter rifle compared to Sara. But even so, it still packs quite a punch…"

As the subject about Elena's augmented suit came up, Akira could not help but to remember the augmented suit that Elena used when he visited Shizuka's shop.

Talking about the figure of Elena in her augmented suit, it reminded Akira about her beautiful curves highlighted by her augmented suit and also the image of flustered and blushing Elena in her seductive augmented suit.

On top of that, it also reminded him of the highly accurate naked image of Elena that Alpha created using her advanced image reconstruction ability. The same thing also happened in Sara's image. Both of them had a very attractive body. Those images left a strong impression on Akira.

When Akira realised that he made a big blunder, he already remembered those images in his head. He frantically tried to distract his mind, but since he was so shocked, he was not able to completely forget those images.

Seeing Akira's reaction Elena immediately realized that he was recalling the time when she met him in Shizuka's shop. Watching how hard he was trying to keep calm, she also tried her best to do so. But it was not like she could completely calm down either.

Akira and Elena's conversation stopped, both of them smiled at each other trying to gloss over the subject. Sara smiled mischievously looking at both of them, she had heard what happened from Shizuka, so she knew what was going on now. Seeing how her best friend was acting so unlike herself, she felt pitiful but also found it interesting at the same time.

Of course, there was no way Sara could know that Akira also thought of her naked image.

In order to change the mood, Akira also tried to come up with another subject.

"By the way, how many people are in Elena-san's group?"

Elena immediately hopped on to that subject and quickly answered back.

"With you included, it's 4 people."

"4 people? Uhh, if I'm not mistaken, isn't that smaller compared to a normal group? I think it's a good idea to get more people."

Akira remembered that he had to face a swarm of Yarata Scorpion only with Reina and Shiori, with 4 people including him, it would not be that much different from yesterday. With such a number of people, Akira felt like he would be brushing with death again.

There were Yarata Scorpions' nests located in the uncharted areas of the underground city. Although the exploration team's duty was to only scout those uncharted areas, Akira still thought that 4 people were too small. Of

course, there was also a possibility that such a small number was not a problem with their abilities, but it was not a number that could reassure other Hunters without any further explanation.

Elena and Sara raised their eyebrows when Akira asked them that question, they then looked at each other. It seemed that it was not a pleasant subject to talk about.

Sara answered Akira's question.

"Well, to be honest, we wanted to get more Hunters, you see… But something happened."

"What happened?"

This time, Elena answered Akira's question.

"There was some compatibility problem with the other Hunters who joined this team before, you see. Although such situations are not rare, I really hope they take care of things like that beforehand…"

Akira looked at both Sara and Elena. Judging from their expression, he noticed that there was a slight difference between Sara's expression and Elena's expression. He thought that Elena and Sara had different kinds of problems. Elena's problem was with the group itself while Sara's problem was more on a personal level.

Suddenly, the last person in the team joined their conversation.

"I'm really sorry. I'll be sure to tell them to take care of that problem beforehand next time."

The last member of the team was Shikarabe, a Hunter from Drankam just like Katsuya and his friends. He was the Hunter who acted as Katsuya's guardian in the past. But right now, Shikarabe had been released from that position and Katsuya's group was already moving separately from him.

Shikarabe turned to Akira and said.

“I’m Shikarabe. I’m also on the exploration team number 9. Are you the Hunter who will join this team?”

“I’m Akira. I’ll be in your care for today.”

Shikarabe looked at Akira as if he was evaluating him.

“I do welcome an extra Hunter, but I hate to get someone who would pull us down like the previous one. Are you sure you’re not mistaking something?”

Although Shikarabe sounded as if he was provoking him, Akira just answered back as if it was nothing.

“If you think that I’m a dead weight, please tell that to HQ. I’ve tried… It’s the HQ who assigned me here after all. So if you want to complain, then complain as much as you want to the HQ and get a replacement for me.”

To someone who was obviously telling him that he was doubting his ability, Akira replied back telling him to blame the people who sent him to that place instead.

In the first place, Akira preferred to be assigned to the defense team. So he did not want to listen to the other Hunters’ complaints that should have been directed to the people who assigned him to the exploration team even though he did not have enough skill.

His answer was the opposite of what Shikarabe expected. He thought that Akira would start boasting about his skill or snap back at him who doubted his skill.

But looking at how he reacted, it seemed that Akira did not feel any displeasure towards other people who looked down on his skill, and that was rather surprising for Shikarabe.

Shikarabe tried to hide his surprise as he intentionally mocked and provoked Akira.

“That sounded really pathetic, don’t you have confidence in your own skill.”

But Akira replied back calmly.

“I don’t know what you’re expecting in terms of my ability. But at least, I know for sure that I don’t have enough ability to say things like ‘everything will be okay since I’m here now’ or like ‘don’t worry, I’ll do something about it’. So if you’re talking about that, then yes, I’m not confident enough with my skill to say things like that.”

After hearing Akira’s answer, Shikarabe burst out in laughter. His mood turned better as he said.

“It’s all good, I’m sorry about that. I know a lot of foolish Hunters who are so full of their abilities even though they have no proof to support their claim. At least, I know that you’re not one of those fools. Well, I bet it’ll be alright. The people in the HQ are not that stupid as to send someone with questionable skills here.”

Shikarabe said that as he grumbled and apologized to Akira.

“I’ve already finished my preparation, I can go anytime you’re ready.”

Elena checked her information terminal which was transferring data. Her terminal showed the estimated time needed to finish the data transfer.

“We’ll go once I’m finished with the data transfer, it’ll still take about 5 more minutes. Are you okay with that, Akira?”

“It’s okay. I can go anytime… Hm?”

Alpha suddenly pointed her finger and Akira instinctively turned to that direction. Not too far from them, he could see Katsuya’s group walking towards him with Katsuya leading in the front. He obviously looked displeased.

Silavin: I don’t know why, but I was smiling throughout the chapter. Maybe because it was a long awaited team exploration. Tell me how you guys feel. And that cliffhanger!

p4553r get the respirator! I’m dying here XD.

p4553r: Respirator already dispatched. It’ll reach you in a week! ;-)

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Rebuild World – Chapter 49, Elena’s Judgement

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As Akira turned his head, Elena, Sara and Shikarabe instinctively followed him and saw Katsuya’s team approaching them. Shikarabe’s face turned sour, Elena put both of her hands on her face while Sara just smiled bitterly.

Alpha then warned Akira.

“I don’t think I even need to tell you this, but be a good boy and try not to cause a fight, okay?”

“I know, Elena-san and the others are here too. I’m sure they’re not here to pick a fight either.”

“Well, I wonder about that.”

Akira looked confident with his guess, but Alpha refuted him making a serious face.

From how Alpha was acting, Akira thought that she was worried if he would cause a problem. So he reminded himself to act carefully.

Elena let out a sigh and said to Shikarabe.

“If it’s another problem among Drankam Hunters, be sure to sort it out yourself, okay?”

“Of course. You can just blame me for everything he says.”

Shikarabe stated that out flatly. Akira, who did not know what was going on, looked at Elena. Sara noticed him and explained the situation to him.

“Just like Elena said, there was a compatibility problem earlier. Originally, we planned to go out with more people. But it seems that among the Hunters that Drankam sent, there’s a Hunter that Shikarabe just can’t get along with, and so Shikarabe vehemently said that he would not go with that Hunter.”

Sara and Elena then told everything to Akira.

Sara, Elena and Shikarabe were originally a part of the temporary base construction aid request. Sara and Elena formed a team of two and were given the duty to patrol the area and take out any monsters they find. While Shikarabe was dispatched together with the other Hunters from Drankam and had similar duties.

In order to make a way to the deeper part of the ruin, there were a lot of people working around the temporary base in the construction site, some of them were clearing the rubble and wreckages while some of them were paving the road. Normally, they would use tanks to clear up the wreckages, but bringing tanks inside a ruin was next to impossible. There were monsters living in the tall buildings around the area and there were cases where humanoid weapons could not be used to deal with them because of their size. Because of that, Hunters were dispatched to help in fighting against those monsters.

As the road from the temporary base extended deeper into the ruin, the workers encountered more monsters, each seemingly stronger than the last. And in order to deal with those monsters, the Hunters with enough skill to be stationed in the front line were dispatched.

But on the outskirts of the ruins, where there should be only weak monsters, they encountered Yarata Scorpion swarms. Then a later investigation showed that there were multiple Yarata Scorpion nests in the underground city. Given the size of the underground city, it was perfectly possible for it to be connected to the deeper part of the Kuzusuhara Ruin.

Because of that, the commander in the temporal HQ on the surface had no other choice but to send some of the Hunters from the surface to the underground. And that was the reason why Elena, Sara and Shikarabe were here.

The three of them were originally skilled Hunters who were stationed in the front line. They only needed to pick up some Hunters immediately to form an exploration team. Since Shikarabe was affiliated with Drankam, the original plan was to team up with some other Hunters that Drankam had dispatched to form an exploration team.

But there was a problem. The Hunters that Drankam sent were Katsuya's team.

Even in Drankam, Katsuya and Shikarabe just could not get along with each other. Especially Shikarabe, he really hated Katsuya's guts.

Shikarabe was strongly against the idea of teaming up with Katsuya and his friends. He said that he would step out if they joined the team, or that he would do all their worth of work too, so there's no need to take Katsuya's team. He even said that if things got really bad, he did not mind if Elena and Sara used him as a decoy to save themselves.

This was an internal problem of Drankam. Thanks to Shikarabe's highly evaluated skill and his good connection with someone among the higher-ups in Drankam, in the end, his selfish appeal was accepted. After that, the HQ sent Akira to join their team.

Shikarabe and Katsuya were arguing while Akira was listening to Sara and Elena's explanation.

Katsuya suddenly yelled while glaring at Shikarabe.

“Give it a break already!! I’m no longer working under you!! I have no reason to listen to you!! Don’t you know that you’re troubling Elena-san and Sara-san just because of your selfishness!?”

Shikarabe replied back while posing as if he was picking a fight, he was not even trying to hide his hatred toward Katsuya.

“Before spouting something like that, you should know how much trouble you’ll be giving them if we let you join the group. Now get lost!!”

They sounded like they would not come to a compromise anytime soon. At this rate, they would just continue arguing forever.

Katsuya was so happy when he found out that he would be dispatched together with Elena and Sara, he thought that it was the chance to show them his growth and redeem himself from their last evaluation of him. Although he also hated the idea of being in the same group with Shikarabe, he was planning to endure it.

But Shikarabe cut short that opportunity just because of his selfishness. So it was understandable that Katsuya was angry at Shikarabe.

Katsuya’s face tensed up as he tried to convince Shikarabe.

“Are you seriously planning to go out with only the three of you?! Drankam would not send another Hunter here just because you hate me, you know!! How long are you planning to be so stubborn?!!”

Katsuya did contact Drankam’s management beforehand, he was hoping that the management side would give their absolute order to Shikarabe, who was so vehemently opposed to Katsuya joining the exploration team.

But in the end, the management side told them to sort it out themselves. It was because Drankam’s management wanted to avoid using its right to force Shikarabe, who was a veteran and skilled Hunter or Katsuya, who was like the representative of the young Hunters in the gang.

Although the Drankam's management sided with Shikarabe, they did not send another Hunter from Drankam here. So Katsuya thought if Shikarabe met a monster strong enough to give him a hard time, he might let Katsuya join the exploration team. That was why he went to talk to Shikarabe who just returned from an exploration.

Shikarabe smiled lightly.

"Don't worry about that. The HQ already sent an extra Hunter. It's Akira. He seems to be pretty strong, doesn't he? It seems that he took out a huge number of Yarata Scorpions yesterday, even the HQ approved him, you know?"

Shikarabe said that and introduced Akira to Katsuya. Katsuya and his friends turned to Akira. They did notice Akira's presence, but they did not think that he would be the extra Hunter for the exploration team. They thought that he was only talking to Sara and Elena since they knew each other.

"…He's not a Hunter from Drankam, you know?"

"So what? The HQ was the one who recommended him. I bet he'll do just fine. In the first place, Elena and Sara are not from Drankam too, am I wrong?"

"Our rule says that when we need a skilled Hunter for a certain request, we'll be prioritizing Hunters from Drankam!!"

"That doesn't mean that we have to take deadweight useless Hunters with us and divide our hard-earned reward with them, you know. Are you misunderstanding everything that you've experienced up until now or something?!"

Shikarabe was looking down at Katsuya, and Katsuya was glaring at Shikarabe with rage. They were totally against each other. The only reason why it did not break into a fight was because both of them knew that they should not fight in that place. If it was not for the Hunters around them, it would have been a very dangerous situation.

As it looked like it would not end anytime soon, Elena interrupted and put an end to their argument.

“It’s time, let’s go.”

Elena immediately turned and left the place after saying that, Akira and Sara just silently followed behind her. Shikarabe smiled mockingly at Katsuya before following suit.

Katsuya kept glaring at Shikarabe’s back as he was leaving that place, his gaze then shifted to Akira.

“…That boy again, huh?!”

If Akira was not there, Shikarabe might back off and let Katsuya join their exploration team. Katsuya unconsciously thought so as he mumbled angrily.

Akira who just joined the exploration team headed by Elena continued walking deeper into the underground ruin with a grim face.

Every exploration team was given a certain job. The exploration team number 9 to which Akira was assigned to, got the duty to map an uncharted area of the underground city. In order to at least understand the rough layout of the uncharted area, they brought a survey device to map out their surrounding.

But of course, they had no information about the area that they were exploring. They did not know what kind of monsters were living there nor its count. Moreover, the hallways in the underground city formed a system of a labyrinth. And on top of that, it was unlike the defensive point, where there were illuminations. The uncharted area was still wrapped in total darkness. It was the territory where those monsters which could live in dark conditions roamed around.

To delve into the uncharted areas, to bring back information on the layout of the area and the monsters roaming that place, and to ensure a minimal level of safety for the extermination team that would go there later. These were

the jobs of the exploration team, in other words, these were the jobs for Elena's team, which now included Akira.

They continued exploring the uncharted area without a minimal level of safety like illuminations or information about the area. It was taxing Akira's physical and psychical stamina more than he thought.

The team was moving with Elena in the centre, Sara on the left, Shikarabe at the front and Akira on the right. They, of course, brought with them some illuminations, but it was far from enough to illuminate the whole area, as such, the area around them was still pitch black. They were using their individual information-gathering devices to inspect their surroundings as they moved forward.

The whole team was moving pretty fast, too fast for Akira.

He did not know that Elena adjusted the whole team to move slower than usual in order to check Akira's skill. But even so, it took everything that he had to barely be able to match up with their speed.

Akira was scanning the area using his own ability without any help from Alpha, it was a form of training for him. But because of the difference between Akira's ability and the other Hunters' abilities, it quickly made him tired. Because of that, Alpha decided to stop the training temporarily.

Alpha said to Akira.

"Akira, let's stop the training here. I'll be watching out for any monsters, so you can relax for a bit. If we stay like this, you might get too tired to handle the situation in case if anything bad happens."

"…I'm sorry. To be honest, I'm already at my limit right now. So, is it okay if I leave it to you?"

"Of course, just leave it to me and relax. Nervousness will only cause you to get tired faster. It'll be bad if the tiredness slows you down when you need it the most."

“I’m really sorry. I’ll be leaving it to you then.”

“Just leave it to me.”

Alpha replied back confidently. It gave Akira a sense of security as he obviously relaxed his guard.

Akira did not know that Shikarabe was actually observing him. Shikarabe suddenly asked him.

“Akira, how’s the right side?”

Akira was a bit surprised as he quickly replied back.

“…There are 3 Yarata Scorpions about 50 metres ahead. They’re not moving, so I think they’re dead. But even if they’re just playing dead, since they’re not in our way and it doesn’t seem like they’re coming here either, I think it’s fine to just ignore them.”

Shikarabe turned to Elena, he was asking for her confirmation, so Elena quickly responded.

“He’s right.”

Shikarabe looked a bit surprised when he heard Elena’s answer.

“Roger that… That’s weird, here I thought that he lowered his guard, but it seems that he’s doing his job properly, huh. I guess my intuition has dulled.”

Of course, Akira was only repeating what Alpha said to him. Although he tried his best to hide his shock and keep calm, there was still a trace of shock on his face.

[…That was a close call.]

Shikarabe was able to accurately grasp the fact that Akira lowered his guard. As Akira caught a glimpse of the skill of a real veteran Hunter, he

gritted his teeth to stop himself from making a bitter smile. But on the other hand, his face turned stiff because of that.

It was not like Shikarabe asked Akira that question in order to warn him. Akira was added to that team as extra firepower in the first place. So even if he lacked surveillance skills, Elena could cover him just fine.

If it bothered him, Shikarabe could just watch his right side too, it was only a question to help him judge whether he should do that or not.

Sara and Elena were surprised by how proficient Akira was. After all, that level of area scan was close to Elena's level who specialized in that skill. Sara and Elena did not think that Akira's searching ability was that good, but of course, their prediction was correct. After all, in reality, it was Alpha who was scanning the area.

Shikarabe suddenly said gleefully.

"What a jackpot, to think that not only he's good with fighting, he's also good with surveillance too. I'm glad we decided to bring him rather than Katsuya."

Elena jabbed, she sounded a bit annoyed.

"But I really hope you stop roping us into your gang's problem, you know?"

"Don't say that, I did volunteer myself to be in the front as an exchange for my selfishness, right? And in the end, you being the leader of the group also approved it, didn't you?"

Akira turned to Elena in surprise, and that remark by Shikarabe meant that she decided to bring Shikarabe alone rather than bringing 5 people in Katsuya's team.

Akira did not think that Katsuya was that weak and he also did not think that Shikarabe was so strong. Elena could catch Akira's line of thinking from his expression.

So she decided to explain it to Akira.

“…Well, it’s not like I was taking Shikarabe’s side. I decided that based on all the advantages and disadvantages that we would get if we replaced Shikarabe with Katsuya’s team. For example, in a small narrow underground hallway or room, it’ll diminish the advantage of bringing more people. In that case, it’s better to bring one skilled person who can deal with various situations. Moreover, it’s hard to move fast when you bring a big team. Then also…”

Elena hesitated.

“…I’m not sure if they would listen to my command in case if we’re in a pinch, you see.”

It seemed that Elena knew that she made a difficult choice.

Sara smiled bitterly and joined their conversation.

“Well, Elena is a worrywart after all, but you decided to take that option thinking that it was the best option for our safety. This team was formed on the spot, so it might be a bad idea to suddenly form a big team. So please don’t think bad of her, okay?”

Akira smiled as he answered back.

“Of course not, it’s just that because of my inexperience, I thought that more people would definitely mean it would be safer, that was why I found it a little strange. It’s not like I’m doubting Elena-san’s decision. If Elena-san thinks so, I’m sure that it’s the correct decision.”

Shikarabe then said in a good mood.

“I agree with that. I can assure you that it was the correct decision. I used to work together with them, you see. So I know a lot of things about them. Katsuya often takes action without approval thinking that he’s absolutely correct. Yumina and Airi are only there to support him, so they obey whatever he says. Reina is impulsive and hot-tempered. While Shiori is

only there prioritizing Reina's safety. All of them are full of problems. Especially that Katsuya, if he finds something that he doesn't like, he'll always go with voting and take over the command. Since the other 4 are always backing him, his opinion will always come out on top. He would not even notice that and insist that it's a decision they made together. I can guarantee that. If they do something like that in the uncharted area of the underground city, it'll definitely break the team. In the worst-case scenario, it might even cause the whole team to get wiped out. That's why it would be a big mistake to bring them here."

Although he still did not know for sure whether that was correct or not, Akira at least knew that Shikarabe really hated Katsuya's guts after listening to what Shikarabe just said.

Elena sighed.

"…Leaving aside whether that information is accurate or not, I wanted to cut off the need to worry for something like that and that's the biggest reason why I decided not to bring them here. I'll be very careful not to give any bad orders, so Akira, be sure to obey my orders, okay? If you want to know why I give you a certain order, you can just ask me and I'll explain it to you."

"I understand, don't worry, even if you make a bad decision, I'm sure that it's still better than if I were to make the decision myself. And when I ask you about your reason, that's not because I want to complain, please think of it that I only ask the reason just in order to learn."

Akira was being honest when he said that, he did not think even for a second that his judging ability was better than Elena. Moreover, Alpha herself also recognized Elena's skill. So he had no reason to doubt her decision.

Elena blushed as she replied back.

"I'll give my best to answer your trust."

Sara was smiling mischievously when she saw how Elena was acting. Elena noticed her and returned with an intimidating smile, so Sara quickly turned her face back to watching the hallway.

They continued their exploration without any trouble. The underground city had a very complex design in the first place, and on top of that, the crumbled rubbles blocked some hallways and there were shutters that sealed some areas. Because of that, the underground city felt like a labyrinth.

The only reason why they could venture safely deep into the underground city without getting lost was because of Elena's information analysis skill. She used the gathered topological information of the area to create a rough map and used the special features of the area around them in tandem with the direction and distance they travelled to accurately ascertain their position. She was also avoiding areas with monsters and any other dangerous areas where other Hunters had encountered monsters, to pick the safest route.

They encountered some monsters during their exploration. Most of the time, Shikarabe who was in the front would take them out all by himself, and when the monsters were too many for him, 4 of them would work together to repel the monsters. Most of the monsters that they met were Yarata Scorpions, but their numbers were not huge. They continued exploring the underground city without facing much trouble.

Among all 4 of them, Shikarabe was the one who worked the hardest since he was in the lead position. Just like he said, he took Katsuya's team's worth of work too, that was why he had the biggest workload.

Of course, it put Shikarabe under more stress, it shaved his physical and psychical stamina as well as his ammo reserve faster.

Elena thought that it was time to rotate the position as she said to Sara.

"Sara, can you take the lead now?"

"Sure."

“I’m not that tired yet, I can still go on.”

Although Shikarabe said that, Elena immediately rejected his suggestion.

“Even if you have the stamina, it’s not like you have an unlimited amount of ammo, right? It’s better to rotate when we have the chance. Not only can you take a rest, but it’ll also conserve your ammo too.”

“I see, alright… In that case, how about Akira takes the lead?”

Elena looked puzzled when Shikarabe made that suggestion.

“Akira?”

“I want to confirm his ability. Since we’re not in a relatively dangerous area, we can handle the situation even if he misses something and gets ambushed by surprise. So what do you think? Well, I won’t force it if Akira doesn’t want to do it though.”

It was true that it was a good idea to confirm whether Akira would handle well during a real fight or would drag them down. Akira also thought so as he said to Elena.

“I don’t mind.”

In the end, Elena had the final say in that team. Even if she judged that he did not have the skill to do that job, Akira did not mind at all.

Elena looked at Akira’s face, she planned to reject that suggestion if there was even the slightest annoyance or nervousness in his expression.

There was no nervousness in Akira’s expression even if he was about to be put in the lead position. But on the other hand, there was also no trace of excitement either. So Elena thought that he really did not mind whether he was put at the front or not.

Elena also agreed with Shikarabe’s suggestion, so she decided to rotate Akira’s position to the front.

“Alright then. Akira, exchange position with Shikarabe and take the point. Be sure not to do anything reckless, okay? Also, Sara and Shikarabe, if you think that Akira is in danger, there’s no need to wait for my orders to help him, okay?”

Akira: “I understand.”

Sara: “Okay.”

Shikarabe: “Roger that.”

Akira was completely neutral, Sara and Elena smiled gently to reassure him, while Shikarabe sounded as if he was looking forward to it.

Alpha then asked Akira before he changed position.

“Let me ask you this while we still have the chance, how much support do you want from me?”

Akira did not understand why Alpha asked that question. He looked puzzled as he answered back.

“…How much, you ask? Full support, please.”

“This is just an idea, if you want, you can lower your performance so you might get assigned to the defense team next time. On the other hand, if you do too well, they might send you to a more dangerous place next time. So, with that in mind, what do you want?”

Akira finally understood why Alpha asked that question after listening to her explanation. He realized that he had such an option after he understood what Alpha actually meant, he then said.

“…Hmmm, it’s true that I can do that, but if I do that, I’ll be causing more trouble for the others. So give me full support, just like usual.”

“Well, I knew you would say that. Alright then, just leave it to me.”

Alpha smiled as she said. She now understood bit by bit how Akira’s thought process worked.

Silavin: Yo, Finally, we hit the Goal!

There will be two chapters this week. Naturally, it is all in accordance to the goal. So, if the goal dips, we will be returning back to normal.
At this time of posting, the goal has dipped but I thought it was fair to have 2 chapter this week since we hit it last week.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 50, Underground Exploration

Index

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Editor: Silavin

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Elena’s team proceeded deeper into the underground city with Akira leading the front.

With Akira leading the team, they moved more or less at the same speed as when Shikarabe was in the lead. Moving with that speed was completely above Akira’s ability, so he relied fully on Alpha to watch for any monsters.

Although Akira had limited visibility through the darkness thanks to his enhanced vision, it was not like he used that to spot monsters. It was Alpha who was using the information from that enhanced vision to detect monsters.

From the other person’s point of view, it looked like Akira was moving forward without even checking his surroundings. The only reason why the other Hunters did not say anything about that was because Elena was also scanning the area and Akira was able to answer correctly when Shikarabe questioned him.

And even if Akira missed something, the other Hunters thought that it would not cause a fatal situation, that was why the other Hunters let him take the lead.

Alpha suddenly said to Akira.

“Akira, there are 3 scorpions up ahead. Take them out before they notice you.”

Akira’s vision was enhanced by Alpha. Thanks to that, he was able to see clearly the scorpions up ahead amidst the total darkness. It also allowed him to spot rubbles and wreckages that would block his aim.

His distance from the scorpions was considered a bit far. Akira had no confidence to be able to accurately shoot from such a distance, but he believed that it was not a problem with Alpha’s support. Not to mention that since Alpha told him to shoot at those scorpions from such distance, he thought that it must be the best option to do it from here.

“Roger that.”

Akira readied his AAH rifle and aimed at those scorpions. He lined the TPL added into his vision by Alpha to the head of one of those scorpions and calmly pulled the trigger.

Thanks to Alpha’s support, the piercing bullet which flew out from its muzzle hit the scorpion right where Akira was aiming and blasted the scorpion’s head to pieces.

The other scorpions jumped into action as their friend was killed in an instant. They started looking around for enemies, but Akira quickly released the next volley of highly piercing bullets at them. Those bullets pierced through the scorpions’ shells and slowed their movement.

When those scorpions’ movements had dulled significantly, Akira released the finishing shot at them. Those scorpions then fell down and twitched before they completely stopped moving.

Akira lowered his rifle and sighed.

“It did take them out, so this is the power of the high piercing ammo, huh? It’s on a different level compared to the normal bullet.”

Akira remembered the time when he had to fight a swarm of Yarata Scorpions using only normal ammo. At first, he was rather sceptical if he could fight Yarata Scorpions without CWH anti-material rifle. But after seeing the power of the piercing ammo, he understood that it should not be a problem.

Alpha smiled at him and said.

“It seems that the piercing ammo works well against the scorpions. Let’s keep using it for the time being.”

“I understand.”

Seeing how Akira was acting, Alpha thought that his worry must have been cleared up. It was a good thing since unnecessary nervousness would only cause needless tiredness.

Sara relied mostly on Elena when it came to detecting monsters. After all, compared to the information-gathering device that she was using, Elena’s information-gathering device was way better. In case if Elena noticed something, she would send that data to Sara, and then Sara would be able to accurately spot any monsters around her.

But Sara did not get any information about the scorpions that Akira just took out, so she turned to Elena and asked her.

“Elena, can you send me the data about those scorpions?”

“Sure.”

Elena then sent the data about the area ahead of them to Sara. The new data that Sara received was displayed on her visor.

“Thank you… Yep, I see it. 3 Yarata Scorpions… They’re already dead… He’s pretty good.”

Sara looked at the dead scorpions and mumbled out her amazement.

Shikarabe used his own information-gathering device to confirm the scorpions that Akira just took out.

“Is there any need to shoot them from such distance? If it was me, I would move closer first…”

Elena answered Shikarabe’s question.

“We’re in a one-way hallway. There are wreckages and rubbles blocking our way. Those monsters are also basically in our way. You can either move closer to them using those wreckages to hide and take them out when you have the chance, or you can also bait them to closer before finally killing them. It’s up to you whichever you want to choose.”

“Well, it’s true that everyone has a different sense of distance. It’s not like he missed his shots anyway, so I guess it’s not a problem.”

Shikarabe thought that it was not like Akira’s action caused a fight that could have been avoided, and it was true that they might have to fight those monsters later so it was a good idea to take them out when they had the chance.

Elena also agreed with Shikarabe’s opinion. But there was one thing that bothered her, how was Akira able to spot those scorpions.

The information-gathering device Akira was using was originally the device that she sold to him. So she knew well the ability of that information-gathering device.

If Elena asked herself whether she could do the same thing with that information-gathering device, she could answer the question immediately with a resounding no.

“It should be very difficult to detect those scorpions from this distance using the device that I sold him. That information-gathering device is not so powerful. It might be possible to do that on the surface, but in this dark underground city where information-gathering devices’ effectiveness is

greatly reduced, it should be near impossible to do that. So how in the world…”

Elena actually had a guess as to how Akira detected those scorpions.

“There’s a good chance that Akira can connect to the old-world domain. That might be the reason why he can do this. It does pique my interest, but if that’s true, then I can’t just carelessly ask him.”

Elena had promised Akira not to ask him any unnecessary questions. Although she was interested in him since he had better detection ability compared to her who was the team’s main in surveillance, it was not enough of a reason to break her promise with the person who saved her life.

On top of it, if she really asked him if he could connect to the old-world domain, it might cause a fight in which they were forced to kill each other.

If he could really connect to the old-world domain, Akira might have slowly but surely noticed the fact that she and Sara were suspicious of him. Thus, if she asked him in order to confirm her guess, it might cause their relationship to immediately turn sour.

Sara was not that knowledgeable about information-gathering devices compared to Elena, while Shikarabe believed that Akira must be using an expensive information-gathering device. So Elena thought that there should be no problem if she did not say anything as she put a lid on her curiosity.

They continued their exploration with Akira still positioned in the front.

They encountered monsters a few times, but Akira could handle them just fine. He was at least able to avoid being a dead weight to the other Hunters. Because of the layout of the underground city and the number of rubbles scattered in its hallways, they were forced to fight monsters in a close range for a few times, but again, Akira was able to handle those fights without any problem.

They delved deeper through the darkness of the underground city. Traces of advanced civilizations could be found around them together with the

inactive advanced technologies that were waiting to be reactivated. These silently revealed the glory that once prevailed in the past as these were now warped in total darkness. Akira and the others used their lights to scan the area and caught a glimpse of those remnants from the old-world civilization's glorious era, they could see countless old-world relics that were left there.

Akira then found something that resembled a shop's ruin. When he checked the insides of it for monsters, he was stunned as he found a huge amount of relics.

"Oh!! What a find!! There are these many relics lying here!!"

Akira could not help but imagine just how much money he could get if he brought back all these relics. Seeing that, Sara smiled bitterly and warned Akira.

"I can understand your feelings of wanting to bring them back, but remember that our contract says all the relics that we find during this request are fully owned by Kugamayama city. I do understand your feelings, I really do, but you can't carry them with you, okay?"

There was a trace of disappointment in Sara's face which was saying that it would have been really great if they found those relics while not in the middle of this request. She was enduring the evil whispers urging her to take those relics. She somehow ignored those whispers in order to stop both Akira and herself from doing something stupid.

"Don't even think of carrying just a small amount of those relics or mixing them with your ammo thinking that they won't notice them. It's a bad idea, so just don't, okay?"

When Sara said that to Akira, she was actually reminding herself.

Elena joined in.

"That's right, Akira. It's not like they would do a full body search on you, but still, if you take some of them, it almost always has some kind of effect

on your behaviour. So it’s more or less guaranteed that they will notice it. And when they do, they’ll confiscate those relics from you and make you pay a huge amount of fine that it’ll completely screw your life for good. So don’t do that no matter what, alright?”

Elena sounded like she was giving warning to a small boy.

Akira also did not wish to be a bad boy, so he answered back obediently.

“Okay.”

Judging from how Akira replied back with no trace of displeasure or discontent, Elena and Sara believed that there was no need to worry about him.

Shikarabe also joined in their conversation.

“I don’t know exactly how much the relics from this area is worth, but I believe the city thinks that they are worth enough to even make them spend a lot of money to build a forward outpost here, clear up the rubbles to make a road, and pay a lot of Hunters to exterminate the monsters. They collect those relics to pay for our rewards after all. So if you have any complaints, you should direct that to yourself for accepting this request for the amount of reward they are giving out. Well, if you don’t want to do that, you also have the chance of coming here alone. I don’t know whether it is worth the expense or not, but if someone can do that, then that person must be a first-rate Hunter.”

Akira did not need too much deliberation to come to the conclusion that it would be impossible for him to come all the way here by himself.

“That would be impossible for me, that just means that these relics are not something that I can get yet.”

Alpha smiled provocatively.

“You would be able to do that one day. But don’t worry, I’ll be giving you my full support, so it’s not something that’s too far in the future.”

“Is that so? In that case, let’s survive the request that I’m taking right now so I can still meet that future. I’ll be relying on your support so I can survive until that day comes.”

“Just leave it to me!”

As Akira was listening to Alpha’s reassuring answer, he cast aside all his worries about the hardships that were lying in front of him until that day came and focused on surviving today. After all, that day would not come if he died in the first place.

Shikarabe looked at those dusty relics which reminded him of something.

“…Ahh, I see. That might be true, I guess that’s also an option, huh.”

Shikarabe was talking alone as if he just came up with something, but he immediately noticed that the others were looking at him. Since it would be bad if they mistook him for thinking of a way to bring those relics, Shikarabe was a bit flustered as he explained.

“…Ah, it’s not what you think. It just reminded me of that news about a boy who exchanged an expensive relic in the Exchange Centre not too long ago. Because of that, there was a rumour about an unexplored area in Kuzusuhara outskirts and a lot of Hunters went out to search for that area, remember? Hm?”

The other 3 Hunters made a weird face when Shikarabe said that, after all, it reminded them of bad memories.

Sara and Elena went to the ruin after hearing that rumour, got attacked by some thugs, and almost got killed. As for Akira, he was followed in the last half of his search and almost got killed too. These were the reasons why all 3 of them made difficult faces.

Shikarabe looked at their faces and found it weird.

“What’s wrong?”

But Elena prompted him to continue.

“Don’t worry, it’s nothing. So then, what do you want to say about that rumour?”

“Ah, right, about that boy, you see. I bet he found a way underground, this place is still in the outskirts of the Kuzusuhara ruin, right? So I just thought that he must have found an entrance somewhere and got his relics from the underground city. There were still not that many Yarata scorpions at that time, so there were almost no scorpions on the surface, that would explain why that boy was able to come back alive. That sounds like a good explanation, don’t you think?”

Akira who knew exactly what had happened, feigned ignorance. He had no wish of saying anything since it might reveal his secret.

Elena thought for a while before replying.

“Well, that sounds reasonable enough… You’re not thinking of looking for another entrance to carry those relics, aren’t you? Just so you know, I’m not going to help you.”

Elena firmly told Shikarabe that she would not help. She was collecting layout and topological information of the area and making a rough map using that information, so she might be able to find another entrance if she used that rough map.

“I know. I have no plan to pick a fight with the city either. I’m just saying that out since I thought that it might be a good explanation for that rumour. Calm down, I’m not planning to cause any trouble.”

Elena then told Shikarabe why she was in a bad mood.

“It is good that you are not planning anything dangerous. Now that you brought that rumour up, it reminded us of the past. We also followed that rumour and something bad happened because of that.”

Shikarabe finally understood why Elena was in a bad mood.

“Ah, I see, sorry about that. You too Akira?”

“Yeah, something similar.”

In reality, Akira actually was the source of that rumour. He was attacked by some Hunters when he was just starting out without any real equipment, he then got attacked once more by former Hunters looking to rob him of his relics when he returned back. That rumour only brought trouble for him.

Shikarabe knew how powerful Sara and Elena were, even if they went to the outskirts of Kuzusuhara ruin where the rumour was referring to, it should not cause them any trouble. That was why he was rather curious why Elena and Sara were in such a bad mood.

“But still, I never thought it would bother you that much. What exactly happened? Did you miss a good request just to chase that rumour?”

Sara went silent for a few seconds before answering.

“Well, a lot of things happened, but in the end, we came back with more money, so I guess it’s a plus in the end. Not to mention that we got to meet someone nice and got valuable experience, it was a good trigger to reevaluate ourselves. Result-wise, it ended up well, so I think that’s good enough. But of course, I can only say that now after all is done. How about you, Elena?”

Elena smiled and replied.

“…You’re right. I guess it did end up well. I guess I’ll settle with that since it’ll only keep bothering me otherwise. So yep, I think I’m glad I went behind that rumour back then.”

Sara laughed.

“Yep, that’s right. Not to mention that our luck got better since then, or more like, we’re doing pretty well since then.”

“…Now that you mention it, that’s true. I guess we really started doing well since that happened.”

Elena and Sara remembered about that time. It was when they were having money problems and a lot of other things to worry about. Now that they thought about it, they realised that they started doing better since the moment Akira saved them.

At that time, their luck was at the all-time low. But then Akira saved them and they were able to get over their situation. After that, things always went smoothly for them.

Seeing how Elena and Sara quickly cheered up, Shikarabe found that a bit weird. But he then turned to Akira and asked him.

"…How about you, Akira?"

"Well. Despite all that happened, I guess it ended up well too."

If Akira did not help Sara and Elena at that time, he might have gotten killed when he was attacked by a swarm of monsters as he was travelling together with Katsuragi. Putting the motive aside, what he did back then allowed him to survive the other day.

Elena and Sara cheered up while Akira returned back to his usual mood, but in contrast, Shikarabe's mood worsened.

"Oh great, so in the end, I'm the only one who ended up with a big loss, huh. At that time, I was dispatched by Drankam to search for relics which also doubled as training for the young Hunters in the gang. I was dispatched together with those… Fools… They just wouldn't listen to me and it was a huge pain in the ass to assist them… Shit, remembering it makes me angry again. Let's just end this topic here and continue the exploration. I'll vent this irritation on any monsters that I can find. Akira, let's switch positions, I'll take the front."

Shikarabe took the front position again as they continued their exploration in the underground city. They got to meet some monsters just like Shikarabe hoped, as such, he was able to vent all his pent-up anger.

During their exploration, they often encountered Yarata Scorpions.

Akira shot the head of a Yarata Scorpion that was about 5 metres ahead of him and instantly killed it. He then continued showering the other scorpions with his piercing bullet, fatally wounding them and rendering them unable to fight.

The swarms that they encountered were annihilated without even a chance to retreat. They were able to easily take out a swarm of 30 scorpions without any problem. Although they were unscathed, their faces were grim.

Shikarabe looked at the corpses of scorpions that were scattered around, he kicked one of those corpses and said.

“Their numbers keep increasing. It doesn’t seem to be decreasing at all even after we killed this many. I wonder if there’s a big nest around here somewhere.”

Elena reevaluated their situation. If there was really a big nest around them, they should leave that nest to the extermination team. They had moved away quite far from the nearest relay station. Because of that, it would be impossible to contact the nearest relay station in case anything bad happened.

Elena decided to order the whole group to return back.

“Let’s return back for now. We already got quite a lot of information and we’re close on finishing one whole shift, this is a good place to finish the exploration.”

And so, the whole team headed to the nearest safe place which was the defensive point 19. Elena relied on the rough map that she made to navigate through the total darkness.

Akira thought that their exploration would finish without any trouble at this rate, but Elena suddenly stopped and tilted her head.

“…That’s weird.”

Elena’s words somehow felt like a bad omen. Akira who noticed that asked her.

“Is something wrong?”

“The route is blocked by rubbles, but these rubbles weren’t there when we passed through it.”

Elena rescanned the whole area using her information-gathering device before continuing. The scan radius was pretty wide that it allowed her to check the area around her for monsters.

When she looked at the rescan result, she noticed that there were wreckages and rubbles blocking the route back.

Shikarabe then came up with a guess.

“Other exploration teams might have encountered some monsters and used explosives in fragile points of the underground city. This ruin should not be so fragile originally, but with the scorpions digging holes all over the place, it’s no wonder some areas became fragile.”

Sara flustered as she asked Elena.

“Elena, is there any roundabout route that we can take?”

Their way back to defensive point 19 was already closed. She hoped that she did not have to wander around the underground city to look for another entrance. Elena gave a positive answer, but her answer did not make Sara feel any safer.

“Don’t worry, there are many other routes that we can take, but… We actually have changed the route thrice, you see.”

Elena’s words made the other 3 Hunters tense up. It had happened 3 times, so it was impossible to rule it out as a mere coincidence.

Shikarabe then calmly said.

“There might be battles happening on the upper floor of the underground city or maybe even on the surface, that might be the reason why some weak points of the hallways crumbled. I don’t want to get buried alive down here. It was the right decision to head back. After all, even if we decide to look for another route, we need to conserve our stamina and ammo.”

All of them understood that getting panicked there, even if it was an unconscious one, would be very dangerous given their situation. Elena tried to calm herself down as she said.

“You’re right, let’s go. The next route we’ll take will be a longer one, but let’s keep calm as we move forward.”

Elena, Sara and Shikarabe readied themselves to start moving again. As Akira was about to follow them, Alpha suddenly stopped him.

“Akira, tell Elena to stop and to take the shortest route instead.”

“I’m sure we’re already doing that even without you telling us.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

Akira looked a bit confused, so Alpha explained everything to him. Although her explanation included a lot of assumptions, if those assumptions were correct, it would be really really bad unless they came up with a solution soon. His face immediately turned grim.

Akira sounded dreadful when he called Elena.

“Elena-san, can you stop for a bit?”

When Elena looked at Akira’s serious expression, she immediately tensed up. It was not because she put up her guard on Akira, but it was because of the situation that they were in.

“Akira, what’s wrong?”

“I want to check the rubbles blocking the route back to defensive point 19. They were not there when we came here. If it’s possible, I want to go there

as soon as I can. Is that okay?”

Of course, Akira could not tell Elena that it was because Alpha told him to do so. He was actually worried if Elena would demand him the reason since he asked her without explaining anything at all.

Elena stared at Akira, she looked deep into his eyes trying to understand the meaning behind his words. She then made her decision.

“Very well, let’s go then. You’re in a hurry, right? I bet you’re in such a hurry that you don’t have the time to explain your reason.”

“Yes.”

“This way then.”

Elena only said that before quickly starting to run. Akira and Sara immediately followed behind her. Shikarabe also followed suit albeit a bit late.

The team ran fast through the underground city with Elena leading them. Because of that, they did not have the leeway of checking their surroundings, they could be ambushed anytime. In the worst-case scenario, the situation might turn fatal. Although Elena knew so, she paced the team faster.

Shikarabe did not understand why Akira came up with that suggestion and he was surprised that Elena took Akira’s suggestion even without asking his reason. He then shouted from the back while watching the flank.

“Heyy!! Can you at least tell me the reason why we are doing this?!!”

It was completely understandable that Shikarabe would ask that question, but Elena immediately shot his question down.

“Do that later, you promised to obey the team leader’s order, right? If you don’t want to, you’re more than welcome to stay behind.”

“…I’ll be sure to ask you later, alright?!!”

After he said that, Shikarabe clicked his tongue and continued running.

Since they did not spend their time scanning their surroundings, they were able to reach their destination faster. Akira reached that place first since he already overtook Elena. He suddenly stopped not too far from the wreckages that were blocking their way. Elena and the other Hunters who saw him also stopped behind him.

Alpha looked worried as she said to Akira.

“Akira, take out your CWH anti-material rifle. You can thank the requester for paying your ammo expense again later today.”

Akira’s face turned grim.

“Is it that again?”

“Yep.”

Akira changed his rifle from AAH assault rifle to CWH anti-material rifle, he then readied his gun and aimed at the wreckage in front of him.

Elena, who saw that, was surprised.

“Akira, what are you doing?”

“Those things are not wreckages!!”

Akira only said that before pulling the trigger of his rifle.

The CWH special ammo left the gun’s muzzle and pierced through the thing that blocked the hallway. That bullet pierced and tore through the scorpion’s shell and blasted it to small pieces.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 51, The Ability of The Hunters

Index

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The wreckages that Elena thought to be just crumbled walls were actually Yarata Scorpions. Since it was a hallway that they had passed through once, she only made a quick scan of the area. If she had done that close enough, she would have noticed that they were monsters.

As Akira and the others saw through their camouflage, the scorpions jumped into action and charged toward Akira. There were so many scorpions in that place that they fully blocked the passage through the hallway.

Sara, Elena and Shikarabe quickly picked up their rifles and started shooting at those scorpions. Although all of them were caught by surprise, there was almost no lag time before they started shooting. With the overwhelming firepower from Sara and Shikarabe, they were able to push back the scorpions without any trouble.

Countless bullets rained down on those scorpions. The biggest danger of a swarm came from its sheer number, but that number folded like it was nothing in front of the powerful bullets that rained upon them. It only took a few minutes for Elena’s team to completely annihilate the scorpions that

filled the hallway. Without their camouflage, these scorpions were no match against their opponent's firepower.

The whole team confirmed that it was over as they let out a long sigh. But Akira, who had not lowered his guard even after the battle was over, spoke in a serious tone.

"Elena-san, let's head to defensive point 19 as soon as possible, or at least we should get close enough to contact them. In the worst-case scenario, we might have already been surrounded right now. I want to break off from their encirclement before they close in. We'll depend on you to lead us while adjusting our pace."

Elena quickly ordered the rest of the team.

"Alright then. Sara and Shikarabe take the lead. Akira, you watch our flank. Assume any wreckages that weren't there before as Yarata Scorpions. Let's go."

Sara smiled at Akira as she moved to the front.

"Akira, I'll leave the flank to you."

Shikarabe annoyedly moved forward too.

"Well, I guess this is at least better than wandering in the underground, huh."

They then quickly started moving again.

On their way back, they met so many scorpions that made them wonder just where exactly those were coming from.

Elena picked a route that allowed them to reach the defensive point in the shortest time and with the least risk of getting ambushed. Thanks to that, they were able to rapidly close the distance to the defensive point 19.

Sara used her overwhelming firepower to devastate the scorpion swarm. The rifle that she was using had a size that reflected its superior firepower,

the only reason Sara was able to handle and endure the kickback from that massive heavy gun was because of her nanomachines augmented body. The scorpions were not even able to get close to her before they turned into minced meat.

As for Shikarabe, he accurately shot at the weak points of those scorpions. He used the minimum amount of ammo to produce the greatest result. The countless dead scorpion's corpses that looked unscathed at a glance testified his amazing accuracy.

Sara scattered the big group of scorpions with her firepower while Shikarabe nitpicked the scorpions that were left alive after that. As he was running behind the team, Akira was amazed when he saw the scene of Sara and Shikarabe taking out all the scorpions ahead of them without even missing a beat.

"Amazing… unlike me yesterday, they are actually charging right into the Yarata Scorpions swarm. But even so, they keep pushing forward without slowing down at all against such a number of scorpions."

As Akira looked amazed at how Sara and Shikarabe were fighting in the front, Alpha said to him something that was obvious.

"It's because they have better skills and equipment than you. So it's nothing to be surprised about. You'll be able to do that too, eventually."

"With my own power?"

"Of course with your own power, you'll have to do something like that in places where you can't get any support from me, you know?"

Akira reconfirmed again as if he was doubting it.

"…Are you really sure that I too would be able to do that eventually?"

Alpha smiled confidently and said.

"Yep. Who do you think is training you? But well, of course, I won't say that you would be able to do that next month or something like that."

“I see… Alright then, I’ll be relying on your guidance.”

As Akira smiled and replied back, it seemed that his doubt was cleared completely.

If Alpha was to be honest, she actually did not think that Akira would be able to do that, but she decided to say otherwise.

Akira fully thought that Alpha’s reasoning weighted heavier than his own. He fully believed everything that she said. Although it did not sound that serious, but to Akira, Alpha’s words were almost absolute.

There were many people who ended up being unable to do anything because they thought that it was impossible for them, and it would be very hard to change such an opinion once it had settled in. Often times, they only considered their present conditions and abilities to arrive at such a conclusion. Since they could not even imagine themselves doing it, this further reinforced their belief that it was impossible to do and they would never attempt to do it.

But here, Akira’s subconscious was rewritten from impossible to possible. It changed the upper limit that he had set for himself, then one day, that possibility would turn into reality since Alpha had the means to do that.

Alpha smiled and said to Akira.

“Alright then, let’s focus on the monsters behind you and immediately take them out for now.”

Akira was still running as he looked behind him, his face quickly turned grim.

“There are so many already?!”

There was a swarm of Yarata Scorpion chasing after Elena’s team behind Akira. When they were breaking through the encirclement, more and more scorpions joined in from the other hallways as they slowly built up their number.

Akira stopped and readied his CWH anti-material rifle, he then quickly pulled the trigger as his rifle spat out CWH special ammo at the ever-increasing scorpions. The bullets tore through the scorpion swarm in a straight line. But that crack in the swarm formation was quickly filled by the scorpions behind it.

After Akira shot a few bullets into that swarm, he would quickly turn and run as fast as he could to catch up with Elena and the other Hunters before turning back at the swarm again. He was basically stuck in that loop.

“I feel like I’ve done the same thing yesterday too!!”

“In that case, you can just do what you did yesterday. Although, unlike yesterday, you have an escape route this time. But on the other hand, this hallway is a little wider than yesterday’s tunnel.”

“So which one is it!? Is it harder than yesterday!? Or is it easier!?”

“Which one do you think it is?”

“No idea!!”

“If you ask me, it’s actually not that much different from yesterday, so it’ll be alright.”

“That’s good news!!”

Akira got a little bit desperate and smiled while still shooting at the scorpions.

Shikarabe who was busy in the front got a bit curious about what was going on in the back and took a glance. As he saw how Akira was acting, he thought.

[This boy is smiling, it seems that he’s enjoying this. In that case, I guess there’s no need to worry about the flank, huh. It’s pretty impressive for a boy his age.]

In reality, Akira was not smiling because he was enjoying it. But looking at his movement that was enhanced with Alpha's support and the number of dead scorpion corpses that he was producing, it made Shikarabe misunderstand that Akira was smiling because he was enjoying the fight.

[But still, if Akira is really this skilled, it's weird that it doesn't cause any rumour… Ah, there's indeed a rumour about a skilled young Hunter circulating, but I guess it gets mixed with Katsuya since their age is not much different, huh. It's hard to believe that there's such a coincidence where two skilled young Hunters exist at the same time. So I guess it's nothing strange that most of the people would think the boy from that rumour is Katsuya rather than him.]

After coming to that conclusion, Shikarabe completely stopped thinking about it. After all, he too was still in the midst of a battle.

It had been 30 minutes since they started running. The number of scorpions coming at them had greatly decreased. Then eventually, there were no longer any scorpions trying to attack them. They were finally able to break off from the scorpions' encirclement.

They were already close enough to defensive point 19 to contact them, so Elena pulled out her terminal and tried to contact defensive point 19.

"This is exploration team 9. Defensive point 19, can you hear me?"

"This is defensive point 19, are you guys on your way back?"

"That's correct. And also, we just fought against a huge amount of Yarata Scorpions. They might be a swarm coming from a big nest somewhere around this area and we might be bringing that swarm with us, so be ready if we do. I'll fill you in on the details later after we return back. That's all."

"Roger that."

After Elena ended her call, she sighed in relief. Seeing that, Akira lowered his guard and returned back to his usual mood.

Elena smiled and spoke to her team.

“It’s alright now. Let’s take it easy and walk back to the defensive point.”

The rest of her team agreed as they walked back to defensive point 19.

__*__*__*__

When they reached defensive point 19, they were ordered to stand-by. Elena was reporting the details of the exploration to a city staff while waiting to finish transferring the data that she gathered from the exploration. Elena, Sara and Shikarabe had fulfilled the least needed working hours for their shift, as such, they planned to disband the team once Elena finished transferring the data. But until then, they were to be on stand-by; ready for action.

Shikarabe approached Akira and asked him the reason why he suddenly decided to do what he did back then. Elena and Sara were also curious, so they joined in and listened to Akira’s explanation.

Akira then explained to them about the time he was attacked by a swarm of Yarata Scorpions on the surface.

He said that he got encircled before he realized it and the things that he thought to be just wreckages turned out to be Yarata Scorpions. That was the reason why he was suspicious if the wreckages that were blocking their route were actually Yarata Scorpions that were camouflaging themselves. And he thought that if those wreckages were indeed Yarata Scorpions, then there was a good chance that they were already surrounded back there.

Although Akira omitted everything about Alpha, Shikarabe was somehow convinced by his explanation. He then asked Akira one more question to clear up his suspicion.

“…Well, although it sounded as if you came up with that excuse after going through it, the logic is all there. It’s true that your decision back then was the correct one. But still, what would you do if your guess was wrong? Or is it that you were 100% sure you were correct because of something?”

Akira did have something that guaranteed he was correct, and that something was Alpha. But of course, he could not say that to Shikarabe. So instead, Akira answered back in a fashion as if he was trying to gloss over that question.

“If I was wrong, then it would clear up one of my worries, that’s all.”

“But there’s no mistaking it that it would lower your evaluation, you know?”

“Yeah, I bet it will. I’m sorry to say this, but in that case, give your complaint to the HQ and tell them not to put me in the exploration team again.”

Akira said that as if it was nothing. But Shikarabe was surprised when he heard it.

Akira did not care about his evaluation, or at least, that was how it seemed to Shikarabe.

There were many Hunters who could not stand other Hunters looking down at their ability. There were also cases where something like that would affect the amount of reward that they would receive. Being looked down could be a fatal thing.

The young Hunters received favourable treatment in Drankam. Because of that, they often over-judged their abilities and most of those young Hunters could not stand when looked down upon by others.

The other young Hunters took examples from the young Hunters in Drankam and behaved like them. And so, Hunters who reacted like Akira were very rare and it caught Shikarabe by surprise.

Shikarabe’s suspicion was not fully cleared yet. He understood that Akira did that while fully knowing that he might be mistaken. But even so, from his point of view, Akira seemed to act as if he had known for sure.

Shikarabe asked Akira another question.

“…Is that all the reasons? Did you just really want to confirm your worry even though you knew that you might be mistaken? It seems like you’re still hiding something from me, you know.”

“Even if you say so, I can only say that I followed my intuition…”

There was no way Akira could tell Shikarabe that he knew everything from Alpha. So he could only come up with that random excuse. But surprisingly enough, that was able to clear up all of Shikarabe’s suspicions.

“…Intuition, huh? I guess there’s nothing more to say if that’s the case.”

There were many top-tier Hunters who had sharp intuition. Some of them could feel the position of the monsters that were too far to be visible, some them could feel other’s gaze from positions that were impossible to spot, some of them could feel when monsters were trying to ambush them in an area that looked completely safe. Some of them could just simply feel the monsters around them. Their ability to read and understand others’ moves was closer to a prediction rather than just a guess.

When others asked them the reason behind their decisions or how they knew all of that, they could only say that it was because of their intuition. There were many cases where Hunters with good intuition decided to follow their intuition which allowed them to miraculously survive a very dire situation. Thanks to that, a lot of first-rate Hunters had very good intuition.

Shikarabe was also one of those Hunters who often followed their intuition. So when Akira said that he was only following his intuition, Shikarabe could not question Akira’s answer at all.

Akira might be hiding something from him and had a different reason why he did that. But whatever it was, his decision was the correct one. So Shikarabe thought that there was no need to chase that subject any further.

After he decided to just drop that subject, Shikarabe changed the mood by coming up with a new topic.

“Well, that aside, when you’re working in a team, the result is not everything, it’s also important how you produce that result. But again, I guess I’m not in a position to say that, huh. Elena, I’m sorry but is it okay if I go ahead and leave first? I need to go back to the HQ and write a report for Drankam.”

“Sure. Thanks for the hard work.”

“Sorry about this, I’ll be leaving first.”

After saying that, Shikarabe turned and left the group.

Shikarabe packed his things and was about to leave the defensive point when Shiori suddenly approached him.

“Shikarabe-sama, would it be okay if I ask you some questions right now?”

He looked around and saw Katsuya’s team not too far from there, watching him.

He thought that Shiori might have told Katsuya not to come here. He looked slightly annoyed as he answered back.

“Make it quick. I need to write a report back in HQ. I’m pretty busy, you know.”

“Certainly. Shikarabe-sama, how is your evaluation for Akira-sama?”

“What are you planning to do with my evaluation? I don’t think, even for a millisecond, that it would have been better to bring Katsuya’s team rather than bringing Akira, you know? I’m sorry, but no matter how incompetent Akira is, I would still pick him over Katsuya’s team.”

“…I didn’t think about that at all. I only want to know Akira-sama’s real ability.”

“Why do you want to know that? I think it’s none of your business, isn’t it?”

“It’s just to be safe. I’m ashamed to say this, but I was so close to getting into a fight with Akira-sama yesterday. Thankfully, I was barely able to avoid it, but it was indeed a dangerous situation. In order to not make the same blunder again, I want to know about his ability. Since it seemed that I mistakenly judged his ability, I decided to ask you, Shikarabe-sama.”

Shikarabe was surprised. He knew well how skilled Shiori was. But even so, something bad happened between her and Akira yesterday that made her even call it a blunder on her part. It was hard to believe that Shiori, who was working as Reina’s bodyguard would misjudge someone’s ability.

Shikarabe thought for a moment before answering back.

“Akira’s skill, huh. Well, I would not say that he’s as good as me or the other two, but he at least did not slow us down at all. This might be a little bit of exaggeration, but even if I don’t have any problems with Katsuya, I might still pick Akira over them.”

“Does that mean that Akira is better than Katsuya?”

When Shiori asked that, Shikarabe hesitated for a bit. His expression then turned serious.

“…My intuition is saying that Katsuya is stronger. I also recognize Katsuya’s ability. But if I bring Katsuya, then he would be bringing extra deadweight with him too, you see. Because of that, I think it’s better to bring Akira alone.”

The reason why Shikarabe hesitated was because he knew his intuition was wrong, but even so, he decided to trust his intuition. If he doubted his intuition that had saved him numerous times in the past now, it would affect his judgement in the future. So he did not say anything to deny it in order to reconfirm his own intuition.

“…I’ve answered your question. Is it okay if I go now?”

“Thank you very much.”

Shiori bowed deeply at Shikarabe. He passed beside her, but he suddenly stopped.

Shikarabe did not turn back as he said.

“I guess you’re having it rough too, huh?”

Shiori raised her head, she also did not turn back as she smiled and replied.

“It’s my duty after all.”

“Duty, huh? I don’t know how much you get, but I don’t think it is worth all the problem looking over other children too.”

“Please don’t worry, my main duty is to protect milady and it’s only a trivial thing that comes along with my duty.”

“…I see.”

After that, Shikarabe started walking again toward the hallway.

Shiori realized what Shikarabe was trying to say to her and sighed. She noticed that Reina and the others were approaching her, so she quickly returned back to her usual self.

Reina hesitated when she asked Shiori.

“…Uhmm, what were you talking about?”

“I was asking Shikarabe-sama about Akira-sama who they brought with them in place of Milady’s group. It seemed that he did not slow the team down at all and the exploration went well without any trouble.”

“I see… Well, they were exploring in a team of 3 before, so I guess that’s to be expected.”

That judgement was a very naive one. Saying that Akira did not slow them down at all meant that his skill was better than most of the other Hunters in

that place. Shiori understood that fact very well, but she refrained herself from explaining it to Reina.

Katsuya looked displeased as he mumbled.

“I see…”

Shiori heard Katsuya’s mumble, but she tried to be careful not to change her expression.

Akira was still talking with Elena and Sara. The data transfer was still not finished yet since there was a huge amount of data from their battle with the Yarata Scorpions swarm.

Sara, who was asking Akira’s opinion about the exploration that they just went through looked a bit surprised and said.

“Is it really that bad? I think you did very well, or at least from our point of view, it seems that you still had some leeway back there. There’s no need to try to be humble. Don’t worry, we won’t think that you’re being cheeky or something.”

Akira looked flustered and shook his head.

“I’m not being humble at all, I was barely able to catch up with the whole team. As I thought, it’s still too soon for me to join the exploration team.”

“Is that so? Elena, what do you think?”

Elena thought for a moment before answering.

“Let’s see. Shikarabe did not complain at all, so I think Akira did pretty well back there. Putting aside what you think about your own performance, since today’s exploration went well without any problems, I think that you’ll be assigned to the exploration team again from now on.”

“I-is that so?”

Elena looked at Akira's expression. To her, he sounded as if he was only being humble and there was also a trace of happiness since his skill was recognized.

Elena smiled mischievously and said.

"In that case, as the leader of the exploration team 9, I can mention in the report that you weren't of much use, you know? You might be assigned to the defense team next time if I do that."

If Akira was only being humble there, he would start making a troubled face, Elena was looking forward to seeing it. She believed that too much humbleness could sometimes cause a loss.

But Akira replied with something that completely went against her expectation.

Akira made a serious face.

"Please do that for me!!"

Elena and Sara were stunned. Elena then asked Akira.

"…Uhmmm, if you really prefer the defense team that much, why did you join the exploration team? Since you can even get assigned to the exploration team, you should be able to work in other teams too, you know?"

"The staff on the first floor only gave me 2 options, whether to join the exploration team or the extermination team. When I told him I wanted to join the defense team, I got scolded instead. It seems that it was because of their evaluation of my performance yesterday, although to be honest, I was only able to do that because the requester paid for my ammo expense. If I had to pay for the ammo myself, I would have gone bankrupt by now."

"Ahhh, now that you mention it, the requester pays for your ammo expense according to your contract, huh. Normally, using CWH special ammo on Yarata Scorpion would only make you end up losing more money after all."

Akira nervously asked Elena again.

“So then, can I ask you to do that for the report?”

Elena and Sara looked at each other, Sara asked Akira for a confirmation.

“Are you sure you want us to do that? You can definitely earn more money if you join the exploration team or the extermination team than the defense team, you know? Well, it’s true that you would spend more ammo, but it will leave a good record in your battle history and give your rank a boost.”

“Yes, I don’t mind. I can only enjoy my reward if I’m alive. It’s still too soon for me to join the exploration team or the extermination team.”

From how Akira was acting, Elena and Sara understood that he was being serious.

Judging from his performance that day, most of the people would think that he was being a coward by saying those words. Sara thought that it was rather strange for him to do that, but to be honest, she was not bothered if Akira really wanted so. Elena thought that it might have something to do with him being someone who could connect to the old-world domain, so she decided to stop questioning him.

Elena smiled at Akira to change the mood and said.

“Okay then. But since it’s not like I can lie in the report, I’ll say something like you felt it was too soon for you to get assigned to the exploration team or like you were still lacking the skills to join the exploration team. It would sound as if you really don’t want to get assigned to the exploration or extermination team though, are you really okay with that?”

“Yes, I don’t mind at all.”

As Akira answered back promptly and without any hesitation, the girls smiled bitterly. Sara then said.

“Normally, people would ask the opposite, to say things that would make them sound better. You’re a peculiar boy, Akira.”

Akira looked puzzled and asked Sara.

“Is that so? It seems that there are a lot of Hunters out there who would jump to their own death, huh… Well, since I’m also a Hunter, I guess I’m not the one to say that.”

Akira smiled bitterly at the other two, they too gave out a similar smile.

After that, they headed to the surface. Akira lightly bowed at Elena and Sara before they went to the surface. The girls waved at him as they left the defensive point.

Akira’s next job was to join the defense team. He was positioned not too far from the defensive point, he was staring at the darkness of the underground city while looking out for any monsters.

To be precise, it was Alpha who was looking out for monsters, Akira was only standing there in silence. But for the other people, it looked like Akira was seriously watching his surroundings. If anything happened, Alpha would immediately warn him. As such, he was actually doing his job properly.

Akira and Alpha were talking to each other while waiting for his shift to end. They were talking about Sara, Elena and Shikarabe.

“But still, Sara-san, Elena-san and Shikarabe-san are really strong. So that is the real ability of first-rate Hunters, huh?”

Akira remembered the time when those 3 Hunters plowed through the Yarata Scorpions encirclement. It felt like he just caught a glance of first-rate Hunters in action.

But Alpha refuted that.

“Unfortunately, their skill and equipment are still far away from being first-rate Hunters. But they are at least strong enough to stick out among other Hunters in Kugamayama city.”

Akira was shocked. He did not expect that such a level of strength was not even close to being a first-rate Hunter.

“Even though they are that strong!?”

“Most of the first-rate Hunters live in the far east of the eastern district, they are working in the frontline. The level of their skill and equipment, and the monsters that they are fighting, all of them are at a level that you can’t imagine. In the frontline, they’ll only treat you as a greenhorn unless you have your own tank, you know. You can’t call yourself a first-rate Hunter if you are not active in the frontline.”

“There are so many things that I don’t know about this world, huh… Wait, doesn’t that mean that Katsuragi and Darris frequent such dangerous places?”

Akira worked together with Katsuragi before, he did not imagine that Katsuragi was that strong.

“Even though it is called the frontline, it’s actually a large area. There are places in the frontline which are not that dangerous. I bet he used to stay in the safest place guarded by a lot of bodyguards. But even if he does so, it’s still a dangerous gamble whether he can return back alive from there or not. You should ask him yourself if it was worth the gamble or not. Just because he returned back alive does not mean that he got the money worth all that risk.”

Just coming back alive did not mean that they won their gamble, they could only declare so if they earned big enough money which was worth taking that risk.

Akira then mumbled.

“I guess that’s also the case for the Hunters, too huh?”

“Yep, that’s correct. So let’s work to become a Hunter who can earn a lot of money, okay? Or more like, I’ll be sure to make you do that.”

Alpha smiled confidently. In order to do that, Akira would have to go through an enormous amount of strict and vigorous training. Although it was a kind of blessing to be able to undergo such training, it did not change the fact that it would be very harsh.

Akira laughed lightly and replied.

“I already resolved myself for that, after all, resolve is my responsibility. So the rest depends on your support, right?”

“There’s nothing to worry about my part.”

“And I’m glad to hear that.”

Akira and Alpha smiled at each other for different reasons.

Akira did not understand what Alpha was thinking, if she was actually tricking him, there was nothing he could do about it. But even so, he decided to trust her.

As for Alpha, she did not tell Akira about what she was thinking, and he would not notice it as long as she did not leak anything out.

Akira finished his shift without any trouble after that.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 52, The Suspicious Person Underground

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On the next day, Akira quickly packed his equipment and headed to the Kuzusuhara ruin's underground city again, the HQ assigned him the job of installing illuminations in the underground city.

The illuminations also doubled as an information-gathering device and communication relay. It allowed the Hunters to contact the HQ as long as they were close to it. Some of them were also equipped with a camera and motion tracker to watch out for the monsters around the area.

Most of the illuminations installed in the underground were just normal illuminations, so Akira's job was to replace those illuminations with these new hi-tech illuminations starting from the area around the HQ.

The underground city was way larger than what the people from Kugamayama city had predicted and the number of the monsters inhabiting it was also more than expected. At first, the city only planned to destroy Yarata Scorpion nests underground until none of these monsters could venture to the surface, before pulling out from there. But now the city had decided to change its stance and fully explore the underground city in order to get full control of the area.

Akira and the other Hunters were carrying hand-carts full of high-tech illuminations and replacing the old illuminations. Once their hand cart was filled with the old illuminations, they would return back to the HQ to get a new batch of high-tech illuminations before heading out again.

As Akira was replacing the illuminations, something came up in his mind.

“I wonder why they did not use this high-tech illumination from the start.”

Alpha thought carefully about his question before answering. Rather than telling Akira the truth, she prioritized on telling him an answer that could convince him. She wanted to observe how he would react to her answer in order to confirm how much she understood how his mind worked.

Alpha answered back smiling.

“The whole operation cost them more money than originally thought, that is all. If the underground city was not this large and if there were not this many monsters here, I bet they would have kept the old illuminations.”

“I see.”

Akira was convinced by her answer, Alpha was slowly but surely getting closer to fully understanding his mind.

There were other Hunters around Akira, some of them were also working on replacing the old illuminations, some of them were pushing the carts, some of them were watching out for monsters. From time to time, some Hunters left after completing their shift and were replaced by new Hunters.

Since the areas where they needed to replace the old illuminations were considered as fully controlled areas, they were in a relatively safe area. But there was no guarantee that nothing would happen, Yarata scorpions might burst out from a new hole anytime. The wreckages that were scattered around the narrow hallway might also be Yarata scorpions. These were the reasons why the HQ sent many Hunters just to replace the old illuminations.

Akira continued working for some more time. Since some of the other Hunters were about to finish their shift, he was thinking of returning back to the HQ with them. So he contacted the HQ, but instead, the HQ told him to continue working and stay there until the new Hunters dispatched from HQ met up with him. And so he did not have any other choice but to wait there.

In the hallway illuminated by the lightings that he just installed, Akira was waiting for the new Hunters dispatched by the HQ. But no one came even after some time had passed.

“No one is coming…”

“Let’s wait for a bit more, I’ll handle the enemy detection, so there’s no need to worry about getting ambushed by monsters. Just count it as your luck since you only need to stand here without doing anything while waiting for your shift to end.”

Alpha smiled at Akira to reassure him that there was no danger around him. Looking at that, Akira held back all his displeasures, but he was still bored since he had nothing to do.

Alpha’s face suddenly turned stern.

“Akira, just to be safe, get your weapon ready.”

“What’s wrong?”

Aware of her sudden change, Akira quickly put his guard up. Alpha never made such an expression when she detected Yarata Scorpions that were far away from him. So in short, it must be something more dangerous than that.

Alpha pointed her finger toward the hallway. There was a small opening not too far from where Akira was standing and there was a shadow of someone in that opening.

“There’s someone armed over there.”

Akira looked puzzled as he asked Alpha.

“Wait, it’s not anything strange, isn’t it?”

Including Akira, all the other Hunters in the underground city were armed. Thus, there was nothing strange with carrying a weapon in this area.

“You do know that the terminal lent to the Hunters here are sending signals to ascertain their position so that the Hunters won’t mistakenly shoot at each other, right? But nothing as such is coming from that person. There are only a few reasons for it, either his terminal ran out of battery or it has been destroyed, or maybe he doesn’t have one in the first place.”

If it was because their terminal ran out of battery or because that person was not carrying a terminal in the first place, it would make that person suspicious. In short, there was a 66% chance that the person was suspicious and he was armed too. Akira quickly understood the situation and readied his rifle.

Akira focused his gaze on that person, his vision was enhanced to see the area around that person. It seemed that the person was alone. Since he was quite far away, he did not seem to notice Akira yet.

Akira hesitated for a moment before contacting the HQ. There was a possibility that it would turn into something troublesome. Although he had the choice of ignoring that person since it seemed like that person had yet to notice him, Akira thought that his current situation was enough of a reason to contact the HQ.

“This is number 27. HQ, can you hear me?”

“This is HQ. We’ve dispatched some Hunters and sent them your way. Just wait for a bit more.”

The staff thought that Akira was calling the HQ to ask about the Hunters, so he just said that and was about to disconnect the call.

“That’s not it. Don’t disconnect the call. I found someone who doesn’t give off a Hunter signal. Tell me what to do. If you don’t, I’ll just leave that man alone.”

“Seriously?”

“I won’t come up with a lie like that just because I’m bored.”

“I see. It might be because of some kind of error in the terminal. Can you check on that man? If he turned off his terminal by mistake, tell him to turn it on again and immediately contact the HQ.”

“What should I do if that’s not the case?”

“Bring that man to the HQ if it’s possible. In case if he retaliates, you’re allowed to use violence to deal with him. Work with the other Hunters around you and report to me on the progress later.”

“…Roger that.”

Akira disconnected his call and let out a big sigh.

Alpha floated in front of Akira and warned him.

“You already got permission from HQ, so you can kill him if you need to. Don’t hesitate when you really have to kill him, okay?”

“As I thought, that was what the staff actually meant, huh…”

In short, the situation might really turn into something troublesome to even make the HQ give him that permission.

Akira looked around and made a mental note of the positions of the rubbles and wreckages around him. It was so that he could quickly jump behind them to hide in case that person suddenly started shooting at him. Akira then moved and positioned himself better before taking a deep breath.

“Alpha, I’ll be counting on you if things go bad.”

“Don’t worry, just leave it to me.”

After hearing her reply, Akira calmed himself down and made his resolve.

“You there!! Your terminal is off, you know!!”

Akira’s voice echoed through the hallway. The person ahead of him started looking around confusedly, but it did not take long for him to notice Akira.

That man smiled and waved at Akira, he then pointed his finger at his terminal a few times before waving at Akira, urging him to come closer.

That man was signalling that his terminal was broken, so he was telling Akira to come closer since he wanted to contact the HQ. But that man did not take even a single step toward Akira.

Akira just stood there and was watching how that man was acting. That man’s face suddenly changed from smiling to puzzled and started walking toward Akira.

[…I guess I worry too much.]

Akira thought that the reason why that man did not approach him was because he was trying to lure him. But now that the man had started walking toward him with a puzzled face, Akira stopped suspecting him.

Akira started swinging his legs toward that man, leaving the wreckages around him. That man smiled as he saw Akira walking toward him.

After a few steps, that man pointed at his terminal again. Akira lowered his guard as he slowly lowered his rifle that he was gripping, the muzzle of the AAH rifle in his right hand shifted from pointing at that man to the ground.

The very next moment, that man pulled out a handgun and released a few shots toward Akira.

Gunshots reverberated through the hallway. Akira could not react in time to that handgun which was suddenly pointed toward him nor the bullets that were released from that gun. The first bullet grazed his cheek, the second bullet hit the information terminal on his left hand, and the third bullet hit the closest wreckage from Akira.

All the bullets were accurately aimed at Akira. He was not able to react at all, it was Alpha who operated his augmented suit and forcefully moved his body from the bullets' trajectories.

Alpha controlled Akira's right hand through his augmented suit to quickly grab his AAH rifle and started shooting back at that man. Piercing bullets flew straight from the rifle's muzzle, but that man was already hiding behind a cover and removed himself from the bullets' trajectories. Thus the bullets only ended up hitting the walls and the floors and ricocheted.

The aiming device of Akira's AAH rifle was connected to his terminal. Alpha used that to capture images and analyze the data from it, she then confirmed that none of the bullets hit that man.

Even after knowing that, Alpha made Akira shoot at him, it was to prevent that man from shooting back. It was also to buy more time until Akira returned back to his senses.

Akira moved behind wreckage in the midst of that chaos, he had finally come back to his senses. It was thanks to Alpha who was moving his body through his augmented suit that he was able to survive.

Because Alpha was moving Akira's body forcefully, his body was put under immense stress. But even so, that was still a thousand times better than having holes in his body. That man's skill was a real thing, if Alpha had not moved Akira out of the way, he would have been immediately killed right there.

Akira asked Alpha while enduring pain.

"…Alpha, what's going on here?"

"That man is proficient with a handgun and he just shot a few shots at you. I controlled your body through your augmented suit to evade the bullets and made you shoot back at him, but nothing hit him. I also used the terminal to shield your body, so it might be broken now. That man is so fast that I did not have much leeway. Looking at how fast he moved, it seems that he's a physically enhanced human. That's why he could execute such accurate

quick-draw. I believe that his skill and equipment are tailored to kill other humans, basically, a skill set for a murderer. I bet he used a handgun to maximize speed in place of firepower since he understands well about the differences between fighting a monster and fighting another human."

From Alpha's explanation, he understood that his opponent was someone above him, and it was someone who would not lower his guard even when fighting against a boy like Akira.

"I see. Is it possible to win against him?"

"Of course! The moment he wasn't able to finish you off with that surprise attack, that man had run out of luck."

Alpha smiled when she said that. Hearing her confident answer, Akira lightly smiled.

"That's great news. My whole body is hurting like crazy though, this isn't anything bad, right?"

"Don't worry. Take the medicine while you're hiding here, be sure to take the expensive one, okay?"

"The cheap one won't do?"

Alpha smiled.

"Sure, if you don't mind getting your arm or leg torn off."

It meant that there might be a need for him to make extreme maneuvers that would put his body under immense stress, Akira smiled bitterly knowing this fact.

"I'll take the expensive one."

Akira only had a small amount left of the medicines that he found in Kuzusuhara ruin, but it would be stupid to get himself killed here just because he did not want to use it. He pulled out the medicines from inside a

small pouch hanging on his hip and swallowed them. He also put some in his mouth and held them there.

After Akira had finished all his preparations, Alpha said to him.

“Alright then. Akira, let’s start fighting back. Ready your resolve.”

“Yeah, that’s my responsibility, after all.”

Resolve was Akira’s responsibility. He had resolved himself that he would kill in order to survive, it was something that he had always done until now. He lightly smiled thinking that he might have to keep doing that from now on.

Yajima, the person who shot Akira, was shocked by what just happened, but he calmly looked around for Akira.

[There’s no mistaking it, that surprise attack was perfectly executed. His face didn’t show that he was acting at all. My shots really caught him off guard and my quickdraw was perfect, just like always… So how in the world he evaded that?!! He had the reflexes to evade my shots!! Is he always using an accelerator that can only be bought using Chrome?!! Or is it that he has an enhanced brain?!!]

The eastern district had analyzed all kinds of old-world relics to create drugs and medicines, some of them provided temporary physical enhancement, some of them increased cognitive ability. There were all kinds of medicines ranging from only healing fatigue to recovering from serious wounds.

Among all of those drugs, there was a type of drug that caused the users to feel time move slower around them, this drug was known as the accelerator. Many Hunters used this accelerator so that they could make an important decision faster than their opponents during a dangerous situation. Among the old-world relics, there was an accelerator that would even make the user able to follow a flying bullet with their eyes.

On the other hand, using such a drug would put the user's brain under immense stress. If it was a high-quality expensive drug, it would leave almost no backlash, at most, it would only leave the user a little tired. But if it was a strong drug or a cheap low-quality drug, it might leave the user crippled after using it or even cause brain death.

Moreover, there were a group of people in the eastern district who were dubbed as the brain enhanced people. These people put modifications inside their brain to accelerate their brain functions. Some of them used nanomachines to do that, while some of them stuffed a mechanical processing unit into their brain. They did that in order to accelerate their cognitive processing ability or to add new functions into their brain and gain a better brain than a normal one.

But of course, it was very dangerous to mess with the brain. Not only with money, but they also had to pay for such enhancement with their flesh or even psyche. Each and every person had different opinions whether such an enhancement was worth the sacrifice or not.

Since Akira could connect to the old-world domain, it could be said that he already belonged to that group. Without his ability to connect to the old-world domain, Akira would not be able to enjoy all of the support that he was receiving from Alpha. So Yajima's guess that Akira had an enhanced brain, in a sense, was actually correct.

[There should only be Hunters assigned to replace the old illuminations around this area, there's no way someone who could explore the inner part of the underground city is assigned to this place. So why would someone like him be here…? Don't tell me that he's a secret agent from Kugamayama city? Did the city discover our plan?! He might be a child-type cyborg with someone actually skilled controlling his body. Whichever it is, this is not good. I have to take care of him as soon as possible.]

Yajima decided to contact his friends. Since he was using the communication device installed inside his brain, he did not make any sounds at all.

“It’s me. How is it going over there? Did you already open a hole to the surface?”

Yajima’s friend replied.

“We haven’t even started yet, aren’t you the one who told us to wait until all the relics are gathered?”

Yajima clicked his tongue.

“We have a change of plan. Start digging a hole now and tell the truck to hurry up. Also, send Kain and Nelia here.”

“Wha-?! what’s going on there?”

“The city might have noticed our plan. There’s someone who could evade my quick draw loitering in this place. It’s suspicious that someone like him is even here. In the worst-case scenario, that person might be an agent sent by the city.”

“…An agent from the city?! Are you kidding me? I have no plans on picking a fight against the city, you know?!! Didn’t you say that it’s going to be alright?!!”

“Just shut up. We’re already picking a fight with the city the moment we decided to snatch the old-world relics owned by them. This won’t be a problem if I can kill him and escape this place, just hurry up with the hole.”

Yajima then disconnected the call.

Yajima and his friends were planning to smuggle the old-world relics from inside the underground ruin to the surface. They were working in the exploration team before and had explored the underground city. During that period, they found an impressive amount of expensive old-world relics. They knew that they could definitely earn a huge load of money if they sold those relics.

But it was almost impossible to bring all of those relics through the entrance that was located in the HQ. So, they hid all of those relics in a certain place

in the underground city and hatched a plot to carry them out.

And since then, Yajima and his friends continued exploring the underground city while also filling up their hidden relics repository. They found way more relics than they expected and their plan was going well.

But then came a big threat to their plan, the HQ decided to replace the old illuminations with new ones.

The new advanced illuminations were equipped with a surveillance camera and motion detector, thus it would be almost impossible to carry all of those relics secretly once the new illuminations were installed. It was already difficult enough for them to move the relics from their hidden repository. And if their hidden repository was discovered, Yajima and his friends who were assigned to explore the area around it in the past would be the first ones to be suspected. Thus he decided to execute the plan sooner than they had originally planned.

Yajima was monitoring the area around their hidden relics repository. He turned off his terminal so that the HQ would not be able to track his position. Although it might make the HQ suspicious of him, it would at least prevent the HQ from pinpointing his location. He already knew about this when he turned off his terminal.

On top of that, Yajima was also being careful not to get discovered by other Hunters. Since if someone found him, the HQ would quickly notice that he had left his station without permission and it might jeopardize his plan.

The reason why Akira was able to spot him was because of Alpha’s superior detection ability and Yajima who was in the middle of executing his plan was anxious and nervous.

In Yajima’s eyes, Akira looked like just a common young Hunter. He bet that Akira was a Hunter from Drankam and that he was only able to join the Yarata Scorpion nest extermination request due to the gang’s influence. Which meant that he just needed to kill Akira if Akira had noticed him.

Yajima’s wrong guess led to the current situation.

Akira was hiding behind a pile of rubble while Yajima was hiding behind a pillar. Both of them were peeking and checking each other.

Akira used his right hand holding an AAH rifle to peek out. The aiming device of his AAH rifle that was already connected to his information terminal sent the image of the pillar where Yajima was hiding to Akira's information terminal. Then that data was reflected onto his enhanced vision, it was so that he could put holes on Yajima's body the moment he jumped out from that pillar. Thanks to Alpha's superior detection ability, he could even clearly see what Yajima was doing behind that pillar through his enhanced vision.

"So, what do you want to do? Want to try approaching him?"

Since both of them were hiding behind an object, they had to move if they wanted to be able to have a clear aim at the other person. Akira sent Alpha an image of him moving quickly from one wreckage to another while pointing his rifle at that pillar following a route that he planned.

Thanks to his telepathic training that started with Akira sending the image of Alpha's dress through telepathy, he was able to send accurate images now.

Akira's suggestion was perfectly sent to Alpha, but she shot it down.

"No, let's make good use of your equipment advantage first. Take out the CWH anti-material rifle."

"Roger that."

Akira exchanged the AAH assault rifle in his hand with CWH anti-material rifle loaded with special ammo. Of course, he never thought that he would be using it against a human.

But suddenly Yajima shouted.

"I'm really sorry!! Things happened to me so I thought you're an enemy!! Please don't shoot! Let's talk!! I'm sure you'll understand if you just listen

to me!! I'm a Hunter assigned to the exploration team around this area!! My terminal was destroyed by another Hunter and I can't contact the HQ!! So can you please contact the HQ?!! I'm sure it'll clear up the misunderstanding if you call the HQ!!"

Akira replied to that plea with a simple answer. He started unleashing CWH special ammo to that pillar. A loud bang echoed through the underground city with each shot followed by a big crack on the pillar. But the bullets were not able to penetrate it.

"That's one strong pillar, as expected of the old-world ruin."

"Let's keep shooting."

Akira kept shooting at the pillar and all the bullets that he shot hit the exact same point on it without even the slightest error. The special ammo would instantly kill Yajima once it was able to penetrate through the pillar. Even if Yajima jumped out from that pillar in panic, Akira who could completely see his image would immediately shoot and kill him. But if he stayed there, Akira would eventually destroy that pillar and kill him. It was checkmate.

Yajima was able to gauge his situation from the tremors of the pillar.

[…He didn't say anything and started shooting. It seems like he's using some kind of anti-material weapon, which means that this pillar won't hold for long. But he didn't contact the HQ or try to tell the HQ what's going on here. In short, either his terminal is broken because of that surprise attack or he got suspicious of me because I told him to contact the HQ. Whichever the case, this is a good thing, I just need to kill him here to keep my plan hidden.]

Yajima laughed, he thought that his situation was not that bad. His face showed a twisted expression as if he was enjoying the situation that he was in.

Akira saw something fly out from behind the pillar, he thought that it was some kind of explosive and quickly shot it down. But rather than exploding,

it spread some kind of smoke. Yajima quickly moved behind another wreckage the moment that happened while pointing his handgun at Akira.

CWH anti-material rifle was not built for continuous shooting. As such, Akira was not able to shoot at Yajima when he jumped out from behind the pillar. But it was not enough of an opening for Yajima to reach behind another wreckage as Akira aimed his next shot at Yajima, ready to pull the trigger and shoot through that smoke.

But suddenly Yajima's image from the aiming device blurred. Akira was surprised but managed to pull the trigger. The bullet spat out from the muzzle but did not hit Yajima, it stirred the smoke and flew straight before vanishing into the dark hallway.

Yajima released a few shots at Akira to keep him in check while still running. Akira quickly evaded and hid behind a wreckage, Yajima too used that small opening to hide behind another wreckage.

"Alpha, what was that?"

"That's a jamming smoke. It reduces the effectiveness of information-gathering devices. It was made using the technology obtained from analyzing the colourless mist. The reason why your vision blurred is because your enhanced vision is based on the data gathered by the information-gathering device which is affected by that smoke. Normally, it's used to reduce the detection ability of mechanical monsters, but since most of the monsters in the underground city are biological monsters, it means that he was expecting to fight other Hunters down here right from the beginning."

"What a pain in the ass. As I thought, fighting against another person is different compared to fighting against a monster."

"But that's the reason why humans survive this long."

"Well, you're not wrong."

Akira smiled bitterly. He had thought that he would mostly fight monsters after getting his augmented suit, but instead, he had to fight against another human now.

Because of their tenacity and craftiness, humans were able to survive in the eastern district which was filled with monsters. Although they had to deal with all of those monsters, they still had the leeway to fight and attempt to kill each other.

Humans were still trying to kill each other even now. This might be one thing that would remain unchanged even after they exterminated all the monsters.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 53, Turning Point

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Multiple grenade-like objects flew out from behind the wreckage. Akira quickly grabbed his AAH assault rifle and shot all of them while they were in the air. One of them was a hand-grenade, due to the impact-trigger function of the grenade, it immediately exploded instead of bouncing back to the person who threw it when it was hit by the bullet. The rest were information interference jamming smoke grenades, the explosion from the hand-grenade caused the jamming smoke to expand very fast.

The jamming smoke not only spread around Akira, but it even blanketed the whole area. Akira noticed that and found it suspicious.

“Alpha, this will also make it hard for him to ascertain my position, right? Is he planning to use the smoke’s cover to escape?”

Akira thought that much of the jamming smoke would affect the information-gathering device of both sides and so his opponent was planning to use that chance to escape. But Alpha replied with an unfavourable answer.

“The composition of the jamming smoke can be adjusted to increase or decrease its potency. So in short, he could have adjusted its composition to

only have a minimal effect on his own information-gathering device. If my prediction is correct, he should still have a good ability to ascertain your position."

"Doesn't that mean that he can clearly see me while I can't? That's really convenient."

In the worst-case scenario, it would be as if Akira was fighting without any information-gathering device support. He understood the graveness of the situation and made a cynical remark of it, to which Alpha just smiled.

"You can just let him think so and take him out when he lowers his guard."

"…I don't really know what's going on, but I'll be counting on you."

"Leave it to me."

Akira quickly moved following Alpha's order.

Akira's visibility was not affected by too much within that jamming smoke. Since it was not thick, he could still see up to a little distance in front of him. But even so, his ability to detect what was around him was greatly reduced. After all, he did not have the advanced image analysis support from the information-gathering device.

Akira grabbed his CWH anti-material rifle and shot at the wreckage where Yajima hid. The CWH special ammo flew at high speed and stirred the smoke before blasting the wreckages, making a loud banging sound. He did get some hit on the wreckage where Yajima was hiding, but Yajima quickly moved to the other wreckage before getting hit.

Yajima thought that Akira kept on shooting to smoke him out from the piles of wreckages.

He was able to confirm Akira's position while hiding himself, it was because his information-gathering device was not affected by the jamming smoke. He was searching for a chance to return shots at Akira.

He had absolute confidence in his quick draw skill, at least, until Akira evaded his quick draw. But even so, he did not think that there was any need for him to try other kinds of attacks. There was no mistaking it that the quick draw technique was the most powerful technique that he had, as such, he had no other choice but to kill Akira in order to regain his confidence.

Yajima carefully gauged his chance.

[He's just randomly shooting at the wreckages thinking that I might be hiding there. Judging from the fact that he started shooting in a wider radius, he doesn't know my location yet. The jamming smoke is working as intended. He doesn't know my location, but I know his location precisely. He's one of those Hunters who does not use a helmet, and looking at the way he evaded my shot, he doesn't have an enhanced body. It'll only take one bullet to his head to kill him. I have the upper hand here.]

The reason why Yajima did not run away was because he had to kill Akira. If the HQ discovered anything about him and his friends, it would be extremely hard to execute their plan. In order to avoid such a situation, he had no other choice but to kill Akira.

Yajima could accurately see Akira's movement with his information-gathering device. He even knew exactly where Akira was hiding. Yajima blended in with the smoke and carefully moved from the wreckage he was hiding.

Yajima had ascertained Akira's location. He knew for sure where Akira was hiding, what he just needed to do next was to shoot in that direction. He could see a faint shadow of Akira in the middle of the smoke that was slowly dispersing. Although it should be impossible to see Akira without any support, Yajima was able to clearly see him.

Akira took a shooting stance, he was aiming at a wreckage in the opposite direction to where Yajima was. Yajima who saw that from behind Akira smiled, his years of experience and his own intuition were saying that he had already won.

Yajima jumped out from behind the wreckage where he was hiding, and at the same time, he quickly grabbed his handgun and directed it at Akira's head. He had already lined his aim, he only needed to pull the trigger next and it would confirm his victory.

But no bullet flew out from its muzzle. Both his handgun and his whole arm was torn off by CWH anti-material rifle's special ammo.

The moment Yajima lined his aim, Akira suddenly pushed his augmented suit to the limit to turn his CWH anti-material rifle to the opposite direction. He supported the CWH anti-material rifle with only his right hand and took a shot at Yajima without even looking back before Yajima could even pull the trigger.

The blast from the bullet smacked Yajima to the ground. He still could not process what just happened. In the middle of that chaos, he inadvertently mumbled his first impression of his current situation.

"…You gotta be kidding me…"

Yajima's right hand that was blasted to pieces left mechanical parts scattered on the ground along with his destroyed handgun. He was a cyborg.

Akira looked like he was in pain. His whole body was pulsing with pain from all the stress that the augmented suit put on his body. Especially his right arm. It was to be expected since he used only his right arm to hold the kickback of his CWH anti-material rifle.

The medicines that he consumed beforehand started taking effect. But it was not like it could immediately heal his injuries. He felt like he would collapse anytime, but he was able to somehow hold his body up.

Akira looked at Yajima who was lying on the ground and asked Alpha.

"…Did I do well?"

Alpha smiled and said.

"Yep, you did a splendid job."

To be perfectly honest, it was Alpha who aimed at Yajima and shot him down. She controlled Akira's augmented suit to execute that highly accurate shot.

Alpha was able to completely grasp Akira's 5 senses, in short, she was able to extract information directly from his sensory organs. She used the image information sent from his eyes to search for any smallest suspicious shifts in the smoke, and thus she was able to guess where Yajima was hiding.

Alpha also had readjusted the setting of the information-gathering device, thus keeping the effect from the jamming smoke to the minimum. Although its effectiveness was still reduced, she could fill that hole with her advanced calculating ability.

So just like Yajima who knew precisely where Akira was, Alpha also knew Yajima's exact position. The only person who did not know was Akira. Judging from how Akira was acting, Yajima thought that Akira did not know where he was hiding and got lured into coming out from the wreckage.

Akira kept his eyes on Yajima who was lying on the ground and asked Alpha.

"Why didn't you aim for his head?"

"There are 2 reasons. First of all, it might not stop his finger from pulling the trigger even if you blast his head off. If he pulled the trigger the moment he got shot or before the bullet reached him, he might get a shot on you. So I shot his arm instead, just to be safe. The second reason was because he might still be alive even without his head."

"No no no, there's no way he can survive without a head, isn't it?"

"That man is a cyborg, it might be possible that he has a remote control function. There are cyborgs with no brain in their heads, you know. If it's just a remote body, then even if you destroy his head where the control unit is, he might have another support unit that can act as the control unit's substitute, he's a cyborg after all. But whichever the case, I was worried that

he might still shoot back even without his head, that's why I decided to prioritize taking out any possibilities of him shooting at you."

Akira took a closer look at the still shocked Yajima. Although he blew Yajima's arm to pieces, there was no blood splatter at all. But he could see some mechanical parts peeking out from Yajima's open wound.

Just like Alpha said, Yajima was a cyborg. His body was composed of a mix between mechanical and organic parts, but the only organic part of his body was his central nervous system. Although he had lost his right arm, he did not feel any pain at all. His body was adjusted so that he would only feel minimal pain. But even so, he could feel the impact when the bullet tore his right arm, it caused enough damage to render him unable to continue fighting.

Akira never thought the possibility that Yajima was a cyborg. He looked a bit surprised as he asked Alpha.

"How did you notice that he's a cyborg?"

"There are a lot of reasons, but the biggest reason is that he's too good at lying. You got tricked and caught off guard back there, remember?"

"I'm really thankful for saving me there."

"You're welcome."

Akira conveyed his gratitude and Alpha replied back with a content smile.

"…So, how is his lie connected to him being a cyborg?"

"I can get an inkling whether someone is lying or not from their expression. Like if they make a strange expression, or if they make any suspicious gestures, or if there's an inconsistency in their tone."

"In that case, you should've told me back then."

"Believe me, I also got tricked."

“…But you just said that you can tell if someone is lying, right?”

“There was no sign in his expression that he was lying. But in truth, he was actually lying. This means that his expression was not connected to his inner mind at all. The only people who could do that are either cyborgs who can completely control their facial muscles or remote mechanical bodies. I bet he recorded his normal expression and was applying it on his face.”

“I see. Well, you’re really amazing.”

“It goes without saying.”

Alpha smiled at Akira in response to his compliment.

As Akira approached Yajima’s body without lowering his guard, he heard Alpha’s warning.

“Although it wasn’t fatal, the CWH anti-material rifle’s special ammo has caused him significant damage. But even so, don’t drop your guard.”

“I know.”

“And also, reload a new magazine. Although it’s not completely empty, the loaded magazine has but few bullets.”

“Roger that.”

Akira followed Alpha’s suggestion and reloaded a new magazine. Although Yajima was badly wounded, he was still someone who was more powerful than Akira. He kept that in mind as he carefully approached Yajima.

Yajima was not dead nor was he knocked unconscious. He was lying there on the ground, completely conscious. And he was thinking hard about how to escape his current predicament.

Although he was badly wounded, it was not fatal. It might be hard to fight Akira without one arm, but he still could run away from Akira. But of course, he needed to think about what to do since Akira definitely would shoot him from behind if he started running.

Yajima had requested reinforcements from his friends, but he did not know for sure when his reinforcements would arrive. No matter how he calculated the estimated time for his reinforcements to arrive, it would only happen after Akira shot his head. So in short, Yajima was already in checkmate.

After Akira took a few steps closer to Yajima, he readied his CWH anti-material rifle and pointed it at Yajima. Akira understood Yajima was someone stronger than him, thus it did not seem like he had any plan on lowering his guard yet. He stood at a distance where he could safely kill Yajima even if Yajima suddenly jumped and charged at him. His gesture and expression were saying that he would not hesitate to pull the trigger if Yajima made any suspicious moves.

Yajima looked meek as he raised his left hand toward Akira expressing his surrender while still lying on the ground.

“P-Please stop… It’s my loss… Please don’t shoot…”

“Why did you attack me?”

“Like I said, it’s a misunderstanding… Please… Listen to what I have to say… If you just listen… I’m sure you’ll understand…”

Yajima was trembling as he was pleading for his life, he made a plea for Akira to listen to his explanation.

Akira had the upper hand here, he basically had Yajima’s life in his hands. His situation gave Akira a leeway to reassess and think about his next actions.

“What to do here?”

“He’s sincerely pleading for his life, but that meek look is a lie. His plea for you to listen to him is also a lie. He might be planning to talk his way out, or he’s planning to buy time.”

After listening to Alpha’s explanation, Akira turned to Yajima and asked him.

“You’re planning to buy time, huh? So how long do you need to wait until your friends come here?”

“Buying time?! It’s a misunderstanding! I have no plans to do that!! I swear!! I’m not lying!!”

“Akira, that’s a lie.”

Yajima was spouting excuses in panic. Alpha quickly pointed out to Akira that it was a lie, and he believed her.

“I’ll just shoot all his limbs and carry him to HQ, I bet he won’t die even if I do that anyway, and that would also render him completely harmless. Not to mention that HQ did tell me to bring him back to them if it’s possible.”

“You’re right. I don’t think he won’t fight back if you’re going to carry him to the HQ. It’s rather dangerous to carry him around if we don’t do that much at least.”

Akira pulled up his CWH anti-material rifle and lined his aim at Yajima’s left arm. But the pain on his right arm caused him to stop his action and made him twitch.

“T-that hurts. I can still feel the pain though, what’s going on? Shouldn’t the medicine already be working by now?”

“Even with your augmented suit, it seems that it’s still impossible for you to shoot CWH anti-material rifle with a single hand. Your muscles and bones are at their limit, you might need to take more medicines.”

“Then why did you do that?”

“It was because that was the shortest and quickest way to execute that shot. It’s also because you were facing the opposite direction from where he was in order to lure him out. Other than that…”

Since it looked like it would be a long lecture, Akira quickly interjected.

“Alright, alright. Basically, you had your reasons for doing that, right?”

“Yep. If it’s too painful, you should take more medicines now while you have the chance.”

Akira pulled out some medicines and swallowed them. Since he had no idea how long it would take for the cheap medicines to start having any effects, he chose to use his precious expensive medicines instead.

With this, Akira had exhausted all of the medicines that he found in Kuzusuhara ruin. He let out a sigh.

“…It’s all gone now, dammit!! Rather than only paying for my ammo expense, I should’ve made them pay for my medicines too!”

“It can’t be helped, Akira. Like I told you before, don’t do anything dangerous from now on. Remember to be very careful.”

“Roger that.”

Akira aimed his CWH anti-material rifle back at Yajima’s left arm.

Yajima understood Akira’s plans from his behaviour.

[He has no plans to listen to me. I guess it’s obvious that I’m trying to buy more time, huh? It’s thankful that he’s not planning to kill me here, but it’ll be game over if he brings me to HQ. He’s planning to destroy all my limbs before carrying me, huh? He’s one careful boy. What should I do now? If he’s this careful, even if Nelia and the others arrive to save me, he would kill me first before moving to fight them. I still can’t contact them because of the jamming smoke, I’ll again once I’m out of the jamming smoke’s range…]

Although Yajima’s expression looked like he was scared and in so much pain, he was still thinking calmly inside. He was trying to find a way to avoid having to pay the expense for fixing all his 4 limbs and escape that dangerous situation.

Yajima had no way to escape from his predicament. He could not change Akira’s position as the one with the upper hand no matter what he did. In

short, he could not turn the table with his own power there. It was also unthinkable that Akira would do anything stupid that would endanger his position. The situation there would not change with only two of them.

But it was a different case with a third person.

“What are you doing there?!!”

Reina’s voice echoed through the hallway. Akira and Yajima could see Reina and Shiori running towards them.

Drankam sent some young Hunters from the gang to help replace the illuminations. Katsuya’s team was among those young Hunters.

The HQ told Katsuya’s group to send 2 of their members to another team. Katsuya tried hard to negotiate with the HQ to rethink, but in the end, it did not work at all. And so he reluctantly sent Shiori and Reina. It was because, amongst all of his members, Shiori was the only person who could handle the situation in case something bad happened when they were in another team.

Reina and Shiori did not know that Akira was in the same team where they were sent to. When they arrived at their assigned station, they only found a cart filled with illuminations and no one around. When they decided to look around for the other Hunters, they saw Akira pointing his rifle toward another Hunter.

Akira and Yajima turned towards Shiori and Reina. His expression turned stern the moment he saw Shiori and Reina. He thought that it would be a huge pain in the ass to explain the situation to them.

“So those two are the Hunters that the HQ sent, huh?”

“It would have been great if they had come sooner while I was in the middle of that fight.”

Normally, Alpha would quickly notice those two and inform Akira about them. He thought that it was strange she did not do that, so he asked her.

“…Now that I think about it, Alpha, didn’t you notice them before?”

“As I said before, the jamming smoke reduced my detection ability.”

“Ah, you’re right.”

Akira was convinced by her answer.

Alpha did not lie, it was true that the jamming smoke reduced her detection ability. But she did not say anything about the fact that she was hoping Akira would at least destroy Yajima’s 4 limbs before Shiori and Reina arrived there.

Of course, Alpha could just control Akira’s augmented suit to immediately kill Yajima. But doing so would mean that she would ignore his will, and to do so, there were many requirements that needed to be satisfied first in order to release her from her bind and execute that action.

But more than that, Alpha had to prioritize Akira’s wish, that was why she could not just ignore his will and force him to do something.

Akira was still looking at Reina and Shiori when Yajima turned to Akira.

He looked at Akira’s expression and found a ray of hope to get out of his crisis.

[He knows them but they’re not his friends. Or at least, they are not close enough for them to believe his explanation without questioning it. And this boy just thought that it’s a pain in the ass to explain what’s going on, didn’t he? He thought that those girls won’t believe him even if he tried to explain the situation.]

Although he was snickering inside, his face still looked desperate as he shouted at Shiori and Reina.

“Help me!! He’ll kill me!!”

Akira inadvertently turned his gaze back to Yajima. Yajima was trembling and shouted again.

“This boy shot me out of the blue!! He’s trying to kill me!! Although I was just working on replacing the illuminations!!”

Akira denied in panic.

“That’s not true!! Well, it’s true that I shot him, but it’s because he tried to kill me first!!”

“He’s lying!! I only fought back because he tried to kill me!!!”

“Are you f*cking kidding me?! You were obviously trying to kill me, weren’t you?!! And you’re the one who shot at me first too!!”

“That’s because you pointed your rifle at me!!”

Akira and Yajima were yelling at each other.

Reina and Shiori were confused. They were only sent there to help with the work to replace the illuminations. They did not know who was saying the truth. Judging from the situation, they only knew that those two fought and Akira won. But they could not tell which one was lying and which one was saying the truth.

Reina was confused and asked Shiori for help.

“S-Shiori… W-what do you think?”

“Even if Milady asks me, I myself don’t know for sure…”

Shiori did not know what to do. It was at least obvious to her that something had happened which triggered a fight. Since she was once so close to getting into a fight with Akira, a part of her was actually suspecting him.

But with that being said, Shiori did not think that Akira was lying. After all, when she asked him in the past, he once told her that he would rather answer truthfully even if it might cause a fight with her rather than coming up with a random answer to evade answering the real question.

No matter which one of them was lying, or even if it was just a big misunderstanding between the two of them, there was no way Shiori could tell, and she understood that.

Shiori looked at Yajima and Akira with a serious face.

“I believe that I have to contact the HQ first, will that be alright?”

Shiori thought that if any of them looked troubled when she wanted to contact the HQ, then that person would be the one who was lying. Or at least, the possibility for that person to be the liar would be high. So she stared intensely at Yajima and Akira.

Akira answered back swiftly.

“Ah, right, you can go ahead and contact the HQ. I did report to the HQ that I found a suspicious person who’s not using the terminal from the HQ, then HQ gave me permission to deal with that person even if it meant that I need to kill him. You’ll understand the situation once you contact the HQ.”

Yajima shouted.

“That’s my line!! Just contact the HQ!! I’m sure you’ll realise that I’m saying the truth!!”

Akira and Yajima were glaring at each other. Reina pulled out her information terminal to contact the HQ, but her call would not go through.

“… I can’t get any connections to HQ.”

Yajima, who heard Reina’s mumble, said.

“That’s because this boy used jamming smoke!! You!! You knew that this would happen when you told them to contact the HQ, didn’t you?!”

“You’re the one who used the jamming smoke!! I don’t have any grenades on me!! Just check me, if you don’t believe!!”

“That’s only because you used all of your grenades!! Just stop lying already!!!”

Akira and Yajima glared at each other again. Both of them encouraged Reina to contact HQ, but she could not get any connection.

Reina and Shiori came there to help with replacing the illuminations, which were the same excuse as to why Yajima was there.

On the other hand, Akira said that he was told by the HQ to deal with a Hunter who was not sharing his position through the same network, but Shiori did not hear anything about that from the HQ. Thus there was a discrepancy with what Akira said.

Shiori took another careful look at Akira and Yajima. Both of them did not seem like they were lying.

Reina looked confused as she was observing Akira and Yajima. She could not tell which one was lying. After racking her brains out and still unable to come up with an answer, she turned to Shiori for help.

Shiori came up with a suggestion.

“Well then. Let’s bring everyone back to HQ first. Or at least get away from the jamming smoke until we can contact the HQ.”

Shiori turned to Akira and carefully said to him.

“…Now then, Akira-sama. Could you please lower your rifle?”

Akira’s face was grim, his rifle was still pointing at Yajima.

“…I should’ve killed this guy before they came here.”

“It can’t be helped, it’s not like you can kill him now in this situation. Don’t worry, it should be recorded just fine. It’s highly unlikely that you would get framed. Since we were also originally planning to bring him to the HQ, let’s think of it as a good thing now that you got more help to bring this man to the HQ.”

Akira calmed down after Alpha said that to him.

Since Akira did not lower his rifle, Shiori put up her guard.

“…Akira-sama?”

“I already heard you.”

Akira then lowered his rifle. But Shiori still had her guards up against Akira.

Shiori knew about Akira’s ability and personality. And so she thought that in this situation, Akira was the one that she should be putting her guard against. Thus it could not be helped as she lowered her guard against the other guy, who was still lying on the ground trembling in fear with his right arm missing and unarmed.

With Shiori keeping her eyes on him, Akira’s focus shifted to Shiori.

It meant that both of them were not watching Yajima.

“Akira!! Stop her at once!!”

It was already too late when Alpha alerted him.

“Get up.”

Reina was already standing next to Yajima and extending her hand. It was completely normal to do that to someone who had lost his right arm, lying on the ground without any weapon, and looked completely scared. But it was a fatal mistake.

Yajima pulled Reina’s hand and made her lose balance. At the same time, he stood up, circled behind her, and used his left arm to restrain Reina, choking her.

Yajima smirked vilely and said.

“Don’t move!”

The fear that was on Yajima’s face until a few seconds ago, had dissipated.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 54, Their Respective Decisions

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Looking from Akira's expression, Yajima understood that Akira did not think Reina and Shiori as his friends. While from Reina and Shiori's expression, he understood that they too did not regard Akira as their friend and they did not understand the current situation.

Yajima knew that he could use Shiori and Reina to get out from this dangerous situation. So he decided to exploit them.

When Akira lowered his rifle, Yajima was actually celebrating inside. After all, he at least was able to get out of the situation where he could be killed anytime. He now just needed to wait until the effect of the jamming smoke weakened to contact his friends for help.

And so, he decided to start acting in order to buy more time. But fortunately, someone who did not have her guards up suddenly approached him without suspecting anything. Yajima was thankful for his devil's luck.

Reina, who was captured by Yajima squeezed out some words while in pain.

"W-what are you doing?"

Yajima laughed vilely as he replied back, he was obviously mocking Reina.

“Are you seriously asking me what I’m doing? Do I really have to explain this? I didn’t think there’s someone that stupid, you know? I think this situation explains itself really well. But I guess, just to be safe, in the rare case if those two also don’t understand what’s going on. I’m basically holding you hostage to threaten the other two people in this place.”

Yajima stopped smiling and turned to Akira and Shiori.

“Don’t move or I’ll kill this girl.”

Although his voice was calm, it was clear that he was serious.

Akira and Shiori did not make any moves while staring at Yajima. Akira’s face was stern as he glared at Yajima. As for Shiori, she was obviously directing her killing intent toward Yajima. Although she tried hard to keep a calm expression, she was actually furious inside and it was projected from her eyes. She glared intensely at Yajima as if she was trying to bore holes through him with her gaze.

Yajima looked at Akira and Shiori who just stood there and said.

“…Very nice. It’s really helpful that you guys are smart enough to understand what’s going on.”

Yajima still kept his eyes on Shiori and Akira as he said to Reina.

“Now then, since your sorry brain can’t understand what’s going on, I’ll let you know about this too. I can easily crush your neck with my hand. So don’t do anything stupid. It might be true that I’ve lost my right arm and was lying on the ground until a few minutes ago. So it’s completely understandable if you’re thinking of waiting for a chance to escape. But that would be a big mistake. I won’t lower my guard and I’m not so weak that you can break away even if there’s an opening. If it seemed like I lowered my guard to you, it’s just because I look so from your point of view, and you were completely mistaken. You might not believe my words. But

looking at how the person who's wanting to help you is just standing there obeying my words, I hope you understand the meaning of that."

A moment of silence drifted. After confirming that Reina did not try to fight back, and Akira and Shiori did not do anything suspicious, Yajima continued.

"…That's good. Then, throw down your weapon."

Shiori quickly dropped the gun that she was holding. She also dropped down the gun in her holster and any other weapons that she had on her. After she removed all of her weapons, she took a few steps back.

Shiori kept her eyes on Yajima for even the slightest opening. When she removed all of her weapons, she noticed that he frowned slightly.

Yajima turned to Akira, Shiori looked puzzled and turned towards him too.

Akira was still gripping his rifle. He still had his guards up as he was staring at Yajima.

"…Akira-sama, could you please drop your gun?"

Shiori pleaded with Akira to drop his gun. But he did not say anything while still staring at Yajima.

"…Akira-sama?"

"I hear you."

Akira only said that, but he did not look like he was going to drop his rifle anytime soon.

Yajima frowned. He tightened his choke on Reina and made her groan in pain. Shiori looked hurt when she heard Reina groan.

Yajima calmly said.

“I’m sure you heard what I said, or is it that you wouldn’t listen to me? Are you saying that you don’t care if she dies?”

“How much more would you demand from us? Is it until your friends come here and kill us?”

“I don’t know what you’re thinking, but I don’t have friends. If you drop your gun, I’ll just withdraw to the hallway and let this girl go after I gain some distance from here. I promise you that. Ahhh, I didn’t tell you that I’m going to release her if you drop your gun, huh. My bad. So, do you get it now?”

“You… You’re thinking of stealing relics, aren’t you?”

Yajima slightly reacted when he said that. Akira then continued.

“I got that right, didn’t I? Back then when you tried to kill me, you didn’t try to make any excuses and instead immediately tried to kill me without hesitation. Which meant that the moment I saw your face, you had no other choice but to kill me. You’re a cyborg, so you can freely change your expression the way you want. But even so, you still tried to kill me when I wanted to contact the HQ. I bet there’s something down here that you don’t want the city to notice no matter what.”

Akira’s guess was correct. Yajima and his friends had hidden relics in multiple places in the underground city, and one of those places was around that area. His friends should already be transporting the relics from the other places. His job was to guard that place until his friends came there to carry the relics.

Akira continued.

“You’re planning to kill everyone who saw your face, aren’t you? Since we know your face, the city staff would easily identify you after all. You’re basically picking a fight with the city, they would have a bounty for your head. So in order to avoid that, you have no other choice but to kill us. Am I wrong?”

Yajima who was only listening without saying anything replied as if he was reproving someone that would not listen to him.

“It seems that you’re misunderstanding a lot of things here. I don’t mind telling you where you went wrong with your guess that is full of holes, but I have a feeling that you would not listen to me no matter what I say.”

“So, for how long do you need to buy time? How strong are your friends? Seeing how you’re taking this slowly, it seems that they’re strong enough to be able to kill us easily.”

“Even if I go along with your rubbish talk, one thing for sure is, this girl will die if you don’t drop your gun.”

“If you kill that girl, there’s no mistaking it that you won’t leave this place alive. But you’ll still kill her even after knowing that, huh. I guess you’re confident that you have enough power to deal with us then.”

Akira and Yajima locked gazes with a serious face. There was a moment of silence before Yajima coldly said.

“This is the last warning. Drop your gun.”

“No thanks.”

Akira swiftly refused Yajima’s demand. They stared intensely at each other, Shiori’s face was already turned pale as she was watching them.

Yajima sighed.

[…Is this boy for real? He knows my plan and also knows that I’m not planning to leave anyone alive. What should I do now? I don’t know for sure when Kain and Nelia will arrive. This boy might decide to shoot me on the spot the moment he sees Kain and Nelia. My cyborg body is badly damaged, I don’t think I can evade if he shoots at me.]

Yajima looked exasperated.

“Although I’m taking hostage a beautiful girl like her here… You’re really a cold person, you know. Don’t you have any sense of righteousness in your heart?”

“I don’t want to hear that from the person who’s taking that beautiful girl hostage.”

“It’s fine for me, I’m a villain after all. I can do bad things without feeling guilty at all. It’s the special right only for villains, so a hero can’t afford to do that. Well, putting that aside, since it seems that this hostage isn’t important to you, I’ll just ask the other person who cares for the hostage.”

Yajima then turned to Shiori.

“If you don’t want this girl to die, go kill that boy.”

The moment Yajima said that, Akira put up his guard against both Yajima and Shiori. Yajima noticed that slight change and inadvertently took a step back while still holding Reina.

Akira still had his CWH anti-material rifle pointed downward. If he had pointed his rifle at Yajima, Yajima would have reacted with something more extreme.

Shiori was in dismay and exchanged glances between Akira and Reina. She was shocked and confused as she was put in that absurd situation.

Akira chose not to drop his gun. The rest was up to Shiori to decide, and all the available options that she had were hopeless.

Akira was waiting to see what Shiori would do as he asked Alpha.

“…Alpha, what do you think?”

Alpha replied back almost instantly.

“I think she’ll decide to attack you.”

“And the reason for that?”

“It’ll allow the hostage to live longer by attacking you. If she doesn’t follow what he said, he would realize that there’s no meaning in holding the hostage and kill the hostage. Even though she knows that he plans to kill everyone, as long as the hostage is still alive, there’s a hope that she would be able to save the hostage. Looking from that point of view, there’s no way she would let this chance to keep the hostage’s life slide.”

“I totally agree with you for the same exact reason. Dammit, I should’ve not worried about explaining the situation back then and just quickly killed this man.”

“Nothing will change even if you regret it now. Let’s just do what you can do right now. In the worst-case scenario, you’ll have to kill everyone, okay?”

“Roger that.”

Akira had made his resolve.

While on the other hand, Shiori still could not resolve herself to decide on anything. If she lunged at Yajima, he would immediately kill Reina. But even if she killed Akira, there was no guarantee that Yajima would not kill Reina. She believed that Akira’s guess was correct, Yajima planned to kill everyone in the end.

Looking at Shiori who was still standing frozen in place, Yajima acted angrily and said.

“…What the heck, so taking this girl hostage is basically meaningless, huh? I guess I have no other choice but to kill her then. I’m sure I’ll be dead too afterwards, but my friends would definitely avenge my death when they get here.”

Yajima’s words were just a bluff. He had no plan to die in that place. Shiori understood that well, but if she just stood there and did nothing, it would be only a matter of time before that bluff turned into reality.

Looking at how Shiori was in so much pain, Reina tried to say something. But she could not raise her voice since Yajima was strongly strangling her neck.

Yajima turned to Reina and said with full killing intent.

“You just shut up.”

Yajima did not know what Reina was trying to say. But whether she was trying to ask for rescue or she was trying to tell Shiori to just forget about her, it was nothing but a needless voice in his opinion.

Yajima’s crooked mind thought if Reina pleaded for help with a pained voice, Shiori might start attacking Akira. And if Reina told them to just forget about her, Shiori and Akira might really do that.

Reina’s pained groan and expression triggered Shiori to move.

Shiori lunged forward and grabbed the gun that she dropped on the ground, she quickly pointed it to Akira and pulled the trigger. But the moment Shiori moved, Akira quickly hid behind nearest wreckage. Thus the bullets shot by Shiori did not hit Akira as they ricocheted when they hit the wall, the floor or the wreckage.

The battle had already started.

Akira readied his CWH anti-material rifle and shot at Shiori. But she quickly took cover behind thick wreckage that could hold the power of CWH special ammo. She used her experience, skill and observation ability to predict when Akira released shots and took cover from the flying bullets.

If Shiori chose wrong wreckage, the CWH special ammo would easily penetrate through the wreckage and cause a fatal injury. If she mistakenly read when Akira took a shot, the CWH special ammo would turn her into minced meat in an instant. There was no way human armour could withstand the power of the ammo that could even destroy a tank.

In the case of firepower, Akira was overwhelmingly above Shiori. But he could not land a hit on her. In such an extreme situation where one hit would be enough to turn her into minced meat, she used her superior reflex and highly-trained skill to evade his shots.

Shiori kept shooting at Akira to keep him in check while trying to get close to him, who was keeping his distance from her.

Shiori understood that even if she killed Akira, that did not mean that her situation would improve. She knew that Yajima hoped she and Akira would kill each other in this fight.

But if she did not kill Akira, then Yajima would kill Reina. She was aware of her duty, and the hopelessness of the current situation had distorted her mind as she recklessly charged toward Akira.

Akira kept shooting at Shiori who was charging at him. Since CWH anti-material rifle could not be used for continuous shooting, Shiori was able to quickly close the distance between them using the opening between each shot. She eventually reached Akira and saw him changing the magazine of his CWH anti-material rifle right in front of her.

Shiori thought that it might be her only chance to take away his overwhelming firepower and quickly closed the distance between them. Akira finished reloading the magazine and pointed his rifle at her in point-blank range. Gunshot echoed through the area, but it was only after Shiori kicked the rifle. The stray bullet ripped through the air and hit the ceiling.

Shiori looked relieved for a few seconds after disarming Akira. But he did not let her get away with that and swiftly kicked her rifle too. Both of them lost their weapons as their rifles landed on the floor away from them.

Both Akira and Shiori did not think even for a second about picking up their rifles as they quickly decided to continue the fight with CQC. They both had non-enhanced bodies and were using augmented suits. Since both of them were not using a helmet, single hit on the head using the augmented suit would spell instant death. They leapt forward with the goal of inflicting that single fatal blow.

Their fight shifted from shooting bullets to throwing punches. Even though the distance between them had reduced and the weapon they used had changed, they still tried to kill each other just like before.

Reina could see blurry images of Akira and Shiori trying to kill each other through her teary eyes. It was a fight that happened because she was taken hostage, she knew that both of them would stop if only she died, but she was still alive at the moment.

Reina's feelings were in chaos. The fear of getting killed as Yajima literally had her life in his grasp. The regret of doing something stupid. The guilt from seeing Shiori who was fighting in order to save her and Akira who was dragged into this situation. And lastly, the feeling of powerlessness for not being able to do anything in such a situation.

She was desperate and wanted to do something, and also the hatred toward Yajima made Reina use all her power to swing her elbow at him.

Reina was using an augmented suit. So her elbow swing smacked Yajima with more power than from a usual human, but it was only enough to make him stagger a bit. It did not make his left arm move at all as it was still firmly holding her neck.

Yajima's expression did not change as he applied more power in his left arm, tightening the choke on Reina. She gasped in pain.

Yajima kept his choke tight as he said to Reina.

"Did you think that there was an opening? Or is that a plea to just kill you? Well, either way, that was pointless, you know? My cyborg body won't even get damaged with that level of attack and I won't easily kill you since you still have your use as a hostage. It seems that your body is an organic body, are you planning to bite your tongue and kill yourself? Well, if you do that, I'll just move your body to make it look like you're still alive. Don't worry, I've been making sure that you don't make any sound, so I'm sure they wouldn't notice it right away."

Yajima laughed mockingly. Reina heard clearly that he was ridiculing her futile effort. With that, she completely stopped trying to fight back.

As Reina stopped struggling to fight back, she could only just silently cry there.

Seeing how Reina had stopped, Yajima sneered at her and thought.

[She lost her will to fight back just because of that bluff, huh. She's naive, way too naive. If she resolves herself to die and fight back, she might be able to create an opening. There are also so many other ways for the others to notice if she's already dead or not. Well, this stupid girl was someone who would come to me and basically offer herself to be the hostage after all. I thought that I've run out of luck when that boy was so close to killing me, but at this rate, I guess it'll be alright now.]

Yajima was observing the fight between Akira and Shiori while holding Reina as his meat shield.

[…But still, those two are pretty strong. There's no way Hunters with that much skill gets assigned to replacing the illuminations, so what exactly is going on here?]

Before losing his CWH anti-material rifle, Akira was actually looking for a chance to shoot Yajima. Shiori thought that Akira might shoot and kill Yajima there even if it meant that Reina would be killed in the process. That was why she regularly shot at Akira to prevent him from shooting at Yajima. In the end, her actions allowed Yajima to survive.

In front of Yajima's eyes, Akira and Shiori were evenly matched. If both of them worked together to attack him, his winning chance would be extremely slim. But that chance got better and better the more they injured each other.

[Just keep on fighting like that until either one of you can't move or run out of energy. That girl, is this the best she can do? Try harder, will you? If that boy is dead, it's basically my win. And as a reward, I'll give you a painless death.]

Yajima laughed while still gripping hard on the useless girl who was also acting as his life insurance.

Shiori's teary face looked pained as if she was crying like a little girl while still throwing deadly swift attacks at Akira. While on the other hand, Akira's expression looked grim while desperately blocking and evading her attacks and throwing counters.

Even a single hit from their attack would inflict a fatal injury. A straight hit on the head would not end with only a stinging pain, it would blast their head and scatter their brain matters.

Akira was actually surprised by Shiori's strength, he thought that he would win the fight the moment they switched to CQC.

Akira was trained in CQC by Alpha. Although it was a virtual training, Alpha demonstrated an overwhelming fighting strength against him. So if she took control of his augmented suit, he thought he would be able to perform in that level of strength too. Although it might put his body in more stress, he would at least be able to easily win this fight.

But something unexpected happened. Shiori was able to hold off his attacks although Alpha was helping him, or more like, Shiori was actually slowly pushing him back.

"I never thought she's this strong!! Alpha!! Is this going to be alright?!!"

"Don't worry, it's going to be fine, just endure the fight for now."

"Please do something about it before my limbs get torn off, okay?!! They're already hurting like hell, you know!! I would even believe you if you tell me that they're already torn off!!"

As Alpha was controlling Akira's augmented suit, the more he made a manoeuvre that was above his ability, the more it put his body under stress. And the harder the manoeuvre, the higher the stress on his body. His and Shiori's CQC abilities were obviously not at the same level. In order to fill the big gap in skill, Alpha pushed his body to its limit.

Alpha smiled as she replied.

“It’ll be alright… Maybe.”

“What do you mean with that ‘maybe’?!!”

Seeing how Alpha answered back with something worrying while looking completely calm, Akira twitched and yelled in response.

In order to avoid getting hit by Shiori’s high-speed consecutive attacks, Akira had to evade on the same level of speed before readjusting his stance and attacking back. Because of that, his vision changed really fast, enough to make him dizzy. He could no longer discern the floor or the wall or the ceiling.

But even so, Akira was able to see Alpha’s smile because she anchored her image onto his vision. Even if he was upside-down, or made a 360-degree spin, or even if he closed his eyes. He would still be able to clearly see the image of Alpha smiling.

If there was someone else who could see her, Alpha would look as if she was floating around, detached from what was going on there.

As Akira’s body was flung around to avoid Shiori’s attack, Alpha who was floating beside him said.

“It seems that she’s using a drug to enhance her ability. I don’t know how long that drug will be in effect, that was why I said ‘maybe’. She looked desperate trying to end the fight as soon as possible. Looking at how she was able to evade your shots and how she’s avoiding your attacks now, it seems that it’s a drug that focuses more on the strength of its effect rather than the duration. It’ll be your win once the effect wears off. That’s why it’ll be alright, maybe.”

Akira readjusted his stance and quickly asked back.

“Wait, but I’m also using a drug, right?! That medicine that I took before the fight! It’s still in effect right now, that’s why I can continue fighting like

this without tearing my limbs off, right? So it’s a matter of whose medicine’s effect wears off first between us, huh?!! Are you sure this is going to be alright?!!”

Thanks to the medicine that he took beforehand, the micro-injuries created from the stress put on his body were continuously getting healed. This was why he could keep fighting without tearing his limbs. But of course, the effect of that medicine would not go on forever.

“It’s alright, maybe.”

“Just stop with that ‘maybe’ already!!!”

“I don’t know how much drug she took beforehand, that’s why I can only say maybe. But don’t worry about that, just focus on the fight. Complaining won’t change your situation.”

Akira saw Alpha’s smile which cleared up his worry. After all, according to his experience, everything would be alright as long as she was still smiling.

Alpha was still smiling. As long as making a grim face would not help Akira’s situation, she would keep smiling. As long as it might bring about a good turn of events, she might still smile even when he was on the verge of death. She was giving her best to help with the current situation.

It was like what Alpha had guessed, Shiori was actually using an accelerator. Even if the augmented suit could increase its user physical ability, the user would still need the required speed and cognitive ability to control and match the movement speed. She was only able to evade bullets because of the time dilation effect from the accelerator drug.

But even so, Shiori was having a hard time fighting against Akira. Although it looked as if he had a lot of openings, the moment she tried to strike during that opening, he would block or evade her attack and strike back. His attacks that looked amateurish at a glance would turn into sharp and deadly strikes the moment they almost hit her. It threw her off guard and made it extremely hard to evade those attacks. For her, all of his openings already looked like nothing but baits to lure her.

The moment they changed into CQC, Shiori was sure that she would have the upper hand. The fighting techniques that the Hunters learned focused on fighting monsters. Basically, it was to kill monsters from afar before they could get close, or to fight monsters in close range using a gun in case they encountered monsters in a closed space when exploring the ruin. Those were the usual skill set for the Hunters, in short, they were not usually trained to fight another human.

But that was not the case for Shiori, she might be registered as a Hunter, but she was not just a Hunter. She was Reina's maid and bodyguard, she was only going along with Reina's Hunter activities. As a bodyguard, Shiori was trained on how to fight another human. It included methods to deal with the situation when she lost her weapon and had to fight unarmed.

Because of that, when the fight shifted to CQC. Shiori was thinking of holding back and making it look as if she was fighting the best she could in order to buy time, she thought that something might change if she did so.

But it was immediately obvious that she did not have to do that. Akira was strong enough to kill her if she held back. He came at her with moves showing that he was obviously trained as he was trying to kill her.

[…To think that he's this strong!! I never thought that there was this big of a gap between my guess and his real ability!! I was thinking to look for an opening to save Milady while fighting against him, but it seems that it's impossible now!! Once the accelerator runs out of its effect, I would not be able to fight anymore! …Milady, I might not be able to save you this time… What should I do?! What should I do?!!]

Helplessness continued to corrode Shiori's heart. The feeling of despair started dominating her sense of loyalty. She kept on struggling while making a pained expression, she would not give up until there was nothing that she could do. But that end was already creeping close.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 55, How The Fight Ended

Index

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Yajima was watching the fight between Shiori and Akira.

Since he thought that there was no longer any need to keep his eyes on Reina, who was just meekly and obediently hanging her head low, Yajima had the leeway to start thinking about something else. His gaze naturally shifted to Akira's CWH anti-material rifle that was lying on the ground away from Akira and Shiori.

Yajima noticed that Akira was slowly but surely getting closer to that CWH anti-material rifle. Although he could not pick up that rifle because he had his hands full with Shiori, it was only a matter of time before he could pick up that rifle.

If Akira defeated Shiori, he would be able to quickly pick up that rifle and shoot Yajima. Since he was already fighting her at this point, Yajima thought that there was no reason for Akira to hesitate to shoot at him the moment he picked up that rifle even if that would hurt Reina too.

There was still a plausible chance that Akira might defeat Shiori before Yajima's friends reached their current location. With that CWH anti-

material rifle, Akira would have enough firepower to kill Yajima. After all, it was the rifle that blasted his right arm off.

Yajima imagined how satisfying it would be if he could kill Akira with his own rifle, his mind started to focus on thinking how he could do that.

[…That rifle is also a threat to my friends, it was able to blow my right arm easily. Is it loaded with special ammo? If I don't take it for myself soon, it might cause a problem later. While his attention is preoccupied with something else, I might be able to take that rifle and get the upper hand…]

Yajima's mind was already unconsciously urging him to take that rifle before Akira could. He started sneaking closer and closer to Akira's CWH anti-material rifle while still firmly gripping Reina.

Reina already had no more power to fight back, even if she squeezed all her leftover power, she would only slightly disrupt Yajima's movement. Aware of her situation, he started to sneak faster and faster. He was already closer to that rifle than Akira.

[Calm down, it's still too far away. If I rush myself to pick up that rifle, there's no mistaking it that he'll charge at me even though he's not watching his back at the moment. Carefully and quietly, don't let him notice me, just a little more…]

Yajima kept his eyes on Shiori and Akira while slowly approaching the CWH anti-material rifle.

When Yajima judged that he was close enough, he rushed to pick up that rifle. Akira was beaten by a few milliseconds before he turned around, forgetting Shiori who was behind him, he ran toward Yajima.

"Too late!! It's my win!!"

Yajima threw Reina aside and picked the CWH anti-material rifle from the floor. With his cyborg body, he was able to use CWH anti-material rifle with only one arm as he quickly pointed the rifle's muzzle at Akira who was running toward him.

There was no obstruction between him and Akira, he had a clear shot. With his shooting skill, there was zero chance that he would miss his shot from such a distance and Akira did not have the skill nor the ability to evade his shot. Yajima quickly pulled the trigger.

But no bullet flew out from its muzzle.

“Haaah?!?!”

Yajima could not help but to leak out what he was thinking. This unexpected scenario caught him completely off guard and erased the smile from his face.

He was stunned with what just happened. The shocking turn of events froze his expression as well as his brain.

During that short opening, Akira quickly closed the distance between them and threw a punch straight to Yajima’s face with full power. The augmented suit enhanced Akira’s physical strength to its limit for a few milliseconds. That punch blew Yajima’s heavy cyborg body away and threw Akira’s CWH anti-material rifle into the air at the same time.

After he was sent flying, Yajima was back to his senses and thought while still flying in the air.

[It didn’t shoot any bullets?! Shouldn’t it be loaded with special ammo?! That rifle was just loaded with a new magazine, right?!! Wait, was that rifle a trap?! Did he throw it away from him in order to lure me?! So rather than changing rifles back then, he chose to load a new magazine although he knew how dangerous it was, just in order to trick me?!! So that’s why he made that gesture and intentionally showed me when he loaded a new magazine that was actually empty?! And he also shot once in order to use the last bullet that was already loaded in that rifle before throwing the empty rifle away, so that he could catch me off-guard!!]

Yajima flew and landed on rubble. He already completed his guess in that short amount of time when he was in the air. Although his guess might be correct, it would not be able to save him now.

He crashed into the rubble so hard, hard enough to even crack open the rubble. Although it only inflicted a small amount of damage thanks to his cyborg body, it was enough to create a fatal opening.

Akira quickly leapt and grabbed the CWH anti-material rifle that was still spinning in the air. In one fluid sweep, he grabbed a new magazine and loaded it into the rifle, this time, it was not an empty magazine. The special ammo was automatically loaded the moment Akira stuck in the new magazine.

He then aimed his special-ammo-loaded CWH anti-material rifle at Yajima who was still stuck on the rubble.

“Let’s finish him before we get any more hindrances.”

“I know.”

When he was back to his senses, Yajima saw Akira and found CWH anti-material rifle’s muzzle pointing at him. He at least wanted to know if his guess was correct as he opened his mouth.

But before Yajima could say anything, a CWH special ammo blew his head and scattered his brain all over the place. He was dead before he could even utter his last words.

Just to be safe, Akira also shot and destroyed Yajima’s limbs. With this, even if Yajima was a remote mechanical body that could move without a brain, he would not be able to pose any threat now.

Shiori was stunned by the sudden turn of events, but the moment she was able to return to her senses, she quickly went to Reina. Reina was coughing intensely. Shiori looked worried as she enquired.

“Milady!! Are you alright?”

“…A-are we saved?”

Reina too, could not follow what just happened, she mumbled to Shiori, looking for an answer.

Shiori said to Reina that it was already fine. She was about to smile at Reina when she noticed that Akira had not lowered his rifle yet.

Although Shiori no longer had any reason to fight Akira, it did not erase the fact that they did fight each other just a few seconds ago. She thought that it was fully understandable considering his disposition that he would still put his guard up expecting that they would continue their fight.

Shiori already had no wish to fight Akira, after all, he was the one who saved Reina. She did not mind getting killed by Akira if it would satisfy him. But there was no guarantee that was the case.

Akira quickly dropped his CWH anti-material rifle and exchanged it with 2 AAH assault rifles. One of them was pointed at Shiori and another pointed at Reina. Akira's fingers were already resting on the triggers.

Shiori understood that Akira knew the easiest way to kill her, which was to shoot Reina and make her cover Reina.

She slowly moved to the front of Reina. Akira's aim followed her. Eventually, both of Akira's rifles that were pointed at Shiori and Reina were pointed only at Shiori.

Akira was breathing roughly while supporting the rifles in his both hands. Because of his crazy moves not too long ago, his body had hit its limit. Although the medicines that were still active in his body were desperately healing his micro-wounds, it would run out of its effect eventually. At the moment, even pulling the trigger would be a difficult task for him.

Of course, it was impossible for him to fully get back to tip-top shape, but the medicines that he took beforehand should at least be enough to mend his body from the backlash of the crazy manoeuvre that he just pulled. He hoped that Shiori would not make any moves until then.

"Alpha, what do you think of her situation? Do you think the effects of the drug that she took has already run out?"

"I don't think so."

“I feel like my medicines would run out of its effect soon though.”

“You’re right. Akira, just stay like this and don’t move so that the medicines can have the optimum effect. Depending on what happens next, you might have to start the fight again.”

“…But like, we have no more reasons to fight, right? I wonder if it would end the fight if I just lower my gun.”

“Although you’ve won that fight, they messed everything up since they did not believe what you said. The situation was even turned 180 degrees because of their mistake, then Shiori opted to attack you to make sure of Reina’s safety. In this situation, there were no longer any reasons why she should kill you. So, if you lower your gun, she might quickly evacuate Reina to somewhere safe. But she would take more accelerator and come back to kill you in order to confirm Reina’s safety thinking that you might be holding a grudge against her. With your current condition, this would be her perfect chance to kill you, you know? Well, if you believe that she would not do that no matter what, you can go ahead and lower your rifle.”

“No thanks. I’ll stay like this.”

Akira replied back instantly, although he had no will to continue the fight, it was not like he could trust them. And it was the same for Shiori and Reina too.

Shiori looked at Akira with a grim expression. He was still pointing his rifles toward her and Reina. Although she was forced, she did fight with him not too long ago and it was not like she could do anything about that now.

The real question was why Akira did not pull the trigger. Shiori frowned while trying to understand his reason.

[It would be fine if he’s only being cautious of us. But the real problem is why he isn’t pulling the trigger. What if he knows that I’m using an accelerator and is waiting for it to run out of its effect so that he can finish me off for sure…?]

There was a trace of fear in Shiori's face. It was not because she was afraid of losing her own life, it was because she feared she had lost any possibilities of saving Reina.

Shiori would be more than glad to give up her life if it meant that Akira would not kill Reina too. She would not mind if he chose to finish her with one shot or by beating her to death.

But if Akira's grudge also included Reina, it would be a whole different story. Shiori would do anything to make sure that Reina would escape alive. Although, it was a different problem whether that was possible or not.

Personally, Shiori did not believe that Akira would stop with only killing her. After all, Reina was the main reason why they were in that situation. Not only did she aggravate the fight that Akira already won by not believing his words, she even carelessly approached Yajima and was taken hostage which in turn triggered the fight between him and Shiori. She just could not believe Akira would let that slide.

Shiori said to Akira with a serious face.

"…Akira-sama, could you please lower your gun? I have no wish to continue fighting with you."

Akira did not move at all. He only glanced briefly at Shiori.

"…Akira-sama, I can understand that you're angry. I'm really sorry. I'll do anything to make it up to you."

Akira remained motionless. His rifles that were pointing at Shiori also stayed still.

"…It's all my fault for everything that happened. So please let Milady go."

Akira still did not move. His expression also did not change at all. He only glanced at Shiori showing that he was listening.

Shiori thought that Akira might change his mind if she prostrated in front of him and begged him with a trembling voice. So she started to move in order

to do that.

Akira finally showed a movement. His aim shifted straight at Shiori and stopped her from moving any further.

Shiori still had some accelerator drugs left with her. Although the backlash from using that drug continuously would definitely kill her, she would not hesitate to do that if she had the chance.

But in the end, those were her spare drugs. So it was not like she could use it right away. She would have to reach for them and pull them out before putting them in her mouth. If she prostrated in front of Akira, she might be able to do that in secret.

But with that slight move from Akira, Shiori was no longer able to do that and stopped midway. She thought that not only did Akira know she was using an accelerator, he was also trying to prevent her from taking more accelerators.

Her guess was partially correct, it was not like Akira knew that, it was Alpha. Alpha was also the one who shifted his aim to Shiori. Akira did not notice that at all, after all, he was busy enduring the extreme pain that was assaulting him since the medicine that he took beforehand just ran out of its effect.

Shiori knew that if she made any suspicious moves or said anything carelessly, it might cause Akira to pull the trigger. As such, she was only able to keep quiet while making a stern expression. And with that, she was rendered powerless, she could not do anything. Her expression distorted as she looked to be in pain.

Reina who thought that she was saved realized that she was mistaken after seeing how Shiori and Akira were acting.

She was shocked when she saw Akira fought evenly against Shiori. As such, she was afraid of angering him.

And even now, Shiori was trying her hardest to protect Reina from Akira. But even Reina understood that it was not going well.

Reina did not want to die and she did not want Shiori to die too. If Shiori could not do anything, then she might be able to do something.

Reina, who was hiding behind Shiori's back, decided to step up. But the moment she stepped out from behind Shiori, Akira's aim swiftly shifted to her and stopped her midway.

She thought that she should say something to Akira to convince him. Although she still had no idea what to say, she already took a step out from behind Shiori. But since he stopped her from going any further, it also stopped her from saying anything. As such, she could only repeat what she wanted to say inside her head.

[Shiori only tried to kill you because she wanted to keep me alive. So please forgive her. I know it's my fault, I know that it's because we didn't believe your words that the table was turned and you almost got killed although you already won that fight. I'm really sorry, so please forgive us.]

Reina frowned as she realized what she had to say to Akira. She finally understood the graveness of her mistake.

Although it was hypothetically speaking, Reina thought that if it was Katsuya rather than Akira who was in front of her, he would have just smiled, or at least looked slightly annoyed, and forgave her and Shiori.

Shiori suddenly collapsed, the accelerator already ran out of its effect. The backlash caused all the accumulated tiredness to assault her body at the same time. Although she was able to somehow stay conscious, she could not stand up from the ground.

With this, Akira knew for sure that Shiori's accelerator had worn off. Her face was filled with hopelessness since he could easily finish her and Reina off now.

Reina panicked and quickly ran to Shiori, she then tried helping her to stand.

“Shiori!? Are you okay?!! Hang in there!!”

Shiori was trembling meekly as she glanced at Akira, Reina was supporting her so that she could stand. She saw Akira lower his rifle while looking toward the hallway.

When Shiori collapsed, Alpha said to Akira.

“Akira, it’s okay to lower your rifle now.”

“Is that so? She still has spare accelerators, right?”

“I won’t make that mistake of allowing her to take more accelerator in this situation. But of course, I also don’t mind if you want to shoot her instead. I don’t think she would fight back in this situation if you shoot her.”

“Nah, that would be a little bit too cruel.”

“In that case then, let’s get ready to face the next problem. I still can’t confirm the situation in this area since the effect from the jamming smoke has yet to completely disappear. So don’t drop your guard.”

“How long will it take before the jamming smoke is completely gone? Will it be gone if we just wait for a bit more? Or will it still stay here for a few hours?”

“I don’t know for sure. It depends on the type and the composition of the smoke as well as the topology of the area. But one thing for sure is that it’ll stay longer down here compared to when it’s on the surface. We’re in an enclosed space after all. It’s faster if you try to confirm it yourself, let’s try if you can contact the HQ or not.”

“You’re right, let’s at least start from there.”

Akira who was watching the hallway suddenly turned to Reina and Shiori. Reina flinched seeing that.

Reina thought that she should at least say something to calm Akira down. Thus she tried to squeeze out anything that she could think of in a panic.

“Uhh, uhmm…”

But Akira quickly interjected.

“Try calling the HQ.”

“Eh?! Uh…”

Reina was surprised when Akira suddenly said that. There was obviously a gap between his behaviour and what she was expecting, as such, she was so stunned that she froze.

Akira repeated what he said.

“Try to call the HQ now. The effect from the jamming smoke might have weakened, you might be able to contact the HQ. So, can you try calling the HQ? That guy shot and destroyed my terminal. So try contacting the HQ in my place. Do it, quickly.”

Akira strongly urged her, so Reina operated her terminal in a fluster.

“I still can’t get any connections. I think it’s because of the jamming smoke.”

Shiori reported the result to Akira before Reina could. She was already trying to contact the HQ when she was back to her senses.

Akira immediately told them what to do next.

“Let’s head to the HQ for now. Keep trying to contact the HQ on our way there. Let’s go!! Move your legs!! Quickly!!”

Shiori immediately understood that there was no need to be worried about Akira. At least, it did not seem like he was thinking of causing a scene here. Which means, it would be best for them to follow his instructions. It was also the best for Reina if they could contact the HQ or at least meet up with

the other Hunters. Shiori, who had already calmed down, came with such a thought.

“I understand. Milady, let’s go.”

Shiori grabbed Reina, who was still confused, by her hand. But she suddenly collapsed again.

“S-Shiori!?”

“I-I’m alright. Milady, we should hurry up and leave this place too.”

Shiori’s whole body was screaming in pain from the backlash of the accelerator. She was barely able to move thanks to her augmented suit.

Her tired body felt like it was as heavy as lead, the stinging pain that ran through her body was telling her to stop moving and her tired brain was trying hard to shut down.

Shiori used her sense of loyalty in order to maintain her consciousness. But she knew it was only a matter of time before she reached her limit.

She was obviously in pain as she was pushing herself past her limit. The fact that even Reina could tell showed her current state. After all, she normally would be able to hide it from Reina, and Reina knew that too.

Reina was lending her shoulder to Shiori. Shiori looked apologetic as she said.

“…I’m really sorry, Milady.”

“Don’t worry about it, let’s go.”

Reina looked at Akira, she wanted to ask him if they could take a short rest. But she stopped when she saw his expression, she knew that he would just turn her suggestion down.

Akira, Reina and Shiori quickly left that area.

When Yajima’s friends, Kain and Nelia, finally arrived there; Akira, Reina and Shiori had already left the place and were on their way back to HQ.

Kain was using a large-sized heavy-armour-type augmented suit, better known as a powered suit. Although the underground hallway was rather wide, his powered suit almost blocked the whole hallway.

It was equipped with 2 extra arms in each side and all of those 4 arms were carrying heavy weapons. The lower part of his powered suit formed reverse joints. Although it was a type of augmented suit, it was closer to a battle-oriented mechanical suit for a cyborg.

Kain folded all his mechanical limbs and stored them into the powered suit’s torso. Unlike the augmented suit for cyborgs that made its user look like a normal human from the outside, it was obvious from the first glance that this was a mechanized augmented suit that only a cyborg could use.

Their original plan was to have Kain and Nelia guard the truck after the relics were carried to the surface. That was why they were heavily armed, but they could not wander around the underground city with such equipment. After all, the underground work was actually Yajima’s job.

Kain and Nelia came into the underground city through the hole that was originally created for carrying out relics. At first, they planned to open that hole after the relics were transported into its position. But there was a change of plan and they had to open that hole sooner than they scheduled, they already carried as many relics as they could to the surface.

Kain looked over the area and said.

“I found Yajima’s body… Or to be more precise, it’s a pile of destroyed cyborg body that I believe belong to Yajima. Since his head is blown to smithereens, well, he’s dead for good, no doubt about it. It’s not like we can just carry his brain either.”

Nelia replied back lightly.

“You’re right. He was a pretty useful guy, but it’s not like he can help us with anything now that he’s dead. Let’s just go back.”

“What are we going to do with the relics in this area?”

“Did you find any other corpse other than Yajima’s?”

“Nope, none at all.”

“That means the person who killed Yajima is still alive and has already left this place. Which means that the HQ at least knows that there was a fight here. I’m sure they’ll send some Hunters here to check this place. So, after knowing that, are you planning on carrying the relics from this area while fighting those Hunters?”

If Kain’s memories served him right, Nelia and Yajima should be lovers. But it seemed like she did not care that Yajima was dead.

“Are you not thinking of revenging him or something? You guys are lovers, right?”

“Me? I don’t let myself stuck in the past.”

Nelia answered back casually.

Suddenly, some Hunters also arrived in that location. The HQ found it suspicious that Akira did not contact them again after that, as such, they decided to send some Hunters to check that area.

Of course, it was suspicious to find someone equipped with a powered suit and not showing his location through the shared network. So one of the Hunters shouted at them.

“You there!! What are you doing there?!!”

Kain aimed his heavy weapons towards those Hunters and started shooting without saying anything or giving any warnings. Loud explosions echoed through the underground, the Hunters were showered in explosions and it wiped them out in an instant.

Nelia exasperatedly sighed.

“Good grief, can you do that more quietly?”

“It’s as you can see, I’m not good with details and minute things.”

Some of the Hunters who survived that bombing started shooting back. All of their shots were focused on Kain, but those bullets just ricocheted when they hit his formidable powered suit. Some of the rebounded bullets hit Nelia too, but they also ricocheted just like when they had hit Kain.

“Whoah there, some of them ricocheted at me, you know?”

Nelia said those words as if she got splashed by mere rainwater.

“It’s not like I can do anything about it. You should say that to them instead of me.”

After that small and casual exchange, Kain started shooting back at those Hunters. The 4 heavy weapons Kain was carrying unleashed hell on those Hunters with its overwhelming firepower. He launched countless warheads toward those Hunters and blew them off together with the wreckages and the rubbles in the area.

Silavin: Haa… I wonder if the author made Kazuya just to be hated on? Or maybe a character to just show contrast?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 56, Post-Mortem Revenge Request Program

Index

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Akira, Reina and Shiori were still on their way to the HQ. Reina was supporting Shiori who was on the verge of collapsing as they were walking through the underground hallway. As for Akira, he was walking a little further away beside Shiori and Reina, his distance showed that he was still cautious of them.

Akira was regularly consuming medicines while keeping his eyes on his surroundings. The medicines that he was taking were the ones that he bought from Shizuka's shop. Compared to the medicines found in the old-world ruin, their potency was extremely low. But even so, if he chugged a significant amount of that medicine, it would at least speed up his fatigue recovery and the healing of his wounds.

He glanced at the warning printed on the medicine's packaging. Thanks to Alpha's training, he was able to recognize words, and so he was able to understand the warning. But even so, he kept on chugging that medicine frequently.

Akira was weak. He understood that well, and so, it was important for him to maintain his body in the best possible state. Even if it meant that he

would definitely die 10 years later from the side effect of the medicines that he was consuming. He knew that he had to do crazy things to survive the present, to stay alive tomorrow, and to keep his body functioning next week.

Reina watched Akira chugging medicines and asked him.

“…I noticed that you’ve been regularly consuming a lot of that medicine. Are you alright with consuming that many at once?”

Akira answered back swiftly.

“I bet it’s not alright.”

Reina was surprised by his answer.

“N-not alright, huh…”

“Although it doesn’t say how many is too many, it does warn to not consume a large amount of this medicine in a short time. So I bet it’s bad for my body.”

“T-then why…?”

Shiori thought that if she let Reina and Akira continue that conversation, the subject of their conversation may turn into something that was not pleasant to talk about between the three of them. So she squeezed her leftover power to interject in their conversation.

“Milady, we’ve moved quite far from that area. I know it’s rude for me to ask, but can you please check if we can already contact the HQ or not.”

The reason why Akira was consuming such an excessive amount of medicines, even though he knew that it was bad for his body, was because he was injured and extremely tired after his fight with Shiori. He did it so that he would be in the best possible condition in case they encountered monsters on their way back. So in short, it was Shiori’s fault as well as Reina’s too. And it was not something to discuss in that situation.

Shiori’s mind was still slightly numb as she thought that she should have stopped Reina sooner, or at least warned her not to talk about anything sensitive. If she was in her usual condition, she would have warned Reina way sooner than that, but the current her was unable to do that. It was because she was focusing all of her remaining energy to keep herself awake and not to fall unconscious in that place.

Akira understood why Shiori suddenly interjected, but since he also did not want to cause any fight there, he just kept quiet. Reina was the only person who did not notice that as she focused on her terminal.

A voice came out from her terminal.

“This is HQ-“

“It’s connected!!”

The moment Reina confirmed that her terminal was connected to the HQ, Akira immediately yelled at the terminal.

“This is number 27!! We’ve got 3 injured Hunters after fighting against that suspicious person!! We’re not in a condition to face any more fights!! The suspicious person is dead!! There’s a good chance that he brought more of his friends from underground tunnels!! It seems that they’re planning to secretly carry relics out from the underground city!! Send us Hunters who can fight well and are proficient in providing support!! My terminal was destroyed by that suspicious person when I fought him!! That’s why I’m contacting you from another Hunter’s terminal!!”

There was a brief pause before the HQ staff replied back.

“Number 27, explain what happened. First of all, about that suspicious person-“

“Give us permission to return back to HQ first.”

“Number 27, we need to confirm the situation first before we can do that, so answer our questions first-“

“The permission first!”

Akira was yelling. From his voice, it was obvious that he was tired. The staff understood that it was pointless to argue back, so he just gave them permission to return.

“…Very well, you’re permitted to return back to the HQ. But answer our questions while you’re on your way back, understand?”

There was a slight intimidating nuance coming from his voice.

“…This is number 27, roger that.”

Akira took a deep breath in order to calm himself down.

They could hear sounds of a commotion leaking out from the terminal, it seemed that there was something going on in the HQ.

Akira was answering the questions from the HQ staff while walking back to the HQ. He told the staff about Yajima who suddenly attacked him out of the blue, about the jamming smoke that prevented him from contacting Shiori and Reina, about the fact that he killed Yajima, and about the reason why he thought Yajima and his friends were planning to secretly carry out old-world relics from the underground city. He properly answered all the questions that the HQ staff asked him.

The staff was also thinking of asking Shiori and Reina too. But Reina still could not fully recover from that chaos and was still a bit dazed by everything that just happened. Not to mention, she was really worried about Shiori, as such, she was not in a condition to answer the staff’s questions. As for Shiori, she was barely conscious, she was also not in a position where she could properly answer his questions. Thus he was only able to question Akira.

Akira was giving his report while carefully moving forward, he then noticed a group of Hunters running towards them. Reina and Shiori were relieved that their rescue finally arrived, but in contrast to them, Akira frowned.

“Reina!! Shiori!! Are you guys alright?!”

The reason why Akira looked slightly annoyed was because it was Katsuya’s group who came running.

Shiori was so relieved that they were finally able to meet up with the other Hunters, that she immediately lost consciousness then and there. Reina panicked and tried to hold her up as she was about to collapse. Katsuya and the others quickly surrounded her and helped Reina support Shiori.

Alpha then said to Akira.

“Let’s just leave her to them. We should leave quickly. If you stay around them, it would be a pain in the bum when they start asking you about the situation.”

“You’re right. It’s not like they told us to go back to the HQ together anyway. And I want to avoid anything troublesome if it’s possible.”

Akira was quietly walking away from Katsuya’s group, but Katsuya noticed him and tried to stop him.

“Wait!! Where do you think you’re going?!!”

Shiori was obviously in a bad shape as she fell unconscious and Reina panicked when that happened. The only person who was completely calm, Akira, was trying to sneak away. From the situation that they were in; plus his distrust of Akira, Katsuya thought that Akira was the real cause of that situation. He thought that Akira did something bad and caused Shiori and Reina to get injured, or even maybe it was he who attacked Reina and Shiori.

Akira was already running away from that place. Alpha smiled at him and warned him.

“You can’t stop running, okay?”

“I know.”

Even without Alpha telling him, Akira ignored Katsuya's voice as he kept on running towards the HQ.

Katsuya was at a loss whether he should chase Akira or not. Then suddenly HQ staff's voice came out from Reina's terminal, and the staff was unaware that Akira was already gone from that place as he asked a question.

"Number 27, what was that sound? What's going on over there?"

Katsuya sounded obviously angry when he replied back.

"This is Katsuya from Drankam!! We just met up with the injured Hunters!"

"Who? What number?"

"…It's number 52!!"

"Where's number 27? Is he not there? I heard that there were 3 injured people including number 27."

Katsuya realized that number 27 was Akira as he answered back as if he was venting.

"If it's that guy, he looks completely fine and ran away!! I don't even know where he's going!!"

"…I see. The rest of the injured Hunters are from Drankam, right? Number 52, I'll put the other two back in your team, you take the command from here and on. That's all."

Katsuya yelled at the terminal.

"Wait!! Are you telling me to bring Reina and Shiori around rather than sending them back?"

"Your duty is to confirm your situation. Check how bad their injuries are and decide whether to bring them along with you or to let them rest in the defensive point. You can even bring them to the medical team if their injuries are serious. You guys decide what to do from there. Whether you

would send some people back or not, or proceed with your duties with the remaining Hunters, or whether you bring your whole team back since it doesn't seem like you can continue with your current situation, it's up to you guys from Drankam to discuss and decide on your own. Don't ask us for every single thing on what to do. Ask Drankam instead. Only inform the HQ if you decide that it's necessary to do so. We're also busy here, you know. That's all."

The HQ staff ended the call after saying that.

Katsuya could feel that the HQ was taking Shiori and Reina's situation lightly. His face was twitching with anger. He then quickly decided on what to do next.

"We'll take Shiori and Reina back to the HQ."

Taking everyone back to the HQ could be interpreted as abandoning his duty. Airi understood it, so she asked Katsuya.

"What about our duties?"

Katsuya smiled as he answered back.

"They told us to decide on our own. We'll return back to HQ, leave Reina and Shiori with the medical team, and then return back to our duty. After all, our friends' lives are much more important than our duty, right?"

Seeing how Katsuya prioritized his friends' lives over his duty, the other young Hunters in his team looked at him with approving gazes.

Although Yumina was not sure whether it was a good idea to bring everyone back, she felt like Katsuya would decide to be the one staying behind if she said anything, so she just kept quiet. She knew how skilled Shiori was and something had happened to render her in such a bad shape, so she did not want to let Katsuya take any risk by going alone.

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When Akira arrived at HQ, he went on to give his report about Yajima. He thought that the staff would be asking him a lot of questions again, but instead, he was let go after giving a simple report.

It was because they had already asked the necessary details when Akira was on his way back to the HQ together with Shiori and Reina. And also, while Akira was on his way back, the situation had changed. There seemed to be more of Yajima's friends found in the underground city and they killed some Hunters that the HQ had dispatched.

Akira let out cold sweat when the HQ staff told him that there were some deaths reported after the clash between them. If he had encountered more people who were as strong as Yajima on his way back, there was no doubt he would have been dead by now. He barely dodged the bullet back there.

Looking at Akira who was lightly shivering, Alpha just smiled and consoled.

"I'm glad we quickly left that place."

"You can say that again. I wonder why I'm always pushed into this kind of dangerous situation? Is it because I really ran out of luck?"

Alpha replied back as if she was cheering the mumbling Akira.

"I'm sure it's because you were thinking of leaving a beautiful hostage to die back then. You might need to do more good deeds in the future."

Akira looked annoyed.

"Don't be crazy. If I had threw down my weapon, there was no mistaking it that he would have killed me immediately, you know?"

"I bet you're right. Although you somehow saved her, that might not be enough to balance everything. Or it may be since you were able to save her ultimately, your luck increased and were able to get out from that unlucky place right before anything troublesome happened."

Akira mumbled.

“That’s just unreasonable.”

While it was true that if he had stayed together with Katsuya’s group, it might have turned into something troublesome. Akira did not want to think that it was because of luck that he was able to escape. If it was possible, he wanted to use his accumulated luck for something better.

He understood that Alpha was only joking in order to cheer him up. But for some reason, she sounded really convincing to Akira.

Although there were only a few minor external wounds, Akira’s body was actually in a terrible state. The cheap medicines were not enough to heal his wounds. So he asked the staff about the medical team and the staff explained to him about the details.

“I don’t mind if you want to meet the medical team. But let me tell you this beforehand, it’s not free. There are a lot of Hunters who misunderstand this point. So be careful with the bill.”

“What should I do to pay the medical bill?”

“You should negotiate it with the medical team. Most of the Hunters have their medical bills subtracted from their rewards. The amount of the bill depends on the medical services you seek and whether you have taken the insurance or not. Ahh, your terminal was broken, right? You should go and get a replacement first, the medical team won’t help you without the terminal. If you don’t share your location through the shared network, they might think that you’re going to run away without paying. So be careful about that too.”

Akira followed the staff’s suggestions to first get a new terminal before heading to the room where the medical team was on standby.

Although they were called as the medical team, there were many other Hunters who did not have a biological body like Akira. Some of them used nanomachines to enhance their bodies, some of them were cyborgs with human-like appearance, and some of them looked completely mechanical from the outside. These types of Hunters needed fixing rather than healing.

As Akira followed a board saying ‘biological body is this way’, a man wearing a white coat welcomed him.

That man, Yatsubayashi, looked more like a scientist who loved to do human experiments rather than a doctor. He was stationed there to heal Hunters with biological bodies.

Akira looked worried when he saw Yatsubayashi. Although he never went to a doctor before, it did not take him much to notice that Yatsubayashi was obviously a shady person.

Yatsubayashi welcomed Akira in high spirits.

“Welcome to Yatsubayashi clinic, Kuzusuhara ruin branch. Sorry to cut the chase, but how are you going to pay for the bill?”

“Subtract it from my reward.”

“Alright, got it. Ahhh, thanks to the aid from Kugamayama city management, you can get a free check-up. Check-up is free of cost but my other services costs money. Don’t hold any grudge against me if I don’t fix your body because you don’t have enough money, okay? Alright then, remove your clothes.”

Akira followed Yatsubayashi’s instructions and took off his augmented suit. Yatsubayashi used a strange camera-like tool and some kind of scanner to check Akira’s body. He also used other weird tools to do the check-up. With his current knowledge, Akira had no idea if all of those tools were really for checking his body or not.

It took about 10 minutes to finish the check-up. After which, Yatsubayashi gave Akira the result.

“I’m glad that it’s nothing serious. But I suggest that you get some treatment. So, what kind of treatment would you like to take?”

“My wounds are nothing serious? My limbs are screaming in pain though. I can only move around thanks to the cheap medicines that I’m taking.”

Akira seemed to doubt what he just heard. Yatsubayashi just smiled and answered.

“Serious injuries are those cases in which you have lost your limbs or have your internal organ gouged out or even destroyed, basically they’re injuries that win you a straight ticked to the hospital. Just a few cracks on your bones, or some internal bleedings, or damages from tired muscles are all small injuries.”

It seemed there was a big gap between Akira’s and Yatsubayashi’s standard for light injuries. But from the perspective of the Hunters, Yatsubayashi’s line of thinking was the correct one.

Akira smiled vaguely, he sounded as if he was half convinced.

“Can you heal my wounds at least so it won’t lower my fighting ability?”

“I see. There are various treatments that you can take, but I suggest you take the one for which normal insurance doesn’t apply.”

“I’m not in any insurance.”

Yatsubayashi looked surprised. After all, most of the Hunters in that place were in some type of insurance.

Yatsubayashi seemed delighted. It was at least an expression that a doctor would not make.

“That sounds great!! In that case, how about taking this medicine that I’m developing? This is my recommendation! You’re not in any insurance, right? So I’ll let you buy it for cheap!!”

Yatsubayashi grabbed a small container near him and showed it to Akira. The container was filled with a green liquid. It was a very dubious-looking medicine no matter how you slice it.

“No thanks. Since insurance doesn’t apply to that thing, it must be something unsafe.”

“It’s fine, don’t worry. It’s not like I made it from nothing. I made it by breaking down and analyzing the old-world medicine, then using that data to imitate its effect. I can guarantee its effect since I’ve already tried it on myself before. The reason why insurance doesn’t apply to it is because of the influence of the big companies, it’s set like that so people would choose the medicines manufactured by those big companies instead. This medicine is better, I can guarantee you at least that much! So, what do you think? It’s not like I can get the certification unless I have enough data and samples from people using it. It’ll also be better for the world if people can buy a cheap but powerful medicine, right? It’ll provide a better healing effect that might even save people’s lives. Just think of it as a good deed to regain some of your humanity that you guys tend to lose when you do dangerous works as Hunters.”

Yatsubayashi was trying hard to convince Akira.

From her observation of Yatsubayashi, Alpha said to Akira.

“Akira, I’ll at least tell you this, he’s not lying. He’s not trying to scam you or squeeze your money. I don’t think he’s planning of tricking you at all.”

“W-well, even if you tell me so, it’s just that… You know…”

“Well, that’s completely normal.”

Even if that medicine could not become mainstream because of the influence of the big pharmaceutical companies, if it was a medicine that had spread among the people and had earned a certification, then it at least should not have any bad side effects. No matter how many times Yatsubayashi used that medicine on himself in the past, it was not enough to convince Akira.

Yatsubayashi knew that Akira was hesitating. But hesitation was not equal to refusal. Yatsubayashi thought so as he urged Akira further.

“Ah, I know!! If you buy this medicine, I’ll also sell the old-world medicines that I have with me!! These are medicines that you can’t usually

buy unless you use Chrome!! But I'll sell them to you in Aurum!! What do you think?!"

Yatsubayashi pulled out a box from a bag near him and showed it to Akira. Akira was familiar with that box, it was similar to the medicine that he found back in Kuzusuhara ruin.

Akira confirmed that with Alpha.

"Alpha, isn't that…?"

"It doesn't seem like he's lying and that box is still sealed. I think it's the real thing. You would want to get that if it's possible."

Alpha and Akira agreed with each other. He knew well how powerful that medicine was. As such, he really wanted to get some of those medicines if it was possible.

"How many boxes are you willing to sell?"

"Just one for 2,000,000 Aurum. This medicine is usually used only for serious injuries, so it's not like I can sell it for cheap."

To be honest, it was actually a kind of insurance in case his medicine did not work. But of course, Yatsubayashi would not say that to Akira.

The price was reasonable. Although Akira was hesitating at first, he ended up taking that offer.

"Alright. I'll take that. Please subtract the payment from my reward."

"Alright then!!"

Yatsubayashi seemed delighted as he started to prepare for the treatment. Seeing that, Akira felt like he just made a bad decision and looked slightly worried. But he then resolved himself and accepted the treatment.

The treatment itself was finished in no time. They only put bandages soaked in that green liquid and injected that green liquid at some points in Akira's

body.

“That’s it. Just take a rest for the time being… Let’s say for about the next 1 hour. It won’t kill you if you move around, but its effect will be maximized if you just take rest. And also, don’t tell anyone that I sold you that medicine, okay? It’s not something that I usually sell, you know. So it would be troublesome if other Hunters come to me asking for the same thing.”

“Alright. How much for that treatment?”

“100,000 Aurum. You can look forward to its effect. Since insurance doesn’t apply for this one, I gave you a big discount for the treatment here. Thank you very much for cooperating with the treatment.”

Yatsubayashi smiled suspiciously. Akira frowned since he found some words that Yatsubayashi just said to be very questionable.

Akira did not know whether it was expensive or not. If it would recover his body to the point that his injuries would not lower his fighting ability in 1 hour, he thought that it was rather cheap.

Not to mention, he also got a powerful medicine, so he could use that in case if anything bad happened. Alpha also did not stop him, so it should be okay. So he just decided not to worry about that in order to conserve his mental strength.

Suddenly things got pretty busy around him. Akira looked over to the source of the commotion and saw some Hunters with severe injuries being carried to the medical team. Some of them were drenched in blood, some of them lost all of their 4 limbs, there was even a Hunter who had lost half of his body.

Yatsubayashi looked at those Hunters and said.

“Whoah, we have an emergency here. Everyone with light injuries would only get in the way. I’m sorry but can you guys move somewhere else? I want to save as many people as possible.”

“…Even if you say so, some of them are already dead, aren’t they?”

“That might not exactly be the case. Some of them have half mechanized brains and some of them are using nanomachines that would allow them to stay alive even after losing their neck for a short time. We might still be able to save those people if we hurry up. Well, of course, that is if they have enough money to pay us though. It’s not like we can turn you into a cyborg with zero cost after all. They might have to work for their whole life to pay the debt, but it’s not our problem. So there you have it, make way, make way.”

Akira took another look at those Hunters. He was surprised to know that Hunters with that level of injuries could still be saved as he moved away so that he would not get in the way.

Alpha smiled at Akira who was looking at those Hunters.

“It’s good that you only get light injuries.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

Akira would have joined that line of Hunters if he had made even the slightest mistake. He even bet that he would be dead if that had happened.

Before putting back his augmented suit, Akira replaced the energy pack in his augmented suit with a new one. He noticed that he had used way more energy than he had expected.

“We’ve used quite a lot of energy, don’t you think?”

“It’s because I took control of the augmented suit to execute crazy manoeuvres. So it can’t be helped. It’s a good thing that it’s not broken because of that.”

In order to make sure that Akira would survive the fight, Alpha controlled the augmented suit in a way that would definitely shorten its lifetime. Although it allowed Akira to survive, it was not cheap at all.

Akira could feel that the augmented suit was a bit stiff as he walked back to the HQ. The check-up result from Yatsubayashi was a good excuse to explain about Akira's injured state to HQ, as such, the HQ only assigned him to keep watch around the area near the HQ so he could take rest. He hoped that his shift would end without any more bad things happening.

__*__*__*__

There were a lot of crumbled buildings in the Kuzusuhara ruin. Behind one of those crumbled buildings, a big sized transport truck was parked as if it was hiding from sight. There were heavily armed people near that truck. It was Yajima's friends who were planning to carry out old-world relics from the underground city.

Since the mastermind of that plan, Yajima, was dead. The plan continued with Nelia and Kain at the helm.

Kain and Nelia had exited the underground city carrying the relics that Yajima had hidden. After they reached the surface, they blew up the hole to cover their tracks.

Their original plan was to run away to another city after retrieving all the relics that they had hidden in the underground city. The truck itself was well prepared to traverse the wasteland, it was big and very durable. There was a huge amount of expensive old-world relics piled on its tray. They only needed to escape that place together with their friends and they would be rich.

Of course, that was if they could escape that place with those relics. For some reason, they were still gathered in that place. It was because they encountered a problem.

Countless terminals that were fixed into Nelia's powered suit were connected to the truck. She was connecting to the truck's control device. Among all of them, she was the second-best when it came to operating the control device after Yajima died. She was now trying to take control of the truck's control device.

While Nelia was still trying to take control of the truck, Kain asked her, he did not even try to hide his displeasure.

“So, how’s it going?”

“…Nil.”

Nelia waved her hand as if she was giving up when she said that to Kain. Hearing those words, Kain vented the feelings inside his heart.

“…Dammit!! That damn Yajima, how dare he leave us with this shitty souvenir!!!”

Kain smacked the truck. His powered suit was big sized with equally big power. Thus it made a loud sound when he smacked the truck.

The truck was originally Yajima’s. It had an advanced control unit so that even an amateur would be able to drive that truck just fine. But the very source of their problem was that advanced control unit. The control unit prepared by Yajima was installed with an extra program from him.

It was the post-mortem revenge request program. It was a program that the Hunters could download from the dark web of the eastern district network. It was a program used by the cyborgs to collect the data of the person who killed them and send them over the network to make a request to kill that person. By killing that person, the one who completed that request would get rewards such as money from the requester’s hidden account or locations of hidden properties of the requester.

Yajima installed this program to the truck’s control device in case Kain or any of his friends betrayed him.

But Yajima was killed by Akira. That program had set Akira as the most likely person who killed Yajima. After all, he was the last person that Yajima met before he died. He was also the closest person to Yajima before the program’s connection was interrupted by the jamming smoke.

The control device of the truck was set to freeze until the target from the program was killed. Of course, they could just rip out the control device, but in order to install a new one, they would need a special set of skills. And they did not have that skill nor a spare control device that they could use.

The program could confirm the target's death using different methods depending on the setting of the program. Some badly made programs could be fooled using a similar mannequin doll, it might also be unable to confirm the death of the target even after the target of the request was killed. As for advanced programs, they confirmed the death of the target from submitting the image of the dead target.

Nelia was trying to bypass that confirmation process. But all of her trials ended in failure thanks to the advanced control device and the advanced program that someone spread in the darknet. She also did not have the skill to hack through the program.

Since Nelia could not do it, it meant that no one here could do it.

Nelia sighed and said to Kain and the others.

"There's nothing we can do about it, let's just give up."

Kain yelled back in anger.

"Give up, you say?!! Are you kidding me?! How much money do you think is riding on this plan?!! How much do you think all the relics that we gathered are worth?!! If we sell them, we can at least get 10,000,000,000 Aurum!!! No, we can get even more than that!!! Like hell, I would leave those relics here!!!"

The others around flashed looks of dread when Kain flared. If he went on a rampage with his formidable powered suit, no one in that place would be able to stop him.

Looking at Kain who was misunderstanding her words, Nelia exasperatedly said.

“Who said anything about giving up on the relics?”

“…What do you mean?”

“I was just saying to give up on bypassing that program.”

The terminal connected to the truck’s control device was showing the target of that program’s request. Nelia pointed her finger at that terminal and said.

“Let’s go and kill this boy.”

On that terminal was the image of Akira.

Silavin: Hey Akira… how’s that good luck going for you?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 57, Force Field Armour

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Akira continued keeping watch around the HQ and there was no problem in particular. Thanks to Yastsubayashi's treatment, the pain from his wounds slowly subsided and he was recovering from his fatigue. He was able to fight normally now.

Akira lightly moved his arm to check his body.

"It seems that treatment actually works, huh."

"Well, he did say that he made the liquid by analyzing old-world medicine. Your arms seem to be properly healed, and not to mention that we got old-world medicine too. All in all, that was a good decision."

Akira replied optimistically as he heard Alpha, who sounded a bit surprised.

"So basically it was good luck, huh. Well, after all of that bad luck, I guess this will reset the score back to zero."

He thought that he had already gone through the last bad luck for the day.

Not too far from where Akira was, there was an HQ staff who was talking with his subordinates, he sounded a bit irritated.

“We still can’t contact the temporary base?”

“We’re still trying to contact them, but we can’t get any connections at all. We won’t be able to contact the temporary base until the colourless mist weakens. It might be a better idea to send some Hunters from the underground to the surface.”

“Most of the Hunters here are contracted to work underground. We might need to change the details of the request if we have to send them to the surface, but we don’t have the right to do so. Sending them to fight those relics thieves is already barely outside their job description, you know? So we can’t do that!”

The HQ was having a huge headache in deciding how to deal with the rest of Yajima’s friends. Although the HQ successfully flushed them out from the underground, the HQ sacrificed a lot of Hunters to do so.

It was possible for them to request Hunters to go down there due to the lack of information. But now they knew there were a group of at least 2 people in the surface equipped with powered suits and powerful weaponry. So they did not have the authority to send the Hunters, who came for the Yarata Scorpion nests extermination request, to hunt for that group.

Not to mention, there was a good chance they already ran far away from the ruin with all the relics that they stole. The HQ did not think that they would be able to find that group even if they searched around the area.

“It can’t be helped then. We have no other choice but to send someone to the temporary base and directly convey the message. I’m sure they’re also thinking of sending someone this way. Find a Hunter suitable for the job and dispatch him immediately.”

“Yessir.”

His men immediately operated their terminal to look for a suitable Hunter for the job.

They could not pick Hunters who were already deep inside the underground city since it would take some time for that Hunter to return to the HQ. They also could not pick someone from Drankam. If they assigned someone affiliated with a particular organization to a job outside their contract, the HQ would need to negotiate with the manager of that organization which would take some time.

They needed an individual Hunter with no affiliation and who was already near the HQ. Someone who would not cause any problem if they were sent away from that place. The staff were looking for a Hunter who fulfilled all of those conditions.

Fortunately enough, they immediately found one. And that Hunter was Akira.

"…So in short, I just need to carry this terminal to the temporary base, right?"

"That's right. To be more precise, you just need to go close enough to get a connection with the temporary base and the terminal will automatically send the message. So please, can you do that for us? You may finish your shift and immediately return back home right after that. You just got yourself treated, right? So you must be injured. You can just go, quickly finish it, return back home and then take a good rest. I'm sure you also want to go back home as soon as possible, you just need to visit the temporary base on your way back home."

Akira thought for a while. It sounded too good to be true for him.

[Welp, it seems that I really exhausted all of my bad luck for today. I guess I should quickly go back home, take a good bath, sleep well and get myself ready for my tomorrow's share of bad luck.]

Since he was told that he was allowed to finish his shift and return back immediately after doing that, it made him really want to go back home as

soon as possible. So Akira accepted that request and got himself ready to return back home.

Akira actually still had a lot of time left until he finished his shift. So he was happy that he could leave the underground city sooner than expected. He went to pick up his bike that he parked not too far away from the building connected to the underground city. He was smiling happily as he said to Alpha.

“My job for today will be finished after I visit the temporary base. Let’s finish this, quickly return back to the inn, and take a good rest.”

“Yep, let’s do that. Your augmented suit is also damaged, so you might want to send it for repair as soon as possible. It would be great if we can get it temporarily fixed in Shizuka’s shop though.”

“Well, in that case, I guess I have to visit Shizuka-san’s shop on my way back.”

Akira got on his bike and headed to the temporary base. Most of the rubbles and wreckages were already cleaned out from the road connecting to the temporary base. If nothing bad happened, he would be able to reach the temporary base in no time.

Alpha looked relaxed as she said to Akira.

“Akira, it seems that the colourless mist around the temporary base is getting thicker. Just to be safe, I’ll lower the speed.”

“Roger that. How about this area? Your detection ability falls off inside a thick colourless mist, right?”

“It’s alright. Although we’re in a thick colourless mist, my detection ability is still better in this open place compared to when we were in the underground.”

“Haah, that only makes me not want to go back to the underground even more. I wonder if we can come up with some kind of excuses so that the

city would reduce the length of my contract.”

“Your only chance is if you pay someone with good negotiating skill.”

“I have neither the connection nor the money to do that.”

Akira just gave up as he rode his bike through the wasteland.

He paced his bike to the temporary base. But in all actuality, it was Alpha who was controlling the bike. He was just gripping on the handle and sitting on the seat. But since Alpha was also controlling his augmented suit, it could be said that it was her who was gripping the handle too. So in short, he was actually doing nothing, it was all done by Alpha.

Thus Akira was caught off guard when Alpha suddenly made a 90 degrees turn.

He turned to Alpha in reflex and asked her why she did that so suddenly.

“Alpha!? Why did you do that…?!”

Akira’s face froze the moment he saw what was coming at him. He was leaning so low that his shoulder almost touched the ground as he turned his head away from the ground. Far away from him, he could see a tall building crumbling down against the backdrop of the blue sky together with hundreds of small missiles that were pouring down in his direction.

The countless small missiles cut through the colourless mist and left traces in the sky as they rained down on the area around him. Some of them hit the ground while some of them hit the walls of the buildings scattered around the area followed by loud explosions that echoed through the area. They wrapped the area with explosions and smokes as they destroyed buildings and the paved road, leaving the area filled with new rubbles.

Kain and Nelia were standing not too far from the area where the missiles rained down. Since the surface was wide open compared to the cramped underground, they could freely use the new heavy weapons that they installed on their powered suits.

Especially Kain, he was carrying nothing but heavy weaponry. He was even carrying missile pods that were normally only installed on a special type of tank or vehicle.

Kain was the one who unleashed those small missiles toward Akira. He detached the empty missile pod from his powered suit, the missile pod made a loud banging sound as it fell to the ground.

He sounded delighted as he said.

“And here I was at loss on how we are going to kill that boy, but to think that he would come out to the surface by himself!! We’re really lucky, aren’t we? There won’t be much trouble now to remove the lock from the truck’s control device.”

Kain was in high spirits. He was savouring the feeling of satisfaction from killing his target by pouring down countless missiles at him. But that was not all, it was also because he thought he was finally able to remove the person who was preventing him from carrying all the old-world relics that he had gathered.

Nelia sounded completely normal as she replied back.

“Although I’ve prepared so many different plans to go back to the underground, I guess they’re all for naught now, huh. Well, it doesn’t really matter, it’s a good thing that he reduced the work for us.”

Kain and Nelia were gazing towards the Kuzusuhara ruin, which was blanketed in smoke, through the camera of their powered suits. Kain emptied 1 whole missile pod at Akira, so he thought that Akira would be dead for sure.

“Nelia, is the lock on the truck removed yet?”

Nelia sent the image captured from her powered suit’s camera to the truck’s control device. If the control device could confirm Akira’s death from that image, it should be able to remove the lock on the control device.

Nelia checked the control unit.

“…Nope. It’s still locked.”

“Huh?! But how?! That should kill him, right?!!”

“How would I know? Either it can’t confirm the kill because of the smokes, or that boy is still alive and kicking. I’m sure it would be able to confirm the kill if we show the corpse up close or at least the head of that boy. I don’t mind if you use big explosives to kill him, but if the program can’t confirm the kill because of that, it would be all on you, okay?”

“I know, I know. I just need to look for his corpse, right? I’ll go.”

Kain went to look for Akira’s corpse. The powerful reverse joint of his powered suit crushed the wreckages under him as he walked towards the ruin. Suddenly, a building close to him crumbled right onto his head, but it did not even damage Kain’s powered suit.

When he arrived at where Akira was, he used his head camera to look for Akira’s body. But he could not find anything, not even a trace of flesh or blood.

“Nope, nothing at all.”

Nelia could hear Kain’s mumbling, so she snapped at him.

“Don’t give me that!! He might be buried under the rubbles. Just dig through the rubbles and check the area using your information-gathering device! It should be an easy job for your powered suit, right?!!”

“Yeah yeah. Give me a few minutes.”

Kain grabbed the wreckages using his huge hand and threw them out of the road. The huge wreckage made a loud banging sound as they landed on the ground. It simply showed the strength of his powered suit.

But even then, he could not find Akira’s body under the rubbles. But instead, he found a destroyed bike. It was the bike that Akira was riding.

The completely destroyed bike was a testament to Kain's overwhelming firepower.

"I found his bike, he should be near."

"There's nothing we can do with the bike, find the body!!"

"I'm searching for it right now!!"

Kain had vented his irritation by using his overwhelming firepower. He regretted his choice now as he thought that he should have used something that would have caused less damage to the area.

He thought that Akira's body should be around, so he pulled out his information-gathering device to scan the area. With its current setting, it should be able to find any corpse buried under the rubbles.

Kain was looking for Akira's body while removing the rubbles that were reducing the accuracy of his information-gathering device. But he still could not find anything.

"…Still nothing. Did his body get thrown away because of the explosion?"

He thought so and increased the scan-range of his information-gathering device. But he still could not find any signal that looked like Akira's dead body. So he slowly increased the scan range, even then, he still could not find anything.

Kain started to get impatient and set the scan range to the max. He got a signal right after he did it.

"Over there, huh!!"

He sounded happy as he turned the camera of his powered suit towards the direction of that signal. But the moment he did that, he could see Akira's CWH anti-material rifle's muzzle staring straight at him.

When the missiles rained down on Akira, Alpha moved his body and tried her best to avoid the missiles.

The moment her calculation showed that it was impossible to evade all of the small missiles, she quickly decided to move Akira to the safest place possible near him. She increased the output of the augmented suit to the maximum and intentionally let the bike fall to the ground. Using the inertia, Akira slid on his leg under the bike and used the bike as a shield from the missiles.

Akira was able to defend himself from the missiles by using his bike as a shield. He also did not fight the explosions as he let the shockwave throw his body and quickly fixed his body position before landing to soften the blow.

Everything happened in a short span of time with unbelievable accuracy. Even the slightest error would have spelt doom for Akira. Alpha controlled his augmented suit and moved his body with absolute accuracy.

But even so, the damage was not small. The impact from the shockwave of the missiles, the stress that the augmented suit put on his body to pull those crazy manoeuvres, plus the countless impacts that his body absorbed when he was slammed to the ground, all of them drained Akira's consciousness bit by bit.

In the midst of that dangerous situation, Akira even lost consciousness for a few seconds. It was a complete coincidence that he was not dead, it could even be said that it was also thanks to his good luck. The good luck that he had the moment he met Alpha continued until now as it let him survive this attack.

Akira who just regained his consciousness was still in a daze as he tried to confirm the situation around him. Although he had his cheek touching the ground, he did not realize that he was lying on the ground.

[…What… What just happened…? Did I just fall asleep…? Since when I fell asleep? Where am I? Is this my room? Did I get back to my room…? Am I already in my room? Or am I still on my way back?]

Akira kept asking himself those questions in confusion. He slowly got his senses back and eventually noticed Alpha who was calling him.

“Akira!! Wake up!! Akira!! If you don’t want to die here, get up!!”

Alpha was yelling at him. In the past, no matter how bad the situation was, in contrast to Akira who was panicking, she would always smile. But that Alpha was yelling at him right now. The moment he noticed it, he quickly snapped back to his senses.

Akira tried to push his body up. But he could feel stinging pain run through his whole body from Kain’s missile barrage. It made him grimace in pain and dull his movements. But then Alpha forced his body to move by controlling his augmented suit.

“Shoot back at the enemy!! Right now!! Quickly!!”

Akira quickly extended his hand to the CWH anti-material rifle that was lying on the ground. He gritted his teeth enduring the pain while trying to follow Alpha’s orders.

He understood very well from his experience that if he did not do what Alpha told him as fast as he could, his survival chance would take a dive.

He followed the movement of his augmented suit to grab his CWH anti-material rifle and took an aim. He did not even question whether the person, who he was aiming, was really an enemy or not.

Kain could not move quick enough as Akira pulled the trigger faster than he could evade. The CWH special ammo hit Kain’s powered suit and made a loud banging sound that echoed through the wasteland.

A portion of the impact energy was converted into a blinding flash. Although the impact was still enough to throw him off, the automatic balance adjustment function of his powered suit saved Kain from falling to the ground.

Kain used all the weapons that his 4 arms were carrying to shoot back at Akira even before he could regain his balance. The heavy weapons that were handled using his strength-focused powered suit released countless

bullets towards Akira. The bullets were able to pierce, destroy and crush any rubbles and wreckage along their way.

The moment he saw Kain's arms move, Akira quickly took evasive action. Thanks to that, he was able to avoid the bullets' barrage.

Nelia called Kain.

"Kain? What just happened? Did you find a monster or something?"

Kain answered back in panic.

"It's that boy!! He's still alive!!"

"Is that so? Was he on the verge of death? You adjusted the missiles to at least leave a corpse behind, right? So then, did you just shoot him to make sure that he's dead? Did you properly kill him this time?"

"That's not it!! That boy evaded the missiles barrage!! Moreover, he got a shot at me!! And he also evaded my shot just now!! He even depleted a huge chunk of my force field energy with his shot!! Was that CWH special ammo?!! That's the ammo you usually use for hunting tanks or mechanical monsters, right?! Isn't there only Yarata scorpions in the underground?!! So why the heck he's using that ammo?!! This is just too strange!!"

The level of firepower that was normally used to fight Yarata scorpions would not be able to breach Kain's forcefield armour. But it was a completely different story if it was CWH special ammo.

Kain could not help but get panicked. After all, he thought that it would be an easy job, a one-way fight thanks to his superior equipment, but instead, he found himself fighting for his life now.

"Judging from the flash of light that the force field made, his shot packed a powerful punch! Nelia!! You sent me first since you knew that this would happen, didn't you?!!"

"Like hell if I knew. But I did expect him to be someone pretty strong since he killed Yajima. You should at least know that much, right?"

“W-well, you’re right, but still…”

Nelia made a guess about the situation and said to Kain.

“Before he died, Yajima did say that it might be an agent sent by the city, remember? So that might be him. Yajima might have made a mistake during the planning and got the whole plan leaked out. Or at least, something leaked out and the city somehow got suspicious that he would be stealing the relics. So that boy might be an agent who was sent by the city to blend in with the Hunters in the underground. It won’t be strange for him to be using CWH special ammo if he was expecting to fight against relics burglars.”

Although Nelia was absolutely wrong, her explanation fit the current situation. Kain was getting more and more panicked now.

“What should we do then? If that’s true, then in the worst-case scenario, the city might even have sent its army this way, you know? There’s no way we can deal with that.”

“If the city was seriously expecting this to happen, there’s no way they would send him alone like this. So in short, he was sent just for caution’s sake. There should be no problem if we kill him quickly. Fortunately, thanks to the colourless mist, he shouldn’t be able to contact the temporary base at the moment. So we have some time to kill him.”

“In short, we just need to kill him fast and get out of this place, right?”

“Yep, that’s right. Let’s go.”

Kain and Nelia chased Akira. There was a good chance that the defense squad from the city was heading their way. But fortunately, they had plenty of time to kill Akira.

The relics that they had gathered would earn them a huge amount of money. Because of that, they just could not easily give up on killing Akira.

After escaping the barrage from Kain, Akira was running among the ruins. His bike was already destroyed, so he had no choice but to use his legs.

Akira popped out the medicines that he bought from Yatsubayashi. The intense pain slowly subsided from his body, but it was no more than the effect of painkillers from the medicines, his body was still in a very bad condition.

He wanted to move his body with his own will, but his limbs were not in the condition to listen to him. As such, Alpha was forcefully moving his body through the augmented suit to make him run.

Akira looked grim as he said.

“Alpha!! That guy just took the CWH special ammo head-on and survived?!!”

“That’s a force field armour. The impact energy from the bullet was converted into that flash of light. The force field can reduce the impact from external force by converting a portion of the impact energy into light, you see…”

“That’s not it!! I wasn’t asking about how he did that, I was asking what I should do now?! He can take CWH special ammo head-on, so what can I do to fight him?!!”

“I guess there’s no other choice but to keep shooting at him hoping that it would at least deal some damages.”

“Isn’t there any weakness?”

“In this situation, that would be no.”

Akira became worried. The CWH special ammo had more than enough firepower to kill any kind of monsters that he could find in that area. It could destroy any monsters as long as he hit his shot, he knew that and took solace in its firepower.

But right now, he was fighting against someone who could survive his bullet and even shoot back at him right after. It was a shocking thing to him.

Alpha noticed what Akira was feeling.

“Just don’t think about it for now and get some distance from him. You also have run out of medicines too. I’ll do anything that I can, just like always.”

“…You’re right. I’ll be counting on you.”

“Leave it to me.”

Alpha replied back firmly, but she was still not smiling.

She was floating ahead of Akira while guiding him with a serious face. Akira, who saw her expression, kept running while hoping that her support would be able to handle this bad luck.

Akira followed Alpha’s guide to run through buildings that were scattered in the Kuzusuhara ruin. Eventually, he arrived on the third floor of a building where he could take a peek outside from his position.

Alpha asked Akira about his body condition.

“Akira, how are you feeling right now?”

Akira moved his limbs to check them, he was still looking at his hand as he said.

“…I don’t feel pain anymore. But I think this is because of the painkiller. Although I can move my limbs, I don’t know if they’re okay inside.”

Akira seemed to be able to move his limbs just fine. But that was only because of his augmented suit, he had no idea how it looked under his augmented suit, or more like, he did not even want to imagine it.

Alpha made a serious face as she told Akira.

“Akira, try not to move at all to maximize the effect of the medicines. If they chase you all the way here, you’ll make your stand in this place. So get your resolve ready.”

“…I understand. It doesn’t look like I can run away, huh?”

“Looking at their ability to move, search, and the power of their weaponry, I think it’s highly unlikely that you can run away from them. Judging from their first attack, you would have zero chance to win if you get out into an open space. Even back then with that amount of wreckages and buildings around, you were only able to get out in one piece from there by using your bike as a shield, you remember?”

“I don’t remember at all, so something like that happened, huh?”

“It’s really regrettable that we lost the bike. If you had the bike now, you might have been able to run away from them. But since it would be meaningless if the bike was okay while you’re not, I guess that was a necessary sacrifice.”

“I see… And it’s not like I can run away from them using my legs, huh?”

Alpha replied back jokingly.

“Want to try running away from them hoping that you’re lucky that they don’t have the expected mobility or scanning range or firepower?”

Akira smiled bitterly.

“No thanks. I’m not expecting to find any more good luck after I met you.”

Akira used all his life-worth of luck when he met Alpha. That was why during his dangerous Hunter work, he would try to do good deeds to replenish his scarce supply of good luck and then use it in tandem with Alpha’s support to overcome any problems. She also told him something similar to that in the past and he believed it.

That was why he subconsciously believed that the moment he met a problem that Alpha’s support could not deal with, he would not be able to

do anything against it with his own power and he would just drop dead.

Of course, he would fight back as hard as he could. After all, he had resolved himself to fight back as hard as he could in the face of death. But even so, although he was planning to fight back, there was a trace of resignation since he also knew that it would be pointless and it would not change the outcome no matter how hard he fought.

As Akira replied back through telepathy, a part of his feeling and emotion that he did not convert into words were also unintentionally sent to Alpha.

Alpha who received that message said to him resolutely.

“Akira, I’ll say this to you upfront. I have no plan of losing. Do you think that my support is something so worthless that it would not be able to fight back this level of a bad situation?”

Akira stared at Alpha as she stared back at him.

It was not like Alpha was actually there. Akira was only seeing her image that was added into his vision. He understood that very well, but even so, he kept his eyes locked at that image of Alpha.

The image of Alpha that he was staring at was looking back at him. It was not like those eyes were actually looking at him, but even so, Alpha kept staring at him.

“Akira, get your resolve ready. If you do so, this will just be like business as usual.”

Alpha smiled. Akira stared at her smile, there was a trace of his usual trust in his eyes. His subconscious shifted from fighting back as hard as he could in a futile fight into fighting back as hard as he could to survive the fight.

Akira lightly sighed and smiled in return.

“Getting my resolve ready is my responsibility, huh? Alright, I’m sorry I got all pessimistic. Alright then! I’m ready!”

Just like he always did until now, in order to survive the harsh life that he was living or to cross the countless dangerous bridges that he had faced, Akira stood up.

Alpha smiled and said.

“That’s the way I like it.”

Seeing how Akira stood up, leaving all his hesitations behind, Alpha smiled happily. At that moment, it could be said that her expression agreed with her honest feeling.

After all, seeing how her words could change Akira’s inner will to a better direction, showed the fact that she was able to manipulate his will the way she wanted and that her will adjustment protocol was functioning as expected.

Silavin: Damn. After reading this, I feel so bad for Akira. Boy getting played by HQ, Alpha and these two new Hunters who are just hunting him down for money.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 58, Searching Method

Index

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Nelia and Kain were easily able to find the building where Akira was hiding by following his tracks.

Nelia's and Kain's powered suits were equipped with advanced information-gathering devices. Not to mention, there were particular substances stuck on Akira's body such as dust from Kain's missile barrage. So, they only needed to increase the sensitivity of their own information-gathering device to find Akira's trace even inside the thick colourless mist.

Kain looked at the building and asked Nelia.

"That building, huh? Is he thinking that we'll just catch up with him if he runs away?"

"Yup, maybe he thinks so. It's a good thing that we don't have to chase him. Let's just quickly finish this."

"You're right."

The moment he said that, Kain's force field armour flashed brightly from the impact of a bullet. Away from them, Akira was aiming at Kain from the

window of that building.

Nelia hid behind Kain.

“It seems that the boy is expecting a fight.”

“That damn brat, looking down on us!!”

Kain’s powered suit’s control device quickly analyzed the impact angle and made a conjecture about where the shot came from. The camera on the head of his powered suit captured the image of Akira holding his CWH anti-material rifle on one of that building’s windows.

Kain quickly aimed his 4 big guns toward Akira’s direction. Those huge cannons then released a barrage of warheads at Akira, causing a loud bang.

Those big guns normally could only be used by humanoid mechanical soldiers, but Kain was able to handle them thanks to his powered suit. The warheads released by those big guns could tear metals as if they were sheets of paper. But even so, they were only able to cause slight damage to that building.

Nelia was shocked.

“That’s one strong building. Although it might only be the outer wall that is durable, I wonder how long it has been standing there.”

There were many types of old-world buildings. Their locations, positions and ages showed the different techniques and technologies used to construct those buildings. The people of the eastern district did not know for sure about the era and the culture when the Kuzusuhara ruin was constructed. But by seeing just how strong the building in which Akira was hiding, Nelia and Kain caught a glimpse of the culture and the era when Kuzusuhara was thriving.

But Kain just brushed Nelia’s question.

“Like hell if I know! So how was that? Did that finish him off?”

“Nope, the control device is still locked.”

“He survived that again?!!”

As Kain shouted, he took another shot from CWH special ammo. Akira had evaded that barrage as he ran through the hallway and shot Kain from another window.

“That damn br-…!!!!”

Another shot hit Kain, cutting his words midway. Akira judged that Kain would not shoot back at him, so he quickly took another shot at Kain.

“…Dammit!!!”

Kain fixed his stance and readied his guns again. Nelia stood behind him and also helped him shoot back. They showered the window, where Akira was, with bullets that would easily turn a tank into papier-mâché. Those bullets passed through that window and created holes on the wall inside that building.

Since Alpha told Akira to quickly leave that position, he was able to avoid those bullets. As he was running through the hallway, his face turned grim when he saw the walls that were about to crumble down after the recent barrage.

“Yikes!! That’s scary!! I won’t even leave a trace if I get caught in that!!”

“Although it’s not as strong as CWH special ammo, with a similar budget, that barrage has more or less the same amount of destructive power.”

“I can only shoot one bullet at a time while he can go full auto. I’ll be dead if I get shot even once, while on the other hand, he can take a direct hit from CWH special ammo just fine. This is just crazy.”

Akira smiled bitterly. Although he had decided to stand up against Nelia and Kain, it did not make them any weaker.

Akira looked at the CWH anti-material rifle in his hand. It was indeed a rifle that carried overwhelming firepower when he was underground, but now, it was barely able to do any damage.

But even so, it was true that it was his lifeline. Even if he loaded AP bullets into his AAH rifle, it would only ricochet on Kain's powered suit like water falling on an umbrella.

(p4553r: AP bullets are Armor Piercing bullets)

"Although I heard that this CWH special ammo can easily destroy a tank…"

"But they didn't say that it can easily destroy any tanks, right?"

"Well, that's true. It's just that I'm starting to doubt whether it can even do anything since it seems that my shots barely damage him at all. So how much do my shots affect him? Wait, it does affect him, right?"

"That big sized powered suit must have an equally big generator. I bet half of the generator output is routed to maintain his force field armour. Although it doesn't look like it had any effects, there's no doubt that each shot shaved its energy. So don't worry about it and keep shooting."

"Roger that."

No matter how much it affected Kain, there was a limit on how much Akira could do. He crouched close to the ground while moving through the hallway to his next shooting position.

As Akira was crouching through the hallway, he could clearly see Nelia and Kain through the wall, it was thanks to the vision enhancement from Alpha.

Because of that, Akira was able to quickly line his aim at them the moment he peeked out through the window. If he took more time aiming, it would not give him enough time to evade the returning fire. Even the slightest delay would be fatal. He heightened his focus to the peak to maintain a high

level of accuracy, he could even feel the time stretched out as he kept shooting.

Akira peeked out for a short moment through the window and sniped Kain, he then quickly pulled back and moved to his next shooting position before Kain could shoot back at him. Akira was the mole in their game of whack-a-mole, but in his case, one whack would turn him into minced meat. In order to avoid getting whacked and to get the chance to shoot Kain at the same time, Akira repeatedly executed that dangerous sniping.

On the other hand, the player in their whack-a-mole game, Kain, was aiming his heavy weapons toward the windows of that building while waiting for Akira to show himself. He was waiting to see Akira's muzzle the moment Akira took his aim. The 4 heavy weapons he was carrying were aimed at 4 different windows of that building, but of course, there were more windows in that building than his limbs.

Kain aimed his guns toward the windows that he guessed Akira would shoot from, he set his rifles ready so he could pull the trigger the moment Akira peeked out. If Akira showed up in any of the windows that he was aiming, it would be the end for Akira. Thanks to his forcefield armour, even if his guess was wrong and took a direct hit from Akira, he could keep on playing this game just fine. He absolutely had the upper hand here.

Akira kept on shooting from the windows that Kain was not aiming at. Although the impact threw Kain off-balance, he was able to quickly return fire. But the moment he did that, Akira had already pulled back and was on his way to the other window.

"A miss, huh. Next!"

Akira took another shot from a different window, Kain countered back, but it was too late. The extension limbs of Kain's powered suit were quite heavy. Not to mention that the 4 big cannons that those limbs were carrying added to the total weight he was supporting. On top of that, most of the generator's output was routed to his forcefield armour. Thanks to that, his movement was greatly slowed down.

“No luck. Next then.”

He only needed one correct guess as to where Akira would shoot from and it would be his win. But Akira was able to keep avoiding the windows that he was watching. Statistically speaking, if it was completely a uniform random chance, he would have killed Akira about 3 times by now.

Kain kept on receiving CWH bullets from Akira while trying to shoot back at him. He kept on hoping that his next guess would finally get a hit, but after that so many misses, Kain started getting irritated.

“Next…!! Next…!! Next…!! Dammit!! Next!!”

Kain thought that it was all because of his bad luck and started getting more and more annoyed, but in truth, that was not the case. Alpha was telling Akira where to shoot, she kept picking the right windows where he would be able to easily evade Kain’s attack.

With her superior detection ability, Alpha was able to ascertain Kain’s stance and accurately calculate where he was aiming. She knew exactly where he was aiming and she placed Akira in the safest window when he sniped Kain.

Kain noticed that Akira was somehow able to read his guesses. He didn’t notice it until now because Akira was only able to barely evade getting hit. If Akira was able to perfectly evade his aims without any trouble, he would have found out sooner. Akira’s lack of skill made him notice it later.

“Dammit!! Dammit!! F*cking dammit!!!”

Kain yelled in anger. Nelia looked annoyed as she said.

“Kain, you’re too noisy. If you want to shout, cut the connection first.”

“Nelia!! You should take a better aim than that!!!”

“I’m doing that even without you telling me!! He’s evading my shots too. Moreover, I never thought that he could evade this well. As expected of

someone who killed Yajima, he might really be an agent from the city.”

Nelia continued wording out her guess.

“This means that he’s somehow able to accurately read our movements, huh? I guess that’s also the reason why he could survive that missile barrage from you.”

Kain sounded surprised as he replied.

“What do you mean? Even if he’s really an agent from the city, does it have anything to do with his ability to evade our attacks? Or is it that he’s carrying some kind of advanced information-gathering device to read our movement since he’s an agent? That’s just impossible!! Are you telling me that he’s using some kind of advanced information-gathering device that allows him to completely see our movement even from this distance? We’re under the colourless mist right now, you know? Wait, it’s possible that he’s using one, but that level of an information-gathering device is something that the Hunters in the frontline would use. There’s no way someone around this area would use something like that.”

“That’s not what I’m saying. But I guess, it’s something similar.”

Kain got more irritated since Nelia was being cheeky.

“Yeah, right, so what? Just tell me already!”

“I’m sure that you at least know some facilities in this Kuzusuhara ruin are still operating, right? It’s rather obvious when you see those big buildings in the deeper part of the ruin. There are many important facilities in the ruin that are guarded by powerful securities even now. I heard that the city plans to eventually control those facilities.”

“I at least know that much. So, what does it have to do with this?”

“I heard that among the relics that they brought back from the ruin, they found a device showing the full map of Kuzusuhara ruin in real-time… Or was it the technology to access the full map of the ruin anytime…?”

“So then what?? Just tell me already!!”

“What a clueless man. Just like I said, that relic shows the full map of the ruin, all the details, and in real-time. You know it yourself just how unbelievable the old-world technologies are, right? In the worst-case scenario, he might be able to trace even every single bullet that we shoot at him. Of course, that would mean he can do the same for us too. So in short, he might be using that relic as an advanced information-gathering device which can only be used in this ruin. Using its data, he would be able to know where we’re aiming.”

Kain was flabbergasted.

“…Seriously?”

“Well, it’s just a possibility. Although it’s just silly talk, there’s another rumour coming around the same time when the rumour about that relic spread. That ghost story of the Kuzusuhara ruin, the beguiling ghost. I heard that the people, who could access that full map by some kind of means, were able to see that ghost and always ended up dead. Well, it might be just some kind of rumour that the city spread to prevent people from trying to connect to that network which somehow leaked out. That’s why, if he’s really an agent from the city, he might be connected to that network…”

Nelia seemed to be enjoying boasting her knowledge, but she suddenly realized that Kain had gone silent.

“…Kain? Hmm? Kain?!!”

Kain shouted. He sounded very irritated.

“…That damn brat!!”

The mole in this whack-a-mole game knew exactly where he would hit. Kain was so angry since he felt as if Akira was playing him for a fool.

“I’ll f*cking kill you!!”

Kain readied his gun to shoot all the windows in that building.

Akira was in the midst of moving to his next shooting position, but Alpha suddenly said to him with a grim face.

“Akira!! Go deeper into the building!!!”

Alpha moved his augmented suit the moment she said that. She moved him to the deeper part of the building through the hallway that connected the outer side of the building. Akira did not try to resist as he ran through the hallway.

Akira ran through rooms filled with wreckages as he tried to go as far away as possible from where he was. He understood from Alpha’s voice and expression that it was extremely dangerous to stay there, but he did not know why.

Before he could say anything, something happened that made him understand without even the need of asking Alpha. He could hear countless explosions behind him, the shockwaves and the rumbles from those explosions reached him as a piece of it flew past him. The area was filled with smokes soon after.

Kain emptied 2 missile pods onto that building. The missiles destroyed all the windows on the floor where Akira shot from. Some of them passed through the windows and destroyed the walls inside that building.

The explosion funnelled through the narrow hallway and smoke burst out from the windows.

Nelia panicked.

“Whoah there! What do you think you’re doing?! Didn’t I tell you before that the control device wouldn’t be able to confirm the target’s death if you turn that boy into minced meat?!!”

Kain yelled back.

“Shut up!! If he’s really an agent from the city, his corpse would at least get left behind!! And this is way better than wasting our time trying to hit him!!

Or more like, if this doesn’t confirm his death, the death confirmation feature of that thing might be broken in the first place. The program should be able to recognize that the key target to remove its lock was in that building!! So how was that? Did you get the kill confirmation?”

“Wait for a sec, I’ll check… Nope, still locked.”

“Hah!! Is it saying that the target is not dead yet according to the configuration of that program? That Yajima, it’s not like he set the program so it would never get unlocked, right?”

“As far as I can check, there’s no trace that the kill confirmation function was ever modified in the past.”

Kain was obviously irritated, knowing which, Nelia sighed.

“…It can’t be helped then. I’ll go up close and check it myself. I’m sure I just need to get close enough to find at least a piece of his dead body. But in case if he’s still alive, I’ll just go ahead and kill him myself.”

“Are you going alone?”

“It would be bad if you try to blow him up again for no good reason. It’ll be better if I go alone.”

Nelia’s powered suit opened up and she jumped out from it.

Just like Yajima, Nelia was a cyborg. She looked like a young girl from the outside, it was because she adjusted her cyborg body to look like a young attractive girl. If it was a fully all-natural organic body, she would not be able to get such a level of beauty unless she was born with that kind of blessing.

Nelia was using a half-transparent, thin bodysuit. Some cyborgs regarded their bodies as if they were replaceable articles like a piece of cloth, that was why those people had no problem with showing their skin. There were also some cyborgs who used sexy clothes to boast to other people that their artificial bodies were no different from natural bodies. Either she was one

of them or maybe even both, the bodysuit she was using only covered half of her body. There was a cord coming out from one of her exposed body parts, it was connected to her powered suit.

When Nelia pulled the cord off from a plug, it quickly retracted back to her powered suit. She then looked up to Kain.

“I’ll contact you if anything bad happens. Keep your eyes on the area around the building. I’ll leave my powered suit here since it’ll only restrict my movement inside the building, just make sure to keep your hands away from it, okay?”

Kain replied back.

“Yeah yeah, you’re not going to bring a rifle with you this time? If you want one, I’ll lend you mine. It’s a bit huge though.”

Kain sounded as if he was teasing Nelia as he moved one of his big guns.

“No thanks, it won’t be useful in close quarters.”

Nelia smiled confidently. She then pulled a belt from her powered suit, that belt housed a rusty knife and so many other sharp objects.

Akira was lying on the ground. His hand twitched. Although he could feel pain all over his body, he was fully conscious.

“…I got blown away again, huh. But I didn’t faint this time.”

This was the second time his body got thrown by explosions today. If he was given the option, he would prefer facing 2 swarms of monsters on the same day instead.

Akira looked up, he could see Alpha squatting near him while looking at him.

“Akira, if you’re awake, then get up.”

“Roger that.”

Looking at Alpha's expression, Akira knew that he just survived through some life-threatening situation, but at the same time, his life was still in grave danger even right now.

"Once you get up, take some medicines. There's no need to move from this place, you can take a rest here for now."

"Alright, but like, I already ran out of medicine, remember?"

"You still have some of the cheap ones. It's better than nothing."

Akira pushed his body up and reached for the cheap medicines inside his rucksack.

On the medicine box, a warning was printed in big letters saying not to take a large dosage in a short time. Akira's hand stopped when he saw that warning, but he then resolved himself and completely ignored that warning.

Akira swallowed the medicines and then smiled bitterly.

"…No doubt about it, this is bad for my body. I feel like I'm going to faint again, like back then."

Alpha smiled.

"If it is just like back then, it means that you'll faint after defeating the enemies when you are completely safe. So let's hope that would happen again this time."

"I really do hope so."

Akira crushed the empty medicine box in his hand and threw it away. With this, he also ran out of the cheap medicine too. The old-world medicine that was still in effect was working hard to fix his body. But it was only a matter of time before the effect waned. The next time he got a fatal injury, he might really end up dead.

He did not even move a finger to increase the effectiveness of the medicines as high as possible. A question suddenly came up in his mind.

“Now that I think about it, why did they start attacking me out of the blue in the first place? Alpha, do you know anything?”

“Unfortunately, I have no idea at all. This is only a guess, but they might be the friends of that cyborg who you killed in the underground. That guy did say that his friends will take revenge for his death, remember? He might have informed them about you before you killed him for good.”

“If that’s true, they really care for their friend, huh. I wonder if they would think that I’m dead with that attack and just leave this place. Like, normally, no one would survive that, right?”

“I’m not sure about that. After all, even after facing that missile barrage, rather than dropping dead, you even shot back at them.”

“Ahhh, you’re right… If I knew this would happen, I would’ve stayed underground. My luck is really the worst, is it because of that? Is it some kind of karma because I was planning to abandon the hostage back then? But result wise, I saved the hostage too, right…?”

Akira mumbled those words out, it somehow reinforced his thinking as he sighed. Looking at him, Alpha smiled.

Nelia, who was already inside the building, stopped in the middle of a hallway.

Nelia’s cyborg body was also equipped with an information-gathering device, although, it was not as strong as the one installed in her powered suit. Because of that, she was barely able to use that device to scan the area.

[The scan range is really bad because of the colourless mist. I guess it’s the same if I just turn this off.]

Nelia smiled. She then turned off the information-gathering device installed inside her body and lowered her ability to detect the enemy. But even so, she was still smiling, the reason for that was because of the other object that she was carrying.

[To think that I got a chance to test this thing so soon.]

Nelia and her friends had transported a huge amount of relics into their truck, but she secretly took some of those relics for herself. Among the relics that she took, there was a relic that would allow her to connect to the network where she could see the full map of the Kuzusuhara ruin real-time, it was the relic that she was talking about with Kain just now.

[Well now, let’s see if this thing still works.]

Nelia turned the device on. The data received by that device was then organized and converted before being added to her vision. Thanks to that, she was able to see the details of the building.

She smiled since it was working as she expected.

[That went well. Since I limited the data only to the area around this building in order to reduce the amount of the incoming data, my data processing capacity should still be fine. But still, it’s receiving a huge amount of data right now. I guess it really is impossible to process all of the data unless I use an information-gathering device too, huh. But well, in this thick colourless mist, I guess this is better than nothing. Now then, where’s that boy?]

Nelia looked around searching for Akira. Although the data that she was receiving was only limited to the area around that building, it even allowed her to see past the walls. Thus, she was able to quickly find Akira.

Nelia was surprised the moment she saw Akira. She then contacted Kain.

“Kain, how’s the situation over there?”

“Nothing worth noting. How about you? Did you find the corpse?”

“Kain, the death confirmation program was correct, that boy is still alive.”

“What the heck!?”

“He might really be an agent from the city. Something like a child-sized cyborg. With his cyborg body, it’s nothing weird that he could survive that barrage and evade our shots.”

“But why would the city even go as far as to use a child-sized cyborg agent? It’s not as strong as an adult-sized cyborg, or at least, it’s not cost-effective at all.”

“Isn’t that because the agent wanted to blend in with the other Hunters as a young Hunter? After all, it seems that there are many young Hunters under Drankam working in the underground.”

“I see now… Wait, doesn’t that mean that the city somehow had enough information to make them send an undercover agent? Where exactly did the information leak from?”

“No idea. But one thing for sure, he must be heading to the temporary HQ to report back after encountering Yajima. Since he can’t contact the HQ through the colourless mist, he has no other choice but to go there and give his report in person.”

“So it’s lucky that we can ambush him on the surface, huh. It would at least slow the defense squad from reacting. So then, what should we do? If he’s really an agent, then he’s pretty dangerous, you know?”

“Of course, we’ll kill him. It’s kind of obvious, isn’t it? Or do you think that I will lose in a fight in a narrow space like this? You just wait there and keep watch, I’ll finish this in no time.”

“Roger that. And also, hurry up, okay?”

Nelia then disconnected the call. Although she looked surprised at first when she saw Akira, she already returned back to smiling.

“But still, to think that there are two of them. So it’s not like he ran to this building purely by coincidence, huh? Did he come here to meet up with his comrades?”

Past the multiple walls that separated them, Nelia could see Alpha who was standing beside Akira. The reason why she did not say anything to Kain about Alpha was because she wanted to avoid getting found out that she secretly took some of the relics for herself.

“Well, it doesn’t really matter anyway.”

Nelia smiled and pulled out a rusted knife, the knife’s cutting edge was completely dulled. It did not seem like it had any cutting ability whatsoever.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 59, An Expensive Deathmatch

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Alpha had changed her clothes before Akira realized it.

“Alpha, why are you wearing this now?”

Alpha was wearing an augmented suit that looked much like Akira’s. Although its shape was different due to the difference in their build and gender, it more or less looked like another series from the same type of augmented suit.

Alpha smiled.

“I just thought that it might be fun to use the same suit as you from time to time, what do you think?”

“Even if you ask me so… It looks… normal?”

When she was training Akira for CQC, Alpha was usually in an augmented suit. But it was not a common augmented suit, it had the old-world feeling with a daring design that showed the difference in their culture.

Compared to that augmented suit, the one that Alpha was wearing now looked very normal. Although it had a striking curve to house her voluptuous body, it was way better compared to her usual augmented suit that had a mysterious useless opening in the front.

Alpha looked exasperated.

“That was a straight and boring reply. As I thought, it might be a good idea to train you in that department.”

Akira looked slightly annoyed.

“Even if that’s true, this is not the time for it.”

“Well, you’re right. Let’s talk about something else then, Akira, one of the enemies has entered the building. It’s the one with the smaller powered suit, while the other one is watching from the outside right now.”

Akira tensed up. He completely forgot about Alpha’s appearance in an instant.

“As I thought, they won’t leave, huh? Even if you say that it’s a smaller powered suit, it’s still a pretty big one. So how did that girl get in this building with that powered suit?”

The hallway where Akira was in, was rather narrow and short. It would be pretty hard to move around in that space with all of Nelia’s equipment.

Akira was worried if Nelia was moving inside the building by demolishing the walls, but Alpha confirmed that it was not the case.

“She left her powered suit behind. It seems that my plan to bait them into the hallway without their powered suit is going well. But even so, we still don’t know how strong she’s without her powered suit. She might be confident that she would be able to kill you even without the powered suit, that’s why she entered the building without it.”

“It’s a good thing that she left her tank-like powered suit behind. Without her powered suit, the CWH special ammo should be enough to kill her,

right?”

He thought that it was at least better than repeatedly shooting at an enemy despite dealing almost no damage at all. Since continuing so would only shave his optimism bit by bit, Akira looked hopeful thinking that he had a better chance to win now.

But before his optimistic guess turned into a real hope, Alpha warned him.

“It might give you a better chance, but it doesn’t mean that you’re in a better position now. So don’t let your guard down.”

“I know. They’re stronger than me, so it’s not like I can afford to lower my guard.”

Akira focused his mind and answered back firmly.

Alpha smiled, satisfied with his answer.

“If it’s possible, it would be great if we can lure her into a long hallway where you can take aim at her from the other end of the hallway. We’ll keep on moving until we find a good position.”

“Where is she right now?”

“She’s over there.”

Alpha pointed her finger towards nothing but the wall. But thanks to her support, Akira was easily able to see Nelia’s image past the layers of walls.

Although he was keeping his guard up since he knew he was fighting against someone better than him, with the layers of walls and the distance between them, Akira thought that there was no way Nelia would be able to see him as he instinctively lowered his guard.

While Akira was observing Nelia, she too was looking straight at his face. Although there were layers of walls separating them, he could feel Nelia’s gaze looking straight at him.

Akira’s and Nelia’s eyes suddenly met each other. Akira who had lowered his guard immediately tensed up.

“Get down!!”

The moment Alpha said that to Akira, he quickly lied down on the ground, his move was almost perfectly in sync with his augmented suit. Thanks to that, he was able to quickly lie down.

Right before Akira lied down, he was observing Nelia. That was when Nelia made a gesture as if she was cutting him down.

Not only was there quite a distance between them, but there were also layers of walls separating them. Akira could see Nelia holding a blade that was not long enough to reach him. And even if it could extend to reach him, he thought that the walls between them should be strong enough to greatly reduce its cutting power. Thus, it was highly unlikely that Nelia could wound him from behind those walls.

Normally, Akira would not even have to take any evasive action. But when he saw that, he instinctively forced himself to lie down onto the ground. If someone asked him why he did that, he could not answer back with anything else but intuition. After all, he really did that purely out of instinct.

There were so many reasons why his instinct told him to take evasive action. There was no hesitation in Nelia’s movement, it was as if she could completely see him. It looked like she did that knowing exactly what she was doing, it was not merely a random action. But more than everything, Akira remembered that he too had done something similar in the past.

Nelia swung the blade in her hand as if she was cutting the air. The blade itself did not even reach the wall in front of her. But with that motion, the wall in front of her, and all the walls between her and Akira, were all split into two. The blade that she was using was an old-world relic. The blue light that shot out from it cleanly cut everything in front of her.

Akira was barely able to avoid that slash. But his rucksack was not so lucky, it was cut open, spilling out everything that was inside. The

magazines and medicines boxes inside his rucksack were cut clean into two. The bullets melted where it was cut and its cross-section looked like a mirror.

Since the light that just passed above Akira's back did not transfer heat, the gunpowder inside the bullets did not explode. The blade simply erased everything that was on its path.

After Nelia cut everything within a few dozen metres radius around her, the old-world blade that she was holding silently crumbled into dust and was blown away by the wind before the dust could even reach the ground.

Nelia looked at the image of Akira, who was lying on the ground, and smiled. She immediately noticed that he was still alive.

"Nice!!… No, wait, that only cut open his rucksack…? Well, I guess that's fine. But it at least cut his friend down. To think that he would evade that attack, as I thought, he could clearly see my movements."

She looked at Akira's movements and from it, she could easily guess that he could also clearly see her. After all, it would be impossible for him to evade that attack otherwise.

Nelia threw away the blade in her hand that had nothing left other than its handle.

"Good grief, I even wasted an old-world relic just to kill you, you know. You're really an expensive boy. Well, it doesn't matter. I still have a lot of other old-world relics. Just wait there, I'll chop you to pieces."

Nelia pulled two blades from her belt. Those were nothing but handles without a blade. But when she firmly gripped those handles, liquid metal came out from those handles, ignoring the gravity it formed the blades' cutting edge. The blades kept on extending out until it reached 2 metres in length.

She swung her blade at the wall in front of her, the blade cut through the strong wall as if it was made of jelly.

She utilised the power of her cyborg body to kick the part of the wall that she just cut and sent it flying. She then used that hole to enter the room. She kept on cutting the walls in front of her as she walked to Akira in a straight line. She was smiling happily as she was enjoying the satisfaction of cutting down old-world buildings.

Akira who was lying on the ground tried to confirm the situation that he was in. Although he had no idea what exactly Nelia did, he understood that he just barely escaped death from that blade slash which somehow even reached him.

Because his rucksack was cut open, the things that were inside it were now scattered on the ground around him. Unfortunately, among those, Akira found his information terminal which was already sliced into two. Since there was no need for him to operate his information terminal as long as Alpha was around, he normally kept it inside his rucksack.

Akira clicked his tongue when he saw his sliced information terminal. He knew that Alpha was doing so many things in the background, which he did not even understand, to control his augmented suit. But one thing he knew for sure, Alpha controlled his augmented suit through the information terminal the first time she did. If the destroyed information terminal prevented her from controlling his augmented suit, it would significantly lower his fighting ability.

Akira pushed his body up and turned towards Alpha’s direction as he said.

“Alpha, the terminal is destroyed, am I going to be okay?”

Akira was completely shocked the moment he saw Alpha. She was lying on the ground, sliced into two, and covered in blood.

He could not believe what he was seeing, this scene should have been impossible to happen. Because of his shock, he forgot about Nelia and shouted.

“Alpha!?”

He ran towards Alpha's dead body in a panic. He extended his hand to grab Alpha's upper half that was already separated from its lower half. But his hand passed through her body and hit the floor.

"Calm down. Did you forget that I'm only an image?"

Akira, who was utterly confused, snapped back to his senses the moment he heard Alpha's voice which sounded as if nothing worthwhile had happened. She was still lying on the ground with her sliced body as she turned towards him and smiled.

"I'm just showing an image of what would have happened if it was a corporeal body that was cut into two by that attack."

Although it looked as if Alpha was cleanly cut into two, for her, it was as simple as changing her clothes. Akira felt relieved as he understood that she was completely fine, but he then asked her while looking totally surprised.

"W-why would you even do this…?"

Akira thought that it was not like Alpha did it just to surprise him. When he asked her that question, he started to think for any valid reason. But she quickly stopped him.

"Save your questions for later, I'm completely fine. Keep one thing in mind, in this battle, you'll fight the enemy in close quarters. Get yourself ready. Aah, I'll stay like this for a while, but you can still talk to me normally and it won't affect my support for you too, so don't worry about that part."

The moment he heard the word 'enemy', Akira tensed up. He put all of his questions for later and focused on Nelia who was coming at him.

Akira quickly got on his feet and aimed his CWH anti-material rifle at Nelia. He hesitated for a moment since he could only see a wall where he was aiming. But he kept the muzzle aimed at the image of Nelia behind the wall and pulled the trigger.

The bullet that he shot at point-blank range made a crater on the wall, but it did not create a hole that Akira could pass through. The CWH special ammo could not penetrate the wall although it was shot at a point-blank range.

Akira was surprised at how durable the wall was.

“Whoah, this wall is crazy hard! How the hell did she slice through it?!”

“She used an old-world relic after all. You too did the same thing before, remember?”

Akira remembered that he once used an old-world blade to cut through the building wall together with the thug who attacked him. But at that time, there was only a single layer of wall separating them. So, Nelia was clearly using something more powerful.

“That thing, huh!! What a huge pain in the ass, what should I do now?”

“You have no other choice but to somehow lure her to a place where you can get a clear shot at her. I don’t know how far you can fight with your augmented suit, but one thing for sure, you’ll have to do crazy manoeuvres. So just grit your teeth and get yourself ready.”

“Alright, I get it!! Please somehow end the fight before my limbs fall off my body, okay!!”

Akira yelled back as if he had already given up. He had already used all of his medicines. And on top of that, the medicines that he had taken would eventually run out of their effects soon. The next crazy manoeuvres that he would do would put his body under immense stress which might rip his limbs off for real this time.

Alpha’s image was still lying on the ground, sliced into two.

“I’ll put in extra effort to comply with your request.”

If Akira judged from only her voice, it sounded as if Alpha was standing beside him just like usual. Although it calmed him a little, he still sounded

panicked when he said.

“You should answer back with full confidence like always!!”

“Don’t worry… Even if you get some muscles torn, you can still walk back home as long as you have your augmented suit.”

Akira could not see Alpha’s expression since he was watching Nelia, but he somehow thought that Alpha must be smiling teasingly at him right now. In response, he just smiled bitterly.

Nelia kept on slashing through the walls as she was walking towards Akira, eventually, she reached the last wall that separated her and the room where Akira was. She could see Akira holding his CWH anti-material rifle aiming it at her, waiting for the moment she would step into the room.

She stopped in front of the last wall and smiled.

“Standing there means that you’ve done the same thing in the past too. You know that I can’t use the old-world relic that I just used to cut down your friend. That’s correct, I can’t use that old-world relic twice. Although, to be honest, it would have been really great if you had dropped dead with that attack. Good grief, you’re really a troublesome boy.”

Nelia readied her blades.

“You can’t shoot me with that gun through this wall, right? Although my blade can cut through the walls, I can’t cut you from far away. So we’re basically at an impasse here. If we just stand here waiting, the colourless mist will go away and you’ll be able to call for reinforcement. You might be hoping that would happen, but I’m sorry, we’re in a hurry here, you see.”

She spun the blades in her hands in a full circle on the ground.

“That’s why I’ll go there right away.”

She then raised her leg above her head and swung it down at the floor, the part of the floor that had been cut in a circle cracked and collapsed. Nelia

smiled and fell to the floor below together with the crumbled pieces of the floor on which she was standing.

Thanks to Alpha's support, Akira could clearly see Nelia's actions behind the wall. He was surprised when he saw her fall. The moment he noticed that she did that deliberately, his face turned grim.

Akira quickly jumped out from where he was hiding. A few split-seconds later, two silver blades protruded from the floor below him, everything that those two blades touched were cut clean. Fortunately, the blades only cut through the air and a few strands of his hair. Nelia, who was in the room below, also noticed that she failed to cut Akira.

Nelia aimed her blades at Akira from the floor below, with her cyborg body she jumped close enough to the ceiling and slashed towards her target who was above that ceiling. The silver blades in her hand could easily cut through the wall that CWH special ammo could not even penetrate. So of course, Akira's augmented suit would not stand a chance against them.

Akira was desperately evading the blades that were coming at him from below. He could not afford to get cut by those blades and it was not like he could use his rifle to block them either. In the worst-case scenario, the blades might cut through his CWH rifle as easily as they cut through the walls which would render his rifle useless.

If he lost his only means to fight back, he would lose any chance to win this fight. He understood this fact from his fight against Yajima. He could not render Yajima unable to fight even though he used all his strength to punch at Yajima. So, that might also be the case for Nelia too. She was not someone that he could defeat without a weapon.

Nelia's blades vigorously cut through the floors while chasing Akira as he kept avoiding those blades from touching his body.

Normally, using the same blade to cut that floor that even CWH special ammo could not penetrate would gradually dull the blade. But the blades that Nelia was using were old-world relics, those blades retained their sharpness no matter how many times she used them to cut through that

floor. Those blades were formed by holding liquid metal within a forcefield. This forcefield would distort every time she used them to cut through objects, but it would quickly return back in no time, thus maintaining the highest sharpness no matter how many times she used them.

Akira was still inside that room while evading the blades. Every time he tried to get out of that room, Nelia would slash at him and prevent him from getting out. Because of that, he was trapped inside.

On the other hand, he had no means to shoot at Nelia. The floor was made of the same material as the wall, and also because of the length of his CWH anti-material rifle, he could not aim straight down to where Nelia was.

“Alpha!! At this rate, it’s only a matter of time before my legs give up!!!”

In order to evade Nelia’s blades, he had to keep jumping around. Successively accelerating his body followed by a quick stop put his legs under immense stress. He had already numbed from any other feelings except the pain. Both his body and his augmented suit were close to their limit.

Alpha gently said to Akira, trying to calm him down.

“Endure it for a little bit more. It’s okay, they’re not torn yet.”

“That means that I would get a chance to shoot at her soon, right? It’s not like you’re saying that my limbs are going to tear off soon, right??”

“Yep… But I can’t guarantee that your body will be okay after you take a shot at her.”

“Just tell me that I’ll be okay!”

“That would be a little impossible.”

It meant that he would get a chance to shoot at Nelia but the sacrifice would be big. Akira frowned while desperately evading Nelia’s blades.

Nelia had sliced at Akira so many times, but she could not get a hit at him at all. Although she found it surprising, she kept smiling since she thought she still had the upper hand.

It might look like Nelia was only randomly slashing at Akira, but that was not the case. The ceiling for her was the floor for Akira, by cutting it at a certain angle, she made parts of the floor brittle.

Nelia was planning to restrict Akira's movements and lure him to any of the brittle parts of the floor. She would then break the floor with a kick, throwing him off balance and cut him down while he fell to the below floor.

She constantly adjusted her attacks to push Akira to that particular part of the floor. If he did not evade her attack, it would cut him to pieces, but if he did, he would be slowly led to that trap. Both outcomes were to her advantage. Unaware of the trap, Akira kept evading and finally stepped on the brittle part of the floor.

The moment Akira stepped into that trap, Nelia smiled and kicked the ceiling. She used the full power of her cyborg body to deliver that kick. The floor where he was standing cracked due to the impact of her kick which could even bend steel.

But even with that powerful kick, strangely enough, the ceiling did not crumble down as she had expected. Even though it was brittle and had absorbed a powerful kick from her, that part of the floor stayed in its place.

"Wha-!?"

Nelia shouted in shock. At the same time, recoil from her kick threw her off balance. Since the floor that she kicked stayed in place, all the force rebounded back to her.

That floor was already fragile enough after it got slashed so many times by Nelia's blades. After that strong kick, it finally started to crumble and fall.

Nelia could not immediately figure out why there was a delay in the crumbling of the floor or why she was hit with recoil.

Among the crumbling pieces of the floor, Nelia could see Akira who was also thrown off balance falling down just like her. Akira's eyes were locked onto her.

When Nelia kicked that part of the floor, Akira also did the same from above as instructed by Alpha. Alpha had already read Nelia's plan and used it against her.

Right before Akira kicked the floor, he pointed his CWH anti-material rifle upward and pulled the trigger. The kickback from that shot was absorbed into his augmented suit and increased the force of his kick that he released after pushing his augmented suit to its limit. His kick more or less packed the same amount of impact power as the kick from a cyborg body.

The reason why the floor did not crumble when Nelia kicked it was because Akira's kick balanced the force on the floor.

In that short chaotic moment, Akira, who was thrown to the air due to the recoil from his kick, looked at the crumbling floor he was standing just a moment ago. The floor was breaking up into chunks as it crumbled down. He felt the time slow down; this sudden change confused his perception so much that it felt like he took forever to load a new magazine into his CWH anti-material rifle.

He still did not have a clear shot at her. He could only see the image of Nelia, who was on the other side of the rubbles, because of Alpha's support.

[What should I do? I won't be able to hit her even if I try to shoot her now. I'll be falling down at this rate and she might try to cut me while I'm in the air. I won't be able to evade when that happens, it's not like I can freely move in midair. What should I do…]

The time still felt like it was running slow as Akira was thinking hard on what he should do. But his body suddenly moved on its own, it was Alpha who was controlling his augmented suit.

Akira quickly pointed his CWH anti-material rifle straight up again and pulled the trigger the moment he finished loading another round. The

kickback blasted his body down and pushed other rubbles between him and Nelia down with him.

Nelia tried to attack while still in the air, she was about to throw the blade in her hand. But Akira, who was falling down fast because of the kickback of that shot, brought all the rubbles between them along with him and smashed onto her, preventing her from throwing the blade at him.

After they crashed onto the floor below, Akira and Nelia were once again got thrown off to the air. The impact made both of them let go of their weapons. But they quickly regained their balance and grabbed a weapon near them as they landed on the floor. They were now ready to fight again.

They stood against each other with their weapons ready in their hands. Nelia was standing ready with a blade's handle in her right hand. While on the other side, surprisingly enough, Akira was also gripping the same object in his right hand.

Nelia smiled at Akira. She then turned her blade on, just like before, liquid metal came out from its handle and formed a blade.

"Too bad, what are you planning to do with that handle? It's not like you can get the blade out just by grabbing it, you know? Old-world relics have security measures installed in them. Unless you know how to remove it, you won't be able to-"

Nelia was smiling contently thinking that there was no way Akira could use that weapon. But her words were cut short when a blade came out from Akira's handle too. She was completely taken aback by what she saw but quickly regained her composure.

"…Ahhh, I see. So you know how to use it too, huh? A normal Hunter should not be able to get that information though. It's secret information that even an agent from the city should not be able to get easily as well… So, who exactly are you?"

Akira really did not know anything about operating the blade, but Alpha knew. He too did not even know how she knew about it, and it was not like

he wanted to know anyway. If someone asked him who he was, he would say that he was just your everyday common Hunter. The one that made him different from your everyday common Hunter was Alpha, and of course, it was not like he could tell Nelia about Alpha.

That was why Akira did not reply. Nelia took that as him refusing to answer.

“I see, in that case, can you at least tell me your name? This must be some kind of destiny that we met here. So at least let me remember your name.”

Akira hesitated but eventually replied.

“…Akira.”

“I see. I’m Nelia. I’ll remember your name until I kill you. To be more precise, that would happen in about 30 seconds.”

Nelia suddenly closed the distance between them as if she just warped right next to him. She then swung up the blade that was long enough to almost touch the ground.

Akira evaded her blade by jumping to the side. Had he jumped back then he would have been cut down even if he knew the exact length of that blade. After all, the blade suddenly extended when it was swung.

Then Nelia’s blade made a sharp turn, chasing Akira who jumped to the side. Akira used the blade in his right hand to block it. Both of their blades clashed, Nelia’s blade broke at the contact point, the broken part turned into liquid metal and splattered on the ground.

But even after losing a part of her blade, she didn’t retreat. Instead, she stepped in and lunged at him with her broken blade. Akira bent over and evaded. Right after she lunged, her blade which was broken, returned back to its original length. If Akira had stepped back, the blade would have definitely reached him.

Although Akira lost his balance when he evaded, he made a big sweep with his blade. But it did not extend like Nelia's blade. As a result, she evaded with just a jump as he made that sweep.

Both gained their balance immediately after and were standing facing each other again. Akira made an extremely grim face, while Nelia was smiling leisurely. While adjusting the distance between them, she said.

"Anyone else would have normally died after my previous attack. Seriously though, who exactly are you? Looking at your movements when you evaded, you're properly trained. Not to mention, you also know how to use that weapon. A normal Hunter should not be able to do these things."

Akira did not give any reply. After all, he could not answer the question to which he himself did not know the answer.

"Alpha, I still didn't get any chance to strike back though?!"

"Well, at least we've escaped the situation where she was one-sidedly attacking you. Originally, I was planning to shoot her with the CWH special ammo while we were falling down, but the rubbles were blocking your shot so it was impossible to do that. Unfortunately, it seemed that you didn't have enough luck to execute that plan. If only you had better luck and was able to take that shot, you would've won by now."

"Well, I guess I'm really left with a scarce supply of luck. No wonder I always get to be in this kind of dangerous situation. By the way, why won't my blade extend like hers?"

"The liquid metal stock in your handle is low. She might have intentionally emptied the liquid metal stock of the blades that she was using when she was attacking you from below."

"So basically I got the handle with the less liquid metal, huh? Did she go for that handle knowing that it has more liquid metal? Or was it simply a pure coincidence?"

"I think it's pure coincidence."

“I see… Good grief, what the heck is going on with my luck?”

“I’ll also give my best to substitute for your bad luck.”

“Well, thanks for that.”

He knew for sure that the moment Alpha’s support could not substitute for his bad luck, he would get killed.

Looking at how Nelia was smiling leisurely, Akira tried to disturb her mood in order to change the flow of the fight and to get the upper hand. He mockingly said to her.

“It’s already well past 30 seconds, isn’t it?”

Akira hoped that Nelia would get annoyed after hearing that, or at least, it would make her movements rougher. He tried his best to make a mocking expression towards her.

But instead, Nelia laughed at him.

“I’m happy that you remember what I told you.”

Akira frowned.

[…How in the world did she even come up with that reply?]

He was a bit overwhelmed by that unexpected reply. Nelia kept making an unwavering happy face in front of him.

“But still, I’m surprised that you can even evade all my attacks. It’s pretty amazing for someone your age to have enough skill to fight evenly against me with a blade. Or is that you’re actually a child-sized cyborg? Don’t tell me that you’re actually an old man. Well, I don’t really mind either way though. By the way, are you already taken?”

Akira looked puzzled, he did not understand the meaning of Nelia’s question.

“What exactly are you talking about?”

“If you’re not taken yet, want to try dating me? My boyfriend just died not too long ago, so you came at the perfect time. I like men who are stronger than me, you see. And I have nothing to complain about your skill too.”

“To think that you can even joke like that, you must be really enjoying this.”

Akira brushed it off thinking that Nelia was only joking. But she replied back with a smile.

“Oh my, I wasn’t joking. I’m serious, you know. I’m seriously asking you, so what’s your answer?”

Even if it was only a ploy to shake him off, Akira thought that it might really change the flow of the fight if he went along with her acting. So then he asked Nelia.

“…Well, say that I accept your proposal, will that save me from this situation?”

Nelia immediately replied without a trace of hesitation.

“Of course not, I’ll still kill you. This and that are two different things, you see. Me killing you and me going out with you are two completely separate things, don’t you think so too?”

She slowly got closer to Akira while still smiling. Akira frowned and took a step back carefully.

Her bizarre reply successfully shook his inner belief, but Akira was barely able to make a bitter smile as he jabbed back at Nelia.

“Are you seriously hitting on a guy that you’re trying to kill? Are you sure you’re right in the head?”

“Is it strange? Humans are creatures that could even kill the person who they’ve loved for years. So, I don’t see anything strange with killing the guy

who I just dated. What's more, whether it's a tragedy or a comedy, having a deathmatch with your lover is not something that you can usually experience, right? It's a kind of experience that can add some spices to this boring life. You only live once after all. It would be a waste not to savour such experiences."

For some reason, Akira did not think that Nelia was lying. Although he did think of asking for a confirmation from Alpha, he decided not to. After all, he did not want Alpha to confirm that she was indeed telling the truth.

Akira was even more overwhelmed by Nelia's way of thinking since he just could not understand it. The conversation that started as him trying to disturb her focus ended up as being counter-effective.

Nelia somehow let out a pressuring smile at Akira while she kept closing the distance between them.

"So, what's your answer?"

In order to erase the unexplained fear that was growing stronger inside him, Akira yelled back.

"…No thanks!!"

"Is that so? That's just too bad."

Nelia did not seem to be acting as she looked seriously disappointed. She then quickly closed the distance between them and swung her blade at Akira. He evaded her blade and struck back immediately.

Both of them were using blades that could easily cut through an object that even the CWH special ammo could not penetrate. Had they left unused, those blades would have fetched a huge amount of money.

Originally, all old-world relics could be sold at a high price. But if they were used, meaning that the energy saved inside it were reduced, then the value would also be decreased. And of course, their values would be significantly lowered if they were broken.

Akira and Nelia were constantly reducing the value of the old-world relics that they were using to kill each other. The lesser the value of the relic in their hand, the lesser the energy inside it, and the closer they would be to death. It was indeed a luxurious deathmatch.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 60, Time For Goodbye

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Kain kept monitoring the situation around the building. He was using the information-gathering device installed in his powered suit to check everything around him. Every little change in the area was displayed in his enhanced vision. It was also showing a warning that the scanning sensitivity was worsened because of the colourless mist.

It was only a matter of time before the colourless mist waned, and that would be really bad for Kain and Nelia. If the colourless mist stopped preventing Akira from contacting the temporary base, the base would know about their existence and there was no doubt that it would send the city's defensive squad to that place. As such, they had to withdraw from that place before the base comes to know about them.

"She's taking too long. What the heck is Nelia doing? With her ability, she should be able to make a short work of that brat…"

Kain thought highly of Nelia. He even thought that no one would be able to win against Nelia in CQC. She might even be able to kill him and all of his companions by herself if they were not in their powered suits and were

forced to fight her in close range. So, he thought that Nelia should be able to quickly kill Akira and come back by now.

But even so, she still had not come back from the fight in that building. It was not an exaggeration to say that it was really alarming.

At first, he thought that Nelia would eventually contact him anyway and he would only be a nuisance if he contacted her first. That was why he decided to hold himself back from doing so. But now that things had turned rather worrying, he decided to contact her.

“Nelia!! How long are you going to take?”

Nelia quickly replied back, she sounded happy.

“Kain, I’m having a good time right now. If it’s not something urgent, can you put it for later?”

“Hey! This is something very urgent!! The colourless mist is getting thinner!! Depending on the relay device that they’re using in the temporary base, they might be able to establish a connection by now!! Stop wasting time and get him already!! Or is it that you need more time since you’re chopping the corpse to pieces?”

“I’m not wasting time. And it’s not like I have that kind of hobby either!!”

“Then, are you having trouble confirming the death? It’s not like Yajima set the program so that it would reject any attempts of confirmation, right?”

“That’s not the problem either.”

Kain guessed what was going on with Nelia, to be honest, he did not want to believe his guess as he mumbled.

“…Don’t tell me.”

“Yep, you guessed it right. To think that there’s someone who can fight me evenly in close combat. No wonder Yajima got himself killed. Although he’s not as strong as me, he had his strengths, that’s why we left him to take

care of the underground side of the operation. I guess he was really unlucky to meet this boy. Well then, you're disturbing my focus, so let's stop here."

Nelia then disconnected his call.

Kain carefully analyzed the new information that he just got from her.

"…Having Yajima killed is a pretty bad turn of events already. And now this, huh? Is it because there were discrepancies between the information that we shared? Or is it just bad luck piling up on one another by pure coincidence? No matter whichever it is, I need to make a change in the plan."

There was no one listening to him. But he sounded completely different compared to when he spoke to Nelia and the others.

After ending the call, Nelia quickly closed in and threw a slash at Akira.

"Sorry for the wait. I got a call from my friend that I had to take. Did you wait long?"

When Nelia was talking with Kain, she was keeping her distance with Akira and her movements were dulled.

When Akira saw Nelia keeping her distance from him. He thought that she did that to take a breather as she was close to her limit in their CQC fight. He even hoped that she was thinking of retreating. But it turned out that he was sadly mistaken.

Akira was trying hard to fight back as he said.

"Don't mind me, you can take your time talking with your friend."

Nelia answered back provokingly.

"Don't be so cold. Girls won't like you if you say something like that, you know?"

“I have no plans on getting liked by a girl who loves to kill her lover.”

“Oh my, it’s not like I do it because I like it. As I said, it just adds a little spice to life. It’s boring to have a dull life, don’t you think?”

“Sadly enough, I have enough spices for my life right now!!”

“Is that so? Then, in that case, you can just enjoy a little bit more, right?”

Nelia looked like she was having the time of her life as she kept swinging her blade at Akira. Her cyborg body that was designed for dexterity rather than strength danced gracefully in the middle of the battlefield as her beautiful slender arm swung the liquid metal blade in her hand. The blade was so thin that it was almost transparent, but even so, it had an unbelievable sharpness as it cut through rubbles and wreckages without any effort.

Thanks to the painkiller in his medicine, Akira did not feel any pain as his body was forced to move to evade Nelia’s attacks. But the moment his augmented suit ran out of energy, he would not be able to lift even a finger. Even though he was in the midst of battle, his brain kept telling his body to shut down, while on the other hand, his survival instinct was telling him to stay awake no matter what.

Akira was close to his limit. While on the other hand, Nelia had a lot of leeway during their fight. If things kept going at this rate, there was no mistaking that he would end up dead.

But there was something else that had hit its limit before Akira. It was the very place where Nelia and Akira were having their fight.

Nelia had sliced and diced the ceiling of that room, after that, they both released a powerful kick to the ceiling at the same time. The floor of that room was also sliced so many times during their fight that it was significantly weakened.

The ceiling that was destroyed earlier was crumbling and its pieces were falling over Nelia and Akira. Normally, with their ability, it was not a hard

thing to evade those falling rubbles.

But it was an entirely different story now as they were closely watching each other's movements for any openings. They both knew that even the smallest opening would be fatal. In order to get the upper hand over one another, they were mostly ignoring the falling rubbles.

The impact of the falling rubbles damaged and cracked the already weakened floor. As Akira and Nelia were fighting while keeping their eyes on each other, suddenly, they were swallowed up by the crumbling ceiling and floor and fell down to the lower floor.

One of the piles of rubbles on the lower floor moved. Rubbles were shoved aside and Nelia stood up from within the pile.

"Good grief, to interrupt our date like this, what a bunch of rude rubbles?!"

Nelia looked at the handle in her right hand, it had lost its blade. Although she tried many times to recreate the blade, the silver blade just would not come out from the handle. It was either the handle was broken during that fall, or it had run out of liquid metal, or it had no energy left.

Nelia threw that handle away and looked around. She could not find Akira anywhere. She thought that he might be buried somewhere. At least, after that fall, there should be no possibility of him pulling off an ambush.

After scanning the area, she could see Alpha's body. It was still sliced into two as it was lying on a pile of rubble. She could see Alpha's location with the map of the Kuzusuhara ruin that she was connected to.

[That is… his friend, right? The one who I killed earlier. I'm glad I killed her despite the fact that I had to sacrifice an expensive relic. If she's as strong as him, this would be 2 against 1 and I would be the one losing.]

The image of Alpha in her vision vanished for a split second before returning back. It was because Nelia set her vision to only show information coming from her cyborg body.

[Since my cyborg body can’t see her, it means that she’s using some kind of advanced camouflage. I can’t even see the blood around her too, so it must be something more than just an optical camouflage. It might be some kind of old-world technology. Was it because she thought I couldn’t see her that she was caught by surprise back then?]

Nelia judged that Alpha was really there. It was because she was seeing Alpha’s sliced body in front of her. That body was bleeding out and leaving traces just like a real body should, thus, judging solely on what she was seeing, there was no doubt that Alpha was really dead.

After confirming her surroundings, Nelia turned her attention to the most important thing in that location, Akira. Akira popped out and stood up from a pile of rubbles, he wobbled for a short moment before falling over.

Nelia approached him, she was also all wobbly. The fall had dealt quite a lot of damage to her cyborg body too.

[…Well, let’s put everything aside for now. First things,first…]

Nelia smiled in relief as Akira was not carrying his blade too. Instead, he was using his CWH anti-material rifle to help him stand on his feet.

“…First things first, I need to kill you!!”

Nelia started running toward Akira. Because of the damage on her cyborg body, her movement stuttered a bit, but even so, she judged that she was still strong enough to take out Akira given their situation. She charged at him, hoping to put an end to their fight.

Akira who just came out from the rubbles kept on stumbling over. Although he tried to get back on his feet as fast as he could, he just could not do it. Both his body and his augmented suit were put under immense stress when he had to fight Nelia.

“Alpha, I can’t move my body well, can you control my body through the augmented suit?”

“Unfortunately, I can’t do that right now. A part of the augmented suit and one of its control units were broken after that fall. Because of that, I can’t completely control your augmented suit anymore.”

Akira smiled bitterly and gritted his teeth. Losing Alpha’s support because of his broken augmented suit meant that his fighting ability was greatly reduced.

“Why now of all times? But it’s not like it’s completely broken, right?”

“You should still be able to move it. After all, the input signal should be much more stable when you use it compared to when I control it. It still has some energy left too. You should still be able to move it if you try.”

“Is that so? So I keep stumbling because I’m not trying hard enough, huh?”

“It’s true that the damage also makes it more difficult to move the augmented suit. I’ll keep trying to take control of your augmented suit while also finding an opening to strike back. Just try to buy as much time as possible until I get that chance.”

“Roger that, and please hurry up.”

Akira was somehow able to keep himself standing using his CWH anti-material rifle to support his body. Extreme pain ran through his whole body. He gritted his teeth to endure that pain as he kept his eyes on Nelia who was coming towards him.

Nelia’s cyborg body was sustaining significant damage. But even so, it still had enough power to close the distance between her and Akira faster than a normal human.

Akira raised his CWH anti-material rifle and pulled the trigger. But because of the pain and lack of support from Alpha, he was moving way slower compared to when he was evading Nelia’s blade.

Even before he was able to pull the trigger, Nelia kicked the CWH’s muzzle. The bullet flew out from the gun’s muzzle and hit somewhere far

away from her. With that kick, the CWH rifle was also thrown off from Akira's hand and landed nearby them.

After that, she continued launching consecutive strikes toward Akira. Akira's CQC ability had gotten way better because of Alpha's training, thanks to that, he was barely able to defend himself. But with that being said, he was not skilled enough to be able to counterattack. Akira could only desperately defend himself from Nelia's flurry of attacks.

Every time Akira blocked Nelia's strike, he could feel his bones cracking and his muscles tearing. Looking at how he was being pushed to only defend himself, Nelia increased the intensity of her attacks.

Since Akira was moving very badly compared to before as if he was a different person, Nelia overestimated his injuries.

Although it actually was his real ability since he had lost his support from Alpha, there was no way for Nelia to know that. So, she started to smile faintly.

[He's moving way worse compared to before!! I have to kill him now before he can regain his composure!!]

Akira kept facing Nelia's attack head-on. The reason why he did not run away from that place was because he simply did not want to get attacked from behind. Not to mention, his CWH anti-material rifle was lying on the ground not too far from them.

If he turned his back and ran away, Nelia would take his CWH anti-material rifle which was his only weapon that could inflict damage on her cyborg body. So if he lost that rifle, his winning chance would plummet to zero. Not to mention that Kain, who was able to take CWH special ammo head-on, was monitoring the situation outside that building. There was no way he could fight Kain using only an AAH assault rifle. If Kain found out that he had no way of fighting back, there was no doubt that Kain would come to kill him.

Although Akira's eyes and reflex were able to follow Nelia's attacks, it was not the case for his body. His movements were dulled because his body was tired and he was in so much pain. Thanks to that, some of Nelia's attacks went through and added injuries to his already injured body. Even his augmented suit started getting heavier and heavier as it sustained more and more damage.

The moment either his body or his augmented suit finally gave out, Nelia would be able to quickly kill him.

"Alpha!! I'm gonna hit my limit soon. Where is the opening to strike back that you said you're going to create?!!"

"It's not like I can easily make one. Hang on a little bit longer. Look behind her."

Akira glanced over Nelia's back. He could see Alpha standing not too far from them.

He looked puzzled. Since Nelia was not aware that Alpha was behind her, she did not put up her guard toward Alpha at all. But even if Alpha attacked her from behind, it was not like Alpha who had no corporal body could injure her. Thus he did not understand the reason behind Alpha's action.

From the way Akira glanced behind her, Nelia noticed that someone was behind her. But her cyborg body could not identify who it was. From her experience in cutting Alpha down, she knew that there were people using some kind of advanced camouflage that prevented her cyborg information-gathering organs from identifying them.

So, Nelia quickly checked the Kuzusuhara map network that she was connected with, from it, she was able to ascertain Alpha's movements behind her. Judging from how Alpha was moving, she thought that Alpha did not know that she could track her location.

She quickly turned around and sent a roundhouse kick. She set that up so that it would be a perfect counter that would catch Alpha, who was coming at her, off guard.

But she was surprised three-fold. The person who was coming at her was the same person who she thought was dead. Then her kick just passed through that person as if she was only kicking through the air, throwing her off balance. Then at the same exact moment, Akira kicked her and sent her flying. She did not see that coming at all.

Akira released that kick with all of his strength and it sent Nelia, who was already off-balance, flying into the air. Although it was not enough to damage Nelia's cyborg body, it was enough to overturn the table.

Nelia was totally confused, all the questions that were flooding her brain prevented her from thinking clearly. She was still confused even after she slammed into a pile of rubble, but her confusion was cut short the moment her eyes met Akira's eyes. What reflected in her eyes was Akira who was already aiming his CWH anti-material rifle at her.

After Akira sent Nelia flying with his kick, he quickly grabbed his CWH anti-material rifle lying near him and immediately aimed it at her before pulling the trigger.

The CWH special ammo hit Nelia on her torso. The impact ripped her cyborg body into two, mechanical parts were sent flying into the air and scattered on the ground. Her upper body and lower body then landed at two different places.

But Akira did not stop there, he emptied his rifle at Nelia. Although he was able to destroy her lower half and limbs, her head was left untouched. It was not like he did that intentionally, he had aimed at Nelia's head when he released those shots but all of them missed their target.

Akira clicked his tongue. It was obvious that Nelia was using a cyborg body. So he needed to at least destroy her head to make sure that she would not pose any more danger.

When he kicked Nelia, it was actually Alpha controlling his augmented suit. Alpha was already able to control his augmented suit at that time.

The reason why Alpha did not immediately give her support to Akira was to catch Nelia off-guard. She knew that even with her support, Akira would not be able to win if they did not somehow catch Nelia unprepared.

Nelia took that bait more than Alpha thought, thanks to that, she was able to take full advantage of that opening. All of that hard work turned her plan into a big success and Akira was able to turn the table around.

Akira realized that Alpha's support was back when she controlled his augmented suit. So he thought that his shooting support should be recovered too.

But all of his shots missed the target. He sounded slightly panicked as he said.

"…I can't hit her at all!! What's going on here?!!"

"The augmented suit is too damaged, so it's not working properly and disrupting your aiming. Not to mention that the CWH special ammo adds an extra kickback for each shot. So it's rather impossible to control that kickback using your damaged augmented suit. Even that shot at her torso would have been impossible without my support, you know?"

Akira loaded a new magazine while listening to Alpha's explanation.

"What should I do then?"

"You'll have to get closer before shooting at her. I don't recommend leaving her alone. Even in that condition, she might still be able to control the powered suit which she left outside."

"I wonder if the other guy would run away if I kill her."

"I hope that would be the case too."

Akira and Alpha worded out their wishful thinking as they hoped that such a thing would happen.

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Kain was still monitoring the situation outside the building. The colourless mist had already thinned out.

He was pretty sure that Akira should be able to contact the temporary base by now, but Nelia had not contacted him yet. As such, he concluded what to do.

“I guess this is time for goodbye, huh.”

Kain’s powered suit opened up from behind. It looked more like the powered suit used him as its control unit rather than him using it as a powered suit. He then stepped out from his powered suit. Although his limbs were folded-in when he got out, he extended his limbs in midair and landed smoothly.

In contrast to his bulky powered suit, Kain himself was a slender man. His limbs were thin, so was his torso. His hair and skin did not look like a human, he looked more like a robot with a human appearance. From the outside, it was obvious that he was not a cyborg that resembled a human, but more of a humanoid battle cyborg. The only part of his body that resembled a human was his 10 fingers, and even that part was fully mechanical.

A heavy machine gun and a sniper rifle popped out from behind his powered suit. Both of them were huge rifles that a normal human would not be able to use. But he caught them both with his thin arms and carried each rifle on either arm.

Although both of them were heavy rifles, it did not seem like it bothered him at all. It was unbelievable that he could produce that much power with those slim arms.

Nelia’s powered suit suddenly started moving on its own. Kain, who saw that, understood Nelia was remotely controlling her powered suit from inside that building. So, it confirmed his suspicion.

He remotely controlled his powered suit to aim the big guns in its arms at Nelia’s powered suit and showered it with countless warheads. It blew

Nelia's powered suit to smithereens almost instantly.

"I'm sorry, it's just to be safe. It would be problematic if you're tailing me after all."

Kain then abandoned his powered suit behind and left that place alone.

Even after losing half of her body and her limbs, Nelia was still alive. As a cyborg, she would be able to stay alive for a few days with just her head.

But that did not mean that she could survive her present situation which was simply hopeless. Akira was walking towards her with a loaded CWH anti-material rifle.

Akira wanted to make sure that she was dead for good. She herself understood that the only reason she was alive was not because Akira wanted to beat her to death. But it was because he kept on missing his shots at her head due to the tiredness and his injuries.

Akira took another aim at Nelia's head and pulled the trigger. He frowned as his shot missed again. He then carefully walked closer to her while still watching his surroundings and took another shot. He repeated that action since he kept missing his shot.

He could immediately kill Nelia if he walked right next to her, thrust his rifle to her neck, and pulled the trigger. The only reason he did not do that was because he was still very cautious of her.

He knew that Nelia was obviously stronger than him. Even though he had the upper hand right now, he did not think that he had rendered her fully harmless. And that was exactly what delayed her death.

Nelia was still smiling even in that situation. To Akira, it looked like she still had an inkling on how to win that fight. So he became more cautious of her and it slowed him down from approaching her.

Nelia actually was not smiling thinking that she could still win that fight. She was actually smiling in order to numb her feelings from death. If she died here, then that would be the end for her. That was all there was to it. She was only smiling because she understood that fact.

But it was not like she wanted to die either. So she still tried everything that she could think of. That was why, although she thought that it would not make it, she still called her powered suit which was outside the building to come to where she was.

But suddenly the connection to her powered suit got cut off.

[…Did my powered suit get destroyed? What the heck happened outside?]

Right as she was wondering what happened outside, Kain called Nelia. Since they were talking through their internal organs, no one could hear their conversation.

“Nelia, how are you over there?”

“Kain? I’m actually having a hard time here. I’m sorry, but can you please help me out?”

Nelia answered back as if there was nothing special happening. It was because she wanted to increase her odds no matter how small it was.

But Kain answered back casually.

“I see, so you lost, huh?”

If she told him the truth, it was unlikely that Kain would help her. So Nelia answered back as if she was doing fine.

“As I said, I’m just having a hard time here. Although, it would be a big help if you could hurry up.”

But then Kain replied.

“At least you have been done-in to the point that you can’t move, right? Not to mention that you got beaten in your speciality, CQC. If that’s not the case, you wouldn’t have moved your powered suit to get you out from the closed space like that room, right? Ahh, about that though, I’m sorry but I destroyed your powered suit. That’s why it’s pointless to wait for your powered suit.”

“Oh my, you’re so mean. Didn’t I tell you not to touch my powered suit?”

“My bad, I have reasons why I had to do that.”

Nelia sounded as if it was completely normal. And Kain also replied back as if they were just having an everyday banter. Both of them were abnormal people. Forget about other people’s lives, they did not even worry about their own.

Kain continued.

“Well, I do apologize for destroying your powered suit. But as an exchange, I’m sending my powered suit to you.”

“Thank you so much… Wait, sending?”

“Yep. I’m sending only my powered suit. It’s on autopilot as I’m running away from here. I have no wish to fight someone who can beat you in CQC. By the way, I also set it to go on a rampage regardless of friends or enemies. The colourless mist is already gone. So he might have contacted the city and the city defense squad might already be somewhere near. If my powered suit goes on a rampage, it would at least be able to divert their attention. Well then, take care.”

Kain then ended the call. Nelia tried to call him multiple times only to get rejected. She then mumbled.

“…Good grief. If you would send me your powered suit, I hope that you would send me the access code too.”

Nelia kept calm even in that situation. In her head, she simulated any ideas that she could come up with. Suddenly, Akira’s shot landed right beside her. Although it shook her head, she still looked completely calm without even a trace of fear or panic.

“Well, I guess I’ll at least do everything I can.”

Nelia smiled as she placed all her hope on her new plan that she just came up with.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 61, Lucky / Unlucky Ending

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Akira took another aim at Nelia's head and pulled the trigger. The bullet flew and landed right beside Nelia's head, sending her head flying again.

"…I still can't hit her, huh!!"

Alpha smiled trying to calm him down.

"Calm down, if you lose your cool you won't be able to hit the target that you normally could."

"Can you do something with your support?"

"Your augmented suit is damaged to the point that it's not working normally. If I try to control it now, it might cause a malfunction, in the worst-case scenario, it might even tear your limbs. So, are you sure you want me to control it?"

"Nah, please don't."

Alpha had already turned back to her usual self. She was floating beside Akira, just like always.

But at this point, Nelia could no longer see Alpha. It was because the relic that she used to connect to the Kuzusuhara map was destroyed by Akira's attack and Alpha knew about it.

Akira pointed his rifle at Nelia once more, she just smiled and said.

"If you kill me, you'll die too."

Akira ignored her and pulled the trigger. The bullet landed near Nelia and threw her head up in the air again. Even so, she continued.

"My friend has betrayed me and he's planning to kill both you and me now. He has sent his powered suit here, setting it in autopilot. His powered suit is equipped with a self-destruct sequence to take anyone around it down together with it. You can't run away from it. It's set to chase you no matter where you go and it'll explode the moment you get in its explosion radius. I bet it's loaded with enough explosive to take down this whole building."

Akira ignored Nelia's warning as he kept walking towards her. He then took another shot which destroyed her upper half, leaving her only with her neck and head.

"Your only chance to turn off the self-destruct sequence is by either destroying or deactivating its control device. I bet it would be very difficult to destroy its control device since it's hidden behind its thick armour. But if you leave it to me, I can hack into its control device and deactivate it. As a matter of fact, I'm actually doing that right now and preventing it from exploding. But if you kill me now, it'll immediately explode."

Akira ignored her yet again and took another shot. The bullet grazed Nelia's ear and hit the floor. Her head got thrown once more by the bullet's shockwave.

"I see, well, it's up to you. You're in the position to decide here. I guess it's not a bad thing to die together with someone who I tried to hit-on."

Nelia smiled. It was the same smile she had when she flirted with Akira.

Akira stood beside Nelia and picked her head up by pulling her hair. He locked gaze with her.

“Any proof?”

“Nope.”

Akira asked her if it was only a lie to save herself or she had some kind of proof that she was saying the truth.

But Nelia said that she did not have any proof. She even told Akira that he could go ahead and do anything he wanted if he did not believe her words.

Akira could not tell if she was lying or not. Alpha looked grim as she suddenly told him, who was still confused, to quickly get away from that place.

“Akira, you need to get away from this place first, quickly.”

Akira immediately followed Alpha’s instruction. He ran away from that place, bringing Nelia’s head with him.

The whole building was rumbling. It was because Kain’s powered suit was forcing its way into that building.

That powered suit, which was set to auto-pilot, ignored any damage on itself as it forced its way in from the side of the building that was weakened by the missile barrage earlier.

It broke through the wall, floor and ceiling of the building with its huge body. It used its powerful firepower to drill its way through that building. It did not care about its energy expense or its output safety limit as it headed straight to where Akira was.

Although it could not accurately detect Akira’s location, with the absence of colourless mist it could at least guess where he was.

It kept shooting with its huge guns towards Akira, but the warheads released by those guns could only hit the walls in front of it and turn them

into dust. The inner walls of that building were not as strong as its outer walls, so they were no match for the warheads. The walls and ceilings inside that building crumbled down into a big pile of rubbles. The autopilot did not give any regards to its remaining ammo. It would keep shooting until it ran out of ammo.

Akira quickly ran away from that place, away from Kain's powered suit. He asked Nelia while still running.

"Why do you guys want to kill me that much? Or is that thing only to cover your friend while he's running away?"

"That's not it. We can't take the relics that we gathered if we don't kill you."

"How is that even connected to killing me?"

"The guy that you killed, Yajima, he had his post-mortem revenge program set you as its target. Because of that, the truck that we're using to transport the relics won't move unless we kill you."

Akira remembered the words that Yajima left before he was killed. He did say that his friends would take revenge if Akira killed him, but at that time, Akira thought that it was only an empty bluff.

Akira's face twitched, he was obviously annoyed.

"…What a huge pain in the bum. So you can even get that kind of program, huh?"

"Yeah, you can. If it's not for that, we won't even spend our energy trying to kill you. If you can believe me now, how about we make a deal? I'll stop Kain's powered suit, and as an exchange, you'll help me."

"I'll just keep on running like this. It'll take a lot of time for that powered suit to push through the building, so I'm sure I can outrun it by then."

"Didn't you run to this building since you knew you can't outrun it?"

“…There’s no guarantee that you won’t use it to attack me after you take control of that powered suit. After all, you can get all of your relics if you kill me, right?”

“Well, you have no other choice but to trust me on that one. You beat me real good, you know? I have no wish to fight you again. Not to mention that my friend even chose to run away from here in order to avoid having to fight you, even if it meant leaving behind the expensive relics that we gathered. I don’t think it’s a bad offer since it’ll save your life too. Well, I won’t go as far as to demand you to be my boyfriend though. After all, I don’t want to get a boyfriend by threatening him.”

Nelia was still smiling even though she was only left with nothing but her head. Akira frowned seeing her expression.

“Alpha, is she telling the truth? You can detect it if she’s actually lying, right?”

Alpha shook her head.

“Unfortunately, as I said before, I can’t read whether she’s lying or not because of her cyborg body. So I can’t say anything else other than ‘I can’t say for sure’ now”.

Akira looked obviously troubled. If he took Nelia’s offer, not only would he let go of the enemy who he had pushed to a corner, there was also a possibility that she would use the powered suit to attack him. While on the other hand, there was no guarantee that he would be able to outrun that powered suit outside that building. If he went outside that building, Kain might also use his cyborg body to quickly catch up with him and kill him.

“…So either I risk it by running away from that powered suit or by placing my trust in her offer, huh…

As Akira was still thinking about what to do, Alpha came up with a third choice.

“You do have another choice. You can try to fight that powered suit.”

“But like, that thing will explode if I get too close, right?”

“First of all, we don’t know for sure if it really has a self-destruct sequence. And even if it has one, there’s no real proof that she’s trying to prevent it from setting off the explosion. Since it hasn’t exploded yet, it might mean that the explosion radius is actually pretty small, so you can just keep your distance from it to make sure that it won’t explode. As for the self-destruct sequence, it might have explosives installed inside it or it’s set to make an explosion by rerouting the energy inside it. If it’s the latter, it should also be using a portion of its energy for its force field. So if you keep shooting at it and shaving its energy, you might exhaust its energy and prevent it from creating an explosion. And if it goes well, you might even be able to destroy its control device.”

It was not like Alpha had any proof when she made those guesses. She was only speaking of possibilities. But it did not change the fact that it presented Akira with a third option.

“So either I take her offer or run away or fight it, huh?”

“I can only give you suggestions. All of them depend on your luck, so I have no recommendation on which one to pick. You should decide, Akira. I’ll give you my full support no matter which one you pick.”

“I understand.”

Akira threw Nelia’s head to the ground.

Nelia stared at Akira while he made his decision.

“I’ll try fighting back first before asking you for help, so you just wait here.”

After saying that, Akira started running back to fight Kain’s powered suit.

Nelia was smiling as she watched Akira run.

Although Kain’s powered suit was following an autopilot program, it was not a smart autopilot program. It was not clear whether it was targeting

someone inside that building or just randomly rampaging. It was not like it was aiming its guns accurately at Akira. It was only attacking any signal picked by its information-gathering device. That powered suit was set to attack any human-like signal that it could find.

Even if there were some obstacles between it and its target, it would not take alternative route but use its guns or its body to push them aside. 2 of the 4 big guns on its arms had already run out of ammo and turned into mere decorations.

With the help of his enhanced vision, Akira could see the big powered suit that was on a rampage not too far from where he was. He could notice that some of its guns had already run out of ammo.

“Wait, if I just hide, won’t it use all of its ammo at this rate?”

“Well, yes it would. But I hope it won’t explode the moment it runs out of ammo. It would be really bad if the whole building crumbles down, you know.”

“That sounds really likely to happen. So it can’t be helped, let’s go.”

The rampaging powered suit created new holes on the building’s walls. Akira used those holes to snipe that powered suit and thanks to its huge size, the shot landed.

The CWH special ammo hit that powered suit’s torso. The impact threw its huge body into the narrow halls. It was moving very slow, although Akira’s body was in a bad shape, he was still able to move faster than that huge powered suit.

The force field absorbed the impact of the CWH special ammo. A huge bang and a flash of blinding light enveloped the area. The powered suit reacted by turning its guns at Akira, but its arms and guns got caught in the rubbles, thus slowing it down and giving Akira a chance to move somewhere safe.

Akira kept doing that hit-and-run sniping and hammered that powered suit with CWH special ammo. While at the same time, that powered suit kept on shooting randomly inside the building, destroying the walls, floors and ceilings as warheads flew around the area.

Although it seemed like Akira was one-sidedly shooting at that powered suit, one hit from it was enough to kill him. While on the other hand, although each impact threw its body off balance, Kain's powered suit did not stop spewing out warheads from its huge guns. Those warheads turned wreckages and rubbles in the area into dust, thus Akira had fewer and fewer places to hide. Akira did not think even for the slightest that he had the upper hand there.

Then suddenly, the sound of the bullet impact changed. The force field had run out of energy, so the CWH special bullet was able to directly hit the powered suit's body. It started getting obvious as its movement got worse.

Akira did not let that slide as he kept on shooting at its torso. It was not for naught, Akira eventually dealt some damages to its control device. When that happened, the control device sent an emergency signal and caused the powered suit to violently flung its limbs around as if it was in pain.

But it did not stop Akira. As he kept on shooting at it, the powered suit eventually stopped moving.

Akira carefully checked the stopped powered suit while exchanging the magazine on his rifle. It seemed that the powered suit had stopped for good.

"Did we… Win?"

"That seems to be the case. At least, it doesn't seem like it poses any danger anymore."

"Yeaahhh!!"

Akira shouted in delight. It was a shout of victory since he was finally able to escape from his deadly situation and defeat the big enemy who he originally did not expect to defeat.

“Akira, this is not the end yet. Don’t drop your guard until we finish everything.”

“I know, let’s go.”

Akira firmly replied before running to finish the rest of his business there.

Nelia was waiting for Akira, it was not like she could do anything other than waiting for the result of her gamble.

And finally, she could see the result coming back.

Akira returned to where Nelia was, she smiled and welcomed him.

“Welcome back. It seems that you somehow destroyed Kain’s powered suit, huh. It’s amazing for you to be able to do that in this situation.”

It was as Nelia said, Akira’s body was in such bad shape. Both his body and his augmented suit were near their limit. But even so, he somehow survived and stood there in front of her.

Looking at how Nelia was still smiling even in that situation, Akira obviously looked puzzled and asked.

“You look so relaxed, are you not afraid of dying?”

“Nope, not at all. But it would be great if you can let me live.”

“I see, well, I don’t want to die either.”

“We really think alike. As I thought, won’t you be my boyfriend?”

“No thanks. I don’t want to date someone who tried to kill me and I don’t want to date a dead girl either.”

Akira answered back swiftly. He then readied his CWH anti-material rifle and pointed it at Nelia. There was no way he would miss his shot at this range. He just needed to pull the trigger to assure his victory and he still had enough power to at least do that much.

But then Nelia smiled and said.

“Well, it’s going to be fine.”

Akira looked puzzled.

“…What do you mean by that?”

Before Nelia could answer that question, Alpha suddenly interjected.

“Akira!! Don’t move!!”

Akira followed Alpha’s order, he stopped moving. His finger was still resting on the trigger. Then the next moment, the CWH anti-material rifle in his hand was suddenly sent flying.

He was taken aback by what happened as few guys suddenly appeared around him. They appeared all of a sudden from nowhere, or at least, Akira did not notice them before at all. The person who shot and sent Akira’s CWH anti-material rifle flying was one of those men.

As Akira was still confused by what was going on, more of those people appeared around him.

“Alpha! Where did these people come from?! I didn’t notice them at all!!”

“They just came. All of them are using camouflaging devices, that’s why you didn’t notice them.”

“C-camouflaging devices…?”

“Those are devices that prevent other people from detecting your location. There are many types of camouflaging devices, starting from heat camouflage, movement camouflage, sound camouflage…”

“That’s not what I’m asking about…”

Then one of those guys said something that answered Akira’s question.

“Don’t move!! We’re Kugamayama Defense Squad!! Surrender yourself and don’t try to fight back!! If you don’t obey our orders, we might judge that you’re against the City Management!! We even have the permission to take you out in that case!!”

Those guys were soldiers from Kugamayama Defense Squad. More of them kept appearing as they surrounded Akira.

Other than Akira, there were many who were trying to make contact between the underground exploration HQ and the temporary base. Although Akira failed to make contact with the temporary base, other people successfully conveyed the message from the underground exploration HQ. The Head Commander of the temporary base thought that the situation was pretty bad and decided to quickly send out the city’s defense squad.

The defense squad quickly patrolled the area around the underground exploration HQ. In the midst of their patrol, they noticed explosions as if someone was fighting nearby. That was when Kain sent his powered suit to the building where Akira and Nelia were. The defense squad thought that it might be the relic thieves fighting against monsters, so they sent some of their men to check the source of that sound.

When they arrived, they saw Akira aiming his CWH anti-material rifle at Nelia.

Akira looked at the people who were surrounding him and let out a sigh. It was obvious that they were more skilled and had better equipment than him. They looked completely cautious as they pointed their rifles at him. They could kill him anytime if he made any suspicious move.

“I feel like this has happened before.”

“What a coincidence, actually I too feel the same.”

Akira was talking about the experience he had when he was about to kill Yajima. At that time, he should have quickly pulled the trigger, because he didn’t do it he had to pay for that mistake by fighting Shiori. But with that being said, it’s not like he could do that in this situation.

He quickly raised his hands and yelled before Nelia could say anything. After all, it would be problematic if she said something that would complicate the situation.

“I’m Akira!! I’m a Hunter working in the underground city exploration operation! The relic thieves ambushed me when I was on my way to the temporary base! You can ask them for confirmation!!”

“Chain them!! You have permission to shoot them if they fight back!! We’ve received reports of dead Hunters from the underground!! So keep your guard up!!”

“I’m just a Hunter…!!”

A few men restrained Akira and handcuffed him, he did not fight back when they did that. The defense squad then took him and Nelia away from that place.

Akira could feel the tension inside his body and mind loosen. No matter what the outcome was, his battle had finally come to an end. Both his body and psyche were very tired. Akira, who did faint once, did not have the ability to fight back that tiredness now.

His eyes were slowly closing. Before he lost consciousness, he could hear Alpha’s voice.

“It’s okay, don’t worry, just take a good rest.”

Alpha smiled to reassure Akira. It was a smile telling him that there was no longer any danger.

“…I see… Good night then.”

He was relieved as his consciousness slowly faded away. The defense squad panicked as they supported Akira, who suddenly went unconscious.

“The target has lost consciousness!!!”

“Check for his vitals and respond accordingly!! He might be one of the relic thieves!! Don’t let him die no matter what before we can extract all the information that we can get from him! Call the medical squad from the underground exploration HQ and tell them to be on standby!! B squad, search the building!! There might be more relic thieves around!! If you find any of them, take them alive if it’s possible!! If it’s not, you have the permission to kill!”

The rest of the men quickly got into their job, following their commander’s order.

Just like Akira, Nelia was also secured by the defense squad. Although she was only left with her head, the device installed inside her head allowed her to make a long-range call with other people. Because of which she came to know about the situation outside.

Although Nelia could not control her body, she caught a glimpse of Akira when she was carried away.

[You see, just like I said, it’s going to be fine.]

Nelia was smiling. She knew that if she bought time until the defense squad arrived, she might be able to get out of that situation alive, and she actually did.

Her luck allowed her to survive. It could also be said that it was Akira’s luck that allowed her to survive.

Kain escaped until he reached the outskirts of the Kuzusuhara ruin. He met up with some men there. Although they looked different from one another, it was obvious from their appearance that they were cyborgs just like Kain.

They then saluted Kain. The representative among those men stepped forward and said.

“Welcome back, sir!”

Kain replied back.

“Thanks for the hard work, give me a sitrep.”

“Yessir!! We’ve withdrawn everyone that we’ve dispatched. We’ve also received reports that our moles have successfully pulled back.”

“I see. We should pull back too. Just to be safe, we’ll not visit Kugamayama city and head straight to another city. Let’s go.”

“Are we going to just leave them alone?”

When they mentioned “them”, they meant the people who Kain was working with when he was stealing the relics from the underground city. They were still waiting for him and Nelia near the truck, but they were no longer his friends at this point.

“Yeah, I’m sure the defense squad would take care of them for us. If we take care of them ourselves, it would only make it easier for the defense squad to track us. Although it might be okay if they discover about me, it would be a hindrance to our operation if they found out about the others too.”

“Roger that, let’s move out!!”

Kain then left that place together with those men. In the middle of their travel, one of those men asked him.

“Sir, I heard that you changed the plan during the last hour. Is there any reason why you did that?”

“The main reason was because a guy named Yajima got killed. He was responsible for the transportation. Things got complicated after his death. Because of that, we had to cancel our original plan.”

“Was it impossible to somehow save that man?”

“His death shouldn’t have caused much trouble in our original plan. That man was supposed to be alive only until he brought the old world relics to

our place… If you want to mock me for my inability to predict something like this, which had turned the whole operation into a failure, you can go ahead and do that, I'll take full responsibility."

"No, that's not it. I can understand that something bad happened which was outside of your control and it was not something that we can deal with. I apologize if my question rubbed you the wrong way."

That man noticed that Kain's mood was worsened. So he decided to stop asking any more questions.

Kain fell into deep thought.

[But still, how did it end up like this? According to the men from inside the Long-term Strategic Division, there should be no Hunter in this area who can take out Yajima or Nelia. Nelia did say that there might be an agent mixed among the young Hunters from Drankam. Now that I think about it, Drankam did send some young Hunters to the underground city, and I heard that there was someone among them who was actually a good Hunter. Did the city send some agents to Drankam in order to control that big gang from the inside? And did we encounter one of those agents by pure chance…? If he's really an agent from the city, that explains why he's that strong. I guess I'll look into it more later.]

He then asked the guy near him.

"I heard that there was a big group among the Drankam's young Hunters, do you know who's the centre of that group? Since we're talking about a young Hunter here, simple propaganda should be enough to pull him in, they should at least come up with such a plan."

"Certainly… The target name should be Katsuya. Do you need us to make a detailed document about him?"

"No need. I'll investigate about him myself later. I'll ask you to make one later in case if I need it."

"Yessir."

That man decided not to say anything needless in order not to make Kain's mood worse again. But because of that, he lost the chance to correct their misunderstanding.

Kain and those men left Kuzusuhara ruin and vanished into the wasteland.

Nelia was imprisoned in a solitary cell inside the Kugamayama city's prison. It was equipped with devices to restraint a cyborg. There was a table inside that solitary cell. Nelia was fixed above that table. She was still only a head.

There were a lot of cables connected through her neck. Most of them were for keeping her alive while some of them were to block her from contacting other people. So she couldn't do anything and felt bored to death.

Shortly after, a man came in. He smiled at Nelia.

"Uhhh, Nelia-san, right? I'm Yanagisawa. How are you, I guess?"

Nelia smiled and replied.

"I can't say that I'm doing good. I'm feeling so bored. I don't mind if you put a filter on, but can you at least let me connect with the outside world?"

Yanagisawa smiled and shook his head.

"I'm sorry, but sadly, I don't have the authority to do that. But I can at least accompany you in wasting some time. Don't worry, we'll just have a good talk. In short, I just need to get information out from you, but it doesn't mean that we can't have a good civilized talk."

"I have told you everything though. Well, I don't mind talking to you, but this is an exchange, okay? For everything that I'll tell you, make sure that it'll reduce my sentence, okay?"

After saying that, Nelia smiled invincibly.

Yanagisawa smiled back.

“Of course, I’m someone who thinks that human rights apply even to criminals. That also includes the right to make a deal. Making a deal is important. It’s one thing that binds people together. It’s a means to communicate with people in different positions. Those who can’t make a deal with other people are the same as monsters. After all, it’s not like you can negotiate with them.”

Nelia seemed to be a bit annoyed by Yanagisawa’s attitude. She stopped smiling and asked.

“…So then, what do you want to ask me?”

“We want to know more about this Kain.”

“I’ve told you everything before. Do you want me to tell you the same thing one more time?”

“Well, it’s true that you did. We’ve heard about him both from you and your friends. We followed the information you gave and tried to chase this guy named Kain. But then there’s one thing that we discovered, this Kain guy doesn’t exist. I’m not here to complain to you that ‘Kain’ is a fake name. If it’s fake, then it’s fake. One thing for sure, this guy who’s using this fake ‘Kain’ name does exist.”

“Don’t blame me for your inability to make a proper investigation.”

Yanagisawa just smiled silently. That smile somehow made Nelia worry.

He suddenly said.

“By the way, what do you think will happen for your punishment?”

“…Hmmm, let’s see. I guess my cyborg body will be confiscated by the city and they’ll make me do forced labour. They’ll send me to dangerous ruins controlled by the City Management. Then they’ll use me like an expendable good until I can repay my debt to the city. So until then, I’ll be spending my days excavating relics from that dangerous ruin.”

Yanagisawa smiled and said.

“That’s correct. But there’s only this one thing that you are misunderstanding here, you see. What you said would be your punishment if you’re a relic thief. That is if they think that you’re only a common relic thief that you can find in abundance in this eastern district.”

Nelia’s expression turned grim. Even when Akira pointed his rifle at her, she did not make this face.

“What do you mean?”

Yanagisawa smiled, it only made her even more worried.

“We believe that this guy by the name of Kain is one of the Nationalist. Moreover, he’s not a goon, he’s one of their upper echelons.”

Nelia was shocked. Looking at her, Yanagisawa’s smile widened as he continued.

“We have quite a lot of problems in the eastern district because of those Nationalist, you see. Not only do they encourage common thugs to steal relics from under the City Management, they then robbed them off those relics. They caused the City Management so much losses to the point that we can no longer ignore them. Then we noticed from all the troubles that happened around the city that there must be someone orchestrating them, but we didn’t know for sure who that person was. We believe that Kain is the person in question. The defense squad that secured you guys were all well armed, right? Those men were originally sent to capture the Nationalist.”

Nelia’s face turned pale, after hearing what he said, she understood her situation.

Yanagisawa continued. He kept talking about the subject that made Nelia even more worried. It made her understand just how bad the situation that she was in.

“Right now, the city is suspicious of you since it seems that you’re pretty close to this Nationalist officer. So we’re rather suspicious if you’re actually

hiding some information that might help us identify that person. Some of us even think that you might be one of those Nationalist that stands against not only this city but against the whole Corporate Government. If this misunderstanding doesn't get cleared up, your punishment will be very… very…. miserable. To be more precise, you'll be used in the Rebuild laboratory experiment."

Nelia sounded terrified as she asked.

"W-wait. Didn't that laboratory get disbanded…?"

"Of course, the Rebuild laboratory was publicly disbanded. But it's not like we killed all the researchers or scrapped all the research results from that lab. They're still researching even now. But this time, they're doing more ethical experiments compared to before. As long as they keep producing results, the Corporate Government is willing to turn their eyes away. Under the management of the Corporate Government, they're producing a huge amount of results at the expense of the human rights of a very small number of people. But of course, these people are chosen from 'unredeemable' criminals, I'm talking about criminals who have caused quite a significant loss to the City Management."

Nelia was so scared that she had trouble saying anything, but she somehow was able to raise her voice although only barely.

"B–b-but… I-I'm not…"

"Well, I'm sure that's the case. I'm sure you're not one of them and you have nothing to do with those Nationalist. That's why you better try your best to prove that you're telling the truth. Tell us something that will make us believe you. Like I said before, I'm someone who believes that human rights apply even to criminals. I believe that we need to at least uphold the minimal level of human rights like sentencing criminals to death by turning them into minced meat, or by injecting them with poison, or by feeding them to the monsters. That's why I don't really agree with the idea of handing criminals over to the Rebuild laboratory for experiments. But I have duties that I need to fulfil too, you see. That's why I hope that you cooperate with me. And also, to be honest, I don't know for sure what they

do inside the Rebuild laboratory. After all, it’s a secret that only the Corporate Government knows.”

Nelia was frozen in fear. Yanagisawa smiled and continued.

“So then, you’ll tell me everything, right? Don’t worry, we have a lot of time in our hands. Not to mention that you did say you’re bored, right? Now you have something to spend your time on.”

It could be said that it was Nelia’s luck that was keeping her alive, it could also be said that it was Akira’s luck too. But she regretted the fact that she was still alive as she was desperately trying to make excuses so that she could continue to stay alive.

Whether it was a lucky thing or an unlucky thing, no one knew for sure yet.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 62, The Value of A Battle Record

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Editor: Silavin

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Akira was standing in the middle of a white world. His mind was cloudy. But even so, he somehow understood that he was dreaming and it was the same world that he once visited in the past.

He could see Alpha not too far from him. And just like the last time when he was in this world, Alpha did not seem to have noticed him at all.

Alpha was completely expressionless while talking to herself.

“Evaluating the 499th try. Calculating the possibility of the subject stepping into the targeted area… Less than 1 per cent. Calculating the possibility of the subject returning back alive from the unexplored territory… Less than 1 per cent. Unsuitable. Recommending increasing the subject’s fighting capability.”

Alpha continued.

“Constructing a plan on how to direct the subject. Making sure to take into account the reason why the previous subject broke the contract. Predicting the factors that steered the previous subject’s judgement. If the previous subject’s action was successful, there would be undefined numbers of

human well-being affected and rescued, etc… As such, this unit needs to be careful so that the current subject would not even consider taking the same action that the previous subject took."

Alpha continued.

"Now, taking into account the character of the current subject. It's unlikely that the current subject would take the same decision as the previous subject. This is based on the fact that the current subject doesn't trust other humans, is apathetic toward others, and tends to be egocentric. It's highly unlikely that the current subject has the same moral values, tolerance, morality and principles as the previous subject."

Alpha continued.

"In order not to repeat the same mistake as the 498th try, it's recommended to keep watch of the current subject's possible change of attitude."

Akira's consciousness waned. The world was once again enveloped in darkness, his dream had ended.

Akira woke up inside a sickroom. He felt like he just saw an important dream, but he could not recall what it was. It only left him with the feeling that he saw a similar dream once before.

The sickroom where he woke up was a room for one, filled with devices to treat a human with an organic body. As Akira tried to sit on the bed he was lying, he saw Alpha.

"Good morning, Akira. Did you sleep well?"

"Morning Alpha. Yeah, I feel like it has been a long time since I slept so well."

He felt completely refreshed and his body felt better than usual. His injuries were fully healed as he no longer felt any pain. His body was in tip-top shape now.

Akira scanned the whole room. There were no railings on the window and it seemed like the camera installed in the room was not to prevent the patient from running away, but to check the patient's condition. It was not a bad place at all, but it did not tell anything about his current situation.

"So then, where am I?"

"Kugamayama city's hospital. They brought you here to get you treated."

"Is that so?"

There was a big public hospital inside the city that both Kugamayama city and the Hunter Office relied on. It was designed to be able to treat organic human and cyborg, as such, it was naturally expanded into a huge facility. Most of its patients were people who regularly went into battle such as Hunters and soldiers who guarded dangerous places.

This hospital mainly focused on treating injuries than curing diseases. It was so specialised in its treatment that it could heal someone who had lost 4 of their limbs by using an expensive procedure to regenerate them back, or fix people with a modified body or even transplant some of their body parts, or install cyborg body parts with better and more powerful parts, or even revert a cyborg body back into an organic body by regrowing body parts.

Akira had fainted when the defense squad was transporting him. He was suspected to be one of the relic thieves, as such, it would not be strange if he had woke up inside a cell.

"What do they think of me now?"

"I believe that someone would come here to explain that. But don't worry, they no longer suspect you to be one of the relic thieves. So don't worry about that part."

"That's good to hear."

Akira stroke his chest in relief.

Although he was in good shape, it was not like he could just go out of the room. So he just spent his time inside that room talking with Alpha. It did not take long before a city staff came in, and it was Kibayashi.

For some reason, Kibayashi looked like he was in a really good mood.

“We meet again. It’s good to see that you’re as reckless as always.”

Akira appeared to be puzzled as he looked at Kibayashi. Kibayashi realized that Akira did not remember him.

“It’s me, Kibayashi. The guy who gave you that bike, remember?”

“Akira, he’s the person who gave you the bike when you decided to accept the SOS request when a swarm of monsters from Kuzusuhara ruin headed to Kugamayama city. He’s the Hunter Office staff from that time.”

Akira vaguely remembered Kibayashi’s face, and after listening to Alpha’s explanation, he recalled immediately.

“Ah, I remember it now. If I’m not mistaken, you’re the Hunter Office staff who was driving the truck, right? And from that SOS request too…”

Kibayashi nodded happily.

“That’s right, so you remember me now, huh? I was there as a Hunter Office staff, but today, I’m here as City staff. It’s good to see you, Akira.”

Kibayashi extended his hand, expecting a handshake. When Akira grabbed his hand, Kibayashi excitedly shook it up and down. It seemed that Kibayashi was really in a good mood.

“Now then, to be honest, I have a lot of things that I want to ask. But work comes first, I’m here today to make a deal with you.”

“A deal?”

“Yep. But before we do that, I want to explain to you about your current situation. I’m sure you want to know why you are here or if the city still

suspects you as one of the relic thieves, right?”

“Yeah, please do.”

Kibayashi nodded firmly in response to Akira’s words.

He then handed a pile of papers to Akira. Those were documents explaining his current situation.

“All the details are written in it. I’ll read it for you, you are free to stop and ask me if you find anything confusing.”

Kibayashi then started giving explanations to Akira, he also had a copy of the same documents in his hand.

After the defense squad captured Nelia and Akira, they handed them over to the medical squad in the underground exploration HQ to receive emergency treatment. They were then transported to Kugamayama city as suspects.

It did not take long for them to deduce that Nelia was one of the relic thieves. After all, she quickly confessed and told them everything about the other relic thieves.

Nelia was very cooperative during the questioning. She honestly told the City Management about the details of her plan, the number and identity of the people who were working with her, the amount of the relics that they hid and where they hid them, and where they hid their truck. She told everything that might be of help even when not asked about that information. Of course, Nelia gave all those information in exchange for a lighter sentence.

Akira found such a change of attitude really strange from the girl who he had a deathmatch with.

“Nelia, was it again? Was she really being that cooperative?”

“Yeah. I heard that she was very cooperative. Even though she only did that to reduce her sentence, it’s strange that she was so cooperative. Even the person responsible for questioning her found it strange and asked her.”

“And what did she say?”

“She said that she’s someone who doesn’t let herself get stuck in the past.”

Akira’s expression showed a mix of admiration and dismay.

“That girl really holds to her value… Or more like, she doesn’t take much time to move on… So there are people like her out there, huh.”

“But thanks to that, the investigation went really well and the suspicion on you was quickly cleared up. Normally, we would have done a stricter investigation, you know. Maybe because the person who was assigned for her investigation was the best one there is, they got it done like this.”

“But even if that’s true, I don’t feel thankful to that Nelia at all. She was so close to killing me, you know… So, what happened to her after that? From your story, it sounded like she got a big pardon in her sentence. Did she escape the death sentence? It’s not like you just set her free, right?”

“Of course not. But it at least saved her from severe punishment. She was sent for forced labour under the City Management. She was given a cyborg body with the City Management’s authority set above her own authority plus an explosive planted in her head. So forget her right of life and death, she doesn’t even have the right over her own body. She’ll be sent to explore dangerous ruins or fight dangerous monsters. I bet the city would use her as an expendable pawn until she serves her punishment period or pays back her debt to the city. Depending on how hard she works, she might be set free in the future, that’s unless if she doesn’t die first of course.”

“…I see.”

After listening to what would happen to Nelia, Akira was rather relieved. But he still somehow felt uneasy.

Although she deserved that, Akira somehow felt unsatisfied. Even though someone as strong as Nelia was denied authority over her own body and sent to do forced labour, he still felt that she was let off easily.

Kibayashi noticed that Akira still looked a bit unsatisfied.

“What’s wrong?”

“…It’s nothing.”

“Ohh, I see, you wanted to kill her yourself, huh? Since her cyborg body is owned by the City Management now, don’t even think of killing her, okay? In the worst-case scenario, all of her debt will be shifted to you if you do that, you know? If you want to kill her yourself, do that after she finishes her sentence.”

“It’s okay. I have no plans for picking a fight with the city.”

“It’s good to hear that. There are people who do that from time to time, you know. Well, it’s not like I don’t understand their feelings though.”

Kibayashi continued his explanation.

After that, it did not take long to capture the rest of the relic thieves. The transport truck was also confiscated by the city and the city recovered all the stolen relics. Although few of them escaped with some of the stolen relics, thanks to Nelia’s confession, the city had precise information about who they were. It was only a matter of time before the City Management captured them.

But there was still no information about Kain. The city did investigate the information about him that they received from Nelia, but they only ended up finding out that it was fabricated information. They even inspected and analyzed the powered suit left behind in the battle site, but there was no personal information that could be extracted from that powered suit. They only knew that this Kain was someone brought in by the mastermind of that operation, Yajima.

When Akira fainted, the city also investigated him and it was quickly proven that Akira had nothing to do with the relic thieves. So then he was sent to get treated until he woke up just a while back.

Kibayashi then finished his explanation about the relic thieves and what happened to them after they were apprehended by the city's Defense Squad.

"…And that will conclude my explanation about the relic thieves. Do you have any questions?"

Akira thought for a bit, he did not have any questions at the moment.

"Alpha, do you have any questions that you want to ask?"

"No."

Just to be safe, Akira also asked Alpha, but it seemed that she too did not have any questions either. Akira was about to say that he did not have any questions, but something suddenly came up in his mind.

"You guys also inspected Kain's powered suit, right? Did you guys find a self-destruction device inside it?"

"Self-destruction device…? Wait for a sec."

Kibayashi checked his information terminal and scanned through the documents about the investigation's result. He then checked the details about Kain's powered suit.

"No, we didn't find anything like that."

After Kibayashi said that, Akira frowned. He realized that Nelia was lying back then. Alpha smiled bitterly and said.

"She did get us good, didn't she Akira?"

"…Well, I still somehow won that fight, so I guess it doesn't really matter now."

Akira's words and expression contradicted each other. Nelia lied to him and he got completely tricked. She was a good trickster, that was all there was to it. Akira thought so while making a disgruntled expression.

Kibayashi thought that it was rather weird, but he then continued.

“Well, at least, according to the result of the investigation done by the city’s Defense Squad, we didn’t find anything that looked like a self-destruction device inside that powered suit. Why did you ask that question by the way?”

“…Well, since it was charging right at me ignoring any damage to its body, I thought that it was set to self-destruct, you see.”

“I’m sure it was sent only as a diversion to buy more time. With such a big thing charging at you, you’ll have no other choice but to deal with it, right?”

“I see. I guess that’s all the questions I have.”

“Well then, I’ll get to the real reason why I’m here. Look at the last page of that document.”

Akira turned the document in his hand to the last page. As soon as he glanced at the page, he was wide-eyed, his jaw dropped. It was a bill addressed to him.

After he was moved to the hospital, Akira received a lot of treatments. That bill listed all the detailed expenses for those treatments. Moreover, it also included his 1 week stay in the hospital since he had fainted.

The Yarata Scorpion’s nest extermination request lasted for 7 days. So the bill also included the remaining 4 days’ cancellation fine.

Putting it all together, it totalled 60,000,000 Aurum. Half of it was from Akira’s treatment. It was a number that was more than enough to make his face pale.

Akira was about to faint but somehow stayed awake. If it was not for his tip-top shape, he would have immediately fainted right there.

Looking at Akira’s reaction, Kibayashi laughed lightly.

“That’s the bill amount you have to pay right now. You might have some complaints about that amount, but let me tell you this beforehand, it’s pointless to complain about it to the hospital. The cost of the treatment does make sense. During an emergency where the patient has lost consciousness, the type of treatment and its cost are both decided by the hospital. Well, it’s basically just a preventive measure against a case where the hospital can’t give the patient any treatment just because they can’t confirm if the patient wants to take that treatment or not since the patient has already passed out.”

Akira replied in a panic.

“B-but just because of that, it’s not like I can pay this much money, you know…?!!”

Kibayashi did expect that Akira would be shocked like this. He then tried to calm Akira down.

“Calm down. The hospital won’t charge you that amount if they don’t think that you can pay it. It’s not like they’re running a charity after all, and even a charity would not run without money. So they’ll make you pay a lot of money whenever they have the chance. Which in this case, to be more precise, it would be subtracted from your reward.”

“My reward?”

“Yep, your reward. Like I said before, I’m here to make a deal with you.”

Kibayashi smiled when he said that.

“To cut the chase, if you accept our offer, not only can you pay for that bill, you can even go back home with an extra 100,000,000 Aurum. So what do you think? Doesn’t that sound enticing?”

Akira was thunderstruck, when he thought that he would be carrying a 60,000,000 Aurum debt, he was then told that he might even go back home with 100,000,000 Aurum surplus money. He was so dumbfounded that he was lost for words.

“Akira, get back to your senses.”

“…Ah!?”

Akira immediately snapped back to his senses when Alpha called for him. Looking at that, Kibayashi smiled bitterly.

“Now that you’ve returned back to this world, can I continue?”

“Ah, yeah, sure. So what’s your demand?”

“Our demand is simple. We want you to sell your battle record in the black market. To be more precise, we want you to change it to this: you were just monitoring the underground defensive point when a swarm of Yarata scorpions attacked you, you then got injured and were sent to the hospital. You’ll be bound by confidentiality, so you can’t tell anyone about this. If someone asks you what happened, just tell them that you got assigned to watch the defensive point or you can’t say anything due to the confidentiality of the request. It’ll also get reflected in your record in the Hunter Office’s webpage. There might be a chance that the record which you sold to be listed under another Hunter’s battle record, in which case, you can’t claim that as your battle record, okay?”

After saying that, Kibayashi waited for Akira’s reply. Akira was actually waiting for Kibayashi to continue his explanation, but since Kibayashi went silent, Akira quickly asked him.

“…Is that all?”

When Akira asked that, Kibayashi tried hard to hold back his laughter. Akira looked puzzled since he did not think that he said anything funny. Kibayashi somehow held back his laughter, he then answered back while locking his gaze at Akira.

“Yep!! That’s all!! You’ll just have to sell your battle record which says you overpowered 3 relic thieves alone!! The record says that you even defeated them when 2 of them were equipped with powered suits!! I’m really glad that you are always so reckless!! For someone like you, losing this record is

nothing big at all, right? A normal Hunter would get super angry if they lose this kind of record, you know?”

Although Hunter Rank can be used to judge the ability of a Hunter, the same thing could also be done using battle records. Records like defeating a strong monster or bringing back an expensive relic and so on. With records like these, Hunters could boast regardless of their Hunter Rank.

Records of fighting against battle oriented cyborgs or a powered suit would boost Hunter’s value. If it was only winning a battle against a strong monster, anyone would be able to get that record by working in dangerous areas where powerful biological monsters roamed. In contrast to that, winning a fight against another human with powerful fighting skills and equipment was an extremely rare record.

Fighting a monster and fighting a human demanded completely different combat skills. A battle record against someone powerful would really entice requesters who are looking for people with that skill set. Not to mention, both the city and the Hunter Office guaranteed the accuracy of such battle record, thus it was a highly valued commodity.

So in short, the City Management demanded such an important thing from Akira. Even though Akira did not know the real worth of that battle record, the fact that he was thinking very lightly of his own battle record made Kibayashi really delighted.

Akira looked puzzled as he looked back at Kibayashi.

“To be honest, I don’t see how that thing is worth 100,000,000 Aurum, no, adding the 60,000,000 Aurum, that would be 160,000,000 Aurum. I don’t see how my record is worth that much. If you’re serious about this, can you tell me how you even came up with such a value?”

Akira sounded doubtful. He thought that there must be some kind of string attached to this deal.

Akira could not refuse the deal. If he did, he would have to find another way to pay his 60,000,000 Aurum debt. Although he might be able to pay

most of his debt from the reward of the underground exploration request, there was no guarantee that it would be able to fully pay back the debt.

He actually understood that the huge medical bill was some kind of a ploy so that he could not refuse this offer. But it was not like he had any means to fight back.

So he was confident that Kibayashi should not be able to easily answer his question. But unexpectedly, Kibayashi swiftly answered back.

“I don’t mind telling you, but it is confidential information. That’s why I can’t explain it to you unless you accept my offer first. So, is it okay if we do that after you accept my offer?”

“Alright.”

“Okay then, put your sign over here.”

Kibayashi handed over a pen and a paper to Akira. Akira tried to read what was written in the paper, but it was filled with lots of hard-to-read small-sized words that Akira quickly decided to give up.

But Alpha read through it in his place and summarised the information to Akira.

“It’s alright. There’s nothing dangerous written in this paper. If I were to summarize its content, it’s saying that you might turn the whole city into your enemy if you were to tell other people about the confidential information.”

After hearing Alpha, Akira felt relieved as he signed his name on the paper and handed it back to Kibayashi. Kibayashi received the paper while smiling.

“Nice!! With this, our deal is sealed!! And my job is done!! Ah, right, about that explanation, can you wait for a bit? I need to tell the City Management that we now have a deal. We’re in a hurry, you see.”

Kibayashi pulled out his information terminal and contacted the City Management. Shortly after that, another staff member came to the room. That staff then took the documents that were in Kibayashi's and Akira's hands, including the paper that Akira just signed. The staff checked those documents before putting them inside his bag.

Kibayashi then continued.

"With this, my evaluation will also soar. You can go ahead and ask me anything, in that way I can at least give you something in return, right? Although I look like this, I am actually someone important. I even have enough authority to give you a bike as front payment. No one can just give out a city's property as a reward unless they have high authority, don't you agree?"

"Alright, just give me a proper explanation first."

"Ah, that 160,000,000 Aurum, right? It's not weird that you think it's too good to be true. It's normal to think that there must be some kind of string attached behind that offer. Well, to put it simply, it is a bribe to keep your mouth sealed."

Kibayashi continued his explanation.

The incident about the relic thieves had come to a closure. Fortunately enough, it did not incur much loss to the city. But this whole incident was caused by the mistakes and the lack of vigilance of the City Management. It was because they did not quickly excavate the relics from the underground city, they let the relic thieves roam around the underground for too long, and they failed to anticipate the possibility of relic theft. Most of the reasons why that incident happened stemmed from City Management's negligence.

It was now impossible to hide that incident, not only were some Hunters killed, the city even sent out its defense squad. With that being said, it did not mean that they could just let it spread to the public. But then a Hunter encountered one of those relic thieves by pure coincidence and killed him, that Hunter then went to the surface, got ambushed by another pair of relic

thieves, and drove them back. The city did not want that incident to end like that since it would bring the City Management to shame.

Although it happened because of the incompetence of the City Management, luckily enough, it somehow got resolved. Now the City Management would have to give the report explaining the incident to the others including the people living in the city who were paying a lot of money for the defense squad's expense, the people from the other City Management that they were regularly in contact with, and more importantly, the upper echelons of the Corporate Government. Thus this incident might hurt Kugamayama City Management's authority.

Kugamayama City Management tried to come up with various plans to resolve the problem. According to their investigation and interrogation regarding the incident, they quickly found out that the main players in that relics thieving incident mistook Akira as an agent from the city. And so the people who were looking for a solution turned their focus onto that revelation.

So rather than some nameless Hunter taking out those relic thieves by pure coincidence, if the story was splintered into something better, something like the city somehow got hold of the information about those relic thieves, so the City Management decided to send an agent in disguise as a Hunter, then as expected, that agent encountered the relic thieves and took them out. If that was what happened, then the City Management would get a good evaluation instead.

Fortunately enough, City Management immediately noticed that it would not take much effort to fabricate such a story. In short, they only needed to convince Akira who took that request himself. Another good thing was that he was not affiliated with any gangs. So the City Management only needed to make a deal with Akira and then they could take care of the rest.

As an assurance for the deal to go smoothly, Akira was given an expensive treatment. The hospital did not hesitate when giving Akira such an expensive treatment since the City Management gave its guarantee. As a result, Akira was handed that 60,000,000 Aurum bill.

Silavin: Wow. My boy got played hard. These guys…

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Rebuild World – Chapter 63, The Benefit Of A Charm

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Kibayashi finished explaining the summary of what happened. But of course, he could not tell Akira the complete story behind that deal, after all, Akira was still an outsider in the end.

“Well, I guess that’s the gist of it. If you want to know more about the detail, you can ask me anytime, but it’ll cost you. And since it’s a piece of insider-information only known among the city staff, it’ll cost you a lot of money. So?”

“Nah, that’s enough.”

Akira said so since he felt that he had heard enough information.

To be honest, Akira did not care if the city wanted to twist the truth. To him, it was something that lay in a world that had nothing to do with him.

Akira had been living in the slum city near the lower district of Kugamayama city for all his life. As such, matters pertaining to the Kugamayama city, the other cities and the corporate government were on a whole different world that was not related to him at all. Or at least, that was the case as long as it did not cause any harm to him.

“I see. Do you have anything else you want to ask? Just go ahead and ask anything you want here. Once either you or I leave this place, it would be too late to ask anything. Ahh, although I said you can ask me anything, just don’t ask for more reward money. It’s not like the city has a bottomless treasury, you know. If you have any complaints about your reward money, you should’ve complained before you signed that document. But on the other hand, if it has nothing to do with money, I’ll try my best to grant anything you ask. I’m very much interested in you. So I’m planning to support you the best I can.”

Kibayashi was telling the truth, he was really interested in Akira. But Akira did not understand the reason why.

“Which part of me piques your interest?”

Kibayashi smiled widely while telling Akira the reason.

“What, you ask?? Your way of living, of course!! The level of recklessness!! Just go out there and die or go out there and live!! That’s really something!! I’m also a part of the Hunter Office, so I can access information about Hunters, and that includes information that is not made public. Have you ever seen your own battle record? You fought against Cannon Insects with just your AAH rifle. You charged into a building full of Yarata scorpions all alone and returned back alive. And you even took out more than 500 scorpions in the underground city. Then to top it off, you took out 3 relic thieves alone, although all of them were cyborgs and 2 of them even had powered suits. These feats are not something that a Rank 20 Hunter can normally accomplish. Not even possible for a Rank 30 Hunter. Although, it seems that you got all beaten up to be able to do these. It’s great that we can patch you up, though I’m sure that you’ll get all beaten up again in no time.”

Akira looked rather disturbed as he asked.

“…Was my body that bad?”

“Yeah, that’s why it took 60,000,000 Aurum to fix your body. I did say to you that the medical bill does make sense, remember? One of the treatments

that we used to fix your body was limb regeneration, it's a treatment that we normally use on people who have lost their limbs, you know. Without all of those treatments… Well, it's not like you'll be dead tomorrow or something, but I bet you won't survive another year. So thanks to those treatments, your body is basically as healthy as most of the people who live in the middle district."

Akira was speechless when he heard what Kibayashi said. But Kibayashi just smiled and continued.

"You feel like you're in your tiptop shape right now, don't you? That's thanks to all those treatments. You're from the slum city, right? So I bet you mostly eat those foods that the city distributed freely in the distribution area. Those things sometimes contain nasty stuff, you know. Like monster's meat which no one knows if it's okay for consumption, or food produced from old-world relics which we don't even know how they work. Of course, it's not like it'll kill you the moment you eat those foods. But it's definitely bad for your health if you keep consuming those foods for a prolonged period. There were even reports of cases where they caused immediate effects, I heard that it was because of the nanomachines which they couldn't fully clean-up from the monster meat or some unknown nanomachines that were mixed in the food produced by suspicious-looking old-world relics. I wonder if you ever noticed it yourself."

Akira frowned. If asked whether he had noticed it himself, the answer was definitely yes.

Akira was able to connect to the old-world domain, that in itself could be considered as an immediate change. It was an ability that the current technology could not explain yet. Although he was able to meet Alpha thanks to that, it was not like he could honestly feel happy about it.

"…So the City Management is distributing those kinds of foods, huh?"

"Well, it's just like what people say, there's nothing more expensive than free stuff. You can get them for free, but they're unhealthy. So I hope you understand that part. By the way, it's basically written in the wrapping of the distributed food and the signboards in the distribution areas, you know?

But well, I bet there are not many people in the slum city who can read those warnings though. On the other hand, I'm sure those who can read the warning decide not to say anything since they'll be troubled if the city stops distributing free food. Although there are good people out there who give out healthy food for free, I bet they are not the majority. Moreover, if such information leaks outside, big influential people in the slum city would immediately monopolize those people. Well, that's just how it works in the slum city. It's not like I can do anything about it even if you complain to me."

The City Management mostly kept its hands clean from the slum city. As long as the slum city did not cause any bad influence on the rest of the city, the City Management would leave the slum city alone. It could even be said that the order in the slum city was guarded by the people of the slum city.

Even if the slum city was technically a part of the lower district, people regarded it as a part of the wasteland. That was why people had no problem robbing under the daylight just like those thugs who attacked Akira the other day. Even if those thugs killed Akira, no one would try to capture those thugs. But it also worked both ways, no one would try to capture Akira even if he fought back and killed all of those thugs as long as those thugs were not affiliated to any organization.

But then, if someone said that that slum city was lawless, that was completely wrong. If power was everything, then the ruler of the eastern district was the Corporate Government, while the ruler of the slum city was Kugamayama city, and both the Corporate Government and the Kugamayama city hated unruliness. If the order in the slum city worsened to the point it even caused damage to Kugamayama city, the City Management would not hesitate to clean the whole slum city together with everyone inside it.

That was why the people of the slum city at least kept the minimum level of order. And the gangs in the slum city were overseeing that by maintaining the order in their respective territory.

"I don't know whether it's because of those foods or not, but the nanomachine residue in your body was pretty bad. Although I know all

Hunters rely on drugs, you particularly consumed a huge amount of medicines, didn't you?"

"Yeah, that is my only choice if I don't want to die after all."

"I'm sure you'll keep doing that in the future no matter what I say. So make sure that you check your nanomachine residue and get them cleaned at least once per month. Most drugs for Hunters contain nanomachines no matter whether it's healing medicine, accelerator, stimulant or any other kinds of drugs."

"Is it bad if I get residue inside my body?"

"Well, there are exceptions and it depends on the type of nanomachine. The effect also differs for each person. But the baseline is, the residue is basically a contaminant, so it's better if you think of it as harmful to your body."

Kibayashi then explained to Akira the dangers of the nanomachine residue.

There were rare cases where the person had very good compatibility with the nanomachine inside his or her body, in which case, the nanomachine stayed effective and brought positive effects for basically forever. In contrast to that, most of the time the nanomachine residue acted as a contaminant as it bought a negative effect on the body.

Sometimes the body would not be able to expel the nanomachines from inside even after they had stopped working. Some Hunters, unbeknown to its risk, think that those nanomachines would not cause any harm since it had stopped working anyway. But in reality, it often interfered with the effect of the new drugs that they consumed.

And when the effect of the drug that they consumed reduced, these Hunters tend to consume the drug in a bigger portion which in turn increased the amount of nanomachine residue inside their bodies. Then the cycle continued until the drugs that they consumed had barely any effect at all on their bodies. Moreover, the residue might even harm their bodies when they consumed drugs with nanomachine with the opposite effect.

While working as a Hunter, Akira ended up having to consume a huge amount of medicines. He consumed medicine while ignoring the consumption warning. And so the nanomachine residue had been slowly piling up inside his body without him even knowing it.

Kibayashi sincerely warned Akira since he still wanted to enjoy watching Akira.

“Basically, for a Hunter, the body is their main asset. There are Hunters who think that they only need guts to do impressive feats and end up neglecting their bodies. If you want to survive for long, be sure to take good care of your body just like how you take care of your rifles. If you don’t take proper care of your rifles, the bullet that it spews might fly in the wrong direction, it might even explode too. There’ll be a good chance that the rifle itself will explode any time you pull the trigger. Same is the case for your body as well. It’s not at all funny if you die because of something as stupid as that. So make sure to be careful.”

“Okay… Hm? Speaking of rifle…”

Akira remembered about his own equipment. At the moment, he had nothing other than the clothes on his body.

Akira scanned the whole room one more time, but he could not find his stuff anywhere. So he then asked Kibayashi.

“Where are my equipment?”

Kibayashi did not know where Akira’s equipment was as well, so he used his information terminal to contact another staff member. After that, he then conveyed the bad news to Akira.

“…Nothing?”

“Yeah. Rather than your equipment, your current personal belonging itself is zero. It’s not like we could recover all of your belongings from where we arrested you, as for your belongings that we recovered like your rifles and augmented suit, they were confiscated and broken down by the City

Management for inspection in order to clear your name. Right now they're under the custody of the City Management as evidence. You can have them back, but all the processes will take you at least 1 month, not to mention that all of them were already severely damaged."

"Did you find my Hunter ID at least?"

"I don't know. Either your ID is left behind where we arrested you or it's confiscated as evidence. Whichever it is, it's faster if you ask for a reissue."

"Alright then, so here is my request. Reissuance of my Hunter ID, an information terminal that I can immediately use and some Hunter clothes that I can wear. After all, if I go out like this, I'll look like a patient running from the hospital."

"Roger that. I'll have them sent to this room later. Anything else?"

Akira turned to Alpha.

"Alpha, do I need anything else?"

"Aren't you going to ask for a rifle or an augmented suit?"

"For the equipment, I want to buy them from Shizuka's shop if it's possible. It's not like that's a must though."

Alpha knew that it was only a matter of preference, but if it was something meaningful for Akira, she had no plan trying to carelessly change his preference.

Although it would mean that Akira would have to walk from the hospital to Shizuka's shop without any weapons, Alpha thought that it would be alright as long as he had her support. If he could not even avoid problems on this level, then he might as well never step outside.

"In that case, let's have him introduce us to some real estate agent for Hunters. You need to step up from living in inns soon."

Akira agreed with her opinion and conveyed it to Kibayashi.

“Introduce me to a real estate agent. I’m not sure if I can rent a good house with my Hunter Rank, so please find me a cheap but decent house. And also, hmm, right, hurry up with the payment. I want to buy new equipment with that money. I guess that’s all I have to ask.”

“Alright. About the payment, it should’ve been directly transferred to your account. Just check it once you get your Hunter ID and information terminal. Just to be safe, I’ll leave my contact in your information terminal after setting it for standard first-use. As for the real estate agent, I’ll try to connect you with a real estate agent under the City Management. I’ll send the details through your Hunter code later, so check your terminal once you get it. So, anything else? If you have nothing else, I’ll leave the room. Once I’m outside, you can’t ask me for anything more. So, do you really have nothing else to ask?”

“Yeah.”

“I see, alright then, take care and good luck in your hunt. I’ll be looking forward to your next reckless feat.”

Kibayashi waved his hand and left the room.

It was only a few minutes after Kibayashi left the room when Akira could feel his empty stomach. He had not eaten anything for a whole week. He bet that he was fed through an I.V tube during his treatment.

The moment he realized that he had an empty stomach, his stomach started to grumble. But at the moment, Akira had no money at all, and even if he had some money, it was not like he could leave that place before he could get his Hunter ID. Akira regretted the fact that he did not ask Kibayashi for food.

“…Oh great, I should’ve asked for some food too.”

“Now that you mention it, it has been a week since your last meal. You didn’t notice it earlier?”

“You didn’t notice it either?”

“I don’t need food. Since you didn’t say anything, I thought that you were okay at the moment. It’s not like I can tell if you’re hungry, you see. So let’s just wait, I’m sure that your stuff will come soon.”

“…Ah, I should’ve also asked when they will arrive here. You only remember things like this once you miss your chance.”

“That’s true.”

Akira had no other choice but to keep waiting while enduring his empty stomach. It took about an hour before a city staff member came to that room, bringing all the stuff that Akira asked Kibayashi.

__*__*__*__

Shizuka was managing her shop just like always.

As usual, she was spending her days selling ammo and other equipment to the Hunters for her living. But, Shizuka herself noticed that she had been sighing more than usual lately. She even understood the reason behind it, it was because it had been a week since the last time Akira visited her shop.

There had been occasions when Akira did not visit her shop for more than a week in the past. But right now, he should have just finished his request to take out the Yarata scorpion nest in the underground city.

Shizuka’s shop was quite popular. It was selling a pretty good collection of equipment and it had a lot of regular customers. As such, she knew a lot of Hunters who bought their equipment from her shop and never returned.

There were Hunters whom she got acquainted after they bought equipment for a few times in her shop. There were also those whom she knew well after coming to her shop for consultations or getting recommendations for buying equipment. There were even some Hunters who flirted with her or even asked her hand in marriage. All kinds of Hunters went to the wasteland chasing after money and fame just to end up dead. Shizuka knew that all too well.

But Shizuka was running a business, and in order to protect her sanity, she was intentionally trying not to let herself be bothered by their death. After all, she was doing business with the people who might die practically anytime. If she let herself be bothered by their death, she would not be able to continue the business. Although she might feel sad, she did not let it interfere with her calm life. People might call her heartless, but she had decided to accept that too.

That was exactly why it was extremely rare for her to be sighing just because one of her frequent customers did not visit her shop for an extended period of time.

[… I guess I'm too emotionally invested this time, I wonder why I did that.]

Shizuka kept thinking while managing her shop, to be honest, she could come up with many reasons. It might be because Akira was a small boy and she felt like it was her responsibility to watch over him. Or maybe that it was because of her feeling of gratitude toward Akira who saved her close friends, Elena and Sara. Or maybe it was because she once saw how Akira's body was riddled with scars. Or maybe because Akira bought his equipment from her shop and she hugged him before he headed to the wasteland. But in the end, none of those reasons was conclusive.

As Shizuka was about to get absorbed into her thinking, the source of her worry suddenly appeared and stopped her midway. Akira looked a bit surprised when he entered Shizuka's shop.

"Welcome, Akira. It has been quite a while."

"Eh, ah, yes, it has been quite a while."

Shizuka was smiling as she was welcoming Akira with her usual self. Or at least, she was trying to act natural.

But Akira replied back awkwardly as if he was overwhelmed by her smile.

Although Shizuka found that a bit weird, she continued just like usual.

“Are you here for ammo refill today? How about the request that you were taking the last time you came here, are you still doing it? Since I stocked up on CWH special ammo, you can buy a lot of them if you need it. It has been a week already, so you should’ve finished that request, right?”

“Ah, yes, that request is done.”

“I see. So are you here to get a normal bullet and AP bullet then?”

“Well, about that, actually…”

Akira hesitated, Shizuka looked puzzled.

Akira looked straight into Shizuka’s eyes, looked away for a moment, and then returned back. He had resolved himself to say what he was about to say.

“…I lost all of my equipment. So can I buy one full set of equipment today?”

Shizuka sounded a bit shocked as she asked back.

“All of your equipment? What exactly did you lose?”

“All of my rifles, my augmented suit, my information terminal, my rucksack and everything that was inside it, and the information-gathering device that I bought from Elena-san. Basically, everything. My personal belongings right now are just the clothes that I’m wearing, an information terminal and my Hunter ID.”

Shizuka was taken aback after hearing what Akira just said. She knew that Akira used most of the money that he earned to invest in better equipment. Thus, it meant he had lost most of his assets.

“…Wait for a sec there, what exactly happened?”

“Well, a lot of things happened. So then, can I get a full set here?”

“Sure, but… How much is your budget?”

Shizuka thought that Akira had lost most of his assets. She did feel sorry for him, but it was not like she could give him free equipment or accept credit payment. She was running a business and she had to earn money to pay for her living. That was a line that she would absolutely never cross.

Shizuka was thinking of getting Akira the best equipment with whatever the small budget that he had when she asked him how much money he was planning to spend. That was also why she was dumbstruck by what Akira said next.

“It’s 80,000,000 Aurum.”

“…I’m sorry. Just to make sure that I didn’t mishear it, can you say it one more time?”

“It’s 80,000,000 Aurum.”

Shizuka’s face frowned after she confirmed that she did not mishear Akira’s answer. It was not an amount of money that a new Hunter could muster. It was a huge amount of money even for veteran Hunters.

Shizuka stared at Akira. He looked scared but he still returned her stare. She sounded stern as she cornered Akira with her questions.

“Akira, what exactly happened? You should at least know it yourself that such an amount of money is not normal, right? It still doesn’t explain it even if you say that it’s from the reward of your last request. No matter how many scorpions that you took out since the ammo expense is paid by the requester, the reward can’t be that big, right? So, what kind of reckless thing did you do this time to get that 80,000,000 Aurum?”

Shizuka’s stern voice reflected her worry toward him. Akira felt happy as well as sorry because of that.

“I’m sorry. I can’t tell you the details because I’m bound by confidentiality with the requester. Since it’ll affect my credibility, I can’t even tell Shizuka-san anything. But it’s not because I don’t trust you, it’s because my contract

said that I shouldn’t say anything. To be honest, I’m not even sure whether it’s okay to tell you that it’s a confidential matter…”

Normally, Akira would lie saying that nothing in particular happened. But rather than telling an obvious lie, he decided to just tell Shizuka that he could not reveal anything since it was confidential information.

Shizuka kept staring at Akira who was behaving awkwardly as she thought.

[…Akira’s requester this time is Kugamayama city, right? I’m sure he did something dangerous. But on the other hand, it means that the City Management is the one forbidding him from saying anything, so I can’t keep digging deeper. It doesn’t seem like he’s injured and his complexion looks well too. To be honest, I want to know the details, but basically, Akira finished his request and got a huge amount of money, huh. The only reason that I can’t honestly praise him is that he might continue doing reckless things if I praise him here, but I guess that’s just my selfishness, huh…]

“…Although you said a lot of things happened, it seems that you’re not injured at all.”

Akira answered back swiftly.

“I’m alright in that part. Or more like, thanks to all the treatments that I took, I feel better than before I took that request.”

Shizuka at least felt relieved after hearing that. She understood Akira had reasons why he could not explain anything to her, but one thing for sure, he was doing fine.

Shizuka looked at Akira with her usual smile.

“Alright. As for the equipment, I can decide everything as long as it’s under the budget, right? With such an amount of money, I’ll really use it to pick anything I want, you know? So don’t regret it later, okay?”

Shizuka smiled teasingly when she said that. Akira just replied with a smile.

“It’s okay. I’m sure that your choice will definitely be better than mine. If I have to make any particular request, then it would be to get a better augmented suit, I don’t mind if it’s more expensive than my previous one. I want to get an augmented suit that can at least last for a few years.”

“Alright, it’ll be too late to take back what you said now. Just wait here for a bit, okay?”

Shizuka then went to the backroom before returning back with 2 rifles.

“You can use these until your augmented suit arrives. These are my recommended rifles that can be used without an augmented suit. AAH assault rifle and an A2D assault rifle. I’ve explained to you before about the AAH rifle, so, do you want me to explain about the A2D assault rifle?”

“Yes, please.”

Shizuka had predicted that Akira would say yes. And so she continued by happily explaining about the A2D assault rifle.

The A2D assault rifle was basically derived from AAH assault rifle with extra firepower and accuracy. But unlike AAH assault rifle, its parts were designed so that it could be used with AP ammo or +P ammo without any extra modifications.

Moreover, it was equipped with a grenade launcher that could be loaded with all types of grenades. It was light enough to be used without an augmented suit and it was loved by the Hunters as the next best gun to use after AAH assault rifle. It used some similar parts as AAH assault rifle and it was a user-friendly rifle.

“Both of them are unmodified rifles. Just try how they feel without an augmented suit. If you don’t like its weight, you should avoid adding any modifications that add too much to its weight. Even after you get your augmented suit, you’ll need to at least keep some rifles that you can use without it. It would be bad if your augmented suit breaks inside the ruin and you have no rifles that you can use without an augmented suit.”

“Is it better if I buy a sight right now?”

“If you plan to use that sight in tandem with your information-gathering device like before, it’s better if you buy one after you get your new information-gathering device. Using a standard sight without an augmented vision is not really that bad. But I’m actually planning to include the information-gathering device in your equipment set too, so of course, I already have in mind which sight to get. Or, do you want to choose the information-gathering device you need yourself?”

“No, I’ll leave everything to you.”

“Alright then, I’ll contact you once I have a good estimation of how much the total cost is, so just wait for a bit more. It’ll take about 2 weeks until everything arrives after I get the total cost.”

Until he got everything, Akira would be without an augmented suit. So Alpha warned Akira.

“I’m sure you know it even without me telling you, but I’ll say it again, we’ll take a break from Hunter jobs until you get all your new equipment, okay?”

“I know. It’s not like I’m going to underestimate my bad luck after all. I don’t want to fight a swarm of monster or more people with powered suits without my augmented suit.”

He remembered that he encountered a swarm of monsters when he was training outside and he had to fight other Hunters with powered suits when he was out doing Hunter request. Now that he had experienced it himself, he had no plans of going out without Alpha’s full support and he had no qualms staying inside the relatively safe Kugamayama city for the time being.

After that, Akira finished buying most of his equipment set in Shizuka’s shop. He stuffed his new rucksack with medicines, ammo and a rifle maintenance kit. He then picked his new rifles and hung them around his

body. Once he put everything on, he could feel they were quite heavy, it reminded him just how helpful his augmented suit was.

Akira exchanged his information terminal contact number with Shizuka. If only he had his previous information terminal, he would be able to use the same contact number, but since it was destroyed in his fight against Nelia, he had to use a new contact number now. He also asked Shizuka to contact him through his Hunter code instead if she could not contact him through his information terminal contact number.

Shizuka looked at Akira with his new equipment. He had a better set of equipment compared to the first time he came to her shop. But to her, those equipment did not look reliable at all for some reason. It was because she had a feeling that as long as Akira kept working as a Hunter, he would only get to face more battles and harsher fights.

“Akira, are you planning to go out like this for now?”

If he said yes, Shizuka planned to give Akira a stern warning not to do anything dangerous.

But he shook his head.

“No, I’m planning to take a break until I get all of my new equipment. After all, it’s not like I have the ability to fend myself in the wasteland without a complete set of equipment.”

“Is that so? That’s good. It seems that you’ve gone through a lot lately, so it might be a good thing to take a good rest from time to time.”

Shizuka smiled in relief knowing that Akira himself had no plans to be reckless.

They exchanged a short light conversation before Akira left the shop. After seeing him off, Shizuka took out her information terminal and started operating it.

“Since he had also lost his information-gathering device, I guess it’s a good idea to contact Elena and Sara to get their opinion. After all, I feel like they’ll complain if I decide on an information-gathering device to get for Akira without asking them. And I’m sure that they’ll be happy to hear that he is still alive as well.”

Shizuka wrote a message to Elena and Sara saying that she wanted to ask for their opinions since she was buying a new set of equipment for Akira and sent that message.

After visiting Shizuka’s shop, Akira went to Sheryl’s base.

Since he was lying in the hospital bed for a few days and had lost his information terminal, he had no means to contact Sheryl. It would not be strange if she had assumed that he was already dead. So, Akira thought that he should visit Sheryl’s place as soon as possible before it caused any problems.

Akira was talking with Alpha as he was walking through the slum city.

“But still, 60,000,000 Aurum for medical treatment and 80,000,000 Aurum for new equipment. I already spent most of my money, huh. I wonder what’s going on with my sense of money.”

Akira smiled bitterly when he said that, but Alpha just smiled and replied.

“You should be happy that you’re earning enough money to use them like this now. You might also think that such an amount of money isn’t worth it for winning that gamble with a bad odds even after betting your life and all your personal belongings. But with this, you’ll be able to get a good set of equipment, you know. Not to mention that since you received that treatment, all of your injuries from that gamble are completely healed now. It’s true that it was not easy at all, but result-wise, I think it ended up well.”

“Hmmm, to be honest, I’m not really sure about that.”

During that fight, Akira lost his rifles, his augmented suit and all the small things that were inside his rucksack. He got all of them by risking his life,

so he had a certain attachment towards them.

He then remembered something. The charm that he bought from Shizuka's shop was a good luck charm for his gamble in the old-world ruin. And just like any other gambles, the more you bet, the lesser your chance to win, but the bigger the prize if you won.

[…If what happened back then was because of that good luck charm… If the effect of that good luck charm is to increase the number of occasions of such a gamble… I guess it's not an exaggeration to say that it brought good luck by bringing gambling chance with a big bet. Even if I had to supplement the amount of bet with something else, for example, the danger of death. It is not an easy thing to find such a chance where I can get this much amount of money by betting my own life. After all, normally, you can only get a small amount of money even if you bet your own life. So looking from that perspective, I guess it really brought me good luck, huh… Wait… But…]

Akira decided to stop thinking about it. It was because he knew that it would be bad for his spirit.

Moreover, he had lost that charm now. So there was no meaning in thinking about that thing anymore. Akira thought so as he stopped thinking further about it.

Alpha looked a bit puzzled as she asked Akira.

"Akira, what are you thinking?"

"Ah, no, I was just thinking about that charm that I bought from Shizuka's shop."

As Akira answered back through telepathy, he also unintentionally sent his thoughts to Alpha about that charm and him thinking he would get to face more deadly fights if he kept that charm with him. It was true that he was able to get a lot of money but, to be honest, he did not want to get into such a fight ever again. And lastly, it also transmitted the fact that it was Alpha who recommended that charm to Akira.

Alpha was obviously averting Akira’s gaze as she said.

“It’s not my fault.”

“I know, I know.”

Akira lightly smiled, it was rare for Alpha to react like that.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 64, Sheryl's Panic

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Sheryl was busy with her work inside her room. She was making a rather scary face while working on her desk. She was being way too focused on her job as if she was trying to avert her attention from something else.

She was in such a bad mood for the last few days. Because of that, her underlings were being very careful not to worsen her mood.

Everyone in her gang knew the reason why Sheryl was in such a bad mood. It was nothing other than Akira who had not visited the base for the last few days. Although it was a simple reason, it was also a serious one at the same time.

Sheryl's gang was able to exist because of Akira's support. Although they were armed, they only had anti-human weapons such as handguns. And it was not like any of its members was familiar to fighting. Unlike Shijima's gang, Sheryl's gang did not have the ability to secure its position on its own.

The only reason why they could stay relatively safe in the slum city was because the other gangs were being wary of Akira. The incident between Shijima and Akira had already spread among the gangs in the slum city.

As long as they had Akira behind them, no one would risk their own life needlessly by picking a fight against Sheryl's gang. Because of that, her gang's safety was guaranteed in the middle of such a violent place.

But Akira had not been visiting Sheryl's base lately. So it was to be expected for her to be that worried and all the children under Sheryl's gang understood it. But there was a subtle difference between Sheryl's thoughts and her underlings' understanding of the situation.

Sheryl was alone inside her room, so there was no need for her to keep up her appearance to fool the other children. But even so, she was intentionally making a scary face. Rather than to fool others, it was in order to fool herself.

Sheryl was desperately trying to suppress her panic, anxiety and terror that was welling up inside her. She was putting a lid on those feelings by making an irritated expression.

Up until now, she was able to fool her underlings. Everyone thought that she was only in a bad mood. But its effect on herself was running close to its limit.

The reason why Sheryl was in such a panic, the reason why she was so worried, the reason why she was trembling in fear were all caused by one simple reason. It was because she could not contact Akira.

Since he had not been visiting her place lately, Sheryl tried to contact Akira using her information terminal. But her call did not get through at all, it was not just simply because she could not establish a connection to Akira's information terminal, but it was because the target terminal was not found. That was what her information terminal was saying every time she tried to make a call.

Akira did say to Sheryl once in the past that if she could not contact his information terminal, then she should assume that he was dead. And that was exactly what she was facing right now.

Sheryl actually depended on Akira on a deeper level. Her psyche was anchored at the fact that Akira was willing to help her. To support her spirit as she maintained her position and acted as the boss of her gang, she relied on Akira's words when he said that he would help her.

She noticed the ominous sound inside her which signalled a crack on the anchor that supported her spirit. She would instantly scream and cry the moment that anchor fully broke.

The calm side of Sheryl was counting the number of days before her core broke down as if it had nothing to do with her. At best, it would be a few weeks, and at worst, it would just be a few days. If anything bad happened, it might even be a few hours. As the voice inside her head was silently counting down that number, Sheryl could feel her spirit being shaved bit by bit.

Sheryl kept trying to distract herself as much as possible from what was actually in front of her. That was why her eyes were making such a scary gaze. But she would not last much longer.

Erio suddenly entered her room without knocking at the door.

Sheryl turned to Erio, she looked terrifying as she glared at him.

"Didn't I tell you to knock first before entering my room?"

Erio was scared by that silent pressure from Sheryl as he answered.

"I-I'm sorry. I'll be careful next time."

"So then, why are you here?"

"Akira-san is here. Should I just bring him to this room?"

The intense pressure that Sheryl was oozing out completely vanished in an instant when she heard what Erio just said.

__*__*__*__

Akira who was brought to Sheryl's room was sitting on a sofa, his expression saying that he was really uncomfortable. It was because Sheryl was sitting on his lap.

Sheryl looked delighted as she circled her arm around Akira's neck. He knew that something like this would happen and he thought that he should get used to it soon, that was why he let Sheryl do as she wanted.

Sheryl looked completely relaxed as if she was in heaven.

"I'm happy to get to see you. I'm sure that you're busy, but if it's possible, I hope you would come here more often. So, were you too busy? Is it okay if I ask you what happened?"

"Well, I almost got killed."

Akira answered back with a low voice as if he was whispering. Because of that, for some reason, Sheryl caught it as a bad joke.

To Sheryl, Akira's survival was crucial. Thus, she could not just ignore such a statement even if it was only a joke. Both for the well-being of her gang and her psychical health, it would be problematic if he died.

Sheryl looked worried as she hesitantly asked Akira.

"…Uhmmm, if it was a joke, I've heard about it before too. I'm sorry but it's not funny. So please don't say such a thing even as a joke."

Sheryl's expression was half intentional. She deliberately adjusted her expression to suit her voice.

From doing her usual everyday business, she had trained her ability to control the impression that she would give to other people. If she did that to the other children in her gang, her beauty would amplify its effect and cause that person to be ridden with guilt for saying such a bad joke while also giving the sense of happiness from having such a beautiful girl worry about him or her.

But what she said now was also her real feeling. Her voice and her expressions were nothing but high-quality tools to help her convey her message.

But then Akira answered back calmly.

“I’m not lying and it’s not a joke. I really almost got killed back then and this time too.”

Sheryl understood from the way he said it that Akira was serious. His voice did not sound as if he was exaggerating or boasting over a lie.

She was so panicked now that she understood Akira really almost got killed twice and her mask immediately crumbled down.

Sheryl moved her hands from Akira’s back to his shoulders as she pushed herself away so she could sit face to face with him.

“A-are you alright?”

“Just like you can see, I’m super healthy right now. I don’t feel any pain and I’m not wounded at all.”

Sheryl sighed out of relief. She understood that Akira did not say that just to look strong.

She then returned back to hugging Akira.

“…Please don’t make me worry like that.”

Most of the people would have hugged Sheryl back and told her something to reassure her in this situation. But someone as twisted as Akira just answered back calmly as if it was nothing at all.

“That would be impossible. Facing danger is our occupational hazard as a Hunter.”

It was obvious from her face that Sheryl did not like Akira’s answer, she then worriedly said to Akira.

“That’s true… But still…”

Looking at how Sheryl looked to be in so much pain, Akira tried to think of the reason behind it. But as expected, since he had a twisted personality, he could only come up with twisted answers.

Akira thought that the reason why Sheryl was fawning over him was for the sake of maintaining her gang. And he could accept that reason. After all, he, who had spent his life in the slum city, knew well just how scary living in the slum city could be, thus he could understand why Sheryl would be so desperate.

Although Sheryl only did it because Akira pushed that job to her, she was also maintaining her position as the head of her gang with his support. That was why Akira thought that it was not strange for her to be so desperate in trying to stay on his good side.

That also meant once Sheryl’s gang acquired enough influence to support itself, it would not need Akira’s support any longer and Sheryl would lose any reason to keep her relationship with him. At that point, they might as well leave him alone. That was what Akira thought.

Sheryl’s expression turned more worried as she said to Akira with a shaky voice.

“…I’m trying my best to strengthen the gang. I understand very well that we’re always relying on you. But please stop talking about your death.”

“…Hm? Alright.”

From how Sheryl was acting, her painful voice, and her arm that tightened around him, Akira at least understood that he should not say what he had said back then. But he did not understand just how many times he had made that mistake up until now.

Akira did not know what he should say and stayed quiet. Sheryl also did not say anything while still hugging Akira.

Since the time when Sheryl begged at Akira while crying and he answered her pleas, since the time when she was looking for someone to lean onto and Akira gave her a place, since the day when her spirit was broken by the truth of her situation and was constructed back up by the sense of security that Akira provided, although she seemed to be doing the same thing on the surface, the reason behind her actions were completely changed compared to before.

The reason why she worked so hard developing her gang was so that she could hand over the gang once it was properly developed to Akira in order to return the favour.

Sheryl had offered her body to Akira once, but he rejected that offer.

She was a very beautiful girl according to the standard in that place. For a slum city girl, she grew up very healthy and her attire was neat and beautiful, her overall appearance was even better than most of the people in the lower district of the Kugamayama city. Since she was living in a relatively blessed condition when she was under Sibea’s protection, the beauty that she acquired was not tainted by the living situation in the slum city.

But when Sheryl told Akira that he could do anything he wanted with her extremely beautiful body, Akira completely rejected her offer saying that she would not be able to help him out in case they fought against monsters, not even as a diversion. As such, Sheryl understood that she could not use her body to repay Akira’s kindness nor to maintain her good relationship with him.

Sheryl did not know why Akira helped her. She did not consider the possibility that Akira did it since he thought that doing a good deed might help him fight against his bad luck. After all, she could not imagine him believing in such a baseless thing. She thought that he only did it out of a whim due to his kindness.

At the moment, she had nothing of value that she could use to repay Akira’s kindness. But even so, he was still helping her out, thus piling the favour that she wished to repay one day.

Sheryl thought that if she did not expand the gang's influence and somehow earned some profits that she could give back to Akira, and if she did not make him think that he was glad he helped her out, Akira might one day just abandon her.

In truth, Akira was not that eager to abandon Sheryl as much as she thought. While at the same time, she was also not eager to cut her relationship with him as much as he thought. But both of them thought that eventually the other person would end their relationship and that misunderstanding caused her to cling onto Akira even more.

Sheryl thought that she had to do something about the strange silence after that small exchange. So she came up with another subject to talk about.

"Uhmm, I tried to contact you, but I couldn't get any connection at all."

"Aahhh, right, the information terminal that I was using was destroyed. I came here today to tell you the contact number for my new information terminal."

Akira lifted her aside and pulled out a small information terminal. Sheryl also went and picked up her information terminal that was on her desk.

She then sat beside Akira and operated her terminal to exchange their contact number. After completing the task, she put her information terminal on the table near her and was about to return back to sitting on Akira's lap facing him.

Akira thought that Sheryl had finished hugging him, thus he stopped her.

"Wait, are you going to continue doing that?"

"Yes. Since we've exchanged contact numbers, it's okay if I continue hugging you, right?"

"Since you already got off once, shouldn't that be enough?"

"No, I became so worried when I heard that you almost got killed. So I won't let go until I completely recover from my stress. It's already tiring

enough managing the gang, that's why I'll need to keep hugging you for longer than usual."

"But like, you have your own job to take care of, right?"

"I'm going by priority. While I'm recovering from my mental stress by clinging onto you, it'll also show the other gang members that we're getting along well. So this is a very important thing for the sake of maintaining the gang and retaining the gang's position among the other gangs in the slum city."

"No one is looking though, so isn't it pointless doing something like that here?"

"Should I call someone then?"

"Please don't."

Akira also understood well that it was important to show the others of their good relationship in order to maintain Sheryl's position in the gang. But he was not that brazen as to show off to others as he was being hugged by a girl.

As long as he and Sheryl were alone in her private room, others would at least make their own guesses as to what they were doing inside. Akira at least tolerated that much.

Sheryl once again sat on Akira's lap while hugging him. People would definitely misunderstand if they saw them now.

Sometime later, Erio entered the room after knocking.

Sheryl turned to Erio while still hugging Akira.

"…Erio, it's true that I did say to knock first before entering the room, but you can't enter the room until the person inside gives you permission, you know?"

Erio looked scared as he answered back.

“I-I’m sorry.”

“So, why are you here?”

Sheryl gazed at Erio, as though saying that it would cost him a lot if he had no good reason for interrupting her.

Erio looked frightened under Sheryl’s gaze as he answered back.

“Katsuragi-san is here. He said he has something to discuss with you. I made him wait in the reception room for now… Should I… tell him that you’re busy right now?”

Although he was not as important as Akira, Katsuragi was also an important person for the well-being of the gang. After all, most of the income of the gang came from Katsuragi. Thus they could not afford to be rude to him.

“…Tell him that I’ll immediately meet him.”

Sheryl suppressed her desire to keep clinging on Akira as she replied.

__*__*__*__

Katsuragi was sitting on the sofa inside the reception room. On the other side of the table, Akira and Sheryl were sitting on another sofa with Erio and Alicia standing behind them.

Erio and Alicia were sorts of officers within the gang since their main duty was to organize the members of the gang. Every time Sheryl had a meeting with people outside the gang like Shijima or Katsuragi, Erio and Alicia were always there to attend the meeting too. Eventually, both of them would be given the duty of resolving problems both outside and inside the gang, but for now, standing behind Sheryl was hard enough of a job for both of them.

At the moment, the meeting was attended by the boss and the officers of Sheryl’s gang and the 2 crucial people for their gang. But Akira was only there to accompany Sheryl, while Erio and Alicia had no right to say anything in the meeting.

One of Sheryl's underlings came and placed 3 portions of meal on the table before quickly leaving the room. Erio and Alicia, who were not used to being in the room, looked enviously at that kid who just left.

Sheryl was smiling brightly as she said to Katsuragi.

"To be honest, I hope that you would contact me first before visiting us so that we can welcome you without making you wait. After all, it's not like I'm always in the gang's base. Aahh, is it that you told one of my underlings beforehand? If that's the case, I apologize for our mistake."

Katsuragi smiled in return as he said.

"Nah, it's just that I had a business to take care near this area, so I decided to pay a visit. Sorry that I came without notice."

"Please don't be. So then, is there anything you need of me?"

Katsuragi glanced at Akira before answering back.

"It's just that I haven't seen Akira's face lately. So I was planning to ask you if you know where he is. But since he's here, I guess there's no need to do that anymore."

Judging from how her underlings were behaving, Katsuragi thought that Akira might have cut his connection with Sheryl. The reason why he came without notice was to see Sheryl's reaction.

To Katsuragi, there was still no worth partnering with Sheryl's gang if it was not because of its connection with Akira. If Akira was dead or had cut his connection with Sheryl's gang, Katsuragi had no wish to continue working with her gang.

If Katsuragi told her beforehand that he would come visiting, it would give Sheryl time to come up with a plan to hide the fact that she could not contact Akira in case if Akira did abandon her. Sheryl would also warn her underlings to hide that fact too. So in order to prevent her from doing something like that, Katsuragi deliberately came to her base without notice.

Sheryl knew very well that was the reason Katsuragi visited out of the blue. The reason why Katsuragi did not say anything about it was not because he was being careful. But it was because he knew Sheryl would be able to easily guess it from his action.

Both Sheryl and Katsuragi understood why they were there. But since it was already solved, there was no need to intentionally reveal it. The only person who did not try to read deeper into Katsuragi's words was Akira.

Since his business with Sheryl was finished, Katsuragi turned to Akira.

"So then, Akira. How's your ruin exploration going? Are you collecting relics to sell at my place? Or are you still working on the temporary HQ construction request?"

"I'm done with that request and I have no plans to continue taking it."

"That's good to hear, so you're back to exploring ruins then, right?"

"That's the plan. But at the moment, I'm planning to take a break until I get my new equipment which will take about 2 weeks from today. I'll then go back to exploring ruins for about a week before selling my relics to you. So just wait for a bit more."

Katsuragi looked displeased.

"New equipment? Wait there, you should've bought them from me then. You do know what I'm selling, right?"

But Akira immediately refused that offer.

"I'm sorry, I have a regular shop where I get my equipment."

Katsuragi looked even more displeased now. Sheryl who was beside Akira interjected, trying to give Akira a hint.

"…Uhmmm, Akira. Katsuragi-san is saying that now you're not selling relics to him or buying equipment from him, is there any meaning in your

partnership? Even if both of you had faced deathly situation together, there's a limit on how far he can tolerate this."

Although Akira thought that Sheryl was indeed correct, he had no plans in buying equipment outside Shizuka's shop. But if he did not buy anything, or at least contributed to Katsuragi's profit, he would not be able to abate Katsuragi's displeasure. Thus Akira tried mentioning something that he might buy from Katsuragi.

"I see, in that case, sell me some medicines."

"It's pointless if you're only buying cheap stuff…"

Katsuragi said it in a fashion which was obviously showing his displeasure that Akira only bought such cheap things from him. But Akira's next words quickly cleared his displeasure.

"I'm planning to spend 10,000,000 Aurum."

"…Hah?"

Katsuragi could not help but express his surprise the moment he heard how much Akira was planning to spend.

Akira continued with a serious face.

"I don't want cheap medicines that barely has any effect at all. I'm looking for medicines that can even heal broken bones in no time like those powerful old-world relic medicines. You used to sell stuff in the frontline, right? So I bet you have at least that kind of medicine in your stock, right?"

Katsuragi quickly turned to business mode as he asked Akira.

"How are you going to pay for it?"

"If you're okay with it, I'll do a bank transfer. So, do you have the medicines?"

“I have 2,000,000 Aurum per box medicine. Since I have them in my trailer, I just need to go grab it and you can have it today.”

“Give me 5 boxes then.”

Akira then handed over his Hunter ID to take care of the payment. Katsuragi received the ID, held it on his Hunter ID reader terminal and completed the payment process.

Katsuragi was doubting if the terminal would show the usual payment completion notice. But once he confirmed that the payment was indeed completed, he smiled.

For the people who were doing business with Hunters, having a connection with a Hunter who was earning a healthy amount of money was something that was more important than selling their goods. Katsuragi glanced at Sheryl as he thought.

[He just gave 10,000,000 Aurum like it was nothing. This is wonderful. Even if he only did that just to show off in front of Sheryl, he’s still contributing to my revenue. I’ll be counting on you to keep this up, okay?]

Katsuragi stood up and was about to go fetch the medicines for which Akira just paid.

“Alright then, I’ll go grab the goods, just wait for a bit. You have no plans of going anywhere, right?”

“Yeah.”

As Katsuragi was about to leave the room, he turned back to Akira and threw a question at him.

“…Well, you just gave me that much money so easily. But what will you do if I just run away with your money or bring you bad goods instead?”

Akira swiftly but calmly answered Katsuragi’s question.

“If you run away with my money, I’ll just chase you down and kill you. And if you bring me bad goods, I’ll just cut my connection with you.”

“I see. It seems that we’ll get along very well in the future.”

Katsuragi smiled in satisfaction after hearing Akira’s answer, he then left the room.

Erio and Alicia were dumbfounded as they saw a 10,000,000 Aurum deal was done right in front of their eyes. For Erio and the other children, they could rarely get 1,000 Aurum even after spending their whole day collecting wreckages and selling them to Katsuragi. Moreover, the gang’s cut would be subtracted before the balance was divided equally among all the children that did the work. So in the end, every single child would get less than that. They felt conflicted as they watched Akira finish that deal, which involved a huge amount of money that was outside their reach, like it was nothing.

Erio and Alicia knew that Akira was also a child from the slum. Their age and the environment where they grew up were not that much different, but now, Akira was standing in front of them as if he came from an entirely different place. Although it gave them a hope that they might get as successful as Akira if they got lucky, at the same time, it also made them feel unfair at how Akira could be so successful despite the fact that they were about the same age and were living in the same place.

Although from the outside Sheryl looked completely calm, she was actually pretty shocked inside. It was because Akira was actually earning way lot more money than she imagined.

Being able to pay 10,000,000 Aurum so easily showed that Akira was on a different level compared to those average Hunters. And that would mean Sheryl was using such a great Hunter for her benefit although she had nothing that she could give to pay him back.

Sheryl thought that if she could not somehow give something back to Akira, he might eventually abandon her gang. But since Akira was a good Hunter,

then it would mean that she should give him something of worth for such a good Hunter.

But she could not imagine what could be of worth for someone who could regularly earn at least 10,000,000 Aurum.

Not too long after that, Katsuragi came back with the medicines.

“Sorry for the wait, this is the 200,000 Aurum per box medicine.”

As Katsuragi said that, he put some boxes of medicine on top of the table. All of them were small enough to carry with one hand, they also did not look heavy.

Akira frowned as he looked at those medicine boxes.

“…I bought 5 boxes, right?”

There were only four boxes on the table, one box was missing.

“When I went to check my stock, it turned out that I only had 4 boxes left. So that’s it.”

After saying that, Katsuragi took out another 3 boxes and put them on the table.

“As my apology, I’ll give you 3 boxes of this 1,000,000 Aurum per box medicine. So in total, you get 11,000,000 Aurum worth of goods for just 10,000,000 Aurum. Are you good with that?”

“…Well, I don’t really mind, so I’ll accept it.”

“I’m sorry about this.”

Akira had no qualms with getting more goods with what he paid. As for Katsuragi, although he ended up with less profit, he was willing to tolerate it.

But more than that, as a businessman, he wanted to make up for his blunder of not being able to provide what his customer requested although he had already accepted the payment. After all, it was not a problem that he could fix just by returning the money that he had received.

Now that he had already cleared up that problem, Katsuragi immediately moved on to the next order of business.

“By the way, I’m planning to restock that medicine soon, I can order more of that medicine if you want me to. So, what do you think?”

“I’ll come to your trailer to buy them when I have the money. If I have the money but you don’t have the stock, shouldn’t you try to get some stock from a different store? As for the money, I can’t really say for sure whether I can get them or not, after all, that’s what it means to be a Hunter. But as for your stock, it’s yours to take care to begin with, after all, that’s what it means to be a merchant, right?”

“I can’t deny that. Very well, I’ll put my hopes up and wait for you. Just contact me when you have the money.”

If Akira told Katsuragi to put in more orders, Katsuragi might use that as an excuse to make him buy his leftover goods. But Akira was somehow able to avoid making such a mistake. Deep inside, Katsuragi clicked his tongue, but he was giving his businessman’s smile on the outside.

Katsuragi decided to move on and brought up another subject.

“Ahh, by the way, you’re planning to return back to exploring the ruins, right? Other than old-world relics, I actually buy and sell other things too. Things like information about relics location or the maps of the ruins that you can’t normally find circulating in public. If you still have nowhere to sell them, you can bring them to me. You can even use me as a proxy to sell them. Of course, I’ll take some commission out of it for taking care of all the troubles for you. But it’ll be easier than selling them yourself, right?”

“Even if I want to sell the data about the inner parts of the ruins, what should I do about the data format?”

“I know someone who specializes in analyzing the data collected by information-gathering devices. As long as it’s not a special information-gathering device, it should be okay. With this, you would not be coming back without any result even if you don’t find any relics after exploring the ruins. Well, even if you bring back information of an area that has already freely circulated in the network, you can still get a small amount of money for bringing in a bit more detailed information of that area.”

“Alright, I’ll do that when I feel like it. But still, I see that you’re handling all kinds of goods.”

“To be successful under the Corporate Government, I need more than just money, you know. But of course, I still need money too, so I accept investment from time to time.”

“I’m sorry but I don’t have that much money to spare.”

“Thought so.”

After that, Katsuragi exchanged his number with Akira and left the building.

Akira stuffed his newly bought medicines into his rucksack. But as he reached for the last 1,000,000 Aurum per box medicine and was about to put it inside his rucksack, he suddenly stopped.

He thought for a while before passing that medicine to Sheryl. She caught the medicine box, which flew at her in a parabola, with her both hands.

Akira then said to Sheryl.

“You can have that, just use it when you need it.”

“T-thank you very much.”

Sheryl tried her best to return a smile at Akira, but she couldn’t show her natural smile and looked rather stiff. Even someone who hardly knew her could tell that she was pushing herself to smile. At least, it was not a smile that she usually gave Akira.

Akira noticed that there was something strange with Sheryl's expression. He at least understood that he had done something wrong, but he could not tell what and where he went wrong.

"Alpha, did I do something wrong again? I just thought that these children might get injured during their job in the slum city, that's why I gave her that medicine… "

Alpha seemed to be thinking before answering back.

"I don't think you did anything wrong. But well, people see you and Sheryl as a couple, or maybe lovers? They might find it strange that you gave her something so-not-cute like that medicine box. Moreover, if you give a present from a discount, then it means that your love is also discounted. Basically, if you give a 10 per cent discount object as a present, then it means that your love and gratitude are also 10 per cent less or something like that? Nah, I guess I'm just reading too far into it."

"I didn't think that far when I gave her that medicine though. But well, I guess it's true that I wouldn't have given her that medicine if I hadn't got it as a bonus."

"Well, as an object to show off to others that she's your lover, if someone asks you which one works better between accessories like a necklace or a ring and a box of medicine, I guess you know the obvious answer. After all, it's not like she can use a box of medicine as proof to other people."

"…Ahh, right, that was the case, huh. Well, I did say that I'll help her, I guess I'll give her something which she can use for such purpose later."

Akira and Alpha were talking to each other although they were somehow not talking about exactly the same thing. And of course, they did not even touch the subject about why Sheryl was making such an awkward expression.

While looking at the medicine box that she held with both of her hands, Sheryl thought that now she had received even more favour which she

should payback. Although she already had enough problems thinking about how to repay Akira, she now had that hurdle raised up.

Sheryl was in a panic now.

Silavin: This girl is calculative in a good way I suppose. The ship sailing for them is kind of hard but if Akira were to actually have more time than to focus on survival, I wonder if it would work out.

All the girls in this novel are all pretty independant with various skill sets after all. And all of them who associate with Akira could be considered as beauties as well. Each are a catch on its own so, it is really hard to say who he would be most interested in.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 65, Good Deed Subcontract

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Sheryl shooed Erio and Alicia out of the room. Although from the outside, it looked like Sheryl was only telling them to get back to their work, Erio and Alicia felt like Sheryl was actually telling them to get out from that room and not disturb her and Akira. So they flusteredly exited the room.

Sheryl stood up. Akira thought that she would cling onto him again, but instead, she sat across him. She then made a serious face as she said to him.

“Akira, do you have anything you want me to do for you?”

“That’s out of the blue.”

“You always help us, so I was wondering if I can do anything to pay you back after receiving so much. You can ask anything of me or even from all of us.”

Judging from her expression, it did not seem like Sheryl was happy after receiving such an expensive item. But instead, it seemed like it made her rather desperate.

Akira took some time thinking of what to say, but nothing came up in his mind.

“Nothing comes up in my mind at the moment. I’ll come again and ask you when I have anything I want from you.”

Normally, Sheryl would have stopped here after Akira said that, but not this time. She kept her serious expression as she stared at him. From Akira’s point of view, it was as if Sheryl was begging or pleading to him.

“Is there really nothing? You can ask anything. It doesn’t matter if it’s an easy thing or a difficult thing, will you please ask something, anything?”

Sheryl thought that it would be really bad if she did not return Akira’s favour even if it was only a little bit. But she did not even have the slightest hint of what she could do for Akira.

Because of that, Sheryl decided to directly ask Akira. If it was out of Akira’s request rather than her own idea, there would be less chance that it might annoy him, while at the same time, it would also have a better chance to make him happy.

Sheryl, who did not want Akira to abandon her, would do anything that she could for Akira even if he asked her for something difficult. If he told her to get naked, get on her knees, and lick his feet, she might as well do that without a shred of hesitation.

Sheryl’s seriousness was conveyed to Akira. But he did not know what suddenly got into her. Even if she asked him to request something, he could not come up with anything at all.

“Well, even if you ask me so, I really have nothing to ask from you right now…”

Akira understood Sheryl would not back down unless he asked her for something.

He was put under pressure by Sheryl as he was racking his brain for anything to ask of her. He thought that asking her to give him a shoulder massage would not be enough. Meanwhile, Sheryl's serious gaze was being counter-effective, it brought her further away from her objective because it made Akira think that he should not ask an easy thing from her.

After taking his time thinking, Akira finally came up with something.

"Ah, right. In that case, just give the slum children good food and teach them how to read and write."

Sheryl was dumbfounded when she heard what Akira said. She looked puzzled as she asked him.

"…Is that really enough?"

Sheryl had no idea what kind of profit it would bring Akira even if she did what he asked.

But Akira sounded a bit surprised as he replied.

"To be honest, I thought I asked something that was really hard, you know. If it's really an easy thing for you, then can you just do that for me? I'll leave the details to you, but make sure that it's a realistic plan."

Sheryl swiftly replied with a serious expression.

"I understand, I'll give my best in doing it."

"Aahh, and also, don't tell anyone that I'm the one asking you to do that. If someone asks you why, just come up with a random excuse."

Sheryl firmly nodded.

"Alright, I'll never tell anyone."

Sheryl had no idea why Akira would ask her to do that. She knew very well that Akira was not someone who was kind enough to ask others to do a good deed. What he asked of her was not something that could bring direct

profit for him. And even if Akira did that to get his name out as a good Samaritan, then he would definitely not ask her to hide his name.

But for Sheryl, that was not where the important point laid. The important point was that Akira asked her to do that while thinking that it was a difficult request for her. Thus if she could do it, Akira would at least think she was useful to him.

Sheryl made her resolve that she would make use of anything and everything in order to accomplish Akira's request.

Alpha did not understand why Akira would even come up with such an idea. She was always quietly but closely observing Akira, assessing his way of thinking, trying to understand the principles behind his actions, and continuously trying to control him.

But Akira's action just now was unexpected even to Alpha. In order to understand him deeper, Alpha thought that there was a need to understand the reason behind this action.

Alpha then asked Akira in a very calm manner, such that it prevented him from reading what Alpha was actually thinking, thus hiding her surprise.

"Akira, why did you ask Sheryl to do that?"

"How should I put this, uhh, providing education and food for the slum children is a good deed, right?"

"Well, it sure is."

"If I ask Sheryl to do that, then it would be my good deed although an indirect one, right? I just thought that it might help me fight my bad luck."

So basically, it was like a subcontract for Akira's good deed. If bad deeds beget bad things, then good deeds should beget good things. In short, by pushing Sheryl to do a good deed, Akira thought that it might help lift some of his bad luck.

In the end, leaving the fact that Akira was seeking a superstitious and occult thing like good luck, the only reason why he asked Sheryl to do that was for his own selfish intention.

“And why did you ask her not to say that it’s your idea?”

“If others come to know that it was my idea, I somehow feel that it would only bring me trouble.”

The reason why Akira asked Sheryl to keep it a secret was to avoid getting roped into any trouble afterwards. It was not a rare story when somebody came to help someone in need and quickly disappeared without asking for any reward or leaving behind any name. Akira was twisted enough to interpret such a heroic story as though that person did not want others to know his or her name because people would swarm into that person for free help. So, it would be a huge pain in the ass if other people knew his identity.

Akira was pushing any possible troubles that might come from such a good deed to Sheryl while trying to reap some profit from it. That was also the reason why he said that he thought it was a difficult request for Sheryl.

Alpha was relieved since it was not like Akira suddenly had a change of heart and became a good person, after all, it meant that she did not misevaluate him. The more selfish Akira was, the easier it was for her to control him, thus it would be troublesome for her if he suddenly became a selfless person.

“I see, I understand now. Although, I don’t think it’ll give the result that you’re hoping.”

“Well, to be honest, I’m not placing much hope for its result anyway. I just randomly came up with that idea. And even if it has no effect at all, it’s not like it’ll cause me any harm.”

“That’s true. Well, even if it causes you some harm later, I don’t mind as long as you don’t try to put your life at risk just to cover for someone else. Remember that I only have you, so I don’t want you to put yourself in unnecessary danger, okay?”

“I have no problem abandoning a hostage who has nothing to do with me. So I won’t do such a thing. You know that all too well don’t you, Alpha?”

“Now that you mention it, you’re right.”

When he was in the underground, Akira did not drop his weapon even when Yajima took Reina hostage. Akira himself knew that he was a cold-hearted person.

But on the other hand, Alpha still remembered when Akira did not hesitate to shoot and kill the person who threatened to harm Shizuka inside Sheryl’s base. Akira also took an SOS request, which he had rejected, when he knew Sara and Elena participated in intercepting the monster swarm even when it meant that he had to go alone.

Alpha could not make any predictions about what Akira would do if one day Shizuka or Elena or Sara were taken hostage.

After both of them returned back to Sheryl’s room, Sheryl returned to clinging on Akira again. Although he was planning to leave the base right after, he was overwhelmed by Sheryl as he was pulled by her to her room.

Sheryl was charging herself by clinging to him. Akira did not know it, but Sheryl was actually using him as her psychical support. When she could not contact Akira, she was tremendously stressed. Because of that, she took way more time than usual clinging to him when normally 1 hour would be enough to recover her calmness.

Now that Sheryl had recovered her calm, there were 2 things racing through her mind.

First of all, she was thinking about what she could do to get in a deeper relationship with Akira. Sheryl understood that Akira right now was in a situation where he was susceptible to get swept by the flow. At the moment, he would get swept by the mood no matter how far it would go. Thus, Sheryl was thinking about how to use this chance to get as close as possible to him so that he would not easily abandon her.

Although it was just her baseless intuition, Sheryl thought that if only Akira did something with her, would it give a clear indication about their relationship and prove that she was his favourite.

The other thing that was running inside her mind was that it was time to pull away as she was still clinging on Akira. Even though there was a similar aged beautiful girl, who had told him that he could do anything he wanted to her in the past, clinging to him right now, he did not do anything to her at all. Sheryl did not know whether it was because Akira simply had no interest in such a thing or it was because he was holding himself back since he knew that it would cause him a lot of trouble.

It would be pointless if she rushed herself in trying to get close to Akira to only annoy him instead. If Akira looked annoyed when she was clinging to him, it would damage her psychical state too, and that was something that she would not want to happen.

Akira noticed that Sheryl had a lot of things inside her mind. But he did not know what she was thinking nor had any interest in knowing about it at all. He only thought that Sheryl must have a lot of things to worry about as the boss of the gang and stopped thinking any further.

He then spent some time talking with Sheryl to gather some information about the slum city. Suddenly someone knocked on the door. They both quickly turned towards the source of that sound. The person who just knocked at the door waited outside for an answer.

“Come in.”

After Sheryl replied back, Alicia entered the room. Showing her close relationship with Akira was an important thing for Sheryl to keep her position as the gang’s leader as well as for the safety of her gang. Akira understood that too, that was why he did not try to get Sheryl off his lap. But he still felt a little bit embarrassed being seen like this, thus he averted his eyes from Alicia to a random place in the room.

Sheryl was still clinging on Akira as she asked Alicia.

“Do you need anything?”

“Ah, it’s nothing, it’s already your bath time. So I was wondering if you’re going to take a bath today. If you’re not then someone else might use the bath instead.”

Alicia was there to remind Sheryl that it was her bath time.

There was a bathroom inside the gang’s base. Everyone in the gang was using the bath in turns since it was not big enough for all. Due to the same reason, the bathroom was always occupied except for when it was cleaned, or when the next person took his or her turn. And with more and more children joining the gang, it was incredibly difficult for everyone to get their turn for taking a bath every day.

Because of that, Sheryl wanted to limit herself from occupying the bath for an extended time. It was not like she could not do that, but it’ll definitely cause displeasure among her subordinates. And so Sheryl always used the bath every day at a fixed time.

Since Sheryl was not using the bath even though it was already her bath time, Alicia came to check her. If she was not going to use the bath, Alicia was planning to use the bath with Erio before letting other children use it.

Sheryl was a bit surprised when she realized how long she had been talking with Akira.

“It’s already that late? I’ll go, wait for a sec.”

Sheryl stepped down from Akira and grabbed her toiletries, she kept her toiletries in her room since it would be gone in no time if she left them in the bathroom.

Akira then mumbled.

“Bath, huh… I guess I’ll go back home and take a bath too.”

It had been a week since the last time Akira took a bath. Although he felt all refreshed after all the treatments that he received, it did not change the fact

that it had been so long since the last time he took a bath. As Akira was thinking of going back home soon, he extended his arm to reach for his rucksack, but Alpha suddenly asked him.

“Akira, where are you planning to go?”

“My inn, of course.”

“You no longer have the room in the inn that you were renting before you were hospitalized. You need to look for a place to sleep first before you can take a rest, you know?”

Akira stopped, Alpha was right. It was already past the stay duration in that inn. Everything that he left behind inside his room, including all his medicines and ammo, would have been confiscated by the inn.

“…So I should look for a place to stay now, huh? Well, I’m sure I can find one though.”

The day had already gone dark, there was a good chance that all the good rooms were already taken. The only rooms that he could still find would be either cheap rooms with only showers or super luxury rooms, but Akira had no plans to stay in such a room. Although he wanted to take a bath, it was not like he had enough surplus money to waste on a luxury room.

When Akira imagined himself walking around in the lower district in the middle of the night looking for a good place to rest, it made him lose all motivation to leave. Since he was already thinking of going back home to take a good rest, it made him way less motivated when he thought that he had to carry his heavy rucksack while walking through the lower district.

Sheryl noticed that slight change in Akira and asked him.

“Akira, what’s wrong?”

“Well, I just realized that it’s already late but I still have to look for a place to stay.”

Judging from Akira's voice and behaviour, Sheryl knew that he really did not want to do that.

"If it's alright with you, you can stay for a night in my room. Although it doesn't have furniture like in an inn, at least, it has a bed to sleep."

"Are you sure? But I want to take a good long bath too…"

Akira was not sure what to do. He was wondering if it was a better idea to take Sheryl's offer rather than walking through the lower district when it was already dark and relatively dangerous. He knew that it had been so long since the last time he took a bath, the more he thought about it, the more he wanted to take a bath, and that made him lean more towards looking somewhere to stay in the lower district.

Sheryl, who had recovered her calm, could understand what was going through Akira's mind. Thus, she gave him a suggestion, although she knew that he would refuse it anyway.

"Want to go with me? We can take our time enjoying the bath before others come to use it. We have a big bath, you can even extend your hands and legs in it. And I'm sure there's no one stupid enough in this gang to steal your belongings. If it still worries you, you can place your belongings near the bath and you can watch over them through the transparent glass."

Akira hesitated. The biggest reason why he hesitated was because he was worried about his belongings. He was inside Sheryl's base and not in the slum city alley, so he did not know just how safe this place was. His hesitation showed that to a certain extent. He thought this place was safe, but at the same time, he also thought that it was not. He was in a dilemma.

Sheryl's words did reduce his worry, but it was not enough to make him decide on what to do.

Since it seemed that Akira would not be able to decide anytime soon, Alpha also gave him an extra push to make his decision.

“If you’re worried about getting attacked, rest easy. I’ll be watching your surroundings just like always. You’ll be able to know immediately if someone steals your belongings.”

“Is that so? Then it should be okay, right?”

Sheryl then said something that caused Akira to quickly make his decision.

“Our bath time is getting shorter right now… so…?”

Sheryl looked at Akira’s expression and knew his answer before he could even say anything.

__*__*__*__

Akira dipped inside the big bath in Sheryl’s base. He extended his legs and arms as he sunk himself up to his neck and surrendered his whole body to the pleasure of the warm bath.

He could feel tiredness, which should have not been inside his body after all the treatments that he received, melting into the water. Whether it was his psychical tiredness or just an illusion, it did not change the fact that he was being healed.

He left all of his belongings in the changing room. And in order to make sure that no one would try to snatch them, Erio and Alicia were keeping watch outside the changing room.

A guard was always present there when Sheryl or other girls were taking a bath. There were already cases where some children tried to peek, and of course, those children were already kicked out from Sheryl’s gang.

As Akira was looking forward with his numbed mind, he could see Sheryl washing her body in front of him. He had already washed his body with the soap that he borrowed from Sheryl before getting into the bath. Although they had more or less started washing their bodies at the same time, Sheryl was taking a considerably longer time than him.

Akira wondered for an instant if there was really a need to wash that rigorously, but his question was quickly swallowed by the pleasure from the bath and vanished. After all, for him, it was not an important question.

Sheryl took very good care in washing her body and her hair. She understood very well that her appearance was an indispensable asset in order to get the upper hand during a negotiation. As such, she put a lot of effort into polishing her body.

The cosmetics and the soap that Sheryl received the other day from Katsuragi were luxurious goods judging from the slum city's standard, and she was using those goods to polish her appearance. Thanks to that, she was able to regain the beautiful hair and skin that she had lost because of the poor living condition in the slum city.

The hot water raised the beauty and charm of Sheryl's lustrous skin. It was beautiful enough to make the young boys of the slum city bet all the great benefits that they got from joining Sheryl's gang just to get a peek of her beauty.

Now then, since they lost their bet when they were caught peeking, not only were they unable to see Sheryl's beautiful naked body, they were also kicked out from the gang with nothing but the clothes that they were wearing. If they were still alive, they would be deeply regretting their decision, but also thinking that they should have at least sneaked a peek before getting kicked out from the gang.

After she finished washing her body, Sheryl went towards the bath. Akira quickly turned his gaze to her out of reflex since something within his views suddenly moved. Sheryl, who felt his gaze, blushed as she walked to the bath.

Despite the fact that Sheryl had given her consent for Akira to take a bath together with her, she still felt embarrassed having someone of the same age and opposite gender looking at her naked body. But even so, she did not show any hesitation nor did she try to hide her body with her hands as she walked to the bath. Although she was embarrassed, she still dipped herself

into the bath as if she was showing off her beautiful and near-perfect body to Akira.

Sheryl watched closely how Akira reacted. His gaze was just simply following an object that was moving within his field of view, thus after she stopped making any big moves, his gaze returned to the empty space in front of him. With the exception of one part, to be more precise, her chest area, she was actually pretty confident about her body. That was why Sheryl was quite shocked when Akira barely made any reactions as if he had no interest in her body at all.

Sheryl embarrassedly asked Akira.

"…Uhm… What do you think?"

Akira looked around before replying.

"…It's huge."

Some of Akira's consciousness had already melted into the warm water. Thus when Sheryl asked him that question, he could only use his half-working brain to interpret it and answer back while still in his dazed state.

Sheryl, who still had her brain working normally, understood why Akira even came up with such an answer. Although she had embarrassedly asked him such a question, he thought that she was asking about his impression of the bathroom, and he answered back saying that he was pretty much impressed by its size.

She was a bit depressed when she realized that her body, which she was so confident of, was turned into mere decoration inside the bathroom. She sunk deeper into the bath, some bubbles came out from her mouth which was under the water, which seemed like she was badmouthing Akira.

[…I did say that the bathroom is big, so he should have known that before, right?]

Sheryl was pouting while staring at Akira. From her gaze, Akira realized that he might have said something bad. But with half of his consciousness taken away by the warm water, he could not correctly interpret her question nor come up with the correct reaction.

Whenever Akira took a bath in his inn, Alpha was always together with him. Although it was only an image, he was already used to taking a bath together with someone else. That was one of the reasons why he was barely bothered at all by Sheryl, who was taking a bath together with him right now.

Akira was, to a certain extent, already used to taking a bath together with an extremely beautiful and charming girl. Because of that, his sexual drive was extremely low. This might be the result of Alpha's anti-honeytrap training. Or maybe it was simply because, for Akira, nothing could beat the pleasure of the warm bath.

Judging from Akira's reaction, it seemed that the time that she spent polishing her body after telling Akira that he could do anything with her was all for vain. Sheryl let out a big sigh as she understood that fact.

She decided to move on and looked at Akira who was enjoying the bath. Since Akira was surrendering his whole body to the pleasure of the bath, it seemed like he had completely dropped his guard. The Akira in front of her right now did not seem like a skilled Hunter who could easily pay someone 10,000,000 Aurum. His fully relaxed expression made him look like one of those common young boys that she could find anywhere in the slum.

Looking at the relaxed Akira, Sheryl thought that if he really was one of those common young boys, she might be able to solve most of her problems if she used her body to seduce him. If she took Akira's hand and guided it along her body, or entangled her legs with Akira's and put her lips on his, Akira should at least get aroused. She believed that her body should be charming enough for most members of the opposite gender. If her assumption was true, then deep inside, Akira might actually not hate this idea.

Sheryl imagined what would happen if she pushed herself to Akira. She thought that he would accept it while only resisting verbally. Akira's seemingly defenceless state caused her to be less cautious as her imaginations and assumptions leaned more towards good-case scenarios. These abnormal thoughts corroded Sheryl's judgement. Although she herself was not aware of it, she was actually in an aroused state.

When Sheryl extended her hand and tried to reach Akira, she noticed that he was staring at her.

Akira locked his cold gaze at Sheryl. He was carefully observing her moves and judging whether the person in front of him posed a danger to him or not.

Akira could subconsciously feel some kind of suspicious intent from Sheryl, although it was not malice, it was definitely not benevolence. Because of that, he quickly snapped back to his senses.

Sheryl was immediately frozen in place. The common young boy in front of her completely vanished, and in its place, she could see a cold-blooded young Hunter who would kill without even a shred of hesitation. All the optimistic imaginations that were inside her mind a few seconds ago were completely erased. Then, in the very next moment, Akira's gaze turned back to normal.

Akira himself did not realize his change. So from his perspective, it only looked like Sheryl was about to move and then suddenly stopped.

Akira made a puzzled face as he asked Sheryl.

"What's wrong?"

"A-ah, it's nothing."

"Hm? I see."

Akira ignored the fact that Sheryl was stuttering when she answered back as he once again focused on enjoying the bath. Akira's expression loosened

and returned back to before. As he once more relaxed his body, his consciousness once again melted into the warm water.

Sheryl felt relieved when she saw that, it seemed that Akira's mood had returned back to normal.

[…That was dangerous, that was so stupid of me. If seduction worked on Akira, he would have been seduced a long time ago. I should be more careful.]

Sheryl then tried to imagine what would have happened if she had pushed herself on Akira. In her imagination, she saw him quickly grabbing her by her throat and pressing her against the floor. Seeing such a scene, she then decided to stop herself from imagining any further than this.

[…As I thought, my only choice is either to make Akira take the initiative or getting his permission first before trying to seduce him.]

Sheryl thought it was already good enough for now that Akira was willing to get in a bath together with her.

And so Sheryl decided to spend the rest of her bathing time to just enjoy the bath and recover from all the tiredness she accumulated from the day's work.

Silavin: Hmm… well, it is to be expected. Now, I kinda wonder if Sheryl actually has feeling for Akira or not. Whether their relationship is strictly business. I am aware that Akira does not see it as strictly business (inclusive of the luck aspect).

On the other hand, if Sheryl simply was honest about caring about his well being, I'm pretty sure their relationship would have settled pretty quickly.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 66, Important Day, Checkpoint Day

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After finishing his bath, Akira returned to Sheryl's room. On his way there, the other boys in the gang were looking enviously at him. They knew that he shared the bath together with Sheryl. The girls in the gang could not blame the boys since they also knew that many boys fantasized about being with Sheryl. But it was obvious that Sheryl was only into Akira.

Akira was a Hunter who could pay 10,000,000 Aurum like it was nothing. If Sheryl was not the boss of the gang, the other girls in the gang would have tried to seduce him.

But doing something like that would be an obvious declaration of war against Sheryl. The reason why Sheryl could maintain her position as the boss was because of Akira's influence. Thus trying to seduce him also meant trying to wrest the boss position from Sheryl. Because of that, no one dared to even attempt to do that.

After returning back to Sheryl's room, Akira started to feel sleepy. He said to Sheryl while fighting against his sleepiness.

"…Sheryl, I'm going to sleep now. So, can I borrow your sofa?"

Sheryl replied happily.

“You can use my bed, it’s bigger than the sofa”

“…Really? Thanks.”

Once he got Sheryl’s permission, Akira put his luggage on the floor near the bed and was about to get on the bed. Although from the way Sheryl said it, she hinted that she would also sleep on the same bed, he did not notice that at all. She then carefully picked her words as she said.

“Is it okay if I ask you to take off your clothes? It would be a lot of work to clean the bed if it gets dirty.”

“…Okay.”

Akira was half-asleep as he removed his clothes and put them on his luggage. After leaving only the underwear on his body, Akira got on to the bed. His eyelids were already too heavy, thus he planned to just go ahead and sleep.

Although she looked rather disappointed, Sheryl still smiled and said to Akira.

“Good night and sleep well.”

“…G’night.”

Akira sounded drowsy when he replied, he then quickly fell asleep.

Even after Akira fell asleep, Sheryl still stayed awake to work on her job as the boss of the gang. She checked the progress of the work she distributed among the members of the gang, checked their results, and planned for the next job distribution. If there was any trouble with the work done by her underlings, she would try to formulate a solution, readjust the whole work schedule of the gang, and resolve any fights between the members of the gang. Although it would be unreasonable to simply compare her workload with the other members, it could be said that Sheryl was working the hardest in the gang.

After finishing, Sheryl returned to her private room and locked the door. She undressed down to her undies and crawled onto the same bed as Akira, she then slowly hugged him.

As Akira was already asleep on the bed for quite some time, his body warmth was spread throughout the bed. Both Akira and Sheryl were in their underwear. As she felt Akira's warmth on her body, Sheryl revealed a satisfied smile.

Sheryl closed her eyes while still hugging Akira as she looked back at everything that happened that day.

[…Although a lot of things happened today, it was still an amazing day. I'll do my best so that Akira will not abandon me…]

As she was thinking about the future, Sheryl was slowly consumed by her sleepiness. She eventually drifted to sleep with a big smile on her face.

The next day, Akira woke up and noticed that Sheryl was still clinging on him. She had a peaceful and blissful look on her sleeping face.

Akira, who was still lying on that bed, suddenly heard Alpha's voice.

"Good morning, Akira. Did you sleep well?"

"… Morning… Ah, right, I slept in Sheryl's place last night, huh."

Akira pulled himself away from Sheryl, stepped down from the bed, and put his clothes on. He then looked at Sheryl who was still sleeping on the bed.

After he got a good night's sleep, Akira regained his calm. He remembered what happened yesterday as he was looking at Sheryl, who was still wearing nothing but her undies.

"She was clinging on to me yesterday without any good reason. She also took a bath together with me, and until just a moment ago, she was sleeping with me only in her undies. What exactly does she think of me? Does she think that I definitely won't attack her or something?"

Even when his mind was in good condition, Akira still came up with the wrong conclusion. So Alpha exasperatedly said to him.

“What are you talking about? She’s tempting you to assault her, you know. She did say to you that you can do anything to her, remember?”

“Is that so? But still, is there any particular reason why she would do something like this?”

“She might be thinking that her current situation can quickly change for the better if you do something to her. As a matter of fact, I’m quite sure that’s what she’s thinking.”

Akira made a conflicted face as he stared at Sheryl.

“Is that so? I guess it’s true if you say so.”

“Well, I don’t really mind if you want to get involved with her as long as you don’t forget your contract with me. But if you really do, just make sure to be careful.”

“It’s about exploring the particular ruin that you want me to go to, right? Don’t worry. If you abandon me, I’m sure I’ll immediately die in no time eaten by one of those monsters. I won’t do anything that might endanger my life. So you don’t need to worry about that.”

Akira stated that clearly, the only reason why he was still alive was all thanks to Alpha’s support. He understood that one fact very well.

“That’s good to hear. But still, although there’s a beautiful girl of the same age as you sleeping only in her undies in front of you, you don’t seem to be bothered at all. Are you really not interested?”

“Well, what can I say… Since I have this girl, who always follows me around while being naked, I guess I grew up some resistance against it.”

Akira lightly laughed when he said that and Alpha smiled invincibly. Right at the next moment, he had a bad feeling, and his feeling was accurate.

Alpha's dress suddenly vanished, leaving her beautiful body in full view. She was showing off her virtual body that was produced through an extremely advanced calculation without even a shred of embarrassment. She even adjusted her appearance to suit Akira's taste, which she gathered from all of her observations of him, but her base body shape was also so beautiful that it would charm most of the members of the opposite gender.

Then, to put the cherry on the top, Alpha was looking at Akira with a flirtatious gaze and a charming smile.

He blushed a little and quickly turned his face away. Alpha giggled as she saw his vexed expression.

"Oh, I thought you said you'd grown some resistance against this, right?"

Akira still blushed as he complained.

"Just shut up. It depends on the timing and the girl, you know. Just get your dress back on already."

Alpha returned her dress back. When she did that, Akira kept telling himself that he did not regret it.

"If you want to see it again, feel free to tell me anytime."

Alpha teasingly whispered that to Akira.

As she was continuously observing him, she could tell that it was not like he had no sexual drive or interest in the opposite sex.

There was no denying the fact that Sheryl was a beautiful girl. The only reason why his reaction was so dull even when she clung on him, got on the same bath with him, and slept beside him defencelessly while being only in her undies, was simply because Akira did not think of her in that way at all.

In principle, Akira categorized the people that he met into one of two groups, either they were enemies or not enemies. He showed no gender bias when it came to this matter. But he did react differently towards a very

small number of people, who were not included in either of those two groups, namely, people he thought as his allies.

This very small number of people included Shizuka, who worried for him without any ulterior motives, Sara and Elena, who saved his life, and Alpha, who was supporting him. As far as Alpha knew, Akira only regarded these 4 people as his allies.

This could be seen from how Akira reacted when Sara was only wearing a light dress when he was in their house, or when Elena came up in front of him with a sexy augmented suit that pronounced her body line, or when Alpha reconstructed the image of Elena's and Sara's naked body in front of him. And finally, he also reacted the same way when Alpha was showing her naked body just a moment ago.

If for some reason, Sheryl's position shifted to this group, there was a good chance that Akira would be seduced by her in no time. Alpha thought so as she decided that she should investigate that possibility further.

But looking at how he reacted just now, Alpha knew that there was no need to worry about it.

As long as nothing big happened, it was very unlikely for Sheryl's position to be changed from Akira's 'not enemy' group. No matter what Sheryl would do, as long as he only thought of maintaining their relationship, it was unlikely for him to change how he treated Sheryl.

Not too long after that, Sheryl also woke up. She was still half-asleep as she probed for Akira with her hands. Sadly enough, her hands only wandered around the empty bedsheet around her, she looked disappointed when she realized Akira had already woken up.

Sheryl slowly got to her senses. When she was finally fully awake, she could see Akira already prepared to go out.

Akira was sitting on the sofa while operating his information terminal, he was looking through the emails that reached him by his Hunter Code. One

of the emails was from Kibayashi, it contained the information about the property agency that Akira had asked.

Akira noticed Sheryl who just woke up.

“Ah, you’ve woken up, huh. Morning.”

“Good morning… Are you going out already? You can at least eat some breakfast here, you know?”

“It’s fine, I’ll just grab something outside.”

If Akira ate something there, it would reduce the portion for the rest of the gang’s members. After all, he knew perfectly well how precious food was in the slum city.

“I understand, please allow me to at least see you off.”

Akira smiled bitterly and asked.

“…You sure you want to see me off dressed like this?”

When Akira pointed it out, Sheryl realized that she was wearing nothing but her undies. She then quickly grabbed her dress and put it on in panic.

Akira left Sheryl’s base and headed to the real estate agent’s office introduced by Kibayashi.

In the middle of his way there, Alpha asked him.

“Akira, what kind of house do you want? I’m sure the staff would ask you this question, so it’s a good idea to think about it now.”

“Let’s see. First of all, I want a big bath. I’m also planning to buy a vehicle, so I want a big garage too. And also maybe a big room to store my equipment, ammo and my reserves. Then maybe a warehouse and a bedroom too.”

“Then the next problem will be the rent. I’m sure Kibayashi has told that real estate agency about you, so it would be troublesome if they recommend you an expensive estate thinking that you still have that 100,000,000 Aurum.”

“Well, that’s true… I already spent 90,000,000 Aurum yesterday… My money sense is completely broken, isn’t it? I wonder where that small boy, who got all flustered by 200,000 Aurum, is now.”

“It’s not like you wasted that money on unnecessary things, just think about it as proof of your growth.”

When he heard Alpha’s words, his expression turned bewildered as he mumbled.

“…Growth, huh? To be honest, I’m not sure if I’ve really grown stronger. Since, until now, I only got myself better equipment and I’m still fully relying on you. I don’t feel like I’m getting stronger myself though.”

Akira himself did not think that he had grown stronger. After all, he still had problems in all his fights and he was only able to barely survive till now because of Alpha’s support.

Alpha smiled at Akira to reassure him.

“Don’t worry. You’ve become stronger. But I think it’s okay to think like that too. It’s better to underestimate your ability rather than to overestimate it. After all, it’s not like you would be able to breeze through your fights against the monsters just because you got a little bit stronger. If Hunters could easily kill them, they would not be called monsters after all. Not to mention, facing danger is your occupational hazard too, so let’s not get too reckless and stay careful. If you’re worried about it, you can put more effort into your training and you can also rely more on me.”

Akira smiled, he was rather relieved after Alpha said that to him.

“…Is that so? Well, I suppose you’re right. I’ll be counting on you.”

Akira collected himself as he stepped forward.

Eventually, he arrived at the real estate agency that Kibayashi introduced. After he showed his Hunter ID at the reception counter and mentioned Kibayashi's name. One of the staff quickly came to serve him.

That staff was surprised when he saw Akira. It was because not only was Akira a small boy, he also did not seem like a Hunter who could receive a recommendation from the Kugamayama City Management. But that staff quickly showed Akira a friendly smile before Akira could notice his surprise.

Akira told that staff what kind of house he was looking for. After that, they finished their small consultation and went to check the prospective houses.

The real estate agency Kibayashi introduced to him was located in the outskirts of the lower district. Although there were a lot of open plots in the district, only a very small number of them were safe. There was a big difference in the values between the plots on the upper and middle districts that were located behind the wall, and the lower district that was located outside the wall. This difference in values came from the difference in their safety and security.

The closer the property was to the wasteland, the cheaper it would be. And the closer it was to the wall, the more expensive it would be. Although there were exceptions, these exceptions were sold at a higher price since they were located in regions that were maintained by private security companies. So in short, the extra price was for the safety provided.

The agency staff gave Akira a tour through a certain house. As Akira looked around the inside of that house, he felt that it was big enough for him to live alone. It had a big bath, a lot of rooms, and a huge garage. It was also fully-furnished, so there was no need to buy new furniture. It fulfilled most of Akira's expectations.

The staff then explained to Akira.

“It’s a building designed for a Hunter. Normally, we would only recommend this house for a Hunter above Rank 30. It’s pretty well made that it can withstand explosives and gunshots. The city security gave permission to install heavy weaponry on this house for self-defense too, but if it causes problems with other people who live around the area, then we’re not liable for that and you would have to solve that problem yourself. Although it is mentioned under the contract that this area is guarded by a private security company, don’t put your hopes too high. In case you’re attacked by robbers, expect to handle it yourself. As for cleaning up rubbles and dead bodies, you can contact us and we’ll take care of them for you. While for the rent, considering the position of the person who introduced you to us, we’ll charge you 500,000 Aurum per month. It already includes the water bill, energy bill, security bill and insurance. You can always ask us anytime in case you need more security guards. Do you have any questions?”

Normally, this house would not be introduced to a small Hunter like Akira. It was all thanks to Kibayashi’s influence as city staff. Thus, Akira thought that this kind of opportunity might never come again if he let it go here.

Akira enquired the staff.

“When can I rent this house?”

“You can use it immediately after you pay the rent. If you pay it here and now, you can immediately use it right afterwards.”

“I understand, I’ll take this house then.”

Akira then gave the staff his Hunter ID. The staff received the Hunter ID, scanned it with his terminal, and operated his terminal to finalize the contract. He then deeply bowed to Akira.

“I’ve confirmed that we’ve received the payment. Thank you very much for using our service. This is the key for that house. Please do inform us if you lose it. The future rent payment will be automatically withdrawn from your bank account. If you’re late in paying the rent even by a second, the rental contract will be immediately nullified and all the properties inside the house

will be confiscated by the company who owns the building. So please be careful. You can do anything you want with all the furniture that is already inside. You can throw them away or sell them if you don't need them."

"Wait, those furniture… were they…"

"Yes. They were owned by the previous renter."

Akira glanced back at the furniture inside the house. Those furniture were left behind by the previous person who lived there. He realized that if he too died, then his furniture would also be passed on for the subsequent renters in the same way.

"Well then, please let me excuse myself. If you need anything, feel free to give us a call. Once again, thank you very much for using our service."

The staff bowed deeply at Akira once more before leaving.

Akira then locked the door, went to his new room, and put down his luggage and equipment.

He then sat on a chair near him. He looked deeply moved as he took a big breath and let out a long sigh.

"…A home… My home…"

"You're only renting it though."

"Even if I'm just renting it, it's still my home. After living all these years in the slum city alley, I finally get a place that I can call my home."

Akira looked around the room. He became a Hunter hoping to improve his life condition and a lot had happened since he went to the wasteland for the first time. He just sat there reminiscing those days.

The past Akira, the Akira before he met Alpha, would have never imagined that he would be able to live in such a place. But right now, right here, it was his reality.

Akira stood up and turned to Alpha, he made a serious face as he bowed his head.

“It’s all thanks to you, Alpha. Thank you. And also, I’ll keep counting on you.”

Alpha was smiling just like usual.

“You’re welcome, and I’ll be counting on you too.”

For Akira, today was an important day, it was the day he stopped living in inns. But for Alpha, it was not that big of a deal, it was nothing more than a day where Akira reached one of the checkpoints. These differences between them were shown in their respective expressions.

After that, Akira went to and fro to the lower district to buy food, indoor clothes, and other daily necessities. He also adjusted his new information terminal so that Alpha could access it. He then checked all the rooms inside his new house one more time. He spent the whole day to prepare himself for his new lifestyle. By nightfall, Akira had finished all the preparations that he needed for his new life inside his new house.

Akira dipped himself inside the warm bath to recover from all the hard work that he did during the day. Just like he wished, the bath inside his house was pretty big. It was large enough for him to fully extend his arms and legs as he enjoyed the warm water. Alpha was also there together with him, although she was only an image.

When he was enjoying his bath, Akira did not even pay any attention to Alpha who was naked right beside him. After all, it was a normal sight for him every time he took a bath. It was also because she was calmly enjoying the bath just like usual. If she was teasing him there, he would not be able to ignore her.

“Akira, it’s about our plan for the future. Starting from tomorrow until the day your new equipment arrives, you’ll spend your time studying and training, okay?”

“I understand… But what kind of training are we going to do?”

Akira was puzzled, after all, it was not like he could do shooting training or CQC training inside his house. He might be able to do CQC training inside the empty garage, but his movements would be restricted in such a small place. But Alpha’s answer had nothing to do with both of those training.

“You’ll train on how to compress your time perception both intentionally and out of pure reflex.”

Akira sounded puzzled as he said.

“…I’m sorry, I don’t really understand what you just said. So, what exactly am I going to do?

“Well, you’ll understand that tomorrow.”

“Alright.”

Akira did not have any idea on what kind of training he would be doing, but since Alpha said that he would understand once the training started, he stopped worrying any further. It showed just how far he trusted Alpha.

Alpha was satisfied with his answer.

On the next day, Akira started his training inside the garage. Alpha initiated the training with an explanation on what to do.

“The training that you’ll be doing starting from today will be to freely compress time perception by yourself. Simply put, you’ll accelerate your cognitive mind to compress your time perception. When you do that, things around you will look like they’re moving in slow motion. You’ll train on how to do it intentionally. While on the other hand, we’ll also condition your body to automatically do that when you’re in a certain situation. Once you achieve it, we’ll train to increase the level of compression. For starters, let’s aim to extend 1 second into 10 seconds, then into 100 seconds, and so on. We’ll also train so you can maintain it for an extended time with a

minimum level of burden to your brain. If you can do this, I'm sure you'll grow strong really quickly."

Alpha gave a very straight forward and plain explanation. But Akira did not get the same impression after hearing her explanation. For him, it sounded like an impossible and crazy idea, it was as if Alpha was telling him to fly.

"Even if you give me that explanation… Can I really do something like that? To be honest, I'm not even sure I can do it, you know?"

But her reply quickly cleared up Akira's doubt. She smiled and said.

"You can. Or more like, you've done it unconsciously before. You just need to work it out so you can do the same intentionally."

Akira was surprised by what he heard.

"…I've done something like that?"

"That's right. If you need a more precise example, you still remember your fight against Nelia, right? That's a good example. I'm pretty sure Nelia was using an accelerator when she fought you. It increased the speed of her movements and slowed down her time perception, thus allowing her to fight at a very high speed. In order to adjust her cyborg body to fight in such a high speed, I bet she put in extra modifications inside her brain too."

Akira remembered his fight with Nelia. At that time, although he was moving his body desperately, he was barely able to follow the movement of his augmented suit that was controlled by Alpha.

"So, does it have anything to do with my training?"

"Yes. At that time, you were somehow able to follow and react to Nelia's movements. You were also barely able to follow the movements of your augmented suit when I was controlling it. Although you weren't aware of it since you were so desperate at that time, there's no way you could do something like that unless you were compressing your time perception, you know? The danger of death made you so focused that you were

unconsciously compressing your time perception in order to survive that situation.”

Akira was dumbfounded as he heard Alpha’s explanation. He was only vaguely aware of it during that fight and now Alpha, who he trusted, also confirmed it. Thus Akira thought that it must be true.

Leaving the truth aside, Akira believed her explanation. Now that he believed it, it became the truth for him. It turned his belief from being impossible to possible.

“Let’s start by trying to fool your brain into thinking that your life is in danger. With this, you should be able to grasp how to compress time unconsciously. Once you’re done with it, you’ll next learn how to do the same in any situation.”

“…I understand the gist of it, but what exactly should I do?”

“You’ll understand once we start the training. So let’s get into it right away.”

After saying that, Alpha changed her appearance from her usual dress into some kind of exotic costume for dancers which had a lot of decorations on it. The only exposed part of her body was her head, she was wearing a long skirt that extended to the floor and her arms were covered by long sleeves.

Alpha was holding blades in both of her hands. Those blades were thin and looked extremely sharp. She then thrust the blade in her right hand toward Akira. Although Akira understood well that the blade in front of his eyes was not a real thing and only an image, it looked sharp enough that Akira could not help but take a step back.

“I’ll be dancing in front of you and you’ll need to keep your eyes on me. I’ll launch some attacks in the middle of it and you just need to evade them, you get that?”

“O-okay.”

“Since it’s training to compress your time perception, you’re not allowed to keep your distance to avoid my attacks. You’re also not allowed to take a step back when I approach you as long as I don’t try to attack you.”

“Alright.”

“Very well, let’s begin.”

After both of them opened up some distance between them, Alpha saluted Akira, closed her eyes and started dancing while making a dignified expression with her beautiful face.

The multi-layered dress flailed in the air as she danced, she looked completely mesmerizing. The many decorations on her dress swayed along, complimenting her every move. The blades, which were as smooth as a mirror, gave a clear reflection of the garage as they slashed the air.

Watching her dance, Akira felt like he was taking part in some kind of ritual. It was obvious that Akira was slowly hypnotized by that dance. It made him immediately forget that he was in the garage and both Alpha’s dress and dance were completely out of place.

When Akira got back to his senses, Alpha had already finished her slash. Alpha, who was dancing next to him, had slashed at his neck with the blade in her right hand. He could not react to that at all. If that blade was real, he would have been dead by now.

Alpha smiled mischievously at Akira, who was still dumbfounded.

“You should properly keep your eyes open for any attacks, okay?”

“…I understand.”

Akira pulled himself together. It would be all for naught if he did not feel any sense of danger even when there was someone flinging a sword right at him. He could not just stand there mesmerized, he should properly keep his focus and watch Alpha’s movements closely. He gathered all his focus and directed all his attention towards Alpha.

Alpha reset the distance between them. Akira kept his eyes on her so that he would not miss even the slightest move from Alpha, but then he suddenly realized something and looked puzzled.

A layer of cloth tore off from Alpha's dress. That piece of cloth fluttered and vanished before it could touch the floor. Akira understood that it was nothing more than an image, thus it was not like that piece of cloth would just peel off from Alpha's dress on its own. So in short, Alpha did that intentionally.

"…Alpha, why did you let that piece of cloth off?"

"I'm just reducing the difficulty, this multi-layered dress is hiding my movements which in turn hides my attack. If you can get a better view of my limbs, you should be able to see my attacks more easily, right?"

"Well, that's true, but isn't it like we're doing this training so that I can quickly recognize my enemy's movement, compress my time perception, and evade incoming attacks?"

"It's fine. It doesn't seem like you can even react to my attacks at this rate, after all. Or more like, you don't feel any danger at all, do you? As long as you don't recognize the danger, you won't be able to notice that you're being attacked, and it won't be able to trigger you to compress your time perception."

"…Well, that's true."

"I'll take off one layer of my dress every time my attack hits you, okay?"

"…Hah?!"

"If you want to see me naked, you can just go ahead and take it easy, you know?"

After Alpha said that while smiling bewitchingly, she started dancing again in front of flustered Akira.

Akira stiffened his face to not let out his inner feeling as he was keeping his eyes on Alpha, who was dancing beautifully in front of him.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 67, Making Sure That Everything Is Alright

Index

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Akira placed all his focus on Alpha's movements, he did not let even the slightest shift go unnoticed. But even so, he could not evade a single attack.

It was because Alpha's multi-layered dress hid her blades, making it extremely difficult to judge the timing of her attack. Moreover, Akira could not follow her movements with his eyes at all.

Akira was trying his best to focus on Alpha's movements, but it was not even close compared to the level of focus he had when he was facing a deathly situation. Alpha noticed every single time he lowered his guard and used that opening to accurately slip in an attack.

Then just like she said, every time Akira received an attack, one piece of cloth was removed from her dress. Thus, one by one, pieces of cloth kept falling off from Alpha's heavily decorated dress. As fewer and fewer clothes and decorations were left on her dress, her skin started getting exposed bit by bit. Starting with her 4 limbs, to her back, then eventually up to the cleavage of her chest and bum. But as Alpha kept dancing, the

exposed part of her skin was only barely able to peek out from time to time as the leftover pieces of clothes on her dress hid them from view.

The more part of her body got exposed, the more seducing her dance became. Alpha was smiling bewitchingly and sending a flirtatious gaze at Akira. She had lost most pieces of clothes that were hiding her body, thus it should have been easier to see her movements now. But her dance was still as deadly as it was charming.

Akira was sliced and diced so many times by Alpha's swords. Although he was familiar with her attacks, he still could not evade the incoming blades. Akira was getting tired after keeping his focus for an extended length of time. Because of that, his focus was getting worse with each passing second.

Eventually, Akira was too tired to even react to Alpha's attacks. Alpha noticed that and decided to end the training.

"Let's end it here today."

Akira did not try to hide his tiredness as he let out a big sigh. He then looked at Alpha one more time and sighed again.

Alpha was almost naked. The only pieces of clothes left were those that hid particular parts of her body and some decorative pieces that were barely able to hide the rest of her body. All the layers of clothes that Alpha started with had turned into such a sexy dress. Alpha's beautiful figure that was almost on full view showed just how pathetic Akira was during the training.

Alpha tried to cheer Akira up since he was obviously disheartened.

"It's not something that you can learn in one night. Today's training was not fruitless. Let's keep on training patiently."

"…I guess you're right."

It was not like Akira had completely recovered, he was just putting a brave front. If he was given enough time, Akira would get back on his feet by

himself.

“Let’s take a short break before continuing with studying in your room. Or do you want to just take a rest for the remainder of the day?”

“No, let’s study. I’m on a break from Hunter work, so I at least want to keep improving myself during my break.”

“Alright then, I wonder what should I teach you today…”

Akira returned to his room and started taking lessons after he had enough rest.

“Let’s work on your math today. As a Hunter, you should at least be able to properly calculate your reward.”

“…Before that, how long are you planning to stay like that?”

Alpha was still wearing what was left of her dress from the previous training. It was not least bit suitable for teaching. She just smiled teasingly as she said.

“Since you hadn’t told me to change it, I thought that you liked it. That’s why I’m keeping it like this.”

“Alright alright. Next time, I’ll tell you to change your clothes right away after the training.”

“You don’t have to hold yourself back, you know.”

“Just return back to your usual dress, will you?”

Alpha’s dress then changed to the suit that she usually wore when she was teaching Akira. Although it was far less exposing than her previous dress, it had a big opening on her chest and her skirt was very short with a decorated slit on it. It was sexy in its own style.

Akira’s reaction to this sexy suit was only ‘well, whatever’. Humans really could get used to anything.

Akira then spent the day studying in such a weird situation, but for him, it was nothing out of ordinary.

It had been 5 days since Akira rented the house. He did the same training every day to compress his time perception. But the result of his training did not change much compared to the first day of his training.

Every single time, the training would continue till Alpha's multi-layered dress was almost completely gone and it would end when Akira's reaction was considerably dulled because of the tiredness. Even after 5 days, Akira still could not evade even a single attack. Although his reaction speed increased without using the time compression, that was not the main aim of this training.

Akira was taking a break after the training. He looked pretty depressed as he felt how pathetic he was for not showing any improvement all this time.

Since Alpha told him that he could compress his time perception, he believed that he should be able to do it. But even so, he still could not achieve it. He didn't even show a sign that he could do it anytime soon.

As Akira was fraught with frustration, Alpha suddenly said something weird to him.

"Akira, a strange request just arrived for you."

"A strange request?"

"Yep, a strange request, you should check it yourself."

Alpha pointed her finger at Akira's information terminal. The monitor on his information terminal quickly went through a series of screens as Alpha was operating it. It eventually stopped when it was on the page showing Akira's information on the website that could only be accessed by Hunters. Akira reached for his information terminal and checked the notification, it was true that there was a request designated for him.

The requester was Shiori. She was one of the Hunters who he had met in Kuzusuhara ruin's underground city. He once fought her when the relic thief, Yajima, took Reina hostage. The request was simply titled 'for consultation'.

When Akira checked the description of the request, it only said that she wanted to meet and talk with him, and mentioned the location and time of the meeting. As for the reward, it said that Shiori would pay for the meal.

"…What the heck is this?"

Akira found it really strange and rechecked the request, but he had not misread anything.

"No idea. Maybe it's just a request to meet and talk about the real request. We won't know unless you go and ask Shiori yourself."

"As far as I can see, it says nothing other than she's inviting me for a talk while having a meal and she'll be paying for the meal."

"That is true."

"What exactly does she want to talk about with me?"

"Even if you ask me, I have no guesses at all."

Both Akira and Alpha had no idea what Shiori's intention was for inviting Akira for a meal.

"So then, what do you plan to do? Are you going to take the request and meet her? Judging from where she's planning to meet you, I don't think there'll be any danger though."

The meeting place mentioned in Shiori's request was the restaurant inside the biggest Hunter Office in Kugamayama city. Anyone who caused trouble in that place would be picking a fight against the Hunter Office at the same time. Since Shiori asked Akira to meet her there, he can rest assured that she would not try to pick a fight against him.

“It’s okay if you want to just decline the request. You can also ignore it if you want. It’s up to you, Akira.”

Alpha finished giving all of her suggestions to Akira. Although it might be a good chance for a breather if Akira went to meet Shiori, there was no particular reason for Alpha to recommend it either. It was really up to Akira. As long as his actions would not interfere with her objective, Alpha would try to respect Akira’s will.

Akira reread the request many times, he did not know whether to accept it or not.

After taking some time to think, Akira eventually decided to accept it. It was because he was curious why Shiori wanted to meet him. If he could confirm that safely through this request, then there should be no problem accepting it. Akira thought so as he decided to accept the request.

On top of that, the meeting place was in a high-class restaurant, so if Shiori would pay for the meal, then it would mean Akira would be able to eat expensive foods without having to pay for it at all. That was also why he decided to accept that request. But since getting free food was fixed as one of the factors in his decision, he tried his best to ignore it when he was considering what to do.

Akira sent a confirmation to Shiori that he accepted the request, he then finished his preparation and went to the appointed restaurant.

The Kugamayama city branch Hunter Office was located inside a huge building that was integrated with the city wall which separated the middle district and the lower district. Inside that building, there were many stores directed at Hunters. Most of the stores were frequented by high-level Hunters who had houses in the middle district. Among them, there were even stores that only accepted high ranked Hunters. Basically, it was not a place that a low-level Hunter like Akira could visit.

The restaurant that Shiori specified had no Hunter Rank restriction. But there was no mistaking that it catered to high ranked Hunters.

Akira hesitated for a bit when he saw that it was a high-class restaurant. Alpha, who saw that, said to him.

“Giving up?”

“…Nah, I’ll go. It’s not like I’m going into an old-world ruin anyway. There’s no need to be afraid.”

Although Akira said so, he directed it more towards himself as he stepped forward to that restaurant.

The interior of the restaurant looked luxurious, unlike most restaurants in the lower district. If he tried to enter this restaurant right after coming back from the wasteland with his dusty clothes or leftover blood from the monsters, he bet that he would be sent away immediately. While it would be alright if he did the same in one of the taverns or restaurants in the lower district. Akira thought so as he got nervous.

Although in reality, he could just clean off the dust on his body and change into new clothes inside the restaurant itself. It was not rare for a high-class restaurant to have showers installed inside their restrooms and provide a clean suit for rental for its customers. Even the restaurant staff would be willing to laundry the dirty clothes if asked.

The restaurant staff quickly noticed Akira, who just entered the store, and greeted him.

“Thank you for coming to our restaurant, do you have a reservation today?”

As the staff brightly greeted him, Akira answered back in a fluster.

“Eh? Ah? Uhmm, someone by the name of Shiori should be already inside… So…”

“May I ask your name?”

“It’s Akira.”

“Very well. Akira-sama, please leave your weapons with us.”

Akira hesitated, but he eventually decided to hand over his rifles to that restaurant staff. That staff politely received Akira's rifles and put them on a table near him.

"Thank you very much for your cooperation. Please let me guide you to your table."

Akira followed behind that staff as he walked through the restaurant. The high-class feeling inside that restaurant felt so much different from all the other restaurants that he had visited in the past. Even the soft sensation he felt on his feet every time he took a step on the carpeted floor showed that it was on a whole different world compared to where Akira was living.

Akira looked around while walking through the restaurant. He could see all kinds of people inside that restaurant, all of them were enjoying their expensive meals. While some of the people there such as the cyborgs looked out of place eating in such a luxurious restaurant, all kinds of expensive-looking foods were served in front of those people.

Akira could not help but ask Alpha a naive question.

"Alpha, how do those people eat their food?"

"Looking from their appearance, they must have at least enough organs to process the food that they eat. Or maybe they mistook the capabilities of their cyborg body, thinking that their cyborg body will be able to digest food. Or maybe they're just sending the taste data to someone else remotely. Or maybe they are only here to enjoy the beautiful food although they can't eat them. There are many possibilities, you know."

"I see. But I don't think any of them are here just to enjoy the beauty though. Having something that looks delicious in front of you even though you can't eat them sounds more like torture to me."

"There are all kinds of people out there, you see. There are things that you can't understand unless you're the one doing it."

Akira was actually still curious about that subject, but it was not like he could just stand there observing them. So he just gave up on his curiosity and followed the staff in front of him.

Akira was guided to the table where Shiori was already waiting for him. The staff pulled the chair for him as he flusteredly sat on that chair. The staff then placed the menu in front of Akira and Shiori.

“We’ll call you again when we’ve decided what to order.”

“Certainly.”

The staff bowed and left. Both, the staff and Shiori, looked already accustomed to such an exchange, Akira was the only person there who could not follow it.

People were not only here to eat food, some Hunters picked this restaurant to negotiate with each other to avoid turning their negotiation into a fight. With the Kugamayama City Management and the Hunter Office watching this place, no matter how heated their talks went, they would be forced to act calmly. Thus avoiding the worst-case scenario where they tried to kill each other.

Shiori was looking prim in her stylish suit. Unlike Akira, who was wearing clothes that he could use to go to the wasteland anytime, Shiori’s suit made her look like some kind of businesswoman. Or to be more precise, she looked like those people who lived in the middle district.

After seeing Shiori’s attire, Akira lowered his guard. But on contrary to that, Shiori raised her guard when she saw Akira’s attire, after all, he was wearing armour similar to the one that he used when he fought her.

Although Akira looked out of place inside the restaurant, Shiori could somehow guess Akira’s intention from his outer appearance. But in reality, Akira had no plans to antagonize Shiori at all, the reason why he was in those clothes was simply because he had no other clothes to wear.

Shiori looked at Akira with a serious expression, she had resolved herself to be in this place. For some reason, her serious expression looked beautiful.

“Akira-sama, thank you very much for accepting my request. As I promised, I’ll pay for the meal, please order anything you want.”

When he heard that, Akira’s gaze shifted down to the menu in front of him, but he then turned his gaze back to Shiori.

“Let’s finish whatever you want to talk about first. After all, we wouldn’t know if I can completely finish your request and deserve this reward.”

“… I understand. Let’s move to the main subject then.”

Shiori bowed deeply to Akira.

“First of all, I apologize for causing you so much trouble the other day. And thank you very much for saving Milady. I’m sure you feel rather conflicted about me and Milady, but everything that happened back there was my fault. If you want to, I’ll pay you back with anything I have—money, body, even my life. But in an exchange, please don’t put any blame on Milady.”

Shiori pleaded sincerely to Akira. Even Akira understood that Shiori really meant what she said.

Because of Reina’s foolishness, the battle that Akira had already won was turned 180 degrees. Moreover, Yajima even took Reina hostage and made Shiori fight against him. Fortunately enough, they were able to get out of that situation alive, but it would not be strange if Akira harbored some grudge against Reina and Shiori because of their actions. Since the servants’ fault was the master’s fault, thus Akira might even be blaming Reina for what happened.

In order to make sure that Akira was not holding a grudge against Reina, Shiori was willing to do anything for him.

Akira was rather taken aback by Shiori’s serious attitude.

“Before I give you my reply, there’s one thing that I want to ask you. Why did you take the roundabout way of sending a request through the Hunter Office if you just want to talk with me?”

“If you accept the request, I’ll at least know that you have a good intention.”

Shiori employed Akira once when they were in the underground city. At that time, he criticized Reina and said something that angered Shiori, but Akira only did that thinking that it was a part of his duty. He did not try to do any lip service as he decided to say his honest opinion even though it might cause a fight.

Shiori thought that there was a need to know Akira’s real feelings. Even if Akira already completely regarded Reina and her as his enemies, it would still be better if she knew that. It was also to check whether Akira was only trying to look normal on the outside while thinking of killing Reina on the inside.

Shiori had offered her money, body, and even her life to Akira, she hoped that it would be enough to abate Akira’s grudge. Although it was by pure coincidence, Akira was the one who saved Reina after all. Shiori could not deny that fact. But if that was not the case, she would have to resolve herself to protect Reina even if it meant that she would have to fight Akira again.

Because of all this, Shiori needed to know Akira’s real feelings about that matter.

Of course, Akira could not read that deep into Shiori’s intention. But at least, he had already prepared himself for whatever that might happen since he had no plans to lie when he decided to come to that place.

“I see. Leaving aside whether my answer can satisfy you or not, I’ll give you my honest answer. So raise your head and listen well.”

Shiori raised her head and waited for Akira’s answer with a serious expression.

Akira hesitated when he saw Shiori's serious face, which made it difficult to express himself.

"Forget about that incident, you don't need to do anything about it. That's all."

"…Hah?"

Shiori's serious expression crumbled down, and that one-word response perfectly reflected her real feeling.

Akira sounded a little bit embarrassed as he continued.

"Ah, well, what can I say? I guess I have to give a proper explanation, huh. Alright then, I'll explain everything. So just put aside any questions that you have at the moment and listen well. Since you sent that request right to me through the Hunter Office, you know my Hunter Code, right? Use your information terminal to see my battle record in my Hunter profile page, you can do that, right? I can lend mine if you can't though."

"Please don't worry. I understand, please wait for a bit while I check it."

Shiori looked a little puzzled as she did what Akira told her to do, she pulled out her information terminal, opened the Hunter Office's site, and checked Akira's battle record. But Shiori was shocked when she opened Akira's profile page and checked for his battle record in the underground city.

"…What is this?!"

Shiori looked surprised as she turned her gaze at Akira. When she checked his information page, his battle record was much different from what she knew had happened in the underground city.

Akira's battle record said that he was monitoring various defense points in the underground city for 3 days, nothing big happened during his assignment, but on the third day, he got injured in a battle against monsters

and was sent to the hospital. That was what was written in Akira's battle record, or at least, that was what the battle record publicly displayed.

Akira then explained to Shiori who was obviously confused.

"Due to my confidentiality contract with the requester, the Kugamayama City Management, I can't tell you the details. But that's my battle record, it has nothing, right? Since nothing had happened between us, I don't have anything to do with you. After all, it's not like something unbelievable had happened. If you can't accept my explanation, you can go ahead and talk with the City Management. But of course, make sure not to get me involved. I have no wish to pick a fight against the City Management, you know."

Due to his deal with Kibayashi, Akira's battle record from the underground city was completely rewritten. Akira himself had no wish to talk about it, he was planning to behave as if whatever written in his battle record was the truth.

Because of that, Akira decided to completely forget about everything that had happened between him and Shiori. Or at least, he had no plans to bring that up again. Although it would be a lie to say that he did not feel anything about it, it was not enough of a reason to make him take any particular action. Akira had already completely moved on from that incident.

Shiori looked at Akira, the Hunter whose battle record was displayed on her information terminal. After taking some time observing him, Shiori carefully tried to understand the situation. She tried to recheck if there was anything that she missed, any lies between them, any misunderstandings, or any implicit message she did not interpret that might fatally worsen the situation.

Shiori looked very serious as she asked Akira.

"…Nothing happened, is that really alright?"

"Yep, it's not like anything happened after all."

“I understand. As a gesture of my thanks for coming all the way here for me just to confirm this matter, you can go ahead and order anything you want.”

Shiori smiled as she urged Akira to take the menu in front of him.

“In that case, I won’t hold back.”

After saying that, Akira took the menu in front of him. Shiori patted her chest in relief. Now that she had resolved that problem with him, she had nothing more to worry about.

Akira hummed when he read the menu. There were all kinds of dishes written on that menu, although he could read the letters, he had no idea what kind of dishes they were.

“Alpha. This Arandouse Grie New Palies Style with Elianes thingy, what kind of dish is this?”

“No idea, but it seems that it’s some kind of meat dish…”

“Well, it’s written under the meat section, so I’m sure it’s a meat dish, but… I don’t know what kind of dish it is.”

Akira’s hum got longer as he continued reading the menu. Shiori could guess what he was thinking looking from how he was behaving, she then smiled and said.

“Akira-sama, I’m planning to order today’s special course. It usually contains a good combination of dishes, so if you don’t know what to pick, how about ordering today’s special course? You can order more dishes if you still want to eat more after that.”

“…I’ll take that then.”

Of course, he could just randomly pick any dish from the menu, but since he might end up ordering weird things by mistake because of his bad luck, he decided to avoid doing such a thing and took Shiori’s offer.

Shiori called for the waiter and placed the order for her table. It did not take long for their order to arrive. As Akira looked at all the dishes that were lined up in front of him, he noticed that he knew nothing about any of those dishes. For him, all of them looked equally expensive and delicious. Akira made a long ‘hmmmm’ as he nervously reached for one of those dishes and put it in his mouth.

He was overwhelmed as flavours exploded inside his mouth. Akira almost fainted as flavours spread all over his tongue, but he was barely able to survive that fierce assault. It was because he knew from his experience that losing composure could lead to a fatal situation.

Akira took his time chewing, enjoying, and relishing the dish which he did not even have the slightest idea of how it was cooked or what was inside it. It was a wonderful dining experience that changed his sense of taste. It was a pleasure that he could never find in the slum city.

Since it looked like Akira was absolutely mind blown and was about to get spirited away, Alpha worriedly asked him.

“Akira, are you okay?”

“A-ah, yeah, I’m alright.”

Instead of using telepathy, Akira accidentally answered Alpha’s question aloud. So in short, he was not alright at all.

Shiori was confused when Akira suddenly said that.

“…It doesn’t suit your taste?”

“Eh? Ah, no, it’s alright. It’s so good that it gave me a shock.”

Akira was acting weird as he flusteredly answered Shiori’s question. Shiori too thought that he was behaving strangely as she smiled at him.

“I’m glad that it suits your taste very well. There’s no time limit, so you can take your time enjoying the food.”

“O-okay.”

Akira was somehow able to answer back before he started eating again. Since he had already experienced it before, Akira was not surprised anymore as he continued eating his meal.

Alpha did not say anything and just watched Akira eating. It was because she was worried if she said anything, he might make another mistake.

Shiori was enjoying her meal while keeping her eyes on Akira. Seeing how he was eating his meal with a big smile on his face, he did not look like someone who could force her to use her trump card accelerator drug and still fight evenly against her. He looked just like a common young boy that she could find in the city.

But even so, Shiori did not drop her guard against Akira. To be more precise, she became even more careful when dealing with Akira after knowing what she just heard today.

Akira’s battle record was completely rewritten. Compared to his real battle record, his new shabby battle record was a big downgrade. But even so, it did not seem like Akira was bothered by that at all. Thus, it could be assumed that the City Management made some kind of deal with him, a deal that brought him enough benefit that he did not mind his new battle record at all.

[This boy is good enough to make the City Management give him a beneficial deal. It means that the City Management recognizes his ability as a Hunter. With someone like him around, there should be at least some rumours about him, but Drankam’s information network has no information about him at all. Although Drankam is recruiting new young promising Hunters in order to increase its sphere of influence, it doesn’t seem like it’s trying to recruit him. I guess I need to investigate more whether it’s just because the gang still hasn’t discovered about him or if it’s because the gang is deliberately keeping a secret about him. But that might be a dangerous thing to do. I have to avoid anything that might cause Milady any harm…]

Shiori’s mind was preoccupied with the person in front of her as she was eating her meal. All this time, Alpha was paying her full attention at Shiori.

Akira did not notice Alpha, who was staring at Shiori, as all of his attention was focused on enjoying the meal in front of him.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 68, Real Strength

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Akira's stomach was lulled by the great food, and when he finally regained some of his composure to fight back that pleasure, the only dishes left in front of him were the desserts. He could order for more, but since he did not want to leave any leftover food, he decided not to.

Akira took a spoonful of the beautiful mouthwatering dessert in front of him. Shiori also did the same while asking Akira a question.

"So like, Akira-sama, do you always work alone?"

He indulged in the taste of the dessert, but Akira somehow managed to answer Shiori's question.

"Yes, I'm always alone. Although I did say 'always', it hasn't been that long since I became a Hunter."

Shiori was trying to learn more about Akira during the meal, but this was the first question which Akira was able to answer seriously. When she asked her questions during the meal, he was only able to give vague answers as if he had his mind somewhere else, and of course, it was because his mind was indeed filled by the flavour of the meal that he was

eating. Because of that, Shiori could not gather much information about Akira till now.

“Don’t you have any plans to get more companions or join a gang? Neither hunting monsters nor exploring ruins, I believe, is an easy job to do alone.”

“Well, that’s true. But at the moment, it’s much more comfortable for me to work alone for a lot of reasons. I don’t need to fight for rewards when I’m alone, not to mention that I’m not really a team-player kind of person. So rather than causing a fight by being in a group, I would better do my job alone.”

Although Shiori was giving a friendly smile from the outside, she was actually diligently gathering information about Akira. She kept asking him questions as both of them were enjoying the desserts in front of them. Although for Akira, all the questions that she asked were just about ordinary stuff, Shiori was, in fact, carefully picking her questions.

Akira was also asking Shiori any questions that came up in his mind. Most of his questions were about the gang that she and Reina were part of, Drankam.

“Ohhh, so they’re gathering young Hunters, huh?”

“Yes. The current Drankam is aiming to recruit more young Hunters. At the moment, it seems that they’re even willing to accept complete beginners who had just registered their name in the Hunter Office.”

“I know it sounds weird for someone like me to say this, but is there any meaning in giving guns to complete beginners? They’ll just die in no time, right?”

There was a big difference between Akira’s and Shiori’s understanding of the word “beginner”. It was not like Drankam would accept any Rank 1 Hunter like the past Akira. One needed to be at least a Rank 10 Hunter with their name registered in the Hunter Office, to be accepted by them.

Although there was a slight misunderstanding between them, it was not big enough to disrupt their conversation.

Shiori then replied.

“In the worst cases, there are gangs out there that deliberately trick beginner Hunters to join their gangs just to use them as meat shields or decoys. Indeed there are many young Hunters who quickly die in no time depending on the quality of the gang that they join. In order to avoid something like that, Drankam offers a lot of support programs like setting up a training period for young Hunters or lending them better equipment to boost their fighting capabilities.”

“Equipment, huh… Well, equipments are indeed important.”

Akira mumbled as he remembered that he had once headed to the wasteland with just a handgun. To the current him, it looked like nothing but foolish and suicidal.

“Well, what can I say, I always thought that all of those gangs were only using young Hunters as sacrificial pawns. But I guess some of them are not that bad, huh.”

“Drankam provides the young Hunters with such support since it’ll benefit the gang in the long run. But lately, some of the veteran Hunters are complaining, saying that the gang is giving too many preferential treatments for the young Hunters. After all, they get some of their rewards deducted to help to pay for those support programs for the young Hunters. Although the veteran Hunters never received such a preferential treatment up until now, they have to lend some of their equipment and get their rewards deducted. But even so, the young Hunters are enjoying those benefits without showing any gratitude. So it’s to be expected that the veteran Hunters would get annoyed. While on the other hand, it’s true that the gang has gotten a lot of skilled young Hunters because of that too. Not to mention that those veteran Hunters, who work as the officers, are the very people who decided on those support programs in the first place. So I can’t really blame neither the young Hunters nor the veteran Hunters as a whole.”

Akira was reminded about Shikarabe and Katsuya. Those two people looked like water and oil, but it did not seem like it was only a matter of individual affinity between them.

“It reminds me of those two, Shikarabe and Katsuya, was it again? Those two don’t get along with each other because of that?”

“Shikarabe-sama and Katsuya-sama, huh? I’ve only heard that Shikarabe-sama was once assigned to look over Katsuya-sama’s group and that they just can’t get along with each other. Although to be honest, I don’t think it’s because Katsuya-sama’s group fault…”

Shiori’s expression looked a little bit conflicted. After that, they started talking about Katsuya, it sounded like Shiori was complaining and Akira was forced to listen to her.

According to Shiori’s story, it seemed that Katsuya was a rather skilled Hunter among all the young Hunters in Drankam. During the underground city request, Katsuya was proactively trying to accomplish his duty as he worked together with the other skilled Hunters. As a result, the young Hunters in his group had gotten quite famous among the other Hunters for their skills. It also seemed that the young Hunters in Drankam had even formed a faction with Katsuya as its head.

Because of his skills as a young Hunter, the gang placed all its hope on Katsuya to show the success of their young Hunters’ support program. But if that was all there was to it, it should not be enough to cause Shiori to make that expression. The real problem was the side-effect of that.

Katsuya was greatly admired by the other young Hunters, especially by the members of the opposite gender. He was pretty handsome and not arrogant even though he was skilled. To put it simply, he had a good prospect to be a good Hunter with stable earnings in the future. Thus it was only to be expected that the young female Hunters would be admiring him.

Some of them ended up falling for him although they only approached him for money at first. Some of them fell for him after Katsuya saved them. Some of them grew closer and closer to each other after they recognized

each other’s skills. Basically, a lot of girls were taking his side. Some of them were even fighting each other in the background to be able to be in the same team as Katsuya.

That was also the case for Reina. At first, Reina only looked at Katsuya with disdain thinking that he was just an unruly boy. But after she recognized his skill, Reina started to fall for Katsuya although she was yet to realize this herself. Shiori noticed that was also one of the reasons why Reina forcefully got herself in the same team as Katsuya.

Shiori sounded rather annoyed as her voice became slightly heightened.

“I have nothing to complain if Katsuya-sama is being honest with Milady. But, even though it doesn’t seem like he’s planning to go out with anyone, Katsuya-sama never makes that clear and always only gives vague answers as if he’s trying to woo Milady. Not to mention that he keeps getting more and more girls around him every single day!! Just because he isn’t doing that intentionally, it doesn’t mean that it’s okay to keep doing it!!”

“I-I see…”

Akira could only reply awkwardly as he slurped the after-meal coffee. It was already his 3rd cup of coffee. They had long finished their desserts even after Shiori ordered 2 more plates of desserts after their first one.

“It’s true that Katsuya-sama is a skilled Hunter and I’m sure he’ll be a great Hunter in the future. You can even say that he has this heroic aura. But there’s a limit on everything!! Even if he can do that by his own ability, if he wants to create a harem, he can just go to the western district and become a noble or a king or something!! After all, I heard that having a harem is a normal thing for kings and nobles according to the culture in the western district!! Don’t you think so too, Akira-sama?!!”

To be honest, Akira did not care at all. Moreover, it was only to be expected for them to grow closer to each other if they were to go through dangerous situations together numerous times. Although Akira thought so, it would only worsen Shiori’s mood if he answered back honestly.

Akira carefully chose his words to find a compromise so that he would not go against his own principle since he had taken this meeting as a request. He then awkwardly replied.

“Well… Uhhh… I’m still of the age where food is much more interesting than girls though. So it’s like, I’m not really knowledgeable about something like that… To be honest, I don’t think I can give you any good opinion even if you ask me. So… Uhhh… It’s not like I’m taking his side here. But since he’s working as a Hunter, it’s normal for him and his companions to face life and death situation on daily basis, so things like that are not really that unexpected, right…?”

“But Katsuya-sama even tried to hit on me too, you know?!! Not to mention that Milady was right beside me when he did that!! That’s just… Hm? My apologies.”

Shiori was interrupted by a call notification. She apologised to Akira and checked her information terminal.

“I’m really sorry, it’s a call from my workplace. It seems that I’ll have to excuse myself here. How about you, Akira-sama? If you want to order more meals, this will be your last chance…”

“No thanks, I’m pretty much full right now, so I’ll leave too. Thank you very much for treating me with such delicious meals.”

Akira had eaten quite a lot of dishes, and the final empty space in his stomach was already filled with coffee and desserts. Since he did not want to turn the entrance of the meals into the exit, Akira reluctantly decided to stop there.

As Shiori was making the payment, Akira received his guns back. When he heard the total bill for the meals they had, he decided to just forget it by convincing himself that he must have misheard it.

With his current earning ability, it was very unlikely that he would ever come to this restaurant ever again for the time being. After they left the

restaurant, Akira said his thanks to Shiori one more time before going back home.

After Akira left, Shiori picked her information terminal and called her colleague.

“It’s me, please tell Milady that I’m on my way back now.”

“Alright. So, are you okay? He didn’t rip your limbs, right? Milady is really worried, you know.”

The person, who Shiori was talking to, said something so awful like it was none of her business. Shiori then replied back with a serious expression.

“I’m alright. Kanae, you didn’t say anything unnecessary to Milady, did you?”

“We just had some small talks about the current situation.”

“To be more precise, what were you girls talking about?”

“A lot of things, like Milady’s work as a Hunter or any interesting Hunters that Milady knows. Then we talked about the underground city too. Milady also told me the story where you almost got killed too, you know? You went to meet that Hunter today, right?”

Shiori sounded annoyed as she sternly said to Kanae.

“…Didn’t I tell you to avoid talking about the underground city when you talk with Milady?”

“We somehow ended up talking about that due to the flow of the conversation, you see. And unlike you, I’m basically a soldier, so I’m not good with that kind of stuff. If you have anything to complain about, then you should return back here as soon as possible.”

“I’m already on my way.”

Shiori then ended the call after she said that.

***

Inside a mansion in the middle district behind the city wall, a young girl wearing a maid uniform lightly smiled while looking at her information terminal as her call ended just a moment ago. It was Shiori's colleague, Kanae.

Though she looked like a young girl, her age was unknown. However, there was a shred of innocence in that smile of her's. Yet from the outside, it looked like nothing but a mischievous smile.

Kanae imagined the kind of face Shiori would be making as she mumbled.

"She sounded pretty annoyed."

Although Kanae was wearing an outfit which looked like a normal maid uniform from the outside, it was actually made of enhanced fibres, making it bulletproof and stab-proof. It was more or less as strong as the armour that Hunters commonly used. Kanae was wearing such an armour since she would need to take blows in order to protect Reina in case of an emergency. The black tights that extended from under her skirt was a part of her augmented suit that she was wearing under the maid uniform.

Kanae was there as Reina's bodyguard. Although her job as a bodyguard was more or less the same as Shiori, unlike Shiori, her duty didn't extend to taking care of Reina. Kanae was actually a soldier who had no maid skill, so she would never get assigned to such a job normally. The maid outfit was only to disguise herself so that she would not cause a ruckus in the middle district as well as simply out of her employer's preference.

After she closed her information terminal, she returned back to Reina's room. Since Shiori was sent to the hospital after her fight against Akira, Reina was told to take a break from her Hunter job until Shiori recovered. Reina was studying inside her room when Kanae spoke to her.

"Milady, Ane-san is already on her way back."

"Ane-san? Ahh, Shiori, huh. Uhh, is she alright?"

“It seems that she’s not injured at all. She also said that she’ll return here as soon as possible, so I’m sure she’s alright.”

“Thank goodness. It’s all your fault for saying all of those worrying things to me, you know. Don’t scare me like that again.”

Reina looked relieved, but her expression turned stern as she scolded Kanae.

Kanae swiftly replied back.

“People die when they die. And it’s doubly true for people who do a dangerous job like the Hunters. You need quite a determination when you step out of the city wall on your own volition, you know?”

Reina sounded rather annoyed as she said.

“…Well, that’s true, but still…”

After passing her post to Kanae, Shiori quickly went out without even telling Reina where she was going. It was also Reina, who told Kanae, to check on Shiori’s safety.

All this while, Kanae was whispering worrying things to Reina like ‘Shiori might not be able to come back alive’. Only after confirming Shiori’s safety, did Reina realise that everything Kanae said was nothing but jokes. If not, just her honest opinion.

In truth, before she even went to meet Akira, Shiori had finished leaving her will and instructions to tie up any leftover business in case she died.

Kanae was somehow able to read what was in Shiori’s mind when she saw her off. She then thought while carefully making sure that it would not show on her face.

[…Ane-san told me to assume that she’s dead and act accordingly if I can’t contact her for 24 hours. She even arranged for soldiers to be dispatched if she was killed. Although our current situation is dangerous enough that Ane-san might get killed, Milady’s sense of danger is still too naive.]

Kanae realized just how naive Reina was, but she did not find that unpleasant at all. It could be said that it was because Reina was living a comfortable life since Shiori was always there to support her. And if she made another blunder, the situation might roll to the direction that Kanae preferred.

Kanae was a battle maniac, she herself understood that very well. Thus she had no complaints about her employer as long as she got enough reward and was able to experience good fights.

It was Shiori's duty to teach Reina to avoid any needless danger. So Kanae had no plans to fix Reina's sense of danger.

It did not take long for Shiori to arrive. After she changed to her maid uniform, she then went to explain the reason why she went out to Reina.

Although the incident with Akira was resolved, Reina might make a similar mistake if she was not made aware of the gravity of the situation. Thus, Shiori carefully explained everything to Reina.

After she finished listening to Shiori's explanation, Reina then asked Shiori.

"…So, basically, Akira is not angry or anything, right?"

"Since nothing happened, then there's nothing to be angry about. At least that's Akira-sama's current stance. Thus, just to be safe, I want to tell Milady that Milady should not try thanking him or apologizing to him because of that incident since nothing had happened between us. Not only doing such a thing might bring the whole problem back to square one, but it might also be taken as a form of harassment since Akira-sama has signed a confidentiality contract with the City Management. So, please be extra careful about this subject."

For Reina, it was a big disappointment since not only could she not say sorry after she caused so much trouble because of her blunder, she also could not convey her thanks after she got herself and Shiori saved by Akira. But if it would cause Akira more problems, then it was a whole different story.

Reina sounded apologetic as she said.

“…I see, I understand now.”

Shiori somehow understood what went through Reina’s mind, she then smiled and said.

“I’ve conveyed our thanks and apology to Akira-sama, it seemed that he also really enjoyed the meal. So I believe it’s alright for Milady to stop worrying about that.”

Kanae smiled and interjected.

“Milady, if you’re still angry for getting abandoned there, I can just go and give him a good beating in secret, you know?”

Reina and Shiori immediately turned at Kanae and sent their intense glare to her. Kanae winced back as she pretended that it was a joke.

“Oof, I guess I went too far. You know, like, I just thought that saying something like that might cheer everyone up, no ill-feeling intended at all, alright? It’s not like Milady is a saint either, so I just thought that there’s no way Milady is not at all angry about that part, okay? Ah, I’m sorry if I’m mistaken here.”

Reina and Shiori were still sending death glares to Kanae.

“Just stop.”

“Stop there, Kanae.”

It was not like Reina and Shiori had no ill feelings toward Akira at all. Although it was true that he had no duty or reason to save Reina, Akira did abandon her to die in that incident. But it was all because of Reina’s fault in the first place and he did save both of them in the end. Thus both Reina and Shiori were not as shameless as to vent their displeasure toward Akira.

Kanae then lightly apologized.

“I was just joking. I’m sorry that I went too far.”

Kanae actually was interested in knowing Akira’s real strength since he was able to fight evenly against Shiori even after Shiori used her trump card. Kanae was even thinking of pretending not to know anything or misunderstand the information given to her to mess a bit with Akira. But after seeing how Shiori and Reina reacted, she decided to give up that plan.

[Leaving Milady aside, to see that even Ane-san, who thinks about nothing but Milady, would react like this. This Akira guy must be a really dangerous guy. Yep, this is interesting.]

Unlike Shiori, Kanae was not very loyal to her employer nor to the person that she was assigned to as a bodyguard. Although she could feel their gratitude; good reward and a pleasant working environment were much more enticing. Kanae might cover for Reina and go as far as sacrificing herself, but it was because it was her job and not because of her loyalty toward Reina.

Kanae also knew well just how loyal Shiori was toward Reina. That was why she couldn’t believe that Shiori did not feel any grudge against Akira, who abandoned the object of her loyalty to die. If it was indeed true, then it carried a huge meaning.

She could come up with two possible reasons. One, because Shiori’s gratitude toward Akira, who ended up saving Reina, outweighed her grudge. Two, because Shiori was afraid of expressing her grudge towards Akira.

Kanae lightly smiled, hoping that it was the latter.

__*__*__*__

Akira was enjoying the bath inside his house while reminiscing the taste of the meals that he ate in the restaurant that day, he looked like he was in a good mood. And just like always, Alpha was also together with him in that bath. Although there was a goddess-level beautiful naked girl beside him, for the young Akira, who was of the age where delicious food was more

interesting than a girl, his mind was filled with the memory of those delicious foods, so much that he ignored Alpha even more than usual.

“That was really amazing. I want to go there again. I guess I have one more reason to earn more money now, huh.”

“It’s good that you discover more things that you can enjoy in life… But you can’t go there with your current earning, you know?”

“…You’re right. Now that I think about it, I didn’t really consider the price back then, huh. I can’t really go to that restaurant again until I can at least pay those meals like it was nothing.”

Being a Hunter was an expensive job, there were equipment expenses, ammo cost, and treatment cost when injured. For the current Akira, it would be very difficult to eat in that restaurant using his own money. It was not like he could not afford to pay the bill, but that would mean that he would have to cut other expenses which would increase his chances of getting killed. At least, until the day when he earned a stable income to pay for his own expense, he would have to stay with frozen food.

“Now that I remember it, there were many cyborgs inside that restaurant. I wonder if they ate their meals in the end? And if they did, what would happen to the food that they ate?”

“For those cyborgs who have an organic furnace installed inside their body, the food that they eat will be broken down and then converted into energy or become one with their biological organs. But for those cyborgs who don’t have such a thing, I’m sure they’ll take the food out from their body later.”

“And then after that?”

“Throw them away, I guess.”

“So it’s basically purely for their eye’s pleasure, huh. I bet those cyborgs have a whole lot of money with them so that they can even enjoy such a luxury.”

Akira looked exasperated. For him who had grown up in the slum city where getting food was a matter of life and death, he found such behaviour disgusting. But it had a very important significance for the cyborgs, so important that there were demands for developing foods for cyborgs. After all, it was a matter that affected their psychical health.

“Well, just because they exchanged their biological organs for mechanical ones, it does not remove their desire to drink and eat. In exchange for getting a body that is stronger than their organic body, they have to take care of problems that they could have easily solved when they had organic bodies. Of course, there are high-quality cyborg bodies that would allow them to solve those problems easily, but I’m sure they cost much more. Also, there are only a very small portion of people who can afford those high-quality cyborg bodies like the staff from big companies, people from super-rich families, or those Hunters who work on the frontline.”

“…That does sound super expensive. It doesn’t seem like I would be able to get one just from selling mountains of relics. Now that I remember it, those relic Hunters were cyborgs too, right? They even took their chance stealing those relics even if it meant having to fight the City Management, I wonder if they wanted that much money in order to buy such kind of cyborg body.”

Akira remembered about Nelia and Yajima. Up until now, no matter how much money was at stake, Akira never thought that any amount of money was worth fighting against the City Management. But that might not be true for the people who got turned into a cyborg because of some kind of accident or after getting attacked by monsters and had to live their life in a body that could not even process food. For them, getting a high-quality cyborg body that could process food as if it was a normal biological body, and then using it to enjoy expensive meals in a high-class restaurant would be like a dream come true. Since Akira had already tasted the pleasure of such a delicious meal, he somehow understood why people with cyborg bodies would even do something like that.

During the night of the same day, Akira saw a dream. He was fighting against Nelia in his dream.

Akira was desperately trying to evade Nelia's attacks as she was swinging the blades in both of her hands at him. Although it was a difficult place to move around freely with all the rubbles around them, both Akira and Nelia were not bothered by those rubbles at all.

There was no opening where Akira could slip any counter-attack. Because there was a big gap between their skills, he was only able to barely survive Nelia's onslaught. Akira was unarmed in his dream. Nelia was not someone that Akira could defeat without any weapons, his kicks and punches could not damage her cyborg body at all. Not to mention that Nelia might even cut his limbs if he tried to attack her.

Akira turned to Alpha and asked in a panic.

"My rifles?! Where's my CWH anti-material rifle?! There's no way I can win this fight without it!!"

"You lost your CWH anti-material rifle, remember? You need to buy a new one from Shizuka later."

"Ah, that's right!!"

Although there were a lot of strange things happening, Akira did not realize that he was in a dream.

"Now that I remember it, I did go to Shizuka's shop not too long ago, right?! So why didn't I buy one back then?!"

"There's no way you can use that rifle without an augmented suit, you know? You did lose your augmented suit too, remember?"

"Ah, you're right!… Hm, wait?"

Akira checked his equipment while making a puzzled face. He was not wearing his augmented suit, not even an armour, but the same durable clothes that he received from Kibayashi.

His movements immediately dulled the moment he realized that. After all, without his augmented suit, Alpha could not give her support and his

physical capability would return back to normal.

When his movement dulled, Nelia did not let that chance slip as she quickly lunged at Akira. He could see Nelia's blades chasing for his neck in slow motion.

[Ah, I'm dead.]

As that thought ran through Akira's mind, Nelia's blade separated his head from his body.

[I really wish I can at least taste those foods again…]

That was his last thought as he looked down on his headless body that fell down to the floor in front of him, then his consciousness was swallowed by the darkness.

Akira suddenly woke up from his dream. He looked around and realized that he was on his bed inside his room. It was dark since it was still very early in the morning. Trembling, he moved his hands to his neck. Once he confirmed that his neck was still attached to his body, he realized that it was only a dream.

"…Just a dream, huh."

Alpha looked worried and asked Akira.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I just had a weird dream. But I'm okay now."

Even after replying, Akira did not shift his gaze from Alpha.

In reality, Akira did survive his fight against Nelia. But in his dream, he was killed by Nelia when he lost Alpha's support.

The current Akira and the Akira in his dream were not that different. If for some reason, he lost Alpha's support, he might simply drop dead just like inside his dream.

[The me from that dream is the current me, with my real strength.]

Because of his luck, he was able to meet Alpha and was receiving her support since then. That was the only thing that allowed Akira to survive until now. But not even he knew just how long his luck would remain.

As Akira kept staring at Alpha without saying anything, she just smiled mischievously and said.

“What’s wrong? Are you falling for my beautiful face again?”

Akira retained his serious face.

“…Alpha, for how long are you planning to keep giving me your support?”

Alpha sounded puzzled as she answered back.

“Of course I’m planning to keep giving you my support until you are finished with my request. Why did you ask that question so suddenly?”

“I just thought that rather than asking me, wouldn’t it be better if you ask one of those veteran Hunters out there? The reason why you got in that contract with me is because I can connect to the old-world domain, right? So like, I’m sure I’m not the only Hunter in this world who can connect to the old-world domain. I bet you can find another better Hunter if you look for one, right? Ah, but rather than looking for another person who can connect to the old-world domain, I can just post a request in your name to accomplish your request, right?”

Hearing Akira’s answer, Alpha stared into his eyes. Akira too stared back at hers, awaiting her reply. There was a moment of silence before she answered his question with a serious expression.

“I have no plans to neither interrogate you nor to make you confess what made you think that I might stop giving you my support. But I’ll at least make this one thing clear to you. My support is just the front payment for doing my request. So I’ll keep following you until you finish my request even if you don’t want me to.”

“…I see, you’re right.”

“Yep.”

Since Akira received Alpha’s support, he had the debt and duty to accomplish her request. Even if he thought that it would be better for her to replace him, even if that was the truth, Alpha would not let him get away from her, that was what she meant between the lines.

Akira was relieved after hearing Alpha’s answer. To be honest, he even felt a bit guilty for receiving such superb support from Alpha since he sometimes felt that he did not deserve it. But on the other hand, somewhere inside him, Akira knew that Alpha intentionally said that to him since she knew that it would give him a sense of reassurance.

Akira smiled and said.

“I see, I’ll go back to sleep then.”

Alpha smiled and replied back.

“Good night, I hope you’ll get a nice dream this time.”

“I think it’ll be okay.”

Akira laid down on his bed again. Since his worry was already cleared, he quickly drifted back to sleep.

For some reason, Akira was sure that even if he got the same dream again, it would not end the same way as his previous one.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 69, An Unlucky Girl

Index

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Akira was doing time compression training again with Alpha the next day.

Just like before, Alpha was dancing in front of Akira with blades in both of her hands. She danced gracefully and elegantly, it felt as if her movements were so natural even when she sliced Akira's neck.

Akira did not move even when Alpha attacked him. Forget evading her attack, he did not even react at all. He just stood there watching her.

"…Akira?"

"It's alright, just continue."

Akira's expression was dead-serious. It was enough to make Alpha understand that he was not fooling around.

Alpha was actually curious why he did that, but she did not ask him anything as she stepped back and straightened her stance. A piece of her dress detached itself and vanished before she started dancing again.

Even after that, Akira did not react at all, he just stood there watching Alpha with a dead-serious expression as she kept slicing at him.

Every time one of her blades went through Akira's body, a piece of her dress would fall off and vanish. In the beginning, she was only losing decorations on her dress, but then slowly she started to lose pieces of clothes that hid her skin. As more and more parts of her body were exposed, she started to look like Nelia when Akira was fighting against her in Kuzusuhara ruin.

[…Remember that sensation!! That feeling in that dream!! That tension during that fight!! I was able to do it back then!! I was able to do it in my dream too! So I should be able to do it now!! Alpha also did say that I should be able to do it!!]

That level of focus when he stood in a life and death situation. That sensation when he walked on that thin line that separated life and death. Akira was trying his best to recreate those feelings as he stood in his place without moving. He focused on Alpha who was dancing in front of him, or to be more precise, he focused on the blades in her hands that had already sliced through his body numerous times.

And then, in the middle of her dance, Alpha suddenly swung the blade in her right hand at Akira's neck. By pure coincidence, her movements were exactly the same as Nelia's movements that Akira saw in his dream.

As Akira watched that extremely sharp looking blade cut through the air aiming for his neck, he instinctively reacted and quickly shifted his body backwards to evade that blade. But his maneuver caused him to lose balance and fall splendidly on his back.

As he fell, Akira's head violently bumped the floor. He rolled around with both of his hands on the back of his head as he writhed in pain.

Alpha quickly floated to Akira and worriedly asked him.

"Akira, are you alright?"

“I-it hurts like hell, where is my medicine??”

“It’s on the shelf over there.”

Akira wobbled around as he stood up and extended his hand to reach for the medicine box on a shelf near him. It was the 1,000,000 Aurum per box medicine. He took out a capsule from that box, opened it, and spread the paste-like medicine content on the back of his head where he was hurt.

The pain immediately vanished when he applied the medicine. But it was not because the injury was healed, it was simply because the pain killer numbed his pain and it was enough to make Akira feel thankful. As for the injury itself, it would heal given enough time. The medicine paste was slowly absorbed through his skin, thus there was no need to wipe the leftover.

Since the pain on his head was gone, Akira stopped gritting his teeth.

“It’s really nice to have this kind of medicine which you can just directly apply on an injury at a time like this.”

“But you might not have the time to apply it to your wound directly in the middle of a fight, so for the time being, it might be better to get a medicine that you can just swallow. Not to mention, it can help in healing your inner injuries and recovering your fatigue if you take it orally. That aside, you did it, didn’t you Akira?”

Alpha smiled when she said that, Akira smiled back and replied.

“Yeah, I did it. But thanks to that, I couldn’t move my body well and ended up falling splendidly on my back though.”

“That’s to be expected. Just because your time perception became 10 times faster, that doesn’t make your body move 10 times faster as well. So there’s a time lag between when you tell your limbs to move and when they actually move. Because of that, compared to when you usually move your body out of reflex, you’ll have to be more aware of your movement from now on. Watch your slowed opponent’s move carefully and based on it,

decide how you are going to move. But again, I guess you can only learn such a thing from training, huh."

"You're right. I can only learn to do that through training."

Akira unconsciously moved his hands to the back of his head. Although he did not feel pain any longer, he still felt some kind of awkwardness.

"Well, you basically whacked your head hard on the floor back there. So how about we take a rest for today?"

"Nah, let's continue. I want to try and do that again while I can still remember that sensation."

"Sure, but don't push yourself too hard, okay?"

"Yeah."

His training continued, Alpha started dancing in front of him again. Most of her dress had already vanished, thus depending on how she moved, her dance seemed to be very erotic from time to time. But in order to properly follow Alpha's movements, Akira did not avert his eyes at all.

Akira then finished his training for the day. Usually, by the end of the time compression training, Alpha would be more or less naked. But this time she still had some more pieces of clothes on her body than usual.

But that was not because Akira was able to evade Alpha's attacks, it was more because he was too tired to continue until she became naked.

Akira was lying on the hard floor with his limbs spread out as he was breathing roughly. During the training, he was able to compress his time perception many times. But every time he did that, his brain was hit by enormous stress and tiredness because of the sheer focus he needed to do that.

The longer he maintained the time compression, the longer he had to keep his focus. Moreover, moving his body in that state felt like he was

mustering his whole body to keep moving without rest. It was no wonder that it quickly made his body tired.

As his brain and body were extremely strained, Akira could not even stand up on his own.

He was still lying on the floor when Alpha, who was still wearing her erotic dress, said to him.

“Let’s end our training for today. Do your best to at least stand up from there.”

“…I can’t do it, just a little bit more, just let me lie here a bit more.”

“Just a little bit, okay? If you stay there like that, you’ll end up falling asleep on the floor, you know. At least drag yourself to the bed first, else you’ll definitely regret it in the morning if you wake up on the floor.”

Akira, who had lived in the slum alley for years, had slept on the hard cold ground numerous times. So he understood very well what Alpha meant by that. Now that he had experienced the comfort of sleeping on a fluffy bed, he no longer had the ability to recover his fatigue from sleeping on a hard surface. If he really ended up falling asleep on the floor, there was no mistaking it that he would definitely regret it tomorrow.

Akira was still breathing roughly on the floor, but he eventually calmed down. He then wrung any strength that he still had left to pull himself up and drag his feet to the bedroom before crashing to the bed.

Alpha was floating next to him. Since Akira had not told her to change her dress yet, she was still wearing what was left of her dress after the training. Her high-class looking undies peeked through the gaps between her clothes. But Akira did not even have the strength to tell her to change her dress.

Akira was somehow still able to fight the heaviness of his eyelids, but it was only a matter of time before he was lulled by the fluffy bed and his heavy body.

“…I’ll sleep for a bit. Wake me up when it’s time to study.”

“Just take a good rest for today. It’s not like you can learn anything if you’re still tired during the study session.”

“…Alright.”

After saying that, Akira let the tiredness take over his body.

As he fell asleep in front of her, Alpha looked at him thoughtfully.

To be honest, she predicted that it would take about at least 6 months until Akira could compress time. So basically, now her prediction was totally off.

Alpha was not sure if it was a good thing or it was a bad thing since it indicated that Akira could surpass her prediction.

Whichever the case, there was a need for Alpha to readjust her plan. As she thought of what she should do to readjust her plan, she was not smiling, not even once.

***

There were all kinds of people living in the Kugamayama lower district slum city, from youngsters to old people, male and female. All of them had to somehow earn money to pay for their expenses in the slum city. Some of them collected wreckages from the wasteland bordering the slum city and sold them. Some of them worked for people who, for some reason, lived in the slum city although they had relatively a lot of money. Some people chose to gather any sellable things that they could find and sold them to scrappers.

And of course, some of them were living by stealing others’ money. A girl named Alna, who was living in the slum city, was one of these people.

Luckily enough, Alna was a genius when it came to picking pockets, and unfortunately, she had no other choice but to rely on her talent to survive in the slum city. The harsh living condition gave her enough justification for

her action, and her talent let her continue picking pockets without getting caught until now.

Her living condition forced her to pickpocket, and the more she stole, the better she became. At this point, it would not be an exaggeration to say that she was already a first-rate pickpocket.

Her biggest mistake was that she shared the money that she stole with her friends. After all, it was not like all of her friends could keep secrets. The more famous she became as a first-rate pickpocket, the more her friends demanded their share.

Her friends asked for more and more money, hoping that eventually, Alna would help them escape the days when they had to starve. But Alna ended up running away from such expectations, and now she was basically working alone. Of course, she still had some friends that she was close with, but she decided not to join any gang anymore.

But living alone in the slum city was an extremely difficult thing for a little girl. There were only a few reliable methods available to earn money, and even after she earned some money, she had even fewer means to protect her money from other people. In order to get her enough food, a place to sleep, and a means to protect herself, she was left with no other choice but to rely on her rare talent.

Just like any other day, Alna was prowling for prey. It was not like she would just randomly pick people’s pockets as she was walking around the slum city. Instead, she intentionally aimed for people who seemed to be carrying a lot of money and were an easy target.

Most of the people in the slum city did not carry much money. While some of them, who carried a lot of money, were mostly people who she should never try to mess with. As such, it was rare for people in the slum city to turn into a pickpocket, that was also the reason why people of the slum city were not that cautious against pickpockets.

As such, pickpockets in the slum city tended to aim for people who came from outside the slum city. Like the customers who visited the shops that

could only be found in the slum city, or people who return from wasteland while brimming with confidence as they passed through the slum city, or people who ended up in the slum city for any unknown reasons, or people who came to the slum city hoping that they might be able to help the residents of the slum city, or people who are absconding and trying to hide in the slum city, or people who tried to look for anything that could be scrapped in the slum city. These people carried more money than the residents of the slum city most of the time.

Alna was looking for Hunters to pickpocket. But even so, there were many types of Hunters, some of them were veteran Hunters who she should never mess with, while on the other hand, there were also those Hunters who spent most of their money in taverns rather than renewing their bad-looking equipment. Whichever it was, these Hunters frequently visited the wasteland. Unlike pickpockets, thugs rarely robbed Hunters, of course, these thugs could get some money from selling the equipment that they robbed, but the danger of getting killed was too high.

In contrast to that, pickpockets often aimed for Hunters. If they tried to aim for the equipment, of course, these Hunters could easily detect them. After all, equipment was the Hunters' lifeline, without their equipment, those Hunters would not be able to fight monsters. So thanks to that, Hunters tended to be less careful when it came to other stuff, for example, their wallets.

Alna had found her target, that Hunter looked like an easy target in her eyes. Although that Hunter was wearing armour normally used by Hunters, it was so clean which indicated that the Hunter had never gone to the wasteland yet. The rifles dangling on that Hunter's body also looked brand new, there was not even any gunpowder trace, showing that they were never used before. It was a young Hunter and that Hunter's expression did not give the intimidating or dangerous aura like those veteran Hunters. So Alna thought that he must be a beginner Hunter who just gathered enough equipment to be able to register in the Hunter Office and start from Rank 10.

[Let's aim for that Hunter. If that Hunter is here for browsing the stands right after registering in the Hunter Office, he should be carrying quite a lot

of money. Let’s get his wallet before that Hunter can spend it on anything.]

Just like usual, Alna approached that Hunter naturally. Then using her genius-level talent and polished skill, she extended her arm and took the wallet from that Hunter. That Hunter did not notice it at all.

Unfortunately, Alna’s luck ended that day.

__*__*__*__

That day, Akira was walking through the slum city as he was heading to Sheryl’s base. There was no particular reason other than just showing his face in the gang and to take a breather.

The equipment that he ordered in Shizuka’s shop had not arrived yet. As such, Akira was still using his old equipment which included his new Hunter armour and AAH and A2D rifles that he had never used ever since he bought them. Thus it would not be a surprise if someone mistook him as a new Hunter.

And then, a disaster that often befell most of the green Hunters, who wandered through the slum city, also befell Akira.

“Akira, someone took your wallet.”

“Wha-!?”

Akira half-shouted, he quickly checked his pocket, and as Alpha said, he could not find the wallet that was inside the pocket.

“Be more careful next time. I might be able to protect you from pickpockets when you’re using an augmented suit that I can control, but as long as you’re not using an augmented suit, you should handle this kind of thing yourself, okay?”

Alpha just gave him a light warning as if it was not that big of a disaster to her. The wallet that Akira lost contained 100,000 Aurum. Although it was a big amount of money, compared to the money that he earned lately, it was

not big enough to cause any inconvenience. So Alpha just brushed it off as the fee for a small lesson for teaching Akira to be more careful.

But there was a big difference between Akira and Alpha as to how they took this incident.

Akira took a few seconds to register, process, and understand what had just happened. After a few seconds of silence where Akira did not move from where he was standing, he finished assessing his situation and immediately said.

"…Who took my wallet?"

In his calm emotionless voice, there was a fit of dark foreboding anger seething under it. Behind his calm expression, Akira was leaking out an aura showing the sharpness and readiness to fight.

"Alpha, do you know who took my wallet?"

In order to not cause any suspicions, Akira asked that through telepathy. It showed that he had regained his calm and composure, enough for him to remember to talk with Alpha through telepathy.

Alpha was surprised by how angry Akira was. At the same time, she took this chance to gather more information about him and readjusted her image of Akira inside her mind. With this, she was able to understand his character at an even deeper level.

Alpha quickly answered back.

"It's that girl."

At the same time as Alpha pointed her finger, Akira's vision enhanced, allowing him to see through obstacles. His attention quickly zeroed onto a young girl who was already in the back alley. He immediately started running the moment he found his target.

Alna was looking through the insides of Akira's wallet.

“…Oh!! 100,000 Aurum! Lucky!! This should be enough for a few days.”

Alna was beaming since she got more money than she thought she would get this time. But that smile immediately vanished.

“…This should be enough for a few days, but after that…”

Alna cut her sentence there. She did not want to say its continuation nor to think about it. It was exactly because she understood the meaning behind it.

It was an extremely difficult endeavor to become successful in the slum city. Of course, being successful here did not mean being rich, but getting a stable income enough for one’s living through honest work would be enough. Even so, getting to that point was an extremely difficult struggle.

In order to get an honest job, one would need to have enough knowledge and education. But in order to get enough education, one would need enough money and connection. Most of the residents of the slum city did not have the knowledge to get that money nor enough money to gain such knowledge.

Alna knew somewhere inside her heart that her future was bleak. She would definitely ruin her own life one day. There was no way she could keep on living as a pickpocket. After all, if she kept doing that, she would be found one day, captured, and made to pay the price for everything that she had done.

She had no idea what kind of price she would have to pay. It might be just getting beaten up and then dumped in the back alley, or she might get raped and then left battered on the roadside, or maybe she would be simply killed. In the worst-case scenario, she might be put in a living hell where death would have been better.

But with that being said, Alna had no other skill that she could rely on to survive other than picking pockets. And since she was able to survive until now, that particular skill of hers was very well polished.

Alna shook her head to help her forget her thoughts.

“…Let’s stop here. There’s nothing I can do about it even if I start thinking about that here. Now that I have some money with me, let’s just go and grab some food, an empty stomach will only make me more depressed.”

Alna started walking toward the shop that she often visited.

She suddenly heard a loud sound coming from behind. She quickly turned back to check the source of that loud sound. On the other end of the narrow alley, she could see Akira running in her direction. That loud sound came from when Akira kicked the obstacles out of his way as he ran through the back alley.

Akira’s eyes met Alna’s. Both of them froze for a few seconds before Alna regained her composure and started running as fast as she could toward the opposite direction from where Akira was.

Alna quickly understood that Akira found out that she took his wallet and he was there chasing for her.

[How did he find out? It didn’t seem like he noticed anything when I took his wallet!! And even if he did, there’s no way he would know that it was me?! And that too!! It doesn’t seem like he was randomly looking for me and found me by pure coincidence!! He ran here fully knowing my location!!]

Alna did not know what kind of person Akira was. But that was not the only reason why she was running as fast as she could, it was because she saw Akira’s expression.

“He’s going to kill me!! He’s definitely going to kill me if I get caught!!”

Alna, who could feel the intense killing intent from Akira, ran as fast as she could for her life.

The moment Alna started running, Akira snapped back to his senses, he quickly fixed his stance and took an aim with his AAH rifle. But before he could pull the trigger, Alpha warned Akira who had lost his calm.

“If you pull the trigger, you might hit innocent people. Are you sure you want to do that?”

Alna and Akira were not the only people in that small alley. Although it was not like it was filled with people, there were quite a lot of people there. Some of them were merchants who could not open their shop in public, some of them were customers and guards of those shops. There were also people, who had lost their place, sleeping in the corners of that alley.

Although Akira’s shooting skill was way better than before, at the moment, he had no augmented suit that would allow Alpha to assist his aim and he was using a brand new gun that had never been used before. Thus he had no confidence that he could shoot accurately.

When he was hesitating, the people around him noticed that Akira had his rifle out and ready to shoot, they started to panic as they moved away from Akira. But at the same time, they also blocked his line of sight at his target.

Akira himself had no wish to get other innocent people involved. So he decided to pull back his rifle and started chasing Alna again.

The distance between Akira and Alna was not getting closer.

It was mainly because Alna could use her smaller stature to easily pass through the narrow alley.

On the other hand, Alna could not completely break away from Akira’s chase since Alpha was always informing Akira of her exact location.

Even after taking so many forked turns hoping that Akira would lose her, he was still able to precisely know which way she went. Thus Alna started to panic.

“How!? How does he know exactly where I am?! … Don’t tell me-“

Alna thought that Akira’s wallet might be equipped with a tracker. If that was the case, it was no wonder why he could accurately pinpoint her location. So she threw Akira’s wallet toward his direction.

When he saw his wallet fly above his head, Akira stopped, turned, and picked up his wallet.

Akira more or less regained his calm after he got his wallet back. The expression on his face also loosened.

Now, if the money in the wallet was still there, then Akira would get back everything that he had lost, and he would be able to clean his history of getting his wallet stolen. If it was the past Akira from when he was still living in the back alley, he would have never allowed such a blunder.

He then would be able to learn from this incident and be more careful next time, thus closing the incident there.

When Akira checked the inside of the wallet, it was empty, all the money in it was already taken out.

Akira's face immediately turned stern.

"…Alpha."

"Over there. I won't be able to pinpoint her location if she's too far from me. So if you want to chase her, you need to hurry up."

"…Roger that."

Akira answered back swiftly with a voice that would send a chill down to one's spine. He then started running again.

So in short, that incident did not end there. Akira blazed through the alley once again, chasing after Alna.

Alna, who was running through the back alley of the lower district, stopped as she was running out of breath. She then took a long breath and tried to calm herself. Her gaze was fixed at the alley that she just ran through, but she did not see Akira there. Even after she somehow calmed herself and adjusted her breathing, she still did not see Akira.

“D-did I lose him…? So that wallet was really equipped with a tracker, huh? Well, I guess it doesn’t matter now.”

Alna felt relieved and smiled. But that smile immediately vanished, it was because she saw Akira running towards her through the alley.

“…You gotta be kidding me?!!”

Alna was so surprised that she reacted late. When she started running again, the distance between her and Akira was already not that far.

Alna was focused on running. Her face was distorted due to fear, she was even half-crying. As she desperately ran away, she did not confirm what was in front of her before jumping out from the alley to the big road in the middle of the lower district. Because of that, she crashed right onto someone who was just passing through that road.

“Whoah!! Careful there!!”

Alna looked terrified as she turned toward the person that she just crashed onto. It was a young Hunter. Looking at his equipment, he seemed to be a pretty skilled Hunter.

His expression was showing that he was angry, but the moment he saw Alna’s frightened expression, his rage vanished. He then worriedly asked Alna.

“Are you alright?”

He smiled as if to calm Alna who seemed horrified. The moment Alna saw his handsome smiling face, she forgot her situation and was captivated by his smile, fear disappeared from her expression, her cheeks turned red as she let out a small gasp.

But the moment Alna could feel Akira’s presence coming from behind the alley, she quickly snapped back to her senses. Her eyes shifted back and forth between the terror coming from deep beyond the alley and the dazzling smile that gave her hope.

Alna decided to take the bet as she hugged that boy and screamed.

“Please help me!! I’m being chased!!”

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Rebuild World – Chapter 70, Quality of a Hero

Index

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Katsuya was walking through the main road in the middle of the lower district together with Yumina, Airi, Reina, Shiori, and Kanae. They were showing the lower district of the Kugamayama city to Kanae, who just joined their team.

Since all the girls, who were together with Katsuya, were wearing dresses that were better than most of the dresses in the lower district and also with some of them wearing a maid uniform, Katsuya's group gathered a lot of attention.

Kanae was wearing a maid uniform. It was not rare for female Hunters to walk around in the lower district with their Hunter armors, but it was rare to find them wearing a maid uniform. Because of that, most of the people around them were sending curious gazes to Kanae and the other girls who were together with Katsuya.

Reina sighed exasperatedly and turned to Kanae.

"Kanae, are you seriously planning to accompany me in that uniform from now on?"

Kanae instantly replied back.

“Yep, is there any problem?”

Kanae knew that her maid uniform was gathering a lot of attention, but she did not care at all. After all, she was that kind of girl.

But in contrast to her, Reina was a bit bothered by that.

“You’re attracting a lot of attention, you know. Can’t you at least take that off?”

“Nope, just because I have an augmented suit underneath it, I don’t want to take it off. After all, I have no hobby of walking through a public space in a tight suit. Even if you have a hobby to make others do that, it’s outside of my real duty. So I’ll have to refuse.”

Kanae was subtly poking fun at Reina, so Reina shouted back at her.

“I don’t have that kind of hobby either!! I’m telling you to change into something else!!! You can just use another Hunter armour that you have, right?!!”

“Even if you tell me so, this is the best one that I have. Just because I’m attracting some attention, I have no plans to change into another cheaper armour that might prove fatal for my survival. After all, no one would care when we’re out in the wasteland anyways. So it’s fine, isn’t it? Ahh, but I’ll rethink it if Milady would give me better armour. Although, to be honest, if Milady has money to buy me a present, I think it’s better if Milady spends it for better equipment instead.”

Reina could not refute that logic. Of course, she could not tell Kanae to change her armour into something cheaper just because she did not like her current appearance.

Reina turned to Shiori, requesting for help. But Shiori just shook her head.

For Shiori, Kanae was Reina’s shield. As Reina’s bodyguard, it was Kanae’s duty to protect Reina even if it meant that she had to sacrifice her

own life in the worst-case scenario. Thus Shiori had no plans to weaken that shield.

Kanae smiled like it was none of her business and said.

“Well, at least until Milady becomes strong enough to the point that Milady only needs one bodyguard, Milady will have to deal with it.”

Basically, Kanae was indirectly telling Reina that it was all her fault for being weak, and if she had anything she wanted to complain about, then she should become stronger. So Reina stopped thinking of making any counter-argument then and there.

In the first place, if it was not because her family thought that Shiori alone was not enough as her bodyguard, then Kanae too would not have been assigned as her bodyguard. The real reason why that happened was all because of her own fault.

Reina looked dispirited as she sighed and hung her head low. It was because she understood very well herself that it was all because she was too weak.

Katsuya, who saw Reina depressed, tried to cheer her up.

“We’ll help you too, so let’s work hard and become stronger together. I’m sure you can do it.”

“…Ah, right, thank you… Hm?”

Thanks to him, Reina was somehow able to cheer up. But she then realized that Katsuya said something that bothered her.

To be more precise, what bothered her was the implied meaning behind Katsuya’s words which he himself made clear with his next words.

“That’s why, won’t you cancel your decision to break away from my team?”

Reina and Shiori were originally a part of a Drankam affiliated team with Katsuya as its head. Around the time when Reina had not recognized

Katsuya’s strength, she somehow forced her way into his team.

And even after she recognized Katsuya’s strength, she continued to work as a part of his team. She even somehow forced her way to join difficult requests compared to her level in order to get stronger and to collect achievements so that she could catch up with Katsuya.

Then after they finished the Kuzusuhara underground city request, Reina decided to break off from Katsuya’s team. Katsuya thought that it was just temporary until her extra bodyguard, Kanae, arrived and Shiori fully recovered.

But in contrast to his expectation, Reina decided to formally separate from Katsuya’s team. And it was all because of Reina’s own wish.

The requests that Drankam assigned to each of the Hunter teams affiliated to it were based on the average Hunter Ranks of the members of each team. Of course, the higher the average rank of a team, the higher the reward and the difficulty of the request that Drankam assigned to that team.

If Reina broke off from Katsuya’s team, there was no mistaking that her team would only get lower-level requests with lower rewards. It would be almost impossible for her new team to get a high-risk high-reward request such as the underground city exploration request from the other day. So in the end, it would be harder for Reina to increase her Hunter Rank.

Reina understood that Katsuya was trying to stop her out of good-will. Most of the people would think that Katsuya was trying to stop her out of ulterior motives, something like because Shiori and Reina were real beauties, or because he wanted to get skilled fighters like Shiori and Kanae on his team. But since Reina knew Katsuya’s personality well, she knew that was not the case.

Even though she knew all of that, she still shook her head.

“I’m sorry. I have no plans to withdraw that decision. After all, this all happened since I forced my way to join your team and accepted that underground city exploration request. Because I took a request that was way

out of my capability, I ended up causing Shiori a lot of trouble. That's why I'm planning to start again by doing small requests that I can manage on my own from now on."

Katsuya at least understood that something must have happened when Reina and Shiori separated from his team in the underground city. But even until now, he still did not know the details of what exactly happened.

He did try to ask for the details, but both Reina and Shiori refused to say anything. Katsuya only knew about the aftermath, Reina was so tired to the point that she could not fight while Shiori was sent to the hospital. That was all that he knew.

Katsuya regretted the fact that he could not stay near them and protect them. He thought that he might have been able to do something to avoid such an outcome if he was together with them.

He looked a bit bashful as he smiled at Reina and said.

"If you stay with my team, you should be able to get better requests. Not to mention, if anything bad happens, well, I can protect you. So, won't you at least reconsider?"

Airi and Yumina, who listened to the conversation between Katsuya and Reina, showed 2 different reactions. Yumina just sighed exasperatedly while Airi looked slightly annoyed as she squinted her eyes.

Although Katsuya sounded as if he was trying to hit on Reina, he did not realize it himself. It was a common thing that he did numerous times in the past, but he always kept his word, he even had sacrificed himself to keep his promise.

Most of the time, it caused the girls, who he protected, to fall for him and this was the main reason why he kept amassing more and more girls around him.

Since Yumina had been together with Katsuya for years, she had given up on fixing that bad habit of his. As for Airi, since she was saved by Katsuya

in the past, she could not tell him to stop doing that.

Because no one was trying to fix his bad habit, Katsuya's team had a very unbalanced male to female ratio.

Both Yumina and Airi thought that Reina would change her mind with this, but her answer was rather unexpected.

Instead, Reina cornered Katsuya with questions.

"…Katsuya, I'm happy that you said that to me, I really am. But, am I really that bad? Am I so bad that even after I've got Shiori with me, and Kanae assigned to me, that I would still need to be protected by you too? Am I really that bad as a Hunter in your eyes too?"

There was no trace of ill-will in Reina's expression. But her expression was serious and looked slightly desperate.

Katsuya was cornered by Reina's questions, he could only flusteredly answer back.

"T-that's not true. I just thought that we should help each other and we'll have a better chance of survival if we stay as a team. It's exactly because I recognize your skill that I want to have you in my team."

Reina stared at Katsuya as if she was questioning if that was really what he felt, she then shook her head.

"…Sorry, I don't think I'm that strong myself, that's why I can't take your offer."

"I-I see. It's really unfortunate, but it can't be helped then. You can tell me anytime if you change your mind, I'll wait for you."

After Katsuya said that, everyone went silent.

Reina did not say anything back to Katsuya. Shiori understood Reina's feelings, but since trying to carelessly cheer her up might be counter-effective, she decided not to say anything too. Meanwhile, Kanae thought

that Reina would be angry at her if she said anything insensitive there, so she also did not say anything. Yumina did not know what exactly Reina was feeling, so she could not come up with anything to say to her. Airi was rather jealous that Katsuya tried to stop Reina, so she decided to just keep shut since she felt like she might say something unnecessary in that situation.

The awkwardness in that situation was palpable, and because of that, Katsuya's attention was diverted to the point that he could not step aside when a young girl suddenly came out from the alley and crashed on him.

"Whoah! Watch where you're going!"

Katsuya ended up scolding that girl out of annoyance. That girl, in turn, looked at him with a desperate and utterly scared expression.

Katsuya thought that his scolding was the reason why that girl looked so scared. So he decided to put his feelings aside and tried to calm her down as he smiled gently at her.

"Are you okay?"

It looked like it was effective since that girl's expression relaxed. With that one sentence, Yumina looked exasperated while Airi's face turned stern. Both of them mumbled.

"Again, huh?"

Katsuya quickly noticed that someone else was coming from the back alley where that girl just suddenly popped out. That girl's expression quickly returned back to looking very scared.

She then hugged Katsuya and screamed.

"Please help me!! I'm being chased!!"

She was the one who stole Akira's wallet, Alna.

While the other person that popped out from the back alley was the person who was chasing Alna, Akira.

Akira was surprised, but he quickly grasped the situation.

Alna, who stole his wallet, was clinging to Katsuya. Yumina and Airi looked at Akira with disdain and hatred, they quickly put their guard up against him. Katsuya covered Alna with his left hand while his right hand was ready to pick up his rifle anytime. He was already looking at Akira with a hostile gaze.

Reina and Shiori also quickly grasped the situation although they were surprised at first. As for Kanae, she was just smiling as if she was enjoying what was going on.

Both Akira and Katsuya had finished registering all the information in front of them.

Alpha then warned Akira, who was overly cautious of Katsuya's team.

"Akira, calm down and don't do anything reckless."

"You don't even need to remind me."

Alpha and Akira were talking through telepathy. Akira was calm enough to remember to reply back through telepathy. The moment he was facing Katsuya's team, the moment he knew he was facing skilled Hunters that he should be careful with, Akira quickly regained his composure.

"Alpha, what do you think? That pickpocket, is she that guy's… Katsuya, was it again? Is she his acquaintance? If she is, does that mean that girl is a Hunter who works as a pickpocket as a side job? Is she affiliated with Drankam too?"

"It depends on how much of this is a coincidence. If it's all pure coincidence, then I bet it's just that she bumped into a kind-looking Hunter and made some random excuse to ask for help. But if it's not a coincidence, then she must have run through the alley, which she knew well, into an area

where there are many Hunters who patronized pickpockets. Those Hunters might have promised to protect her if she gets caught."

"…I guess this must be a coincidence then. I don't see any Hunters here who look so poor that they would go as far as to work with pickpockets."

"Well, you can't really judge a book by its cover. And even the small income from pickpocketing can become a huge sum once they pickpocket enough. But if you ask my honest opinion, I agree with you. This is just a coincidence. So, what are you going to do now?"

"…Good question."

If they just stood there glaring at each other, it would not solve anything. In order to achieve the reason why he was there, Akira opened his mouth first.

"I have some business with that girl, so can you give her to me?"

Alna shivered when she heard that. Katsuya could feel her shiver since Alna was clinging at him. And his wish to protect her grew stronger, it was also further fuelled by his hostile disposition toward Akira.

Katsuya's impression of the situation was fully cemented. He thought that Akira was chasing the beautiful girl Alna because of some kind of no-good reason.

And so, he was obviously showing his hostility with his glare.

"Do you really think that I'll just give her to you because you tell me to?"

Akira more or less knew that Katsuya would give him that reply, his expression turned stern thus showing his intent.

Yumina and Airi readjusted their position so that they could jump to Katsuya's help anytime. Shiori slowly moved in front of Reina, who was still confused by the sudden turn of events, as she watched carefully how the situation developed.

In the middle of that situation where everyone's tension was rising, Kanae was the only one who was still so relaxed. It was not like she was enjoying the situation, it was because she was a battle maniac who loved fighting.

Kanae then interjected with a cheery voice that did not suit the situation.

"So then, why are you chasing her?"

"She stole my wallet."

Everyone turned to Alna. It was obvious that she was starting to panic. Kanae then asked Alna with the same cheery voice as before.

"That's what he says, so, did you?"

Alna desperately clung on Katsuya.

"It's not me!! That boy just suddenly started chasing me with a scary face!!! That's why I was running as fast as I could!! I'm telling you the truth!!"

Katsuya could not discern whether Alna panicked because she was accused of something that she really did not do, or because she was trying to hide something. But at least he understood very well that she was desperate.

Because of his bad predisposition towards Akira, Katsuya somehow sounded mocking as he asked Akira.

"Do you even have any proof that she took your wallet?"

"Proof, huh…"

Akira went silent as he was thinking of what to say, but Katsuya immediately interpreted that silence as a no.

"You went silent there, so you don't have any proof, huh? I bet you just dropped it somewhere."

Akira and Katsuya glared at each other, raising the tension.

Airi then approached Alna.

“I’ll search her, if she had really stolen your wallet, I should be able to find it if I search her body.”

“O-Okay, you can go ahead.”

Alna stepped away from Katsuya and raised both her hands in front of Airi. But before Airi started searching her body, Akira interjected.

“You won’t find my wallet on her. She took out all of my money from my wallet and threw it away to cover up her crime.”

After hearing that explanation, Airi stopped. She thought for a bit and then asked Akira a question.

“How much did she take?”

“About 100,000 Aurum.”

Airi took another look at Alna, who was wearing a complete set of clothes. But the clothes that she was wearing were those worn-out clothes normal for the slum city residents, at least, she did not look like she even had 100 Aurum with her.

Even if she found that Alna was carrying 100,000 Aurum with her after searching her body. There was still no proof that she stole that, she might be carrying that money by pure coincidence.

Airi turned to Akira. Even if she told him to back off since he had no evidence, it did not seem like Akira would withdraw at all.

This time, Yumina interjected.

“Is there any chance that it was just a pure misunderstanding or some kind of other mistakes? Are you really really sure that she’s the one who stole your wallet?”

“There’s no mistaking, it’s her.”

“Do you have any proof why you can say that with confidence? Do you have any proof that you’re not mistaking anything? Did she somehow run away from you after you caught her once before? Was the situation akin to you being with only her in a certain location when you realized you lost your wallet?”

“Well, about that…”

As Yumina asked him those questions in a calm manner without blaming him, Akira was rather troubled by how to answer those questions.

The one who noticed that he had lost his wallet was Alpha, not Akira himself. At least until Alna threw away his wallet, he was chasing Alna purely because he trusted Alpha when she said Alna was the one who took his wallet. He had no other proof why he thought that Alna was the pickpocket other than because Alpha told him so. But of course, he could not say that to Yumina.

Seeing how Akira could not answer her questions, Yumina pressed further.

“Is it because of the information you analyzed from your information-gathering device? I heard that some Hunters always keep their information-gathering device on and focus it to scan the area around them just to be safe.”

“No, that’s not the case either. Or more like, I got my information-gathering device destroyed in a fight.”

“So, is it because someone who was together with you, told you so? If it is, can we go to meet that person and ask for proof?”

“Well… Uhh…”

Yumina’s guess was correct, but no one other than Akira could see Alpha. Thus he could not really say anything back.

“Is there any security camera around the area where you got your wallet stolen? There are multiple security cameras installed on the main road of

the lower district, we might be able to find something if we check the recording."

"…It happened when I was in the slum city, so I think there aren't any security cameras around…"

As Yumina continued questioning him, Akira's voice became smaller and smaller.

Compared to when they started, Akira sounded as if he had calmed down considerably. Yumina then continued with her still calm voice.

"I won't say that you're lying and I won't say that you're mistaken either. I do think that you have absolute proof that makes you say for sure that she's the one who stole your wallet. But it seems that you have your reason as to why you can't tell us the details about that. But again, as long as you won't tell us anything or give us any proof, we can't just trust your words and give this girl to you. You at least understand my point, right?"

Yumina stated that she understood what Akira was trying to say as well as asking him to understand her point. Akira also understood well why Yumina was taking that stance. So basically, she was not saying that he was mistaken or anything, while on the other hand, she asked him to not fully blame her either. Because of that, Akira was considerably calmed down, and the aura that was leaking out from him had also vanished.

After talking with Yumina, Akira had more or less regained his calm. It was not like Akira himself wanted to rope someone unrelated to his problem too.

The tension in the air had already lessened. It felt like at this rate, that incident would be solved without any fighting. Seeing how the situation had developed, Kanae looked slightly displeased.

"Akira, let's withdraw here. It's true that we can't expect them to trust us without telling them anything."

Alpha also encouraged Akira to pull back. He also agreed with Alpha's opinion.

There were many criteria that could be used to decide the winner and the loser, and they were often used to make a clear distinction between the loser and the winner in every case.

Akira, who had gotten his wallet stolen and his money taken by Alna, might be the loser here if he withdrew from this place without getting his money back. Then at the same time, it might mean that it was Alna's victory for getting protected by Katsuya although she did steal Akira's wallet, as well as it was Katsuya's victory for being able to successfully protect Alna, who came asking for his protection.

But again, it was nothing more but a biased evaluation.

Katsuya looked confident since he thought that he had won there. Akira, who was leaking out intense pressure, had calmed down after Yumina talked to him. Basically, he had more or less successfully protected Alna from Akira who was chasing her. It boosted his ego, moreover, since the tension in the air had also died down, it gave Katsuya the leeway to think of something else.

Because of all those reasons, Katsuya suddenly mockingly said to Akira.

"Humph, even if it's true that you got your wallet stolen, it's your fault for being careless although you're a Hunter."

"Katsuya!!"

Yumina yelled at Katsuya. She then immediately turned to Akira to apologize in Katsuya's place.

But the moment she saw Akira, Yumina froze.

The aura around Akira had completely changed. The peaceful aura around him from a moment ago had completely vanished, replaced by an ominous aura. It was somehow obvious that Akira would suddenly open fire

anytime. Although he was looking down towards the ground, there was a foreboding ominous pressure exuding from him.

Akira then raised his face and looked at Katsuya, and suddenly started laughing.

“You’re right, you’re absolutely right, it’s all my fault.”

Akira continued laughing as if he had turned insane.

“It’s my fault for being so careless. It’s my fault for being negligent. It’s my fault for being barely able to react when my wallet was stolen. It’s my fault for being unable to protect my own wallet.”

Akira’s laughter was getting louder as he spoke.

“But that’s my money, the money that I earned, the money that I got from working my ass off. To reach this point, I had to consume a whole lot of medicines that it’s breaking my own body, all of that just to be able to move my body when I really need to move it. I even had to cross over dangerous bridges that almost killed me numerous times too. Then I got sent to the hospital and lost all of my equipment. That’s the money that I got after going through all of that stuff. But to think that money will be easily stolen from me like that!! There’s a limit to how someone can be so stupid and so pathetic!! Yeah, you’re right, I’m a big stupid dumb guy to make such a blunder!!”

Akira laughed loudly while admonishing himself. His laughter suddenly died down, only self-hatred and self-reproach were left on his expression.

“But I’ll erase this pathetic mistake from my history. I’ll get my money back and make the person who stole it, regret it. That’s one thing that I can promise you. And now I can finally erase it, or at least, I can deal with it to some point.”

The Akira in the past could not earn that sum of money, and even if he did, he could not get it back if someone robbed his money from him, since he

simply had no right to carry any money. But the current him had worked so hard to the point that he could escape from such a situation.

But right now, Akira could not take back the money that was stolen from him. It was as if he had returned to his former self.

Akira wanted to show to the other people, and especially to himself, that he really had escaped from that position, that situation, that world. And that it was all not just his imagination.

Anger and hatred vanished from his expression, the only thing that reflected on his near-expressionless eyes were his target, and the obstacle that was standing between him and his target.

Alna was shaking behind Katsuya's back. The reason why she did not try to escape from that place was because she unconsciously knew that it was the safest place in her current situation.

Then Akira said in a cold tone.

"Give her to me."

"…I refuse!!"

Katsuya stood by his decision against the immense pressure from Akira and refused to handover Alna.

The reason why he refused to back down was completely unrelated to his dislike towards Akira. He had already resolved himself to protect Alna, who came for his help, even if it meant that it would put him in danger. He had such a kind of disposition and it would not allow him to hand over Alna to Akira.

Athena13: My old man always told me that having a good intention doesn't make you a good person, a person is judged by his or her actions and not their thinking.

Silavin: Your old man is a good man.

But seriously, drama aside, Katsuya’s lack of self-esteem really showed off here.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 71, Adding Salt to Injury

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While it was not always true that the enemies of your enemies were your friends, but almost always, the friends of your enemies were definitely your enemies. According to what Katsuya said, he basically put himself in a position where he allied himself with Akira's enemy. Thus, from Akira's point of view, Katsuya and his friends had already shifted from being innocent people, who got roped into this situation, to his enemies.

It would be nothing strange if Akira suddenly opened fire. Because of that, Alpha warned him with a stern expression.

"Akira, you can't. I won't allow you to do this. It's 7 vs 1, 6 of them are used to fighting, while the remaining one can fight you equally even when you have your augmented suit. You can't take this fight."

"7 against 1, huh…"

Those words were mumbled more to himself than to Alpha. Since he always communicated through telepathy with her, he thought that Katsuya and the others will not be able to hear what he said.

But his stance was already showing that he was ready to fight. Currently, his focus was divided into two, observing the enemies in front of him and planning on how to dispose of all of them. As such, he forgot his usual routine. Thanks to that, his obviously hostile statement that he just mumbled were heard by Katsuya and the others.

Yumina did not think that Akira would not recognize the difference in their strength, so when she heard him mumbled that statement, she was hoping that he would withdraw from that place.

But Shiori suddenly said something unexpected.

“It’s not 7 against 1. I, Reina, and Kanae would not get involved in this fight. We won’t aid Katsuya-sama nor Akira-sama.”

After she said that, Shiori pulled Reina behind her and Kanae.

“S-Shiori-san!?”

Yumina was taken-aback when Shiori said that. There was no trace of blame in her voice, she was just purely surprised by that statement.

Katsuya and Airi were also surprised. Without dropping their guard against Akira, they looked at Shiori as if they were asking her what she was thinking.

Akira’s expression did not change at all, he was still observing Katsuya and the others closely as he sent a glance to Shiori. He tried to guess what Shiori’s group was going to do next since they made an unexpected but suspicious decision.

As Akira and Katsuya’s group focused their attention on Shiori, she showed a wilful expression and said to both of them.

“Katsuya-sama, if you are going to risk a fight in order to protect someone, who you just met for the first time, I do think it’s a commendable act and I can respect that. But it is a completely different thing if it gets Milady involved too. So please handle this situation without involving us.”

Shiori said that with a serious face while exuding an intimidating aura.

“Akira-sama, as long as you do not pose any danger to Milady, including misfire, I can promise you that we won’t attack you. So please make the right decision to avoid any needless battle.”

Shiori basically said that her group would not help either side if they decide to fight it out. While at the same time, she was also questioning Katsuya’s decision to risk his and his friends’ life for Alna’s sake. She was also telling Akira to rethink whether this fight was really that important or not.

Both Akira and Katsuya could make a decision to not fight there. But if none of them backs-off, then anything that would happen after that was their responsibility.

Shiori then pushed Reina, who still could not recover from the confusion, backward as if she was urging her to move. They were slowly distancing themselves from Katsuya and Akira.

“Milady, let’s go.”

“B-but–“

Reina tried to resist a bit as Shiori pulled her away from that place, but she did not try to seriously break off from Shiori to fight beside Katsuya against Akira. To be more precise, she did not even want to be chosen as the third party observer there.

Shiori frowned as she said to Reina.

“My apologies. Milady, I’ll have to pull you away even if it’s against your will… Or is that you’re planning to repeat the same mistake again?”

Shiori did not clearly state what kind of mistake she was talking about. It was so that Reina would figure it out by herself about the worst mistake that she made in the past.

Reina immediately remembered everything that Shiori might be referring to.

That time when Yajima and Akira were arguing in the underground city, both of them were making statements without any proof or evidence. So there was no telling which one was lying and which one was not, but actually Akira was telling the truth at that time. But again, there was no guarantee that it was also the case this time.

She also remembered that she was taken hostage when she carelessly approached Yajima. So, she feared that the same thing would happen again if she tried to approach Akira to calm him down or if she tried to approach Alna to protect her. After all, if Alna took her hostage, Shiori might be forced to fight Akira again. And if Akira took her hostage, then Shiori might be forced to fight Katsuya.

She would just end up as a deadweight again and be forced to watch people killing one another in front of her eyes.

The regret that she was holding inside her heart since that day pushed her to make her decision.

"…Katsuya, I'm sorry. I can't help you this time. I don't think it's wise to risk my life for protecting that girl."

It was a tough decision for Reina, but her love for Katsuya was not big enough for her to rope Shiori into that problem for his selfless action.

Yumina became saddened as she looked at Reina, while on the other hand, Airi's gaze was saying that she was condemning Reina's decision. It seemed that both of them loved Katsuya so much that they would be happy to sacrifice their lives for him. Enough that they would choose to fight Akira rather than pulling Alna off from Katsuya and handing her over to Akira–an act which would make Katsuya hate them.

Kanae suddenly said something with a cheerful voice as if she could not read the mood at all.

"Ah, I don't mind taking Katsuya's side though."

Shiori immediately directed a silent but immense pressure toward Kanae, making her retract her words.

“Ah, I’m sorry! I take that back! This is also my job as a bodyguard! So I can’t do that! Well then, we’ll excuse ourselves here! Milady, let’s go back home!”

Kanae placed both of her hands on Reina’s shoulder and started pushing her away to the point that they were jogging. Shiori lightly bowed and followed Kanae and Reina.

After Reina, Shiori, and Kanae put enough distance from where Akira was, he mumbled.

“Now, it’s 4 on 1…”

Katsuya and his friends were staring at Shiori, who left that place, forgetting about Akira. But the moment Akira mumbled those words, their attention returned back to him, their stances indicating that they were ready to fight anytime.

Although they had not pointed their guns at Akira, their hands were already extended to right beside their own respective rifles. The moment one of them touched their rifles, Akira might quickly react by grabbing his own rifle and start shooting. That was why Katsuya, Airi, and Yumina did not dare to make any sudden or suspicious moves.

Akira’s words reconfirmed their current situation, it was not 3 against 1, but 4 against 1. So in short, Akira included Alna as his target to kill, so Katsuya would have to fight Akira while protecting Alna which would put him at a disadvantage.

Katsuya’s expression turned stern. Since the tension between them was extremely high, it shaved their spirits the longer they stood there staring at each other. And that unbearable tension was tempting Katsuya and his friends to make the first move before Akira.

Akira’s expression did not change as he glared at Katsuya. His eyes were saying that he had no wish to lessen his hostility towards them. He simply had no wish to back-off in such a situation. The only reason why he did not make any move was simply because of the difference between their fighting power.

Akira himself had no plans to go as far as to sacrifice his own life just to kill Alna. After all, if that was not the case, he would have made his move when Katsuya and his friends took their eyes off from him.

After losing Shiori, Reina, and Kanae, the gap between their fighting power greatly reduced. But it still did not change the fact that Akira only had a slim chance of winning; even if he were to put down his life.

Akira’s sense of reason stopped him from pushing forward, but his hatred and anger prevented him from backing off. Because of that, he could not make any moves.

The trigger that changed the situation was Alpha. She scolded Akira with a stern expression.

“Akira, step back! Now! If you just wait for a bit longer, you’ll get better equipment. There’s no reason for you to recklessly charge into a disadvantageous fight, without even waiting for your new equipment, just to kill that girl. From my point of view, what you are going to do now is just adding more salt to your injury. If you fight now, there’s no mistaking that you’ll die. Akira, are you going to disobey me now? Do you not trust me now?”

Even after hearing Alpha’s words, Akira’s expression showed no change. The hostility that he directed to Katsuya did not reduce at all as he was still glaring at them.

But then, Akira, who did not lower his guard and was keeping his eyes fixed on Katsuya and his friends, took a step back without turning around. He then slowly stepped back to the alley where he came from. Akira’s expression did not change and he still glared at Katsuya and his friends until he finally vanished deep into the alley.

Even after Akira’s figure disappeared into the alley and his presence completely vanished, it took a few minutes before Katsuya, Airi, and Yumina lowered their guards. All of them let out a big sigh as they were liberated from the high tension which accumulated during that confrontation.

Even though they did not fight at all, they felt exhausted. That confrontation was psychically more taxing than a fierce battle. It might be because they had no experience fighting against another person. Since they were lucky to be proper Hunters and with a big gang like Drankam behind them, Katsuya rarely had any occasion where he had to fight other Hunters.

Although they had gone through a lot of fights during their job as Hunters, this was the first time someone bore such a level of killing intent and hostility at them.

Yumina strongly scolded Katsuya, which was very rare considering her nature.

“Katsuya!! Don’t expect me to help you if something like that happens again, okay?!”

Katsuya did not think it through as he reflexively replied back.

“Are you seriously telling me that I should have just given this girl away to him?”

“That’s not it!!”

Katsuya’s reply caused Yumina to raise her voice and shut him up. Her fiery reply caused Katsuya to wince back.

“If you hadn’t said what you said back then, we could’ve resolved this peacefully?!! So why in the world did you say that?!”

“I-I didn’t think that he would get enraged, you see.”

“What I’m asking you is the reason why you said that?! Did you really think that he would just laugh it off and forget about it when you say such

things?!!”

“I-It just slipped off from my mouth… I-I’m sorry.”

Katsuya sounded like his apology was sincere, it seemed that he at least knew it was his mistake.

After letting out her pent up emotion, Yumina finally calmed down. Her intense glare had returned back to normal. After she took another long breath, she then scolded Katsuya again.

“The next time you do anything like this, I’ll replace that mouth of your’s with a cyborg part and I’ll set it so that you can’t say anything without my permission, okay? Do you get that?”

“O-Okay.”

After hearing his answer, Yumina finally let go of her rage. Now that she had regained enough composure to think about Alna, she approached Alna, who was still dumbfounded by what had happened, and said to her.

“I’m sorry, it seems that things always get complicated because of Katsuya.”

Then Alna flusteredly thanked Katsuya and his friends.

“P-please don’t be! It’s me who should be apologizing for roping everyone into my problem! Thank you very much for saving me!”

Alna was now sending passionate gazes at Katsuya. It was normal for a girl to send such a gaze to a member of the opposite sex who saved her when she was in trouble, and of course, Alna was not an exception.

Airi watched that confrontation between Akira and Katsuya from a location little far from Yumina.

Unlike Katsuya and Yumina, who became Hunters starting from a blessed environment, Airi started from a rather poor environment. According to her past experiences, she bet that Akira was telling the truth.

Airi was at a loss whether to tell Katsuya and Yumina or not, but in the end, she decided not to say anything. After all, if she did, then she would have to explain her reasoning. But the main reason why she did not tell Katsuya and Yumina was because she did not want to ruin Katsuya's mood. As Airi thought that it had ended anyway, she decided to not tell Katsuya and Yumina.

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Akira was walking through the back alley, he was heading to his original destination, Sheryl's base. His expression had not changed much since his confrontation with Katsuya.

Alpha thought that it would be bad to let Akira meet anyone while he was in this mood. Since with his current mood, even the slightest misunderstanding could trigger an unnecessary fight. So she gently made a suggestion to Akira to calm himself down.

"Akira, how about you take some deep breaths?"

Akira stopped. He did not say anything as he turned to Alpha, while she returned his stare with a smile.

"Hm? What's wrong? You don't know how to do it? Do you need me to explain it? Or do you need an example?"

Although Akira was staring at her with an abnormal expression, Alpha's smile did not diminish. The intonation of her voice also remained the same.

Akira did not say anything as he took a deep breath. He then repeated the process again and again and again.

For his last deep breath, Akira let out a big sigh. His expression loosened and returned back to his depressed face, which said that he hated himself.

Akira then spoke to Alpha through telepathy.

"…I'm sorry."

It might be because he spoke through telepathy, all his guilty feelings and the other emotions inside him were sent to Alpha together with his apology. There was guilt, frustration, self-reproach, and gratitude.

“Don’t worry about that.”

Alpha received all of those emotions sent to her and told Akira that it was not that big of a deal.

Akira started walking again, and Alpha walked beside him.

“I know it’s too late to say this, but I really am relying on you for everything, huh?”

“You can keep on relying more on me, you know? You can just ask me anything.”

“Even if you tell me so, I think I’m already relying more than enough on you. So like, rather than that, do you have anything that you want me to do for you?”

“Let’s see… I want you to not die until you can finish my request.”

“…I’m sorry.”

“Yep, that’s good.”

Akira sincerely apologized and Alpha smiled in satisfaction.

Akira arrived in front of Sheryl’s base, but he decided to head back home without entering the base. Although he had regained his calm, his mood was not fully recovered to his usual self yet. He might inadvertently vent his emotion on Sheryl, thus he thought that it would be better for him to visit the base another day.

Akira retraced his footsteps back to his house.

After Akira left, 2 girls arrived near Sheryl’s base. One of them was a girl by the name of Nasha, she looked just like a normal girl commonly found in

the slum city. While the other girl was Alna.

Alna worriedly asked Nasha.

“Nasha, are you sure that it’ll be fine?”

“Don’t worry, I carefully picked this gang after gathering all the information that I could get. Even if we get rejected from this gang, they won’t kill us or take all of our possessions… Maybe.”

Both Alna and Nasha were hoping to join Sheryl’s gang.

Although Sheryl’s gang was a relatively small gang, it gathered a lot of attention from the young boys and girls in the slum city.

Starting from its boss, Sheryl, all the members of the gang were young boys and girls and there were even small children too. But even so, the gang was properly managed like a real organization and it had enough influence to provide some level of protection to its members. Moreover, news had spread through the slum city that Sheryl’s gang had successfully secured food and guns too. Thus, the reputation of the gang started to spread. People who heard about Sheryl’s gang normally had good impressions of it. So, many of them wished to join Sheryl’s gang in order to gain benefits.

Nasha smiled to clear up Alna’s worries.

“You were the one who kept rushing it in the first place, remember? So why are you hesitating now?”

“W-well, that’s true, but still…”

“I don’t know the real reason why, but it seems that the boss of this gang prohibits all of its members from thieving or murdering other people. That’s why I’m sure they won’t tell you to pickpocket even after you get accepted. I’ll join first to see if that’s true or not and then you can join in later after I confirm it, that’s our plan, remember?”

Alna sounded apologetic as she said.

“Nasha, I’m sorry. It feels like I’m making you go alone to check the gang just for my sake. Please be careful.”

“It’s fine. I’ve always been thinking of joining this gang anyway, so this is a good chance to do that.”

Nasha then extended her right hand to Alna and opened her palm. Alna took out a few pieces of papers from her chest and handed it over to Nasha while making her grip on it.

Both Nasha and Alna did not think that they would be able to join Sheryl’s gang without any connection or money. And at the same time, they thought that they would have a better chance to get accepted if they had some souvenirs that they could give to the boss of the gang or the people working under her. So their plan was to use their hard-earned money to get a better chance.

As Nasha counted the bills that she received from Alna, she frowned and her face turned stern.

“90,000 Aurum!? Alna, you really overdid it this time!! Are you trying to kill yourself?!”

Nasha knew well how Alna got her money. This 90,000 Aurum was a huge sum that would drive any slum city resident into a frenzy if they were pickpocketed. It was huge enough to make someone kill for retrieving it.

Alna’s face distorted with fear as she replied.

“I know!! I did tell you too, remember?! I was really about to get killed!! Although I got lucky and was able to get out alive, it was really a close call!! I know what I’m doing is really dangerous, that’s why I’m rushing you so that I can live without the need to pickpocket!! So that I don’t have to face that kind of thing ever again!”

Alna shivered as she remembered Akira’s image when he was chasing her and when he was confronting Katsuya’s team.

When Nasha saw Alna shivering, she hugged Alna to help her calm down. Alna's shivers slowly died down thanks to that.

Alna then hugged Nasha back.

"I'm sorry, Nasha, please be careful there."

"Rather than worrying about me, you should worry more about yourself. Make sure to remain hidden, okay?"

Alna and Nasha expressed their worries to each other before going their separate ways. Alna went to their hideout in the slum city while Nasha headed to Sheryl's gang.

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Akira spent his days training inside his house without even stepping outside. It was because he decided to stay in his house as much as possible until he got his augmented suit and regained Alpha's support.

He thought that it must be one of his unlucky periods, that was also the reason why he got his wallet stolen. Thus he stayed inside his house as much as possible.

Akira had spent all of his luck when he met Alpha, so normally, he had no luck left with him. He always somehow managed to get through it with his hard work and Alpha's support. But at that time, his carelessness wasted all his hard work, and since he did not have his augmented suit, he could not have Alpha's support. Akira thought these were the reasons why he got his wallet stolen.

Although there was no proof for this, if only Akira did not get careless, or if he had his augmented suit with Alpha's support, he might have not lost his wallet back then. At least the logic checked out and that was enough as a proof for Akira.

As for Alpha, she wanted to keep Akira inside since there was a good chance that the current Akira would react unexpectedly when faced with a

problem. She had no plans to allow him to go out until he got his new equipment, or at least until he got his new augmented suit.

Since both Akira and Alpha agreed with each other on this, he decided to spend his time training inside his house.

Akira's time compression training was doing well. Although it was not like it exponentially increased his fighting skill, his time compression success rate was increasing. He no longer stopped the training because he was too tired to move. But to be more precise, it was because Alpha adjusted the gap between her attacks depending on Akira's level of tiredness.

Because of that, every time Akira finished his training, Alpha would have lost most of her dress to the point that she seemed more or less naked just like before.

Every time he failed to evade Alpha's attack, a piece of her dress would flutter away and vanish as usual. Today too, as the last piece of her dress fluttered away, it vanished without making any sound.

As Alpha was floating there with a dress that was barely hiding any part of her body, she told Akira, who was breathing roughly out of tiredness, that the training had ended.

"Let's end the training here. You did well in today's training."

Akira glanced at Alpha while trying to regulate his breathing.

"What's wrong, Akira??"

"Well, about that dress."

"Hm? Since it seems that you like erotic clothes, doesn't this interest you?"

Akira sounded a bit annoyed as he said.

"That's not it. I'm just thinking that although I'm starting to get a grasp on this time compression thingy, your dress has not changed much compared

to the first time we started this training. So in short, I still can't evade your attacks, and that really bothers me."

Akira was displeased by the result of his training since he felt that he was not getting better at all.

Alpha smiled to reassure him.

"That's normal. Even if you can slow down your time perception to 10 times, it's not like your physical ability increases 10 times. It's not easy to get yourself used to the lag that arises when you try to move your limbs and when they actually move. Moreover, you'll have to get yourself to the point where you can move your body freely in that state. So there's no way you can do it right off the bat. Don't worry, you're slowly getting there, I can guarantee that."

"…Is that so? I don't feel it though. But if you say so, then I guess that's true."

"Yep. So don't worry."

"Okay."

Akira picked himself up and started to walk to his room for taking a rest. But when he grabbed the handle of the garage door, he suddenly stopped and turned back to Alpha.

"Turn back to your usual dress."

"Sure."

Since Akira told her so, Alpha replaced her tattered dress.

Akira was not bothered by her dress during the training since he placed his focus on dodging her attacks, or at least, he tried to do so. So when he returned back to his usual psychical state as he was about to exit the garage, that was no longer the case.

Just like usual, after his training, Akira took rest in his room while eating his meal. It was his usual heated frozen meal.

There was a separate kitchen in his house and it contained a stove for cooking. It was among the leftover stuff from the previous resident. But of course, it was currently not used for cooking anything. Akira had no idea how to cook and it was not like the previous resident also left behind his cooking skill there. Not to mention, the frozen food was not that bad either, so he had no plans to learn cooking any time soon. So, for now, it was just used to heat the frozen meal.

Akira's living standard had definitely risen. But at least until he found pleasure in cooking, it was highly unlikely that he would ever use those cooking utensils.

As Akira was enjoying his meal during the short break before his study, he asked Alpha.

"What am I going to study today? Are we going to continue our talk about the corporations from yesterday? What was it again? Resource trading and distribution among the cities under the eastern Corporate Government?"

When someone said eastern city, Akira did not know that there were cities other than Kugamayama city until now. But thanks to Alpha's education, he started to gather common knowledge and increased his intelligence. Although he was more knowledgeable than before, his knowledge was still considered as minuscule compared to the people living within the inner wall.

The reason why Alpha taught all of those things to him was more for her own sake rather than for Akira's sake.

Alpha was actually probing Akira as she was teaching him. In order to complete her request, she needed him to be more knowledgeable so that he could easily resist any type of beliefs that might become an obstacle in completing her request.

So, studying was important to both Akira and Alpha.

Although their original plan was to study that day, Alpha decided to cancel it.

“We won’t be studying today, after all, it seems that a message just arrived from Shizuka saying that your new equipment has arrived. So let’s go get them.”

“Oh!! I can finally start my Hunter work again, let’s go!!”

In order for Akira to complete Alpha’s request, she needed him to be stronger. So, she prioritized getting better equipment over his study.

Alpha smiled at Akira who looked elated.

Athena13: Big oof Alna, big big oof.

Silavin: Haha. Poor Alna. I don’t hate her. But, she was a little too greedy lol.

p4553r: I’m looking forward to seeing what would happen when Alna and Akira meet in Sheryl’s base. Will she die with grievances or will she become Akira’s aide?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 72, The Buried Ruin

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Akira headed to Shizuka's shop to receive his new equipments.

When he entered the shop, Shizuka waved at him.

"Welcome, Akira. Over here."

Shizuka smiled at him and then guided him to the backroom of the shop. The backroom was used as a warehouse for the stuff that she sold, thus it was filled with guns and ammo.

Akira noticed something and asked Shizuka.

"By the way, is it okay to leave the counter unguarded?"

"It's fine. It's not like there are that many people who want to buy guns anyway, so it will not be much of an issue even if I leave the counter. Even when the city was attacked by a swarm of monsters not too long ago, there were more people coming in than usual but it was not that many to even form a line in front of the counter."

"I meant it more like someone might steal something…"

“The rifles in the display are inside anti-thieving showcases, I have also installed security cameras, and have insurance with a private security company. So it’ll be fine.”

Even if someone was able to break the secured counter, take Shizuka’s money from it, and escape from the security, she’ll be paid with the same amount of money that she lost. Thus it was highly unlikely that Shizuka would suffer much damage that Akira thought she would.

Not to mention, the private security company that was working together with the insurance company, which Shizuka was contracted with, would catch that person dead or alive. If that person was caught alive, he would be fined with all kinds of charges and would be forced to exchange his life, his body, basically just everything that he had to pay the fine. Depending on the severity of the fine, he might get his property seized, or forced into a labour work, or used as a guinea pig for developing new medicines or technologies.

Seeing how Akira still seemed to be worried, Shizuka smiled at him and said.

“If you’re still worried that I’m leaving the counter for your sake, just think of it as me giving some efforts to get a regular customer. It should bother you less that way, right?”

Although Akira had spent 80,000,000 Aurum in Shizuka’s shop, it did not seem that she had thought of him as a regular customer.

Either because it showed on his face or just simply because her intuition was very sharp, she noticed what Akira was thinking and so she continued.

“I’m really thankful that you’re contributing to the revenue of this shop. But to be honest, I hope that you would buy goods that I sell in my shop. I don’t get much profit from that augmented suit that I ordered from another shop, you see.”

Although Shizuka was only joking, Akira flusteredly replied.

“Ahh, well, I’ll do that from next time…”

“Fufufu, I’ll be waiting then.”

Shizuka smiled invincibly, after which, she pointed at the entrance shutter of the warehouse.

“Now then, your new equipment set is over there.”

When Akira peeked in, he was a bit surprised as he happily said.

“Although I know the contents of my new equipment set from reading the document Shizuka-san gave me, is it really okay to get this included too?”

Shizuka smiled in triumph as she said.

“Of course, it’s still under the budget limit, you know.”

In front of Akira was a large-sized vehicle which was also included in his list of new equipment.

Akira and Shizuka walked to that vehicle. Akira looked closely at it, wide-eyed. Although it looked not much different from the truck that he once rented from a rental shop and was just a common vehicle, it was still way better than a rental vehicle.

“Well then, let’s check if you have got everything that you ordered.”

Shizuka then pulled out a documented list of the items and handed a copy to Akira. They then checked the items with that document.

“So you get 1 4WD vehicle specially designed for traversing the wasteland, it’s Teros 97 made by Tatsumori Heavy Industry. Although it’s rather old, it’s fully equipped for exploring the wasteland. I’ve also exchanged the control unit with a new one.”

Akira scanned the vehicle, it was an open type vehicle without a roof designed so that Hunters could shoot their portable heavy weapons from the seat. Since it was a vehicle designed to be used in the wasteland, it could be

said that it was made to fight against monsters. Thus, its body was even equipped with force field plating.

The force field plating was a type of armour plating that would activate a force field when hit by an impact to disperse the force of that impact. But after it activated a force field, the plating tile would peel and fall off. That was the reason why the wasteland was filled with used plating tiles.

“Then, 1 CWH anti-material rifle. 1 DVTS mini-gun. Both of them are installed into the vehicle so you can use them even without an augmented suit. Although you can demount them and use them just like a normal gun, you need to be careful since the DVTS mini-gun consumes a lot of ammo. I’ve also added some modification parts so it’s compatible with piercing ammo. Although it’s loaded with that type of ammo right now, you can also use normal ammo for it, so there’s no need to worry about that part.”

Akira then looked at the rear part of the vehicle. Behind the back seat, there was a removable tray equipped with a gun station. Akira’s CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS mini-gun was installed there. Although they lacked firepower compared to the preinstalled big guns in tanks, for the current Akira, they were already pretty powerful. If he was going to meet another swarm of monsters next time, he could at least put up a fight.

“Then there are also 2 information terminals for Hunters. Since they are strongly built, they should not break easily even if you use them rather crudely. Anything can happen in the wasteland, it’s better to have a sturdy information terminal just to be safe so that you can use it for sending SOS request during an emergency.”

Akira peeked at the driver seat, there were 2 durable-looking information terminals.

“Then 2 electric knives. Well, if you find yourself having to fight monsters using those knives, it means that you’re already in a pretty bad situation, but it’s at least better than nothing. Each knife can only be used for causing a single shock, if you’re lucky, it can shut down a mechanical monster with its shock.”

There were 2 knives beside the information terminal on the driver seat, they might be some kind of bonus items from buying the information terminal. Of course, for most Hunters, it would be suicide to challenge monsters in a close-range battle. Moreover, since most of the people knew that mechanical monsters were weak against electric shock, Akira thought that monsters must have at least adapted to that by now, and that must have been the reason why Shizuka added ‘if you’re lucky’ when she said.

“Then lastly, the ERPS information-gathering device integrated augmented suit. Its name is PWD Silence. It’s inside that case over there together with all of its equipment set. The equipment set includes an aiming device that can be connected with the augmented suit, so be sure to install it later.”

Akira grabbed the handle of the case which was placed on the seat and pulled it out from the vehicle. But it was way heavier than he anticipated, it took everything he had to drag it out from the vehicle even after he used both of his hands.

Seeing this, Shizuka extended her hand from behind Akira and easily picked up the case that he was struggling to drag out. Akira, who saw that, gasped in amazement.

Shizuka smiled and said.

“…It’s not me, it’s my augmented suit, okay?”

Shizuka was using a simple augmented suit under her clothes. Akira remembered the time when she had mentioned it to him.

Although Akira’s reaction was not that big, it seemed to have offended Shizuka.

“Eh, ah, yes, I know.”

Akira tried to gloss it over as he flusteredly replied back.

Shizuka took out the augmented suit from that case and helped Akira put it on.

Unlike his previous augmented suit, Akira's new augmented suit did not have the skeletal-like frame. But instead, it had thin hard rubber linings on top of its artificial fibres that looked like capillary vessels. There were some holes that looked like a connection port on that hard rubber lining.

Akira looked curiously at those holes, Shizuka then explained to him.

"You can use those ports to connect the augmented suit with small-sized information-gathering devices. I did explain that it's an information-gathering device integrated augmented suit, remember? So, it has a small-sized information-gathering device installed in it. After all, it was designed to be used in tandem with information-gathering devices."

"I guess this kind of thing is really expensive, right?"

"Of course a better augmented suit cost more money. But, this PWD Silence is rather special, I got it at a pretty cheap price. Compared to the other augmented suits that you can buy with the same amount of money, this augmented suit is basically one level better."

"Rather special, huh?"

Akira knew that Shizuka would not recommend any defective products to him, but it still bothered him when she said that it was rather special.

"Well, it'll be fine. It's not like it's a used product with a shady background. It's a new product and not one of those products that got called back in the past for some kind of defect in its design. It's just that it's very unpopular for some reason. On its day of release, a particular Hunter made a very bad remark about this product, and since that person was rather famous, the bad review quickly spread in the market. In the end, it became a failure product that didn't sell at all. Later it was known that there was no defect in its design or functionality when another model with the exact same specs and design but with the different name was released and was selling well."

After hearing Shizuka's explanation, Akira somehow felt a sense of affinity. Both him and that augmented suit had bad luck. Thus, it might be the

perfect augmented suit for those who tried to fight back and rise up from that situation.

When Akira turned the augmented suit on, it tightened up and fit perfectly with his body shape, he did not feel any discomfort at all. Even after moving his body around, he still did not feel anything uncomfortable. If he could move this fluidly even before the fine-tuning, there should be no problem with the augmented suit just like Shizuka told him.

Akira then closed the augmented suit's case and put it back in his vehicle. Thanks to his enhanced physical strength due to the augmented suit, he was able to do that easily.

Shizuka smiled at Akira as she said.

"And with this, we've confirmed that you received all your new equipment set. Are you happy with them?"

"Yes, thank you very much."

"I'm glad to hear that, I hope that you'll keep coming to my shop."

Shizuka took a step closer to Akira and gave him a hug.

"…I know that you'll return back to doing your Hunter job, so please be careful out there, okay?"

"Yes."

After Shizuka let him go, Akira got into his vehicle. Shizuka lightly waved at him as she saw him off, Akira lightly bowed back to her and turned the vehicle, he then drove back home.

When Shizuka could no longer see Akira, she sighed and smiled bitterly.

"…This is bad; I am getting too attached. And here I thought I was more disciplined than this. I'm getting too emotionally invested in Akira that I'm now willing to go beyond my self-set boundaries. If it were not because

Akira was also making a good contribution to my shop, this would have been really really bad.”

Shizuka thought that at this rate, she would even become willing to face some monetary loss just to get Akira better equipment. She reminded herself to be more rational and to calm down before she returned back to the counter.

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It had been 3 days since Akira got his new equipment set, and today, he was driving his new vehicle through the wasteland.

The control unit installed inside his vehicle was already under Alpha’s control. Thanks to that, she was able to drive the vehicle. But this time, she allowed Akira to take full control to get him used to drive his vehicle.

He had already gotten himself familiar with his new equipment, he had tried using his augmented suit to move around and took some test shots with his new guns. This was the first day he was going to do a real job after getting his new equipment.

He was heading to an area in the Kuzusuhara ruin that he only visited for a short time once before he took that request to the underground city. It was the area where the pointer was pointing to the underground when he was looking for old-world facilities using the information that he had gotten from the Lion Steel Corporation’s information terminal.

Although there were a lot of rubbles above the ground, there was no building standing out in that area. But just like the underground city of Kuzusuhara ruin, there might be a facility buried underground.

If he could find a load of old-world relics in an unexplored ruin, it would bring him a lot of money. This was the same exact reason that pushed a lot of Hunters to go out to the wasteland and continue exploring. Some of them got lucky and became rich overnight before retiring as a Hunter. This kind of success stories pushed more Hunters to go out to the wasteland hoping to

find the same luck, but unfortunately, most of them got swallowed and vanished in the wasteland instead.

Akira was driving his truck following a guide shown on his vehicle's control unit's monitor. The monitor even showed the estimated time of arrival.

He then asked Alpha who was sitting next to the driver seat.

"But still, I never thought that I would get a vehicle this quickly, you know. With this, even if I find an unexplored ruin, the other Hunters should not be able to find out about it, right? If I remember it right, had it been a rental vehicle, other Hunters would be able to backtrace the log and find the unexplored ruin too, correct?"

"Yep, it's also the same case for subjugation requests. By the way, since you're not in a subjugation request this time, be careful with your ammo expense. After all, you won't be able to get back the money that you spend on your ammo this time, that is, as long as you don't bring back the dead bodies of the monsters that you defeated and sell them."

"So it's better if I bring them back to the city, huh? The Exchange Center in the Hunter Office should accept monster corpses too, right?"

"Let's not do that now. It's something that you only do after getting enough information about where to sell them, how much they'll sell, and which parts of those monsters are profitable. Then you'll have to think about the transportation and the escort too to make sure that you'll still end up with profits. You'll also need to learn how to kill those monsters without damaging the value of their organs. I'm sure you already know this, do you think someone would buy the carcass of a monster that you turned into minced meat with the DVTS mini-gun?"

"Nope."

"See? Moreover, it's better to keep your load to a minimum since it'll affect the speed of your vehicle. So it'll only be a useless extra weight if you bring them back just out of a whim."

“Roger that.”

When Akira was still living in the slum alley, he did think that it would at least get him some money if he brought back monster corpses to sell in the city. But it seemed that in reality, it would not bring him money if he just randomly killed monsters.

“But that aside…”

Akira glanced at Alpha who was sitting next to him.

Alpha was wearing a snow-white dress. The multiple layers of that snow-white dress looked luxurious and glossy, it gave off a holy and clean aura. Her hands were enveloped in white gloves that extended up to her wrist, thus hiding her long beautiful slim fingers from plain view. Her trouser also extended all the way to the floor, hiding her legs. It was as if her dress was designed to hide everything under her neck.

Normally, such a dress would get stuck here and there inside the vehicle and it would have been really hard to stay sitting on a running vehicle while dressed like that. But since Alpha was nothing more than an image, she was able to sit comfortably next to Akira.

“Can you do something about that dress?”

“Oh my, you don’t like it? I guess you don’t like this kind of dress, huh?”

“That’s not the problem here. It just doesn’t fit this place, so it’s like, it feels really weird. It’s not something that normal people would wear when they go to the wasteland, right?”

“I did tell you that I’m doing this intentionally, remember? This is so that I can easily find out if there are other people who can see me. That’s why I’m wearing this kind of dress to incite their reaction.”

“Ahhh, you’re right, you did explain that to me before.”

“Yep, so, I hope that you’ll get used to this kind of dress.”

“Even if you tell me so… Ah, in that case, can you change to that maid uniform? I think it’s at least better than what you’re wearing now.”

“Maid uniform, huh… I might be overthinking this, but I don’t think it’s rare to find people dressed in maid uniforms in the middle of the wasteland. That’s why I’m not wearing that anymore.”

“I don’t think that’s true though.”

“You still remember that you met a person wearing a maid uniform in the lower district, right? She might be a Hunter, and even if she’s not, she must be some kind of soldier.”

“…Ahhh, you’re right about that.”

When he remembered what happened back then, he was mildly annoyed. But he decided to just push that aside for the time being in order to keep his calm. It sure was embarrassing to withdraw from a fight when he was the one who challenged them in the first place, so he could not help but feel annoyed. But again, he knew well getting his calm disrupted because of that would not bring him anything good here.

Akira knew Alpha was talking about Kanae, who was wearing a maid uniform when he met her. During that extremely dangerous situation, even though she knew what was going on, she was smiling as if she was enjoying it. Akira even noticed that she hoped for the situation to end up in a fight. There was no mistaking it, Kanae loved fighting, she was someone who had confidence in her fighting capability. According to their conversations, there was a good chance that she was in the same occupation as Shiori. So, he assumed that she must be at least as strong as Shiori.

“So what I’m saying here is that it might not be that strange for people, who have the same occupation as Shiori and that person, to use a maid uniform. Thus, people might only ignore it thinking that it’s not strange to see Hunters with maid uniform when they see me in such a dress.”

Alpha was basically saying that it was nothing strange to find Hunters in maid uniforms. Akira frowned when he heard that statement that was out of

common sense.

“W-well, I don’t exactly think that’s true though.”

“I’m just saying that there’s a good chance that would be the case. For example, let’s say that a Hunter found a warehouse ruin that was owned by an old-world fashion designer. Then, that Hunter discovered a huge amount of maid uniform inside that warehouse and sold them in the city. Even if they were not designed for fighting, some of the clothes made using old-world technologies are even stronger than the armours made using the current technology, you see. Since the supply is high because of selling all of those uniforms in one go, they’ll be sold at a cheap price. In this case, those Hunters, who are not bothered by the design, might buy them as protective suits regardless of their gender. If something like that were to happen, it won’t be strange to find Hunters wearing maid uniforms in the wasteland, you know?”

“Regardless of gender? Even the guys too?”

“Even the guys too would want to stay alive after all. But well, I guess guys would change their clothes once they are in the wasteland rather than using the maid uniform when they are in the city.”

Akira imagined such a scene.

A brawny guy, who was working as a Hunter, searching for relics in the old-world ruin wearing an expensive maid uniform. That man then met another guy, who was also in a maid uniform. They looked at each other, understood what was going on, and walked away without saying anything as they decided to forget what they just saw. With the same thing happening again and again, eventually, those guys in maid uniform formed a group and searched for relics together while ignoring each other’s appearance, then in the end…

Akira cut his imagination there.

“…Don’t destroy my common sense, will you?”

“Common sense is something that changes with time.”

As Akira was driving through the wasteland, they continued talking about strange subjects.

Since he was avoiding monsters, Akira was only able to arrive at his destination later than he originally estimated. He parked his vehicle under the shadow of a building in that area and put on a camouflage sheet over it. Although Akira could spot it easily, it would be hard for people, who did not know the exact place, to spot it even if they were actively looking for it.

“This should be okay, right?”

Akira mumbled as he looked at his vehicle. Since he got that vehicle purely out of luck, he wanted to avoid getting it destroyed by the monsters or stolen by someone else.

“I think so. It would be counter-effective if you get yourself too worried about it. So just shake that feeling off of you.”

Stealing another Hunter’s vehicle in the wasteland was actually far more difficult than Akira imagined. It was because all Hunters would make sure to keep their vehicles safe.

Vehicles with an automatic combat module installed in its control unit could automatically shoot anyone who tried to steal it. Thus, normally, stealing other Hunter’s vehicles was not worth the risk. But even so, there were cases where parked vehicles got stolen. So in the end, it was all a matter of luck.

Unfortunately enough, Akira was a boy with bad luck. He had no other choice but to hope that all of his precautions could counterbalance his bad luck.

Akira scanned the area around him. He moved around forming a circle with his vehicle in the centre and gradually moved further and further away from that centre. Akira was searching for an entrance to the underground buried among all the rubbles and wreckages in the area. Of course, he could not

search it using his naked eyes. Thus he was relying solely on his information-gathering device.

“By the way, how good is my new information-gathering device? Is it way better than my previous one?”

“Generally speaking, it’s more or less as good as your previous information-gathering device.”

“Is that so? Shizuka-san did say that it’s one level better than other information-gathering devices in the same price range though?”

“I believe she meant it when it’s used in tandem with the augmented suit. Moreover, there’s also the fact that the information-gathering device you got from Elena-san was actually a good information-gathering device. Elena-san sold it at a low price since it was only collecting dust in her place, but normally, with your earnings at that time, it was not something that you could buy, you know.”

“Ahhh, I see…”

Akira became more grateful for Elena and promised himself to return that favour one day.

It had been an hour since Akira started searching. Since he was checking carefully under the rubbles while avoiding the monsters, his search progressed slowly. But even so, he wanted to avoid having to recheck the area just because he missed something during his search. Thus, he continued to carefully check the area.

His search was doing well as he did not encounter any monsters. He was able to see a pointer in his enhanced view based on the information that he got from the old-world corporation, Lion Steel. That pointer was pointing at the secret facility that he was looking for. But it was pointing near the centre of the area that he had already searched and the radius of his search area, which was already pretty big, was growing even bigger and bigger.

“I just can’t find anything. Could the entrance be located somewhere else?”

“That might be the case. However, normally huge underground facilities have multiple entrances. But then again, although I don’t want to think about it, there’s also a chance that the info we downloaded from that information terminal was actually inaccurate. So, what do you want to do? Want to try looking in other places?”

“Nah, I’ll keep looking here. I haven’t met any monsters and the search itself is not that tiring, so I’ll continue searching around this area.”

“Okay.”

Akira continued his search in that area.

“If we assume that there’s a huge scale underground ruin in this place just like that underground city and that it has a lot of entrances, then what might be the reason as to why you can’t pinpoint the location of those entrances?”

“Let’s see, I guess it’s because the ruin of what was once a tall building is now buried deep under the ground. Then after a long time, dirt and sands kept piling up on top of it and ended up burying that building deeper and deeper under the ground.”

“In that case, will it still be impossible to find the entrance using heavy machinery?”

“The entrance is usually located on the first floor or the basement. If it still somehow retains its original shape even after being buried for so long, it would be possible to enter the building from there.”

“So it’s not like it’s impossible, huh.”

Akira continued his search while chatting with Alpha. But even so, he was still cautiously checking every nook and cranny. He had even started searching around the area away from where he parked his vehicle.

As he was starting to think about parking his vehicle closer since he was getting further and further away from it, Alpha suddenly said to him.

“Wait, stop there.”

“Is it monsters?”

Akira hid behind a wreckage and readied his gun. He quickly put up his guard, ready to fight.

“No, it seems that I finally found some hints.”

Alpha then pointed her finger at certain wreckage not too far from Akira. At the same time, she used the data gathered from Akira’s information-gathering device and processed it before showing it in his enhanced vision. Thanks to that, he was able to see a staircase under the wreckage that Alpha was pointing at.

“Finally found it!! …Or so I want to say, but it’s rather far away from where the pointer originally is. Well, it’s fine if it’s because the facility is really that big, but there’s also a chance that it’s from an entirely different building.”

Akira realized that he had got too excited, that was why he intentionally said that to remind not to get ahead of himself.

“There’s no other way but to go down there and check it yourself. Let’s remove the wreckages blocking the way in, it should be an easy job using your new augmented suit.”

“Alright then, let’s do this!”

Akira excitedly started removing the wreckages and the rubbles.

He followed Alpha’s instruction as he sequentially removed the wreckages. Thanks to his augmented suit, Akira was able to easily remove the huge wreckages, which would otherwise have been impossible to even make them budge if he only relied on his raw strength alone.

Alpha even indicated where to put the wreckages that Akira had removed. She carefully calculated the placing so that other people would not be able to easily find that staircase through the rubbles surrounding it. Also, if Akira parked his vehicle near that staircase it would also create a blind spot.

Akira’s new augmented suit showed its full usefulness. It only took him about 30 minutes to remove all the wreckage blocking the way to the stairs.

Akira then returned to his vehicle and parked it under the shadow of a wreckage near the stair. He then removed the CWH anti-material rifle from the gun station and brought it with him. At first, he was unsure whether to bring the DVTS mini-gun too or not, but in the end, he decided to just leave it on his vehicle since he thought that it would only slow him down if he brought more guns than needed. Also, using the DVTS mini-gun would quickly burn through his reserve ammo.

Although his new augmented suit increased his max load, it did not mean that he could just bring more reserve ammo with him to use DVTS mini-gun. It was important to keep his load to a minimum during his ruin exploration.

Akira stood in front of the stair that was leading deep into the underground and took a peek inside. Since the sunlight could not reach the area past few steps, it seemed that there was only endless darkness expanding in front of him.

The thought of getting a pile of old-world relics from an unexplored ruin and turning them into a huge amount of money had already completely gone from Akira’s mind. What laid in front of him was the mouth of a dangerous monster that had swallowed many Hunters who went in chasing their desire and dreams. The only Hunters who were able to get a huge amount of money were those who were able to return back alive from that place.

As Akira became more and more nervous, Alpha suddenly said something with a serious face that delivered the final blow.

“Akira, I’ll tell you this before going down, so make sure to remember it. When you’re underground, try to keep me within your view. When you can’t see me or hear me, basically when you can no longer recognize me, turn back as soon as possible, okay? When you can’t recognize me, it means that you’ll lose all of my support too, so be careful when that happens.”

Akira panicked as he quickly glanced at Alpha's direction.

"All? Not just a portion of it?"

"Yes, of course. It's not like we know for sure if it's going to happen. It's just that there's a chance for something like that to happen when you go inside some ruins and that chance shoots up when you go to the underground ruins. When that happens, you just need to retrace your steps back to the point where you can see me again."

"But, it was alright when we were in the Kuzusuhara underground city, right?"

"Well, Kuzusuhara ruin is basically like my garden. So the effect was not that bad. But even so, it still affected my detection ability, remember?"

Akira clearly felt his legs freeze. He was only able to survive until now thanks to Alpha's support. Thus, he understood that he himself was scared of losing that support. It was fully understandable why he was hesitating to move forward.

"If you're scared, there's no need to push yourself too hard, you know? It's something that might endanger your life, after all, we can just forget about the underground exploration and continue our search above the ground."

"…Well, since you're not stopping me, it means that it's not that dangerous. So it's basically something that I should be able to handle myself, right?"

"That's true, but…"

"I'll go then, resolve is my responsibility, after all."

Akira pulled himself together and somehow squeezed a fake valiant smile. He kept that smile on his face, hoping to make it real. Things that he could overcome with his own power should be overcome with his own effort. That one point did not change even after he met Alpha.

He knew that he had done something like this many times before in the slum city. This time, he just needed to do the same thing in a more blessed

environment. Akira pulled himself together and made his resolve.

Alpha smiled back at Akira.

“Very well, let’s go.”

Akira made his decision and started walking down the stairs. But he quickly returned back.

Alpha found that weird and asked him.

“What’s wrong?”

“On the second thought, I’ll bring that too. I’ll quickly go back if I run out of ammo.”

Akira went back to his vehicle and took off his DVTS mini-gun to bring it together with him. Seeing how he went down the stairs with confidence just to quickly return back, Alpha giggled.

Akira looked annoyed as he mumbled.

“…What?”

“It’s nothing. Being careful is a good trait too.”

Alpha was still smiling when she said that.

Silavin: OMG. Akira and Suit-kun resonating bad luck Ahahaha. I wonder if that would mean his bad luck got stacked even more?

Dress on muscular men. Not bad. I can imagine it.

Finally, Akira is going to have to be more independent now! Can’t wait to see how he deals with his own bad luck.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 73, How To Sell Relics

Index

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Akira followed the stairs underground. It did not take that many steps before he was enveloped with total darkness where he could not see anything at all.

He then turned on the flashlight on his rifle and continued going deeper. The light from the flashlight could not even reach the base of the stair which extended deeper into the darkness.

At that time, Alpha suddenly said to Akira.

“Akira, turn off the flashlight.”

Akira hesitated, but he eventually turned off the flashlight just like he was told. Darkness immediately enveloped him the moment he lost the only source of light. In that situation where he could not even see his own body, he was able to see Alpha’s image clearly.

In the midst of the total darkness, Alpha, who was giving off a silvery glow, suddenly raised her right hand. The moment she did that, everything around Akira suddenly became clear as colours returned to his vision. Akira could even see the cracks and the stains on the wall around him.

Although there was no light at all, Akira was able to see everything as clear as day. He was amazed, it was true that he did not need any light source in this situation.

“Whoah…”

“It’s thanks to the level of accuracy of the data analyser in your new information-gathering device. But because of that, you can’t see too far through the darkness. If you’re bothered by it, you can turn on your flashlight. The light from your flashlight will be able to help me gather information through the rifle’s aiming device, then I can show the result from analyzing that data into your view to let you see what is in front of you more clearly.”

Akira then turned his flashlight back on and peeked forward. He could now see a floor by the end of the stair.

“So your support even goes as far as shooting in the dark too, huh. That’s really amazing.”

“But of course, it’s my support after all.”

Alpha smiled proudly. Her support was really reassuring, but Akira kept on moving forward into a place where he might lose that support.

Akira thought of that possibility, he then made his resolve and swung his legs forward.

Akira felt like he had gone down for about 4 floors before he reached a long hallway. There were lamps installed on the ceiling of the hallway, but of course, they were not on. If it was not because of Alpha’s support, he wouldn’t have been able to see them at all. Akira readied his gun as he continued walking deeper into the long hallway.

The hallway itself was pretty clean. Although the floor was covered in dust and dirt, there were no crumbled parts nor wreckage scattered through the hallway, there was also no white bones leftover from dead people or corpses of either mechanical or biological monsters.

If the floor was not covered in dirt and dust, it would indicate that the old-world cleaning drones in that place were still active. But the dust-covered floor refuted such a possibility. And since Akira did not see any footprints, it might be really an unexplored ruin.

Now, if the facility itself had already been deactivated, then the security drone would also be inactive and Akira would be able to safely search the building. And since there were no footprints on the floor, it also showed that no monster had gone through that hallway. All the signs were indicating that it was a safe building.

“It’s going really well. Now then, if I can find a lot of old-world relics left in this place, then this will be perfect.”

“It seems that this place is just a normal hallway. It will really be a huge jackpot if it leads to a warehouse or a shop. But there’s also a chance this is just a common hallway, if that’s the case, I hope you can at least find some lockers.”

As Akira continued walking through the hallway, he noticed something that looked like a shop next to him.

The shop itself was embedded into the wall of that hallway. Akira realized that it was a shop since the wall was made of glass that allowed him to see what was inside. It seemed like the entire section of the wall was built as the display window of that shop. He came closer to the display window and peeked inside. The interior of that shop looked pretty extravagant with luxurious and expensive looking relics lined up inside that shop. To Akira, all of them looked like they would sell for a lot of money.

Akira could not hide his amazement as he turned to Alpha.

“W-we did it!! Alpha!! Those are relics!! This place has so many old-world relics!! Let’s take them back, let’s take all of them back home!!”

“Akira, calm down.”

“Entrance, where’s the entrance? I don’t see any though.”

Akira excitedly looked for an entrance, but he could not find anything that resembled it. The glass of the display window looked not that durable, he thought that he might be able to break it using his augmented suit.

Looking at Akira, who seemed like he was going to break the glass to get inside, Alpha hesitated as she said to him.

“Calm down. Unfortunately, you can’t take any of those relics at the moment.”

“…Eh?”

Akira seemed utterly shocked as he looked at Alpha.

“I’ll explain it to you, so just calm down for now.”

Alpha then modified Akira’s vision, the moment she did that, all the expensive looking relics that were in front of his eyes immediately vanished. Akira dropped his jaw.

“…Huh?”

“I prioritized the topological data to remove any holographic images from your vision.”

Akira noticed an object that was projecting the image of the relics that he just saw a moment ago. He then dug through his knowledge and worded out the name of the object that came up in his mind.

“Holographic poster?”

“It was made using the technology of the old-world, I’m sure it’s some kind of advertisement from when this place was still active.”

Akira finally understood what was going on, the shop in front of his eyes was non-existent. It was only a super-advanced poster that produced a highly realistic image.

Akira was somehow able to prevent himself from just dropping on his knees.

“Can I at least bring this poster back?”

“It’s embedded into the wall, so that’ll be impossible too.”

“…I guess I got ahead of myself, huh.”

Akira let out a big sigh. He then continued going deeper while calming himself down.

In contrast with his expression, his steps still felt heavy when he left that poster. As time passed by, he eventually got back to his usual self. At that point, he had already reached the end of that long hallway and entered a big open-hall. That big open-hall was connected with another hallway, there were also several automatic ticket gates and shops present.

When Akira looked at those shops, he turned to Alpha as if he wanted to ask her something.

“It’s alright, those are real this time.”

“Nice!!”

Akira smiled and walked to one of those shops. Without any power source, the automatic door in front of the shop could not move, so he used the power of his augmented suit to pry it open before entering that shop.

The interior of the shop was not that big, but inside it, there were all kinds of goods and some leftover broken goods lined up. Some of them were so old that they even turned into a bundle of dust, some of them looked so unnaturally brand new. The latter were known as the old-world relics, they were expensive goods manufactured through an advanced technology that could not be replicated using current technology.

Akira pulled out a rucksack, different from the one that he was using to carry his equipment. He then started stuffing any objects that still retained its original shape into his empty rucksack.

Among them, there were weird looking small electronic devices, knife-like sharp objects, some stationeries, notes that strangely enough still retained its original colour, some pieces of clothing that looked like underclothes, strange discoloured boxes filled with still consumable medicines, liquid containers filled with some kind of cleaner, handkerchiefs, cooking utensils, something that looked like calculators, fashionable clothing, small accessories, and even toys. Akira did not discriminate as he stuffed everything inside his rucksack.

As he was looking at the pile of mismatch relics in his rucksack, he asked Alpha.

"…Say Alpha, what kind of shop was this exactly?"

"Maybe just a general shop."

"They sold cooking utensils and clothing in a general shop? And even this strange electronic device too? I don't really understand the old-world culture. Was this kind of shop normal in the old-world?"

"Different technological era have different cultures. So you shouldn't use your common sense."

"I guess that's true, huh. Well, as long as these relics sell for a lot of money, I don't really care much about it."

Even in the current era, the lifestyle and the culture inside the wall and outside the wall were greatly different. So Akira decided not to let himself get bothered by the mismatched collection of relics that he found inside that shop.

It did not take long for him to fill his rucksack to full capacity. Akira smiled, he should be able to make quite a lot of money with this.

"Now that I already got the relics, I'm thinking of ending the exploration here for today. What do you think, Alpha? Should I continue exploring this area for a bit more instead?"

“If you think so, it’s okay to go back home now. It’s important to be able to decide where to stop before anything bad happens.”

“Alright then, let’s head back home. I didn’t get to meet any monsters too, so I guess I really hit the jackpot today.”

“You can’t relax yet, you know? You should not drop your guard as long as you haven’t returned back alive. And it’s too soon to decide if you have hit the jackpot or not before you have exchanged all the collected relics into money.”

“I know, let’s go back home.”

Akira went back through the hallway that he just passed through in a good spirit. As Alpha was watching him walking back in such a good mood, she thought that things were going too smoothly.

That day, Akira was able to find an unexplored ruin, get himself a lot of relics without encountering any monsters, and now he was going back to Kugamayama city to sell the relics that he gathered.

Akira had bad luck to the point that it was almost guaranteed that he would at least get roped into something troublesome no matter what he did. But now that everything was going well, Alpha was rather worried about the backlash. Although it was not like she had any evidence to support her claim, she still could not help but think so.

Unlike what Alpha expected, Akira was able to return back to Kugamayama city safely with all of his relics. Although he did meet some Hunters driving in the opposite direction on his way back, nothing bad happened. Akira put some distance between them just to be safe and continued driving in the opposite direction, those Hunters eventually disappeared behind Akira without anything major happening.

Once he got back to the city, Akira kept on driving his vehicle all the way back to his home. It was because it was already late, too late for him to look for Katsuragi to sell his relics. So he decided to just take a good rest for the remainder of the day and sell his relics the next day.

Akira took a warm bath to recover his fatigue from all the hard work he did that day. Since he got quite a lot of relics, he was in a rather good mood.

“I wonder how much I’ll get from those relics. Some of them are still in very good shape, so they should be able to get me quite a lot of money. Right, Alpha?”

Akira was asking for a confirmation from Alpha who was taking a bath together with him.

The image of Alpha’s superbly beautiful body swayed together with the steam and the vibration on the water surface. It was a totally unnecessary visual effect produced using her advanced computational ability. But for those people who got more excited when it was barely visible, this might even be the correct way to use her advanced computational ability.

But her charming and beautiful body was barely given any attention by Akira, who was in such a good mood after returning back with a lot of relics. He kept on wasting his chance of seeing such a rare beauty that day too.

Alpha knew that Akira was expecting to get a lot of money from selling those relics. Thus she refuted his thinking in order to calm him down.

“You should not expect too much. This is not the same compared to when you were gathering relics in Kuzusuhara ruin with my instructions. But I won’t say that they won’t sell either.”

“…Is that so?”

“The value of those relics will depend on Katsuragi’s preference and the types of relics that are in demand at the moment. If you get your hopes too high, you might only get disappointed in the end, you know?”

“Hmmm. Well, I guess we’ll find out tomorrow.”

His expectation of the amount of money that he might get from selling those relics stopped swelling after hearing Alpha’s explanation, it also

helped him calm down.

On the next day, Akira went to Katsuragi to sell his relics. After checking all the relics, Katsuragi then told Akira how much he would buy Akira's relics for.

"2,200,000 Aurum."

Akira looked conflicted. It was not a small amount of money for sure, but it was not the amount he had expected.

Katsuragi made a businessman's smile as he said to Akira.

"That face, you were expecting to get more money, weren't you? But unlike last time, you're not saying that you're going to take them to the Hunter Office, so it's not like you fully reject it either, right?"

"…Well, yeah."

If Alpha had not warned him yesterday, Akira would have expected to get way more money than this. If she had said something after hearing the amount of money that Katsuragi was offering, Akira might have reacted differently too, but she did not make any comments at all. After hearing the amount, though Akira did not think that it was completely unexpected, he also was not fully convinced by that amount.

Katsuragi was able to see through Akira's displeasure and noticed that it might be his chance to get his hands on more money.

"I've been planning to get along with you for a long time, so it would be bad if you brought your relics to another place and was left with a bad impression about me. So, hear me out, I have a good idea. It seems that you don't have much knowledge about selling relics. In that case, I don't mind teaching you. After all, I bet that you mostly spend your time doing monster-hunting requests rather than hunting for relics, right? If you had known anything about selling relics, you wouldn't have brought a portion of these relics here."

“About what kind of requests I take, I’ll leave it to your imagination.”

“Well, even if I’m mistaken, you have nothing to lose from listening to my advice.”

Katsuragi started explaining the basics of selling relics to Akira while carefully adjusting the level of self-interest that he could mix in his explanation.

It was not like all old-world relics would sell for a high price and the selling price would also change depending on to whom Akira sold them.

The buying price of relics at the Hunter Office was greatly affected by the type of relics the Corporate Government was looking for. The type of relics that the Corporate Government wanted the most was those with high scientific or technological values even among the old-world relics. After all, these relics could serve as an entry point to learn about old-world technologies.

The Corporate Government of the eastern district was gathering old-world relics from all over its territory to learn more about the old-world technologies. These relics would be then sent to the laboratories under its governance to be broken down, dissected, and analyzed by all the scientists and engineers working in those laboratories. The results from those laboratories are then used to boost Corporate Government’s technology, thus allowing them to produce cheaper and better goods.

The relics that were brought to the Hunter Office’s Exchange Centre, which were under the Corporate Government’s management, would be categorized depending on how much of old-world technologies could be extracted from them. The better the value that those relics had, the higher the chance for them to be sent to the 5 corporations that headed the Corporate Government. Because of this, the technological gap between big companies and the small or medium companies would not shrink anytime soon.

In order to get those valuable relics, the small and the medium-sized companies would have to use other methods. So basically, these companies were the main patrons for Katsuragi and the other relics merchants.

Katsuragi then took the weird-looking electronic devices from the pile of relics that Akira brought to him. He then showed it in front of Akira and said.

“Bringing this type of relics to my place is the right course of action. Any company would happily buy this type of relic. And it’s doubly true for those companies that don’t get much chance to get such a relic. Since these types of relics will sell at a high price, I’m also willing to buy them from you for a high price. Well, of course, I only sell these relics to those companies after gathering quite a lot of them. And when I don’t have enough to sell to the companies, I’ll gather some more from my other fellow merchants.”

It was not like the companies would only use these relics to study the old-world technologies, some of them were used as they were.

Of course, some of them could be reproduced with the same level of quality using the current technology, but most of the time, the manufacturing cost would be too high for them to be profitable. Some of them were used for a different purpose than originally intended when they were manufactured. Some of them could sell at a higher price just because they were old-world relics. These kinds of relics would naturally be transferred to the respective type of company where they would be properly checked, cleaned, sometimes even manufactured into another type of product, before eventually getting sold again.

Katsuragi then took one of the cooking utensils that Akira brought to him and said.

“While this type of relics, well, it’s not wrong to bring them to me. For relics that I know where to sell, I can buy them from you at a good price. Even if I don’t know where to sell them, I can buy them at a better price since I can still sell them to my fellow merchants. But of course, you can get more money if you look for a specialized merchant who deals with this type of relic. If it’s too much of a trouble for you, you can just sell them to me, but again, you’ll get less money if you do that.”

Every day, Hunters would bring back all kinds of relics to the city to exchange them for money. But some of those relics that were deemed

useless had nowhere to go. It was because some Hunters would bring anything that they could find thinking that they would sell well as long as they were old-world relics. So sometimes, they would bring some stuff that could be substituted with common goods that were readily available in the shops around them. Thus, there was no need to gather such kinds of goods from the old-world ruins.

But even so, some of those relics were sometimes sold at a good price. It was because there were demands from people who gathered relics as antique collectibles. Katsuragi then took an accessory and a still-sealed trump card.

“As for these kinds of relics, it’s wrong to sell them to me. They might sell for a good price if you bring them to an exclusive shop, but in my eyes, they don’t have much value at all. It’s the same for cosmetics. I can’t really say how much their actual values are. Because of that, I’ll only buy them for a small price. To be honest, if you keep bringing only this kind of relics to me, I’ll eventually refuse buying them from you.”

“Then what will you do with this kind of relic?”

“Let’s see, I just stuff them inside my warehouse most of the time, then show them to relics connoisseur or people with eccentric taste when I find the chance. Although it’s rare, these people would pay a good price for those relics occasionally. Other than that, when I end up with quite a lot of them, I would just dump them in the wasteland and forget about them.”

“…Uhhh, are you really okay with doing something like that?”

“Of course I’m always careful as to where I dump them, at least, I didn’t get any complaints until now. If I dump them near the slum city, they’ll disappear before even a month. I bet the people of the slum city are taking them. No matter where I dump them in the wasteland, they always eventually disappear. There are a lot of speculations out there, some say that it’s because the still active cleaning droids of the old-world would secretly clean them up when no one’s watching, while some say that the monsters eat them. Personally speaking, I believe the latter. After all, there are

monsters out there that would even eat tanks. So there's nothing strange about it if they eat those relics too."

Akira listened closely to Katsuragi's explanation, he seemed to be honestly interested in the topic. After hearing the explanation, it seemed that Akira was more or less able to accept the amount of money Katsuragi offered. It was obvious to Katsuragi that Akira was properly listening to his explanation.

"And that will end my explanation. So then, I have a suggestion here, how about I buy some of your relics for 2,000,000 Aurum? Then for the other relics that I didn't buy, basically, the relics that I don't know what to do, you can do anything you want with them. You can try selling them to the Hunter Office. Or you can sell them to another merchant. I think this is a good offer for both of us, isn't it?"

Akira was not sure for a while, but he eventually decided to take that offer.

"Alright, I'll take the offer."

"Good to hear that, we have a deal."

Katsuragi was smiling happily as he transferred 2,000,000 Aurum into Akira's account. Although he was still not sure whether his plan would bring him more profits or not, he was at least able to finish laying the groundwork.

Akira then brought the leftover relics back to his home and lined them on the floor.

He ended up bringing back all the relics that Katsuragi rejected. There were also some small accessories and trinkets amidst them. Among all those relics, Akira was rather surprised that Katsuragi did not accept the apparels, like the handkerchiefs and the underclothes.

To him, those goods were completely fine. The apparels even looked completely new, although that was unnaturally so. Therefore, he thought

that it must be because Katsuragi just had no viable outlet as to where to sell these kinds of relics.

“So in short, Katsuragi doesn’t buy apparels, huh.”

“We ended up bringing back more relics than expected, so what’s your plan?”

“What should I do with them… I guess I’ll just throw them in the warehouse for now. We might find a use for them later.”

Akira decided to just postpone the problem for now. Of course, if this continued, then his house would eventually get filled with relics that had nowhere to go, but with that being said, it should be alright for the time being.

He then moved all the unsold relics to an empty room in his house. Even after he was done with it, that room still had a lot of open space and it gave Akira enough buffer time to arrive at a solution.

When Akira was about to leave his house, he suddenly remembered something. He then filled his rucksacks with the apparel and accessory relics.

Alpha tilted her head when Akira did that.

“Oh, what are you doing? Are you going to look for someplace to sell them?”

“Nah, not that. I just thought that they should be perfect as gifts.”

Akira then finished his preparation and left his house with his filled rucksack.

__*__*__*__

In an empty room in her gang’s base, Sheryl was teaching the small children in her gang on how to read and write. Since Akira himself made that request to her, she was putting more effort than usual as she was

thoroughly teaching the children. Because of that, the members of the gang took that activity really well.

Unlike the adults, who ended up in the slum city from another place, most of the small children who were born and brought up in the slum city could not read or write. But they understood that reading and writing were crucial knowledge in their lives, however, they had no chance to acquire that knowledge. Adding the fact that the boss of their gang, Sheryl, told them to do so, everyone in the gang was giving their best in studying how to read and write.

One of Sheryl's gang members suddenly entered the room to inform Sheryl of Akira's arrival at the base.

"Boss, Akira-san is here."

"Okay. Alicia, I'll leave this place to you."

"Sure."

Sheryl left the teaching to Alicia before leaving the study room. Some of the boys in that room looked disappointed when Sheryl left the room.

Because of both her position in the gang and her beauty, Sheryl was popular in the gang. Thanks to that, some boys put more effort into studying hoping that she would notice them.

Nasha was among the children who were studying in that room. The reason why they were also teaching Nasha how to write and read although she just joined the gang was because of the gift that she brought with her when she joined Sheryl's gang. Although she only gave a portion of 90,000 Aurum that she received from Alna, it was enough to get her on the good side of the gang.

Although it was not that long since Nasha had joined Sheryl's gang, she already had a very good impression of the gang after experiencing the life inside the gang for a few days.

She got enough food to keep her from starving and she was able to get a small gun enough for defending herself. Not to mention, no one from the neighboring gangs would even try to mess with Sheryl's gang and their gang was able to make money from its connection with a certain weapon merchant. No one in the gang seemed to be supporting thieves, thus none was thinking of stealing or robbing warehouses or shops.

Nasha was thinking of checking the situation for a bit more before getting Alna into the gang too. So, for that sake, she thought that she had to do a more thorough check of the gang.

When Nasha saw Sheryl exit the room in a good mood, she asked the kid next to her.

"Say, it seems that Boss is in such a good mood though, do you know why exactly is that?"

"Well, it's obviously because Akira is here, you know? Ahhh, you're a new member, huh?"

Since Nasha asked a question that everyone in the gang already knew the answer for, that boy quickly noticed that she must be a new member of the gang.

"Yep, I'm Nasha, nice to meet you. So, what do you mean by that?"

"Akira-san is the boss' boyfriend and it seems that the boss really likes him. He's the main support of the gang and also a skilled Hunter, or so I heard."

"Ahhh, it's hard to ask this, but, is he sponging off the gang?"

Not only the ex-Hunters, but there were also other kinds of people, those who knew how to fight, working as a bodyguard or a back-support for the gangs in the slum city.

Some of them became the boss of a small gang and did whatever they wanted with those gangs. While on the other hand, when they got involved with a big-sized gang, some of them were paid with a huge amount of

money to protect that gang or to work as mercenaries in time of war. No matter which one was the case, the amount of money paid to those people caused a strain for those gangs.

Nasha asked that question thinking that Akira might be one of those people, but that boy shook his head.

“It’s the opposite, it feels more like we’re the one piggy-backing him. It’s also because he’s behind this gang that no one is trying to attack us. He’s also the reason why we get a weapon merchant working with us. Other than that… Ah, right, this building too, it’s a good building for a base, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, it has a lot of rooms and it even has a bath too.”

“That’s exactly why other gangs also have their eyes on this building, you know. There was also an occasion where someone from a big gang came here demanding to hand over this building… It was from Shijima’s gang, was it again? Do you know that gang?”

Nasha knew about Shijima’s gang from the time when she was investigating gangs that she and Alna might be able to join. It was a pretty big gang with far better personnel and equipment compared to Sheryl’s gang. According to Nasha’s knowledge, Sheryl would have no other choice but to give up on the building if that gang asked her for it.

“Of course. It’s impressive that you got out alive from that situation, so, was it alright?”

That boy’s expression turned stern.

“Well, I can’t really say for sure. When that happened, Akira-san shot the person who threatened him and dragged his corpse all the way to Shijima’s place and had a talk with Shijima.”

Nasha’s jaw dropped. The boy nodded at her, saying that he understood her reaction.

“In the end, we somehow have a good relationship with that gang right now. They send people from time to time to check if Akira-san has died or not. Akira-san is a Hunter after all, so it’s nothing strange if he suddenly dies out of the blue. If Akira-san really dies, I bet those people would come here to take over this base.”

Since Alicia was sending a stern gaze at him, that boy quickly stopped making idle chatter.

Nasha realized that and flusteredly fixed her posture.

[It seems that this gang has a pretty amazing Hunter supporting it, huh. I guess even this gang also has some kind of problems too. I’m actually interested in the continuation of that story. And for the sake of Alna, I still need to get more information about this gang. It’s not like Alna can keep hiding forever…]

Then in order not to make Alicia angrier than she was, Nasha returned back to studying.

Silavin: I just want to remind all those in the comments who are writing spoilers to stop. The responsibility does not only lie on them. There are those that are asking questions, which answers are clearly spoilers.

The comment section is for comments about that particular take on that particular chapter.

If you want to discuss about your anger or happiness. Even you goddamn waifus and ships! We have a discord channel for you. A spoiler channel where you can ask and get answers to.

In all seriousness, if it gets troublesome enough, I’ll just remove the comment section for Rebuild World.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 74, Souvenirs From The Ruin Exploration

Index

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After Akira was guided to Sheryl's private room, he stopped Sheryl who was about to cling on him. Sheryl looked disappointed, but she then took a seat in front of Akira and smiled.

"So, how can I help you today? You can ask me anything."

"Well, that's not why I'm here today. I just got my new equipment set so I was able to start exploring ruins again. So I'm just here to pay a regular visit to the base, I've also brought some souvenirs that I got from exploring ruins. Just think of it as my thanks for letting me park my bike here and also letting me sleep here the other day."

Akira took out the old-world relics from his rucksack and lined them in front of her. Sheryl looked at the relics in front of her wide-eyed. Among all the relics that Akira lined up in front of her, there were dresses and underclothes for girls, handkerchiefs, and female accessories. To Sheryl, all of them looked like expensive high-quality goods.

"I-Is it really okay if I take some of these?"

“You can take one each from the handkerchiefs and the accessories, then you can pick your choice from the rest.”

From what Akira said, Sheryl knew that all the goods in front of her were old-world relics. In short, they were high-quality goods for the people of the slum city. Although she did not know their exact value, she knew well that it was impossible for her to buy them normally.

While on the other hand, Akira thought of them as useless goods since Katsuragi would not buy them. Since both of them had the opposite impression for the relics in front of them, they were a little bit surprised to see how the other person reacted to those relics.

Sheryl made a very serious look as she was browsing through the accessories and the handkerchiefs. Seeing that, Akira thought that he should have given her everything since it made her think that much just to pick her choice. Shortly after, she finally decided on her picks.

“I’ll take these.”

“Alright. Since these are old-world relics, you can at least use them to trick other people by showing it to them. So, make sure to use them well.”

Akira then stuffed back the remaining handkerchiefs and the accessories into his rucksack.

Sheryl looked delighted as she looked at the presents that she just received from Akira. Among all of them, there were some underclothes for adults, basically, undies with erotic designs.

She thought that Akira might have given her those undies since he wanted to see her in it as she glanced at Akira. But after checking his reaction, she completely erased that thought from her mind.

After he finished stuffing the leftover relics back to his rucksack, Akira stood up.

“That’s all for today, I’ll head back home now.”

“You’re going back home now? You can stay here a little bit longer, you know…”

Sheryl, who was so surprised when Akira suddenly stood up, tried to stop him. It was not that often he visited her, but even so, he was going to leave before she could cling on him. If it was possible, Sheryl hoped that he would stay a bit longer or even spend another night here.

She tried to think of an excuse to make him stay longer, but before she could come up with anything, Akira suddenly said.

“I’m sorry but I have a plan to visit another place. I’ll come again soon, just give me a call if anything comes up.”

“I see. It’s really regrettable, but I understand. Thank you very much for your presents. I’m really happy to receive them.”

Sheryl smiled and expressed her gratitude. Although it was a dazzling smile that worked really well on the boys in her gang, as expected, it was completely useless against Akira. But it was not because of her smile, it was because Akira was an apathetic boy who did not trust other people.

“…Well, if you’re really that happy, I guess I can bring you more next time.”

Akira’s expression did not change at all when he said that.

Sheryl then accompanied him until just outside her base and saw him off. After that, she returned back to her private room, laid down on her bed, and reviewed her conversation with Akira just now.

She hung the pendant that she received from Akira on her finger and stared at it. Although she was happy with everything that she received from him, for some reason, she also felt an uneasiness inside her heart. She then tried to think of the reason why.

Was it because it was a pendant that she picked rather than something that Akira himself picked? Was it because Akira gave her that just to prove her

relation with him for negotiation? Or was it because he used the word ‘to trick’ back then?

Sheryl thought that it was not a good idea to keep thinking about it, thus she cut her thought there. She was still lying on her bed as she looked at the other souvenirs that she received from Akira. Among them, there were old-world dresses and underclothes.

[…I wonder if I can change the mood between us if I try on another dress]

Sheryl pulled herself up from her bed and started undressing. She remembered that Akira also gave her underclothes, so she decided to take off her undies too. She then extended her hand to pick up one of the old-world undies that she received and opened its seal. When she touched its fabric, it felt so smooth and comfortable, the difference between that undie and all the undies that she had used until now was just like heaven and earth.

[I guess that’s to be expected of old-world relics. I wonder how much this will cost if I were to buy it normally?]

As Sheryl was about to put on that undie, someone suddenly knocked on the door of her room. The person on the other side of the door suddenly opened that door without waiting for Sheryl’s reply.

“Sheryl, Akira…”

Erio’s words were cut short as he entered the room and met Sheryl’s eyes. He panicked and slammed the door behind him as he immediately exited the room.

Erio understood well that he did something really bad, the expression on her face truly projected his inner feelings, it was pure terror.

He could hear Sheryl from the other side of the door.

“Erio.”

“That was an accident!! I just thought that it might be a good idea to get the new members to meet Akira, that’s why I’m here!! And that was just a pure accident!!”

“If it’s about him, he quickly left after he finished his business here. That aside, Erio…”

Sheryl put a pause there. Erio was sweating profusely as he looked at the door to Sheryl’s room.

“There won’t be any mercy next time.”

Although Sheryl said that in her usual tone, it only made her sound more terrifying. Erio swore to himself that he would never ever open that door without a confirmation ever again.

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Inside the Cartridge Freak, Shizuka was talking with Elena and Sara. She was asking them how they were doing lately.

“I see, so your underground city exploration request has finally ended, huh?”

Sara happily replied back.

“Yep, thanks to that, we can go back to exploring ruins.”

Sara was obviously looking happy there, and from the way she worded it out, it sounded as if she got herself free from something.

Shizuka who saw that found it rather weird.

“Was it really that bad? From what I heard from both of your stories, it seems that you girls did not find any difficulties and got paid well from that request though.”

Elena smiled bitterly as she answered Shizuka’s question.

“That’s not the reason. Sara is so displeased because all of the relics that we found during that request were all taken ownership by the City Management according to our contract. No matter how many relics we found down there, we had no other choice but to bite our lips and hold ourselves back from carrying them back home, you see. I lost count how many times I had to pull Sara by her hair just to drag her away from the relics in front of her.”

Elena smiled after she said that. Shizuka imagined that situation and smiled.

While on the other hand, Sara was pouting as she jabbed back.

“Didn’t you also complain a lot about that too?”

“Of course, I did. It was because I had to hold myself back as much as you did back then. I never said that I felt happy about surrendering those relics, did I?”

As Elena answered back so lightly, Sara turned her cheek the other way and made ‘humph’ sound.

In the middle of their silly talks, Akira suddenly entered the shop. They quickly noticed Akira, he also immediately noticed them near the counter the moment he stepped in. He then walked to the counter.

Elena smiled at Akira.

“Long time no see, Akira. I heard that you did some crazy reckless stuff lately, but I’m really glad to see that you’re doing fine.”

Akira smiled back and said.

“Elena-san, Sara-san, long time no see.”

Sara scanned Akira’s body for any visible injuries as she said to Akira.

“I was worried when I heard that you were removed from the underground city exploration request, but it seems that you’re not injured at all. Well, I won’t ask you the details, you can’t tell us anything after all, right?”

“I’m sorry and thank you.”

Sara and Elena were being considerate of Akira’s position, and he was really happy about that.

Shizuka found the conversation between them amusing as she joined in.

“So then, what brings you here today? Don’t tell me that you got too excited about your new equipment and so you’re here to get refill ammo.”

“Nope, it’s just that I was able to bring back quite a lot of relics from the ruins, so I just thought of giving some of them away as souvenirs. It’s also a form of my gratitude for always taking care of me, so please accept them.”

Akira took out the handkerchiefs and accessories from inside his rucksack and lined them on the table.

Shizuka, Sara, and Elena looked closely at those relics. All three of them were already used to seeing old-world relics, thus they had better eyes than Akira when it came to appraising old-world relics.

Elena scanned through all the relics that Akira brought before speaking to him.

“You’ve got a good collection of relics here, are you sure we may take some of them?”

“Of course. They’re basically just leftover relics after I sold all the expensive relics that I brought back. So please don’t worry about it.”

“Is that so? If that’s the case, then I won’t hold back.”

Sara quickly extended her hands and yoinked the handkerchief and accessory that she had her eyes locked on to. Both Elena and Shizuka giggled when they saw that.

“Shizuka-san, can I see the modification parts that you have?”

“Sure. Elena, make sure that Sara would leave some for me too, okay?”

“Roger that.”

“…Geez, I’m not that greedy.”

Elena smiled teasingly, which Sara returned with a bitter smile. Shizuka smiled and headed to the back room to get the modification parts that Akira asked.

Akira was talking to Elena and Sara while he was browsing through the modification parts. Since he brought more handkerchiefs and accessories than the number of people here, he just told them to share the relics between the 3 of them. So Elena, Sara, and Shizuka were also discussing how to divide the relics among them.

Akira picked a modification part that allowed him to get more ammo in a magazine, he then paid for that part and put it inside his rucksack.

After they finished deciding which relics they wanted, Sara looked at the relics that she received. She seemed delighted as she spoke to Akira.

“Since you gave me some good relics, I need to give something back to you. Akira, is there anything you want to know? I might even give you some secret tips about how to work as a Hunter.”

Seeing how Sara happily said that, Elena interjected and gave her a warning.

“Whoa there, Sara, don’t tell him anything unnecessary, okay?”

“I get it, don’t worry, I know where to stop. So, is there anything you want to know?”

Judging from how Sara was behaving, it seemed that she would not withdraw from that place unless Akira asked her something. So he thought of anything that he might ask.

“In that case, can you tell me how to sell relics?”

When Akira said that, Elena and Sara were obviously a little bit surprised. Sara then asked Akira to make sure what he meant by that question.

“Uhhh, that’s a rather specific question. You mean how to sell relics so that you can get more money rather than selling all your relics to the Hunter Office, right? To be honest, I always leave that part to Elena, so I’m not really that informed about that…”

Sara glanced at Elena to see how she reacted.

The way to exchange the relics into a huge amount of money, that was an indispensable knowledge for the Hunters who specialized in exploring ruins. After all, it was not like the people who buy relics from those Hunters had an unlimited asset to pay those Hunters. Moreover, the price of the relics was greatly affected by the supply, the demand, and the current trends. It was a knowledge that they had acquired from hard work and piling experiences, it would allow them to get a better edge to compete with the other Hunters. Thus it was not a thing that Hunters would normally share with the other Hunters.

From that point of view, Akira’s question was actually rather rude. It would not be strange if Elena was offended by that question, that was what Sara was worrying when she glanced at Elena.

But Elena quickly caught the meaning behind that question, she then asked Akira to confirm her guess.

“Akira, you mean the common knowledge that most Hunters would normally know, right?”

“Yes. I actually went to sell all the relics that I brought back from the ruin, but in the end, the person that I sold the relics to was reluctant to buy a portion of the relics that I brought, you see.”

So in short, Akira was less than even a beginner when it came to selling relics. If Elena and Sara were like players who knew the rules, the principle of those rules, and were skilled in the game, then Akira would be a new

player who did not even know the rules at all. If that was the case, then there was no reason for Elena to get offended by his question.

Elena smiled.

“If that’s the case, then sure. First of all, can you tell me what kind of relics you brought back?”

Akira tried to remember the relics that he brought back and conveyed it to Elena. Of course, he would be able to completely retrace everything if he asked Alpha, but it would be suspicious if he was able to accurately recall everything. So he decided to try his best on his own.

When Akira mentioned that he found some old-world underclothes, Sara quickly reacted.

“Underclothes for girls?! How many did you find? Do you still have them?”

“I-I’m sorry, it wasn’t that many and I don’t have them now.”

Akira was slightly overwhelmed by Sara’s reaction while Sara looked very disappointed by Akira’s answer.

“That’s unfortunate. I know this sounds really shameless, but to be honest, I would prefer to get those.”

Akira looked troubled when he heard her.

“…Me giving underclothes as a present to Sara-san, huh? That’s a big hurdle for me, so like… That’s a little bit… You know…”

Akira had no courage to do that.

Sara smiled invincibly as if she was challenging Akira when she teased him.

“If you give me some, I might allow you to see me in those undies, you know?”

She was half-joking there, so to be more precise, she was also half-serious.

Elena sighed exasperatedly and interjected.

“Sara, you’re troubling Akira, you know? You should work hard and find that kind of relic yourself. I’m sorry, Akira. There’s a particular reason why Sara is hungry for more undies right now.”

“Hungry? Elena, don’t use weird expression there.”

Sara sounded annoyed when she said that to Elena. She then noticed Akira, who tilted his head, and tried to explain in panic.

“Akira, it’s not like what you think, okay? Ah, well, it’s true that I’m in a little bit of trouble right now, but it’s not because of anything strange, okay?”

Although Akira did not ask her, Sara then flusteredly explained the reason as if she was making excuses.

Sara was an enhanced human with nanomachines body enhancement. Because of that, her body shape changed depending on the amount of nanomachine reserve remaining inside her body or how many nanomachines that she was using. Especially for her chest where she stored her nanomachines reserve, its size varied with time.

Because of that, if she used the usual stretchable bra, it would sometimes become so stuffed that it suffocated her, but some other time, it left a big empty space enough for it to slip. Moreover, depending on its compatibility with the type of the nanomachine that she was using or the suit with nanomachine reserve that she equipped, even a slight manoeuvre might cause her to tear her undies in no time.

And so, Sara was in dire need of undies that could stretch so much that it would fit comfortably on her body that changed frequently from time to time, also it needed to be strong enough to endure her power and her manoeuvring as an enhanced human. Getting such undies would, of course, cost her a lot of money. Not to mention, if she wanted to get comfortable

undies with a good design, then the price would increase even further. And such undies were rare and most sought after in the market.

But the old-world undies that were made using the advanced old-world technology easily satisfied all of those requirements. It was as if they were intentionally made to annoy people like Sara. This was also the reason why Sara was looking for old-world undies. Although it was not like all the old-world undies were that good, most of them were able to at least satisfy her needs.

Of course, she could find other undies with the same level of functionality as the old-world relics, but such undies would have been made using high-quality materials and advanced technologies. Thus they would be super-duper expensive.

On the other hand, she could also buy the undies that the other Hunters brought to the Exchange Centre. But with the old-world brand plastered on them on top of their high quality, and not to mention that she would be competing with the rich people to get them, it would still cost her a lot of money too.

Because of that, Sara would not sell any old-world undies that she found when she searched the ruins so that she would be able to use them instead. She was able to get quite a lot of reserve undies by doing so. But then because of that underground exploration request, she did not have any chances to hunt for relics. Moreover, since they had to explore the underground city on foot, it also increased the frequency where she had to fight monsters.

Thanks to that, Sara burned through her spare undies really fast to the point that her reserve was in an emergency state at the moment. At this rate, she would have to go full commando.

Sara sounded a little exaggerating as she desperately explained her situation to Akira. Akira at least understood that she was not joking there.

“In that case, I’ll bring them to you next time I find more.”

Sara looked delighted when Akira said that.

“That would be really helpful, thank you. There’s no need to worry even if it has some super erotic design, I’ll properly put it on and show it to you.”

After Sara said that teasingly to Akira, this time it was Shizuka who looked exasperated and interjected.

“Stop spouting stupid things and properly buy them from him. Akira, if you find any old-world clothes, it doesn’t matter if it’s underclothes, you can bring them here and I’ll buy them from you for a good price. Maintaining the guns is a dirty job after all, so there’s a demand in this business for clothes that don’t get ripped or stained easily. Don’t worry, Sara then can buy them from me at an even higher price.”

Sara was shocked by that.

“O-of course you’ll give me a friendly discount, right?”

“Don’t worry, you’re a prospective regular customer to my shop after all. So I’ll properly give you a special price for trying to snatch relics right in front of me.”

Shizuka smiled at Sara when she said but it only served to make her look scarier. Sara obviously winced back there. Akira and Elena laughed when they watched their exchange.

Sara then turned to Akira and asked him.

“Well, basically, I just need to find them myself. So, is it okay to ask you where you found them?”

“Well, it’s rather complicated to explain it but… Hmmm… What should I say here…?”

Akira wanted to explain the location of the ruin that he just visited the other day, but since he could not come up with any good way to describe the place, he looked rather troubled.

“Alpha, how do you think I should explain it to them?”

“If you really want to give them the location, you can just tell them the coordinates rather than the road that you took.”

“Ohhh, I see.”

“…Are you seriously going to tell them?”

“Eh? Is it a bad idea?”

Looking at the troubled Akira, Elena thought that he was hesitating because of something else.

“I’m not going to tell you to remember all the ruins around this area, but it’s a good idea to at least remember the name of the ruin where you get your relics. After all, merchants might buy your relics for a higher price if you can explain to them where you get your relics from.”

The Kuzusuhara ruin was the only ruin that could be reached by foot from Kugamayama city. But that was not the case with a vehicle. There were multiple ruins around the Kugamayama city that Akira could go to if he had a vehicle, thus it was not a strange thing if he could not remember the name of all those ruins. As Elena thought so, she also taught Akira one of the basics of selling relics.

But Akira shook his head and replied.

“I do remember the name of the ruin near it, but the location itself is…”

“Akira, stop!”

When Akira was about to give the precise location of the site, Elena suddenly stopped him with a serious expression.

Akira was a bit surprised. Elena then scanned the shop for any other Hunters. Coincidentally, there was no one else inside the shop. She then sighed in relief and turned to Shizuka.

“Shizuka, I’m sorry but is it okay to change the place?”

“Of course, be sure to teach Akira the basics of selling relics too, okay?”

Shizuka understood well why Elena did that. The only person who did not understand what was going on was Akira.

Elena looked a bit troubled and said to Akira.

“Akira, is it ok if we continue this in another place… Well, it seems like it is going to be a long talk, so how about our house? Are you okay with that?”

“Eh, ah, yes, sure.”

“Let’s go then. Shizuka, see you again next time.”

Elena and Sara then left the shop. Shizuka still looked a bit troubled as she waved at Akira when he left her shop.

Akira just obediently followed Elena and Sara back to their house. He was sitting on a chair inside a room while waiting for Elena and Sara, who went to change their clothes. He was obediently waiting for them since they told him that they would explain the details later.

He looked around the house, judging from the furniture and the other stuff inside, he quickly understood that it was better than his house.

“It might be a good idea not to look around like that.”

“Ah, you’re right.”

Since Alpha warned him, Akira went back to sitting obediently while waiting for Sara and Elena. It did not take long before they returned.

Elena brought with her 3 cups of coffee. She then placed the cups on the table and took a seat on a sofa. She glanced at Sara and exasperatedly said to her.

“Sara, we have a guest here. So, can you at least pick better clothing than that?”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? Since we’re in our home, at least let me wear something that I can relax in. I also don’t mind Akira seeing me in this.”

Sara was wearing a loose white long-sleeve T-shirt that extended all the way to under her hip. Since it was made for comfort, it was showing a lot of skin under it. And to top it off, she was not wearing any skirt or pants.

“Even if it doesn’t bother you, it might still bother Akira, you know.”

“Is that so?”

Elena and Sara who had the exact opposite opinion turned to Akira for confirmation. Both of their faces were telling him to agree with them. Akira was a bit overwhelmed by their expectation.

“Well, I do want to relax in my own house, and since this is Sara-san’s house, so if Sara-san doesn’t mind, then I’m okay with it too.”

Sara smiled smugly while Elena exasperatedly withdrew. Looking at Elena, Sara just smiled and said.

“Don’t worry, I properly put on something down there.”

It could also be inferred from her words that she did not have her bra on right now. Moreover, the shorts that she was wearing was rather provocative. The reason why she was wearing those shorts was to save her undies reserve that was running dangerously low.

With just a little bit of effort, Alpha could accurately determine the direction of Akira’s gaze. So in short, she knew better than Akira himself what he was looking at.

Since Sara was wearing a shirt that was out of her proportion, the valley of her chest sometimes peeked out from her shirt, and whenever she made a big move, her shorts would peek from under the shirt. Alpha knew that

Akira was trying to look away from those two things. She also knew well that his efforts sometimes betrayed him.

So, knowing those facts, Alpha then said to Akira.

“As I thought, Akira, you like erotic clothes more, huh? Are you someone who gets all cold when you see a naked girl instead?”

“Zip it!”

Akira jabbed back hard at Alpha while trying to hide his embarrassment.

Elena then changed the mood and said.

“Now then, let’s continue our talk from before, the ruin that you just visited might be an unexplored ruin, right?”

When someone found an unexplored ruin that the other Hunter frequently visited, eventually, that ruin site would become popular and get a name. Sometimes the Hunters who found it first would just put on a random name on that site which later would spread among the other Hunters, and sometimes they would just pick a name from any particular landmark that they found when they searched for that ruin.

Since Akira said that he remembered the name of the ruin near the location where he found that site, this meant that either it was a nameless ruin that was just discovered recently or it was a completely unexplored ruin.

If it was a newly discovered old-world ruin, no matter how much they tried to hide it, it usually would still leak out unless they did a lot of information control to make sure that it would not leak out. Otherwise, the location of that ruin would quickly spread among the Hunters. Because of that, since Elena and Sara did not hear anything about a newly discovered ruin recently, thus they quickly guessed that the ruin that Akira found was a completely unexplored ruin. Elena was sure of her guess when she asked Akira that question.

“It might be an unexplored ruin. Although, it might also be just a different entrance into a ruin that was already explored.”

Since Akira just said that out so easily as if it was nothing, Elena warned him in a way that sounded as if she was scolding Akira.

“Listen here, Akira. It’s dangerous to give that information to other people, you know? The location of an unexplored ruin, I’m sure you know how valuable that information is, right?”

But Akira’s tone and expression did not change at all as he answered back.

“Of course, I won’t just give this information easily to other people. I just thought that it should be okay to share it with both of you since you’ve helped me so much. Not to mention that I already went into that ruin once before.”

It meant that Akira shared that information to Sara and Elena although he knew well just how valuable that information was. Elena and Sara were delighted when they heard that, but Elena tried to suppress her feelings as she said to Akira.

“I’m happy that you feel like that, but there’s one more thing. It’s dangerous to even say that you have such information in a public space. This is also true even when you’re inside Shizuka’s shop. It won’t be strange to find other Hunters eavesdropping in the middle of a public space like that.”

“I see, I understand, I’ll be careful next time.”

Even after hearing Akira’s reply, Elena felt that his reaction was somehow still too naive. So she then continued while making a serious face.

“If you think that it would only cause you trouble with other Hunters if they find out that you have such information, you’ll have to fix your thinking. Depending on the type of facility that you discover, in the worst-case scenario, it might even cause you some trouble with big companies, you know. Some of them are not only aiming for the relics, they have many other agendas like seizing and monopolizing that ruin in order to restart it.

As a result, they would even use anything, including violence, to get their hands on such information. So make sure to be very careful about it."

"I understand."

Akira nodded with a serious face. Just like Elena said, he only thought that it might cause a problem with other Hunters. Of course, he had no plans to get into trouble with big companies, thus he swore to be more careful.

Elena could get from Akira's expression that he completely took in what she said to him. Thus, the serious expression on her face vanished and turned back into a smile.

Silavin: Ah. Akira is just too pure!

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Rebuild World – Chapter 75, The Result of The Second Exploration

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After Elena finished giving Akira her warnings, she then changed to her serious negotiation face and said to him.

“I’m honestly delighted to hear that you would share with us such valuable information about the location of that unexplored ruin. But we’re still Hunters too, and it doesn’t feel right to just accept that information for free. Not to mention that Shizuka would definitely scold us later if we do so. That’s why I have a suggestion here.”

“A suggestion?”

“Yep. How about we accompany you in exploring that ruin? We’ll also help you gather relics, sell them, and then we can share the money after subtracting the ammo expense. If there’s any relics that we want, we can buy them from each other and add the price to that person’s share. So, what do you think?”

Akira thought about it for a bit before replying.

“I don’t mind, but won’t I just slow Elena-san and Sara-san down?”

Sara smiled.

“Don’t worry, we didn’t have any trouble when we were together during the Kuzusuhara city underground ruin exploration. So I don’t think there’s any need for you to worry about it.”

Elena also smiled and added.

“I’m sure you’ll help us out rather than slowing us down, and even if you do slow us down. I’m sure we would be able to handle it just fine. So don’t worry.”

Akira knew that Elena and Sara would say that by judging his performance during the Kuzusuhara city underground exploration. But in reality, he was only able to do that well thanks to Alpha’s support, while the ruin they were going to explore was a place where he might lose that support.

If that happened, of course, Akira’s fighting capability would drop significantly. So he was worried if that might cause a significant inconvenience to Sara and Elena.

“Alpha, do you think it’ll be okay?”

“From my point of view, it’s a good thing that you get someone who can help you out when you lose my support. So I won’t stop you, this can be a good training for you too.”

It seemed that Alpha had no plans to stop him. So basically the possibility of Akira holding Sara and Elena back was not enough of a reason for her to stop him. She also judged that it would serve as proper training for the worst-case scenario, which was losing her support during an exploration.

Akira bowed to Sara and Elena.

“I understand, I’ll be in your care then.”

Sara smiled happily and said.

“We have a deal then. It has been quite a while since our last ruin exploration, and not to mention that it’s an unexplored ruin too. I can’t wait to start.”

Elena also sounded happy as she asked Akira.

“We’ll follow your schedule as to when we can go. So, when would be a good time for you?”

“I can go anytime.”

“Is that so? In that case, let’s go tomorrow. After all, We need to prepare ourselves too. We’ll finish our preparation tonight. Other than that, let’s talk more about that ruin, not to mention that I still have to tell you about the basics of selling relics too.”

After that, Akira talked with Sara and Elena to share the information about that ruin as well as to reconfirm their plan for tomorrow, and Elena taught Akira about the common knowledge of selling relics.

When he got used to Sara’s provocative appearance, Akira’s focus shifted to Elena.

Sara was wearing a white T-shirt while Elena was wearing a black T-shirt. When they sat together next to each other on the sofa, it boosted the contrast between them.

Elena donned calm-but-sleek and clean clothing that made her look like a smart girl. It even made her look like some kind of high-class princess. Her skirt extended all the way to her ankles. Since she was sitting next to Sara, who was not even wearing a pant nor a skirt, Elena’s skirt looked unnecessarily long. And unlike Sara’s T-shirt that did not hide the valley of her chest, Elena’s T-shirt fit snugly up to her neck.

Akira inadvertently compared Sara’s appearance with Elena’s. They too noticed that. But for both of them, it was not something that bothered them since they were not wearing clothing that would embarrass them when seen by Akira.

But with that being said, both of them were still interested in what Akira had to say after comparing their clothing, while at the same time, it was a rather embarrassing thing to ask him directly about it. Both of them then glanced at each other before looking back at their own clothing.

If they used Elena's appearance as the bottom line, then Sara's clothing was rather provocative. Although it was not like Akira stared intently at her, it was also a fact that Akira's gaze was sometimes sucked into the valley between Sara's chest. Sara knew well that it was because of the clothing that she was wearing.

It was not that much of an issue if Akira was completely cool about it. But it was obvious that he was trying hard to avert his gaze from that particular part of Sara's body and that he was not doing a good job at it. Every time his gaze inadvertently shifted there, Sara started to get embarrassed too. But it would be even more awkward if she just came up with a random excuse to change her clothes, not to mention, Elena would definitely not let that slide later.

But if Sara's appearance was used as the bottom line, then Elena's clothing would be too straight-laced. It was true that Elena picked that clothing since they were having a guest. When they were not having a guest, she usually wore even worse clothing than Sara right now. There were many occasions where she was not wearing anything other than her bath towel while operating the information terminal perching on her shoulders. Elena herself was fully conscious about that fact, that was why she consciously picked a very reserved clothing to hide her usual unsightly appearance even though it might give a wrong impression about her.

But compared to Sara's appearance, it could be said that Elena was overly conscious about her own appearance there. It was true that Elena did not find it amusing at all that Akira kept sending his gaze to Sara. Although she understood that it was because Sara's voluptuous body was further pronounced by her clothing, Elena, as someone who had confidence in her own body, found that rather vexing.

But it was not like she could just come up with a random excuse to show her legs and lower her T-shirt. After all, there was no way Sara would let

that slide later.

Both Elena and Sara decided to pick their clothing more carefully tomorrow. Although they were in a completely opposite situation, they reached the same conclusion. They then carefully chose their words to make sure that Akira would not notice their real feelings.

Unfortunately, Akira noticed that they were acting weirdly. But of course, he did not know the reason behind it.

__*__*__*__

On the next day, Akira took his vehicle to the meeting place he had agreed upon with Sara and Elena. Their meeting place was an area between Kugamayama city and the wasteland.

Although Akira did not mind meeting up in the city or near the ruin, he decided to follow Elena's decision. According to Elena, since there was a good chance that it was an unexplored ruin, she wanted to do the search carefully to make sure that this information would not leak to other Hunters.

Akira arrived earlier than their meeting time, so Elena and Sara were not there yet.

Alpha was sitting in the driver's assistant seat, and just like always, she was wearing a dress that did not fit the wasteland at all. She then said to Akira with a serious expression.

"Akira, I'll reconfirm about it again beforehand, you're really okay with it, right?"

"Yeah, it's about me going in supportless this time, right? I'm okay with it."

Lately, Akira realized that he was being fully reliant on Alpha's support. It made Alpha worry whether he would act calmly and rationally if he suddenly lost her support, thus she decided that it might be a good idea to train Akira so that he would still be able to stay calm even if he lost her support.

It would be a good thing if Akira could learn how to fight monsters while exploring that ruin with other Hunters who he trusted. And although he had visited that ruin once, since it was not fully explored yet, there was still a good chance that he would meet some monsters. Thus, it was a perfect chance for his training.

It was not like Akira himself was not worried at all. But he knew that resolve was his responsibility, so he replied back firmly to Alpha while hiding his nervousness.

“This is a good chance to figure out my current ability. Just let me do it.”

“Alright then. Let’s start, good luck.”

Alpha smiled gently at Akira. Then, at the next moment, her image disappeared from Akira’s view. At the same time, his augmented suit suddenly felt heavier and sluggish. It was because he had completely lost Alpha’s support.

Akira shifted the goggles on his forehead down and properly put it on his face. Those goggles were the same set that came together with his ERPS information-gathering devices integrated augmented suit, PWD Silence. Thus, those goggles were showing the data gathered by his information-gathering devices. It was also equipped with a simple far-sight function. If Akira focused his gaze on a certain point, he could use that function to enhance his vision and zoom into that particular point to get more accurate information.

Although it was an exceptional pair of goggles, it was nowhere near Alpha’s support. It did not take that long for him to appreciate Alpha’s support.

As Akira was adjusting his vision through a terminal, he suddenly found a signal coming his way. When he focused his information-gathering device to that angle, he was able to see that it was coming from a vehicle that was heading in his direction. It was Elena and Sara.

Akira waved at Elena and Sara. Sara, who was sitting on the assistant driver seat, waved back at him.

“They’re right on time. It would not be strange to get a little late if they had encountered some monsters on their way here, so it’s rather impressive that they’re right on time. I guess that’s because they’re skilled Hunters, huh. What do you think, Alpha?”

Alpha did not reply back at all, Akira quickly realized that he was in the middle of a training session.

“…Ahhh, that’s right… Dammit.”

Akira snapped back to hide the loneliness that he suddenly felt creeping.

After meeting up with Elena and Sara, Akira guided both of them to the ruin that he visited not too long ago.

But it was not like Akira was heading straight there. He took a big detour by heading to a completely different location on the wasteland and then turned towards the direction of Kugamayama city while heading to the ruin. It was so that other Hunters would not be able to easily trace his footprint. It could be said it was a big mistake when he directly returned to Kugamayama city from that ruin the other day.

Sara glanced at Elena who was sitting on the driver seat.

“Say, Elena.”

“Yes?”

“If I’m not mistaken, you don’t like that armour, right?”

The armour that Elena was using was a body-tight armour that pronounced her body lines way more than her usual armour. Moreover, the part of her body that would draw the attention of the opposite gender was even more pronounced by a belt. Although hers was not as big as Sara’s, it was at least bigger than the average size.

Elena answered back calmly.

“…It’s not like I hate it. It’s just that because of its material flexibility, it’s hard to move in it. So it quickly tires me when moving in this armour. Since that problem is solved by using an augmented suit under it, I decided to start using it again. After all, this armour is much stronger and more durable than my usual armour. And since we’re going to explore an unexplored ruin, I just thought that it’s better to use this armour.”

“Is that so?”

“Yep.”

There was a moment of silence between them.

This time, it was Elena’s turn to glance at Sara.

“Sara.”

“Yes?”

“That shirt under your armour, I thought you don’t use it since it has bad compatibility with the armour that you’re using right now?”

Sara was wearing a shirt under her armour. Although it was not an old-world relic, it was at least stronger than the usual shirt for Hunters, so it was more expensive than the usual shirt. But because it had bad compatibility with her armour, it would get ripped in no time. Because of that, she had stopped wearing that shirt lately, or at least when she did, she would loosen the fastener on her chest to reduce the strain on her shirt. But even so, this time, she completely closed the fastener. Elena bet that shirt would be ripped to pieces in no time.

“…I just thought that it would be such a waste to let them collect dust just because they have bad compatibility with this armour. Not to mention, we have started hunting for relics again, so I might be able to find some durable underclothing.”

“Is that so?”

“Yep.”

Once again, both of them suddenly went silent after that.

Sara who was wearing more reserved clothing than yesterday, and Elena who was wearing more pronounced clothing than yesterday, both of them were just silently following Akira to their destination.

Akira, Sara, and Elena eventually arrived at their destination. They parked their vehicle under the shadow of the nearby wreckage. To make sure that no monsters would be able to find them, they also put a camouflaging sheet above their vehicles. Then they readied their equipment before venturing down the stairs.

Elena and Sara looked pretty excited as they kept moving deeper and deeper into the ruin. Sara herself looked hopeful to the point that she seemed way too excited, while on the other hand, Elena moved in carefully while keeping her surroundings in check.

Elena remembered Akira’s story from yesterday and thought.

[How exactly did Akira find this place? Was it really because of pure coincidence?]

Although it was true that the entrance was hidden in a rather concealed place, if it was only that much, the other Hunters would have been able to discover this place way sooner than Akira.

Moreover, if it was because monsters just opened the entrance and started coming out from this stair lately, then there should be more monsters loitering around near the entrance.

But according to Akira’s story, there were not that many monsters when he searched around the area. Elena was able to confirm that herself after she scanned the area. There were no monsters signals both from around the area and from inside the ruin.

Elena then gathered her assumptions together. The entrance to the ruin was originally hidden in a very concealed place where it would have been buried under the rubbles without anything that indicated its position. But even so, Akira was able to accurately acquire the exact location of that place and somehow locate it, and it was an information that even veteran Hunters and big companies did not have, this was clearly not normal. But Elena had a guess why Akira was able to do so.

[Akira is probably someone who can connect to the old-world domain. It might be an information that he got from the old-world domain.]

If that assumption was correct, then Akira might have a lot of valuable information with him at the moment. That was exactly the reason why big companies always try to get a hold of people who could connect to the old-world domain, some time to the point that they ignored the will of those people. The facts surrounding this ruin somehow confirmed Elena's guess even further.

Elena glanced at Akira as he was watching the tunnel beside Sara.

[What if, we…]

The inner voice inside Elena screamed at her to stop that line of thinking there. But the calm and logical part inside her encouraged her to continue.

Hypothetically speaking, if she could seduce Akira, then she would be able to get the power of someone who could connect to the old-world domain and all the benefits that came with it. Even the information of the exact locations of all the undiscovered ruins in the eastern district alone would earn her a huge amount of money if she sold it to big companies. That is excluding the old-world warehouses filled with relics, or even labs and old-world factories that could produce those very relics. If she was able to seize them and sell them, she would get enough money to easily buy one or two cities in the eastern district.

Fortunately, it seemed that Akira trusted her and Sara. Looking at how he reacted when he saw Sara's sexy clothing from yesterday, she thought that there were a lot of possible choices that she could pick from in order to

seduce Akira. Akira was still so young and inexperienced as a Hunter, if she kept feeding him with information that fit her needs and added some charm with it, she should be able to easily manipulate him. And so her thoughts kept going deeper and deeper.

Elena herself was no saint, she was a normal girl with a normal level of avarice. And her greed pushed her to keep thinking about that possibility.

“Elena, what’s wrong?”

Elena quickly snapped back from her deep thoughts when Sara called her. Akira and Sara looked at her worriedly.

She pulled herself together and smiled.

“It’s nothing. I was just lost in my thought for a bit. It’s been a while since the last time we went hunting for relics, and not to mention, we’re in an unexplored ruin. I might be just a little bit too nervous, but I’m okay.”

[Akira not only saved my life, but he even shared valuable information with me. There’s no way I can betray his trust. Not to mention that if I look at Akira like that, Sara would beat the crap out of me.]

Elena reflected on what she was thinking and erased that foolish thought that she had just a moment ago.

Akira, Elena, and Sara reached the bottom of the stair and continued going deeper into the ruin. Sara took the front and Akira took the rear, while Elena in the middle made sure to keep their surroundings in check.

Elena and Sara used flashlights to illuminate the way in front of them. Although using a strong light inside a dark ruin like this would allow monsters to quickly discover their location, Elena and Sara still decided to use a powerful flashlight because the monsters which lived in such a dark place would have relied more on their sense other than their vision in the first place.

One of the reasons why Elena and Sara decided to use powerful flashlight was also to inform other Hunters about their position. Basically so that other Hunters would not mistake them as monsters lurking in the darkness. It was also to quickly identify any hostile Hunters in case they met any. If they spotted other Hunters with that light but the other Hunters did not do the same, then those Hunters might be planning to ambush them.

But in the end, it was a very subjective matter. Some Hunters just did not want to get discovered by other Hunters inside the lawless and dangerous wasteland. So basically it was a matter of guessing whether they did not turn on their flashlight because they did not want other Hunters to attack them or because they were thinking of ambushing other Hunters.

Akira, Elena, and Sara explored the ruin at a pretty high pace. It was because there were not that many places to check in the hallway and they did not encounter any monsters around.

Akira was walking not too far behind Elena.

Elena was equipped with multiple information-gathering devices. She was using a belt to strap those information-gathering devices around her body. Depending on where she strapped her information-gathering devices, and because of the material of her armour, they somehow boosted her already charming bodyline.

But of course, Akira had no time to spend admiring her charming figure from behind. Since he did not have Alpha’s support this time, he had to keep his eyes peeled for even the slightest change around him.

In the middle of the exploration, Akira checked the enemy-scan information displayed through his goggles multiple times. He turned and checked his back frequently, and also did not forget to check the information analyzed from the aiming device installed on his rifle.

Seeing how Akira was so high-strung, Elena smiled gently at him and said.

“Akira, you won’t be able to stay for long if you’re that nervous, you know? Calm down. I’m also keeping my eyes on our surroundings, so you don’t

have to be that tense.”

“O-okay, I’m sorry.”

Akira took a deep breath to calm himself down before following Elena from behind.

Looking at how nervous Akira was behind her, Elena just thought.

[He’s way too nervous compared to when we were in the Kuzusuhara underground city ruin. Well, we’re exploring an unexplored ruin after all, but it’s also true that getting too nervous is also a bad thing…]

But even so, considering Akira’s fighting ability that she saw in the past, it was also true that he looked unnecessarily nervous.

[…Well, given his age and his experience as a Hunter, I guess it’s to be expected, huh. Back then, we also had Shikarabe with us, not to mention, we were sure that we could meet up with the other Hunters if we went back. So I guess it’s nothing strange if he’s more nervous compared to back then. But it should be fine, Sara and I just need to cover for him.]

As Elena thought so, she then stopped worrying about it and continued their exploration.

Akira, Elena, and Sara were able to reach the big open-hall where Akira stopped last time without encountering any trouble. When Sara peeked inside the shops in that big hall, her eyes sparkled.

“Ohhh, it seems that this shop is filled with stuff. It will be perfect if we can find a lot of relics here too.”

Akira hesitated for a bit.

“Ahhh, I already cleaned that place last time. So I think there won’t be any relics left there.”

But Sara did not change her expression as she said.

“Is that so? Well, it’s fine. Elena, I’ll leave the lookout to you. Akira, help me.”

Sara then went inside that shop. Elena just stood at the entrance of that shop while scanning the area around for any suspicious signals. Akira followed Sara and entered that shop.

Sara and Akira checked the stuff inside the shop. Since Akira had cleaned that place once before, there was nothing that looked valuable on the racks. At least, that was what Akira thought.

After he and Sara looked around the shop once, Akira then said.

“It doesn’t seem there’s anything valuable left here. So let’s go back.”

“What are you talking about? We’re going to take back home anything that looks expensive, you know.”

Sara smiled when she said that while Akira tilted his head.

“What exactly are we going to take back home?”

“That thing there.”

Sara pointed her finger, Akira turned his head toward the pointed direction. Sara was pointing at a display shelf which contained food-like things that were already past their expiration date to the point that they more or less turned into a block of dirt. Akira seemed more confused than before.

The trio walked back while dragging a cart. On that portable cart, there was the display shelf where the foods that were already turned into dirt were on. Sara and Akira had taken out that shelf from the shop from before.

The rattling sound of the cart’s wheel echoed through the hallway.

Akira looked at the shelf on the cart while pushing it from behind.

“…Well, I guess it’s true that this shelf is an old-world relic too.”

Sara heard that mumble.

“Basically, everything that you find inside an old-world ruin is all old-world relic, you know? That includes the wreckages and the walls too. The only difference with the usual relics is whether they fetch you money if you bring them back with you.”

“So this shelf can get us a lot of money, huh?”

Sara smugly answered that question.

“There’s a good chance that it will, at least, enough for us to bring it back with us.”

It was not like Akira did not believe Sara, but he was still not convinced and it was clearly visible on his face. Elena could guess what Akira was thinking when she saw his expression. So she added on to Sara’s explanation.

“Old-world shelves, especially the food shelves, sometimes have some kind of preservation functions. And when you find one that does have it, it can fetch us a lot of money.”

“Preservation function, huh. But the food inside it has basically turned into a bundle of dirt, so like, isn’t it broken already?”

“It’s simply just because it doesn’t have any energy source. The machine itself doesn’t seem to be damaged. And even if it is damaged, it could still be fixed with a simple TLC. And even if it’s completely broken, the researchers would still happily buy it.”

“Ohhh, I see.”

“The real problem is to spot the shelf that has such a function. In this case, we have no other choice but to rely on our intuition as Hunters. There were cases in the past where a Hunter found a plain-looking box that actually had a high-tech preserving function. So basically if you find relics inside a box, it might be a good idea to bring the box too with you.”

Akira was convinced by that explanation given by Elena. It was also reflected on his face. Elena who saw that smiled in satisfaction.

After that, the trio finished their exploration without any trouble. They went back and forth between where they parked their vehicle and the ruin to carry the relics out. They took out a portable cart from inside Elena and Sara's vehicle, it was a portable cart that could be attached behind their vehicle. After they piled all the relics that they carried out into that cart, they attached that cart behind Elena and Sara's vehicle and left the ruin to head back to the city.

And just like when they met up, in the middle of their way back to Kugamayama city, they separated and took different routes back.

Akira was talking with Elena and Sara through his information terminal on how to sell the relics. Elena tried to reconfirm again with him through the information terminal.

"Are you really sure that it's okay to leave selling the relics to us? It might even take a whole month, you know?"

"Yes. It's not like I'm hard-pressed for money right now anyway, and if it takes that long, then it means that it might sell for a really high price too."

"Fufufu, alright then. I need to keep my pride as the person who taught you how to sell relics. So you can look forward to it."

Akira could hear Elena's laughter from the other side of the information terminal. Sara then interjected.

"We got a good relic and we didn't encounter any monsters, it's a really good ruin site. If it's okay with you, do you want to go to that ruin together again next time?"

"Sure, when will be the next time then?"

"Let's see. Well, we have a lot of things to take care of too, it would be at least next week or maybe even later. I'll call you again when we come up

with a date. Later then."

Sara and Elena then closed the call. Akira let out a sigh and turned to the assistant driver seat.

"Alpha."

"Yes?"

The moment Alpha replied, her image suddenly appeared sitting next to him. Akira's face twitched and stiffened the moment he saw her image. This was because although he knew that she would definitely appear, he tried to put more effort to make sure that his expression did not change.

It seemed that he was about to say something to Alpha but decided not to.

Alpha, who noticed that slight disturbance in Akira's feeling, smiled teasingly and asked.

"Were you lonely?"

"…Yeah, I was!!"

Since he did not want to lie to Alpha, Akira tried to hide his feelings by snapping back at her instead. Alpha just smiled in return.

Akira glanced at Alpha and saw that she was smiling as if enjoying his reaction. But it made him pout even more as he pushed the pedal deeper and paced his vehicle faster toward the city.

As Akira traversed through the wasteland on his way back to the city, there were some people who were watching him from afar.

"Is he gone?"

"Yep, it should be fine now."

"Alright then, let's trace back their footprint."

(p4553r: More like their tire prints. lol)

The guy who was watching Akira from afar picked up his telescope. It was a pretty huge telescope.

“Is there any need to keep our distance from them to the point that you have to use such a big telescope?”

“Are you stupid? He’s also a Hunter. If he finds out that we know he’s searching an unexplored ruin, there’s no mistaking it that he would try to kill us!! Being over-cautious is just perfect in this case.”

“Well, because of that, we’re having a tough time looking for his footprints for the last few days though. But before that, did he really find an unexplored ruin? It’s nothing more but your intuition, right?”

Seeing the other guy doubtfully asking him such a question, he became annoyed.

“I did tell you the reason, remember? When we passed each other on our way to the wasteland the other day, he was returning back to the city. But there’s no nearby ruin from the direction where he was coming, so there’s a good chance that he was on his way back from a newly discovered ruin.”

They were the Hunters who were driving in the opposite direction when Akira was on his way back to Kugamayama city the other day. Judging from where Akira was coming, how he was taking more distance from them than usual, and from how he was being careful, they guessed that Akira was on his way back from a newly discovered ruin.

Of course, they had no definite proof for their guess, so it was not an exaggeration to say that it was purely out of intuition. Luckily enough, that guy’s intuition was really sharp, while on the other hand, Akira was really unlucky that he was found out with such scarce proof.

“His route this time is completely different from his previous route, you know?”

“If he did that intentionally, it means that he doesn’t want other Hunters to know where he went, right?”

“Doesn’t that also mean that he simply went to a different ruin from before?”

“Good grief, just shut up!! Yeah yeah, I know it’s just from my intuition!! If you have more complaints!! You can just leave!!”

That guy suddenly snapped and shouted at the other guy.

“Geez, there’s no need to snap back like that. Isn’t it because I trust your intuition that I’m here right now? I’m sorry, okay?”

That guy tried to laugh it off as he followed the other guy who still seemed annoyed as he went silent and walked to the vehicle that they parked not too far from them.

“After all, if it’s really an unexplored ruin, we might strike it rich in one go. Not only we’ll be able to live the way we want to, we might even be able to buy a house inside the wall. I just want to make sure if I can really put my hopes up this time, you know. Cheer up, there’s no need to be that angry.”

“…Humph, let’s go.”

After that, they joined with their other friends who were posted in a different location. Then, they used their information-gathering device to find the footprint that Akira had left and traced it back while keeping their eyes open for any locations that looked like an old-world ruin. They eventually arrived at the wreckages where the ruin that Akira found was located.

Elena was also being careful to make sure that no one would be able to trace back her footprint. The reason why those Hunters were able to reach that particular area was more because of their pure luck rather than for their skill. Statistically speaking, it would have been highly unlikely for them to be able to trace back all the way to that place.

Although, it was not clear yet at that point whether their luck was more of good luck or more of bad luck for finding that place.

Silavin: Damn. Akira is precious. Their team up is so precious. But like always, he will be facing issues again. I wish my boy would have his peace for a little longer D:

As for Elena, I trust that her thoughts won’t be reflected in her actions. From the way these two act, they already regard Akira internally as the opposite sex (Though they know that he is just a child). So, it is not unlikely for them to really fall for him.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 76, Ruin Exploration with Sheryl and Her Gang

Index

Translator: **Athena13**

Editor: **Silavin**

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Sheryl was doing her job inside her private room when suddenly a call came in from her information terminal.

When she heard that particular ringtone, she quickly grabbed her information terminal and answered that call as fast as she could as if she was trying not to make the caller wait for her at all.

“It’s Sheryl.”

“Akira here, do you have some time now?”

“Of course. No matter whether it’s early in the morning or in the middle of the night, feel free to call me anytime.”

Sheryl answered back with a big smile and high spirit. Akira was obviously weirded out by that.

“I-I see.”

“Yes. There’s no need to hold back. So, how can I help you?”

If only Akira said that he just wanted to hear her voice, Sheryl would immediately ascend to heaven, but she knew well that was not possible. It was nothing more than a pipe dream, and as expected, Akira did not call her just because he wanted to hear her voice.

“Well, let’s say that if I’m offering to escort some of your gang members to Higaraka Residence Ruin. What would you do?”

Sheryl tried to process that sudden invitation from Akira. She tried to think if there was any other meaning or any hidden signals behind Akira’s words, and if there were any, then how she should react in that situation. If that was a demand or a command, then Sheryl would have to reply back with a yes. But that was an offer.

“If there’s no need to give a quick answer, is it okay if I ask you the details?”

“Well, even if you say so, it’s exactly like what you just heard… Ahhh, it’s really fine if you don’t want to go. If you have no wish to go at all, I have no wish to force you either. After all, even though I’ll be escorting you, we’re still going to the dangerous wasteland. So it’s not like I’m going to force you or anything…”

“Ah, that’s not what I meant…”

Sheryl then asked Akira a lot of questions and finally understood the situation. To summarize, it was just an offer from Akira to explore Higaraka Residence Ruin.

Akira was planning to take and escort some children from Sheryl’s gang to Higaraka Residence Ruin in order to collect relics there. There should still be a lot of valuable relics for Sheryl and her gang members in that ruin. If they could bring those relics back, it would earn them quite a lot of money.

Although it was somehow still suspicious, that was a very tempting offer for Sheryl. So she decided to take up that offer in the end.

“I understand. If that’s the case, then I’ll be taking that offer if it’s really okay with you, Akira.”

Akira sounded a bit surprised as he replied.

“Are you sure? Although I’ll be your escort, it’s still the wasteland. It’s dangerous, you know?”

“I think that the possible benefit of going outweighs the danger. Not to mention this kind of offer is a rare chance and we do need money too. So I can’t afford to pass such a rare chance to earn money.”

“…I see, you’re right. Alright then.”

Sheryl noticed that there was a slightly weird change in Akira’s voice. Her gang needed money, thus she decided to go to the wasteland even though she knew of the dangers. Although Akira felt like there was another reason why Sheryl decided to accept his offer, he chose not to ask any further.

After Sheryl confirmed when and where to meet, and the number of the people that she would bring, she thanked Akira.

“…Well then, we’ll be in your care. Thank you very much for giving us this precious chance.”

“I’m the one who came up with the offer, so there’s no need to be that grateful. Later then.”

“Later then.”

Akira then ended the call. The moment he did that, Sheryl’s happy face immediately turned serious. She then asked herself the question that she put aside back then, but even so, she still could not answer that question even now.

[So in the end, why exactly did Akira give me this offer? Is there any kind of profit that he could get from us accepting this offer? I don’t understand at all…]

No matter how much Sheryl tried to think about it, she always ended up with the same conclusion, this offer would only bring Akira a huge loss. Escorting Sheryl and her gang to that ruin without accepting any payment would incur him a huge loss in the first place. For Hunters like Akira who could pay 10,000,000 Aurum like it was nothing, even just staying at home for a whole day doing nothing would need them to spend more money than what Sheryl and her gang could afford. Thus, those Hunters would only accept a request to take a lot of slum children, who knew nothing about living in the wasteland, only if that request offered a huge amount of reward money.

A Hunter on the level similar to Akira would have explored Higaraka Residence Ruin before. And any relics left in that ruin would be those that were not worth the expense for him. Even if he carried as many relics as possible from that place with the help of her gang, and even if Akira could sell those relics at a good price, the money would not even be close to enough to pay a Hunter like him to escort those children.

[…Is it some kind of training? Or maybe a practice run? Is he planning to see how useful we are in the case when he needs our help in the wasteland? But if that's the case, he could just tell it to me straight, right…? I really have no idea what Akira is thinking.]

Even after that, Sheryl still spent some time trying to figure out the reason behind Akira's offer. But in the end, she could not come up with any good guesses. It was because she actually noticed, albeit vaguely, the real reason behind that offer in the middle of her conversation with Akira.

Although Akira didn't explicitly tell her not to ask him that question, it was enough to stop Sheryl from digging any deeper.

It was not like she could do anything about things that she did not understand. But it was true that it was a tempting offer for Sheryl. As such, she thought that she had to try her best to get the most out of this opportunity.

Sheryl then decided to push aside all her questions for now and moved on to decide who she would take with her to Higaraka ruin.

__*__*__*__

Eventually, the day when Akira escorted Sheryl and her gang to the Higaraka Residence Ruin to gather relics came. Sheryl brought her subordinates to their meeting place that was located on the border between the slum city and the wasteland; they were waiting for Akira there.

As the meeting time came closer, all the children that Sheryl brought with her to go to the wasteland started having mixed feelings.

Sheryl looked excited as she was thinking of her plans for the day with a big smile.

[What should we do about the relics that we'll gather? Should I look for someplace to sell them? Or should we open a stand to sell them ourselves? After all, I don't think we'll find any relics that Katsuragi-san would buy in that ruin, I need to find another way to exchange them into money. Even if we get lucky and end up finding some expensive relics, it's not like we can just keep the money without sharing them with Akira. I need to find a way to exchange those relics for a good price even if we only find cheap relics there…]

Sheryl mostly thought about what she should do after coming back from that ruin. She did not worry about going out to the dangerous wasteland or exploring the dangerous old-world ruin at all. It was because she was simply happy to be able to go out with Akira even if it was to the wasteland.

In contrast to that, Erio's expression was filled with fear and worry.

[It's not like Sheryl is sending me to gather relics because I saw her naked back then, right? My assumption is not wrong, right? It's not like she is just sending me to die, right? Please someone tell me that I'm right!!!]

As one of the armed children from Sheryl's gang, Erio had a gun with him. But it was just a cheap handgun bought from Katsuragi-san and he did not have much ammo in his reserve either. It was not a weapon that people would normally use to fight against monsters.

Erio was almost killed in the wasteland before. Thus, he actually did not want to go out to the wasteland again if it could be helped, while on the other hand, he could not go against the command of the boss of the gang. As well as for the sake of his girlfriend, Alicia, he could not afford to go against Sheryl's order and get kicked out of the gang.

Even if Akira did say that he would escort them, Erio had no idea how far Akira would go to protect the gang's members. But one thing was for sure, Akira would prioritize protecting Sheryl more than him. Thus, when the push came to shove, he would have to do something about his situation himself. But again, when it even came to that point, then he would be in a situation where he could do nothing about it anymore.

Erio could not clear his worries. For the sake of his girlfriend, Alicia, he resolved himself to go out and swore to return back alive. So he decided to ward off his fear of going to the wasteland by telling himself that it would be okay with Akira escorting him.

Nasha looked around her and checked how the other children were doing. The only person who was relaxed in that situation was Sheryl. Although each kid was showing a different level of anxiousness, it was obvious that all of them were worried. Leaving Sheryl aside, none of them had come to that place out of their own volition.

[Although I know that they would push the jobs that they don't want to do to me since I'm a new member, to think that they'll send me to the old-world ruin to gather relics right off the bat. But again, what's going on here? Even the boss and the other gang's high officers are here too. I just don't understand what's going on with this gang, I at least need to gather more information before I contact Alna…]

There were a lot of peculiar things about Sheryl's gang, but even so, it was a good enough gang for Nasha to put her hopes on. She thought that she had to get on Sheryl's good side so it would be easier for her to help Alna join this gang. That was why she resolved herself to come.

Akira arrived there in his vehicle a bit sooner than the meeting time. He then finished simple greetings with Sheryl's gang before heading to

Higaraka Residence Ruin.

He attached a pull cart behind his vehicle and was sitting on the driver seat. Sheryl sat next to him, while the rest of the children were on that cart.

Although the back seats were empty, Akira did not allow anyone to sit there. It was because it would be a hindrance when he wanted to use the CWH anti-material rifle or the DVTS mini gun that were mounted on his vehicle. There was someone who was about to sit there but Akira sent him to the back cart.

Akira had bought that cart after seeing how useful it was during the ruin exploration with Elena and Sara. Since he was planning to carry a lot of relics in the future, he decided to buy a big cart. Because of that, there was still a lot of space even after all the children from Sheryl's gang got on that cart. But still, sitting in that cart was nowhere near comfortable.

A boy by the name of Sebla, who was sitting next to Nasha, voiced out his complaints.

"Seriously though, he doesn't let anyone else sit there other than Boss Sheryl, huh. Is he saying that the cart is enough for us? Dammit, that damn boy getting ahead of himself although he was just another slum kid like us not too long ago."

It was not like Akira explained anything when he sent the other kids to the cart, that was why Sebla interpreted his order as a disparaging treatment to show them their difference in position.

"Say, do you know that Akira guy?"

When Nasha asked him that, Sebla's annoyed expression loosened. It was because he realized that she was a new member who did not know much about Akira. So in short, she was someone who might join him in bad-mouthing Akira.

Sebla answered back as if he had found a good place to vent his displeasure.

“Well, it’s not like I know him on a personal level, but I have seen him during the days when he was still living in the slum city back alley. Since he was living near where I was, I sometimes saw him when he went to the food distribution place. So I somehow remember his face.”

“He went to the food distribution place although he was a Hunter?”

“He just started working as a Hunter recently. Up until that point, he was more or less the same as us. I bet he just found some expensive relics out of luck that allowed him to get good equipment and that he’s just doing well lately thanks to his luck.”

“Is that so? I heard that he’s a very strong Hunter though…”

“I’m sure it’s just a bluff. He just got lucky and got himself a powerful weapon. Anyone can be strong if they have a powerful weapon. Even for that incident with Shijima’s gang, I’m sure he just used his gun to threaten the underling that Shijima sent here. Seriously speaking, does he look that strong to you without his gun?”

Nasha took another look at Akira and tried to reconfirm it. It was indeed true that Akira looked strong when he was with his weapons, but when she imagined him without those guns, he did not look that strong at all.

“…Now that you mention it, that’s kind of true.”

“Right?”

Sebla smiled, but his face quickly returned back to being annoyed.

Sebla looked at Akira and all of his equipment. An augmented suit to enhance his physical power, a strong looking vehicle to explore the wasteland, the powerful-looking CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun, and finally the 2,000,000 Aurum per box medicine inside the rucksack on the back seat of his vehicle. They were all the equipment that supported Akira.

He looked at those weapons that made Akira appear strong, equipment that made others envious and jealous.

“…Dammit. How much money do I need to get those guns? If only I can get them too, I’ll be able to become a strong Hunter just like him. If I become one, then the boss would fawn over me too and I’ll be able to do anything I want with her body… Dammit, I bet he has done all kinds of stuff with the boss. He did take a bath with her the other day too after all. I still remember those guys that got kicked out of the gang just because they took a peek when Sheryl was in the bath. Why is he that special although he just got a little lucky…”

Sebla’s complaints somehow sounded as if he was chanting a curse which could be easily interpreted as picking a fight with Akira and Sheryl.

[…Yikes, I asked the wrong person.]

Nasha slowly moved away from Sebla when he was not watching. After all, she did not want to get roped into trouble.

Akira was driving slowly so as not to rock the cart too much. He also picked a level route to Higaraka Residence Ruin to reduce the rocking. But because of that, he took more time going to that ruin than usual which of course increased the possibility of encountering monsters on their way to the ruin.

While driving his vehicle, Akira was constantly checking the data on his goggles. Suddenly he turned on the auto-drive function of the vehicle’s control unit and pointed his rifle outside the vehicle.

“Akira?”

“It’s a monster.”

Akira swiftly replied to Sheryl who was sitting on the driver’s assistant seat.

Sheryl quickly turned to the direction where Akira was aiming, but she could not see any monsters there.

“Uhhmm, where exactly is this monster?”

“Just use that binocular. It’s integrated with my information-gathering device, so you should be able to easily spot the monster.”

Sheryl picked the binocular that was lying near her and tried to look for the monster. She followed the indicator shown in her enhanced vision to look at where the signal was coming. Thanks to the automatic readjustment function of that binocular, which worked in tandem with Akira’s information-gathering device, she was able to quickly find the monster that Akira mentioned.

She could see a big carnivorous beast running toward Akira’s vehicle with a speed that did not fit its size. As she saw the large legs that supported that monster’s huge body kicking the ground, she could somehow hear its stamping sound that she should not be able to hear from such distance.

Akira started shooting at that monster with his AAH assault rifle. But none of his shots hit its mark.

He kept on shooting at that monster although he could not hit any of his shots. That monster eventually got close to Akira’s vehicle.

The children in the cart noticed the monster when they heard the gunshots. They quickly peeked out their heads from the cart to look for the monster. Since that monster was raising a cloud of dust while running toward the vehicle, they could easily find it. Also, it was already close enough to be spotted with naked eyes.

The children in the cart started to make a ruckus.

“Oii!! It’s getting closer and closer!! Can he hit his shot?!!”

“I-Isn’t this getting bad!?”

That monster was running faster than the vehicle and it did not slow down even though Akira was shooting at it.

The children who started to panic moved to the other side of the cart except for Erio. Although he was pointing his gun at that monster, he was also making the same scared expression as the other children.

Akira let out a sigh and put down his AAH assault rifle. He then moved to the back seat of the vehicle and aimed the DVTS minigun at the monster. He calmed himself down and pulled the trigger.

The minigun showered that monster with bullets, so many that it didn't matter even though Akira missed some of his shots. Those bullets pierced through the monster's skin, tore its flesh, and crushed its bones. It splattered its meats and blood around before falling over and stopped moving.

Akira sighed and returned back to the driver seat. It took sometime before the children in the cart started making another ruckus.

"Whoah!! He just killed that huge monster like it was nothing!!!"

"As expected of a Hunter."

All the children then started raising their voices at the same time after they were released from the fear of that monster. All of them were smiling except for one person, it was Sebla.

"He couldn't hit that monster when he was using a normal rifle. The amazing one is that weapon. I can do that too if I had that gun…"

Sebla's complaint was drowned by the voice of the other children celebrating, so no one heard him.

Sheryl welcomed Akira with a smile.

"That was amazing, as I thought, you're really a powerful Hunter, Akira. It's really reassuring to have you escort us."

Sheryl directed her wonderful smile filled with amazement and praise to Akira, but just like usual, Akira's reaction was very bland. Or more like, it was worse than usual.

Akira’s expression showed no change as he said.

“…Well, I’ll at least do my escort work properly.”

For some reason, it seemed that Akira did not want to be thanked. Sheryl understood that from how he reacted.

“…A-alright, I’ll be relying on you.”

Although Sheryl was surprised by that, she decided not to ask any further to avoid making Akira’s mood worse.

Akira did not say anything as he kept driving the vehicle. There was an awkward silence between him and Sheryl who was sitting in the assistant driver seat, it was not a mood that could be fixed by simply throwing some random subject to talk about.

Moreover, it was not like Akira was in a situation where he could afford to engage in silly talks. He was focusing all of his attention to monitor his surroundings for any monsters and he had no plans to divide his attention for anything unnecessary.

In the middle of that awkward mood between Sheryl and Akira, Alpha was smiling as if it did not affect her at all.

“Akira, you’re too tense. If you don’t calm down, it’ll only unnecessarily shave your stamina, you know?”

“I know.”

Just like usual, Alpha was relaxed. But in contrast to her, Akira replied swiftly while pouting.

Since Sheryl took the assistant driver’s seat, Alpha was sitting on the door on the other side of Akira. She let her legs flap freely on the outside of the vehicle as she lightly turned her body around to Akira’s direction.

“It seems that you’re having a hard time there. Just tell me anytime you think that you can’t take it anymore, okay?”

Akira was escorting Sheryl and the other kids without Alpha's support. Although he might still be able to see and hear Alpha, she did not give any type of support to Akira at the moment. She did not enhance his views as she usually did nor did she help with his aiming. There was also no aiming correction support from his augmented suit. And Alpha did not give Akira any instructions at all.

But more than that, Akira had to search for enemies himself. If he let his guard down, he felt like he would be ambushed by monsters in no time. Thus, he could not relax much which slowly shaved his focus and stamina.

This time, Akira was going to gather relics in the ruin as well as to train. To be more precise, the training was his main aim.

The last time he went to explore ruins without Alpha's support, it was with Elena and Sara. At that time, he was able to finish the exploration without encountering any monsters. But if his performance was to be strictly evaluated, then the only word that Alpha could come up with was 'embarrassing'.

Alpha thought that it would be bad to let it stay like that, thus she sent Akira for another training. And that was today's relic hunting. His duty was to simply escort Sheryl and the other children to the ruin and return back alive.

Alpha thought that Akira needed to get used to the situation where he had no support from her. It should at least be to the point where he would not endanger himself from being way too nervous when he was in such a situation.

The reason why Alpha chose Sheryl's gang as the target for the escort was because Sheryl and the other children were complete beginners when it came to exploring the wasteland. Thus, unlike Sara or Elena, they would not be able to protect Akira. And also even if Akira failed and they ended up killed, it would not affect his conscience much.

If Alpha told Akira to invite Sara and Elena for such a purpose, he would be super angry. In the worst-case scenario, it might cause considerable damage to his trust in Alpha. She herself understood that very well.

Because of all those reasons, Alpha decided to use Sheryl's gang. And in order to convince Akira, she put an excuse that it would give Sheryl and her gang some profit too. She also told Akira to cancel the plan if Sheryl refused his offer. But Sheryl accepted it, after all, just like Alpha explained to Akira, it was a delicious offer for her.

Akira was always putting his life on the line as a Hunter and Sheryl's gang was reaping benefits from it. So it should be alright to put Sheryl's gang in danger from time to time as a compensation to that. After all, if Akira died, then Sheryl would lose her position anyway.

That was why Alpha thought that it was okay to put Sheryl and her gang in danger in order to train Akira. Alpha adjusted her explanation to Akira to make him agree with her thoughts, and as she planned, he unconsciously began to think like that too.

If Akira had shown even the slightest refusal when Alpha manipulated him, she would have categorized Sheryl's gang as a threat. Had Akira put that much care for Sheryl's gang, he might even place himself in danger in order to help them. So in the worst-case scenario, there might be even a need to exterminate Sheryl's gang.

The lesser Akira was emotionally attached to the people around him, the better it was. Alpha planned all of this to ensure that she will have the biggest influence in his action. In order for him to accomplish her request, in order for her to accomplish her goal, and in order not to repeat the mistakes that she made in the past, Alpha kept adjusting her plans behind her usual ever-present smile.

Sheryl's gang's profit, Akira's profit, and Alpha's profit. Alpha might be the only existence there who fully understood that these 3 interests were mixed in today's ruin exploration.

Akira glanced at Alpha and complained.

"In that case then, I'll do that right away. Can you change into something else that won't disrupt my focus?"

Alpha was wearing a bold swimsuit with a small amount of fabric. It was a swimsuit with a lot of laces wrapping around her body to secure the few pieces of fabric in their respective places. That extremely risqué swimsuit only served to boost Alpha's charming body.

On the other side of Alpha, there was Sheryl who was wearing prim and proper clothing, thus it made Alpha's swimsuit even more disturbing for Akira's focus.

Alpha smiled and said.

"Nope. Don't let yourself get bothered by something unnecessary. Just focus on the important information. This is also a part of your training, you know? If your focus is disturbed by my appearance, then it means that you're not focused enough."

"That might be true, but still…"

When Akira made that pause, Alpha quickly turned her body around like a gymnast. Thus her body wrapped in that risqué swimsuit was facing Akira right now. Her chest was right beside him.

Alpha got her face close to Akira and said.

"Don't just sit there, another one is coming."

Another monster was running towards him. Akira quickly confirmed its position from the data shown in his goggle.

Akira turned on the auto-drive function, stood up, readied his rifle, and aimed at that monster through the aiming device in his goggle. Although that monster was only a small dot when seen with naked eyes, he was able to properly aim at that monster.

Akira stabilized his grip with the help of his augmented suit, but since the ground was not smooth, the vehicle was swaying up and down and disrupting his aim. While on the other hand, that monster was running as fast as it could towards Akira. It would be nigh impossible to hit that

monster’s weak points in such a situation. It was even hard enough to accurately shoot at that monster in the first place.

“Predict the moves of your target. Consider the lag between when you pull the trigger and when the bullet reaches your target. Feel the swaying of the vehicle and adjust your aim accordingly. There’s no need to rush yourself, just calm down and take your aim. Even if you might miss your shot because of your bad luck, don’t think that you can hit your shot because of your good luck. Don’t rely on luck and aim properly.”

Akira listened to Alpha’s instruction and pulled the trigger. The bullet flew past right beside that monster.

He frowned and asked.

“That’s a miss, what did I do wrong?”

“That was simply because you did not take a good enough aim. Now try again but do it more carefully.”

“Even if you tell me so, if I take too long to aim, that monster would move outside the view of the aiming scope, you know?”

“If you can slow down your time perception right before you pull the trigger, you should be able to take a far more accurate shot though.”

“I’m already trying to do that.”

Akira was still doing his time perception compression training until now. But he still could not use it freely. If he could do that, it would boost his shooting accuracy.

As that monster came closer and closer, Akira was able to hit its oversized body. But as long as he could not hit any of its weak points, the bullets which hit that monster were barely affecting it.

The children in the cart started making a ruckus again. That was it, Akira put his rifle down and moved to the backseat to aim his CWH anti-material rifle at that monster. He then readied his stance and pulled the trigger. The

powerful piercing bullet that flew out from his CWH anti-material rifle pierced the torso of that monster and immediately killed it. As that monster fell to the ground and the vehicle moved further away leaving that monster's corpse behind, the children in the cart started to raise their voices once again.

Although Akira encountered some monsters again after that, he eventually was able to arrive at the Higaraka Residence Ruin safely.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 77, Taking Shelter From The Rain

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Sheryl and the other children immediately started gathering relics when they arrived at the Higaraka Residence Ruin.

The Higaraka Residence ruin was one of the ruins near Kugamayama city that were once frequented by a lot of Hunters. But the current Higaraka Residence Ruin was already emptied from any expensive relics. It had little worth in searching for relics, so Hunters normally would not go there just to hunt for relics.

But with that being said, there were still some relatively cheap relics left in that ruin. And so, Sheryl and the other children were there to collect those kinds of relics.

Although those relics were not worth bringing back home for the Hunters, they were still precious relics for Sheryl's gang. The ruin was filled with relics that those children of the slum city could never find in the back alley of the slum city. If they had any cheap means to go there, those people of the slum city would happily travel to the ruin to collect relics.

So in short, that ruin was like a treasure box for Sheryl's gang. Of course, if they had to pay Akira for escorting them there, Sheryl would have still

ended up with a deficit, but she did not have to worry about that problem this time.

They had already decided beforehand how they would gather the relics. First of all, they would stay in the cart until Akira parked the vehicle near the entrance to one of the buildings. Then Akira would go in first to scan the building for relics and to clean up any monsters inside it. After that, the children from Sheryl's gang would go into that building to carry any relics inside it to the cart while Akira would patrol the area for any monsters. Once they were done emptying the building, Sheryl would contact Akira through the information terminal to meet up before moving to the next building.

As Akira was patrolling the area, he suddenly stopped as he watched the relics that were carried into the cart. The cart was filled with all kinds of relics, there were curtains with holes, broken beds, cracked kitchen utensils, old furniture that had their shape distorted, and also small relics with mechanical parts inside them. Akira stood there staring at that pile of mismatched relics.

Alpha found that weird and asked Akira.

"Akira, what's wrong? There are no expensive relics in that pile, you know?"

"Nah, I just remembered that I was also gathering those kinds of relics not too long ago."

Akira felt slightly nostalgic, but Alpha quickly cut that short.

"Nothing has changed even now. Then you used to go to dangerous ruin to hunt for expensive relics, now you are going to a more dangerous ruin to hunt for more expensive relics. The only difference is the degree of risk involved."

"… Well, that's kinda true now that you mention it."

As Akira looked at the pile of relics in his cart, it reminded him of his past self. Although he felt like he had come a long way since then, after Alpha pointed it out, he realized that what he was doing right now was not that much different from his past self.

The only difference was that the back alley slum city had turned into a relatively safer place for him and stuff that he could find there was relatively not worth the time for him right now. So right now, in order to gain more profit, he chose to go to a more dangerous place and get more expensive relics. That was the only difference between the current him and the past him.

Akira still encountered some monsters inside Higaraka Residence ruin. But he was able to handle them just fine. Thus, Sheryl's gang was able to gather relics without facing any particular trouble. With more and more relics piled inside the cart, the sitting space for the children from Sheryl's gang shrunk.

After they finished collecting relics from one of the buildings there, Akira returned back to his vehicle and asked Sheryl.

"Sheryl, How long are you planning to stay here for today? I don't mind staying here until the sunset though, but it seems we're running out of free space in the cart. I have no complaint if you want to let them sit on the top of the relics, but I won't care if any of them trip and fall off the cart, okay? Also, I might have to pace the vehicle if we encounter a monster on our way back home. So don't blame me when that happens."

Sheryl went to check the cart, and as Akira said, the cart was more or less filled with the pile of relics that they gathered that day.

But since it was a very rare chance for her, Sheryl wanted to take back as many relics as she could. After all, she might not get any more chances to go to the Higaraka Residence Ruin again.

Sheryl did not know what she should do so that Akira would accept if she asked him to escort them again. Thus, as long as she did not know how to get Akira to accept her request, she thought that she would not get another chance like this.

Sheryl looked hesitant, she then said to Akira.

“Let’s go for another one before going home. I think it should still have enough free space for one more building.”

“Alright.”

Akira then went back to the driver seat, Sheryl sat next to him on the driver’s assistant seat. As he was about to turn on the vehicle, suddenly a water droplet fell in front of him.

Akira raised his head and looked up, the sky above him had already turned cloudy before he even realized it.

“Rain, huh. The weather forecast said that we’ll have a clear day though? As I thought, I can’t really trust a free weather forecast, huh?”

“Akira, we should move.”

“Hm? I can just go to that building over there to take shelter from the rain…”

Akira turned his head to glance at Alpha. The moment he confirmed Alpha’s expression, he quickly turned on his vehicle.

Sheryl who was sitting in the driver’s assistant seat could feel the G-force as Akira stepped on the pedal, the children in the cart lost their balance as they quickly grabbed on the cart railing. As the whole cart swayed, some of the relics from that pile toppled over.

The usual smile on Alpha’s face was not there, it only meant that Akira was in a situation that might endanger his life.

Akira drove the car following the instruction shown in the navigator of the vehicle’s control unit. His destination was a big mansion located deep inside that ruin. It was the same mansion where Alpha told him that he was someone who could connect to the old-world domain.

“Akira!? What’s going on?!”

Sheryl was surprised when Akira suddenly paced the vehicle. But Akira only signalled her with his hand that he had no leeway to answer her question. After all, it was not like he had the answer to that question anyway.

“Alpha, what’s going on?”

“I’m sorry to rush you like that. But don’t worry, it’s not like we were about to get attacked by a swarm of monsters again.”

“I see. So then, why did you rush me?”

“It’s to make you move out from the area with the same level of signal interference as the colourless mist as fast as possible. If we had stayed in that area, there’s a good chance that monsters might ambush you. You also need to find a place where you can take shelter from the rain as soon as possible.”

“If it’s because of the rain, can we not pick one of those buildings around here?”

“I’m sure you want to avoid a situation where you’re surrounded by monsters and forced to fight them in a small closed space, right? You need a big place where you can fight optimally. That big mansion would be perfect for that, and even if it’s filled with monsters, you can secure one of the empty rooms for Sheryl and the other children and it would be an easy job for you to clean those monsters from that building.”

As Akira was talking with Alpha, the rain was getting stronger and stronger. Akira noticed that the effective scanning range shown in his goggles was growing narrower because of that.

“Whoah there, this small rain has this much effect? If a small rain has this much impact, what would happen if it’s heavy rain?”

“In the worst-case scenario, your information-gathering device would be completely useless outdoor and there might be some effect even when you are indoors.”

“According to your prediction, how bad will this rain be?”

“To be honest, I don’t know for sure. That’s why I urged you to get out as soon as possible assuming the worst-case scenario.”

Akira frowned. Sheryl looked worried when she saw his expression, Akira then noticed that Sheryl was worried about him.

“I’ll save the details for later, but we’re basically heading to a safer place, so don’t worry.”

Sheryl replied back with a smile.

“I understand, we’ll be in your care.”

Just that short explanation from Akira was enough to make Sheryl regain her calm.

Originally, Akira and Alpha planned to continue their training until Akira escorted Sheryl’s gang back to Kugamayama city. But now with this sudden turn of events, although he planned to rely on Alpha’s support as little as possible, Akira himself had no plans to keep that up and unnecessarily put Sheryl’s gang under more risk.

“Alpha, let’s end the training here. I’ll be relying on your support again.”

“Roger that, I’ll take the wheel.”

The moment Alpha took control of the vehicle, it obviously moved much stable than before. Akira stood up from the driver seat and moved to the back seat.

Up until now, Akira operated the control panel and set the vehicle on auto-drive before he moved to the back seat. But he did not do it this time, Sheryl who noticed that panicked and asked Akira.

“Uhmmm, is it okay to leave the steering wheel?”

“It has a self-driving function, so it’s okay.”

“Don’t you need to set to auto-drive mode using the control unit terminal?”

“It’s alright, it’s one of those advanced control units.”

Akira did not hesitate when he said so. Because of that, he was able to convince Sheryl. And since there was really no problem with the driving, Sheryl easily accepted his explanation.

Alpha smiled teasingly and said to Akira.

“Yep, that’s right. It’s an advanced control unit after all… So you should make your explanation more convincing than that, you know?”

“It’s alright… Maybe.”

Akira thought to himself in secret that he should be more careful next time.

He took out the camouflaging sheet that he usually used on his vehicle and threw it to the children in the back cart.

“Just use that for now!!”

Akira shouted as he set up the folded roof on his open-roof vehicle. The children from Sheryl’s gang expanded the camouflaging sheet to protect the relics and themselves. As for Akira, the vehicle that he was driving was equipped with a foldable roof. Although it still depended on how strong the rain was, they would at least be able to avoid getting completely drenched because of the rain.

They eventually arrived at the mansion that they were heading to. The mansion that Alpha picked was a big mansion complete with a parking lot. There were leftovers of dead monsters scattered around that mansion. There were also metallic wreckages scattered here and there, those might be what was left of the defensive equipment of that mansion. Of course, those already turned into broken scraps after enduring the harsh weather of the wasteland. Akira parked the vehicle near one of the entrances of that mansion.

Akira removed the DVTS minigun and CWH anti-material rifle from his vehicle and carried them with both of his hands. Both of them were heavy rifles, the only reason why he could carry them around with one in each hand was because of the quality of his new augmented suit.

Of course, it was completely a different problem whether he could use them with only one hand since he had to deal with the recoil of those rifles. But with the help of Alpha's support, it should be no problem at all.

When Akira saw some of the children from Sheryl's gang about to enter that mansion before him, he quickly stopped them.

"Don't go in there before me, step back."

But when Akira stopped them, they sounded super annoyed as they replied.

"What the heck, just let us in already."

The rain had gotten pretty heavy. So Akira understood their feeling of wanting to get in that mansion as soon as possible. But he could not let them do that since he was working as their escort at the moment.

"I don't mind if you want to meet the monsters that might have taken shelter from the rain inside that mansion before us."

When he said that, the children from Sheryl's gang flusteredly moved away from the entrance.

After Akira made sure that everything was safe around the area, he gathered all the children from Sheryl's gang in a big hall. The hall was so big that it still had a lot of free space even after everyone gathered there.

The hall was almost empty. It was because the Hunters had already taken out all of the relics from inside that place. Since the mansion looked luxurious, a lot of Hunters in the past must have thought that there must be some expensive relics inside and decided to take out everything from within that mansion.

Akira then gave them an order.

“We’ll stay here until the rain dies down. I’ll go ahead and check the safety of all the rooms. Since it’s dangerous, don’t go outside this room without my permission. Sheryl, give me a call if anything happens.”

“I understand.”

Sheryl bowed and saw Akira off as he left that room.

Akira started scouting all the rooms around the area starting from the closest rooms from where Sheryl’s gang was staying.

He had come to that mansion before in the past, but for some reason, the air inside the mansion felt different this time.

“Alpha, don’t you think there are too many dead monsters here?”

“It’s true that there are more dead monsters compared to the last time we came here. The vibe is also different.”

“The vibe?”

“The last time we came here, remember that there was a dead greedy crocodile corpse, right? I think some Hunters had killed that crocodile. Putting that aside, there seem to be more monsters in this area. They might have originally come here to feast on that dead crocodile, either that or they originally might have been staying away from this place when that greedy crocodile was still around.”

“I see, so there’s something like that too, huh. I thought that this was a safe area the last time we came here, but it seems that it’s not exactly the case now… Or was it actually this dangerous right from the beginning?”

“Don’t worry, looking at the dead monsters in this place, it seems that there are no dangerous monsters in this area. You should be able to deal with them with no problem. Not to mention that I also picked a particularly safe place for Sheryl and her gang. So there’s no need to worry.”

“I see.”

Akira slightly relaxed after hearing that.

But then Alpha changed her tone and warned him.

“Akira, if you’re too tense, it’ll only make you get tired quickly. I did tell you about this before, right? This offer will also profit Sheryl and her gang as well as give you a good chance for training. Although it’s dangerous, Sheryl would be able to bring home some relics with her, they’ll properly profit out from this too. So there’s no need for you to be overly conscientious about it.”

Akira understood that and was trying to not be too tense. Although there were some parts that both he and Sheryl felt awkward about, both of them agreed to do the ruin exploration. But even so, he still felt slightly guilty about it.

This time, when Akira came to the ruin for training, he brought some people who would definitely slow him down to explore an old-world ruin. His duty was to make sure that they would return back alive. It was a training to increase his fighting capability. So in short, Sheryl and her gang were there only to be used for his training.

Akira himself understood that Sheryl and her gang were going to get something out of this ruin exploration too. But at the same time, it felt like he just used sweet words in order to bait Sheryl and her gang out to the dangerous wasteland.

But to be more precise, this also showed the fact that Akira had little trust in his own ability. Simply put, Akira thought that he did not have enough ability to make sure that everyone from Sheryl’s gang would be safe under his protection. After all, if he was strong enough to the point that he was confident that he would be able to make sure of the safety of Sheryl’s gang in the wasteland, then he would not feel guilty as he is now.

Alpha smiled and said to Akira.

“If you can’t stop yourself from getting bothered by it, then you should work hard to become strong. If you become strong enough to the point that

you think it will be a piece of cake to escort Sheryl and her gang, then this kind of training will be just you giving them free help. At that point, it would not be you baiting them to get out to the dangerous wasteland using sweet words, but instead, you'll be just simply spoiling them. I'm sure you won't feel guilty in that case, right? Don't worry, I'll properly give you my support until you can get that strong."

"…You're right. This will all get resolved if I become strong enough. Not to mention that I'll be able to finish that request from you too."

Akira lightly smiled when he said.

"I'll look forward to that."

Alpha also replied back with a smile.

After Akira made sure that the mansion was safe. He put down his rifle on the floor and took a short rest.

He peeked the outside of the mansion through a window. Far from slowing down, the rain was stronger than before. He then tried to check the situation outside using his information-gathering device, but the scan range was already so small that it was basically useless.

Akira then thought of something and asked Alpha.

"By the way, why does rain have the same effect as the colourless mist?"

"There are many theories out there. The most widely accepted theory says that it's because the thick colourless mist in the sky gets mixed with the water droplets and fall down to the ground during a rain."

"If that's true, then we won't be able to move out for some time even after the rain stops, right?"

"I can't really say for sure until the rain stops. There are also cases where the situation quickly comes back to normal once the rain stops, but there are also cases that it gets worse instead."

“…Are you sure that theory is correct?”

“Like I said, there are many theories out there. There are many things that humans don’t understand, you know.”

Akira was obviously not fully satisfied by that answer, but he decided to stop digging any deeper.

The children from Sheryl’s gang were doing all kinds of things to pass the time. Some of them were even playing trump card using the deck that they found among the relics.

Sheryl left everyone behind and went to Akira’s place.

“Uhmm, is it okay if I sit beside you?”

Akira looked up to Sheryl, she was smiling at him while trying to figure out his mood.

“I’m in the middle of my escort duty right now. So just don’t cling on me. It’ll slow me down if anything happens. And also, don’t sit too close.”

Although Sheryl took her gang to Higaraka Residence Ruin because of the offer from Akira, it was still recognized as a formal request in the Hunter Office. Thus the record of this request will also be shown in Akira’s battle record in the Hunter Office website.

The reward from that request was 10,000 Aurum. Including the brokerage fee for the Hunter Office, it would be 20,000 Aurum. Since the request wasn’t submitted as an individually designated request in the Hunter Office site, it was possible for a completely unknown Hunter to take that request too. But such a possibility was highly unlikely.

It was the lowest possible reward for a request that was submitted in the Hunter Office as an individual request which was not from a company or an organization. Not to mention, the transportation would be handled by the Hunters, the ammo expense would be paid fully by the Hunter, the escort targets were just small children who knew nothing about fighting, the

request would take a whole day, and to top it off, the reward payment would be given only after the request was finished.

If Hunters flood to take this request, it would be very suspicious. Although it was to be expected, there was no other Hunter who took that request except Akira. And just to be safe, after Akira finished the administration work to take that request in the Hunter Office, the request was closed. Thus preventing other Hunters from taking that request.

The reason why Akira took the exploration as a formal request through the Hunter Office was to strengthen his resolve. Since it was a formal request, it put him under more pressure to fulfil his duty of protecting Sheryl and her gang. It was a form of his determination as well as a way to convince Sheryl that he would not abandon her just because he did not get paid for escorting her.

That was why Akira said that he was in the middle of a job and hence it would be stupid to let Sheryl cling on him while he was working.

“I understand.”

Sheryl then sat one person space away from Akira, she was relieved that it seemed Akira’s mood was at least better compared to when they were outside.

“The rain is not slowing at all, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, the weather forecast said that it would be a clear day though. Well, it was from a free weather forecast, so I guess it’s not really that accurate, huh? Ah, it might as well be because it’s a weather forecast for Kugamayama city and not Higaraka Residence ruin. Ahh, that makes sense then, it’s not like those people in the inner wall care about the weather in the wasteland after all.”

“It would be bad if it doesn’t rain at all, so it’s a good thing that it rains from time to time. With the humid atmosphere and the wet ground, the air feels much more gentle.”

“Well, it’s all good that it rains from time to time, but I hope that it will not rain when the weather forecast that I checked said that it won’t rain. I just hope that the tire won’t get stuck in the mud. I guess I’ll have to pick another route to go back home.”

Sheryl was only talking about her impression of the weather while Akira was talking about what he should do to adapt to the rain. Both of them were basically talking about the same thing but focused on two different subjects. Akira noticed Alpha was smiling as she watched that exchange.

“…What?”

“It’s nothing. Look there, Sheryl is wearing the clothes that you gave her the other day, you know?”

After Alpha said that, Akira took another look at Sheryl’s clothes. He did not really remember it, but it was actually one of the dresses that he gave to Sheryl.

Sheryl noticed Akira’s gaze, she then smiled and said.

“This is one of the dresses that I received from you, how does it look?”

There were a lot of parts on that dress that did not really fit Sheryl’s body. But because she was used to that kind of dress and because of some adjustment that she made, it did not look weird on her. It was the result of her skill on how to use a dress as well as the trial and errors that she did beforehand in front of a mirror.

As for the underclothing, the old-world underclothes was, for some reason, very flexible and stretchy. Thanks to that, even a petite girl like Sheryl could use them comfortably. Although they do have a sexy design, it was not like people would be able to get a peek as long as she did not do any crazy stunt, and since she planned to only let Akira see them, Sheryl did not have any problem with them.

Sheryl, herself, was actually hoping to get some light compliment, something like ‘they look good on you’. She thought that she should be able

to at least get that since she received that dress from Akira, that was why she asked Akira for his opinion.

Akira stared at Sheryl, he then frowned and looked a bit troubled. After a small pause, he hesitated and said.

“…Well, I think it’s okay.”

“I-I see.”

Although Akira gave a vague response, Sheryl was somehow able to keep up her smile when she said that.

There was an awkward silence between them. After that, Akira suddenly spoke something that sounded like he was confessing his sin.

“Well, uhh, to be honest, those are clothes that I found in the ruin. It’s just that, I didn’t check them when I gave them to you, so some of them might have a weird design. Well, if you find them having strange designs, uhh, you don’t have to use them, you can just throw them away, you know?”

Akira did not have any sense of fashion at all. He had no problem using a piece of cloth as long as it had no tears or holes. Even now, he always wore his augmented suit outside, thus there was no occasion where Akira could train his fashion sense.

There was also a time when Akira was doing close combat training with Alpha. At that time, Alpha would change her dress into a battle outfit from the old-world and it was a suggestive dress that was much more seductive than being naked. When he saw that, it made him really doubt the fashion sense of the old-world people.

The dresses that Akira gave to Sheryl were old-world clothing. So he thought that some of them might have a weird design just like what he once saw from Alpha. Of course, since he more or less had already gotten used to the old-world design, he was not able to tell apart those clothing from others, and so he was worried if he had given some dresses with a weird design according to the current standard to Sheryl without knowing it.

Sheryl, who noticed that Akira suddenly looked worried, carefully picked her words to reply to him.

After listening to Akira’s story, Sheryl more or less understood the situation. She then smiled to reassure him and said.

“I’m using this dress since I really like it, so please don’t worry about that.”

“Is that so? It’s all good then. So… Well, yeah, it looks good on you.”

Akira thought that everything was good as long as the one using it was okay with it.

“Thank you very much.”

Sheryl smiled happily after she got the reaction that she wanted from Akira.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 78, Extra Guests

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The rain continued, it was not getting worse, but it was not letting up either.

Akira regularly went outside the room and checked the surroundings. He was checking the situation around the mansion while keeping close distance to the main room so he could quickly return back to where Sheryl was in case he spotted anything. His information-gathering device was also working just fine as long as it was indoor. Up until now, he had not met any monsters looking for a shelter from the rain yet.

Akira then thought.

“I hope that this situation would continue.”

Alpha smiled bitterly.

“When you say it like that, it sounds as if you’re rising your death flag, you know.”

“Nothing will happen. This is easy, we just need to wait for the rain to stop before going back home.”

“That in itself also did not sound good.”

“Okay okay, I just need to shut up, right?”

In contrast to Alpha who was smiling teasingly there, Akira pouted.

After Akira went back and forth from the main room several times, he spotted Sheryl looking displeased.

It was rather obvious that Sheryl was in a bad mood, but the moment she noticed Akira, she immediately welcomed him with a smile. Maybe because she could not fully hide the displeasure inside her, her smile somehow looked slightly awkward.

As Akira was about to sit next to Sheryl, he asked Erio who was standing near him.

“Did something happen?”

Erio glanced at Sheryl. Sheryl looked back at Erio while smiling. But her eyes were telling Erio not to say anything unnecessary.

Erio did something that angered Sheryl a few days ago, so he couldn’t afford to make it worse. While on the other hand, he also could not afford to worsen Akira’s mood either.

Akira was a dangerous person who would kill without any hesitation. There was even an occasion when he dragged the corpse of the person that he killed to the base of the gang that person was affiliated with. But Akira was harmless as long as he was not hostile. Unless the children of Sheryl’s gang told themselves that, they would need extra courage to even talk with Akira. That was the Akira that Erio knew. Although it should be fine for now since Sheryl was basically having him under control, Akira was still a dangerous person.

Erio carefully answered Akira’s question as not to worsen both his and Sheryl’s mood.

“There was a little dispute, but it’s already over.”

“I see.”

Akira only said that before he sat next to Sheryl.

Erio was relieved that he was at least able to avoid worsening Akira’s mood. He then glanced at Sheryl, who was still smiling at him.

It was not like Sheryl was obviously glaring at him. So Erio thought that she was not angry and it should be fine, or at least, that was what Erio prayed.

Since Sheryl’s heart leaned on Akira and as he was now back beside her, she returned to her normal self. Akira, who saw that change, thought that it was not something bad. So he just decided to stop thinking about it.

As Akira was taking a rest there before the next patrol, Sebla approached him. Sheryl’s mood quickly turned sour again.

Sebla then said to Akira.

“I have something I want to talk with you…”

“No, you don’t, now get back to your place.”

Sheryl interjected and glared at Sebla.

“I’m talking with Akira here.”

“I’m the boss of the gang and I’m telling you to get back to your place.”

“You’re just a proxy in the end, aren’t you? No matter how you look at it, the real boss here is Akira.”

Sheryl and Sebla were glaring at each other.

There were some children in Sheryl’s gang who thought that Sheryl was just a proxy for Akira. Most of the members who joined recently had a strong impression about it. While the senior members of the gang were much more afraid of Akira than Sheryl that they chose to carefully observe

the situation as it developed. Thus prolonging the misunderstanding about Sheryl's actual position in the gang.

So in short, they thought that if they could appeal to Akira, then they could ignore Sheryl's opinion. Although that was true, there was no mistaking it that it was a bad choice of action.

Akira was basically just helping Sheryl as an individual. He was not helping Sheryl's gang in particular. As such, if anyone from Sheryl's gang came directly to Akira to appeal to him, Akira would flatly reject them.

Akira sighed and said.

"So, what is it?"

Since it seemed that Akira was willing to hear what he had to say, Sebla snickered mockingly at Sheryl. Sheryl glared at Sebla even more as she stepped back, it was because Akira was saying that he was willing to listen to Sebla.

Sebla then continued.

"Well, since the rain is not letting up at all, I just thought that it might be a good idea to search the mansion while waiting for the rain to stop."

Akira was just silently looking at Sebla, waiting for him to continue. While on the other hand, Sebla was waiting for Akira's reply. So they were just looking at each other silently. Sebla's smile vanished, and right when he started looking confused, Akira opened his mouth.

"…So then?"

"Like I said, it's a good idea to search for relics in this mansion."

Akira sounded exasperated as he said to Sebla.

"No. I'm in the middle of a job and that is to make sure of Sheryl's and the other children's safety. Don't tell me you haven't noticed it."

Sebla then annoyedly replied to Akira.

“So you’re basically our bodyguard, right?”

“That’s not right. When I say other children, it means the children who view Sheryl as the head of the gang. So it doesn’t include the children who won’t listen to her.”

Sebla’s face twitched, Akira was basically saying that he wouldn’t protect him. So Sebla quickly changed to provocation.

“What? Are you scared or something? Or like, you have no confidence at all?”

“Yeah yeah, I’m scared and I don’t trust my own skill.”

Akira just flatly took in Sebla’s provocation as if it was nothing. Sebla was taken aback. Sheryl, who was also listening at that exchange, was surprised. Akira then continued.

“The monsters are scary, that’s exactly why they’re called ‘monsters’. You don’t even know that? And also, I have priority on who I’m going to protect. First of all, I need to make sure of Sheryl’s safety before protecting the people who are with her. But even after I can be sure that Sheryl and her gang is safe, I have no plans to worry about the safety of the people who try to pick a fight against the monsters on their own volition.”

Not only was Akira mocking Sebla’s futile action, he was also saying that he put Sebla’s safety as his last priority. As Sebla obviously winced back, Sheryl was smiling happily since Akira said that he would prioritize her safety.

Akira looked annoyed as he continued.

“If you want to go search the mansion, you can just go ahead and do that. I won’t stop you. My job is to protect Sheryl and her gang. So stopping you from killing yourself is not included in my job description. So yeah, you can go ahead and do whatever you want.”

After he heard Akira's straight answer, Sebla gave up trying to have Akira protect him while he searched the mansion. But he still wanted to go search the mansion.

Since they arrived at the mansion, Sebla kept thinking that he might be able to find some expensive relics inside such a luxurious looking mansion. And if he did find some and sold them in secret, he would be able to buy some powerful weapon and live a better life working as a Hunter.

As there was someone who had realized all of Sebla's crazy dream right in front of him, he was caught in an even crazier dream.

Sebla went silent and thought. He then lowered his request and pointed at Akira's AAH assault rifle.

"…T-then, at least lend me that gun."

Sebla himself had no plan to search the mansion unarmed. So putting it in another way, he would search the mansion if he could get himself a rifle. As far as he could recognize, other than Akira's equipment, he did not think there was that much difference between him and Akira.

Akira looked obviously exasperated as he said to Sebla.

"What the heck are you saying now? There's no way I would lend you my rifle."

"But it's not like you're using it right now."

"Are you for real? Do you really think that is enough of a reason to lend you my rifle? Are you sure you're okay in the head?"

There was no reason for Akira to lend Sebla his rifle. In his mind, lending his rifle to Sebla was equal to losing his rifle for nothing. Not to mention, Sebla might point that rifle at him, which was basically worse than simply losing his rifle.

When Akira got his calm back, he started to doubt Sebla's sanity.

“Listen here, you’re basically still barely included as one of the people that I have to protect, that is if you don’t do anything crazy. If you keep bugging me like this, I’ll have no other choice but to think of you as an obstruction to my job and remove you from my escort target. If you understand, then get lost. You’re bothering me.”

After Akira gave him a strong rejection, he looked away from Sebla as if he had lost interest in him.

Sebla looked frustrated and stood staring at Akira for some time before he returned to the opposite side of the room. He then sat down leaning his back against the wall, bent his head down, and started mumbling.

Sheryl appeared happy. She was smiling in delight as she was so thankful that Akira took her side. She looked at Sebla, who was walking away, as she felt a sense of victory.

The rain was still pouring down.

As Akira was patrolling the area, Alpha suddenly moved in front of him and pointed her finger outside the window.

“Akira, over there.”

Akira peeked outside the mansion. Thanks to the vision enhancement from Alpha, his vision zoomed into the direction where Alpha was pointing her finger. She was pointing at a vehicle that was heading in his direction.

“The other Hunters, huh? I just hope they won’t cause any trouble but…”

Akira felt that his hope would get betrayed and his bad premonition would happen, that was why he stopped there. He then headed back to the room to inform Sheryl and her gang about the Hunters.

***

Not too long after Akira and Sheryl’s gang took shelter from the rain in that mansion, another vehicle was also heading to Higaraka Residence Ruin. It was a closed-roof car that was designed to explore the wasteland, a big

symbol of the rental company that owned that vehicle was painted on the side of that vehicle.

There were 3 Hunters in that vehicle. Guyver and Colbert were sitting on the backseats while Dale was driving the vehicle.

Guyver said to Dale.

“Say, isn’t it better if we just head straight to Kugamayama city?”

“Didn’t I tell you before that we can’t do that in the middle of this rain?”

“It would be fine. We’ve put some distance between us and that ruin, I’m sure that dangerous-looking monster must have lost us by now.”

“We might still meet it again on our way back, you know. Not to mention that this car is a rental car, so its auto-drive function might get activated when it receives damage. When that happens, it’ll return back to the city on autopilot and I won’t be able to control it. What would you do about it if that happens? In the worst-case scenario, this vehicle might even bring that monster back to the city with it and I’m sure the city defense squad would blow that monster together with us the moment they spot it.”

“You’re just overthinking it.”

When Guyver brushed Dale’s worry as him overthinking it and laughed at him, Dale quickly turned at him with an annoyed face.

Then Colbert joined their conversation as he asked Dale.

“So, why Higaraka Residence Ruin?”

“You remember that big mansion inside the ruin, right? I’m thinking of taking shelter there.”

“It’s not like we have to go to that particular mansion, right? If you just want to take shelter while waiting for the rain to stop, we can just pick a random building around this area.”

“We don’t know how long this rain will stay. So if it’s possible, I want to take a good rest in a big room rather than in a cramped space like inside this vehicle.”

“Good grief!”

When he heard that snide remark from Colbert, Dale held himself back while telling that this would be the last time he went out to the wasteland together with both of them.

[That damn mediator!! Picking these dumb guys for me!! I’ll definitely file a complaint later!!]

Deep inside his heart, Dale kept cursing the mediator who introduced Guyver and Colbert to him.

Dale, Guyver, and Colbert did not go on an expedition together normally. They were all just registered under the same mediator and so they were just temporarily on the same team.

In the eastern district, there were several companies that acted as mediators between Hunters. They would introduce Hunters with other Hunters depending on the requirements set by those Hunters. These requirements included a lot of things such as the level of danger of the ruin that they wanted to explore, the type of request that they were willing to take together, the way to divide the reward, their equipments, Hunter Rank, battle record, and even age, gender and personality.

Most of the Hunters in the eastern district were utilising such mediator’s service. It was because a good mediator company often only introduced reliable and trustworthy Hunters. After all, these mediators would not accept Hunters with bad records. For example, those Hunters who always lose their team members in the wasteland for some reason, or those Hunters who are known to increase the risk of the exploration for other Hunters in the team. These Hunters would get rejected when they tried to register their names in those mediator companies. It was the same for the Hunters who got a lot of complaints after they were introduced to the other Hunters. With

such a process of elimination, the Hunters who were left were usually trustworthy and reliable ones.

In the case when the company was requested by the City Management to send Hunters for some requests that had something to do with public image, it would prioritize those Hunters who had good personalities due to their track record.

In order to prevent the Hunters with powerful weapons from turning into bandits, the Corporate Government usually put a requirement on certain requests that the Hunters had to be registered with a mediator company and must have a relatively good image.

Dale usually worked alone and only formed a team temporarily with the help of a mediator company.

He had a hint and was looking for a particular ruin that might earn him a lot of money. Although he was able to get the information about where that ruin was through his connection, he did not get the information about the monsters around that ruin. Because of that, he thought that it would be a bad idea to go there alone and ended up asking the mediator company to introduce him to some Hunters. And those Hunters were Guyver and Colbert.

Result-wise, Dale's expedition ended up as a failure this time. They were not able to get their hands on any expensive relics and when they decided to just go back home, they encountered a powerful monster and had to escape that ruin in a hurry.

Dale believed that it was Guyver's and Colbert's fault that they failed.

[This Guyver guy can't even properly scan the area for monsters, he was just loitering aimlessly in the ruin and got detected by monsters because of that!! And that Colbert didn't even try to hide it when he was about to abandon us!! It's would have been much better if I had come here alone!! I'll never work together with these two again!!]

But all this was from Dale’s point of view. Both Guyver and Colbert thought that Dale was too scared to make any swift decision which made their expedition a total failure.

In all actuality, it might be just a matter of compatibility between their personalities, but putting that aside, all of them still felt awkward after that failure.

As Dale parked the vehicle near the mansion, he noticed Akira’s vehicle.

He took a good look at Akira’s vehicle.

“Someone’s here first, huh. Well, it’s raining cats and dogs here, no wonder another Hunter would come up with the same idea.”

Guyver glanced at Akira’s vehicle as he was putting on a camouflaging sheet on their vehicle.

“It’s packed with relics though. I wonder where all these relics came from?”

It was obvious that the tray was packed with a lot of relics, but because it was covered with a camouflaging sheet, Guyver could not really see how many relics were in it.

“I bet it’s from this ruin.”

Colbert suddenly interjected in, but when Guyver heard that, he replied back as if he was mocking Colbert.

“There are only garbage relics left in this ruin, you know. There’s no way someone would even go as far as preparing a detachable cart just to carry relics out from this ruin.”

Colbert annoyedly replied back.

“Then where do you think all of those relics come from?”

“Like hell if I know.”

Guyver snapped back at Colbert.

They then checked the area around that mansion. There were dead monsters around the area but there was nothing suspicious. They then noticed Akira by the end of a hallway.

Akira was standing near the entrance of one of the rooms, he was watching the surroundings with CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun in his hands. He also noticed Dale and the other Hunters the moment they came in sight.

Akira walked a few steps toward them before opening his mouth.

“I’m sorry to tell you this, but can you take any other room? We’re using this room to take shelter from the rain.”

Dale raised both of his hands, trying to tell Akira that they were not hostile.

“Calm down, we’re also Hunters. We’re only here to take shelter from the rain on our way back home from the ruins. Are you also on your way back from a ruin? Just so you know, I have no plans to cause any trouble.”

Guyver and Colbert lowered their guns. When he saw that, Akira also lowered his guns.

He then said.

“I’m also a Hunter, but I’m here today for an escort request. If you have no business with us, I hope that you would take shelter somewhere else…”

Since Akira wanted to reduce any unpredictable factors, he hoped that Dale would take his friends somewhere else.

But Dale did not step back.

“Don’t say that. This must be some kind of fate. Let’s at least share information.”

Dale wanted to have someone to talk to about his expedition, or to be more precise, he wanted someone that could help him vent his stress by complaining about Guyver and Colbert. Moreover, making connections was essential for Hunters, and that was doubly true when it came to a Hunter like Akira who was nice enough to be there as an escort and not for hunting relics. Thus Dale wanted to make some connections with Akira if it was possible.

Guyver threw a friendly smile at Akira.

“I don’t mind if you want to exchange relics too, you know? Moreover, if you’re here as an escort, it’s your employer who will decide to meet us or not, right?”

Guyver could not forget about the relic pile that was on Akira’s cart. He thought that if he could somehow ask the owner of those relics to exchange some of it, he might be able to see what kind of relics were in that pile.

Akira hesitated for a bit, he then decided to ask Sheryl. After all, getting more connections with the other Hunters might be a good thing for Sheryl. That was why Akira decided to ask her rather than making his own decision.

“…I’ll go and ask then, wait here for a sec.”

After saying that, Akira went back to the room where Sheryl and her gang were.

Sheryl heard about the situation from Akira and decided to meet with Dale and his friends. Akira was a bit surprised by that, but since Sheryl decided to do so, he had no plan to criticize her at all. He then let Dale and his friends into the room.

After that, Dale and his friends introduced themselves to Sheryl and continued talking with her. While they were doing that, Akira was just standing silently next to Sheryl with both CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun on his hands without lowering his guard at all.

Among the three of them, Dale was the one who was talking the most with Sheryl. From their conversation, it felt like they could get along well with each other.

Sheryl smiled while listening to Dale, it was as if her eyes were sparkling, showing her interest in what the other person had to say. She enthusiastically encouraged Dale to continue his story, sympathized with his complaints, and praised his hard work.

She already understood how much effect her beauty had when talking with others, that was why she thoroughly took care of her skin and hair every day. She was also wearing an old-world dress that looked expensive and was using it skillfully as if she was familiar with such dresses. While on the other hand, since the other children present were only wearing clothing that was a bit better than most of the children in the slum city, it boosted Sheryl's appearance even more.

Sheryl continued her silly talk with Dale while trying to convey that she was not hostile. Because of that, Dale could not stop venting his stress from his failed expedition that day. As a result, their conversation dragged longer and longer.

Dale, who seemed to be interested in Sheryl, stopped boasting about himself and asked about her and her gang.

"So then, uhmmm, are you some kind of representative or something?"

"Yes, I'm the representative of a small gang in the lower district of the Kugamayama city, or more like, I'm the head of that small gang."

"That's a pretty impressive feat considering that you're still so young, what's the name of your gang?"

"It's still a small gang, so we don't have a name yet. Not to mention that it'll attract more attention if we have a name and it might cause needless conflict. We're trying to lay low and avoid any problem right now."

"I see… It sounds rough."

“Not at all, compared to the hard time that the Hunters have when facing the monsters out in the dangerous wasteland, our problem is not that bad. We don’t have anything that can be compared to the rewards that the Hunters get from hunting monsters or from selling relics. By the way, what kind of relics did you find lately?”

“Well, let’s see…”

Dale tried to remember the relics that he sold lately as they continued their conversation.

“Say, Alpha. This might be just my imagination, but…”

Akira who was standing silently next to Sheryl was a bit surprised and somehow a bit terrified, but he tried his best not to show it outside as he asked Alpha for a confirmation.

“Sheryl is trying to probe information out of those Hunters while keeping her own information a secret. I agree with you about that point, I think that she’s doing it intentionally.”

“…I thought so.”

The conversation between Sheryl and Dale was mostly about Dale’s team. Although the conversation shifted to about Sheryl from time to time, she was always able to subtly steer the topic back about Dale and his friends and it seemed that Dale did not notice that at all.

Dale and Sheryl talked about a lot of things. When the topic was about the ruin, they would talk about the monsters that Dale had encountered or about the relics that he had found in the past. Although all of them were information that a Hunter would not normally share with the other Hunters except when they were getting paid, thanks to Sheryl’s sympathy and praises, Dale started blurting out those information for free.

And even after that, Sheryl would still occasionally show her sympathy or throw some praises exactly when he was expecting for them, thus Dale just could not stop himself.

As he was watching Dale continue blurting out those sensitive information, Akira tried to remember all of his exchanges with Sheryl and asked Alpha.

“I didn’t leak any information when I talked with Sheryl up until now, right?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll properly warn you when you’re about to make that blunder.”

“I see. Well, the only sensitive information that I have is about you, so I guess it should be okay, huh?”

“Well, Akira, you sometimes lowered your guard and turned at my direction. So she might think that you have a weird habit of looking at a random direction when you’re deep in thought, but that’s all.”

“…Wait, that’s because you always wear strange clothing, you know? Is it still my fault?”

“It’s not like I’m saying that it’s your fault. And also, it’s so rude of you to say that. If you keep saying something like that, I’ll start using even weirder clothing to train you.”

Alpha was smiling invincibly and teasingly at Akira.

“I’m sorry… please don’t…”

Akira quickly apologized. He did not want to see Alpha in any super strange clothing that would even take him by surprise.

As Dale was boasting about his ‘adventurous’ story to Sheryl, Guyver was keeping distance while silently observing them.

Guyver was surprised when he entered that room since the scene inside was so much different from what he was expecting. He thought he would find Hunters resting inside the room. Since there was only one vehicle with its cart filled with relics, judging from that, he expected to find at most 6 Hunters. He also thought that Akira was guarding the entrance since he was the weakest among those 6 Hunters.

Some Hunters preferred to work as a paid mercenary to accompany other Hunters to the wasteland while any relics that they found during their expedition would all be owned by their employers. Guyver thought that Akira was one of those Hunters.

But what he found inside that room was a beautiful young girl who employed Akira and the other small children in shoddy looking clothing. It did not seem that there was another Hunter except Akira inside that room. Those children did not even seem like they could handle a fight well.

While Dale was talking with Sheryl, Guyver scanned the room and lightly checked all the children in the room. He also kept his eyes on Akira whilst trying to figure out Sheryl's situation from what he heard from their conversation.

After Guyver finished checking everything there, he then interjected in Dale's and Sheryl's conversation.

"Can I say something for a bit here? I have a suggestion, this must be some kind of fate that we met each other here. We're both on our way back from hunting relics. So how about we exchange relics? Although we don't have that many, we got ourselves some good relics, you know?"

There were not that many Hunters who would sell all of the relics that they found in the ruins to the Hunter Office. So in order to adjust the relics that they collected according to the type of the relics preferred by the merchants that they sold those relics to, Hunters sometimes exchanged relics between each other. Usually, Guyver's suggestion was a profitable one for both sides.

But Sheryl looked apologetic as she declined that offer.

"I'm really sorry. The relics that we gathered are nothing more than cheap relics. I don't think we have anything worth exchanging."

"Don't worry, every merchant out there has a different preference. Your relics might not be worth much if you sell to the merchant that you frequent, but they might fetch a good price with the merchant that we

frequent. Don’t worry about the price, it’s not like we have to exchange anything if we don’t find anything worth exchanging.”

“But it would take some time for us to unload the relics.”

“I’m the one suggesting it, so we’ll help out too.”

“…We’re planning to head back to the city as soon as the rain stops, so it might be a bit hard time-wise to unload them and load them again immediately afterwards…”

Although Sheryl was trying to decline his offer, Guyver kept pressuring her. Even though Dale found it weird that Sheryl was trying to decline the offer, because he liked her more than Guyver, he took Sheryl’s side.

“Whoah there, it’s not like you have to press her to do that, right?”

“…Well, that’s true, sorry about that.”

After Dale interjected, Guyver quickly apologized.

The reason why Sheryl refused the offer to exchange relics was to avoid having Dale and his friends looking down at her gang after seeing the cheap relics that her gang had gathered.

Sheryl noticed that Dale and his friends were misunderstanding her position. It seemed that they thought her to be the head of some kind of a big gang. Basically, they thought that Sheryl was someone with quite a load of money.

To be honest, Sheryl was just the head of a small gang and she did not have much money. Normally, she would not even be in that place. It was all thanks to Akira, who provided the transportation means and guard escort, that she was able to come to that place. Moreover, Akira paid for all the expenses for their expedition. Although Sheryl did pay some amount of money as a request reward to him, it was just a small portion of what he had paid in order to prepare for the expedition. And, in the end, the money that

Sheryl used to pay Akira was the money that she got thanks to him in the first place.

If Dale and his friends noticed that the pile of relics in the cart was nothing more than just cheap relics and Sheryl and her gang were nothing more than just powerless and penniless children of the slum city, they would treat her and her gang differently. In the worst-case scenario, they might even start attacking her gang. That was what she thought.

Sheryl was immensely relieved that she had coaxed Dale. Thanks to that, she was able to maintain the trio’s misunderstanding.

Although, it was still unclear whether it was a good or a bad thing.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 79, Hunters In Debt

Index

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While they were waiting for the rain to stop, Guyver suddenly said to Dale.

“It’s so boring that we have nothing to do here, so I’m going to look for relics around here for a bit.”

Dale looked surprised and asked Guyver.

“You do know that there are no expensive relics left around this place, right?”

“It’s fine, I’m just going to search for relics to pass the time. Moreover, there are dead monsters around the area, so I might find some equipments left by the Hunters that those monsters killed.”

“…I see. Well, it’s up to you.”

Although he said that, Dale cursed Guyver deep inside his heart.

[Geh! Damn hyena!!]

There were all kinds of Hunters out there. Dale was someone who thought that it was rude to salvage equipment from the dead corpses of the other Hunters.

It would be fine if it was something that he stumbled upon by pure chance. But if he started to go to the wasteland to intentionally salvage equipment from the dead Hunters, Dale believed that it would only be a matter of time before he started to hunt for equipment from the still alive Hunters too.

Dale thought that Guyver would leave the room right after that, but instead, he went to the other side of the room, to a group of Sheryl's gang's members. He then started speaking with them while mostly focused on Sebla.

"I'm going to search the mansion, you guys want to come?"

Everyone there looked surprised when Guyver said that to them. Dale quickly interjected.

"What the heck are you thinking you're doing?"

Guyver replied back flatly without a trace of hostility.

"What? I'm just inviting them to search for relics."

"I'm telling you that you shouldn't bring them with you without Sheryl's permission!! Or more like, do you think they can hold a fight in the first place?!!"

"It's not like I'm forcing them to come. Moreover, I don't expect them to help me fight monsters, I'm inviting them to help me carry relics. I'll do the fighting. Ahhh, are you worried that we might cause a dispute when dividing the loot? I'll just give them the relics if they're just cheap relics. Like I said before, I'm just looking for a way to spend time."

The children that Guyver invited glanced at Sheryl's direction. Although Akira's expression did not change at all, Sheryl who was beside him obviously looked a little angry. They wanted to search for relics in that

mansion, however, they hesitated to take Guyver's offer since it might cause Sheryl to get even angrier at them.

But that was excluding one person who had already annoyed Sheryl beforehand.

Sebla cautiously asked Guyver.

"Are you seriously going to give the relics to us?"

Guyver smiled and replied.

"Yeah, I have no interest in cheap relics after all."

"Alright then, I'll come with you."

As Sebla stood up, Guyver's smile widened.

Guyver was about to bring Sebla with him without Sheryl's permission, looking at that, Sheryl was making an unpleasant face. Dale was determined to stop Guyver if it was needed, so he asked Sheryl.

"Are you sure you don't need to do anything?"

"I won't stop him, but I won't take responsibility either."

Sheryl answered briefly without any change in her expression.

It was obvious that she had already given up on Sebla. She did not mind if Sebla died after going with Guyver, she also planned to leave him behind in case if the rain stopped and he had not returned. Of course, even if he returned back to the city after that, Sheryl planned to kick him out from the gang.

And if Sebla caused any trouble for Guyver, she had no plans to listen if Guyver came to her to complain nor she planned to apologize to him.

Guyver and Sebla then left that room. For some reason, Sheryl looked slightly relieved.

Now that Guyver was no longer in that room, Dale quickly vented his irritation about Guyver by complaining about him to Sheryl.

After Sebla and Guyver left that room, rather than starting to look for relics around that mansion, they quickly moved to another room away from where they were. After Sebla entered that room, Guyver checked his surroundings before closing the door.

Guyver then pulled a battered chair and sat on it with its backrest to his front. He then reached to his back and signalled Sebla with his head to take the other chair.

“Well, just take a seat.”

Sebla looked confused as he obediently took a seat while Guyver just kept smiling at him.

Guyver actually invited Sebla to come with him since he knew that Sebla also wanted to look for relics in that mansion but did not have the ability to do so alone, and to top it off, he seemed to be displeased with Akira and Sheryl.

This was because Sebla was unconsciously looking down on Akira and Sheryl. He thought that Akira was only a boy who got a little lucky which allowed him to buy powerful weapons while Sheryl was only a girl who got ahead of herself after getting Akira’s support.

That was why Sebla was not really scared even when Sheryl and Akira were next to him. And although Akira was someone who might kill him in a single snap of a finger without any hesitation, his hatred and prejudice toward them dulled his sense of danger.

While on the other hand, unlike Akira, Guyver, who was in front of him right now, was simply a stranger with enough strength to kill him. He was someone that Sebla just met, so he did not know anything about the other person.

That was why Sebla felt a little scared. But in order to hide his fear, he asked Guyver.

“A-aren’t we going to look for relics?”

“Well, just calm down for now.”

Guyver was still smiling at him, but that smile did not even have the slightest trace of good-will.

“There’s one thing that I want to ask you. Don’t worry, it’s nothing bad. I just want to know your honest opinion about those guys.”

From the start, Guyver had no wish to search the mansion for relics at all. He was only interested in picking a random kid to gather more information about Sheryl and Akira.

He was actually having some problems with money. To be more precise, he had a huge debt. Although the deadline was closing in, he still had no idea how to pay his debt.

Today, he had actually lost his hope of repaying that debt. He had bought expensive information about a certain ruin where he might be able to discover expensive relics and so he was planning to find some expensive relics today to pay for his debt. Although that information came from a questionable source with questionable accuracy, it was enough for him to place his bet on that information.

Although there was a lot of frauds like that, fortunately enough, Guyver hit a jackpot. He got the information of several unexplored ruin sites where he might be able to find expensive relics.

Guyver was winning his gamble up to that point, but then bad things happened to him.

The information that he bought did not mention anything about the monsters in that ruin. When they encountered a strong monster, they had no other choice but to run away. If it was not for the other Hunters, who did

not expect to find those monsters and ended up dividing the attention of those monsters, they might not have been able to escape from that ruin alive.

In the end, they ended up bringing back only a small number of relics, and of course, they still had to divide those relics among themselves. Basically, it was not even close to enough for repaying his debt even if he took all of those relics for himself.

Lending money to the Hunters in the eastern district was a dirty business. After all, the Hunters did not have any stable income, they might even die anytime without notice. And since they were armed, there were cases where they even lashed back and refused to pay their debts. So in short, any companies in the eastern district that offered loans to those Hunters had prepared themselves with enough power to forcefully collect the money that the Hunters borrowed from them.

Guyver was desperate for money in order to avoid getting sent to the infamous hellish workplace to return his debt.

So he was now trying to get some information out of Sebla who looked a bit scared of him. Of course, he expected to get slightly inaccurate information out of Sebla about Sheryl and Akira. But even so, it was enough to get the information that he wanted.

Guyver’s desperation of money had already twisted his mind. Because of that, he strongly wished that the relic pile behind Akira’s vehicle was filled with expensive relics. Rather than deciding based on the information he would get from Sebla, he already made a guess that they were indeed expensive relics. That was why he started to gather more information in order to confirm his guess.

Right from the start, Guyver already thought that Sheryl was on her way back from another ruin. And that ruin was an unexplored ruin and the information about which had not spread among the Hunters. He thought that Sheryl was trying to secretly carry out relics from that particular unexplored ruin.

There were two ways to make sure that certain important information would not leak to the public–either only tell the people that one absolutely trusted, or make sure that other people who also knew that information are dead.

Guyver thought that it was the former case for Akira. According to what he heard from Sheryl, it seemed that she placed a lot of trust in Akira. That was why she only took Akira to escort her.

While the other children were the latter case. Guyver was sure that the other children were the children of the slum city who had no idea of the value of the relics that they gathered, and even if she killed those children once they did their job, it would not cause any ruckus at all. Basically, they were the perfect expendable pawns for secretly carrying out relics. That was why Guyver was sure that Sheryl was there to secretly carry out relics from an unexplored ruin.

But unlike what he expected, according to Sebla's information, those relics were gathered from Higaraka Residence Ruin. Although that took him by surprise, Guyver quickly returned back to his sense and made another guess to make everything click together.

He guessed that Sheryl used Higaraka Residence Ruin as a hidden stow or maybe a delivery place for sensitive relics that should be handled carefully. Guyver thought that Sheryl did that to disguise those relics as cheap relics.

According to Sebla, Sheryl was the one who decided which building to loot and what relics to take out from each building. And if she used slum city's children to help her and also prevented them from knowing what they were carrying, then everything would make sense.

Moreover, if the relics on the cart were really cheap relics, then there was no need to even put on a camouflaging sheet on top of it. So it must be those relics that would give Sheryl profit even after deducting the price of the escort, transportation, and the ammo expense.

Among all the children in that room, Akira and Sheryl had obviously better equipment than the rest of the children. Sheryl's dress also seemed to be an

old-world dress which was way better than the common dress. So basically, she must be someone who had enough money to buy old-world dresses.

Even though Sheryl brought with her an escort, Guyver refused to believe that she would intentionally go out to the dangerous wasteland herself if it was not for something that was worth that risk.

Guyver's twisted money sense because of the debt that he was shouldering caused his guess to lean more towards the direction that the relics on Akira's cart were expensive relics.

"Say, Sebla… Was it again? Ahh, I'm Guyver, I forgot to tell you my name before. So then, Sebla."

Sebla was overwhelmed by the ominous vibe from Guyver.

"W-what?"

Guyver was still smiling at Sebla as he continued. It was obvious from his voice that he had made his decision.

"I have a good idea, wanna listen?"

Sebla was completely drowned in Guyver's ominous aura.

___-*___*___*___

Nothing in particular happened as Akira continued waiting for the rain to stop. Not too far from him, Sheryl was talking with Dale and Colbert. Akira was standing there as Sheryl bodyguard, while the children from Sheryl's gang were doing various things to pass the time.

Then suddenly there was an explosion followed by gunshots. Although those sounds were drowned in the rain, the Hunters inside that room quickly reacted to that faint noise. Akira quickly covered Sheryl and scanned his surroundings. While Dale and Colbert quickly went to the window to check the source of that sound.

The moment Dale saw what was happening outside, he immediately shouted.

“Our vehicle!?!!”

Dale and Colbert panicked. Akira calmly and carefully checked outside the mansion, he could see a vehicle moving away from the mansion.

Akira checked that vehicle with his binocular, it was not his vehicle.

“It’s your vehicle, huh. No one is in that vehicle, you know?”

Dale shouted as he was obviously shocked by that sudden turn of events.

“The auto-drive home function, huh!? But that’s impossible!! It should still have enough armour plating on it!!”

Dale’s guess was correct, but it did not stop the vehicle from moving away from the mansion until it eventually vanished into the rain.

Not too long after that, Guyver returned back with more stuff than when he left the room.

Dale quickly ran to him.

“Guyver!! Our vehicle’s auto-drive activated and it went back to the city!!”

In contrast to Dale who was panicking, Guyver looked completely calm.

“Yeah, I know, it was the monster.”

“Hah?!”

“A monster attacked our vehicle, well, it’s because we just left it there in the open after all.”

“What do you mean?!”

According to Guyver’s explanation, he encountered a monster when he was passing near their vehicle. Although he was able to repel the monster back, it caused enough damage to activate the auto-drive function on their rental vehicle and Guyver was too busy facing the monster to stop their vehicle. It seemed that the explosion and the gunshots were from him fighting that monster.

Guyver unloaded the stuff that he was carrying on the floor.

“Fortunately, I was able to save the relics and our ammo reserve and equipments.”

Dale frowned, but his expression quickly turned grim.

“What exactly were you doing back then? If you could save all of this stuff from our vehicle, you should have had enough time to kill the monster, right?”

Guyver turned to Sebla and said.

“This guy said that he wanted to see our equipment, that was why I took these out of the vehicle. And as I was showing it to him, the monster suddenly came at us, you know. So it’s not like we were taking them out while fighting that monster.”

“But even so, you should have been able to protect our vehicle!!”

Guyver hesitated as he glanced at Sebla again.

“Well, uhh, I know that it’s my fault, but I can’t really protect the vehicle while also protecting this guy. So I ended up fighting that monster while using the vehicle as our cover, you see. It was also because I was caught off-guard since I couldn’t detect that monster thanks to the rain…”

Sebla looked apologetic and said.

“…I’m sorry.”

He then bent his neck so deep that no one there could see his face, because of that, Dale chose not to reprimand him any further. Since he thought that it was not a good thing to strongly blame Sebla in front of Sheryl, Dale just clicked his tongue and decided to hold himself from asking him to take responsibility.

But it did not change the fact that they lost their vehicle now. In that situation, in contrast to Dale, who was making a grim face, Guyver looked completely calm. It caused Dale to become even more annoyed.

"…You look pretty calm there, you know? How can you stay calm like that? We just lost our only means to return back home, you know?"

Guyver smiled lightly and said in a relaxed tone as if he was trying to calm Dale down.

"Just calm down. It's true that we lost our vehicle. But fortunately, there's still one vehicle left in this place, remember?"

Guyver then turned to Sheryl. Dale and Colbert followed suit and looked at Sheryl too. Sheryl's expression stiffened.

Dale then apologetically asked her.

"Well, that's how it is. So like, can you please give us a ride back to the city?"

Guyver too smiled and asked Sheryl.

"You'll basically get 3 more Hunters to escort you for free, so I think it's not a bad proposal, right? We can even drive the car for you if you want. It's hard to fight monsters while driving the vehicle for your Hunter there, right?"

That was not a bad offer for Sheryl, but she then glanced at Akira to check with him. Being the escort was Akira's job, if Akira seemed to have any objections, Sheryl would have to come up with some kind of explanation to reject that offer.

Akira did not change his expression as he carefully said to Sheryl.

“We don’t have much choice, let’s give them a ride.”

Sheryl then lightly bowed to Dale and his friends.

“Very well, Dale-san, Guyver-san, Colbert-san, we’ll be counting on you on our way back.”

“Just leave it to us.”

Dale confidently replied as the representative of that team.

Akira kept his eyes on Dale and his friends, to be honest, he was against giving them a ride back to the city. Although it was true that they would have more Hunters to help in case they had to fight monsters, it would also increase the unpredictable factors that he would have to handle.

But with that being said, if Akira declined that offer and left them in the wasteland, they might even start a fight. So to be honest, it was not like he had any other choice as he reluctantly agreed with their offer.

“Alpha, what do you think?”

“You definitely need to keep your eyes on them.”

“Thought so.”

Akira also figured that all of his good predictions would betray him and any of his bad premonitions would come into reality. Which in that case, he had to prepare himself to face it.

If he knew that his bad premonitions were accurate, then he could reduce the possible loss by getting himself ready to brace for it. If he did that, he would not sustain much damage even if it really happened. That was what Akira was telling himself in order to sustain his mental stability.

In the middle of the rain outside the mansion, there was a vehicle that was traversing the wasteland without any driver inside it, it was Dale’s vehicle.

A part of its armour plating was crumbling down. Because of that, the control unit installed in that vehicle judged that the vehicle would be destroyed at this rate. As such the auto-drive function inside it activated and drove the vehicle back to the city on auto-pilot.

The display of that vehicle's control unit was showing the reason as to why the auto-drive function was activated. It based its results on the findings of the diagnostic device installed in the control unit of that vehicle.

It was saying that the auto-drive function was activated because of the damage caused by gunshots or explosion. The scanning device installed in that vehicle did not detect any monsters around when that happened. The display was also showing a warning that shooting at the unit might cause a misunderstanding, in which case the evaluation of the customer might be lowered because of that.

The vehicle kept on heading towards the Kugamayama city while displaying that message which no one read.

It had been quite a while since Guyver returned back. Dale was checking the stuff that Guyver retrieved before their vehicle left. After checking the relics, he proceeded to check the equipment and the ammo reserves, his face suddenly turned grim.

"Hey! The decoy device is not here, nor the ammo."

The decoy device referred to any type of device that could be used to attract monsters' attention. There were a lot of ways to use them in the ruin, they could be used to gather monsters in one place and then take them out all together in one go, or they could be used to sneak from the monsters as they gathered in a certain place. These devices used all kinds of means like sound, heat, smell, light, or vibration to attract monsters.

Of course, if they were not careful when using the decoy devices, the Hunters could end up attracting powerful monsters from the deeper part of the ruin. There were various ways to activate them, some of them could be activated using remote activation, or time-set, or even by sensor trigger. Some of them could even be launched like a projectile.

These decoy devices were of course much more expensive than a normal bullet. And the decoy devices that they lost were all owned by Dale. So no wonder his face turned grim.

But then Guyver answered apathetically.

“They’re not there? They should be still in that vehicle then.”

“You didn’t take them out of the vehicle?”

“It’s not like I took all the equipment out from the vehicle. I only picked out the equipments that boy wanted to see.”

“…Dammit! Those are expensive, you know?”

Dale was extremely frustrated. If he knew this would happen, he would have used all the decoy devices when he escaped from that ruin. Even in the middle of that rain, they should at least still have some effects. If he had used the decoy devices to fool the monster back then, he would have had no need to take shelter from the rain in this mansion.

While Dale was still lamenting his loss, Guyver suddenly stood up and was about to leave the room again. But Dale annoyedly shouted at him.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“I’ll patrol the area while looking for relics in this mansion. After all, there might still be some monsters around.”

But then Dale snapped back at him.

“…Isn’t it because you roam around aimlessly that the monsters easily spot you? Isn’t that also the reason why our vehicle got attacked?”

Dale was basically blaming him for loitering around their vehicle and getting their vehicle attacked.

Guyver just laughed it off as he said.

“Even if you say so, there might still be some monsters around, you know? So it’s better if we keep our guards up, ain’t I right? Don’t worry, I won’t go near Sheryl’s vehicle. After all, I too don’t want to have to walk back to Kugamayama city.”

Guyver left the room after he said that. Sebla then followed behind him afterwards. When Dale saw that, he shouted at Guyver.

“Are you seriously going to bring that boy too!?”

“This boy also feels guilty about what happened and he’s trying to make it up for that blunder. So just let him do it, will you? You just stay here and protect Sheryl and the other children. If you don’t do at least that much, I feel like they won’t give us a ride back home after all. Later then.”

Guyver then left that room together with Sebla.

Akira kept looking at the door through which Guyver and Sebla exited the room. His bad feeling would not go away.

“Alpha, can you check what that Guyver guy is doing from here?”

“Unfortunately, they are outside my detection range. The rain really reduced my detection range after all.”

“I might be overthinking this, but in case if they mess with our vehicle, would you be able to tell from here?”

“If that’s the case, then there’s no need to worry. I’m connected to the control unit in your vehicle. Although I set the detection range to the minimum to conserve the energy, it would leave a record if anyone tries to approach it. You can look at that record from your information terminal, although, you won’t get the latest record unless you’re within the data transfer range.”

“Then it should be fine, huh…”

“Are you suspicious of them?”

“Yeah, I have a bad feeling about them. I always have a good sense when it comes to dangerous things, you see. There were times when I was saved thanks to that. Well, it’s not like everything will be fine as long as I don’t have any bad feelings, so I can’t completely put my guard down too.”

“…I see.”

Alpha thought that since Akira could connect to the old-world domain, he might have been receiving some kind of information without him even realizing it. He then might have been analyzing and interpreting that information unconsciously and mistook it as his intuition. After all, if he could come up with something without any basis, that would be easily interpreted as an intuition.

Although it looked like Alpha was smiling like usual, she was telling herself that she needed to be careful about that. Akira noticed that Alpha was staring at him. So he tilted his head and asked her.

“What’s wrong?”

“Hm? I was just thinking that you are being a bit too paranoid. It’s true that it’s a good thing to be careful of any possibilities, but it’s impossible to consider all kinds of possibilities in the first place, not to mention that it would be highly ineffective too. You can just leave that kind of things to me, I have confidence in my calculation ability after all!”

“Well, that’s true, I’ll be counting on you then.”

“Just leave it to me!”

Alpha smiled invincibly but gently to Akira.

Silavin: Ah! Damn it! This was the wrong time to try to brainwash him Alpha!

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Rebuild World – Chapter 80, Traumatized Hunter

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A few minutes passed by since Guyver and Sebla went out of the room.

While in the room, Dale was showing the relics that he gathered that day. Both Sheryl and her underlings were looking at those relics with full interest.

Dale proudly told them the tale of those relics.

“Of course, the people during the old-world did all kinds of jobs and it seems there were similar companies compared to the current age. It’s still unclear whether they had those companies since they were also human like us, or it is because the people of this era are imitating the old-world people. Well, putting that aside, take a look at this relic. This is a Yasunabashi Corp logo. There were bad and good companies among the old-world companies. Yasunabashi was one of those good old-world companies, so people are willing to buy their products at a good price. If these people are not being careful, they would buy anything at a good price as long as it has this logo. Because of that, some bad Hunters make counterfeits by affixing forged logo of Yasunabashi Corp onto some random garbage that they find. And it’s not rare for relics exchange centres to get fooled by that. But of course,

the relics exchange centres that properly examine the relics can quickly identify these fakes. I heard that it's easy to identify fake relics since this logo is printed with some kind of advanced old-world technology. After they discovered that, some Hunters who got lucky and found an old-world printing machine started using that machine to print this logo. And that's how these relics fakers and the people from the exchange centre are trying to outwit each other…"

"U-uhmmm."

Sheryl suddenly interrupted Dale who was enjoying himself.

"I'm really thankful for giving us all of this information, but are you sure it's okay to share this info?"

Although Sheryl did intentionally encourage Dale to leak out information, she was rather worried since he just could not stop blurting information. Sheryl thought that she should calm him down first and so she interrupted him there.

After Dale calmed down a bit and looked back at what he said, he also noticed that he might have said too much. But after he saw Sheryl's worried expression, he quickly came up with excuses to balance out all the information that he gave.

"Well, uhhh, it's not exactly a secret after all. So I think it's fine. Moreover, you can just take it as my payment for giving us a ride. I don't want to be left in the wasteland without any means to go back to the city after all."

"If that's the case, thank you very much for sharing them with us."

Sheryl lightly bowed and smiled at Dale, who blushed and started talking again.

Akira was observing them not too far away from them. He then asked Alpha while carefully trying to make sure that his expression did not change.

“That guy just blurted out secret information like it was nothing. So this is Sheryl’s ability, huh. To be honest, it’s a bit scary. If you ask me what exactly is scary about it, its the way she makes that guy happily leak information.”

From Akira’s point of view, the information that Dale was giving was valuable information. If Akira tried to get that information by normal means, it would take him a lot of money and time. Even the price of that information would put a dent on Akira’s savings. But Sheryl was able to extract those information through simple conversation. No wonder Akira felt a bit scared of her.

Alpha then told Akira her evaluation about Sheryl, she adjusted the way she said her evaluation in order to give Akira a warning at the same time.

“It’s because Sheryl knows her strength well and she’s using that to its fullest extent. She has the talent and now she’s the boss of a gang, I’m sure she made a lot of effort to sharpen that talent. Akira, you should be careful about her too, you know? And of course, this is not limited to Sheryl only. As you get stronger, more people will try to approach you to get some benefits out of you. It’s fine if they’ll also give some kind of benefits for you too, but I’m sure a lot of them are only going to leech off of you.”

Akira then tried to objectively evaluate himself.

“I understand. I’ll be fine, maybe… As long as they don’t try to bait me with good food like those meals from that restaurant.”

There was an occasion in the past when Shiori invited Akira for a meal in a high-class restaurant. After having experienced the level of meal that completely destroyed Akira’s view of food, he was not sure if he could keep his brain straight if he was baited with that kind of food. When something like that happens, he would have no other choice but hope that Alpha would stop him.

Alpha smiled and said.

“It seems that there’s a need for you to earn enough money to go to that restaurant from time to time, huh?”

“That’s very true.”

Akira sounded a bit optimistic when he said that.

Suddenly Alpha’s expression stiffened, Akira who noticed that quickly got his guard up.

“Akira, carefully peek out the window with your aiming device.”

“Is it a monster?”

“That’s what exactly you’re going to confirm. There’s some noise triggered within my detection range, if it’s not from a monster, then let’s just forget about it.”

The current Alpha was almost fully reliant on Akira’s information-gathering device to gather information. Because of the rain, Alpha’s detection range was greatly reduced, so in order to check more thoroughly, Akira had to do it himself using his aiming device.

Akira readied his rifle next to the window and peeked outside through the aiming device. He followed Alpha’s instructions to adjust the direction he was checking and so he quickly found the source of the noise.

“That thing, huh? That’s pretty big.”

Akira spotted a monster away from the mansion. It was obvious from the first glance that it was a carnivorous monster. Its fur that was drenched in rain looked heavy for some reason.

That monster was sniffing around as if it was looking for something, but it did not seem that it had noticed Akira.

“It doesn’t seem like it’s heading this way… Right? It seems that it’s looking for something around that area though, I wonder if there’s anything there?”

Although that monster had not noticed Akira yet, it also would not move away from the mansion. It kept on loitering around in the same area.

“It’s keeping a distance that’s bothering me, is it a form of bullying or something?”

“I don’t remember doing anything bad to that monster though.”

Although they had to be careful with that monster, it was not like that monster was coming at him either. After Alpha said that implicitly, Akira calmed down a bit and replied with a light joke.

Dale and Colbert were also watching the outside through the other windows.

Dale was watching the situation outside without the help of any equipment and so he did not find any monsters. He then asked Akira.

“Did you find anything?”

“Yeah, a monster. A big one, it’s just loitering around that empty building over there.”

Dale pulled out his binocular and looked at the direction that Akira told him.

“…That monster, huh? You’re pretty good to be able to spot that monster. You weren’t really checking the outside while you’re staying in this room, right?”

“It’s a high-tech after all.”

Akira lightly smiled when he said that. Alpha, who heard that, smiled smugly.

Akira was basically saying that Alpha was high-tech. While Dale thought that Akira was talking about his equipment.

[…Leaving his skill aside, he's basically saying that he has good equipment, huh. Is it because this boy is strong enough to protect Sheryl alone that she did not bring anyone else with her? Don't tell me that his body is a cyborg body. When he said that, does he mean not only his information-gathering equipment but also his cyborg body? Or he means more about his own skill?]

From Dale's point of view, Akira's age and aura did not give any impression that he was a strong Hunter. But his evaluation changed now that he knew Akira was able to find a monster sooner than him.

[How strong is this boy? If I know how strong he is, I can at least guess how much reward he gets from escorting these kids. Then from there, I can guess how much money his employer, Sheryl, has… Well, I guess I'll get a chance to find out on our way back.]

Unlike what Dale expected, the chance to see Akira's ability would come way sooner than he thought.

Colbert was also using the aiming device on his rifle to check the situation outside just like Akira. It did not take long for him to find the monster that Akira just spotted.

The moment he spotted that monster, Colbert's face distorted with fear, his hand that was grabbing his rifle was slightly trembling. Very soon his trembling stopped, but his expression turned grim. His face was obviously showing a deep hatred toward the monster that his rifle muzzle was pointing at.

Something snapped inside Colbert that made him pull the trigger of his rifle. Gunshots reverberated throughout the room. The bullets flew out from his rifle and accurately hit that monster. But it did not inflict any serious damage to that monster.

That monster noticed Akira and the other Hunters as it roared. It immediately started running toward Akira.

"Die!! Die!! Die!!!!"

Colbert kept shooting at that monster while cursing it. Due to Colbert's shooting skill, all of his shots hit that monster. After showering in those bullets, that monster started to move slowly, it eventually dropped down and stopped moving. But Colbert did not stop shooting at it with a desperate face. It took sometime before he started slowing down and eventually let go of the trigger.

Everyone in that room was directing their gazes at Colbert. Akira was just surprised by that sudden outburst, nothing more. But Dale was obviously looking angry as he was sending his gaze to Colbert.

"Why did you do that?!!"

Colbert shouted back at Dale with more or less the same volume.

"Of course because I want to kill it!!"

"It didn't notice us until you shot, you know?!"

"Are you going to wait until it attacks you?! You kill them before they have the chance to kill you!!"

As Dale and Colbert started to argue, a gunshot suddenly interrupted them.

It was from Akira. Both Dale and Colbert immediately turned to Akira, who then calmly said.

"Can you do that later? To be more precise, after you guys take care of the rest."

After he said that, Akira started shooting. The bullet that he shot hit another monster that was running at his direction and blasted that monster's head off to small pieces.

Around the dead monster that Colbert just killed, there were already some monsters gathered around. Those monsters quickly noticed Akira and the other Hunters as they rushed toward the mansion.

Colbert quickly started shooting too, Dale clicked his tongue before helping out.

Monsters of all sizes started to gather and formed a swarm as they rushed toward the mansion. 2 legged lizard, 4 legged beasts, 6 legged turtles, 8 legged horses. They had such a distorted form as if someone made them as a pure joke, their body was half biological and half mechanical as if they stopped midway from turning into a complete robot.

The turtle monsters had a big cannon perched on their shell and they directed those cannons at Akira.

When Akira saw that monster, he could not help but get shocked.

“The heck is that?!”

“That’s the Tochka Turtle. We’re lucky that they haven’t reached adulthood yet. Their weakness is their cannon mouth. Don’t just look at it, start shooting.”

Alpha operated Akira’s augmented suit, Akira aimed the CWH anti-material rifle on his hand toward that cannon and pulled the trigger.

Due to Alpha’s advanced calculating ability, Akira was able to shoot the inside of the canons of those turtles accurately. Those bullets then hit the ammo reserve inside those cannons and set the gunpowder within them to explode, taking out the tochka turtle and the other monsters around it.

As Akira saw the tochka turtle explode into small pieces of flesh, he praised Alpha.

“That was nice, but still, to think that there’s a dangerous monster like that in this place, was this place always this dangerous before? Did this place really change that much just because that greedy crocodile got killed? Moreover, why are so many monsters gathering like this? Are they looking for a place to take shelter from the rain too?”

Akira’s questions were understandable. Alpha did not see that coming. Or to be more precise, Alpha thought that the possibility of such a thing to happen was negligible. After all, if she had known that this would happen, she would have not recommended Akira to take shelter in that mansion.

But leaving Alpha aside, Akira was not in a position to think about that. Alpha then told Akira to keep his focus on shooting the monsters.

“Let’s put that aside for later. You’ll have a lot of time to think about that question after you survive this swarm.”

“That’s true.”

Akira quickly took his aim at the next monster and pulled the trigger. The piercing bullet pierced through the trunk of an 8 legged horse as it fell down to the ground, the other monsters behind it then just trampled over its body and killed it.

Akira and the other Hunters had the upper hand there. Akira had the support from Alpha. While Dale and Colbert had brought with themselves pretty powerful equipment since they were planning to go to an unexplored ruin that day. Thus it was to be expected for them to have the upper hand against the monsters in Higaraka Residence ruin which had a relatively low danger level.

They were able to clean up the monsters without any problem including those monsters that normally should not be roaming around Higaraka Residence ruin. Every time they spotted a strong looking monster, they would focus their firepower and quickly take it out, and if the relatively weak monsters got close to them, Akira would quickly scatter them using his DVTS minigun.

As his minigun spewed countless bullets at those monsters, due to Alpha’s support, all of those bullets were able to find their targets. Of course, it was impossible for all of them to hit the monsters’ weak points. But it was enough to deal severe damage to them. The minigun quickly turned those monsters into a mixed mess of flesh and mechanical parts.

Dale saw that and was honestly amazed.

[So strong!! Although we're facing this many monsters, he doesn't panic at all and calmly takes them out. His shooting skill is also amazing. It seems that he even knows the weak points of these monsters too. He only used one bullet to kill the tochka turtles. It's obvious that he's not shooting these monsters randomly, he's carefully picking out which monster he has to kill first. He's really good.]

Since Colbert was screaming on top of his lungs while shooting at those monsters, from Dale's point of view, Akira looked ever so calm as he was shooting at those monsters without saying anything.

Akira's shooting performance was due to Alpha's support. The reason why he looked so calm was simply because he had fought a bigger swarm in the past, it also showed Akira's trust in Alpha's support. He was silent because he was actually talking with Alpha through telepathy, so Dale could not hear it.

But Dale did not know about that at all, thus he could only see Akira as a really skilled Hunter. That difference between Dale's evaluation and Akira's real ability would cause Akira some troubles down the road.

Sheryl was silently watching Akira from behind him. Even in such a situation, she still looked completely calm with her usual smile. Gunshots echoed through the room, the sounds of cannons from outside the window could be heard even inside that room, Colbert was still screaming on top of his lungs, the monsters could be easily spotted from inside that room, but even so, Sheryl's reaction was completely different compared to the other children that were panicking in that chaotic situation.

Erio, who saw Sheryl's calm expression, approached her and asked her as if he was looking for reassurance.

"A-are we going to be okay?"

"Don't worry, just calm down."

Sheryl smiled as she said that to Erio. There was not even a shred of fear in Sheryl's smile.

Erio calmed down a bit seeing how relaxed Sheryl was, although it was unnaturally so. He then mumbled to himself.

"T-that's right!! Akira is strong after all!!"

"Yep, that's why you should calm down too. Don't worry."

Sheryl looked at the other children and smiled. The children who saw that calmed down a bit.

They then started talking to each other as if to avert their attention away from the fear.

"T-that's right. Boss is so calm there, so I'm sure it's going to be okay."

"Is that Akira guy really that strong? Well, I guess he really is, huh."

"But still, it's amazing how the boss is so calm even in this situation. I guess you have to be that good to be a boss, huh?"

"Boss is amazing on her own, but Akira is extraordinary."

A bullet flew into the room from the window from time to time. Every time that happened, all the children would scream and scatter to look for a place to hide, but even in that situation, Sheryl did not move at all.

The children who were looking down on Sheryl realized their mistake when they saw the current her. They started to recognize her as not only a proxy of Akira but as the boss of the gang.

The reason why Sheryl was unnaturally calm was because of her trust in Akira and also because a part of her had actually already given up. Ever since that day when she asked for Akira's help and he decided to give her a helping hand, Sheryl was always under the mercy of Akira's support.

Even right now, Akira was protecting her from the swarm of monsters heading to that mansion. This fact alone made her calm. Even if that level of calmness was like a tranquillizer, even if it had a similar effect to drugs, even if Sheryl knew that herself, she did not mind it at all.

That blind faith and full reliance were what built up Sheryl right now. As long as she did not lose Akira, she might stay like that forever.

The battle continued with Akira and the other Hunters having the upper hand. They first prioritized taking out monsters with long-range weapons. So they started with killing the Tochka Turtles and other monsters carrying big cannons or at least rendering them unable to use their cannons. When they shot the head of the two-legged lizard that had its arms turned into guns, the lizard that had lost its control unit would lose control and shoot the other monsters around it.

Their next priority was the monsters with weapons and other monsters that looked dangerous. These monsters mechanically, or more like instinctively, ignored the difference between their fighting power as they rushed toward Akira and the other Hunters. The overwhelming number of monsters in that swarm was crushed under the rain of bullets. The already dead monsters in the front were being pushed and trampled from behind by the other monsters, thus turning them into unrecognizable minced meat.

After they finished most of those monsters, the rest of the mechanical monsters that recognized the difference in their fighting ability started to retreat while the biological monsters that started to feel fear also left the place.

The rain had stopped by then and there were no longer monsters detected around the mansion. Akira’s battle eventually came to an end.

The Hunters did not suffer any fatal injuries. It was the best outcome, that was of course if they did not account for the expense of the bullets that they exhausted in that battle.

After Akira finished that fight, Alpha smiled and showed her appreciation to him.

“You did well. You were able to keep calm when facing such a level of a swarm, that was well executed.”

“It’s smaller than the swarm that I’ve faced in the past after all. Not to mention, I have better equipment compared to back then. So I guess this is to be expected.”

“Since you can say that out normally now, it shows that you’ve grown. And I’m glad to hear that.”

Akira looked pretty happy since Alpha praised him. Alpha made sure to note that reaction from him.

Dale sighed, slowly sensing that the battle had ended. As he started to calm down, he also started to get angry at the same time.

He then turned to the source of his anger.

“Colbert!! This is your fault!! If you hadn’t taken that shot, we would have been able to avoid the fight just now, you know!!”

“Haah!? What’s so bad for a Hunter to kill monsters!?”

Colbert, who had not calmed down from that fight, shouted back at Dale. Although it felt like a fight would start there, the mood suddenly changed.

Colbert suddenly calmed down and took a deep breath. He then looked down apologetically and said.

“Sorry… I caused you trouble there.”

Seeing how Colbert suddenly calmed down and honestly apologized as if he was a completely different person, Dale was so surprised that his anger immediately faded away.

“…I was scared… Really scared… That’s why I took that shot before I even realized it.”

Colbert told the others the reason why he suddenly shot at that monster. Akira found something weird as he asked Colbert.

“Scared? Of that monster? Well, it did look like a big monster, but at that range and with your shooting skill, I don’t think there was anything for you to be scared about.”

Unlike Akira who was relying on Alpha’s support, Colbert was able to shoot at that monster accurately with his own skill. Even after that, he was able to perform in that fight without slowing the others down. So Akira thought that as long as he had that skill, there should be nothing to worry about.

Colbert glanced at Akira and started telling him the reason.

“…I almost got killed by a monster in the past, you see. Although I was able to survive it, I lost both of my arms. I sometimes still get nightmares from that time.”

Colbert looked at both of his arms with a distorted expression, Akira sounded sorry as he asked him.

“Those arms… are they prosthetics?”

“My left arm is prosthetic, but for my right arm, I took a regeneration treatment to regrow it. To be honest, I want to regrow both my arms, but I don’t have enough money. And with the maintenance that I should pay for the prosthetic, I just can’t gather enough money… So… that monster looked just like the monsters that ate my arms, you see.”

Akira had an experience when he stuck his arm into a monster’s mouth and shot his rifle from inside the monster. If he was late even by a few seconds, his arms would have been eaten by that monster. Bad things could happen to anyone, Akira felt a bit scared when he imagined it. He sympathized with Colbert who went through that first hand.

Colbert took a deep breath and bowed.

“…I’m really sorry.”

Even after Dale calmed down and Colbert honestly apologized for what he did, Dale still could not lower his fist.

Akira was in a good mood after getting praised by Alpha, he was also feeling sorry for Colbert. So he thought that he had to come up with something to change the subject.

“Well, with that many monsters that we defeated, there should no longer be any of them left around. Not to mention that we got to kill monsters that might attack us on our way back in an advantageous situation. It’s not really that bad. The rain has stopped too, so let’s get ourselves ready to head back.”

Dale at least tried to confirm something with Akira.

“Guyver and that boy from your envoy haven’t returned yet though.”

“Call them and tell them to get back as soon as possible. I’m sorry but I prioritize Sheryl’s safety, there’s a good chance that all of those corpses outside might attract other monsters after all. So I have no plans to wait for them in case we can’t contact them nor to go out and look for them. If you want to stay here to wait for them, you can go ahead and do that. After I escort Sheryl and the other children to the city, I can return here again.”

Dale pulled out his information terminal and called Guyver. Although he still could not connect to the city’s network, with the rain in that area stopped, he should be able to at least reach Guyver’s information terminal if they were still inside the mansion.

In case if he could not reach Guyver, Dale was thinking of just leaving him behind. Even Dale himself had no plans to stay behind in the dangerous wasteland to look for someone that might already be dead. Not to mention if a monster ate him, then he would not leave a corpse behind. Dale did not have the leeway to just look around the Higaraka Residence ruin for a corpse that might not even be there.

But his worry quickly vanished, it was because Guyver had returned to that room.

The anger inside Dale from that needless fight was still lingering. So he vented his anger at Guyver.

“Guyver!! Where were you when we needed extra hands?!!!”

Guyver just laughed lightly.

“Calm down, it seems that you guys got attacked too, huh?”

“So you too?”

“Yep, we got attacked too. We somehow survived though. Then I noticed that the rain had stopped when we were done, so we quickly returned back to this room. I bet you guys are planning to go back to the city as soon as possible now that the rain has stopped, right? By any chance, were you planning to leave me behind?”

Guyver jokingly asked that question, to which Dale annoyedly replied.

“…Humph, yeah, if you were not back.”

“Whoa whoah, that’s just too mean, you know.”

Guyver laughed when he said that, although he was about to get left behind, he did not show any displeasure at all.

After that, they finished all their preparations and left the Higaraka Residence ruin to return back to the Kugamayama city.

Around the area where the first monster that Akira spotted loitered, there were multiple small cylindrical objects scattered. Those were the decoy devices that Dale lost.

The monsters that Akira and the others took out were gathered there because of those decoy devices.

Silavin: While our protagonist in Martial Peak has plot armour, the protagonist in Rebuild World has plot debuff.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 81, The Result of Wrong Information

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Guyver was sitting on the driving seat with Akira next to him, while Colbert and Dale were sitting on the backseat. As not to get in the way in case of a fight, Sheryl was sent to the cart together with the rest of her gang.

Guyver offered to drive saying that it was to make up for not being present when the mansion was attacked by the swarm of monsters. To be honest, Akira did not mind at all, but since Colbert and Dale were pressuring Guyver to do that, he ended up driving the vehicle.

The vehicle was swaying left and right as it traversed the wasteland. There were wreckages scattered around the route that they were taking; with some of them not entirely buried under the ground, the vehicle shook as it bumped with those wreckages.

The one who picked that route was the driver, Guyver. So Akira asked him.

“Say, why are we taking this route?”

“It’s still better than getting stuck on a muddy road, right? This route should not have any muddy roads, but it’s a little bit bumpy though.”

“…Well, you’re right, but still.”

Although Guyver’s explanation was reasonable, Akira was not fully convinced by that.

Akira then asked Alpha.

“Say, Alpha, about that monster from before though…”

“Well, we do have time for that now, so let’s talk about it.”

“Don’t you think that it’s weird? I know that I have bad luck, but that swarm didn’t feel like a pure coincidence.”

“Let’s assume that it was not a coincidence and someone intentionally gathered those monsters there. There are only 2 possible ways of doing that, either that person runs around the wasteland to attract those monsters or by using a decoy device.”

“Decoy device?”

“Yep, that’s a device to attract monsters. It’s usually used to gather monsters in one place.”

Akira then turned to Dale and the others and asked them.

“Say, did you guys bring decoy devices with you?”

Dale, who did bring some before, answered that question.

“I did, but I don’t have it right now. Why do you ask…? Ahhh, about that swarm of monsters, huh?”

“So you did have them?”

“I left them in our vehicle. So I lost them when our vehicle went back to the city on autopilot. Well, even if I did have some back then, it was not a situation where you would use the decoy device, right?”

“…Yeah, you’re right.”

“…Wait for a sec! It’s possible that they got activated when our vehicle was attacked by the monster. It then might have dropped some of those devices on its way back to the city and attracted all the monsters around the route that it took to the city into that mansion. If that’s the case, then there’s nothing strange about the number of monsters that ended up coming there… Hmm, no no no, that shouldn’t be possible. No matter how unlucky we are, that’s just too unlucky. It’s not like anyone in this place has that level of bad luck, right?”

Dale laughed after he said that.

Akira just kept his face looking out to the wasteland without saying anything. It was because he knew the answer to that question, he might be the unlucky person that Dale was talking about.

Seeing how Akira was keeping silent, Alpha smiled teasingly at him. When Akira noticed it, he annoyedly jabbed at her.

“…What?”

“Don’t be angry. Even if that’s true, you did survive, right? And that’s all that matters. So in short, it was not that big of a trouble for the current you. You really got stronger, don’t you think so too?”

“Yeah yeah, I’ll leave it like that.”

Akira was just sitting there looking out to the wasteland without saying anything, Guyver who was beside him was also driving without saying anything. Although Dale found that sudden silence a bit weird, he just decided to ignore it.

Just like when he was leaving for the wasteland, Akira fixed his CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun back on his vehicle. At the moment, he only had his AAH assault rifle and A2D assault rifle with him.

Guyver glanced at Akira’s equipment.

“Won’t you at least let the children on the back borrow some of those rifles?”

“Why should I?”

“It’s better to have more people equipped with guns if another swarm attacks us, right?”

“If you think so, you can just lend them yours.”

“I’m doing that already, you know? I’ve lent one of my guns to that Sebla guy. You have those big weapons on the back, so it’s okay to just lend them those assault rifles, right?”

Akira peeked back at Sebla who was in the back cart. It was true that he was holding a gun and some grenades. But even so, Akira did not feel any reassurance from seeing that.

Akira then replied to Guyver.

“No.”

“Why?”

“They’re my weapons. Even if we get attacked by monsters again, it’s much more useful when they’re with me.”

“…I see. Well, I won’t force you.”

Akira did not get to encounter any monsters even after they got out from the Higaraka residence ruin. He prayed that nothing would happen until they reached the city. But it was quickly proven that his prayer would not come true.

“Akira, it’s a monster.”

“…I guess it won’t go that easy, huh?”

Akira turned to the direction where Alpha was pointing, he quickly spotted a monster running toward the vehicle. It was obvious from their distance that the monster was a carnivorous monster.

“It’s closer than I thought.”

“Blame the rain, there’s still some effect left from the rain, so it’s like we’re still in a colourless mist. That’s why I was late detecting that monster.”

As Akira’s gaze was fixed in one direction in the wide wasteland, Dale and the other Hunters found it weird and followed his gaze, thus they quickly spotted that monster too.

Guyver stopped the vehicle, Akira immediately criticized him.

“Oi, why are we stopping?”

“You won’t be able to get a good aim while the vehicle is rocking, right? We can get off the vehicle and take a good aim on that monster now.”

After he said that, Guyver hopped off the vehicle. Dale and Colbert looked at each other before hopping off the vehicle too.

Akira decided to stay in the vehicle just to be safe. Guyver kept his eyes on Akira who did not hop off from the vehicle.

He then shifted his gaze from Akira to the back cart. When he did that, Sebla hopped off from the cart and joined Dale and the other Hunters.

“Whoah there, are you planning to make him fight too?”

Guyver laughed lightly and said.

“Isn’t that exactly why I’m lending my gun to him? If you’re worried, you can just hop off from there and help us too.”

Akira thought for a bit.

“Alpha, are there any other monsters?”

“None. I’ll let you know when I find any.”

Akira then hopped off from the vehicle. It was not for keeping Sebla’s safe, but it was to make sure that Sebla would not cause extra trouble. It was also to help take out that monster and get back to the vehicle as soon as possible.

There were 4 Hunters against one monster. So Akira thought that there was no need to take out his CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun. Thus, he just left them on the vehicle.

Colbert readied his rifle and took an aim at that monster. Sebla just stood there in silence. Dale ignored Sebla, he just kept his eyes on the surroundings while making sure that he was not blocking Colbert’s aim.

Akira kept his eyes on that monster, he was ready to jump in to help if Colbert was having some trouble taking out that monster.

Everyone there thought that they just needed to quickly take out their target and return back to the vehicle. But there was a minor difference in what they were calling as their targets.

Guyver was being careful of Akira and the other Hunters, he was observing them as if he was looking for an opportunity.

He suddenly jumped away from that place. The other Hunters thought that Guyver jumped out because of that monster’s attack, thus they immediately focused their attention on that monster. But the very next moment, a blinding light and deafening ring drowned Akira and the other Hunters as they were thrown on the ground.

For some reason, Akira was able to keep himself conscious. But because of that light and that loud ringing, he was severely dazed thus preventing him from making any swift reaction. He thought that there was a monster nearby, so he felt the urge to get back on his feet as soon as possible and confirm his situation. Although he knew that well, he just could not do that.

“…W-what was that? Alpha?”

“Akira! Get up!! Quickly!!”

Alpha shouted at him. Akira understood that it meant he was in a deadly situation. In that case, he had to get on his feet as fast as he could. He did not care about the reason, for now, he just had to get on his feet. Akira understood very well that following Alpha’s instructions as fast as he could was the best possible choice to fix his situation.

So, Akira, who was lying face down on the ground, slowly pulled himself back up. He was trying to get on his feet while still severely dazed. But in that situation, when he was still so dizzy, it would be almost impossible to make any quick manoeuvres. He was still swaying left and right as he pushed his body against the ground, got on his knee, and looked up.

The moment he did that, he saw Guyver in front of him with the muzzle of his rifle pointing at him.

Guyver’s finger moved ever so slowly as he was pulling the trigger. He was staring at Akira full of killing intent, Akira was able to see even the slightest change in Guyver’s expression. Akira could clearly feel his time perception stretched out as the passage of time from his point of view considerably slowed down.

“Move away from there!!”

Akira did not wait for Alpha’s instruction as he quickly leapt away from that spot.

Guyver pulled the trigger, his rifle spewed out countless bullets that just sliced through the air right where Akira was just a moment ago and hit the wreckage on their trajectories. The bullets made rattling sounds as they hit those wreckages.

Akira instinctively scanned the area for his rifle as he leapt from that spot, he was in perfect sync with the movements of his augmented suit that was controlled by Alpha. Thanks to that, Akira was able to quickly reach out and grab his rifle. He then got on his feet, aimed at Guyver, and pulled the

trigger. But because he was still severely dazed, he was not able to hit Guyver at all.

But even so, Guyver was taken aback by that swift move. He quickly jumped to the nearest wreckage and hid behind it.

Akira's face turned grim. His consciousness was still not fully recovered yet. In the middle of that hazy situation, Akira asked for Alpha's help.

"…Alpha, I'm sorry but I can't get a good aim, can you help me with that?"

"I'm already doing it. I'm already increasing your accuracy as high as possible in your current situation."

"And my shot missed even after that, huh. Did that attack damage my augmented suit?"

"That's not the problem. Although I'm controlling your augmented suit right now, I'm controlling it through your body. So if you lose your consciousness or have a hazy mind, my support will also get diminished. That's why you missed your shots."

"…I understand. I just need to recover… The medicine, where did I put my medicine? Did I leave it on the vehicle? Or is it inside my rucksack? Where did I drop it? Hm? Where is it?"

Akira's still dazed mind started to veer off into something unnecessary, thus Alpha quickly straightened that up.

"Akira, calm down, I'll give you my instruction. You need to reposition yourself first."

"…Alright."

Akira followed Alpha's instruction as he repositioned himself.

Guyver was still hiding behind the wreckage as he started cursing Akira.

“Dammit!! Not only did he evade my shot in that situation, he even started shooting back at me too, huh!! I thought he was just a normal boy with dangerous weapons?!! This is not what I expected at all!! That damn brat!! Giving me wrong information like that!!”

After he listened to Sebla’s information and decided to take the relics in the cart for himself, Guyver was determined to kill Akira and the other Hunters.

Guyver was the one who shot at Dale’s rental vehicle and activated its auto-drive function. There was a good possibility that Akira would move separately once the rain stopped, thus Guyver took out the only means for Dale’s team to get back to the city in order to come up with an excuse so that they could go back together to the city with Akira. And in case if Akira refused to give them a ride back home, Guyver was planning to get Dale’s and Colbert’s help to start a fight against Akira.

The reason why Akira had to fight the monster swarm not too long ago was also because of the decoy devices that Guyver set near the area. Guyver took the decoy devices from Dale’s vehicle and put them around the mansion after setting it to activate after a few minutes. He intentionally left the decoy devices in the area where those monsters would be able to easily spot Akira and the other Hunters and then he evacuated himself to a safe place.

If Akira and the other Hunters were killed by the monster, then he just needed to recover the relics from the vehicle later. Even if no one got killed, there was a good chance that the monsters would wound some of them, or at least exhaust their ammo reserve. Whatever it was, it would give Guyver some extra advantage when he fought them. Although none of them were wounded, it was at least enough to provoke Dale and Colbert.

Guyver also included Sebla in his plan, Sebla was given a different role and had made him promise to help out. Then in order to win Sebla’s trust, Guyver lent some of his equipment to him. Guyver had mixed a remote detonation stun grenade among all of those equipment that he lent to Sebla. Of course, he did not tell Sebla about that.

The reason why Guyver offered to drive the vehicle himself was so that he could select a situation where he would have the upper hand when he fought Akira and the other Hunters. The reason why he suggested Akira to lend his rifles to the other children in the back cart was so that Akira would lose some of his weapons and to check if he still had some ammo left for his powerful CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun.

To be honest, Guyver wanted to activate the stun gun after making sure that he was staying away as far as possible from it. But there was a good chance that the leftover effect from the rain might interfere with its activation, thus he could not stay too far away from that stun grenade. Then fortunately enough, Akira and the other Hunters decided to stay close near Sebla to make sure that he would not cause any trouble and to give him support when needed. So Guyver did not even take a second guess before he activated the stun gun.

And this was the aftermath. He could not kill Akira and he was forced to hide behind a wreckage.

Guyver looked grim as he mumbled.

“Is this because I trusted the information from that boy? Nah, I guess it doesn’t really matter now. I just need to kill him and take the relics for myself, I still can fix this!!”

Guyver had to take out Akira and the other two Hunters while they were still dazed from the effect of the stun grenade. Once they recovered, it would be 1 against 3 and he would not have any chance to win.

He made his decision and leapt out from behind the wreckage.

Akira was still hiding behind another wreckage while waiting to recover. But he had no other choice but to cut that short as Guyver was not the only threat present. They hopped off from the vehicle to take out a monster that was running in their direction.

The monster had already gotten close to where Akira was, and he could not afford to let that monster too close to the cart attached behind his vehicle.

He peeked out from behind the wreckage with his rifle ready on his hand. But his vision was still blurry and he still could not stand up straight. Since he was sure that he would not hit his shots on target, Akira changed his aim from killing that monster to just provoking its attention.

Akira scattered bullets around that monster. Although none of them hit that monster, it was enough to attract its attention. That monster quickly moved behind a wreckage to take shelter from Akira's shots.

Akira clicked his tongue, it was because even though he shot that many bullets, none of them hit that monster. He had hoped that at least some of them would get hit even if it was by pure chance. With his luck, he might miss some of his shots even if he took a careful aim, but it was strange that he would not get a hit even if he scattered a lot of bullets at his target.

Moreover, although that monster was not strong enough to charge at Akira while eating those bullets, it was also not that weak to just run away after such provocation. Akira had hoped that it was actually just a weak monster with a scary appearance, but that was not the case either.

If it was a strong monster, Guyver would not have done what he just did. After all, if it was really a strong monster, even if Guyver was able to kill Akira and the other Hunters, he then would have to face that monster alone. So in that case, Guyver would have waited until 4 of them killed that monster before activating the stun grenade. But unfortunately for Akira and the other two, that monster was not weak enough to just run away after that barrage and it was not strong enough to make Guyver wait until they killed it.

"Jump to your right!!"

Alpha shouted at Akira and moved his augmented suit at the same time. Akira did not resist that movement as he followed Alpha's instruction and jumped to his right. The moment he did that, a bullet passed through beside him.

Guyver did not stop shooting as he aimed his rifle at Akira. Although Akira was still a bit dazed, he was able to quickly roll over and evade those shots

thanks to his augmented suit.

Guyver looked completely desperate. He never thought that Akira would be able to evade it. According to his experience, he should have been able to fatally wound Akira with that shot.

Guyver's face twisted with terror, but he quickly overwrote it with irritation and anger.

"He even evaded that?! I'm shooting from his flank, you know?! Did he foresee that I'll do that? That's just impossible!! Even if he somehow noticed my position from his information-gathering device or something and predicted my shooting trajectory, there was no way he could measure my timing too!! That must be just a pure coincidence!!"

Akira started shooting back while peeking out from behind wreckage. Although he was aiming at where Guyver was, the bullets just flew randomly around the target without hitting their real target, as such, they were only enough to prevent Guyver from returning shots.

Guyver noticed Akira's inaccurate shooting and said to himself.

"Look at his shots, he doesn't know my position for sure and he's not in a condition where he can aim properly!! His previous evasion must have been just a pure coincidence, that boy is still dazed from the stun grenade!!"

Guyver was mostly saying that to reassure himself. But his brave front was quickly cracked.

[But he got up sooner than Dale and Colbert. It must be just a pure chance too. It's also by pure luck that he evaded my shot right after he got up.]

Guyver wanted to think that it was all just a pure coincidence. Although he did not know the reason behind Akira's actions, he didn't even try to think about it. It was basically the limit of his ability as a Hunter.

Akira got back to hiding behind wreckage and tried to recover. Although he was slowly recovering, it would still take a few minutes before he could get

back to fighting normally.

“Akira, over there.”

Alpha pointed her finger at something. Akira immediately turned to the direction that she was pointing and saw Dale and Colbert slowly getting back on their feet. Seeing that, Akira immediately shouted at them.

“Guyver is trying to kill us!! And the monster is also somewhere nearby!! If you guys are not my enemies, then go and kill the monster!! I’ll deal with Guyver!!”

But both looked confused. Akira did not know whether it was because they could not hear him since they were still recovering, or because they could not process what was going on, or because they were just feigning ignorance.

Dale and Colbert noticed Akira. He was pointing his finger at the monster that was closeby. Colbert who saw that quickly pointed his rifle at that direction and carefully checked the area for that monster, Dale quickly followed suit.

“It seems that they’ll take care of that monster.”

Akira let out a long breath.

“…Alright then. It seems that I don’t need to fight those guys. This is getting better, so then, where’s the other guy?”

“He’s over there.”

Alpha pointed in another direction and Akira’s gaze quickly turned there. Thanks to his enhanced view due to Alpha’s support, Akira was able to see Guyver’s body outlined in red behind a wreckage.

“…This reminds me of how nice this function is. How exactly are you doing this?”

“It’s by using my advanced calculation ability to analyze all the information I gather around you. Right now, I focus on analyzing the data especially around that guy.”

“Is it from the information gathered through my information-gathering device?”

“That’s one of them. Of course, I’m also using the information from your information-gathering device too. Other than that, I’m mostly using the information from your 5 senses. It’s not an exaggeration to say that the human body is an amalgamation of information-gathering devices.”

“I don’t feel like I’m gathering that level of information though.”

“Gathering information and understanding the information that you get is not the same. It’s crucial to ignore the information that you don’t need. If you try to analyze all the information that you receive from all of your 5 senses, it would quickly fry your brain.”

“And you’re saying that you can do that, huh?”

“Yep, that’s the gist of it. But for some reason, there are sometimes people who could unconsciously pick out important information from other unimportant information and analyze them. These people usually have sharp intuition. I guess it’s because they have a lot of chances where they can unintentionally hone that ability.”

“Intuition, huh? I guess it’s the same as that bad feeling that I sometimes get from time to time, huh. I had a lot of opportunities to hone my intuition after all.”

Akira remembered his past and realized it.

“Well, as for your good premonition that usually misses, I’ll make it up for you so you don’t need it anymore. So just hang around with me, okay?”

“For example?”

“Let’s see. First of all, I’m giving you my support even right now. This is the best example and it does help you a lot, don’t you think so? Because of that, you’re able to explore dangerous ruins, find expensive relics, and learn important information as well as fighting skills.”

“Well, you’re right about that. Thanks.”

“Other than that, you’re able to monopolize this beautiful body created through an advanced calculation, right? Isn’t that just wonderful? Right?”

Alpha took a pose as if she was showing her body to Akira. Akira glanced at her, his face was saying that he had no comments at all.

“Uhh, uhh, w-well, yeah.”

Akira stuttered as if he was evading that question. His answer was directed both to Alpha and to himself.

“Wait there, that was a rather vague reaction. Is there anything that you don’t like about my body?”

“Not really, it’s just your imagination.”

Akira was obviously playing dumb there. Those words were both for teasing Alpha as well as to dodge from having to seriously answer that question.

Alpha smiled at Akira, it seemed that she had returned to her usual self.

“Now then, since it seems that you’ve recovered enough to do some silly talk like this. How about we go and start our counter-attack?”

“Yeah, I’m more or less already recovered. Let’s go.”

Akira had recovered from the effect of the stun grenade. So, in short, Alpha’s support through his augmented suit had returned to 100 percent. He basically had recovered back to his usual condition. Akira’s expression turned sharp, his mind changed from defending himself to aggressively attacking his opponent.

He jumped out from behind the wreckage where he was hiding and made a beeline for Guyver. If Guyver came out and aimed at him, it would have been very dangerous. But thanks to Alpha's support, Akira could clearly see where Guyver was hiding.

Although he had the choice of waiting for Guyver to peek out from behind the wreckage and snipe him the moment he did that, Akira thought that the other two might have some problem dealing with the monster behind him. Not to mention, the monster might attack Sheryl and her gang too. As such, Akira decided to quickly take out Guyver and go back to protect Sheryl and her gang.

Guyver was hiding behind a half-destroyed wall. In order to shoot him, Akira had to take a big detour and shoot him from the side or from above. Akira thought so as he asked Alpha while still running.

"Alpha, which route should I take? Left? Right? Above?"

"Let's take a much safer route, run straight at him."

"Straight at him? Do you mean shooting through the wall? This rifle is not enough to do that, you know?"

Akira was carrying an AAH assault rifle with him. Both the magazine and the bullet were not of piercing type. As long as he did not have the CWH anti-material rifle that he had left in the vehicle, it would be impossible to shoot Guyver through that wall.

"It's no problem."

Alpha just said that and smiled.

Guyver was able to notice Akira, who was approaching him, both from Akira's footsteps and the signal detected from his cheap information-gathering device. His face distorted with fear as he readied his gun and looked left and right. His brave front had already completely crumbled down since his position was swapped from the hunter to the hunted.

“Where is he coming from? Which direction?!”

Since he was hiding behind a half-destroyed wall, he could not climb it and shoot at Akira because he felt like he would be showered in bullets and drop dead the moment he did that.

He could feel that Akira was already right on the other side of that wall. With his augmented suit, it was not impossible for Akira to jump over.

Guyver thought that Akira would do that, thus he readied his gun and shifted his focus to above him, waiting for Akira to show himself.

Guyver’s attention was completely focused on watching above him. He was ready to shoot anything that flew over him.

But the next moment, the wall in front of him suddenly crumbled down.

After Akira arrived next to that wall, he mustered all the power of his augmented suit to deliver a destructive kick on that wall. With the help of Alpha’s support, the leg part of Akira’s augmented suit turned hard the moment his kick touched that wall thus increasing the destructive power of his kick. That powerful kick was enough to destroy the wall that was already withered because of the harsh environment in the wasteland.

The wall crumbled down on top of Guyver, thus making him lose balance. He pulled the trigger on his rifle by accident and fell on his back. The bullet that flew from the muzzle cut through the air and flew away aimlessly.

That sudden turn of events completely caught Guyver off guard. But his confusion immediately cleared up the moment he saw Akira pointing his rifle at him from the other side of the crumbled wall. He would be dead now, for him, there was nothing more urgent than that.

Akira did not hesitate at all as he pulled the trigger and released a barrage of bullets at Guyver.

[…This boy is super strong… That damn brat… Telling me… False info…]

In the last few seconds of his life, as he was on the death door, he cursed Sebla.

Akira looked at Guyver's dead corpse, which was drenched in blood, with cold eyes.

"Is he dead?"

"He's not a cyborg, so I guess he's dead for good."

"Nice, let's head back then."

After receiving confirmation from Alpha, Akira quickly lost interest in Guyver and headed back to his vehicle.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 82, Being A Good Hunter

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Sheryl was overwhelmed trying to calm the children down.

Loud explosions and blinding light that suddenly came out of nowhere, Dale and Colbert lying on the ground, Akira and Guyver shooting each other and moreover, a monster coming running at them; there were numerous reasons for those children to panic.

But Sheryl did not flinch, and she bravely forced everyone to shut up. However, there was a limit to how long she could continue to keep them quiet. After all, the sound of gunshots showed no signs of stopping any soon, which proved that the battle was still going on. The children were under great pressure and were close to breaking down.

Sheryl scanned the situation and looked for Akira. Not too long after that, she saw Akira running toward her direction. He did not seem injured at all.

She let out a relieved sigh.

“Akira is on his way back. I’ll go and ask him about the situation, so wait here.”

After Sheryl said that to her gang member, she went to meet Akira. The other children also calmed down when they saw Akira unscathed.

Sheryl jumped off the cart and went to Akira. While that happened, Sebla slowly pushed himself up, he was still all wobbly.

Sheryl also noticed Sebla when she was looking for Akira, but she just ignored him. It was because she did not care whether Sebla was dead or alive.

Akira was relieved when he saw that Sheryl and her gang were still okay. Now he just needed to wait for Dale and Colbert to kill the monster.

Akira did think of helping Dale and Colbert, but he prioritized going and making sure Sheryl and her gang's safety first. If only he had not stepped off his vehicle, he would not have to face all the troubles that he just went through. Thus, he thought that it was sensible to be cautious at least now.

He saw Sheryl walking towards him. He also noticed Sebla pulling himself up from the ground not too far from her. It seemed that Sebla was yet to recover from the effects of the stun grenade, so Akira did not put much attention on him. But that proved to be a wrong decision.

The moment Sheryl passed beside him, Sebla suddenly reached for her arm and pulled her towards him. He then strangled her and pushed the pistol in his hand on her.

"Stop, don't move!!!"

Sebla yelled desperately at Akira.

Sebla had mostly recovered from the effect of the stun grenade. But his movements were dulled because of the fear, confusion and panic.

He had made a deal with Guyver to betray Sheryl and her gang. He and Guyver planned to kill Akira and the other people and share the relics among them. Sebla knew that it was Guyver who shot at Dale's vehicle, he

also left all those devices around to attract the monsters, and he had always been looking for a chance to kill Akira and the other 2 Hunters.

Sebla did lose his consciousness when he was hit by the stun grenade, but he woke up relatively faster. However, he kept himself close to the ground while the confusion prevailed and utilised the chance to slowly checked the situation around him.

But he could not understand much of what was going on. He did hear gunshots, so he guessed that someone was fighting. He did not find Akira's corpse around so there was a chance that Akira was still alive. Thus, he guessed that Akira was fighting against Guyver. That was all that he could make out of the situation.

He then saw Akira return back alone. The moment Sebla saw that, his face twitched. There was a good chance that Guyver was dead at that point, but Guyver being alive or not was unimportant for him right now. He was more interested in knowing whether Guyver told Akira that he was planning to betray Sheryl and her gang as well as to kill Akira and the other 2 Hunters.

The reason why Akira glanced at Sebla was simply to check him. But to Sebla who was in a panic, it seemed as if Akira found out from Guyver that he was also planning to betray him and so he was coming to kill him now.

Sebla was blinded by the terror of losing his life. Right at that time, his eyes caught Sheryl. He could not come up with anything else as he aggressively grabbed Sheryl's arm.

He did not even think about the consequence of his action.

As he tried to blackmail Akira by holding Sheryl hostage, Sebla's face was twisted with fear, and the hand which held the gun was also shaking. It was a very dangerous situation.

Sheryl shouted at Sebla with full hostility.

"Do you really know what will happen to you if you do this?"

“Shut up!! Just shut your mouth!”

Sebla shouted back at her as he prodded his gun.

Akira then tried to calm Sheryl.

“Sheryl, Don’t provoke that guy, it’s dangerous. Just calm down, and try to keep your mouth shut. Don’t try to complicate things. Alright?”

Sheryl was thinking of looking for a chance to break from Sebla’s strangle, but after Akira told her that, she just obediently stayed quiet.

Sebla felt that strange change in behaviour from Sheryl. His face that was twitching in terror changed into a slight smile.

“T-that’s right!! Just shut up and don’t do anything stupid!!”

Thinking that he was getting the upper hand, his tension eased off a little. Hence, he was now able to reconfirm his situation. But once he realised that he was hopeless against Akira, who still had his rifles, his tension raised up again.

Sebla’s gaze quickly focused on the rifle that Akira was carrying. He then glared at Akira and shouted.

“Drop your gun!! Now!!”

Akira locked his gaze with Sebla, thinking about what could be done. But when Akira focused his gaze on him, Sebla flinched back and tensed up.

Right before Sebla’s nervousness manifested into action, Akira dropped his rifle to the ground.

Alpha never imagined that Akira would drop his rifle, that was why she looked at Akira with a surprised expression.

“Akira?!”

Akira did not answer her question, he focused all of his attention on Sebla.

Sheryl was also surprised when she saw Akira drop his rifle since she also thought there was no way Akira would do that. After all, she thought that he did not care too much for her.

She was so happy that she was even close to crying, she did not expect Akira would even do something so dangerous as to drop his rifle in front of his enemy just to save her. While at the same time, she was also feeling so much guilt as she forced Akira to do something that dangerous.

Sheryl was so filled with emotions as her eyes started tearing.

Sebla smiled mockingly after Akira dropped his rifle. It showed that Akira was listening to his order. That caused him to calm down and feel that he had the upper hand. The figure of Akira standing there just looking at him seemed to Sebla as if Akira had given up and had no idea how to get out of that situation.

Sebla had the choice of keeping Sheryl as his hostage and escaping from that place. But his fear and hatred toward Akira pushed him to take a more aggressive approach.

Right now, Akira had no rifle with him, so he might be able to kill Akira now. As that thought passed through Sebla’s mind, he couldn’t let it go. His thoughts manifested as he pointed his gun at Akira, grinned, and pulled the trigger.

But Akira was able to easily evade the bullet launched from Sebla’s gun.

Akira had placed all of his focus on Sebla, he was aware of the ever so slightest move that Sebla made when he tried to shoot. Sebla was moving in slow motion from his point of view. As such, Akira was able to correctly judge when and where Sebla would shoot from where he was aiming the muzzle, the slow-motion when he pulled the trigger, and the slight change in his expression.

Akira had stretched his time perception and was able to easily evade Sebla’s shots.

While Sebla’s gun was away from Sheryl, Akira quickly closed the distance between him and Sebla. He then grabbed Sheryl with his right hand and pulled her away from Sebla, while his left hand got hold of Sebla’s gun and sent Sebla flying with his right kick.

Sebla did not even have the chance to express his surprise when he saw Akira evade his shots. His focus was immediately shifted to the pain on his stomach as he was thrown into the air.

When Sheryl returned to her senses, she found Akira grabbing her right arm. Sheryl, who realized that Akira saved her, hugged him tightly.

Sebla was still confused by that sudden change of events and the pain in his stomach only made his confusion worse. He placed his hands on his stomach as he rolled around in pain.

Akira looked at the gun in his left hand that he took away from Sebla. He then threw it away as if he had no interest in it. It was the gun that Guyver lent to Sebla, so there was no telling what kind of trap was installed in it. Akira walked back to his rifle and equipped it while Sheryl was still clinging on him.

He then pointed his rifle at Sebla. Akira’s eyes met Sebla’s who lied on the ground pale-faced. Sebla’s expression greatly distorted as the pain in his stomach was slowly replaced with fear of death. Akira’s expression did not change much when he saw that. He was about to pull the trigger but he suddenly stopped.

Akira turned to Sheryl who was still clinging at him.

“He’s one of your gang members though, what do you want to do with him?”

“Just kill him.”

Sheryl answered Akira’s question without any hesitation at all. For her, there was no benefit in letting Sebla live. He took her hostage and tried to

shoot Akira, although she might forgive him for the former, the latter was simply unforgivable as long as Akira did not tell her to let him go.

Akira looked at Sebla again. Sebla stared back at Akira with anger and hostility, it showed that he was already a lost cause.

All kinds of things ran through Sebla's mind. The difference between him and Akira although they were living in the same environment until not too long ago and how they were so different right now. Sebla vented out his frustration which sounded as if he was whining.

"Dammit… You just got lucky…!! What's so different between us!?"

Akira, who was about to pull the trigger, stopped when he heard that. There was a moment of silence between them. He then answered Sebla's question.

"Didn't you just say it yourself? That's true, it's our luck. You are just not lucky."

After he said that, Akira pulled the trigger. The bullet pierced through Sebla's torso, it took a few seconds before Sebla stopped breathing.

Akira looked pitifully at Sebla's corpse. If he had not met Alpha, he would have been dead like that too. But Akira quickly scrapped that thought. Even if someone would have shot and killed him, it would have been because of a different reason.

Not too long after that, Dale and Colbert also returned after they took care of the monster. Akira pushed Sheryl, who was still clinging on him, away and she obediently concurred.

Akira was still on his guard, it was obvious that Sheryl was crying up until just now, Sebla was lying dead not too far from them, and Guyver was nowhere around. All of these cues made Dale and Colbert frown.

Both lowered their guns and walked to Akira. Dale took another look around and said to Akira.

"I want to know what just happened first, is it okay?"

“Sure.”

Akira, Sheryl, Dale, and Colbert exchanged information to confirm what was going on. After Dale understood the gist of the matter, he mumbled.

“That bastard! Doing something like this!! But still, although it’s weird to say this myself, that guy is pretty crazy to pick a fight against all three of us. Did he not think what would happen if his ambush failed? Was he so confident that his ambush would work perfectly?”

Dale looked surprised and angry as he said that. He had explored an old-world ruin together with Guyver. Thus, he more or less knew of Guyver’s skill. And according to his judgement, Guyver was average at best.

Colbert interjected and answered Dale’s question.

“…That might be because of his debt.”

“Debt? That guy has debt, huh?”

“Yeah, I heard that it’s a pretty big debt. I also heard that he was originally planning to pay his debt with the relics that we would gather today.”

Dale looked a bit pained as he said.

“Don’t tell me that he had no way of paying that debt as the deadline was coming close so he got desperate. I guess he planned to take our relics and Sheryl’s relics to amass a lot of money either for paying his debt or for running away from his debt, huh. Now that I remember, he also rushed forward without checking for enemies in the ruin. I guess he really was that desperate…”

Dale tried to make sense of everything that happened that day with the new information he just received. But in the end, they were all just his guesses, and with Guyver dead, there was no way to confirm them.

Akira then interjected.

“We can do that later, let’s get to the vehicle and head back to the city.”

As they were about to head back to the vehicle, Colbert suddenly stopped them.

“Ah, wait for a sec. It’s kinda hard to say this but… There’s one thing that I want to do.”

“What?”

“If it’s possible, I want to take Guyver’s body back. Ah, I also brought myself a body bag, so it won’t get your vehicle dirty… So, is it ok?”

Colbert understood that what he was asking was something unpleasant for Akira and the others. As a matter of fact, Dale and Sheryl looked obviously annoyed.

Dale looked at Colbert and said with displeasure.

“Just leave him alone. Some monsters will take care of him in no time. That’s a suitable ending for that guy, don’t you think?”

“Even though he’s like that, I worked with him for a long time. Not to mention, I have my trauma with monsters… So like, I feel bad leaving his corpse for the monsters…”

Akira thought that if it pained Colbert that much, then he could just dig a hole and bury the corpse. He found it weird since there was no need to bring it back to the city, thus he popped out a rude question for Colbert.

“What are you planning to do with his corpse after bringing it back to the city? Are you planning to look for his family and give the body to them?”

“No, I will hand it over to the Hunter Office. If he had left his contact address when he registered his name, the Hunter Office would at least try to contact his family, that is if he did submit his family information too. The Hunter Office will take care of the corpse after that. By the way, in order to reduce the number of Hunters who have gone missing, the Hunter Office also recommends bringing Hunter’s corpse to them, you know?”

That was one of the efforts to keep the Hunters under control and make them stay ethical. It would also help the City Management if they could tell which Hunters went missing and which Hunters were dead. Of course, they would assume the Hunters who went missing were already dead, but it was not like they could actually treat those Hunters as deceased. Those Hunters would need to stay missing for a while and there was a lot of administration stuff that needed to be approved before they were declared dead. But by bringing evidence that they were dead such as their corpses, the City Management and the Hunter Office could bypass the administration stuff and cut short the waiting time.

Colbert smiled bitterly as he continued.

“Well, it’s only recommended and not compulsory. But the Hunter Office does suggest us to do that. If it’s about profit, by doing something right like that, the Hunter Office will have a better impression on us. Not to mention that law-abiding companies also include the personality of the Hunters when they’re looking to hire Hunters. By taking Guyver’s corpse back, we would not get treated like those Hunters who tried to attack the other Hunters on the same team, or at least it would lessen the chance for that. It’s basically about karma.”

After listening to Colbert’s explanation, Dale nodded. After all, it was something that concerned him too. Colbert then turned to Akira and Sheryl.

“I can understand your opinion. So like, well, it’s not like I’m doing this to make it up for you, but I’ll give mine and Guyver’s share of relics to you. They’ll fetch you quite a lot of money if you sell them.”

Sheryl interjected. It was because although it would be just ‘quite a lot of money’ for Colbert, it would be a huge amount of money for Sheryl and her gang.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I too messed up, after all. I caused everyone trouble when we were back in the mansion. Even after we said that we would help escort you in exchange for a ride back home, one of my companions attacked you, and

now, I’m asking permission to go bring that person’s corpse with us. It would be nothing strange if you’re angry and decide to leave us here. So like, it would be great if you accept our share of relics so that it can at least reduce your anger.”

After he said that, Colbert glanced at Dale. Dale hesitated but he then gave up and said.

“…Alright, I know I’m also at fault here. I’ll also give my share.”

Sheryl asked them again to confirm.

“Are you really sure about this?”

“Yeah, I don’t want people to just leave my corpse for the monsters when I’m dead after all.”

Dale smiled bitterly when he said that.

Sheryl looked at Akira to ask for his opinion. So Akira said to her.

“I guess it’s fine. You should take their offer while you have the chance.”

If Akira does not mind, then Sheryl had no problem with it either. She lightly bowed and took their offer.

“I understand, if that’s the case, I’ll thankfully accept your offer.”

“Thanks and sorry. Alright then, let me get this done fast. Just wait here for a few minutes.”

Colbert then went to retrieve Guyver’s corpse alone.

After he finished retrieving Guyver’s corpse, they quickly continued their way back to Kugamayama city, leaving Sebla’s corpse together with the corpse of the monster that Dale and Colbert killed.

Although a lot of things happened, Akira was able to return back to the city safely. But of course, each of them had different opinions whether they

could say that they really did return back safely.

Akira stopped his vehicle near the city, it was somewhere around the border between the wasteland and the slum city. Dale and Colbert said their goodbyes before they went their separate way. Colbert carried Guyver's dead body to the city while Dale went straight to the lower district.

Sheryl and her gang members went back to their base first without loading off the relics. She then told everyone who was left in the base to help carry all the relics in the cart to their base.

Akira was sitting on the driver seat while waiting for Sheryl's gang to finish unloading all the relics in the cart.

"Say, Akira."

"Hm?"

Akira turned to Alpha who was sitting beside him on the driver assistant's seat. Alpha was still in her swimsuit. Although she still looked weird in the middle of the wasteland, Akira who was starting to get used to that did not react any differently now, at least not until Alpha changed into another dress.

Alpha asked Akira something that sounded trivial, but to her, it was an important question.

"It's about when you saved Sheryl. Why did you drop your rifle?"

When Akira was in the underground city, he did not drop his rifle even when Reina was taken hostage. Alpha would accept Akira's excuse even if he simply said that Reina and Sheryl were 2 different cases. But for the sake of her goal, it was imperative to keep Akira alive.

If there was someone that Akira would sacrifice his own life for, Alpha would have to think of a way to handle that person.

Akira proudly answered.

“I had a feeling that I would be able to evade his shots without trouble. No, that’s not right, it was because I wanted to confirm it. Although I did that when I fought with Guyver too, the time with Sebla was the first time I was able to reproduce the feeling I had when I compress my time perception. I guess the reason why I couldn’t do that in my training with you was because deep down, I knew my life was not in danger. But now that I was able to do it, I feel like I should be able to do it better next time.”

“You didn’t think what would happen if you failed?”

“I bet you would move my body by controlling my augmented suit, right? You did that when Guyver shot me from behind, remember…? Uh, was it a situation where you couldn’t do that?”

Akira’s expression stiffened, if that was the case, then his life was really in danger there. Alpha looked at Akira who was frowning and said.

“There was no trouble about that. It’s as you said, at that time, I was about to move your augmented suit to evade that shot, but you suddenly moved on your own. Putting that aside, I think that’s the reason why you could evade Sebla’s shot. But that is not the reason why you dropped your rifle.”

Akira seemed uncomfortable as he said.

“I was able to kill him without any loss, right?”

But Akira suddenly seemed to realize something as he added.

“Well, it was because I was sure I would be able to kill him even if I dropped my rifle. That’s why I did that. I thought that I could pick the option where I had a better chance of safely saving Sheryl. The situation was different compared with Reina in the underground city. If I wasn’t sure that I would be able to do that, I wouldn’t have dropped my rifle.”

Akira had no plans to get himself killed, Alpha knew that very well. As her worry was resolved by his answer, she smiled at Akira and said.

“It’s all good if that was not a suicidal move. I think I don’t need to remind you about this, but it would be bad for me if you die. The reason why I’m helping you is because it’s an upfront payment for taking my request. So basically you have a debt to me. I have no plans of letting you go from that debt unless you finish my request, you know.”

“I know, I know. Although we had a lot of trouble this time, I think I’m growing stronger and stronger. I should have a better chance in finishing your request. I hope you’re satisfied with this for now.”

Alpha and Akira were talking to each other while throwing jokes from time to time.

As Akira was having a silly talk with Alpha, Sheryl’s gang was transporting the relics from the back cart to their base.

Since some of the relics were pretty big, Sheryl’s gang was gathering quite a lot of attention. But there was no worry of getting attacked since people who saw them knew that they were transporting relics from a Hunter’s cart.

Trying to rob them of those relics meant picking a fight against that Hunter. Because of that, Sheryl’s gang was able to safely transport the relics even when they went through a territory in the slum city that was owned by a different gang.

Akira remembered his fight against Guyver and said to Alpha.

“But still, I’m glad that was a stun grenade. If it was a hand grenade, it would have been really bad. Well, the stun grenade itself was pretty dangerous though.”

“Either it was because he didn’t have a hand grenade, or it was because he thought that he might be in the blast range too. We’re saved because of that though, and we were lucky that it was right after the rain stopped.”

“Does it have anything to do with the rain?”

“To be more precise, it has something to do with the colourless mist effect of the rain. The colourless mist effect reduced the intensity of the light and the sound, so the effect from stun grenade must have been considerably weakened. Although, that’s also the reason why it’s hard to detect a monster in the middle of a thick colourless mist. If I have to give you an example, the DVTS minigun didn’t make much sound when you used it, right? If there was no colourless mist, it would have made a very loud sound, you know.”

“I see, hm? But I used that minigun before the rain started, right? And it wasn’t that loud then?”

“Colourless mist is ever-present in the eastern district although the thickness level is different in each region.”

“Is that so? Ah, that’s the reason why the monsters can’t detect us, right?”

“Yep, that’s correct.”

Akira was spending time by learning about what Hunters knew directly from Alpha.

Not too long after that, Sheryl informed Akira that they had finished transporting the relics. Akira was about to turn the vehicle on and head back home when he suddenly realized something.

“Now that I remember, Colbert said all of those excuses and we ended up carrying Guyver’s corpse back to the city while we just left Sebla’s corpse in the wasteland. But when we separated, Colbert was not heading to the direction where the Hunter Office was, I wonder why is that?”

“It’s not like you know him personally and neither is he a Hunter, so it’s normal to leave Sebla’s corpse behind like that. Moreover, when you said Hunter Office, you meant that big Hunter Office branch, right? There are other smaller Hunter Office branches in the city, you know.”

“Is that so? Well, I guess you’re right.”

Since it was not something that interested him, Akira accepted her explanation and stopped thinking about it.

After Colbert separated from Akira and Dale, he headed to the city alone. He then waited for someone to arrive.

In about 30 minutes after Colbert contacted someone, a vehicle stopped close to him. It was a small vehicle designed to be used inside the city.

A man stepped out from that vehicle. Colbert pointed at the body bag that was lying close to him. That man then opened the zipper on the body bag and confirmed that it was indeed Guyver's corpse. He smiled and turned to Colbert.

"It's Guyver. Thanks for the hard work."

"Now that I've done my job, tell them to transfer my reward."

"I know. Just wait for a sec here."

That man then operated his information terminal and contacted someone. Suddenly, Colbert begrudgingly said to that man.

"This is the last time I'm taking this kind of job, okay?"

"Please don't say that. Unlike this dead guy, we think that you're a good Hunter and we trust you. It's not easy for us to get a Hunter like you, you know. We'll give you a reward suitable for the job, okay?"

"It wasn't worth the risk this time. You're lucky that I'm not asking for an extra reward for this job."

"You are not satisfied with the reward? In that case, you should discuss it with the boss. We're just goons, so we can do nothing about it… Oh, it seems that the reward is already transferred, can you check it?"

That man saw a message in his information terminal and conveyed the contents to Colbert. Colbert took out his own information terminal, checked his bank account, and confirmed the payment.

The man then took the body bag and stuffed it in his vehicle's trunk.

"I know it's not easy working as a Hunter, but it's not easy to work as a collector either. We have to go collect the dead body of people in debt like this, you see."

That man was a debt collector sent by the company that lent its money to Guyver. Although Guyver did not know about it, Colbert was actually his observer. It was Colbert's job to watch over him and secure his body if he died. It was to make sure that he would not escape so that they could throw him to labour work in case he could not pay back his debt and to quickly collect his body as soon as possible when he got killed.

There were many private assets that could not be seized if the Hunter was still in 'missing' status, such as the Hunter Office bank account. The fastest way to seize those assets was by bringing the owner of the assets to transfer those assets, regardless of whether the owner was alive or not. In order to make sure that it was not the collector company that killed the person and brought the corpse to the Hunter Office to seize his or her assets, it was important to have someone else as a witness to testify that the person was actually killed in his line of work. The paper works could be done faster if the witness was someone trustworthy with a good track record.

With Guyver's corpse in their hands, it was easy to guess that the collection agency would seize all of Guyver's assets, including the money that he saved to escape from that very debt.

Colbert laughed uncomfortably and said.

"I know how hard it is to work as a collector. The guy who came to collect my debt ended up in the grave after all."

"Oof, scary. It seems that you're in a very bad mood today. Well, I'll listen to your story on our way, hop in."

That man and Colbert then hopped into the vehicle and they went to the city.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 83, The Way to Sell The Relics

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Sheryl was in her private room, talking with Akira through her information terminal.

“…I understand. See you tomorrow then, I’ll be waiting for you… Yes, good night.”

Akira then ended the call. Although she was smiling all the time when she was talking with Akira, her face immediately showed her tiredness the moment the call ended. She then let out a big sigh.

[I guess Akira won’t come here today, huh. That’s just too bad.]

Her call with Akira was basically him telling her that he would not come to the base for today since it was already pretty dark outside. To be honest, Sheryl wanted to use that as an excuse to make him sleepover in the base again, but her wish was not granted.

A lot of things happened that day and she was extremely tired both physically and mentally. Since her bathing time was around the corner, she decided to take a good rest while in the bath.

After Sheryl grabbed her stuff to take bath and exited her room, she suddenly heard her gang members making noises. It seemed that Erio and the other children were excitedly sharing their stories from the wasteland. Since someone got killed, the story became even more intriguing for the other children. But then on top of that, the reason that guy ended up dead was because he took Sheryl hostage and tried to kill Akira, thus the other children could not help but feel excited as they listened to the story.

Erio noticed Sheryl. It was the perfect chance for him to escape from all the other children who were bombarding him with questions.

“Oh, it’s the boss’ bath time. Sorry but I have to go and guard the bath.”

“I’m sure you’re tired, you can take rest for the remainder of the day.”

Sheryl believed that everyone who went to the wasteland that day must be very tired right now, that’s why she said those kind words to Erio. But Erio shook his head and said.

“No no no, don’t worry, I’m good. It’s not really that tiring to just stand guard anyway.”

“Is that so? Well, it’s up to you.”

Sheryl found his reply a bit weird, but she did not pay much attention to it and continued heading to the bathroom.

Since she went out to the wasteland that day, Sheryl took more time washing her body. She carefully cleaned her body before she dipped herself in the bath.

As her tiredness was melting into the warm water, Sheryl relaxed and recollected all which happened that day.

Sheryl always organized everything that she needed to review every day, she would self-evaluate her actions and use them as references to how she should react in the future. But since she was more tired than usual, the only memory that was replaying in her mind was the memory that left the

biggest impression on her. It was the moment when Akira saved her when she was taken hostage by Sebla.

Sheryl smiled as she kept replaying that memory inside her head. Every time she did that, the scene would change bit by bit making Akira's action look much more heroic and the scene became overly dramatized.

Soon, her smiling face turned into something different, maybe because the scene that was playing in her mind had already turned into a completely fictional scene.

She noticed that her body got increasingly relaxed as her head sunk deeper and deeper into the warm water. Engrossed in the soothing feeling, she eventually submerged her head in the water but she was able to pull herself up in a panic before any accident could happen.

"…That was dangerous."

She knew that if she continued staying in the bath, it might happen again. Thus she told herself to be more careful as she continued enjoying the bath.

The same thing repeated at least twice before she decided to finish her bath.

Erio and Alicia were standing guard in front of the changing room. It was essential to make sure that no one tried to peek at Sheryl and got themselves kicked out of the gang.

Alicia glanced at Erio. It was obvious from his face that he was awfully tired, thus Alicia worriedly said to him.

"Sheryl also told you that you can take rest, so why don't you go and do that? I'm sure you're very tired too, right?"

"Yeah, that's why I'm taking rest here. The other children would bombard me with questions if I take rest somewhere else. It's tiring to answer their questions. I've even told the same story for about 5 times already!"

Erio sounded really tired when he said that. When he went to the wasteland with the other children, he was carrying a weapon despite it being only a

cheap gun. Because of that, the other children seemed to be comparing him with Akira, who did all the amazing hard work back then. They were asking Erio what he did in the wasteland.

“…It’s true that I was carrying a gun. But there’s no way I can do what a Hunter does on a daily basis out there, you know. Every time they asked me what I did and I said that I didn’t do anything in particular, they would look at me with a shocked face. There are even some children who began complaining and telling me what I should have done. But they would immediately shut up when I say that they should take the gun the next time we go out to the wasteland. Those damn bastards!”

Erio sounded really annoyed. Alicia’s expression changed as she heard his reply, it was a mix of worry and fear.

“…There’s a plan to go again?”

“…I don’t know, you should ask Sheryl about that.”

To be honest, Erio did not want to ever go to the wasteland again. But if Sheryl told him to go, he then would not have any other choice but to go. Leaving that part aside, Sheryl’s gang was actually a pretty comfortable gang. Thus he could not afford to make Sheryl angry at him and get kicked out of the gang.

Erio’s expression changed into something that showed more fear and worry than Alicia. So, Alicia tried to cheer him up.

“I’ll ask Sheryl not to assign you with the same members as this time if you get sent to the wasteland again.”

“I’ll be counting on you.”

“By the way, it’s not like you did anything that might anger Sheryl, right?”

Erio averted his gaze, Alicia noticed that and pressed Erio for an answer.

“Wait, what did you do?”

“No, nothing. She should have forgiven me after sending me out to the wasteland today. Maybe, I hope so.”

“Seriously now, what did you do?!”

Erio looked flustered as Alicia kept pressing him for an answer. There’s no way he could tell his lover, Alicia, that he saw Sheryl naked. He tried his best to avoid having to answer Alicia’s question.

At the same time, Akira was taking a bath in his own house. He planned to go straight to the bed and sleep after finishing his bath.

Although he did not realize it until he was in his own home, he was actually pretty tired that day. The moment he took off his augmented suit, he could feel all of his tiredness in one go. He was only able to avoid falling down to the ground after squeezing all of the power that he had left to keep himself up. Akira then quickly finished the minimum level of maintenance for his equipment and decided to take a bath first before going straight to the bed.

Akira took his time enjoying his bath as he let his body float on the comfortable warm water. He could feel tiredness melting away from his body as he made sure not to fall asleep by accident in the bath.

“Akira, there’s something I want to talk about.”

“…Yes?”

Akira looked absent-minded as he turned to Alpha. Alpha was also inside the bath together with him. Or to be more precise, she was projecting that kind of image into Akira’s view. Alpha used her fictional image to the best of its potency, she adjusted her already beautiful body to fit Akira’s taste.

Normally, people would at least give some kind of reactions when they saw Alpha’s naked body. But Akira’s reaction was really dull, it was not clear whether it was because he was too tired to give any reaction or it was because he had already gotten used to it. Humans could really get used to almost anything.

Seeing how Akira was looking at her with no more than usual interest, which was showing almost no interest in her body, Alpha thought a lot of things in the back of her mind as she struck up a conversation with him.

“Although a lot of things happened today, we also got quite a lot of relics. So then, when is your next plan to go to the wasteland again?”

Akira obviously looked confused.

“Next time? Are we going to do that again? Together with Sheryl’s gang?”

“Yep.”

“With what happened today, I honestly don’t think that Sheryl would accept the same offer next time though. In the first place, what about my ammo expense? I did use quite a lot of bullets today, I don’t think Sheryl can pay for them, you know?”

Alpha smiled smugly.

“If it’s about that, then there’s no need to worry. Since there was no need to hide the destination, I made sure to take a general-purpose subjugation request too. And with the number of monsters that you defeated, it should at least give you some money to cover for the ammo, right?”

“I see. I did use quite a lot of ammo after all. It’s good to know that I don’t have to worry much about it.”

The ammo expense was paid from Akira’s own wallet and he did not expect to have to fight a swarm of monsters. It was good news for him that he could minimize the unexpected expense. But that was not enough as a reason to invite Sheryl again.

“…But still, I think Sheryl would still reject that offer, you know?”

When Akira said that, Alpha looked back at him with a serious expression and said.

“I’m sorry but I prioritize your growth more than Sheryl’s interest. Also, I’ll have to prioritize your training for the sake of my goal. Since I had to help you during today’s escort mission, it means that you failed the training. I need you to get stronger, so it would not be a good thing to reduce the chance for you to train. And just like I told you before, Sheryl will also get some benefits from this offer.”

Akira looked hesitant. It was because he knew well that he did not have enough strength.

Alpha frowned.

“If you really don’t want to do it, I won’t force you either. I don’t want you to hate me for forcing you after all.”

Akira continued talking with Alpha after that. Although a lot of things happened, Sheryl did get quite a lot of profit in the end. So it was basically up to Sheryl whether to take that offer again or not.

“I’ll at least ask Sheryl about it. If she agrees, then I’ll do it again.”

“Alright then. Next is about you.”

“About me? If it’s about the mistakes that I made today, can you do it tomorrow instead? Even if you tell me now, I might just forget it.”

Akira was only half-conscious as he was enjoying the bath. It was not a situation where he could properly react to a review discussion.

“That’s not what I meant. When that guy asked you what’s so different between him and you, and you said that it’s all about luck, remember? I don’t think that’s true. I know more than anyone else how hard you’re working yourself. After all, I always stick around you since the day we met. Not to mention, the reason why you were able to meet me was because you worked hard to the point that you were able to go to the ruin, right? That’s why I don’t think you’re the same compared with that boy and I don’t want you to have any similar thoughts.”

Alpha smiled smugly at Akira as she said. In that smile, she was actually saying that she didn't make any mistake in choosing Akira.

Akira looked a bit surprised when he heard her, his expression then turned back to normal as he said.

"…it's not like I think I'm the same as him. I do think that I have worked hard before I met you and I keep working hard even after I met you. But that guy might have also given the same amount of effort too, he might have even given more effort than me. But it's a completely different matter whether his effort gave him result or not."

Akira looked down as he recalled his past. His gaze was directed at the swaying water surface.

"…I know that I'm giving effort, but…"

"But?"

"I don't think it's anywhere near the effort that I gave before I met you. That's why, I'm just lucky. I won't say that's it, but I think the contribution from my luck is too big to ignore. Which means that boy is just unlucky. That's why I don't really think that everything he said was false."

There was not a trace of self-deprecation or empathy in Akira's face. It was just his objective evaluation of himself.

"I'm really happy to hear that you actually think so highly about meeting me."

Alpha smiled teasingly as she slid closer to Akira. Akira immediately realized what he said and bashfully looked away from Alpha.

After Akira finished his bath, he went straight to the bed and fell asleep. Alpha looked at the sleeping Akira and began her reflection.

Alpha recognized and praised Akira's hard work in order to increase her likeability. She even considered his personality when she said that, but Akira's reaction was duller than what she expected.

She thought that the way she worded it out was counter-effective, there was a need to fix that flaw.

Alpha had always been and would always be observing Akira.

***

The next day, as previously decided, Akira visited Sheryl's base. He directly went straight to Sheryl's private room.

The moment Akira put his rifle down and sat on the sofa, Sheryl sat on top of his lap and clung to him as if it was a normal behaviour.

Sheryl looked a bit bothered, it seemed that clinging on Akira while he still had his augmented suit on did not feel too good. She placed both of her hands on Akira's shoulders, extended her arms, and complained straight to Akira's face.

"It's hard, can you take it off?"

"No."

Since Akira refused, Sheryl started to grumble.

"Isn't it fine? It's not like you'll lose anything."

"I'll lose my augmented strength. It's a pain in the ass to put it back on too."

"That's just too bad."

Sheryl looked disappointed as her hands reached behind Akira's back and she clung on him again. Akira, who started to get used to her, just sighed.

"So then, Sheryl, where do you want to start?"

"Alright. First of all, about the relics that we brought back, what should we do with them?"

“Even if you ask me… You can do whatever you want with them.”

“But you should at least decide your share and the other details…”

Akira tilted his head.

“My share?”

“Yes, although we only lent you manpower, we did contribute by sending some of my gang members to the wasteland. So, it would be great if you could decide on the share that the other children could accept. But of course, I’ll help to convince them no matter what you decide.”

These children went out to the wasteland because of Sheryl’s order. They had to collect relics while under the fear of getting attacked by monsters, and to top it off, they did get attacked by a swarm of monsters. Thus it was understandable that they would be angry if they only got a small number of relics as payment. Of course, Sheryl could shut them down by telling them what happened to Sebla who betrayed her, but it would not erase their dissatisfaction. That was what Sheryl thought.

Akira noticed that Sheryl was misunderstanding something there, so he explained to her in order to clear up her misunderstanding.

“What are you talking about? Those relics are all yours and your gang’s. That’s why I’m telling you to do whatever you want with them.”

Sheryl stiffened when she heard Akira’s answer.

“A-all of them?”

“Yep.”

“Including the relics from Dale and Colbert too?”

Seeing Sheryl flustered there, Akira found it a little weird.

“All of them, so those relics are included.”

Sheryl remained frozen as she replayed Akira's answer again and again on the back of her mind. She was making sure that she did not omit or mishear anything. She then concluded that she did not mishear it, and that there was no deeper meaning behind his answer.

Since Sheryl was frozen there while clinging at him, Akira called her.

"Sheryl?"

Sheryl then stepped off from Akira and sat beside him. She sounded hesitant as she said with a low voice.

"…Uhmm… I don't really know the details, but like, don't you need them to offset the ammo expense and other stuffs?"

"I see, I made sure to get money from the other source for that, so there's no problem."

"I-is that so? Then how about an extra reward? There were a lot of unexpected things that happened after all, like that fight against the swarm and the other Hunter…"

"Reward? Ahh, reward for the request, huh? You should actually deduct some of it, after all, I put you in more danger by letting those Hunters come with us and you also got taken hostage too. No matter what happened, the fact is that someone I should protect got killed, so it was basically a failure on my part as my job was to escort you and your gang members. Since those relics are the reward for finishing the request, I'm fine with not getting any."

"…I see."

Akira's answer seemed to make Sheryl more depressed. She hung her head low, she felt like she just got into a huge debt that she would never be able to return.

Akira did not understand why Sheryl was so depressed. From his point of view, she had to go through a lot of bad experiences in the wasteland, not

only he basically half-forced her to go along with his training, she got attacked by a swarm of monster, then the Hunter, who they gave a ride to, also attacked her, and to top it off, she was also taken hostage.

Akira, who thought that he did nothing good for Sheryl, decided to give all of those relics to her in order to reduce his guilt. But there was a huge gap between their perspectives.

Akira was bewildered while Sheryl looked depressed, there was an awkward silence between the two of them.

Someone suddenly knocked on the door. Akira and Sheryl quickly turned to the source of the sound. Sheryl still looked depressed as she stayed quiet, Akira, who was at loss on what to do, answered in her stead.

“It’s not locked.”

The door opened and Alicia entered the room.

“Sheryl, Katsuragi-san is here…”

Alicia noticed the mood between Akira and Sheryl, she then tilted her head in confusion.

***

There were 3 people gathered in the base’s guest room–Akira, Sheryl, and Katsuragi. Alicia just left 3 glasses of drinks in that room before hurriedly excusing herself out.

Katsuragi looked a bit confused feeling the mood in the room, after he asked what was going on, he then sipped the coffee and said.

“…Well, so that’s how I heard that you guys returned back from the wasteland with relics and I’m here today just to check those relics.”

Akira replied to Katsuragi.

“I see, so you’re here to buy the relics, huh? But those relics are from Higaraka Residence Ruin. They’re not those expensive relics that you usually handle.”

“They’re from Higaraka Residence Ruin? Why would someone on your level go to that ruin? There are no more expensive relics in that ruin, you know? Do me a favor and go to a ruin with better relics next time, alright?”

“It was Sheryl and her gang who went there for the relics. So those relics are Sheryl’s.”

Katsuragi frowned, it was obvious that he was suspicious of Akira’s unexpected answer.

“They’re Sheryl’s? Didn’t you hire them to collect the relics?”

“It’s the opposite. Sheryl hired me to help them collect the relics.”

Katsuragi knew well of Akira’s ability, he then guessed how much it would take to pay a Hunter with similar skill as a bodyguard. One thing was for sure, Sheryl should not have enough money to pay Akira. His suspicion got deeper, he then tried to ask for more information.

“Sheryl’s gang doesn’t have enough money to have you escort them, right?”

Akira sounded as if he was only making excuses as he said.

“…Well, about that, like, you know, friendly discount.”

“If that’s the case, then you’ll give me a friendly discount too, right?”

“Well, you know what, I guess I should rethink about my relation with you if you’re in so much trouble that you can’t pay for my reward.”

Katsuragi and Akira then laughed. Although both of them seemed to be just getting along with each other from the outside, they were actually carefully gauging each other’s reaction.

Katsuragi then changed into his business smile and looked at Sheryl and Akira.

“Well, since I’m here, can you show me the relics? There might be some expensive relics that amateurs can’t recognize, you know?”

Unlike what Katsuragi expected, his offer was immediately accepted and he was guided to the storage room. The storage room was filled with all the relics that they brought back from the Higaraka Residence Ruin. Even after Katsuragi scanned the whole room, he found nothing but cheap relics that Hunters usually found in Higaraka Residence Ruin.

[They’re really relics from Higaraka Residence Ruin. I was hoping that it was just an excuse for Akira to store relics, that he can’t leave in his home, in Sheryl’s gang… But I guess I was expecting too much…]

The relics that Sheryl received from Dale and Colbert were placed inside her private room since she planned to give them to Akira later. If Katsuragi saw them, he would try to buy them from her.

Katsuragi sighed, it was obvious that he had lost interest.

“…So, Sheryl, what do you plan to do with these relics?”

“I’m thinking of selling them.”

Sheryl, who had somewhat recovered, calmly answered Katsuragi’s question. She could not afford to show Katsuragi that her relationship with Akira was shaken a bit.

Katsuragi then warned Sheryl.

“Just to make it clear, I won’t buy them, you know?”

“There’s no need to worry, we’re planning to open our own stand to sell them. We’ll clean those that can be cleaned and fix those that can be fixed before putting them out for sale. We might also sell some of them to the other gangs that we have a connection with.”

Since Sheryl planned to go to the Higaraka Residence Ruin to collect relics, she had always been thinking of the way to exchange the relics into money. Her conclusion was to sell them herself, although she had some inklings as to how much she should sell them for, she had no guarantee whether it would go well or not.

Katsuragi had lost interest in all the relics in that place, so he apathetically said.

“I see, well, good luck.”

Beside Katsuragi, Akira seemed to be deep in thought.

Katsuragi went back right after that, he was a busy person after all.

After Katsuragi left the base, Sheryl, who had regained her calm, turned gloomy again. Although she was calmer than before, it did not change her situation at all.

She glanced at Akira and realized that he was thinking about something.

Akira’s gaze was directed to the relics inside that room. Sheryl looked at those relics again, but she did not find anything out of ordinary.

She seemed confused and asked him.

“Is there anything wrong with the relics? If anything piqued your interest, I don’t mind giving it to you.”

“No, that’s not it. Sheryl, you plan to clean and fix them before selling them, right?”

“Yes.”

“There’s something that I want to ask from you…”

“Of course!!”

Sheryl quickly replied even before Akira told her what he wanted to ask of her. Akira winced back when she suddenly interjected like that.

“Then wait here for a bit.”

After he said that, Akira left the base.

Not too long after, Akira returned back with a filled rucksack. He then unloaded everything inside that rucksack on the floor, those were the relics that Katsuragi refused to buy from Akira the other day.

Akira then turned to Sheryl and asked.

“Can you sell these relics too?”

Sheryl, who heard that, turned gloomy again.

Akira himself thought that he was pushing troublesome stuff to Sheryl, that was why he thought it was the reason why she looked depressed. But in actuality, it was because she was expecting to get a much harder request from Akira. If that was all that he asked from her, it would be not even close to enough to repay her debt to Akira, that was why her expression turned depressed again. Their perceptions of the situations were completely opposite.

Sheryl then asked Akira.

“Uhmm, is it okay if I ask you the details in my private room? I want to ask about the price and how to sell them… After all, they’re your relics, so it’s not like I can just decide the price on my own…”

“I see, you’re right.”

Akira and Sheryl then returned back to Sheryl’s private room.

He then explained to Sheryl, who was sitting in front of him, about the details of his request.

Akira wanted Sheryl to sell them for a high price as possible. There was no time limit and it was okay if she could not sell them at all in the end. He also wanted the other related information such as when and to whom Sheryl sold them, for how much they were sold, how long it took for Sheryl to sell them, etc. Although he asked a number of things, all of them were easy requests.

Sheryl listened to Akira's explanation and understood what he really wanted from his requests.

Basically, Akira wanted to check the relic market, and he wanted to do that through Sheryl. He wanted to make sure if the relics that Katsuragi would not buy from him were really cheap relics, or was it that they could be sold at a high price as long as he knew where to sell them, or that maybe there was actually a way to process them into something that could be sold at a high price. If Sheryl sold them in her stand and someone bought them at a high price, then there was a good chance that Akira's guess was correct.

The relics that Akira gave to Sheryl would only collect dust in his house. Even if they were sold only for a small price or even if no one would buy them at all, Akira would not lose anything.

"Of course, there's no need to worry about it too much, I'm okay with any result. I know that you guys are busy too. So, your share is half the selling price… I guess that's all from me, do you have any questions?"

"I understand. I don't know how high I can sell them for, but I'll try to do my best."

Sheryl smiled invincibly at Akira, there was no trace of hesitation or doubt in her smile.

Akira felt relieved seeing her reaction. Since there was no restriction or limit in his request, Akira thought that she could do his request as a side job. So it should not put too much burden on her.

But Sheryl focused more on the fact that Akira did not place any particular expectation in it. Unlike yesterday's escort request, this was a request from

Akira that would clearly bring some profit for him. It was a good chance for her to return her debt to Akira that she kept piling up. Sheryl thought that if she could make enough profit for Akira, if she could prove to him that she was useful, then Akira would not easily abandon her.

No matter whatever it was, Sheryl wanted to be useful to Akira. She must become someone useful to Akira. Sheryl thought that her situation was pretty bad since she had become dependent on him as well as all of the debts that she had to Akira. Thus, this request from Akira seemed like a perfect opportunity for her.

If Sheryl expressed her happiness, Akira might find it suspicious. She had regained her composure enough to notice that and just smiled at him. Akira thought that Sheryl had calmed down and smiled in return.

Although both of them took the situation in a completely different manner, both of them were smiling at each other.

Akira thought that it should be okay to invite Sheryl to the Higaraka Residence Ruin again right now. But right when he was about to invite her, Sheryl suddenly asked him.

“So then, Akira. Do you have any other business after this?”

“Eh? Not really.”

“In that case, would you please accompany me to go shopping?”

Sheryl smiled widely when she said that to Akira.

It was not like Akira had any pressing matter to take care of, so he really did not mind going. The moment he was about to say yes, his information terminal suddenly rang, it was a notification for a message. When he checked it, it was from Elena and Sara. The content of the message was about the next schedule to go exploring the ruin again.

“Ah, I’m sorry, something came up, just invite me again next time.”

“I see. It’s really unfortunate. But since you said to invite you again next time, it means that you’re willing to accompany me, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Thank you very much, I’ll be looking forward to it.”

Sheryl was delighted with that promise. Although there was a little bit of displeasure since Akira did not prioritize her, she tried her best to hide it from him.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 84, The Truth About Exploring an Unexplored Ruin

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Akira planned to go to the unexplored ruin together with Elena and Sara again.

Just like before, he met up with Elena and Sara near the border between the wasteland and slum city. The situation was the same as Alpha planned to stop giving her support once Akira was out in the wasteland.

Alpha donned a full-body battle suit with a fastener on her upper and lower body. The glossy fabric stuck tight to her skin as it pronounced her already charming body lines even more. The fastener in front of her extended from under her neck, all the way down between her legs, and to the back. She let that fastener open down to her belly. Her fair skin was clearly exposed through that opening, showing that she was not wearing any underclothing.

If the people around Alpha could see her now, there was no doubt that she would gather a lot of attention. Although it showed less skin than her usual swimsuit, there was not much of a change in its seductiveness.

Akira saw that and stopped himself from making any comments thinking that it was at least better than her usual swimsuit. Clearly, he had more or less gotten used to it by now.

He saw Elena and Sara heading his way as the meeting time was getting closer, Alpha then smiled and told Akira that she would stop her support.

“So then, good luck for today.”

“Alright.”

“You can call me anytime if you feel lonely, okay?”

In contrast to Alpha who smiled when she said that, Akira pouted. Alpha then just giggled and vanished from Akira’s vision.

Before Elena and Sara arrived there, Akira took a deep breath and returned his expression back to normal.

Elena and Sara stopped their vehicle next to Akira’s, Akira smiled at them.

“I’ll be in your care for today.”

Elena smiled and replied, but somehow, her smile was a little clouded.

“We’ll be in your care too. But there’s something I want to ask you first. Akira, do you have an auto-drive function on your vehicle?”

“Yes.”

“Can you set it to follow behind us?”

“Sure.”

“Okay, once you set it like that, can you get on to our vehicle? There’s something I want to talk about.”

“…? Alright.”

Akira did find that a little weird. Even so, he set his vehicle in auto-drive to follow behind Elena and Sara's vehicle before hopping into their vehicle. Once Elena made sure that Akira had set himself in, she then started the vehicle and drove to their destination.

Sara, who was sitting in the driver assistant's seat, stood up and turned back to Akira who was sitting behind her, she then apologetically said.

"Please let me apologize first, we're really sorry."

"What happened?"

"It seems that someone discovered the ruin that we went together the other day."

Akira was obviously a little surprised. He did expect that it would happen sooner or later, but he did not think that it would happen so fast.

"…I see. But it's not like it's Sara-san and Elena-san's fault, or like, do you have any idea why that happened?"

Elena, who was driving the vehicle, answered Akira's question.

"Nothing. Or at least, we've done our best to make sure that wouldn't happen. Well, even if the information about the existence of the new ruin leaked from the selling route that we've employed, there is no way they would know about the location of the ruin too. And according to my scan back then, no one was following us either."

Akira just smiled lightly and said.

"Well, it's just a pure coincidence then. So I don't think it's your fault. Not to mention that it might be because of something that I did. After all, I went back straight to the city the first time I returned back from that ruin. So it might have been me all along."

It was indeed unfortunate that other Hunters knew about that ruin, but that would happen sooner or later anyway and this time it happened sooner than expected. That was all Akira thought.

Elena and Sara frowned when they heard Akira's answer, Elena then mumbled.

"…So you're not suspecting us at all, huh? Aren't you least bit suspicious that we sold the info about that ruin? I did tell you that the info of an unexplored ruin alone can fetch you a lot of money, remember?"

"Not at all."

"Why can you be so sure about that?"

"The reason, hmm….? Just my intuition, I guess."

There was a short pause before Akira continued. He was thinking of any excuse as to why he thought so and conveyed anything that came up in his mind to Sara and Elena while half-joking.

"Moreover, if it was Elena-san and Sara-san who were selling the info for money, I'm sure both of you would come up with a method that would bring you lot more money, like selling the info piece by piece, right? Well, that's just my intuition though."

Elena's and Sara's serious-looking expression softened when they heard Akira's reply.

Elena laughed and replied with a joke as well.

"That's true. If it was me, I would do it in a more profitable manner."

"If it's you, I'm sure you'll mix some fake info while selling it. After all, it'll fetch you more money while leaking less info, right?"

Sara also jumped in with a joke, Elena laughed and said to Sara.

"But of course! I'll sell them as expensive as possible too!!"

She then smiled and said to Akira with a calm voice.

"Akira, thank you for trusting us. I'm honestly happy that you do."

There were many reasons why a team of Hunters broke up, one of them was trust issues. Exploring the old-world ruin means that they were putting their lives on the line to search for expensive relics worthy of that bet. And those expensive relics were the very thing that made these Hunters doubt each other. Thanks to that, there were many Hunter teams which broke up and ended up pointing their rifles at each other.

But Akira completely trusted Sara and Elena, he did not doubt them at all. Elena was extremely delighted with that fact.

Elena, who was starting to feel embarrassed, decided to change the subject.

“Alright then!! That’s it for this matter!! Now to the next subject, listen closely, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Although we’re heading to the same ruin that we visited previously, it might be pretty dangerous this time. So I need everyone to be extremely careful. If anyone gets some bad feelings or any other reasons that make you think it’s better to withdraw, don’t hold back and tell the others too, we’ll immediately withdraw when that happens. I just want to put that out first. Akira, you’re okay with that, right?”

“Yeah. Let’s be extra careful this time. By the way, Elena-san, why do you think that the ruin would turn dangerous this time?”

There were no monsters around that ruin when they visited last time, so Akira was a bit confused why Elena thought it had turned dangerous.

Elena then answered his question.

“When info about a new ruin comes out in the market, it will include all the info regarding that ruin like its location, the interior map of that ruin, the monsters around and inside that ruin, the relics that you can find inside that ruin, and many other kinds of info. But this time, according to our investigation, no other info except the location is available in the market right now.”

“A lot of Hunters will flock to that ruin if they know they can find expensive relics in that ruin, so like, isn’t that just because the people who sold the info didn’t want that to happen?”

“Of course, that’s also one of the possibilities. But there’s also another possibility, it might be because no one returned back alive after diving into that ruin, so no extra information about that ruin comes back to the city. Or the companions of the Hunters, who dove into that ruin, waited outside and killed them on their way back. That would explain why there’s no other info other than the location of the ruin. Or maybe, the people who sold info deliberately only sold the location to make others explore that ruin and wait for the info about the interior of that ruin to be available in the market, that way they can prepare themselves better for exploring that ruin.”

Hearing this, Akira nodded with a serious expression.

“…I see. Let’s be extra careful this time.”

Akira completely erased the thought that the ruin should be safe just because he did not find any trouble the last time he visited that ruin.

On his way to the ruin, Akira was at a loss whether he should call for Alpha or not, but after hesitating for a long time, he eventually decided not to do it. After all, unlike last time with Sheryl, Akira had no extra luggage this time. Not to mention, he had Sara and Elena with him too. They had also decided to withdraw the moment any of them thought that things might get dicey. So Akira decided to do his best on his own for the time being.

Unlike last time, they went to the ruin directly rather than taking any detour. When they stopped their vehicle behind a wreckage near the ruin, they saw a completely different scene compared to the previous time they came there.

There were countless corpses of biological monsters scattered around the area, they were riddled with bullet holes. There were also remnants of mechanical monsters that were blown up with some kind of explosives. And of course, there were also empty magazines, bullet casings, and other equipment as well as dead Hunters among them. All of them were the remnants of fights between Hunters and monsters.

Akira scanned the area and mumbled.

“That’s a hell lot of them!”

It was a huge mess, the rubbles from the explosives that both the monsters and the Hunters used, flesh and blood of the biological monsters and Hunters, mechanical parts both from Hunter’s equipment and the mechanical monsters. All of them mixed together and scattered all over the area. It could be inferred that a group of Hunters fought a big swarm in this place.

Sara also scanned the area and said.

“If these Hunters came here for the ruins, then where did all these monsters come from? Did these monsters come from the inner part of the ruin? Elena, did you find anything?”

Elena checked the signal from her information-gathering device.

“It’s alright. There’s no monster around the area. If these monsters did come from inside the ruin, it seems that the Hunters have killed every single one of them.”

As Akira approached the entrance to the ruin, his expression turned grim as he noticed that the fight was fiercer around that area.

“…If there were this many monsters in this place, it was actually a good thing that the location of this ruin leaked out. Basically, we had other Hunters scout the inner part of this ruin for free thanks to that.”

Elena agreed with Akira’s opinion.

“You might be right about that. The scariest thing about an unexplored ruin is that it has as many monsters as the unclaimed relics inside it and we have no information about both of them at all. Looking at this, it is better to assume that no one was able to return back alive from searching the ruin, and that’s why there is not much info about the ruin available in the market.

Either we just got lucky when we came here last time, or someone made a huge blunder inside the ruin. Akira, we can withdraw now if you want to."

"…I'll leave that decision to Elena-san. At least for me, I don't think we should withdraw yet."

There was a trace of hesitation in Akira's voice, it showed that he carefully made that decision after considering the possible danger. Elena smiled happily and said.

"Alright, let's go then."

Sara seemed a little bit excited as she joined in.

"I look forward to seeing your performance, but don't push yourself too hard, okay?"

Akira, Sara and Elena stood in front of the stairs leading down the underground ruin. The wreckage and rubbles around the entrance looked as if they were shoved out of the way by something huge, and that trace continued all the way inside the ruin. It seemed that there was some kind of powerful monster inside.

Akira took his CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun off his vehicle. He did not forget to stuff his rucksack with ammo too.

Akira prioritized filling his rucksack with ammo rather than reserving space for relics. He was planning to throw away some of his magazines in case he found expensive-looking relics later. After all, it was better to find himself having to throw away ammo rather than finding himself running out of ammo.

Thanks to his augmented suit, Akira did not find any trouble carrying all those ammo. Although the energy consumption of his augmented suit increased, it should still have enough energy to last for the day.

Sara and Elena were also gathering their equipment from their own vehicle. It seemed that they were making sure that they had everything they needed

since they noticed the ruin was more dangerous than they thought.

Elena then asked Akira.

“Akira, are you ready?”

“Yeah. I’m ready.”

“Alright then, let’s go.”

Elena pointed her rifle to the interior of the ruin and pulled the trigger. The grenade launcher equipped on her rifle launched a canister that vanished deep inside the ruin. Elena and Sara started going down the stairs after that, Akira followed suit after them.

While going down the stairs, Akira suddenly asked Elena.

“Elena-san, what did you do back then?”

“Back then? That’s a mini information-gathering device. I used it to get more accurate data of the area and to check for any monsters.”

“Ohhh, so there’s something like that, huh.”

“That one is a canister type that can be launched from a grenade launcher, but there are many other types that you can use, you know. Some of them can be controlled manually or set to automatically explore the floor. There are even controllable drones that you can use to explore the area.”

“That sounds really convenient. How much do they cost?”

“They’re pretty expensive. The drones can even cost up to 1,000,000 Aurum per drone. It’s all good if they returned after exploring the ruin, but sometimes they get destroyed by the monsters or the connection gets interrupted and the drone crashes. There are even cases when they returned back while bringing some monsters together with them. Not to mention, if you get unlucky, some monsters can trace-back the drone and detect your location.”

“I see, so that canister type, how much does it usually cost?”

“That’s about 10,000 Aurum per canister. It’s pretty expensive for a single-use equipment, so I plan to retrieve it later if it’s possible… The reason why I didn’t use it last time was because it would be a waste if something breaks it. So I just thought that there was no need to use one back then, but this time it seems that the ruin has turned more dangerous than before, that’s why I used it just to be safe.”

Elena seemed a bit flustered as she replied. She had done that all for the sake of maximizing the possible profit from the exploration. After all, if they ended up in red because of that, it would beat the main purpose as to why they explored the ruin. Since they decided to bet their lives on exploring the ruin, it was important to return back with more money.

In order for them to minimize their expenses, they had to put their lives in more risk. It was indeed a harsh world. That was what Akira thought.

As Akira went down the stairs, he noticed the traces of something big and heavy running up the stairs. But the stairs were not that damaged, so it did not cause much trouble for Akira and the others as they walked down. It showed just how amazing the old-world building was.

After they went down the stairs, they went through the same hallway that they went through last time. But the interior of that hallway was so much different compared to the previous time they visited the place.

Unlike last time when they had to use a flashlight to explore the hallway, the hallway was bright enough without any extra illumination this time. Looking at the shadow that cast straight below them, they knew that the light came from above, but there was no lamp-like object fixed in the ceiling at all.

Elena looked around and said.

“So this facility is still active, huh. I wonder if some Hunters went to the deeper part of the ruin and did something to turn the facility back on.”

The interior was bright enough for them to see far deep into the ruin. There were traces of explosives, bullets and blood on the hallway, showing that fights happened there.

Akira stared into the deeper part of the ruin and said.

“There are traces of battles here too, there are also traces of something big and heavy passing through the stair… It’s really weird that there’s no dead monster or Hunters in this place.”

Looking at the traces, the battle should have happened a few days ago. And judging from the blood splatters, there should be at least multiple dead organic monsters or at least human corpses in the area. Since there were traces of mechanical monster wreckage above the ground, it meant that there should be at least some leftover mechanical monsters too. Akira thought that it was impossible for all of them to reach the surface without getting killed on the way.

Sara made a guess and said to Akira.

“…I’m not really sure either. But I think that the cleaning drone might have cleaned them up.”

Although the old-world ruins were left unmanned for years, some of them were always kept clean and in tiptop shape. It was all thanks to the cleaning drones and the self-repair function that was still active even right now.

Those kinds of ruins were relatively more dangerous. Since any traces of monsters were regularly cleaned up, making it harder to gauge the danger inside that ruin. Not to mention, the security functions might also still be active and they would try to eradicate any trespassers.

“It seems that there’s no monster around, let’s carefully go deeper.”

With that signal from Elena, they continued exploring deeper into the ruin while keeping their guards up.

They eventually reached the hall where they collected some relics the previous time they came there. They did not meet any monsters yet. Although there were traces of battles here and there, they did not find any dead corpses from those battles either.

The way forward was branching into two hallways. They noticed that there were traces of something big and heavy having passed through the right hallway, the destroyed ticket gate near it showed the strength of that unknown thing.

Elena turned to Akira and Sara and asked them.

“Which way to go?”

“Left.”

“Let’s go left.”

Sara and Akira did not hesitate when they answered Elena’s question. All of them agreed to go to the left.

When they continued to the left hallway, they found themselves inside an underground city.

There were shops and stands lined up inside, but most of them were already in a destroyed state.

And unlike inside the hallway, there were traces of battles complete with the corpses of the organic monsters, wreckages from the mechanical monsters, and the dead Hunters.

Elena’s expression turned grim. But it was not because of the number of the dead Hunters scattered in front of her, nor was it because most of the relics were destroyed by the explosives that were used in this place.

She turned to Akira and Sara.

“Akira, Sara, are you guys ready? They’re coming.”

The moment she said that, Sara and Akira moved to her front and readied their rifles. Akira put his rucksack down and lined up extra magazines on the ground around him. Sara also did the same as Akira.

From the goggles that he was equipping, Akira could see information from his information-gathering device as well as from Elena's information-gathering device. He could see countless signals coming in his direction.

Judging from the movements of those signals, it was rather obvious that they had noticed Akira's position. More and more signals kept appearing in the detection range. The monsters in that area were still alive and kicking. They were only taking a short rest after cleaning up the Hunters that went in before the trio.

Akira pulled the trigger almost at the same time as Sara. As gunshots echoed through the area, it signalled that another fight had started.

Sounds of monsters came out from deep inside the underground city as well as from the already destroyed shops in the area as they quickly gathered at Akira's location. There were all kinds of monsters, some of them were carnivorous monsters with large strong legs, some of them were half-cyborg dogs with conspicuous mechanical body parts. There were even missile pods with legs that burst out missiles randomly as if it did not care if they hit the other monsters.

Those monsters ran from behind wreckage to wreckage while closing into Akira's position, but Akira quickly took them out together with the wreckage that they were using to hide with his DVTS minigun. The powerful DVTS minigun also made a quick work of the monsters that were caught moving from one wreckage to another. The bullet storms destroyed everything, both the monsters and the wreckages.

As for the monsters with long-range weapons which were shooting from far away, Akira would take cover behind sturdy-looking wreckage and use his CWH anti-material rifle while relying on the information received from his information-gathering device to aim at them. The powerful piercing bullet from his CWH anti-material rifle could easily pierce through the rubble and the monster hiding behind it.

Elena was also providing support fire while shooting some mini information-gathering devices into the deeper part of the ruin to perform more accurate detection. She then sent the location of monsters with long-range weaponry as well as the trajectory line of the projectiles that they shot to Akira and Sara. She was also sending the precise locations of the monsters that were approaching Akira and Sara to make sure of their safety while providing them support fire.

Sara used the information from Elena to accurately aim at those monsters. She used her A4WM Repeater Grenade Launcher to shoot the monsters that were hiding behind the rubbles from above them or by bouncing the grenade off the holes on those rubbles.

Sara trusted Elena's information and kept blasting grenades into those monsters. Most of her shots hit the vital points of those monsters like their heads or their cannons which then caused a localized explosion.

Although they had the upper hand in that battle, Elena's and Sara's expression somehow looked grim.

Sara then asked Elena who knew the best about the situation they were in.

"Elena, about those monsters though…"

"Yeah, some of them are the same type of monsters that we found in the Kuzusuhara ruin underground city."

"…I see, so my guess is correct, huh."

Sara's expression turned grimmer than before.

The underground city located under the Kuzusuhara ruin was filled with powerful monsters, enough to make the City Management set up a forward base there. During their forward base aid request, Sara and Elena had to fight back those monsters that were coming out from the underground city. There were even times when they were overwhelmed by some of those monsters, but at that time, they were able to receive reinforcement from the

other Hunters who were standing guard and the tanks nearby, thus they were able to fight back those monsters without any trouble.

In case if those powerful monsters were mixed in the swarm that they were facing right now, then they were indeed in a very bad situation.

Elena then continued.

“As far as my detection goes, these monsters are relatively weaker than the monsters that we faced in the underground city. But still, it’s not normal to find these monsters in this place.”

Sara then turned to Akira.

“Akira, are you okay over there?!”

“I’m fine!!”

“That’s good to hear!! Some of these monsters are dangerous!! There’s no need to try saving your ammo, use your full power!!”

“Understood!!”

Akira’s answer was firm, there was no trace of panic or fear in his voice.

Sara and Elena smiled when they heard his answer. Judging from his answer, it seemed that Akira was able to hold himself just fine in that battle, thus their focuses that were unconsciously leaning toward worrying about him, in case if he was in danger, shifted to the monsters in front of them. Thanks to that, it greatly reduced the time that they needed to clear up the monsters.

Even without Sara’s recommendation, Akira was already using his full power without worrying about his ammo expense. But he had to still worry about his leftover ammo. He carefully gauged the enemy and used the openings to quickly replace the empty magazine of his rifle before immediately returning back to shooting and pushing back the monsters that were approaching him. Since he had no other choice but to use his bullets, he was trying to use them as effectively as possible.

As not to make any mistakes when reloading, he would throw his empty magazines far away from him. But after some time, the number of empty magazines around him had significantly increased.

Because of the absence of Alpha's support, Akira's shooting skill was lower than usual, and also his actual skill was not enough to efficiently take out the monsters in this situation. Akira was actually compensating that by shooting more than usual, as such, he was using more ammo.

[…I still have some reserve magazines left in my rucksack. When I have to use them too, I'll call for Alpha. That is if Alpha can still provide me with support in this place though… I guess I should try to ask her now to confirm that while I still have the chance, huh?]

Akira hesitated for a bit, but he quickly made up his decision.

[No, that kind of pessimistic way of thinking will be fatal in this situation! Moreover, if I can't handle this situation myself, that in itself is a fatal flaw that will definitely get me killed sooner or later! I have to get stronger! That's why I have to handle this myself!]

Akira pulled himself together and continued shooting.

He was trying to get stronger, he was also putting extra effort to get stronger, and for that sake, he placed himself in more danger. The source of that desire was nothing more than his own will to get stronger. But in reality, there was another reason that he himself did not realize as to why he was trying so hard.

As the fight continued, the sound of gunshots that echoed through the underground city summoned more and more monsters. Those gunshots would not stop as long as the Hunters were still fighting the monsters.

Then eventually the gunshots stopped.

The last person who was holding the trigger was Akira. As the final bullet that pushed through the barrel of his rifle pierced through the head of the

last monster alive, it signalled the eradication of the monsters in the area. And with no targets to shoot, the battle came to an end.

The underground city was wrapped in silence, Akira looked around his surroundings while still on high alert.

5 seconds passed, then additional 10 seconds, the silence still continued. After another 10 seconds, Elena smiled and said.

“No more signals. It seems that there are no more monsters around, it’s alright now.”

Elena and Sara finally lowered their guards. Akira let out a big sigh.

There were not many magazines left. Akira smiled lightly, he felt more confident since he was able to survive the battle without Alpha’s support.

Sara smiled and walked to Akira.

“You looked pretty calm there, you did well. There were even some monsters from the inner part of the underground city mixed in that swarm, normal Hunters who never faced those monsters would at least have some hard time fighting them, you know?”

“Well, I was using my ammo without holding back after all. Although, at that point, it can be said that I was already hard-pressed. Had it continued any longer, I would have racked a huge ammo expense since I used quite a lot of ammo to kill those strong monsters that Sara-san and Elena-san warned me about… So those monsters are the ones from the inner part of the underground city, huh?”

“Yep, that’s right. They are actually pretty weak compared to the other monsters that you can find in the inner part of the underground city. For the bigger monsters, you’ll have to get help from a tank to kill them, you know. But I don’t think we’ll encounter any of them in this place. And even if we do, they’re pretty huge, so we can just return back to the narrow hallway. There’s no need to fight them here.”

Elena smiled and joined in.

“Now then, since we’re also in red right now, let’s gather some relics from this place to make sure that we end up with more money than we used.”

Elena then scanned the area around her one more time. That particular area of the underground city was already half-destroyed. After all, both the monsters and the Hunters who fought in that place did not care what happened to the ruin in that area. Although the structure itself was still standing strong thanks to the old-world technologies, the relics inside it did not share the same level of durability.

“…That is… if we can still find good relics in this area though.”

Elena smiled bitterly when she said that.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 85, How The Information Spread

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Akira, Sara and Elena started gathering relics. Although they encountered some unexpected fights, it was not enough of a reason for them to just go back home. Indeed, it was important to return back alive from the old-world ruin, but it was also equally important to come back home with relics. After all, it was not like they went out to the old-world ruin with their lives on the line just to return back in red.

They dug through the rubbles, dead monsters, and corpses of Hunters, searching for relics.

Akira filled the empty space in his rucksack with relics. He chose the relatively still good-looking relics that he could find since most of the relics in that place were either already destroyed or drenched in blood or oil.

Some of the relics were thankfully still fully intact, relics with strong casing were left untouched by the blood and oil outside. Akira was searching for those kinds of relics.

"…Hm?"

He suddenly raised his voice.

“Akira, what’s wrong?”

“Uh, I found underclothes for women…”

“Really?!”

Sara shrieked in delight. Just like what she told Akira before, she was in dire need of durable underclothing. If it was possible, she wanted to get more of them.

“…It seems that blood had slipped through its wrapping though.”

It was as Akira said, the wrapping of that underclothing was actually torn and some kind of liquid had seeped through that opening, thus turning its colour into something strange.

“… I see, that’s really unfortunate.”

Sara sounded very disappointed.

Akira then left that underclothing on top of rubble near him. He had no plans to put that inside his rucksack as he quickly returned back to look for more relics.

He then found something else.

“….Huh?”

“Akira, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing, just another underclothing, but…”

“…But?”

It was the second time, so Sara calmly asked Akira.

“…It has a bullet hole.”

It seemed that a bullet had randomly pierced through that underclothing.

Sara knew that it was not Akira's fault, but she then smiled at Akira and asked.

"Akira, what kind of bullying are you playing here?"

"I didn't mean to bully anyone."

Akira simply answered Sara's question. After all, it was not like he did that on purpose.

Sara, who looked a bit annoyed, seemed to realize something as she smiled mischievously. As she directed her displeasure after getting disappointed for the second time into another direction, she then smiled teasingly at Akira.

"Or is it like you want to see me wearing that?"

"N-No…"

Akira flusteredly answered her question, his face had turned beet red. Sara looked completely satisfied with his reaction.

Elena sighed exasperatedly and said to Sara.

"Stop teasing him already and move the rubbles aside, will you?"

"Yes yes, I know."

There was a good chance of finding intact relics around that place, thus Sara focused on searching relics around the same area with Akira.

There were all kinds of shops in the underground city, but compared to the type of relics that they found, they were only able to find a few different types of relics. The other Hunters might have already carried away some of the relics from this area, or some of them might have gotten destroyed from the battles that happened there, or they might have turned into dust after being left in that place for years. Whatever the reason was, it did not change the fact that only a few relics were left around. There was nothing that Akira and the others could do about it.

They might still be able to find some relics if they moved all the rubbles aside and searched carefully. They could also dig out relics from under the crumbled shops. But of course, they did not have enough time to do any of that. There was a good chance that they would encounter monsters on their way back, thus it was better if they focused only on collecting small relics that they could easily carry back with them.

But, even so, it was enough to fill up Akira's rucksack to the brim. Although there might be some relics in bad conditions mixed in, it was still better than coming back empty-handed. Because of all the ammo that he used in the last fight, Akira was able to bring back quite a lot of relics with him.

Sara suddenly came to Akira and pointed her finger at the relics on top of the rubble.

"Akira, if you're not planning to bring them back, can I take them instead?"

It was the underclothing that Akira found. One of them had suspicious-looking liquid seeped through the wrapping while the other one had a bullet hole. That was why he did not consider taking them back with him.

"…Sure… Wait? It's not like you're planning to use them, right?"

Akira looked a bit weirded out, he thought that they were not in a usable state.

Sara laughed and said.

"Of course I won't use them like that. I'm planning to bring them to a specialist and have them fixed. If I'm lucky, it will be as good as new and it's way cheaper than buying new underclothing."

"So there are specialists for this too, huh. Sure then, I don't mind if you take them."

"I see, I'll go ahead and take them then."

Sara then put them inside another transparent wrapping before placing them inside her bag.

That transparent wrapping piqued Akira's interest.

"Sara-san, what's that plastic bag?"

"This? This is a plastic bag to preserve the relics. I usually use this to carry relics that look fragile or easily damaged. This is just a cheap bag, if you use the expensive bag, it can even protect the relics from gunshots too. It's just a small hack that you can employ to increase the quality of relics that you carry back home."

Akira looked amazed.

"So there's something like that too, huh. Hmmm, I guess I should buy some too."

"That's right. It's really convenient to carry dirty relics inside this bag. You won't lose anything by keeping some handy too. Ahh, but I don't recommend replacing the original relics wrapping with this bag. After all, the original wrapping might actually be more durable than this bag."

"I see."

Akira just received another advice on how to be a good Hunter. Getting such new information was one of the benefits of exploring a ruin together with the other Hunters.

They finally finished gathering relics in that area. Although there was an unexpected fight, they were able to harvest a good number of relics.

Elena then asked Sara and Akira what they planned to do next.

"Now then, what's your next plan? I don't mind going back to the city now, but personally, I want to go further a bit to get more information about this ruin. Since we've killed most of the monsters around this area, this should be a good chance to do that."

Akira looked to the inner part of the ruin, he remembered that his original aim when he came to that ruin was to look for something that was located deep down there. It was the very thing that was indicated by the pointer in his vision when he was searching for that ruin, it was for the Lion Steel Corp information terminal.

“That’s right. The relics in the deeper part of the ruin might still be intact, it might be a good idea to at least check them.”

After Akira found an unexplored ruin and the info about that ruin spread among the other Hunters, he had lost most of his reasons to go to that ruin. But even so, he thought it might be a good idea to at least check the terminal inside.

“I still have enough reserve ammo too, so I guess we can continue going deeper.”

Since Sara also agreed, they decided to continue going deeper into that ruin.

The underground ruin that they were in was not that big. The whole area was illuminated by unknown light sources, but thanks to that, they were able to see clearly the interior of that place. There was also a staircase leading to the surface, but according to Elena’s scan, the entrance was buried under rubbles. It was not very surprising since if that staircase did connect to the surface, someone else would have discovered that ruin before them.

There were traces of battles here and there, it could be inferred that the relics in that place were also left in a bad shape.

Elena finished scanning the area. She did find another hallway, presumably connecting to the other places in the underground city, but she could not see how far that hallway went. So she thought that it was a good place to finish the exploration for that day and decided not to go any deeper.

But then she suddenly stopped, her expression turned serious.

Sara, who noticed it, found it suspicious as she quickly readied her rifle and closely watched her surroundings.

“Elena, did you find something?”

“Somebody’s there.”

Akira put his guard up. But he did not feel any human presence and it was confirmed by his information-gathering device which did not detect any signal.

Elena noticed Akira’s misunderstanding and explained it to him.

“It’s fine, it’s not like someone is hiding using a camouflaging sheet or something. I’m getting some kind of signal from behind that door, it might be from a Hunter who came here before us and somehow survived until now.”

Elena was pointing at a door not too far from them. That door was bent in a horrible form, probably by some monsters as it did not seem like it could be easily opened.

As Akira and Sara turned to the direction of that door, a voice came out from a crack behind that door.

“Heeey!! Is someone there?!! Someone’s there, right?!! Answer me!!”

The person behind that door was shouting in desperation for anyone he could find in that underground city.

After Akira, Sara and Elena looked at each other, they walked toward that door.

As the man behind that door caught a glimpse of the trio, he shouted in delight.

“Thank goodness!! I’m saved!! You guys are Hunters too, right? What happened to the monsters in the area?”

Elena answered his question as the representative of their team.

“We’ve killed all the monsters in the area. Anyways, what are you doing in that place?”

“We were running away from those monsters when we ended up here!! Please!! Help us!!”

“We? How many people are with you?”

“With me included, there are 5 people over here. The other 4 are also inside this room. Can you please open the door? It’s all good that it was strong enough to withstand the monster, but now it’s bent and we can’t open it. Can you guys do something about it?”

There was a short silence before Elena turned to Sara and Akira.

“What to do? Should we help them?”

“What are you talking about? You shouldn’t be hesitating here!? We’re also Hunters, just like you, we should help each other when we’re in trouble, right?!”

“I’m sorry but we have had experiences of meeting people like you in a similar situation but they ended up trying to kill us instead. So it’s not like I can simply trust you guys. Not to mention that there are so many dead Hunters out here. It means that basically, you guys abandoned them just to save your own lives, right?”

“W-well, it couldn’t be helped. The monsters were too strong, we had no chance to win, we just got lucky that we found this door close to us when the others didn’t even get the chance to evacuate here too. As a team leader, I chose to prioritize the life of my own team members. I can’t ask them to risk their lives just for the other Hunters whom we just met exploring the same ruin.”

“I see, well, I can understand your decision.”

“S-so?”

“Basically, you’ll understand if I use the same argument to leave you there, right? I have team members that I’m responsible for too.”

“P-please have mercy.”

That man pleaded from behind the door.

Elena turned back to Akira and Sara.

“So then, what should we do?”

Sara stepped up first to answer that question.

“Let’s see, we can at least open the door for them, right? After that, well, let’s have them escape from this place with their own power. There’s no need for us to escort them all the way back to the city or to the surface.”

“You’re right, I guess we can do that much. Akira, are you okay with that?”

“Sure, but then, what should we do to open this door?”

When Akira said that, Sara smiled smugly and said.

“Let’s kick it down.”

Sara then stood in front of the door and said to the guy behind that door.

“It’s gonna get dangerous, so get away from the door if you don’t want to get crushed!!”

After she said that, Sara used the full power of her nanomachine augmented body to deliver a powerful blow to that door. The banging sound indicated just how much force her kick had delivered to that door as the door got bent even more. Sara then continued kicking that door, although it bent more and more, the door itself was still standing there.

Sara frowned as she noticed that the door was stronger than she had thought, she then mumbled.

“This door is pretty strong.”

Akira came and stood next to Sara. She understood what he meant as she smiled at him.

After they looked at each other for a few split seconds, they kicked the door simultaneously. Both of them used their augmented strength, which allowed them to carry heavy weaponry unthinkable for a normal human, to deliver their kicks on that door at the same time.

The door was sent flying with a loud bang. The heavy door flew and landed right in front of the guy who was behind that door just a few minutes ago.

That guy stared at Sara and Akira with his jaw dropped. Elena just stood on the other side while smiling bitterly at him.

Now that the door was down, all the Hunters trapped in were able to leave the room. All of them looked extremely tired but also relieved at the same time. Since they ran to that room to save their lives, they must have been psychically exhausted staying inside that room.

Sara then said to those Hunters.

“We’re going back home now but don’t tail us!! You guys should go back home on your own!!”

Elena then added.

“Or at least keep your distance that we deem to be acceptable. If you guys are too close, we’ll see that as a hostile action.”

The leader of those Hunters, Revin, flusteredly turned to Elena and Sara and said.

“Wait for a sec!! Are you going to just leave us behind?!”

“Yep, that’s what we just said, right?”

Elena showed no hesitation when she said that.

“I’m sorry but we’re being utmost careful right now… Or is it like you want to fight us here?”

Elena’s and Sara’s smiles vanished. It was not like they were showing hostility toward Revin and his team, but instead, it meant that they were serious about what they said.

Revin looked at Sara and Elena while being overwhelmed by their pressure. In his eyes, both Sara and Elena were beautiful ladies, he figured that they might have gone through a lot of difficult situations thanks to their beauty which made them be extremely cautious against strangers.

He then turned to Akira, his eyes were pleading for help, but Akira then apologetically said to him.

“Uhh, I’m sorry but just recently I gave a ride to some Hunters who asked for my help and one of them tried to kill me. So I understand Elena-san’s and Sara-san’s decision.”

“Who the heck was that bastard!!!”

Revin cursed his situation. The fact that they got locked inside that room was enough of bad luck that he did not think he would get hit by another bad luck so soon.

“If I’m not mistaken, his name was Guyver. I heard that he had a huge debt, so he tried to kill me and the other Hunters to get his hands on more relics.”

“We don’t have any debt, okay!! You guys have no debt, right?!”

Revin shouted as he turned to his team, the other Hunters then nodded at him.

After hearing what Akira said, Elena turned to Akira and asked him.

“Akira, were you okay?”

“Yeah, I didn’t get injured and I was able to kill him. So it ended without any problem.”

“I see, I’m glad to hear that.”

Elena smiled.

Revin placed both of his hands on his head, he was at loss on what to do. Akira, Elena and Sara refused to go together with them. At this rate, he and his team would really get left behind. There might be some monsters lurking around somewhere, and even if they were able to reach the surface, they still had to go back to the city. And with their current reserve ammo, their chance of survival was really low.

Revin then tried to negotiate with Elena.

“…Alright alright, let’s do this instead. I’ll send an SOS request to you. If you guys escort us back to the city, well, since there are 3 of you, we’ll pay 3,000,000 Aurum for the reward. It’s not a bad offer, right?”

If Revin sent an SOS request, then it would be an official request sent through the Hunter Office as the proxy. It carried more weight than just a simple promise.

Elena was also a Hunter, if it was a request then she might as well consider it. She then thought for a while and said.

“Well, that’s not a bad offer.”

“Right?”

Revin’s expression relaxed for a bit as he felt that he finally got something that might help him salvage his situation. But Elena then said to him with a serious face.

“But it’s a different story whether you can pay for it or not, right?”

After he heard Elena’s question, Revin began to panic. He then desperately pleaded to her.

“Of course we’ll pay!! What is it now?! Do you have a bad experience of this thing too?!”

“The last time we received a similar SOS request, the requester gave us a hard time when we asked him to pay for the reward and the ammo expense. The request even mentioned that the ammo expense will be paid by the requester. Well, we did make him pay in the end though, but it was really a huge pain in the ass.”

“What the heck!? What’s wrong with you guys?! Why did you guys meet so many of those bad people?!!”

Revin shouted in reflex. He thought that there was a limit on how bad his luck could be, but that did not seem to be the case.

“By the way, that guy’s name is Katsuragi”

“Alright alright!! Then how about this!! Old-world relics!! We’ll give all the relics that we found inside the room. I don’t know for sure if they can get you 3,000,000 Aurum, but it should be able to get you quite a lot of money. They’re still in good shape after all. So how about that?”

If this did not work, Revin had nothing more that he could offer. That was why he looked really desperate.

Elena turned to Sara and Akira again.

“What do you guys think?”

Judging from Elena’s intonation, she leaned more towards taking that offer compared to the previous offers. But it did not sound like she was looking forward to taking that offer either. It was more like she was okay either way.

Akira then asked Revin.

“Can you tell me what kind of relics you have?”

“They’re mostly clothes. It’s not like those clothes that you can use in place of Hunter armours, they’re mostly normal clothes and some underclothing too. Well, I’m not sure myself if I can call them normal clothes though, like, you know, old-world clothing sometimes have a very weird design, right? What can I say… The culture is just so alien for us.”

“I see… Well, since it seems that you have something to pay me with, I don’t mind taking your offer.”

After he said that, Akira turned to Sara. Elena smiled and looked at Sara too. Sara seemed a bit embarrassed as she returned a smile and said.

“Alright then, let’s take that offer.”

Revin and his team let out a big sigh. They were greatly relieved that Akira, Sara and Elena decided to take their offer in the end.

They then walked to the hallway leading to the surface. It was the same hallway they passed when they went down there.

Elena was talking with Revin as to know how they ended up inside that room. It was in order to gather information about the area.

Revin understood what Elena was trying to do. For the Hunters, information about a ruin was something that they could sell for money, so normally he would not share the information that he had so easily. But since Elena was the leader of the team that eradicated the monster swarm that he and his team could not fight, he chose to avoid souring her mood if it was possible.

Just like Elena and Sara who did not trust Revin and his team, Revin also could not completely trust Elena and Sara without any reason. He thought that when the push came to shove, they might abandon him and his team.

So in order to buy more time, he started his story from when he left the city rather than going straight for what happened in that ruin.

Since Elena might tell him to just skip the unimportant part of his story, he glanced at her to check her expression. But Elena seemed to be listening to him just fine, so he continued his story starting from how he got the information about that ruin.

There was a pub in the lower district that Revin frequented. That day, he and his team were enjoying cheap beers while talking about their plan in that pub just like usual.

In reality, it was not like they were talking about anything in particular. With the alcohol mixed in their blood, they were only talking about random stuff. The moment they veered from the main subject about where to go next, it was obvious that their discussion would not be productive.

At that time, a guy suddenly came to them offering the location of a ruin that was just discovered recently.

That kind of thing was a common story for fraud and scams. A lot of Hunters were fooled by similar occurrences. After all, if they got lucky, an unexplored ruin could turn them rich in a single night. It was understandable that such a talk would easily lure those Hunters.

But not all cases were scams. The possibility of such information to be true was more or less the same as the possibility that it was a scam.

There were cases when Hunters found an unexplored ruin filled with monsters that they could not handle, thus they did not have any other choice but to earn money only by selling that information. There were also cases where Hunters from a gang or people working in a corporation secretly sold classified information about relics or ruins. And last but not least, some people intentionally spread information about ruins and relics in order to incur damage to the competing corporations.

Although Revin and his team hesitated at first, they decided to buy that information in the end. There were many reasons why they decided to do so. The information about the location of that ruin and the information about the inner part of that ruin were sold separately, but both of them were sold at a relatively cheap price. Their deal was that Revin would pay a portion of the price upfront, he then would go to that ruin to gather relics and then pay the rest later.

Compared to the information about the inner part of that ruin which cost quite a lot of money, the information about the location of that ruin was pretty cheap. Not to mention, he could go and verify the authenticity of that information before paying the rest of the money. So, even if that was a scam, it would not cost him much.

And in case if that information was genuine, then he might be able to strike it rich in one go. This gave enough reason for him to accept that deal.

That guy, who sold the information, had given the same offer to the other Hunters too. Some of them accepted his deal, prepared themselves with enough equipment, and went to that ruin.

On their way to their destination, Revin and his team regained their logical faculties and started to doubt whether they got scammed. But when they arrived at the coordinates they had received, they did find a ruin that they never knew of until then. Revin then happily sent the remaining payment to that guy and waited for the rest of the information about the inner part of that ruin to be sent into this information terminal.

But at that time, that guy was busy making deals with the other Hunters and did not have the leeway to respond to Revin. As they were waiting for the information, more and more people arrived at that ruin. Now that many Hunters knew there was really an unexplored ruin in that place, they began spreading the information via their own channels.

Some of those Hunters waited just outside the ruin like Revin and his team, but more and more Hunters started thinking about going ahead and searching the ruin.

Eventually, one of those Hunters just could not wait for the information about the inner part of the ruin and decided to dive in. Soon after that, more and more Hunters got swept by the flow and decided to go into the ruin without waiting.

Although no one knew for sure how big the ruin was, they guessed that it would not be as big as the Kuzusuhara ruin. So in short, the number of relics inside that ruin was limited. If they waited too long outside, the other Hunters might take out all the relics inside that ruin and leave nothing for the Hunters who came in late. All the Hunters in that place thought so too.

Revin was pushed by that line of thinking as they also decided to go into that ruin.

When Revin’s story reached that point, Elena suddenly interjected.

“There’s a hallway right after the stairs leading down, right? Do you still remember how the hallway looked when you went down?”

“Well, it looked just like a normal hallway to me.”

“Was it bright inside? Was there any trace of battles? Did you see any monster corpses?”

“Yeah, it was pretty bright, as for the traces… We were in a hurry so I didn’t really pay much attention. As for the monster corpses… I think there were some in the hallway. We were running while avoiding those corpses, so I’m sure about that. I think those corpses are from the monsters killed by the Hunters that went in first before us. So as for the traces from battles, there should be some traces left from those fights.”

It seemed that the state of that hallway had changed in a short span between when Revin’s team went there and when Elena and her team arrived there.

“I see. You can continue your story.”

After Elena said that, Revin thought for a bit before continuing his story.

“…Then after that, we looked around and ended up in that area. When we were collecting relics together with the other Hunters, suddenly a huge swarm flooded out from the hallway we came. We did try to fight back, but we were overwhelmed by the number and the strength of that swarm. It seemed like some strong monsters were mixed in that swarm as well. We basically had no chance of winning that battle. We then ran inside that room and locked the door. We just kept ourselves locked inside while hoping that the monsters would be gone. And we waited until you guys saved us. That’s all.”

“When you passed through that opening, there’s another hallway other than the one leading to the underground city, right? Did you guys check that hallway?”

Revin was planning to feign ignorance, but when he saw the look in Elena's eyes, he immediately gave up.

"…Well, we did. There were no shops in that hallway, so we quickly returned back and went to the other one."

"What was it like inside that hallway? Do you have any data about the interior of that hallway? If you're going to explore an unexplored ruin, you at least do that much, right?"

"W-well about that…"

"So you do, huh? Give it to me."

Revin looked extremely displeased.

"Please give me a break, the relics that we found inside that room are the most expensive things that we found, you know. And we're giving them to you. I'm planning to make up our loss today by selling the information about the interior of this ruin. If we don't do so, it'll definitely affect our Hunter activity in the future. And now you're telling me to just give it away for free?"

"In that case, you can sell it to us first. I'll give you 500,000 Aurum for the information."

"…Are you really going to pay for it?"

"That's if the relics that you gave us really worth more than 3,000,000 Aurum. If they don't, then I'll take that information for free as compensation."

"…Dammit, okay okay!!"

Revin did not have much choice as he gave Elena his general-purpose data storage. If he did not give it to her, she would doubt whether the relics that he gave were really worth enough for accepting his SOS request.

Elena docked that data storage into her information-gathering device and analyzed the data in it. When she was done, she was able to see topological data of the area that she did not check before, including the hallway that they did not go to.

Her expression immediately turned grim.

“Sara, Akira, we need to hurry up and get out of this place.”

After she said that, Elena increased her pace. Although they did not encounter any monsters the last time they passed through that hallway, she was moving even faster than she would in a safe place. Akira and Sara looked a bit surprised, but they quickly matched their paces with Elena’s. Revin and his team pushed themselves to follow the trio’s pace as well.

As Elena was walking so fast that she was close to running, Sara asked her.

“Elena, did you find something?”

“I have a bad feeling about this, so I want to get out of this place as soon as possible. I’ve analyzed the topological data that I received from Revin. According to that data, there’s a station on the end of the other hallway. It’s a station for those underground subways. Akira, do you understand what a subway is?”

Akira tried to remember what Alpha told him about the subway.

“…If I’m not mistaken, it’s about those trains that run under the ground, right?”

“Yep, that’s more or less correct. Because of the monsters, there are not that many subway stations in the eastern district, you can only find them in big cities. But it seems that it’s common to find them in the federation of nations’ central district. I heard that they use it to connect different nations in the central district. I wonder if that’s true or not. But putting that aside, the subway runs through underground tunnels.”

“I see. So then, what’s so bad about the subway?”

“You remember that I said some of the strong monsters that we found in the underground city were mixed in that swarm, right? Then judging by the fact that this facility is still active, we can assume that the subway is still functional too.”

Sara noticed what Elena was trying to say, her expression also immediately turned grim. She then tried to confirm her guess with Elena.

“…So in short, the train might have carried the monsters from the Kuzusuhara ruin all the way here, huh? Good grief, some of those monsters in that ruin can only be defeated using a tank, you know? It’s rather strange since this place was so safe the first time we came here.”

“At that time, this place was completely dark. So in short, this facility was still inactive. Someone who came after us must have done something to activate this facility, and thanks to that, the underground subway now makes a brief stop in this place.”

Sara sounded as if she was asking for Elena’s confirmation.

“W-well, even if that’s true. Those strong monsters are huge monsters, so it’s not like they can pass through the narrow tunnel to come here, right? So even if some of those monsters came from the inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin, they’re only the relatively weak monsters, right? Which in that case, we should have no problem to go against them, right?”

It was true that all the monsters that they encountered until now did not pose much danger for Elena and Sara. After hearing Sara’s guess, Elena relaxed a bit.

“…You’re right about that, I guess I was too worried.”

Elena smiled, she then turned to Akira to apologize for making him worry.

But his expression was grimmer than before. Elena, who saw that wondered what was wrong.

“…Elena-san, can I ask you something?”

“Sure, what is it?”

“There’s this monster called greedy crocodile, right? It’s a monster that evolves by eating other monsters, so like, are there greedy crocodiles inside Kuzusuhara ruin?”

“It’s not like the inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin is filled with them, but it’s pretty common to find them there.”

“I’m just speaking hypothetically, alright? What if some of those greedy crocodiles were carried here when they were still small through the subway and they quickly evolved after eating all the dead monsters in this area, that’s completely possible, right?”

Akira then looked at the traces left inside that hallway. Those traces indicated that something big and powerful had passed through that hallway.

“It’s not like I’m being too cautious, but I think that it’s the reason why although there are so many traces of battles in this place, we don’t find any monster corpses. Now that I think about it, doesn’t the trace grow bigger and bigger as it goes deeper into the ruin?”

Elena and Sara then looked at the traces left on the floor. It was as Akira said, the trace inside the ruin was bigger compared to the trace in the hallway. Elena then said.

“…You’re right, that’s definitely possible. As I thought, we should get out of this place as soon as we can. I don’t want to meet that monster in case if it returns back to this ruin.”

Sara and Elena agreed with each other.

“That’s true, let’s hurry up.”

Right after that, they immediately started running toward the surface. Revin and his team were barely able to keep up with them.

Silavin: OMG. They just rat out Katsuragi! Hahaha!
And it was so obvious as well. XD

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Rebuild World – Chapter 86, Escape

Index

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Akira was running through the long hallway in the underground ruin. Although him, Elena and Sara were still in good shape, Revin and his men were barely able to keep up, they were close to their limit.

Revin suddenly asked them to slow down.

“Wait, wait, I don’t think I can go any longer!! Can you at least slow down a bit?”

Elena immediately replied back.

“No, if you can’t keep up, we’ll leave you behind. The longer we stay here, the dangerous it becomes. If you don’t want to die, then keep on running. Just so you know, we’re already running slower than usual even right now.”

“How exactly are you even doing that? Are you using that thing? That augmented suit thingy? None of us is using an augmented suit, you know. So please be kind.”

“How in the world did you even think of coming to an unexplored ruin without it? Do you want to kill yourself or something?”

Elena’s opinion was rather harsh, it might be because she knew just how bad their situation was, but what she said was not wrong.

Revin glanced at Akira, seeing how a Hunter younger than him was already using an augmented suit, he threw a question to Akira that sounded more like a complaint.

“Like I said, we came to this unexplored ruin expecting to return home with a lot of money so that we can buy better equipment, okay? Even you too bought that augmented suit after selling expensive relics, right?”

“Well, that’s true. But in order to pay for it, I had to use almost all of my savings. Thanks to that, I had to live in an inn without a bath for a few days. It wasn’t that easy getting this augmented suit.”

Akira vaguely recounted those days. Looking at his current equipment, it was unthinkable that he would have lived in such a situation.

Revin was a bit taken aback by Akira’s unexpected reaction.

“I-I see.”

Elena then jabbed at Revin again.

“I bet you spent all your money on women and booze, right? That’s why you couldn’t save enough money to buy good equipment. It’s true that working as Hunters means that we would die anytime, but if you spend your money recklessly every day, there’s no way you would be able to buy good equipment, you know?”

The moment he heard that remark, Revin immediately groaned. Elena’s guess was spot on. His men also did the same, it was obvious that they realized they were also at fault.

Akira then asked Revin.

“Don’t you have some medicines with you?”

“We already used all that we brought. It’s not like we were able to run away from those monsters without getting injured at all.”

“I see, do you want to buy mine then? I still have quite a lot with me.”

“Really? Thanks and sorry, how much is it?”

“2,000,000 Aurum per box.”

“The heck? That’s so expensive!! What’s with that price? Just how much money do you guys want to squeeze out from us?!”

Revin was thunderstruck by the price that he shouted in reflex. The price of that medicine was totally different from the price of the medicines that he and his men usually used.

But Akira replied calmly.

“It’s the same price that I paid when I bought them. I’m not profiting from it, not even a single Aurum. Moreover, these medicines are powerful enough to save you even when you’re already on your death’s door. It’s true that it’s expensive, but it’s way cheaper compared to my life. It’s up to you to decide whether it’s more expensive than your life or not. So, do you want to buy it?”

“…Still no.”

“I see, well, I won’t force you.”

Revin and his men squeezed everything that they had to keep up with Akira, Elena and Sara as they were running through that long hallway. There was no doubt that they would experience severe muscle pain when they get back to the city.

He and his team were trapped for a long time in a situation where they did not have enough money to gather more money. Seeing how there was a younger Hunter in front of them who did well buying better equipment with the money that he saved in order to gather more money, they swore to themselves that they would also do the same from now on.

His men decided that they would stop spending their money on women and alcohol and use it for buying an augmented suit instead. Although It was a different story whether they would still think the same tomorrow too, but at least, they did think so now.

They eventually arrived in front of the stairs leading to the surface.

But Elena suddenly turned back and stared at the hallway that they just passed. Her expression immediately turned grim, Akira and Sara reacted to that by staring back at the hallway too.

Revin and his men, who were barely able to catch up with them, felt that sudden mood change. He then nervously asked Elena while still trying to catch his breath.

“Hey, what’s going on?”

Elena explained their current situation.

“If you don’t want to die, climb the stairs as fast as you can, the monsters are coming.”

“…Hah?”

Revin’s reaction was a little bit late, he was already both mentally and physically tired. He unconsciously did not want to admit that his situation was getting worse and it slowed his mind from processing the situation.

Elena then shouted at him.

“Don’t just stand there and start running!! Do you really want to die that badly!??”

Sounds started echoing from inside the hallway. They were the sounds of monsters’ roars, hissing sounds from machines and some heavy stomping sounds.

Revin and his men also heard those sounds which quickly made them understand what was going on. They started taking the action that they

should have taken way sooner as they desperately ran up the stairs with faces filled with terror and fear.

Sara readied her automatic grenade launcher and shot grenade shells toward the hallway. After explosions echoed through the hallway, the sounds from the monsters stopped. But not for long, they started to hear those sounds again from the hallway in no time, and those sounds were getting louder and louder.

Elena turned to Sara.

“Sara, I’ll leave it to you to slow them down. We’ll go to the surface and get ourselves ready to leave this place, so there’s no need to hold this place for too long. You just need to buy some time and quickly retreat after that. If it seems that you won’t be able to hold the monsters back while waiting for Revin and his men to retreat, you can just abandon them.”

Although they did receive an SOS request from Revin’s team, Elena thought it would be all for naught if Sara fell here. They would save Revin’s team if it was possible and just abandon them if that was impossible. That was all there was to it.

“Roger that. I’ll be careful, so you guys need to be careful too, okay?”

Sara smiled when she said that. She then handed the other things that she did not need to Elena and Akira. After Elena and Akira received them, they quickly went up the stairs.

They then came across Revin and his team, who had started climbing the stairs, ahead of them. However, they were already exhausted. Although they were still swinging their legs, they were moving very slowly.

Akira shouted at them.

“Want the medicine now?”

Akira would only wait for an answer until he passed beside them, so they only had a few seconds to answer.

Revin looked at Akira and shouted back.

“Dammit!! Give it to me!”

Akira then dropped a box of medicine beside Revin and his team as he kept running to the surface with Elena without slowing down.

Revin used his leftover power to pick up and open those medicines, he then took a capsule out from the box and swallowed it in a hurry.

He quickly regained his strength, even before the medicine actually started working due to the placebo effect from that 2,000,000 Aurum per box medicine. And when its effect started to kick in for real, as expected of expensive medicine, it immediately boosted his physical condition.

“…This thing works wonders! As expected of 2,000,000 Aurum per box medicine!!”

He quickly handed over the medicine to his men. Now that they had recovered their vigour and power, they started running up the stairs as if they were completely different people from just a moment ago.

Akira and Elena climbed the stairs and reached the surface. They quickly scanned their surroundings and confirmed that there were no monsters near the entrance, they then went to their respective vehicles and got themselves ready to leave that place.

They parked their vehicles not too far from the entrance as not to block Sara’s way out from that ruin, and then they waited for Sara and the other Hunters to come out from the entrance.

Akira looked down the stairs, he could see Revin and his men not too far down below, their expression was a mix of fear from the monsters and hope since they were already close to the surface.

But his expression immediately turned grim. He quickly jumped off from the driver seat and once again walked down the stairs, he could not see Sara behind Revin and his men.

Sara was slowly walking up the stairs while repelling the monsters that were approaching her. Her movements were relatively slow. It was obvious from the way she moved that she was injured. She might have gotten hit by some splinter as the blood that was flowing out from her head had already doused her face in red.

There were many reasons why she got injured, some of the monsters that she was fighting were stronger than the monsters usually found in the underground, some monsters had ranged weaponry, some tended to attack her even if they also injured the other monsters, she had no place to hide and she sometimes did not have enough time to evade the monsters' attacks. And above all, she took too long before she decided to retreat.

Although Sara thought that she was fighting just like usual, in reality, that was not true. If she was fighting like usual, she would not make a fatal mistake like taking too long a time before deciding to retreat. Elena had even told her to just abandon Revin and retreat when the push came to shove. If it was her usual self, she would have retreated sooner.

Sara then realized the reason why she made that fatal mistake.

"…Ahhh, I see, I wanted to show my good side to Akira."

Sara smiled, she was laughing at herself. As a veteran Hunter, she wanted to show off her skills to Akira. She wanted to amaze him by holding back the monsters without any trouble even when she had to protect Revin and his men. She wanted to live up to Akira's expectations since he always looked up at her as a great Hunter.

That feeling disrupted Sara's ability to make the right decision. It made her want to achieve a better result which caused her to take a more dangerous choice. It made her greedy.

Being able to stay collected and keep fighting calmly in that situation was enough to show her ability. Sara herself had no plans to die in that place, she had not given up returning back alive from that place. If only she had a few minutes of break, the nanomachines inside her body would quickly heal her wounds.

But as long as she was in the middle of a fight, her healing rate would be considerably slowed down. Just withstanding the kickback from her gun was enough to aggravate her wounds.

And even if she decided to drop her gun and ran up the stairs, in her current condition, the monsters would reach her first before she could reach the surface. Thus, she had no other choice but to slowly climb up the stairs while suppressing the monsters although it slowed down her healing rate. If she abandoned the only means she had to fight back, the monsters would catch up with her and she would be dead in no time. While on the other hand, she did not have unlimited ammo to fight back the monsters.

According to her experience as a veteran Hunter, it would be bad to keep doing the same thing. But at the same time, her experience was also telling her that there was no other viable choice. Sara just gritted her teeth as she continued fighting back the monsters.

Akira, who was running down the stairs, did not stop even after he spotted Sara and the monsters ahead of her. He did not slow down as he readied his CWH anti-material rifle and took an aim at those monsters.

“Alpha!”

“Leave it to me!”

He showed no hesitation when he asked for Alpha’s help. Alpha suddenly appeared within his view and replied to him, at the same time, her support was back online.

Akira pulled the trigger, he had already loaded his CWH anti-material rifle with CWH special ammo. Thanks to Alpha’s support, his shooting was highly effective, even close to godly. The CWH special ammo that could even easily destroy tanks pierced through the monsters in the front and took out the monsters behind them too.

He did not slow down his shooting, he made quick work of the monsters that were running up the stairs. Due to Alpha’s support, Akira was able to accurately snipe the weak points of his targets. The big monsters that got

shot fell down and blocked the other monsters from climbing up the stairs. They then rolled down the stairs while taking some monsters down with them.

The monsters that formed the vanguard quickly fell and died one by one, but even so, the monsters behind them continued pushing forward without a care.

Akira was only carrying his CWH anti-material rifle since he decided to leave anything that might slow him down back in his vehicle, and that included his DVTS minigun. In exchange for the lowered firepower, he loaded CWH special ammo into his CWH anti-material rifle. Thanks to that, he was able to move relatively faster without sacrificing much firepower.

After Alpha quickly confirmed Sara's situation, she then gave a command to Akira.

"She's wounded, but her life is not in danger. Pick her up and start running, it's faster than repelling the monsters while waiting for her to recover."

Akira used the kickback from his rifle to stop his momentum. He then quickly picked Sara up with his left hand and started running up the stairs. While he was ascending the stairs, he continued shooting at the monsters behind him without even looking back at them. Although it seemed like he was shooting randomly, he was actually properly aiming at the monsters with help from Alpha and his shots were also properly hitting those monsters.

Although she was shocked at first, Sara understood that Akira was there to help her. She also understood that she would only slow him down if she made any needless moves, thus she obediently let Akira carry her to the surface.

Elena was still waiting for Akira and Sara on the surface, she quickly noticed that Akira went back down to help Sara, but it was not like she could leave her station too. She decided that the best course of action for her was to wait for Sara and Akira on the surface so that they all could

leave the moment they escaped the ruin. Although there were no monsters around at the moment, monsters could appear anytime without notice, she could not afford to drop down her guard there.

Even after some time passed, Sara and Akira did not appear. Although to be more precise, she had been waiting only for a few seconds, but even a second felt too long for Elena and she just could not stand it. And it was enough to make her expression fill with desperation.

Her desperation was also felt by Revin and his team. They were all on Elena's vehicle since Akira left his vehicle with no driver.

Although Revin and his team looked relieved when they boarded her vehicle, looking at how Elena was waiting for Sara instead of leaving that place, they started to feel uneasy.

One of Revin's men mumbled nervously to her.

"…S-say, isn't it bad if we keep staying in this place…"

"Shut it."

Elena snapped back at that guy. There was no trace of hatred when she said those words. Her calm voice carried an invisible pressure that shut that guy as he looked away from Elena.

Then at the next moment, Akira came out from the ruin while carrying Sara. He immediately headed to his vehicle and jumped in. The moment he did that, his vehicle suddenly turned-on on its own.

Elena, who saw that, also quickly started her vehicle. The sudden acceleration threw Revin and his men out of balance and they hurried to grab on to anything.

Akira and Elena quickly sped their vehicle away from the entrance. Right after that, the monsters that were chasing Akira and Sara flooded out from inside that ruin, they were relatively small monsters, small enough to pass through the stairs.

Because he was in a hurry, he just threw Sara on the back seat. Alpha was already driving the vehicle. When Akira was about to sit on the driver seat, Alpha suddenly stopped him.

“Akira, I’ll do the driving, you should take care of that side.”

“Which side?”

Akira turned to the direction where Alpha was pointing at, she was pointing at the entrance to the stairs leading down into the underground ruin. As he focused on the entrance, he felt that something big was trying to force its way out from that stairs as smaller monsters were pushed or even thrown out from that entrance.

Then suddenly, a huge monster jumped out from the stairs. Its size was almost as big as the entrance’s width. It opened its huge mouth and crushed countless monsters inside its mouth.

It looked like a huge snake but its scales resembled a mix-match mosaic of different monsters. There was even something that looked like a broken cannon embedded into its scale. As it forced its way out the stairs, some of its scales got peeled off and dropped to the ground.

Akira dropped his jaw in shock when he saw that huge monster which was way bigger than any other monsters he just fought.

Due to its momentum when it forced its way through the stairs, that huge monster looked like it actually jumped out from the entrance. But after losing its momentum in the air, it then fell down to the ground due to gravity. It landed with a loud bang and crushed all the small monsters underneath its huge body.

That loud bang snapped Akira back to reality, he inadvertently shouted.

“What the heck is that thing!?”

Alpha answered his question.

“I believe that it’s a subspecies of the greedy crocodile. Those monsters that were inside the hallway were not chasing you, they were running away from that greedy crocodile.”

“Greedy crocodile?! I don’t remember seeing a greedy crocodile like that one, you know?!”

“I did say that it’s a subspecies of greedy crocodile, right? Remember that greedy crocodile evolves according to what they eat, and since it was living in that hallway for a long time, it might have adapted its body shape to the hallway. Now then, don’t just stand there and start shooting. Don’t shoot at that big monster, aim for the smaller ones instead. If its food runs to your direction, there’s a good chance that you’ll get caught up in its feeding time. I’ll handle the driving, so you should handle the monsters.”

Akira jumped to the backside of his vehicle, grabbed both CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun and aimed at the small monsters that were running away from that huge greedy crocodile before pulling the trigger.

Sara quickly turned back and helped Akira too. They were aiming at the monsters that were running in their direction. Bullets from Akira and grenade shells from Sara rained down at those monsters and massacred them.

The monsters that slowed down after getting hit by Akira’s and Sara’s barrage were quickly chomped and swallowed by the huge greedy crocodile. It was indeed a very greedy crocodile. It kept chomping down the smaller monsters no matter whether they were biological monsters or mechanical monsters. Since its attention was focused on the prey near it, it ignored Akira and Elena who were speeding away from it.

Elena was driving her vehicle at a high speed. She was trying to catch up with Akira’s vehicle since she would block Akira and Sara’s aim if she drove behind them. But in order to do that, Elena was driving pretty recklessly.

Revin and his men desperately clung on anything they could find so that they would not fall off the vehicle. They were sure that Elena would not

stop the car to pick them up if any of them fell off and it was obvious that the huge monster would be happy to munch at them if that happened. Their faces were filled with terror as they were holding tight and screaming on top of their lungs.

Akira and Elena blazed through the wreckages and rubbles while speeding away from the monsters behind them. As they were getting away from that place, the huge monster started to look smaller and smaller, and when that huge monster was no longer visible with naked eyes, they knew they had finally escaped from those monsters.

Akira and Sara looked at each other, then gulped down at the same time. It was unclear whether they did it because they felt so relieved or it was because of something else, but then they suddenly started laughing.

Akira and Elena were driving straight to Kugamayama city. After they got away from that huge greedy crocodile, they did not get to encounter any more monsters on their way.

Putting some more distance between that monster and them, they stopped the vehicle after checking the safety around the area. They then resumed their drive once Akira and Sara moved to Elena's vehicle and Revin and his men moved to Akira's vehicle.

Elena looked worried as she asked Sara.

"Sara, are you really okay?"

"I'm fine, don't worry. I won't die just because of something like this, not to mention, my wounds are mostly healed already."

Sara smiled, affirming that she was really okay. As in matter of fact, she had already recovered to the point that she would be able to fight normally in case if they encountered more monsters on their way back to the city.

When Elena saw Sara was bleeding from her head, she was extremely worried about her.

“Well, I guess it’s fine if you say so. Good grief, don’t scare me like that. Just because your body is stronger than a normal human, it’s not enough of a reason to do reckless things, you know. I did tell you not to be reckless, didn’t I?”

Sara’s body was enhanced by the nanomachines. Thus her body was way stronger than that of a normal human. But it did not make her invulnerable, she would still die when seriously injured.

“I’m sorry, things are going so well lately that I guess I got a little bit too cocky. I’ll be more careful next time.”

Sara smiled as she apologized to Elena, but her smile was clouded compared to her usual smile. It somehow felt like she forced herself to smile in order to avoid getting herself too depressed.

Elena looked at Sara and decided to stop dwelling on that subject. As long as Sara returned back alive, felt sorry for her action, and promised to do better next time, that was enough for Elena. After all, scolding her too much would only be counter-effective.

Sara herself knew that she was feeling rather down, so in order to change the mood, she smiled and turned to Akira to thank him.

“Akira, thank you for saving me.”

Elena quickly followed up with a bright voice.

“I also feel grateful to you, Akira. Thank you.”

Akira was a bit surprised by their sudden thank you, so he flustered when he replied back to Elena and Sara.

“Don’t mention it. And I’m sorry, it seems that the ruin is way more dangerous than I thought. There’s also that monster right at the end. I’m just glad that everyone got out alive.”

Seeing how Akira seemed down since he was feeling responsible for what happened, Elena smiled and said to him.

“It’s not your fault. Exploring an unexplored ruin is always dangerous. We both knew that well when we decided to come to that ruin.”

Sara also agreed with her.

“Elena is right. It’s not something that you should feel guilty about.”

“Moreover, although it sounds cruel to say this, but if we had returned back as soon as we finished collecting relics, today’s exploration would have ended up without any trouble, right…? We might really have bad luck when it comes to meeting other Hunters in the old-world ruins.”

Elena meant to say that as a joke, but now that she said it, it made her think about that possibility for real. Sara and Akira groaned as they realized that what Elena said might be true.

Akira felt that the subject of their conversation was leading toward a bad direction, thus he tried to remember anything that contradicted that way of thinking as he presented it to Elena and Sara.

“Uhmm, well, I met Sara-san and Elena-san for the first time in an old-world ruin, so I don’t think it’s all that bad… Or at least, that’s what I think.”

Akira realized that he said something that was way out of his character and felt rather embarrassed.

“W-well, you’re right about that. I guess I was just a bit too paranoid.”

“T-that’s true.”

It might be because Akira’s embarrassment propagated to Sara and Elena, they stuttered when they replied back. The mood between the three of them felt a bit awkward.

The only one who was not embarrassed at all and was smiling like usual was Alpha.

“You’re right, after all, you got to meet me in the old-world ruin too. So I can reassure you that it’s not true.”

“…That’s a good point, but you’re not a Hunter, right?”

Alpha made a displeased face and said.

“Good grief, you should just agree with me here, you know? We’re talking about compatibility here, or are you saying that you don’t like me?”

“Not at all. You really help me in a lot of ways.”

“Yep, that’s the reaction I was expecting.”

After talking with Alpha, Akira regained his calm. He also forgot about the embarrassing thing that just happened.

Elena suddenly came up with another subject, it felt like she did that intentionally to hide her embarrassment.

“Now then, once we return back to the city, there are a lot of things that we need to do like going to the Hunter Office to take care of the SOS request. So I’m thinking of deciding things that we can decide here while we have the chance. I’ll make some suggestions, just tell me if you don’t agree with any of it.”

“Alright.”

“First of all, about the money that we get from today’s exploration. Since Sara would cry if we sell all of the relics that we gathered today and divide it equally among the three of us, so I think it’s better if each of us sells our own relics, is that okay?”

If they did not do that, Sara would have to sell the old-world underclothing that she gathered just to buy it herself later. And of course, she would have to pay more than when she sold them if she did that.

“I’m okay with that, but then, what should we do about the relics that we will get from Revin?”

“Hmm, Sara, do you have any good ideas? If not, then we might as well sell them all and divide the money equally.”

“Well, can you let me buy the underclothing at market price before selling the rest?”

“Even if you say so, who exactly is going to decide the market price for it? And how? Even if you find a way to do that, are you sure that you can get an accurate price? Also, are you going to buy them at market price or at the selling price of relics merchants?”

It was not like Elena was trying to pressure Sara, she just wanted Sara to know that if they picked another option, then they would have to make a lot of adjustments.

But Sara, who really wanted to get the old-world underclothing, made another suggestion.

“…Then how about equally dividing the relics between us?”

“How exactly are you going to do that while making sure that the three of us get the same worth of relics? It’s not easy to decide the worth of a relic. So who is going to do that? I don’t mind if we want to talk it out, but I’m not sure that it’ll end up peacefully.”

“In that case, how about asking a relic appraiser to do that for us…?”

“Sure, but which relic appraiser would we ask for help? And who will pay for the cost too? What if we find out that there’s a big gap between the prices of the relics and we are not able to come to an agreement on how to divide them, then what should we do?”

Elena pointed out various difficulties with Sara’s idea. Akira himself did not really care how exactly they were going to divide the relics, he was just going to agree with any plan that Sara and Elena came up with.

He mumbled as if it was none of his business.

“Dividing relics sounds really rough.”

“Well, to be honest, Elena is actually intentionally pointing out all the details so you can use this chance to learn how to negotiate. If you go out hunting for relics with other people, you’ll have to negotiate with them on how to divide the relics just like now.”

“Ohh, I see, that’s true.”

When Alpha told that to Akira, he thought that doing something like this would be a huge pain in the ass. Some of the Hunters who wanted to avoid things like this tend to have a proxy to do it on their behalf and they would agree with anything that their proxies decided on. Akira somehow understood the feeling of those Hunters.

He suddenly got an idea and decided to voice it out.

“Those relics were originally given to us in place of the 3,000,000 Aurum reward from the SOS request. So if anyone here wants to buy them, then how about having that person buy those relics with 3,000,000 Aurum? And then if we divide that 3,000,000 Aurum equally between the other two, it should be pretty fair, right? If no one would buy them, I’ll do it. After all, I’m the one who came up with this idea and it’s a good chance for me to learn how to sell relics too.”

Sara listened to Akira’s suggestion and said to him.

“In that case, I’ll buy them. It was me who originally wanted those relics. I’ll transfer the money to your account later, is that okay?”

“Okay.”

Elena then moved to the next subject.

“I guess that ends the subject about the relics. The next problem is regarding the information about the ruin. I’m thinking of selling the information about that ruin, then we can divide the money that we get from selling that info equally among us after we deduct the cost of ammo that we used today. But of course, I won’t sell the info if Akira is against it. So, are you okay with that, Akira?”

“Sure. I don’t mind at all.”

“Akira, are you really okay with that? The information about the location of that ruin, the interior of that ruin, and the monsters in that ruin will quickly spread, you know? There might be still some expensive relics left in the deeper part of that ruin, are you sure that you won’t regret it?”

“It’s okay. To be honest, I have no plans to go to that ruin with that huge monster ever again.”

It was obvious from his expression that Akira really did not want to go to that ruin ever. So Elena and Sara just smiled bitterly.

Elena then said.

“Let’s at least make use of that information to earn as much money as possible. But still, to think something like that would appear, searching an unexplored ruin is really a dangerous thing.”

Sara smiled and said.

“You can say that again. It would be a great help if that huge thing got stuck in the small hallway.”

All of them laughed together, after that, Elena continued.

“Alright then, I’ll be responsible for selling the information that we gathered today. Akira, send me how much you spent for your ammo later.”

“Okay.”

“And that will take care of most of the things. Now, let’s just hope that nothing happens until we safely reach the city.”

Elena’s prayer might have been answered since they did not encounter any trouble on their way back to Kugamayama city. But no matter what it was, the fact was that Elena, Akira and Sara were able to return back alive.

They stopped their vehicles in the wasteland not too far away from the city. There, Revin handed over the relics rewards to Elena and Sara, who then said goodbye to Akira and headed to the city. It seemed that there were a lot of things that they had to do like taking care of the SOS request and selling the information.

Akira was left together with Revin and his men in the wasteland. He then told them to board off his vehicle. Seeing how Akira was still sitting on the driver seat after they boarded off, Revin asked him.

“Hey, what’s the meaning of this? Are you telling us to walk to the city?”

“Don’t worry, the request is to escort you guys back to the city, so I’ll properly escort you guys to the city.”

“Then why did you tell us to get off from your vehicle?”

“There’s one thing that I want to make sure first, I’ll escort you guys after that.”

“…? What is it?”

Revin clearly looked confused, but to be honest, he and his men actually knew what Akira was talking about. And as expected, their guess was not wrong.

Akira asked them with a flat tone.

“The medicine, 2,000,000 Aurum, how are you planning to pay for it?”

Revin and his men averted their eyes.

Silavin: Haha. I picture adults looking away like kids in front of a kid. What a cute sight.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 87, People Who Lost Their Dreams

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Akira was sitting on the driver seat, talking with Alpha to kill time, while waiting for Revin to finish his discussion with his men.

Now that Akira had calmed down after he got out of that ruin, he started to feel a tinge of regret.

"…But still, it's such a waste and it's really unfortunate. There should still be relics in that ruin. If only we were able to search the ruin more and carry all of those relics before the ruin somehow activated, I wonder just how much money that would have fetched me."

Alpha smiled and cheered him.

"It's an unexplored ruin after all. Things like this are normal. We still have some leftover data from the Lion Steel Corp, so we can just place our hope at our next location."

"You're right… Haah…."

Although that day he was able to return with some profits, he was not able to return with a lot of riches from an unexplored ruin as he had wished.

Akira himself thought that there should be still a lot of relics left in that ruin, so it would be hard for him to simply forget about that ruin.

Revin and his men were sitting not too far from Akira, they were discussing how to pay for Akira's medicines. One of them looked pretty depressed as he asked Revin.

"…So, what exactly are we going to do now?"

Revin's expression was not much different from that man.

"Isn't that exactly why we're sitting here discussing? Tell me if you have any good ideas."

"Even if you ask me, it's 2,000,000 Aurum, you know? Can we really afford to pay that kind of money? Or more like, you're the one who bought it, so why should we pay for it too?"

Revin looked displeased as he said.

"Are you seriously going to blame me for it? Would it have been better for you if we had kept climbing the stairs with that speed and got killed by the monsters?"

"I didn't mean it like that."

"Then what did you mean by that remark?"

Revin and his men started to make a ruckus, but the moment Akira glanced at them, they quickly calmed down. Another guy from Revin's team then said.

"For real though, what are we going to do now…"

They were all in trouble since they had no idea how to pay Akira.

Revin and his men were talking about the medicine that they bought from Akira which cost them 2,000,000 Aurum. Akira asked them to tell him who would pay and when and where he would receive the payment.

Revin and his men were 5 members in total, so dividing it equally, it would be 400,000 Aurum per person. It was not a huge amount. But if they paid that money, they would not be able to buy ammo for their next expedition. After all, they still had to pay for their food, accommodation, and ammo. They simply did not have enough money to spare.

Another guy then hopelessly said.

"…I guess we have no other choice but to sell our relics."

Another guy quickly refuted his suggestion.

"Don't you remember that we paid them with our relics?"

"We only gave them the relics that we found inside that room. I'm sure all of you are hiding other relics that you found elsewhere, right? If we pooled them together, we might be able to get at least 2,000,000 Aurum."

They then looked at each other, they all understood what that guy was talking about. Revin sighed and took out all the relics that he was hiding, the other guys who saw that also gave up their relics.

One among them reluctantly took out the relics that he was hiding. Revin twitched as he saw that because that man only offered clothes.

Revin immediately called that man.

"You there, you took out nothing but clothes though."

"But I found only these clothes in the ruin."

"Do you really think they'll believe you? They'll definitely doubt it, you know. Just take them back, we can sell it later and divide the money among us."

That guy then retrieved those clothes. Revin looked at all the relics lined up in front of him and made a long 'hmmmm'.

“…To be honest, I’m not even sure we can get enough money with just these relics. But well, I guess at least we can use this to negotiate.”

He then went to Akira.

After Akira listened to what Revin had to say, he asked about something that bothered him.

“Even the relics you found in the room that looked like in good shape were only worth about 3,000,000 Aurum, right? So like, are you sure the rest of the relics would be able to fetch you 2,000,000 Aurum?”

“Well, I think it’s at least possible. Let’s just head back to the city for now, after all, I can’t really ask merchants or appraisers the worth of the relics if we stay here, right?”

There were certain areas in the city where the public order was really bad to the point that it would not be strange for Hunters, who returned from the wasteland, to get robbed. But even so, those areas were still safer compared to the lawless wasteland.

Once they were inside the city, even if Revin and his men had no money to pay Akira, Akira won’t be able to just shoot them where they stood. In contrast to that, something like that would likely happen outside the city or in the wasteland. That was why Revin wanted to reach the city as soon as possible.

Akira did not notice that at all. The only reason why he was staying outside the city was so that it would be easy to chase Revin and his men if they tried to run away.

Akira thought for a bit before saying.

“You only need someone to appraise those relics here, right?”

Akira pulled out his information terminal and contacted Katsuragi. The call got connected soon after he pressed the call button.

“Akira, huh? It’s rare for you to call me like this, is it something profitable?”

“It depends on your ability as a merchant.”

“I see, it’s money talk then. So, what do you have?”

“I just returned back from the old-world ruin with relics, can you come here and check them?”

“Sure, but since you called me, you do have the relics worth calling me there, right?”

“I got those relics from an unexplored ruin, they are from the underground ruin. They do look pretty expensive though. And also, if you come here to pick them up, I’ll at least tell you where I found them.”

“I see, send me your location… Alright then, I’m coming there now, just wait for a bit.”

Katsuragi then ended the call. After that, Akira turned to Revin.

“Just wait for a bit.”

“O-okay.”

Revin frowned, he looked rather pale. He was not expecting for Akira to know a merchant whom he could call over all the way to where they were.

It did not take that long before Katsuragi’s trailer arrived there, it was one of the benefits of having a portable shop.

Akira lined the relics in front of Katsuragi. After Katsuragi finished checking all of those relics, he then made an offer to Akira.

“Let’s see, how about 8,000,000 Aurum?”

“Got it, we have a deal.”

“Nice! I’ll transfer the money right away… So then, how about those relics? You’re not going to sell them?”

Katsuragi glanced over at the relic pile on the backseat of Akira’s vehicle.

“Those are the relic types that you won’t buy. You did teach me that, remember?”

“Well, that’s true, but I can at least take a look at them. It’s just me trying to build a good relationship with you. Even for the clothes, if you have enough of them, I can even make a connection especially to sell those types of relics, you know? Well, even if I say that, it’ll take quite a lot of time to build a new route like that. But since I’ve been dealing with a lot of wholesalers lately, it’ll at least still turn in some money.”

“Thanks for the offer but it’s fine. I found another route to sell those types of relics, you see. So I’m thinking of bringing relics that you won’t buy to that person.”

“…I see. Okay.”

Although Katsuragi was smiling on the surface, he was cursing deep inside. When he gave the explanation about how to sell relics to Akira before, he intentionally evaluated some of the relics with a lower price, and those types of relics were clothes and small accessories. He was actually thinking of intentionally not buying them first, and then buying them for cheap later as to make Akira feel indebted to him.

Akira’s fighting ability was indeed amazing but he had no knowledge on how to sell the relics that he gathered. Or at least that was what Katsuragi thought. That was why he mixed some false information when he explained how to sell relics to Akira. He wanted to paint an impression so that Akira thought it was hard to sell a particular type of relics, and later make Akira feel indebted to him by offering to buy those relics at a cheap price from Akira.

But it seemed that Akira had taken care of that part himself. So Katsuragi’s evaluation of Akira slowly changed because of that.

Katsuragi did regret the fact that he could not earn more profit, but it was not like he could keep himself occupied by that. So he just changed the subject and talked about his goods.

“Now that you got more money and I’m already here too, how about you buy something from me?”

But Akira pointed at Revin and his men and said.

“Before that, can you check their relics too?”

“Are they your friends? Did you go hunting relics with them?”

“No, but I found them inside the ruin that I was exploring.”

“Well, it seems that I can put my hopes up for their relics then.”

Katsuragi smiled and went towards Revin. While Katsuragi was checking Revin’s relics, Akira went to Katsuragi’s trailer to spend his time browsing weapons and other stuff.

After Katsuragi finished checking the relics, he looked disappointed and said.

“Well, I guess the total worth is only about 500,000 Aurum.”

“500,000 Aurum?! Are you trying to scam us or something?!”

Revin panicked when he heard Katsuragi’s statement.

When Akira said that Revin and his men went to the same ruin as him, Katsuragi thought that he could put his hopes up on their relics. But compared to Akira, their equipment looked way cheaper and the relics that they brought were a huge disappointment for him. Some of the relics they brought were dirty or even badly damaged, and it was rather obvious that they were not some kind of high ranking Hunter. These were the reasons why Katsuragi was only willing to pay that amount of money for those relics.

Katsuragi looked like he was in a bad mood, he did not even bother to show a fake smile as he said to Revin.

“That’s the amount of money I’m willing to pay. Even if you bring them to the Hunter Office, I think you’ll get even less money. If you don’t agree with that amount, then just don’t sell them to me, I won’t force you to sell them to me either. Well, later then.”

After Katsuragi said that, he turned and was about to go back to Akira, but Revin suddenly stopped him.

“Please wait!! Are you going to tell him that too!? Can you please not do that?”

That amount of money was not even enough to pay half the price of Akira’s medicine. Revin was terrified of how Akira would react to that, so he desperately tried to stop Katsuragi.

Katsuragi noticed that something was going on there and looked a bit surprised.

But his expression suddenly changed to a smile as he kindly asked Revin.

“What’s going on here? You can at least tell me, you know. I’ve been doing business with that Akira for quite some time now, so I might be able to help you out.”

Katsuragi smelled a chance to make a lot of money, so he did not even try to hide his smile.

After listening to Revin’s explanation, he sympathized with them and said.

“That sounds rough. I do business with Hunters, so I can understand how rough it is. Well, I’m glad that he saved you. Now then, since having you guys work hard and gather a lot of relics also helps my business, I can at least lend you some help, you know.”

Revin’s face looked both grateful and a little suspicious.

“I-is that so? So what exactly are you offering?”

“Of course, I can offer to smooth things out between you guys and him. But still, it’s not easy dealing with Akira, you know. Negotiating with him is not an easy task at all. I do want you to at least remember that. You might also know that Akira is a strong Hunter. His fighting skill is nothing to scoff at and he’s also quite a violent boy. He’s actually protecting a certain gang in the slum city and I heard that he doesn’t hesitate when it comes to killing other people. From the rumour that I heard, there was a time when a certain gang in the slum city that was hostile to the gang that he’s protecting went to negotiate with him, but they got cocky during the negotiation and Akira killed that guy with no hesitation at all. He then dragged the corpse to the base of the gang that sent that guy.”

“…T-that boy is insane.”

Revin who was listening to Katsuragi’s story could not help but word out his impression about Akira.

Katsuragi noticed that Revin was misunderstanding something there, but he did not bother to correct it as he continued.

“You can say that again. That’s why, to be honest, I don’t want to ask him to reduce the amount of money that he demands or to give more time to get that money. I’m sure you can understand me, right?”

“Th-then, what should we do…?”

“That’s why you can just leave it to me. Although it might be a bad deal for you guys, I hope you can understand that it’s the best deal that you guys can currently get. I’ll try my best to talk with him. As for my reward, well, when you guys become Hunters who can earn a lot of money, you guys should come to my shop to buy stuff. So, what do you think? Of course, I won’t stop you if you want to do something about it yourself… But to be honest, I don’t recommend that.”

Katsuragi urged Revin to make a decision, but it was a different story whether they actually had any other choices or not.

Revin and his men gave up and decided to place their hopes on Katsuragi's offer.

Akira was still browsing inside the trailer. Most of the goods were weapons for Hunters, but there was also some other stuff in display inside that trailer.

He took a certain object from one of the displays.

"Relic bag, huh. I guess I'll buy some."

There were all types of bags lined up on that display, bag for clothes, bag for machines, waterproof bag, bulletproof bag, electric-proof bag, shockproof bag, all types of bags. Some of them were single-use bags while others were reusable bags. And of course, their prices also varied.

"There are all kinds of bags though. Alpha, which one do you think should I buy?"

"I'm not sure either. It's not like they're that big anyway, so how about buying multiple types?"

"I guess I'll do that."

Akira picked some bags and put them inside the shopping basket.

He then picked another thing.

"Waterproof spray, huh… It can protect weapons from moulds. Special offer, buy now to get a shock protector as a bonus… Well, I buy this kind of weapon maintenance tools from Shizuka's shop, so I guess I don't really need it."

Akira put that back and reached for another object.

"Jamming smoke… Yuzumo Corp General-Purpose A28 type. To check for the compatibility with your information-gathering device, please check the composition and confirm with the maker of your information-gathering device… Is it better if I have this too, Alpha?"

“It’ll also lower the sensitivity of the information-gathering device that you are using, so I don’t really recommend it.”

“I don’t need it then.”

Akira put it back on the display.

While he was in the middle of browsing stuff, Katsuragi suddenly entered the trailer and engaged Akira with a smile.

“Oh! So you’re finally interested in buying my goods, huh? Make sure to buy a lot of things, okay? All of them are good stuff!”

“You’re done checking their relics?”

“Yeah, and I heard about their situation too. Just wait here for a bit.”

Katsuragi went inside the back room and returned with the medicine that he sold to Akira the other day.

“Here, you basically just need a replacement for the medicine that you sold to them, right? So, is this enough?”

Akira seemed suspicious of Katsuragi, it was true that he had no complaint as long as he got his medicine back.

“Yeah, so, what are you scheming?”

“Don’t say that. I’m just advertising my business, I do this so that they’ll frequent my shop. Even I won’t do something like this for free, you know. I’ll make sure that they’ll pay me for that medicine.”

“I see, so that’s the real reason, huh. Sure then.”

“Alright then, with this, they’re indebted to me now. But with that being said, I recommend you not to hang out with them too much. I’m not sure what happened, but they’re pretty scared of you for some reason.”

“…Well, a lot of things happened back in the ruin after all.”

It was not like Akira had no idea why Revin and his men would be scared of him. It was nothing strange to be scared of an unknown Hunter who was way stronger than yourself, not to mention that Elena was planning to abandon them at first and Akira did agree with her. Akira did not try to think any deeper as he thought that it was to be expected for them to be scared of him.

“Is that so? Well, it’s none of my business anyway, so I guess I shouldn’t stick my nose there. Ah right, you’re in the middle of shopping, right? If you have any questions, just ask away, I can explain to you anything about the goods here. Oh! relics bag, huh. In that case, I recommend you to get this one.”

Katsuragi smiled happily as he kept talking to Akira. He was trying to prolong Akira’s stay inside the trailer as long as possible to make it look like he was having a difficult negotiation with him.

Akira finished shopping about 30 minutes later. He ended up buying a lot of things. As he was looking at his shopping bag, he hoped that he did not buy anything that he did not need.

Katsuragi then saw Akira off as they left the trailer.

“Akira, you can just head back home. I’ll take Revin and his men back to the city. Of course, I’ll have them buy some of my stuff on our way back too. I’ll also gather the information about the ruin from them.”

“Is that so? Alright, later then.”

Akira then got in his car and left that place.

Katsuragi’s smile vanished and was replaced by a deeply serious expression, he then turned to Revin and walked towards him.

Seeing Katsuragi approaching them, Revin and his men asked him.

“S-so how was it?”

Katsuragi’s serious expression did not change.

“…We made a deal. There were some difficulties, but I ended up temporarily paying for your debt. As long as you guys don’t approach Akira, I’m sure he won’t do anything to you. I think.”

“I-I see, thank goodness.”

Revin let out a sigh of relief, he thought that he was able to avoid the imminent danger.

But then Katsuragi apologetically said to Revin and his men.

“…So then, well, in the end, each of you owes me 400,000 Aurum. I know that it’ll cause inconvenience in your daily Hunter activities, but I hope that you’ll understand. We’ll talk about the interest and the other stuff regarding the debt later. I’m sorry.”

“…Debt, huh?”

Revin and his men frowned, all of them were aware that most of the Hunters with debt ended up tragically, and now they had taken a step closer to such a tragic end.

“I don’t think I even need to remind you of this, but you guys will pay it eventually, right? In case if you don’t… I’m sorry but I think I’ll ask for Akira’s help. I don’t want to do that, but I have my reputation to uphold as a merchant, you see.”

Seeing how Katsuragi looked pitifully at them, Revin and his men’s faces turned pale.

“Well then, how about we discuss the details inside my trailer.”

As Katsuragi walked back to his trailer, Revin and his men followed behind with heavy steps.

Katsuragi, who was leading Revin and his men to his trailer, smiled in secret.

__*__*__*__

A few days after that expedition.

Inside a certain pub somewhere in Kugamayama city's downtown. A certain man was sitting on a table, although there were 6 glasses of beer on that table, that man was sitting alone. He was the person who sold that information about the ruin to Revin.

The ruin that Akira discovered was named Yonozuka station ruin. It seemed that it was the name of the subway station inside that ruin. One of the Hunters, who explored that ruin, found the nameplate of the station and that name then got adopted as the official name of that ruin.

Since Elena sold the information about that ruin, it spread quickly among the Hunters. Although the information had spread widely, there were barely any Hunters exploring that ruin. It was because the presence of that huge monster was also included in the information that Elena sold as well as the fact that there was a good chance the monsters in Kuzusuhara ruin underground city used the subway tunnel to go to that ruin.

Since even the Hunters, who had experience in dealing with the monsters in the underground city when they were guarding the forward base, had to run away from that ruin to stay alive, the other Hunters could easily grasp just how dangerous the Yonozuka Station Ruin was. Because of that, the Hunters who thought that they were not strong enough to challenge that place avoided going to Yonozuka station ruin.

Some Hunters thought that it was just fake information in order to prevent other Hunters from exploring that ruin. But these Hunters then ended up contributing to the number of Hunters who went to that ruin and never returned.

Some of the skilled Hunters, who were confident in themselves, dared to go to that ruin to collect some of the many relics still left inside. But it was a completely different story whether they could return back alive or not, it all depended on these Hunters' skills.

That man was the only person who returned back alive after exploring Yonozuka station ruin. It was him and his team who activated that ruin.

When they reached the home platform of Yonozuka station, they messed with the controls there and activated the facility. Then monsters flooded out from the tunnel and killed everyone except that man.

The reason why he was spreading that information was as a form of revenge. He thought that if he kept sending Hunters there, someone might kill the monsters that killed his friends.

Since that man was selling the info cheaply, he did not earn much money from it. His dream of finding an unexplored ruin and getting rich had been crushed and all his close friends were dead.

All the money that he got from selling that information was used to buy expensive alcohols. He would spend his days drinking those alcohols while reminiscing about his dead friends.

Meanwhile, in the other place, Akira was getting ready to go out to the wasteland again. Although he had no plans to go to that particular unexplored ruin, he was still planning to find the other unexplored ruins. In order to do that, he used the data that he acquired from the Lion Steel Corp's terminal to help him search for unexplored ruins.

As Akira was about to turn on the vehicle inside the garage, Alpha who was sitting on the driver's assistant seat suddenly said to him.

"Akira, there's a notification from the Hunter Office."

"A notification?"

Akira pulled out his information terminal and checked the notification.

"Bounty Info, notification for new bounty monsters…"

Akira looked puzzled as he checked the details of that notification.

It was not the usual monster-hunting request, it was a special bounty request with fixed prize money and a huge monetary reward. This type of request was usually issued for strong monsters that did not fit the place that they

were in or the monsters that caused damage to the city's economy. These monsters were known as bounty monsters.

That notification worked both ways, it would attract the attention of the Hunters who had enough skill to hunt those bounty monsters as well as to warn the other Hunters to be careful of those monsters. After all, if those Hunters, who went to the old-world ruin to gather relics, got killed and are unable to bring back the important old-world relics to the city, it would cause trouble for the city too.

While on the other hand, it was the perfect chance for the Hunters who were confident in their skills to make a name for themselves. When a Hunter took out a bounty monster, his name would also be announced as the person who killed that bounty monster. Not only would he get a huge amount of money, his Hunter rank would receive a huge boost, his Hunter record would be decorated with that achievement, and his name would also receive renown. Every time a new bounty request came out in the eastern district, skilled Hunters would flood the wasteland to hunt for that bounty monster.

There were 4 new bounty monsters. Their names, descriptions, bounty prizes, and other details were publicly posted in the Hunter Office. As for their location, they were only able to draw a big radius as to where they might be roaming. That area included Yonozuka station ruin that Akira explored the other day.

Akira's expression turned grim, he remembered that huge greedy crocodile.

"Alpha, about this bounty notification…"

"I think that monster is one of them. Since there are 4 bounty monsters, I guess more similar monsters came out to the surface. Although there were traces of battles in many places, we found no traces of corpses. It is likely that corpses were eaten by the other greedy crocodiles while they were on their way to the surface. There's a good chance the monsters that left those traces in the hallway left that ruin and attacked Hunters and the other monsters that they encountered."

In that particular hallway, there were traces of battles, but strangely enough, there were no monster corpses nor dead Hunters. As Akira expected, it might have been because some kind of monster had eaten all the leftover corpses. Then that particular monster might have evolved, and after it grew stronger, it might have started preying on the other weaker monsters around it and grew even stronger to the point that it was dangerous enough for the City Management to warrant a bounty request.

Akira stepped down from the vehicle without saying anything. Alpha then asked him.

“Are you not going to search for unexplored ruins today?”

“Yeah, if I go out to the wasteland, I feel like my bad luck will get me to meet one of those bounty monsters after all.”

Alpha smiled after hearing his reply.

“You’re right. We can’t underestimate your bad luck after all, so I guess it’s the right choice to not go out today, huh.”

Akira pouted, but he just obediently returned back to his house.

After that, he spent his days studying inside his room and training himself.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 88, Shopping With Sheryl

Index

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Akira was strolling with Sheryl in the Kugamayama city's lower district. He was fulfilling the promise he made the other day.

Since the report said that one of the bounty monsters was spotted in the wasteland somewhere near the city, Akira decided to watch the situation for a while before going out to the wasteland again. He was worried that his bad luck might get him to meet that monster the moment he went out to the wasteland. Accompanying Sheryl doing shopping was also for wasting time while waiting for the situation to get better.

Sheryl and Akira were heading to the market around the big Hunter Office branch that was attached to the wall. The area around this Hunter Office was a relatively safe area compared to the other places in the lower district. Because of that, most of the expensive shops and stands gathered around this area.

But to be more precise, the truly luxurious and expensive shops were located inside the inner wall and it was impossible for Akira and Sheryl to go there. So in short, the shops in this area were only expensive compared

to the standard in the lower district and they gathered here since this area was relatively safer compared to the rest of the lower district.

Sheryl was walking happily next to Akira when Akira suddenly asked her.

“Although you said that you’re going to buy shoes, are you sure you want to buy shoes there? Only expensive shoes are available over there, you know?”

In reality, Akira never shopped in that place and he knew almost nothing about the shops in that area. It was all information provided by Alpha.

“That’s what I found in the network. Well, I’m not sure if that information is fake or not though.”

It seemed that Alpha could not affirm nor refute the information that she told to Akira.

“Alpha, It’s rare for you not being able to say anything about it.”

“It’s complicated.”

It was rare for Alpha to say something like that, Akira wondered. Sheryl looked hesitant as she said.

“I couldn’t find any shoes that matched the clothes that you gave me. I guess that place should have fitting shoes for me. If it’s too expensive, I’ll just give up.”

Akira looked over Sheryl. She was wearing one of the clothes that he gave to her. It was true that compared to her dress, her current shoes looked old and shabby. Since it was shoes that she bought from Katsuragi, they were more tailored towards exploring the wasteland. Not to mention, since the size of the dress was bigger than her actual size, her overall appearance looked a bit weird. But it was rather understandable since Akira could not find old-world shoes that might fit that dress.

Although it also depended on the condition of the clothes, most of the old-world clothes were considered expensive goods. So in order to get shoes

that might fit that dress, she might not have any other choice but to go to the market around that area.

When a small child from the slum city went to one of those expensive shops, he or she would normally get kicked out. Even for Sheryl who came in that dress, the chance of her getting kicked out was still pretty high if they knew where she came from. That was also one of the reasons why she was going there with Akira. If she was accompanied by a successful Hunter, the chance of her getting kicked out would be considerably lowered.

Akira and Sheryl continued walking through the lower district toward their destination. The shop that they were heading to was a shop that Alpha randomly picked from the network, Alpha was actually guiding Akira there.

Of course, Sheryl didn’t know anything about it. Seeing how Akira did not hesitate as they proceeded through that area without getting lost, she thought that he must have frequented that area to the point that he remembered the layout.

They eventually reached their destination. It was a luxurious looking boutique. If he was the past Akira, he would have hesitated to go in. But since he was once invited by Shiori to a luxurious restaurant, Akira was able to enter that shop without showing hesitation.

Sheryl quickly followed behind him. To be honest, she was feeling very nervous, but since she had learned how to hide it, she entered the shop with a calm expression.

A female clerk quickly welcomed them as they entered, she was Kashua, the owner of the shop.

Kashua glanced at Akira. [He is a young boy Hunter with an augmented suit and properly maintained rifles, there should be no problem.]

Kashua then turned her attention to Sheryl.

[There is something strange about her appearance. The dress that she is wearing seems like an old-world dress, in short, an expensive dress. And

she sure has put extra effort to make such a big dress look less weird on her. But compared to that dress, she is using shabby and dirty looking shoes. But anyway, she must be here as the Hunter boy's companion. So, there should be no problem.]

Kashua identified Akira and Sheryl as worthy customers. Thus she put on her business smile as she welcomed them.

"Thank you for coming to our shop, what can we do for you today?"

"Uhh, we're here looking for girl shoes."

After Akira said that, Kashua turned to Sheryl and looked at her shoes one more time.

"But of course! Please come in, I'll guide you to the shoe section."

Kashua's expression did not change as she guided Akira and Sheryl through her shop.

Sheryl followed Kashua's guide. Not too long after that, she was sitting on a chair having a hard time deciding among all the shoes lined up in front of her. All those shoes were recommended for her by Kashua. Sheryl was making a super serious face, all of those shoes that Kashua recommended were wonderful shoes. Even Sheryl was able to know that much, but because of that, the price of those shoes was also pretty high and she could not pay for those shoes with the money that she brought with her that day. She also noticed that Kashua slowly lowered the quality and the price of the shoes that she was recommending to Sheryl every time she brought a new pair of shoes.

One of the reasons why Sheryl was looking for new shoes was for selling the relics that Akira entrusted to her. She would be able to make a better impression by wearing matching shoes when selling those relics. She knew very well that putting a good overall appearance would be beneficial during a negotiation. In order for others to not look down on her, she was searching for shoes that would fit her dress. She was thinking hard on how to do that with the limited amount of budget that she had.

While Sheryl was busy doing that, Akira was walking around the shop, browsing the apparels there. Inside that shop, mannequins were used to show how the dresses would look when they were put on. Akira frowned a bit when he looked at those mannequins.

Alpha noticed that and thought his reaction was a bit weird.

“Akira, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing, I’m just wondering why I don’t feel anything when I look at these mannequins? Is it because they are just mannequins?”

“Do you want me to try it on?”

Alpha changed her dress to the same ones that the mannequin in front of Akira was wearing. Although the size was adjusted to fit on her body, it had the exact same design as the one on the mannequin. She then stood beside that mannequin.

Akira looked at the mannequin and at Alpha in turns. But just like before, he did not feel any big change in his impression.

“Yep, it doesn’t change much. It’s not that bad but not that good either, just a normal dress. This shop is supposed to be an expensive shop in the lower district, right?”

“Well, the clothes here are at least not as cheap as your underclothing.”

“Even if it’s an expensive dress judged by fashion experts for having a good design, it still looks normal to me, I don’t feel anything at all. As I thought, I might have no fashion sense.”

Akira remembered that the meal he had when he went to that expensive restaurant really blew his mind. He could agree that those meals were worth the money.

But that was not the case for fashion. Of course, their prices were not the same as the meal that he had in that luxurious restaurant, but he was expecting something more.

Alpha once again changed her dress, this time, it was an expensive-looking dress appropriate for a high-class lady. Walking through the lower district in that dress would warrant extra escorts, or at least, you would need the influence to let people know not to mess with you in order to ensure your safety.

“Compared to the last one, what do you think about this dress?”

“Not bad. It does look expensive, I at least understand that it’s on a different level compared to the other common clothes around here. If I find this kind of dress in the old-world ruin, I’m sure it’ll fetch me quite a lot of money.”

For Akira to think about how much money it would bring in case he sold that dress when he was actually asked about his opinion on the dress, it seemed that his way of thinking had really adjusted for his Hunter job. That might be one of the reasons why he had a bad sense of fashion.

“If that’s all you have to say after seeing my dress, I guess you have gotten used to it, huh.”

“Gotten used to it? Well, I do feel like I’m starting to get used to your clothes though…”

“I think that you’re misunderstanding something here, it’s true that my dress is nothing but an image, but it’s still a high-class dress. When you’re not worried about the expense for the fabric, you can get a very luxurious dress, as a matter of fact, the design and the outlook of my usual clothes are way better than the current fashion.”

“…So?”

“Basically, since you always see me in high-class clothing all the time, you’ve gotten used to it to the point that it dulls your fashion sense. Maybe.”

“…So in conclusion, my fashion sense is broken, right? Well, I guess it’s fine since now I know the reason why.”

Akira pouted a bit, while Alpha was smiling teasingly at him.

“Isn’t that fine? After all, every time you want to look at a beautiful girl, you can always look at me anytime, right?”

Akira smiled bitterly, he could not refute that.

Kashua, who was with Sheryl up until now, suddenly approached Akira.

“Excuse me, would it be alright if I ask you a question?”

“Sure, what is it?”

“Excuse me for being rude, but, may I know how much your budget is for today? It seems that your companion is worried about the price. If I know the budget, I might be able to adjust my recommendation accordingly.”

It seemed that Kashua thought Akira would be paying for Sheryl. Akira then glanced at Sheryl, she was staring seriously at the shoes in front of her. It seemed that she was really at loss on what to do.

Akira thought for a bit and said.

“Inform me if it costs more than 1,000,000 Aurum.”

Kashua froze for a bit when she heard that.

“…1,000,000 Aurum? Is that correct?”

“Yes, I’ll be paying with my Hunter ID. Ah, if I have to pay with cash, I’ll have to go for a bit to withdraw the money though.”

“Please don’t worry, we also accept payment through Hunter ID. Just for confirmation, may I borrow your Hunter ID?”

It was a common thing for Hunters to lose their IDs during a fight in the old-world ruin. But Kashua was actually asking Akira’s Hunter ID to confirm whether he could really pay that much. It showed just how much surprised she was since it was something that she would never do normally.

After all, it was as if she was asking if Akira could really pay that much money. If she had asked that question to a short-tempered Hunter, it would not be strange if that Hunter got angered. Kashua suddenly realized that fact as she tried her best to keep calm and show a friendly smile to Akira.

But Akira did not feel offended by it and casually handed over his ID to Kashua. Kashua then used her information terminal to read Akira's Hunter ID. When the result came out on her information terminal, she was so surprised that she froze.

She then somehow returned back to her usual smile and returned Akira's Hunter ID.

"I'm sorry for bothering you so much. I'll recommend shoes that suit the aforementioned budget. Please do ask me if you have any questions."

She then lightly bowed at Akira and left.

Alpha then asked Akira.

"Are you sure you're okay with that? She'll make you pay close to the upper limit of your budget, you know?"

"It's fine. I think Sheryl is buying shoes today as preparation so that she can sell relics that I entrusted to her at a better price, right?"

"I think so."

"In that case, then this is a needed expense. If it will really help her sell the relics, then I have no complaints at all. And also, this is for confirming something."

"Confirming something?"

"I want to know how much she can change with 1,000,000 Aurum and how I'll react to that. If I don't feel anything at all even after spending that much money, I have no plans to make any comment about fashion nor spend too much money on fashion in the future."

Akira thought that if even 1,000,000 Aurum fashion did not give him any noticeable impression, then it only meant he really did not have any fashion sense at all.

“Hmmm. It’ll also be affected by the fashion sense of the clerk in this shop though, don’t you think that there are too many unpredictable factors?”

“If that happens, then it’s my bad luck in choosing a weird shop.”

“But I’m the one who picked this shop, you know.”

“Well, that only means that my luck is so bad that we can’t do anything about it even with your ability. Which also means that I really should give up on my fashion sense.”

Akira smiled lightly when he said that.

Alpha looked exasperatedly at Akira who suddenly decided to test his luck there. Although it was not something that might endanger his life, it might lower his evaluation of her ability.

Alpha was pondering if she should do something about it.

Kashua did not go to Sheryl after she talked with Akira, instead, she went right to the back room only for employees. The moment she passed through the door, her business smile changed to a real smile.

“Celen!! Are you awake?!”

After Kashua said that, a young girl dragged herself out.

“Onee-chan, you’re too noisy! You do know that I worked all night yesterday, right?”

Celen looked annoyed as she stared at Kashua. But Kashua ignored her and said.

“Get changed into something presentable and get out there.”

“But it’s your turn to watch the shop at this hour, you know? Just let me sleep, I’m really sleepy.”

“Just do what I say, quickly. And also, I’ve told you many times to call me miss manager, remember?!”

“…Geeez.”

Although she seemed annoyed, Celen did what she was told to. When Kashua saw that, she quickly went back to the shop.

Sheryl was staring intensely on the shoes that Kashua recommended to her. Every time Kashua brought different shoes to her, the quality and the price of those shoes were getting lower and lower compared to the previous one. Since Kashua did not recommend any other shoes, Sheryl thought that there might be no cheaper shoes in that shop.

Although Sheryl had enough money to pay for the shoes, those shoes were not good enough fit for her dress. But still, they were at least better than her current shoes.

She still had to use the rest of her money for something else. So she was at a loss whether she should spend half of her current money for the shoes.

Right when she was still pondering on what to do, Kashua came to her. She brought another pair of shoes to recommend to Sheryl.

“If those don’t suit your taste, then how about this?”

Sheryl thought that Kashua brought cheaper shoes as she turned to her. But her expression quickly changed to bewilderment.

The shoes that Kashua recommended looked obviously high-class. There was no mistaking that it cost way more than all the other shoes that she had recommended up until now. It was understandable since she brought the most expensive shoes in her shop.

Sheryl apologetically said to Kashua as a way to signal her that she wanted cheaper shoes.

“Uhmm, I’m really thankful for recommending these shoes to me. But it might be a tad too…”

Right when Sheryl was about to say ‘too expensive’, Kashua suddenly interrupted while still smiling at her.

“I’m sorry that I might have overstepped my bounds, but I have asked your companion as to how much he’s planning to spend today. We’re really sorry for only recommending cheap shoes up until now.”

Sheryl looked even more confused.

From Sheryl’s reaction, Kashua thought that she was feeling apologetic for making Akira pay for an expensive pair of shoes. That was why Kashua then told Sheryl that it was not a big amount of money for Akira, after all, as a businesswoman, Kashua also had to respect Akira’s wish to buy Sheryl that level of quality shoes.

“Please wait for a bit here, I’ll bring other shoes too.”

After she said that, Kashua placed the most expensive shoes in her shop on top of the table and took all the other cheap shoes off the table. She then bowed lightly to Sheryl before stepping away to replace those cheap shoes with the second most expensive shoes in her shop.

Sheryl, who did not know what was going on, was staring at Kashua’s back as she left that place. She then turned to Akira who she thought should know what exactly was going on.

Akira was browsing the apparel and eventually found himself standing in front of the male underclothing section. Expensive looking underclothings were lined up in front of him, of course, those underclothings were way more expensive than the ones that he usually used.

“Should I buy some underclothing too?”

“I won’t stop you, but I won’t recommend wearing them under an augmented suit. Since it’s not for Hunters, I’m sure it’ll get torn in no time.”

“Well, that’s true. I guess it’s better if I don’t buy it then.”

Akira then placed the underclothing in his hand back to the rack. It seemed that there were no goods that might suit his needs.

“Putting that aside, Sheryl is staring at you, you know.”

“Hm?”

He glanced at Sheryl to check on her. It seemed that she wanted him to return to her, thus he decided to walk back to Sheryl.

After Akira returned, Sheryl asked him what was going on and understood the situation. It was a good thing for Sheryl since it was hard to find the shoes that fit her needs with her current budget. But it was not like she could honestly feel happy about it either.

“…Is it really okay?”

“Yeah, like I said before, if it helps you sell the relics, then it’s alright. There’s no need to worry about it, just think of it as a small debt, you can just subtract it from the sales after you sell the relics.”

Sheryl smiled in relief.

“I understand. I’ll take you up on your offer then.”

She already had a bunch of favours from Akira that she needed to repay. Thus it was easier for her if Akira himself made that request.

Kashua returned with the second and third most expensive shoes in her shop. Celen who had finished changing her clothes eventually dragged herself out, still looking extremely drowsy.

Celen tried to remember the prices of the shoes that were lined on top of the table. She then looked at Sheryl and Akira before glancing at Kashua while thinking.

[Just because he looks like a Hunter with a lot of money, aren’t you a bit too excited? Well, I do understand your feeling though.]

Not all Hunters had a lot of money or were willing to spend a lot of money. But from time to time, there were peculiar Hunters who visited that shop. Some of them had their money perception distorted after getting lucky in the old-world ruin and returning back with a lot of relics. Some of them spent so much money on their equipment that they did not mind spending money at all. These Hunters showed less resistance when they had to pay expensive goods and they were merchants’ favourite customers.

Because of that, all shops would encourage those Hunters to spend as much money as possible when they were in that phase. Of course, that was leaving high-ranking Hunters aside. As long as they did not look like they were going to die anytime soon, shops would treat them hoping that they would do business with them for a long time.

Kashua was also recommending all kinds of other things to Sheryl. Although Sheryl did not have to worry about the budget any longer, she still did not want to buy anything that she did not actually need. And also one more thing, it did not prevent her from being at a loss on which one to pick.

Celen scanned Sheryl’s outlook. Leaving her shoes aside, Sheryl was using old-world relics. But the size of her dress did not fit her and it was obvious for anyone who worked in the fashion business. And now that she noticed it, Celen could not shake her mind off from it.

She then made a suggestion to Sheryl.

“Excuse me, if it’s okay with you, I can readjust the size of your dress while you’re browsing.”

Sheryl glanced at Celen and then looked at her own dress. Akira suddenly asked a question.

“Is that okay?”

But then another person answered Akira’s strange question with her own interpretation.

Kashua smiled confidently as she said.

“I can reassure you that Celen is very skilled in adjusting clothes. I’m sure you’ll find her work satisfying.”

Celen glanced at Kashua and sighed before she added.

“That dress is an old-world dress, right? After I readjust an old-world dress, it would be considered as a normal dress and its price would fall. If it’s one of your assets, I would not recommend readjusting it. But if I may readjust its size, it would look better on you.”

After Celen warned Sheryl and Akira of the downside of readjusting an old-world dress, Kashua looked at Celen.

[Whoah there, you’re the one who offered it so why would you say something that discourages them now?]

[What will you do if they ask for compensation later because we didn’t warn them? Or more like, isn’t that your job as the manager to tell them that?]

Kashua and Celen were still smiling while talking through telepathy, they had been stuck together for years after all, so they could more or less read each other’s minds.

Although Akira had given that dress to her, as a Hunter who hunted for relics, it might still offend him. So Sheryl asked for Akira’s opinion.

“Akira, what do you think?”

“Well, it’s your dress, so it’s up to you what you want to with it. But that aside, what are you going to do about your clothing while she’s readjusting that dress?”

Now that Akira mentioned it, Sheryl realized that point. The readjustment would take some time to finish, and even if she returned back to her base to change first, she did not have any other dress that she could wear to go to that shop. After all, it was unthinkable for her to go there with a slum city outfit.

Of course, she had the choice of taking her measurement there and then asking Akira to send and retrieve her dress, but that would mean she would have to bother Akira again and that was not preferable for her.

In reality, Akira did not think that far when he said that. He was just simply asking the question that came up in his mind.

Celen then said to Sheryl.

“If it’s about that. I should be able to finish readjusting around the evening if I start now, while I’m doing that, you can browse and try the other clothes in this shop.”

Sheryl could not decide, so she asked Akira again.

“Uhmmm, is it okay if I ask you to wait with me until it’s finished?”

“Sure, I have no other plans for today anyway.”

“Thank you very much.”

Sheryl smiled as she thanked Akira and asked Celen to readjust her dress.

After she let Celen take her measurement, she handed over all her clothes except for her undergarments to Celen. She then tried all the clothes that Kashua recommended.

Sheryl would ask for Akira’s opinion every time she put on a new set of clothes. Akira was only sitting on a chair while waiting for Sheryl’s dress to finish. Although Sheryl asked about his opinion again and again, he only gave a dull reaction every single time.

Akira had no confidence in his own fashion sense, Sheryl knew that very well since that one time when she went to Higaraka residence ruin with him. Because of that, she did not really get bothered by Akira's dull reaction as she kept enjoying herself showing her dresses to him and asking for his opinion. Of course, she planned to buy any clothes that incited a reaction from Akira.

Kashua received a message from Celen through her information terminal. She then excused herself and went to Celen's place.

Celen, who had finished the preparation to readjust Sheryl's dress, was staring at it while waiting for Kashua. It did not take long for Kashua to come. Seeing how Celen had not started yet, Kashua, who thought that Celen would have already started, lightly scolded her.

"Celen, is there any problem? You haven't even started working on that dress?"

Celen calmly replied.

"I've finished the preparation and I'm about to start. But there's one thing that I want to ask first."

"What is it? They're waiting for it, so make sure to finish it fast."

"How much should I ask for readjusting this dress?"

Kashua looked confused since Celen asked a strange question.

"How much do you ask? Of course, as much as you need for adjusting that dress, isn't that obvious?"

Celen hummed for a bit and then rephrased her question.

"My bad, that was a poor way to say it. After adding the prices of everything that he is going to buy, does he have any extra money to pay for this adjustment? Wait, maybe it's the other way around. After subtracting the cost of this adjustment, does he have extra money in his budget to pay for the other stuff?"

Kashua looked like she was caught off guard.

“He did say to tell him if it’s over 1,000,000 Aurum, at most, you only charge about 300,000 Aurum for readjusting dresses, right? I’m planning to make him spend the rest of his budget though. Celen, how much are you planning to charge him?”

“If there’s no limit on his budget, I’m planning to ask for 1,500,000 Aurum.”

Kashua was surprised since Celen asked for 5 times more than what she was expecting. But she quickly snapped back to reality and flusteredly asked Celen.

“…Hah?! 1,500,000 Aurum!? You must be kidding, right?!”

“I’m not kidding, that’s why I called you here. I can still stop here. You should tell them and ask them whether they want to choose to only adjust the dress or are they willing to go beyond their budget to make the readjustment and pay for their shopping as well. It’s your job to talk with the customers after all.”

“No no no, wait for a sec, why do you need that much money in the first place? You already made a rough prediction when you offered to readjust that dress, right?”

“That is where I made a mistake. I can only say that I made a bad prediction back there. This dress is made of a way better fabric than I expected. So I need better fabric and a more complicated technique to readjust its size. I have no plans to sell my skill cheaply, you know. Especially after seeing her undergarment, that thing is a high-quality undergarment.”

“How much do you predict it cost?”

“It’s just my guess but it should at least cost about 10,000 Aurum.”

“That isn’t too expensive though. My undergarment is still way more expensive than that.”

“I said ‘at least’. Depending on your luck, it might cost you more than 1,000,000 Aurum.”

Kashua looked obviously surprised.

“…You’re joking, right?”

Celen annoyedly replied.

“I never joke when it comes to fashion. In order to make a precise prediction, I need to check the quality of its fabric, its elasticity and smoothness, and if it has an old-world logo on it. That’s why I can’t say for sure. But if it’s one of those superior-quality undergarments that would even cause a fight among those people who are sitting on the top, it would be nothing strange if it costs more than 1,000,000 Aurum or maybe even a few Chrome.”

Celen made a serious face when she said that. Clothes that were sold in Chrome were on a completely different level compared to the clothes in that shop. Of course, Kashua thought that Celen only mentioned that as an example and it was not like Sheryl’s undergarment actually cost that much. But since Celen even brought up that example, she could not help but think that Sheryl’s undergarment must be quite expensive. Even Kashua could understand that much.

“…Can you… Like, check it more closely?”

“Do you really think I can just ask our customer for permission to check her undergarment closely just because we want to know how much it costs although it has nothing to do with readjusting this dress at all? And in the first place, it’s your job as the manager to ask that if you really want to know.”

Kashua panicked, she thought that Sheryl was only a potential customer, but now it seemed that she needed to be extra careful handling Sheryl.

“How exactly does someone with that cheap shoes get her hands on something so expensive?”

“Maybe she received that as a gift. That would also explain why the dress is not of her size too. The person who gave her this dress and her undergarments might be that Hunter who is with her, he might have found them in an old-world ruin. And since he didn’t find any shoes, they’re here to buy shoes. Well, it’s all just my guess though. If it still bothers you, you should ask him.”

“Hmmm, that would explain everything though…”

“The real problem is whether that Hunter knew the worth of that undergarment when he gave it to her or not. In case if he knew, then I can’t afford to mess up readjusting this dress. Although we did warn them that it’ll reduce the worth of this dress, I’m sure there’s a limit on how much reduction is acceptable. There’s no mistaking it that it’s worth will get reduced from an old-world dress into just a high-quality dress. Of course, I’ll give nothing but my best effort. But I’ll need a special technique to work with this fabric, and that’ll cost more than usual.”

“So it’s whether he knew the real worth of his gift when he gave them, huh? It seems that you think that he does though, is there any reason for that?”

“If he knew, then that’ll explain why he’s expecting to pay about 1,000,000 Aurum for the shoes. Everything makes sense if that’s the case. But it’s up to you if you want to consider the other possibility.”

Kashua actually agreed with Celen’s opinion. If that Hunter knew the real worth of that dress and came here to buy a few shoes suitable for that dress, it would indeed cost him around 1,000,000 Aurum.

She suddenly realized something there.

“…Wait for a sec. I’m the one who will have to confirm that and ask if he’s willing to pay more, right?”

“Well, that’s your job. Good luck, just tell me if they’ve made their decision. But if they decide not to do the adjustment, I’ll come with you to apologize too.”

Although Celen’s voice was neutral, she was actually pushing the problem to Kashua. Somewhere in her expression, she did look like she felt sorry about that.

Kashua placed both of her hands on her head as she walked back to Sheryl and Akira.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 89, Near Miss

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Sheryl was changing into her next dress inside a changing room as Akira was just waiting while sitting on a chair. That was when Kashua approached him with a slightly pale face.

She thought that it might be better to wait for Sheryl, but since it should be no problem as long as the one paying was okay with it, she decided to go straight to Akira. Since it would only get harder the more she waited, it was better to just go ahead and out with it. After all, the more she waits, the readjustment will take more time to finish.

Kashua made her resolve and spoke to Akira.

“Excuse me, there’s something I need to ask.”

After listening to her explanation, Akira did not take too long to make a decision.

“Alright. I’ll pay that extra 1,500,000 Aurum above the initial 1,000,000 Aurum.”

He did not show much reaction when he said that he would pay the extra 1,500,000 Aurum. Although Kashua was surprised by it, she was barely able to maintain her usual expression. But since it did catch her by surprise, she inadvertently asked for a confirmation.

“Are you sure you’re okay with that?”

“Yeah, I’m not an expert in readjusting clothing, so if you tell me that’s how much it would take, I bet that’s really how much it would take. It’s basically like fitting equipment, so I have no plans to get a bad result just so that I can pay less, not to mention that I want to see it in its perfect condition. So I’ll leave it to you… It’s okay if I leave it to you, right?”

“Of course!”

Kashua was able to completely hide her surprise as she said that to Akira with a smile full of confidence. She fully trusted Celen’s skill. If that was not the case, she would have recommended Akira to decline her offer. But even though she was confident of Celen’s skill, it took everything she had to hide her nervousness.

Akira did not notice that at all as he said to Kashua.

“Well, I’ll leave it to you then.”

“With pleasure, please let me excuse myself to tell Celen to start readjusting the dress.”

Kashua was about to head back to Celen, but she remembered something and asked Akira.

“…Excuse me, you did say that it’s something like your equipment, may I ask you how much you spent on your equipment? Although we handle a different kind of clothing, I couldn’t help but wonder.”

Akira did say that fixing Sheryl’s dress was something like making maintenance for his equipment. So Kashua thought that she should be able

to gauge how much Akira was willing to spend this time from asking how much he spent on his own equipment.

Akira did not notice Kashua's intention as he casually replied.

"This? Well, I bought this suit as a combo with some of the other stuff too. So I don't think you can use it as a reference, you know?"

"People buy accessories and shoes to fit their dress, so I believe it's not that much different. So if I may, I want to know how much you paid in total."

"In that case, it was 80,000,000 Aurum."

"…As I thought, Hunters' equipment does cost way more than usual apparel. Well then, please let me excuse myself to tell Celen to start her work."

Kashua lightly bowed at Akira while hiding her grin before returning back to Celen. The reason why she was barely able to avoid getting herself frozen when she heard Akira's answer was because of her disposition as a businesswoman.

When she went back to Celen, she quickly told her to get started with the readjustment.

"Celen, I got confirmation. He said he'll pay the extra 1,500,000 Aurum. So you can start your work."

"Okay, by the way, how did you convince him to pay more?"

Celen thought that even if Kashua was able to get a confirmation in the end, it would at least take her some time to convince Akira. But not only was she back way sooner than Celen thought, she even got Akira's affirmation. Celen knew that Kashua was not that skillful, so she wondered what kind of technique she used.

Although that remark from Celen sounded as if she was a scammer, Kashua just ignored it as she quickly replied.

“When I told him about the situation, he didn’t hesitate to make that decision. And when I asked him how much he spent on his equipment, he said he paid 80,000,000 Aurum, you know. No wonder he didn’t bat an eyelash when he decided to pay for that extra 1,500,000 Aurum.”

“80,000,000 Aurum. Good grief, a healthy Hunter does earn a huge amount of money. Miss manager, can you go and seduce him?”

“Don’t be stupid and do your job. We did boast that we’re a shop which specializes in readjusting clothing and that we’re worth paying 1,500,000 Aurum, so I expect nothing less than perfect.”

“You don’t even need to tell me that, I won’t hold back.”

Then Celen started her work with a big smile and a serious face that showed her pride in her own skill.

As time passed by, Sheryl had tried a lot of clothes, but she had not decided to buy anything yet. She must have her reasons as to why she did that, but the biggest reason might be because none of them incited any particular reaction from Akira.

Kashua, who was always standing near Akira and Sheryl, slowly noticed that too. Thus she made a suggestion to Akira.

“Excuse me, would you like to try picking clothes for your companion?”

“Me?”

“Yes. I believe she’ll be happy too if you do that.”

Kashua thought that if it was something that Akira picked, Sheryl would definitely want to buy it.

“Well, even if you tell me so…”

Since Akira had no confidence in his fashion sense at all, he did not think it was a good idea. But Sheryl, who heard that, seemed to be interested in that idea.

“Eh, Akira will pick my clothing for me?”

Sheryl looked at Akira with eyes full of hope, which made it hard for him to refuse her. But to be honest, Akira did not think he could pick anything good.

Looking at the troubled Akira, Alpha just giggled and offered help.

“Should I do it for you then? Although, I can’t say for sure if I’ll do a good job since I’m not really knowledgeable with all the clothes in this shop.”

“Are you sure you’re okay with that?”

“I’m the one who chose this shop after all. So, let’s see if my choice can defeat your bad luck or not.”

“Now that you mention it, I did say something like that too.”

Akira decided to completely rely on Alpha to pick Sheryl’s clothing. He then looked back at Sheryl who was staring at him with hopeful eyes.

“Well, I’ll go and pick something, just wait here for a bit.”

“I’ll be looking forward to it while waiting.”

Sheryl smiled happily at him. Although, in reality, Akira was not the one who was picking clothing for her, she had no way of knowing that. She was so happy since she thought that Akira would do that for her.

Akira browsed through all the articles in that shop. Even though from outside it looked as if he was only randomly glancing through the clothes in the displays and racks, it was enough for Alpha to scan all the clothes there. But of course, Kashua who did not know that looked a bit surprised by how Akira was behaving.

He already made a round through that shop. But Alpha had not picked anything yet and he found that strange.

“You didn’t find anything good?”

“Nope. That was only to check all the clothes in this shop so that I can make a good combination. I’ll tell you which one to pick, so carry them when I tell you, okay?”

“Okay.”

Akira followed Alpha’s instruction as he went and picked a set of clothing complete with the shoes before he returned to Sheryl and handed them over to her.

Sheryl then went back to the changing room to try the clothing that Akira, or to be more precise, Alpha, picked for her.

After she finished changing, she stepped out from the changing room and bashfully asked for Akira’s opinion.

“H-how do I look?”

Rather than focusing more on showing the cuteness of a girl of her age, it was a beautiful dress that gave off innocence or pure feeling. It also had an opening on its back that showed a bit of Sheryl’s girly charm. Her already beautiful figure made that dress look even more attractive. Sheryl, who was clad in that dress, looked bashful as her cheeks turned reddish, it gave off a conflicting impression of cuteness and loveliness compared to the mature-like dress that she was previously wearing.

Kashua could not help but to give genuine praise.

“It looks really good on you.”

Kashua also gave Akira a compliment inside her heart. Other than the fact that all of those clothes that Akira picked were relatively cheap articles in that shop, she had no complaints at all. But also because of that, it was hard for her to recommend something more expensive right after that.

Alpha smiled smugly and asked Akira.

“How’s it? It’s pretty good, isn’t it?”

“Well, I think it’s better than all the other clothing until now.”

“You don’t look that excited though. Do you have any complaints or something?”

“Even if you tell me so. Just like you said, I might have gotten used to this kind of thing because of the clothes that you usually use. And also, to be honest, I like your current clothes more.”

In order to increase her likeability, Alpha’s appearance was actually adjusted to Akira’s preference, so it was not surprising at all. Not to mention, all of Alpha’s clothes were high-class clothes. Thus, it was rather unfair to compare that to Sheryl’s clothes.

Alpha just smiled bitterly as she said to him.

“Well, at least I know that you think the clothes I picked are better than what that clerk recommended. I guess I’ll settle with that for now. It seems that compared to your bad luck, my skill still has the upper hand.”

“What are you even talking about?”

Akira exasperatedly replied to Alpha, but of course, he did not show that on his face.

Sheryl was still waiting for Akira’s opinion. Since Akira was the one who picked it for her, he carefully chose his words.

“I do think it looks pretty good on you. What do you think?”

“I like it quite a lot.”

“I see, I’m glad to hear that.”

“Yes, thank you very much for picking this wonderful dress for me.”

Sheryl looked overjoyed as she thanked Akira.

Akira and Sheryl then sat on a chair and were talking to each other to spend time.

Sheryl, who was still wearing the dress that Akira picked for her, looked extremely delighted. She looked both mature and a bit childish from the other people's point of view.

They still had some time until Celen finished adjusting Sheryl's dress. Since Akira had paid for the bill, he actually could spend time outside the shop and return back later. But for Sheryl, Celen asked her to stay in the shop in case she needed her for basting or other fine adjustments. In order to get nothing less than perfect adjustment, Sheryl obediently followed Celen's request to stay in the shop. So Akira also decided to stay in that shop to accompany Sheryl.

While they were waiting, Akira also finished discussing about the things related to their next expedition to Higaraka residence ruin.

Unlike what he had expected, Sheryl quickly agreed with his offer to regularly go to gather relics. But after their discussion, there were a lot of changes compared to before.

One of the big changes was related to the ownership of the relics. All of the gathered relics would be owned by Akira; Sheryl and her gang would then sell them and get 50% of the profit from the sales. As for how to sell them, it was all up to Sheryl and her gang. It also applied to the relics that they had gathered last time.

Just to be sure, Akira then asked Sheryl again.

"Well, it might be strange to ask you this since I'm the one who came up with it, but a lot of things happened last time, so like, are you really okay with that?"

Sheryl and her gang had gone through a lot of stuff the previous time they went out to the wasteland. Not only did they get attacked by a swarm of monsters, one of the Hunters that were together with them also attacked

them. But even so, Sheryl accepted his offer with a straight face and that made Akira a bit worried.

But her smile did not change at all as she replied.

“Yes, it’s a good offer for us too. Moreover, if anything happens, you would save us again just like last time, right?”

Sheryl was bashful when she said that. Rather than remembering the dangerous experiences that she had gone through, her mind was filled with how cool Akira was when he saved her. Although the scene that she remembered was not that far from what actually happened, it was still a bit exaggerated by Sheryl’s own imagination.

Akira thought that the last expedition was a failure, that was why he made a serious expression as he said to Sheryl.

“Yeah. Since I took in the request, I’ll do better next time.”

Sheryl looked immensely content. It sounded as if Akira was serious about protecting her, but of course, she herself knew that it was a bit of overstatement from her side.

“In that case, there should be no problem. Actually, I was thinking of making this request to you, but I was unsure whether you would agree to it.”

“Is that so? Well, I’m okay if you’re fine with it…”

There was actually something that still bothered Akira, but since he was the one who came with that offer in the first place, he decided not to press the question.

Sheryl and Akira then continued talking to each other to kill time. But suddenly, Akira felt like he had forgotten about something. So he asked Alpha for confirmation.

“Alpha, am I forgetting something?”

“Forgetting something? I don’t think you’re forgetting anything though. You’ve talked with Sheryl about that offer and I don’t think you have any fixed plan after this. And it’s not like there’s anything that you need to immediately prepare for.”

“Is it only my feeling? Hmmm, I feel like there’s something…”

“If I have to say something, you had only prepared yourself to go out to the wasteland assuming that there are no bounty monsters. So if you have any plans to go out to the wasteland any time soon, you’ll have to readjust your supply in case if you accidentally come across one of the bounty monsters. But you have no plans to go out any time soon, right?”

“…Ah, that’s it!”

Although that was not what Akira was looking for, since Alpha mentioned it, it piqued his interest. He might have to go out to the wasteland soon because of some kind of reason. After all, Akira knew well about his own bad luck.

“Yep, that does bother me. I guess it’s better if I prepare myself when I have the chance.”

“You’re really a worrywart. Well, there’s nothing bad from getting yourself well prepared though.”

Akira then told Sheryl that he would leave her for a bit.

“Sheryl, I just remembered that I had to do something, so I’ll leave for a bit. You just wait here and contact me if you need anything.”

“If it’s something that I can help with, I would like to help too.”

“No, I’m okay with going alone. I’m going to buy ammo and stuff, so it’s faster if I go alone since I have this augmented suit.”

“I see, alright then. I’ll contact you if anything happens.”

Sheryl looked slightly disappointed as she saw Akira off.

After Akira left her alone, she started to regain her calm as she realized that she was a bit too excited until now.

She took a deep breath to calm herself. By pure coincidence, she saw a mirror in front of her. She stared at her own reflection on that mirror, then stood up and took a pose in front of it. She could not help but start smiling again when she did that.

She was actually confirming her own appearance which she had polished in order to get the upper hand during a negotiation. By looking at her reflection, she could understand how she looked in others eyes.

Although Sheryl stood in front of that mirror for that sake at first, it slowly shifted to her enjoying the dress that Akira had chosen for her. When she looked at herself smiling in front of that mirror, she quickly snapped back and returned her expression to normal in panic.

Now that she had calmed down, Sheryl went back to her chair and started thinking about her plans for the future, to be more precise, how to sell the relics. She had to get as much money as possible out of those relics for Akira's sake too. Thus she seriously thought about what she should do to sell those relics.

Kashua noticed another group of customers entering into her shop, and she quickly welcomed them.

Her new customers were a group of 3. A lightly armed young Hunter boy and two girls. Kashua scanned their outer looks and recognized them as customers. Or at least, there was no need to kick them out from her shop. She then welcomed them with a big smile.

"Thank you very much for coming to our shop, how can we help you today?"

When Kashua spoke to them, one of the girls who was overwhelmed by the impression given by her shop twitched in surprise, so the other girl decided to step up and replied to Kashua.

“Uhm, we just want to look around for clothes and other stuff, is that okay?”

“Of course! I’ll be nearby. If you have any question or if there’s anything that interests you, feel free to call me.”

Those girls then walked into the shop, while the boy followed behind. He looked really tired as he mumbled.

“Say, can we take a rest for a bit? And like, we’ve been looking around for a while and you girls haven’t even bought a thing, you know? Is there really a need for me to be here to carry your stuff?”

It was obvious that the girls’ mood soured. It was true that they planned to buy new clothing, but since they were on a limited budget, they had to carefully choose their clothes. Moreover, both of them planned to show their new clothing to that boy. The reason why they had not bought anything was because that boy gave nothing but a dull reaction every time they showed the clothes that they picked.

“Just shut up and follow us. You promised us to accompany us for the whole day today, remember?”

Since it was rather embarrassing if they had to be honest with him, the girl hid her embarrassment by scolding that boy.

That boy did not notice the girls’ real feelings at all as he dragged his legs behind them.

“I know, I know. But Yumina, putting me aside, I think Airi is getting tired too, you know?”

“I’m not.”

Airi quickly interjected. Yumina smiled and replied.

“There, you heard her right, Katsuya? So stop complaining and come here.”

“Okay okay… I should’ve brought lighter equipment since it’s not like we’re going to the wasteland, huh?”

In order to protect Yumina and Airi who were only wearing normal clothes, Katsuya thought that he should bring some weapons and decided to carry pretty heavy equipment with him. It was too late for him to regret that.

Kashua’s new customers were none other than Katsuya, Airi and Yumina.

Although Katsuya helped Yumina and Airi choose clothes at first, he made an excuse saying that he was tired and was able to break away from them.

After Yumina and Airi complained and told him to return after taking a short rest, Katsuya was looking for a place to sit down. He then caught a glimpse of a table inside that shop and went to take a seat on one of the chairs around it.

He noticed that someone else was sitting on a different chair near that table. So he asked for permission.

“Uhmm, is it okay if I sit here?”

“Sure, go ahead.”

It was Sheryl. She smiled at Katsuya as she gave him her permission.

Katsuya, who was about to take a seat without waiting for Sheryl’s permission, suddenly stopped. He was smitten by Sheryl the moment he looked at her.

Sheryl was still wearing that dress which gave off a mature aura. Katsuya, who saw that, felt like Sheryl was on a whole different world compared to him. If someone told him that she was a young lady from the inner district who was visiting the outside of the wall, he would have believed without questioning it.

Katsuya was rather famous among the young Hunters in Drankam. Because of that, he was extremely popular among the young girls in Drankam and that caused his evaluation for girls to be extremely strict.

But even so, he was smitten when he saw Sheryl. Katsuya's evaluation of Sheryl, who was clad in that high-class dress, was completely different compared to the other girls around him. It was even enough to get him enamoured. From his point of view, her appearance was simply destructively beautiful.

Sheryl tilted her head since Katsuya was frozen still.

"…Uhmmm, are you not going to take a seat?"

"Ah, yeah, right."

Katsuya quickly snapped back to reality as he flusteredly took a seat.

Sheryl then looked away from Katsuya and returned back thinking about her plan. But she could feel Katsuya staring at her, so she decided to stop there.

If Katsuya said something, Sheryl would normally reply to him. But he was only staring at her without saying anything.

Thus, she decided to say something first thinking that it could not be helped. Looking at his equipment, it was easy to notice that Katsuya was a Hunter. While also killing time until Akira returned, she decided to extract any info that she could from a Hunter who had enough resources to visit that shop.

Sheryl threw a smile at Katsuya.

"Are you here with your friends today?"

"…Eh? Ah, yes, I am."

Katsuya was only able to flusteredly reply when Sheryl suddenly spoke to him. He was actually in the middle of thinking of any subject that he could use to strike a conversation with her. But since Sheryl caught him completely off guard, everything that was inside his mind suddenly vanished.

“Do you come here often?”

“H-here? W-well, I was actually accompanying Yumina and Airi looking for clothes and we somehow ended up in this shop. Shops around these areas look expensive, so I don’t really come here a lot, but like, ah, that Yumina and Airi, I wonder if they have enough money? Wait, they haven’t bought anything yet, so I guess it’s fine, huh?”

Katsuya was so nervous that he started saying things that Sheryl did not ask about. But even so, Sheryl kept on staring at him while still smiling. Since there was a beautiful girl staring at him, Katsuya tried to hide his embarrassment by laughing.

While on the other hand, Yumina and Airi were going around the shop, browsing the clothes.

Yumina took a cloth from a rack that interested her, she then checked the design and thought that it was pretty good. But after checking the price tag, she returned it back to the rack and inadvertently said.

“…Yikes, so expensive.”

That shop was selling high-class clothes by the lower district’s standard. And of course, high-quality clothes would cost a lot of money. It was not like Yumina could not pay for those clothes, but she needed extra courage to use that much money.

It might be a good reward for a Hunter who worked hard every single day. Yumina thought so, but if she bought it, used it, showed it to Katsuya, and Katsuya thought that it did not look good on her, there was no mistaking that she would get depressed.

So she decided to try it and show it to Katsuya first, but she could not find him around. Yumina then grumbled.

“Katsuya is not back yet? He’s taking too long, good grief, what exactly is he doing?”

Katsuya had made a mistake the other day that caused him to almost fight against Akira, and of course, Yumina and Airi were also roped into that incident. As an apology, Katsuya promised that he would accompany them for the whole day today.

Airi, who was with Yumina, then said.

“I’ll go look for him.”

“Pretty please.”

Airi then left Yumina to look for Katsuya. It did not take long before she returned alone.

Yumina, who expected Airi to return back with Katsuya, tilted her head in confusion.

“Where’s Katsuya?”

Airi was an expressionless girl. But that one time, she looked obviously grumpy as she answered Yumina’s question.

“Hitting on a girl!”

“…Hah?”

Airi’s bad mood also infected Yumina.

Silavin: Seriously. This guy seeks what he can’t have. Happened with Sara and Elena. Now, Sheryl.

For those worried, there is no NTR. So, don’t worry. Anyways, Sheryl is head over heels for Akira at this point. Well, mentally, she is dependent on him, so, head in her heels?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 90, Katsuya and That Special Girl

Index

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Katsuya talked about a lot of things with Sheryl.

To be more precise, there was an obvious inclination in the subject of their conversation. They mostly talked about things related to Katsuya, like his story when he went to an old-world ruin or when he went on a monster extermination request, or about the gang that he belonged to–Drankam.

Katsuya thought that Sheryl was someone from the inner wall from the dress she was wearing. It was not rare for people from the inner wall to go out with some paid escorts. There were a lot of those escorts gathered in the big building sticking to the wall where the huge Hunter Office was located. The area around that building was considerably safer although it was still considered as a part of the lower district. Thus, it was pretty safe for people from the inner wall to walk around that area.

At first, Katsuya thought that the violence-filled daily life of a Hunter would be a boring story for someone like Sheryl. But since it seemed that Sheryl was listening closely to his story, he continued to keep telling stories about his life as a Hunter.

Katsuya felt very comfortable talking with Sheryl. Not only was she a beautiful girl that would listen closely to his rather boastful story, but she would even occasionally praise him right when he was expecting it. And when he told an unpleasant story or complained, Sheryl would look concerned and sympathize with his story as well as praising his will to get over that problem. Katsuya was drowned in the mood as he kept talking with her.

But Sheryl thought something was strange with Katsuya's story.

Katsuya was quite a handsome boy, it could be said that his face was above average. If he was working a job where he had to serve customers, it would definitely attract a lot of girls. If his story was correct, he was a skilled young Hunter and one of the best Hunters in Drankam. Since he worked himself so hard to be able to help his other fellow gang members, it could be inferred that he kept his friends dear. In short, he was a good looking young Hunter with skill and good personality. Sheryl's impression, opinion and intuition evaluated Katsuya highly.

And the other side of Sheryl, the part of her that coldly and rationally evaluated her opponent and continuously thought of ways to use that information to get the upper hand during a negotiation, also evaluated Katsuya highly. But compared to her intuition, it was relatively low.

To be more precise, her intuition actually over-evaluated Katsuya. Thus there was an obvious gap between that and her logical and calm evaluation of him. That was the cause of Sheryl's weird feeling.

Although she did feel that there was something strange in her own evaluation of Katsuya, she did not let it show in her face as she kept her smile while talking to him. While she was keeping that up, it encouraged her further to evaluate him even more highly.

Sheryl unconsciously thought that there was no mistaking it, Katsuya was indeed a skilled young Hunter. Making a connection with that kind of Hunter would be beneficial for her gang. Before she even realized it, she started imagining inviting him for a meal and walking hand-in-hand through the lower district in order to deepen their connection.

In her imagination, she pictured herself walking happily linking arms with Katsuya like a lover. That scene felt so heart-warming.

Then she pictured Akira coming from the opposite direction. Their eyes met, but Akira did not change his expression at all as he simply turned back and cut his ties with her.

When Sheryl returned back to reality, her face had already turned stiff. Her body was frozen out of fear, but she quickly recovered as she reminded herself that it was only her imagination and not reality. But it was not like her nervousness and shivers immediately stopped. Sheryl tried to calm herself by taking short breaths since her heart was beating really fast.

Katsuya, who noticed Sheryl's expression, worriedly asked her.

"…A-are you okay?"

Sheryl looked at Katsuya again, all of her baseless good evaluation of him had completely vanished. Her feeling was telling her that the young Hunter in front of her was simply a promising young Hunter, it was the same evaluation that her rational side was telling her.

She took a deep breath to calm herself. Once she calmed down, she then tried to dodge the subject.

"…I'm alright. I'm sorry to make you worry."

"What's wrong? Ah, did I say something that bothers you?"

"No, it's just that as I was listening to your story, it somehow reminded me of a traumatic memory when I got attacked by monsters in the wasteland… I'm sorry that I made you worry."

Katsuya worriedly asked her.

"Were you alright? Did you get injured?"

"I was fine. The Hunter escorting me saved me so I was able to survive the attack without any wound. As I thought, a skilled Hunter like Katsuya-san

is really reliable.”

Sheryl smiled while observing Katsuya. He seemed a bit bashful as he smiled. It seemed that she was able to completely dodge the subject.

“Escort Hunter, huh. If you ever need an escort again, you can come to me any-“

“Katsuya! To think that you would leave us to hit on another girl like this!”

Yumina appeared from behind Katsuya, she was smiling but her smile was obviously projecting out anger.

When Yumina scolded him, Katsuya remembered that he was there to accompany Airi and Yumina. And at the same time, he also realized that he had forgotten Yumina and Airi as he was talking with Sheryl.

Katsuya flusteredly stood up from his seat and tried to calm Yumina while holding her with both his hands.

“Yumina! Airi!! It’s not like what you think!! It’s a misunderstanding!!”

Yumina cornered Katsuya further while still smiling.

“A misunderstanding? I see, a misunderstanding, huh. Then I’m sure you’ll give me a good explanation later, right?”

Katsuya looked at Airi, who was beside Yumina, asking for her help. But Airi only looked back at him with no emotion.

Sheryl could quickly understand that Airi and Yumina were Katsuya’s acquaintances from their exchange.

She then stood up from her seat and lightly bowed to Yumina and Airi.

“I’m really sorry. I was so interested in Katsuya-san’s story that I insisted him to keep going. Did I hold him back from some kind of promise?”

Yumina and Airi were so focused on Katsuya that they did not place much attention on Sheryl before.

But Yumina was surprised when she looked at Sheryl.

[…What a beautiful girl. That dress is also really pretty. It seems really expensive. I wonder if only people like this would shop in this boutique. Are we actually in the wrong place?]

Yumina ended up staring at Sheryl. She then realized that the beautiful girl in front of her had apologized to her, she got flustered for some reason as she replied back.

“I-I see. Well, uh, no, it’s not like we had a promise or something. It’s just that he said he would only take a short rest before returning back. So I was just wondering what happened since he didn’t come back after quite some time…”

“We were just talking about Katsuya-san’s experience as a Hunter. To be honest, I didn’t feel like he tried to flirt with me… Or was it only my imagination and you were actually trying to flirt with me?”

Sheryl smiled mischievously as she directed that question to Katsuya.

Katsuya shook his head in panic.

“No, I didn’t mean it that way at all, you know?”

In truth, Katsuya did not mean to flirt at all. But even so, although he did not do it intentionally, there were many girls who approached him after he said something which invited such misunderstanding. So he could not be sure that he did not say anything that would have caused such misunderstanding and ended his sentence as a pseudo question.

After all, since he really enjoyed talking with Sheryl, he felt that he might have said something that he should not without realizing it. That was why he could not give a straight answer to that question.

Sheryl then smiled to Yumina.

“Are you Katsuya-san’s girlfriend?”

“G-girlfriend!? No, I-I’m not his girlfriend though…”

Yumina was embarrassed and happy at the same time since Sheryl thought that she was Katsuya’s girlfriend. Her voice was getting feeble when she answered Sheryl’s question.

“Then, is the girl next to you Katsuya-san’s girlfriend?”

“…No.”

Airi’s long silence ended up with a no. Although she was still emotionless, her cheeks slightly turned red.

“I see. Since both Yumina-san and Airi-san’s names came up a lot in Katsuya-san’s story… I thought that one of you is his girlfriend… If I did something that bothers you, I apologize.”

Since Sheryl sounded apologetic, Yumina was only able to flusteredly reply back.

“N-no, it’s fine. Please don’t worry about it.”

If Katsuya really did say something to Sheryl that caused such misunderstanding, Yumina was really happy to know that. That was also the case for Airi too. Yumina and Airi’s mood suddenly turned for the better with that single exchange.

Katsuya blushed a little as he wondered if he really said something like that to Sheryl. But looking at the smiling Sheryl and blushing Airi and Yumina, it quickly slipped off his mind.

It was true that he did share a little about Airi and Yumina, but to be able to make a guess that they were his girlfriend only from what he said, it would require a lot of imagination.

Sheryl kept smiling while still looking at the three of them.

Celen suddenly came out and asked Sheryl for help with her dress adjustment.

“Excuse me to bother you, but can I ask for your help for a bit?”

“Of course, please excuse me.”

Sheryl lightly bowed to Katsuya, Airi and Yumina before she followed Celen.

The mood was a bit awkward between those that were left there, so they decided to return back to browsing clothing.

Yumina remembered about Sheryl while she was picking clothes. From her point of view, Sheryl’s dress looked very refined. She was looking for a similar dress in that shop, and right when she thought of that, Kashua was standing next to them while looking at them.

“Uhmmm, can I ask something? About the dress that the girl who was sitting over there was wearing…”

“Are you interested in that dress? That dress set is all from this shop. You can get the same set if you want to, so how about it?”

It was true that Katsuya reacted positively to that dress. So if she used the same dress, it might increase his evaluation of her. As she thought so, Yumina accepted Kashua’s offer.

“Yes, please.”

“…Me too.”

Airi who was listening to their conversation suddenly jumped in.

“Of course.”

Kashua smiled as she said that. Although that dress set was not an expensive set available in that shop, if she could sell 3 sets of that dress, it

would fetch her quite a lot of profit. She gleefully proceeded to fetch the articles that Airi and Yumina asked.

Kashua quickly prepared the dress set and handed them over to Yumina and Airi. Yumina and Airi immediately tried them on, they then looked at their own reflection on a mirror before showing it to Katsuya. Katsuya looked at both of them and frowned.

“…It’s not bad at all, but…”

His reaction was bland, but that was not enough to sour Yumina and Airi’s mood. They both looked at their own reflections on the mirror, glanced at each other and mumbled.

“It’s true that it’s not bad…”

“…Not bad.”

To be honest, it was quite decent. In fact, they looked pretty good and all of them agreed about that. But Sheryl, who was wearing the exact same dress, looked way better; way more beautiful. They could not help but compare themselves with Sheryl.

Even Kashua could not say that they looked good in that dress even if it was only for lip service.

“If it didn’t satisfy you, how about changing the upper half into something else? I’ll bring something that might look good on both of you.”

“…Yes, please.”

“Me too.”

“Very well.”

Kashua smiled as she left and picked some dress for Airi and Yumina. Of course, she chose more and more expensive articles for her recommendation.

After they finished paying for their dress, Yumina, Airi and Katsuya sat on a table inside that shop to take a quick rest. In the end, they bought a completely different dress set than what Sheryl was wearing. All of it was packed in an expensive-looking box to make sure that they would not wrinkle.

Katsuya then threw a question to Yumina and Airi.

“So then, what’s your next plan? Are we going to another shop?”

“This is the last shop, we did use all our budget here.”

“Me too, it was expensive.”

In order to have Katsuya accompany them browsing through a lot of shops, Yumina and Airi were planning to be frugal with their budget. But they ended up spending all of it in that shop. But with that being said, they did not regret spending their money there. After all, as long as they got a positive reaction from Katsuya, they were all happy with that.

Katsuya looked tired as he said.

“I see. In that case, let’s go to a nearby restaurant and take a rest there while having a meal. There should be some good restaurant around this place.”

“Let’s do that, but let’s take a rest here for a bit more.”

“… Me too… I’m tired.”

Both Airi and Yumina were Hunters. Their job included strolling through the wasteland with heavy equipment and fighting monsters. To be honest, they were confident with their physical stamina, but that was not the case for their mental resilience. After buying dresses that were way more expensive than they usually bought, Airi and Yumina were mentally drained. After all, it would be a huge disaster if they were not careful and got their expensive dress torn.

Katsuya turned his attention to the direction where Sheryl went. Kashua, who was standing in the same direction, thought that Katsuya was calling

for her.

“Do you need me?”

“Ah, no, I just thought that Sheryl went that way, so I was wondering what she was doing.”

“If it’s about that girl… We’re readjusting one of her dresses.”

Kashua was unsure as to how much information could be given to Katsuya, but she then decided to give him that short answer.

Yumina who was listening to them seemed interested in that subject as she joined in.

“Readjusting?”

“Yes, other than selling high-quality clothing, we can also refit them. If you have any dresses that need readjusting, please, by all means, come to us.”

“Well, I am interested, but isn’t that usually expensive?”

“Since it’s readjusting an already finished dress, I can only say that it depends on the dress. But our professional fitter will give nothing less than perfect, I can guarantee that you’ll find it satisfying.”

Kashua gave her best smile when she said that.

Even Yumina always desired a custom-fit dress like that. But buying a dress set in that shop already took a huge chunk of her money. Her expression changed as she calculated the gap between reality and her dream.

Sheryl returned back after some time. There were 4 chairs around the table that Katsuya and his friends were sitting. So one of them was still empty, but Sheryl did not want to interrupt their conversation. Thus she chose to sit on another table.

Katsuya who noticed that invited Sheryl to sit together with them. Although she refused at first, she eventually gave up. She lightly bowed and took that

seat. Katsuya could not help but start smiling.

Yumina looked at Sheryl. From Sheryl's outer appearance, Yumina thought that she was a lady from a rich family. Both her smile and her dress gave off a refined feeling as if they were living in a whole different world. It somehow made Yumina lose her confidence.

[…She's not only beautiful, she's just too different from me.]

Katsuya was rather popular among the girls around his age in Drankam. Because of that, there were many girls who had romantic feelings toward him, and that included Yumina. But even among all those girls around him, none of them was like Sheryl.

Yumina thought that difference came from the fact that she was a girl who went to the wasteland with weapons on a daily basis while Sheryl was a girl from the inner wall who was blessed with prosperity.

But that was a huge misunderstanding. The reason why Yumina felt that much difference was because of something else.

Sheryl's smile was nothing more than her weapon to get an upper hand when talking with other people. It was a technique that she learned with a substantial amount of effort. That smile was the first thing that caused Yumina to feel a big difference between her and Sheryl.

Just like Yumina, Airi could also feel the difference between her and Sheryl. But unlike Yumina, she more or less understood the real cause of that difference.

Sheryl had no romantic feelings toward Katsuya at all. Although she might act all nice since Katsuya was a promising Hunter, she did not show any interest as the opposite sex at all. Airi noticed that. It was something that was very rare among the girls who interacted with Katsuya. Even among the girls who only approached him to make use of him since he was a promising young Hunter, no one gave him the kind of treatment that Sheryl was showing.

Although Airi noticed that, she did not say anything. After all, she did not want to make any enemies unnecessarily and she thought that it was not something important to tell others.

Airi looked at Katsuya. He was smiling happily. Thus she decided to stop worrying about it.

Katsuya did not think too deeply as he threw a question to Sheryl.

“By the way, I heard that you’re readjusting your dress here.”

“Yes, the size was a little too big for me, so I’m refitting it.”

“I wonder how much that kind of thing would usually cost. Is it okay to ask you how much it took you?”

“I’m really sorry. To be honest, I don’t know much about it. So it might be better to ask that question to the clerk. As for my dress readjustment, it was 1,500,000 Aurum.”

Katsuya, Airi and Yumina were dumbstruck when they heard the exact cost. It was way more than what they expected.

Looking at their reaction, Sheryl thought that 1,500,000 Aurum was a huge amount of money even for promising young Hunters like them. It reminded her of how amazing Akira was since he easily paid that much money.

Kashua thought that it might disrupt her future business if they used that amount as a standard, so she interjected.

“It was a rather special case, thus it might be better if you don’t use that amount as a standard. Although it still depends on the request, it’s possible to refit a dress for 500,000 Aurum.”

Yumina frowned as she said.

“…But still, if it takes more money to readjust the dress compared to its original cost…”

“Since we’re refitting old-world clothing, we need to employ some special techniques. Not to mention, the tool and the fabric that we need to readjust the dress also cost a lot of money. Thus, I believe that it’s a justified price. Of course, if you want to readjust a normal dress, it would be cheaper too.”

That news shocked Katsuya and his friends. Not only did Sheryl decide to modify an old-world relic that might fetch her a lot of money if she sold it in a pristine state, she even paid 1,500,000 Aurum to have it refitted.

Katsuya could feel a gap between him and Sheryl. He smiled at her, but there was a slight shadow mixed in that smile.

“You’re really amazing.”

“…That would be true if I’m the one paying for it, but unfortunately, someone else is paying for me. Thus, I believe that it’s not me who is amazing. I think that Katsuya-san is much more amazing for being able to live independently working as a Hunter.”

Sheryl’s smile was obviously clouded, her voice was low when she replied. Although she intentionally did that, the words that she said were her real opinion. Except for one thing, she was actually thinking about Akira and not Katsuya.

“…Is that so?”

“Yes.”

As Katsuya timidly asked that question, Sheryl replied back firmly while smiling.

When he saw her smile, the shadow behind Katsuya’s smile vanished. He just continued to smile while trying to hide his embarrassment.

Yumina and Airi had recovered after a short rest. They thought that it would be a bad idea to stay there for long although they no longer had any budget to buy more clothes. Thus they decided to leave that shop.

“Katsuya, let’s go.”

“Hm? Okay.”

Katsuya stood up and carried Yumina and Airi’s luggage. He hesitated for a bit before deciding to invite Sheryl too.

“Ahh, by the way, we plan to eat in a restaurant nearby. If it’s okay with you, do you want to come too?”

Yumina let out a big sigh.

She had been together with Katsuya for a long time. She knew him well, he had no ill-will toward Sheryl nor was he trying to flirt with her. She knew that Katsuya was simply inviting someone that he considered as a friend.

The usual pattern dictated that the invited person would misunderstand, and when she finally realized the misunderstanding, she was already so in love with Katsuya that she could not separate herself from him.

That was the reason why the team that Katsuya led in Drankam was always filled with girls. Although there were boys from time to time, they did not stay long, it might be because it was hard for them to stay in that team. Some people even started calling Katsuya’s team as a harem team.

As Yumina thought that the usual scenario would play out this time too, she looked at Sheryl with a resigned expression.

But unlike what she expected, Sheryl lightly bowed and refused Katsuya’s offer.

“I’m really sorry. For helping the readjustment, I can’t afford to leave this place. Not to mention, I’m also waiting for someone. So thank you for the invitation, but I have to refuse.”

Katsuya and Yumina were obviously surprised. Katsuya assumed that Sheryl would not refuse, that was also the case for Yumina based on her long experience with Katsuya.

But that was not the case for Airi. She was not that surprised, after all, she did think about that possibility.

“I-I see. Well, it can’t be helped. I’m sure we’ll meet again somewhere, someday.”

Katsuya was a bit taken aback as he replied. It was because he almost never got refused before.

“Yes, please be careful out there.”

Sheryl smiled at him. Katsuya looked at that smile and was relieved since it seemed that he did not offend her there.

After they left that place, Sheryl sat back on her chair and reviewed her conversations with Katsuya and his friends in order to extract any information that she could find.

Sheryl was especially happy to get the information about Drankam. Although it might be subjective information from Katsuya, it was still better than nothing. At least, it was enough for her to get a rough picture of Drankam.

She smiled happily thinking that information would be useful for Akira who was also working as a Hunter.

Not too long after that, Akira returned. Sheryl, who saw him, immediately smiled.

Akira took a seat on the same table with Sheryl and asked her.

“I’m sorry that it took me so long. Replenishing my ammo reserve turned out to be more time consuming than I thought. Well, you didn’t call me at all, so everything is fine, right? Or did something happen?”

“There’s nothing. If I have to say something, some Hunters from Drankam came here to buy some clothing. I ended up talking with some of them. Do you want to hear about it?”

That reminded Akira when Sheryl extracted information from a Hunter called Dale not too long ago.

Akira winced back as he thought that Sheryl must have done the same thing again.

“I-I see. Well, I can listen to your story.”

“Okay.”

Sheryl then told Akira all the information that she gathered and it was indeed an interesting subject for him too.

“…I see. So all the relics that Drankam Hunters gather are given to Drankam before selling them. So it’s not like the Hunters who gather those relics sell the relics themselves, huh.”

“Yes. It seems that they are paid a wage based on their Hunter Ranks and given bonuses depending on their track record. They are categorized to different groups like relics Hunters and monster Hunters, then the gang would distribute request depending on the group that they belong to.”

“So they get wages although they work as Hunters, huh. That somehow does not sound right to me. But that means that they’ll still get some basic wage even if they can’t get good relics, right…”

“But in exchange, the gang will earn a lot of money if they get expensive relics. But even so, some Hunters still hunt for expensive relics to increase their Hunter Rank regardless of the reward. And for the Hunters who don’t seriously hunt for relics, I heard that they get transferred to monster hunting group.”

“They do think about all kinds of scenarios, huh…”

As Akira heard about a different kind of lifestyle for a Hunter, he could not help but voice out his amazement.

“That was really interesting, thank you.”

He thanked Sheryl and she was delighted to hear that.

Sheryl almost never showed a fake smile to Akira. After all, from her experience, it had almost no effect on him.

“I’m glad that I could be useful to you.”

It reminded Sheryl that gathering information was indeed crucial.

Not too long after that, her dress was finally done.

Sheryl changed back to her original dress and returned to Akira. Celen thought that she did a good job as she made a satisfied expression, there was a shred of pride on her face too.

Sheryl nervously asked for Akira’s opinion while fidgeting.

“H-how is it?”

Akira looked at Sheryl with her newly readjusted dress and voiced out his opinion.

“Ohh, that really changed your outlook. You look really good in it.”

Sheryl was thrilled to receive such praise from Akira that she smiled happily while blushing.

The old-world dress, which could no longer be considered an old-world dress after the modification, looked beautiful on Sheryl, enough to make someone like Akira, who had a dead fashion sense, think that she looked good in it. The weird feeling that was present when it was slightly too big for her had completely vanished. While on the other hand, it was able to fully preserve the refined beautiful old-world design which further complemented Sheryl’s already charming figure. It seemed that Celen was indeed a skilled fitter.

Alpha smiled as she said to Akira.

“It seems that it is worth the 1,500,000 Aurum, right? If you had not given any good reactions, it would have meant that your fashion sense was really unsalvageable.”

“Even someone like me can recognize it. It was worth spending that 1,500,000 Aurum.”

Kashua then turned to Akira, who was amazed by that readjusted dress, and asked him.

“I hope you find it satisfying.”

“Of course. To be honest, I didn’t expect that it would change this much. I’m really satisfied with it.”

“Those praises are the greatest reward that we can ask for. If you need to readjust your dress, please, by all means, come to us again.”

Kashua smiled happily as she offered to do more business with Akira in the future.

After Akira and Sheryl left that shop, Kashua asked Celen.

“Celen, to be honest, that was way better than what I expected. Since when have you become that good?”

Celen smugly replied.

“It’s a mix of her base figure, the quality of the dress that she brought in, and my refined skill. That’s the reason I could produce such a miracle. To be honest, I don’t think I can ever do something like this again.”

Kashua was convinced by Celen’s explanation but she panicked when she heard Celen’s last remark.

“…What was that!? I did tell them to come here again if they need more refitting though?! There’s no mistaking that they’ll expect the same result next time, you know!?”

“Well, even if you tell me so. I’m going back to sleep now, don’t interrupt me this time.”

Celen left Kashua after she said that. She was already sleep-deprived when she started working. And since she was still exhausted, she planned to sleep until the next day.

She had done exceptionally well that day, thus she believed she would be able to get a good night's rest as she headed to her bed.

Kashua, who was left behind, worried. But then, she reassured herself that it was a good advertisement for her shop and 'all was well'.

Akira walked Sheryl back to her base.

On her way to her base, Sheryl was wearing the dress that she bought from Kashua's shop. As for her dress that just got readjusted, she put it inside a strong box. She knew that she could not walk around the slum city in that dress because of the danger, even the dress that she was wearing was barely safe to use in the slum city.

The people around her gang's territory knew well that Sheryl was backed by a powerful Hunter, thus none of them wanted to mess with her. But even so, if she wore the dress inside the strong box and walked around the slum city, there might be people who would try to attack her ignoring the fact that a strong Hunter was backing her up. That was why she could not wear that dress on her way back to her base.

After Akira walked Sheryl back to her base, he headed straight to his home. Although Sheryl found that a little unfortunate, she decided to focus on thinking about her next plan while she was inside her private room.

Sheryl glanced at her dress box. She changed to dress inside that box and stood in front of a mirror. She looked at her reflection that looked like a refined lady from a rich family. She then started smiling as she thought of a plan.

[As long as I have this dress that even Akira praised, I'm sure everything will go well.]

Sheryl smiled full of confidence with her next plan as she kept on looking at her own reflection on the mirror.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 91, Bounty Hunting Invitation

Index

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Akira was patrolling through the wasteland around the city. It was because he had taken the patrol request from the Hunter Office. Just because there was a bounty monster roaming around the city, Akira could not afford to keep himself locked inside the city forever. Thus, he decided to go out while avoiding the areas where the bounty monster was spotted.

Akira was sniping at a monster from a moving vehicle, it was for his training so he had no support from Alpha. Of course, it was really difficult to accurately aim at his target from the constantly shaking vehicle. The hit rate was simply miserable. He kept on shooting while following Alpha's instruction.

"Alpha, is there any news about the bounty monsters? Did someone get at least one of them?"

"No, all the 4 bounty monsters are alive and kicking. There's almost no new information about them too. The latest one I could find only contained a more detailed description of the area where they were spotted and mentioned their increased bounty."

Akira sounded annoyed as he said.

“I don’t care who it is, I hope someone would take them out soon. It’s not like they’re hiding deep inside a ruin somewhere, right? They’re just roaming in the open space! Those Hunters with tanks should be able to make a short work of them, right?”

“Well, most Hunters with tanks only work further to the east, after all. If they send some of those Hunters here and the Hunters in this city take out those bounty monsters before the other Hunters arrive, it would be a huge waste of time and money. That’s why those Hunters with tanks are reluctant to bring their tanks all the way here. Of course, it’ll be a different story if no one is able to take the bounty monsters out after a while or if the bounty prize increases.”

Akira lowered his aim. He spotted other Hunters coming from the same direction as the monster that he was aiming at. It would be a pain in the ass if he missed his shot and accidentally hit those Hunters. Even aiming at their direction was enough to cause a needless misunderstanding.

“…Again, huh? Aren’t there too many of them around this place?”

Akira had been encountering a lot of Hunters lately.

“I’m sure it’s because they have the same idea as you, trying to avoid going to the areas where the bounty monsters were spotted. Just like you, they have nothing to do if they only stay inside the city, and taking the patrol request will at least get them some money. Meanwhile, from the City Management perspective, this request would make sure that the bounty monsters are not going to approach the city. That is why the City Management issued a lot of the patrol requests lately.”

“I guess I’ll increase my patrol radius, huh. It’ll be a pain to deal with if I get into a fight with another Hunter after all.”

“You’re right, let’s do that.”

Since the other Hunters had already moved away from the monster, Akira took another aim at the same monster as before and pulled the trigger. This

time, he had Alpha's support in order to quickly take out that monster. The bullet went right through that monster's head and instantly killed it.

Akira could feel the big gap between when he had Alpha's support and when he did not. He then smiled bitterly and mumbled.

"I wonder how long it'll take for me to do this with my own skill."

"It depends on how hard you train, so let's patiently keep training."

Akira was driving his vehicle while Alpha was trying to cheer him up. After moving somewhere further from the city, he continued his shooting training.

The day started to get dark, Akira thought that it should be the time for him to finish his patrol request and head back to the city. On his way back, he encountered a lot of Hunters heading the opposite direction, they must be the Hunters who took the night patrol request.

The night patrol request had a higher reward than the patrol request for the day. Thus, a lot of Hunters preferred it. But looking at the number of Hunters who had taken that request, it seemed like they had run out of the day patrol request and had no other choice but to take the night patrol request. But if that was true, it also showed that most of the Hunters decided not to go out to the wasteland at all.

"Akira, there's a call for you."

"Who is it from?"

"Shikarabe from Drankam."

Akira tilted his head. It was because he did not remember anyone who he was usually in contact with having that name. Alpha noticed that and continued to explain.

"It's that other Hunter with whom you worked together in the underground city exploration with Elena and Sara, remember? He said something about

the other Hunters who were in their team before you came in, something like having a fight against the other Hunters from Drankam.”

After listening to Alpha’s explanation, Akira finally remembered him. It was that male Hunter who was more or less as skilled as Elena and Sara. He was in the same team with Elena and Sara to explore the frontline during the Kuzusuhara ruin underground city’s temporary base aid request. He was a pretty strong Hunter.

“That guy, huh? I wonder what it is about?”

Akira took out his information terminal and picked up the call from Shikarabe.

“It’s Akira, what is it?”

“Shikarabe here. There’s something I want to talk about, do you have some time? Where are you right now?”

“I’m in the wasteland, near the city, on my way back home. So, what is it you want to talk about?”

“Well, it’s related to our work as a Hunter. I’ve talked about it with Elena and Sara too, it’s not anything strange. You can at least listen to the offer first before deciding anything. I’ll send you our location, if you are interested, come here. Later then.”

Shikarabe only left Akira with those words before cutting the call off.

Akira thought for a bit, he then operated his information terminal to send a message to Elena asking if it was okay to call her right now. It did not take long before a call from Elena came in.

“It’s Akira. Elena-san, do you have some time?”

“Sure, what is it?”

“It’s nothing big, just something that I want to ask Elena-san and Sara-san.”

“If it’s going to be a long talk, how about we meet somewhere? I don’t mind if you come over, Sara is here too.”

“No, it’s just a short question. It should be fine to talk it through the phone.”

Akira then explained about his short exchange with Shikarabe to Elena. After listening to his story, Elena made a guess and said to Akira.

“Hmmm. I think he’s recruiting Hunters to join him in hunting the bounty monsters. It seems that Drankam is focusing its effort on hunting those monsters right now. Multiple Hunter teams from that gang are out chasing for the bounty prize, you know. We also got the same offer from Drankam too. They asked us to join one of their Hunter teams. The reward was pretty big, so we accepted it.”

“I see. So that’s the story, huh… But it’s not something that they would offer to a Hunter like me, right?”

“We were together during that Kuzusuhara ruin underground city exploration, remember? I guess he thinks that you should be a good addition to his team. Personally speaking, I also think that you’ll do just fine. I believe that Sara thinks so too. Well, you saved Sara back then in Yonozuka Station ruin. If I may say something about it, I don’t want to hear someone who has enough skill to save us call himself ‘a Hunter like me’, you know.”

“I-I’m sorry.”

Akira apologized in panic, Elena laughed bitterly and said.

“…Akira, I think you underestimate yourself too much. Being humble is a good thing, but some people might react negatively to it. So you need to be more careful.”

Akira thought that he evaluated himself pretty accurately. He believed that most of his performance was thanks to Alpha’s support. Although that might be really the case, the other people thought that his performance was all from his own strength.

Akira’s real ability was hidden behind Alpha’s support, thus Akira himself did not completely grasp his own real ability. That was the main reason why he evaluated himself lowly.

Elena then continued.

“Going back to our main subject, I think there’s nothing hidden behind that offer from Shikarabe. Although, I’m a little bit bothered by the fact that Drankam would even pay other non-member Hunters for the bounty request, well, I bet that they really want to get their names out by defeating the bounty monster. After all, when you take out even one of the bounty monsters, the Hunter Office will announce that achievement in public. But it’ll only include the name of the team and team leader, the names of the non-member Hunters in that team will not be mentioned in the announcement.”

This meant Elena’s and Sara’s name would not be mentioned too. Akira found that weird since having their names out would bring them a lot of benefits.

“Elena-san, are you okay with that?”

“I don’t really mind. After all, it’s not like I’m working as a Hunter to become popular. And of course, because of that, I asked for extra rewards as an exchange.”

Akira giggled as he imagined that Elena must be smiling smugly right now.

“Putting that aside, I’ll at least hear his offer. Thank you very much.”

“If you’re going to take that request from Drankam, I’ll be counting on you if we get assigned to the same team.”

“Yeah, me too.”

Akira then ended the call.

Alpha was staring at Akira.

“What?”

“It’s nothing. If you’re planning to go to where Shikarabe is, let’s go there after you get back home first. The location sent by Shikarabe is the coordinate for a pub in the lower district. There might be no parking space for your vehicle.”

“You’re right… I guess I’ll at least let him know that I’ll go there later.”

Akira then used his information terminal to send a short message to Shikarabe.

Alpha thought that Akira should be thinking of taking that offer from Shikarabe. The reason why she made that guess was because Elena and Sara had taken that request. If Elena and Sara had refused, Akira might not even be willing to listen to Shikarabe’s offer.

It was rather unclear whether Akira realized that or not. But if she asked, Akira might realize it. Considering that it might affect her plans in the future, Alpha decided not to ask him.

Elena was sitting on a chair as she stretched her body. She was sitting in a very comfortable position, so comfortable that she might as well fall asleep on that chair. Though, it was an expensive chair that prevented her from getting tired even after sitting on it for a long time. It was her favourite chair that she splurged her money for.

She was in a very comfy getup. She was only in her undies and an information terminal that was attached to her head. It might be the side effect from working as a Hunter, who was regularly in the dangerous wasteland. So, she really put down her guard and relaxed when she was in her own house, where she was safe, it would not be an exaggeration to even say that she dressed rather slovenly when she was in her home.

Sara suddenly came in with some food. She was only wearing a shirt above her undies, just like Elena, she was in a very relaxed getup. It might be because she was always using a tight bodysuit when she was out doing her Hunter work, so Sara tended to use a very baggy getup that gave her a sense

of freedom when she was at home. Both Sara and Elena would only change into something more respectable if there was someone visiting.

They were talking with each other while enjoying the meal.

“It sounded like you were talking with someone, is it something about tomorrow’s request?”

“Nope. That was from Akira. It seems Drankam also offered that bounty hunting request to Akira. But he hasn’t decided to take it or not, his offer came from Shikarabe.”

“So Akira has become a Hunter that even Drankam would request, huh. Well, it’s not that strange considering his ability… Wait? If it was an offer from Drankam, wouldn’t he have to talk with the person responsible for negotiation in Drankam first? So why would Shikarabe directly make that offer to Akira?”

When Sara pointed out, Elena also questioned that fact.

“Now that you mention it, you have a point there. Not to mention, when Shikarabe also made that offer to us, it seemed that he did not know we had already made a contract with Drankam… Is it because of some kind of misinformation inside the gang? He might be in a hurry since he doesn’t want other Hunters to make a deal with Akira before him.”

But that was all, it was just a small question, and after that exchange, Sara and Elena stopped from thinking any further about that subject.

There were a lot of pubs in the lower district. Since a lot of Hunters came there to drink booze after returning from the wasteland, those pubs were relatively dangerous places filled with rowdy Hunters. Not to mention, those Hunters would get drunk in those pubs while still carrying the rifles that they usually carried to the wasteland. Some of them would even drink until they were only left with their last shred of rationality.

Around those pubs, there were brothels where prostitutes would sell their services to those Hunters. Of course, those girls had people behind them

who protected them in case something happened. It was simply an area that the people who could not handle a fight would never approach.

Shikarabe was inside one of the pubs in that area.

Shikarabe was sitting on a table further inside that pub, he was accompanied by other Hunters that looked more or less as successful as him. There were beers on top of the tables, but Shikarabe had not touched his yet.

The ones drinking those beers were his Hunter friends. One of them had a device installed inside his body to breakdown alcohol. Even if he was dead drunk, it would only take about 10 seconds for him to return back to normal. Some of them had drugs to help break down alcohol too. Thus, it should not cause any trouble during the negotiation for their tomorrow's plan.

Shikarabe opened his information terminal and confirmed Akira's massage. He then said to his friends.

"Akira will come here soon. I'll handle the negotiation, don't say anything unnecessary."

"I know, I know. So then, is this Akira guy going to be useful?"

"He, at least, won't be an extra burden to us. So how about the guys that you brought with you?"

After Shikarabe asked that question, his friends took turns describing the Hunters whom they had in mind.

"I have 2 Hunters with debt and their observer. They're pretty skilled. I've also talked about them with their creditors. They told me that they don't care if those Hunters get killed in the wasteland, but if that happens, they asked me to bring back their dead bodies. I've also asked others, but I'm not sure if any of them would come."

“As for me, I have 2 Hunters who wanted to come in order to make a connection with Drankam. One of them is pretty good while the other one is more or less as skilled as us. I’m also waiting for a call from the proxy corporation in case if other Hunters wanted to join in too.”

After listening to their explanation, Shikarabe asked them.

“If they’re really as good as us, rather than coming to us, they should be able to negotiate directly with Drankam, right? So what’s the catch here?”

“I don’t know the details. But I heard they got into a fight with someone and so they are looking for protection or something. I guess that’s the reason why they can’t go through the normal way. If you want to know the details, you’ll have to ask them directly later.”

“…So basically, they’re telling us to ask what’s going on with those Hunters ourselves and decide what to do with them, huh?”

Shikarabe’s team was aiming to hunt the bounty monster. They were gathering men for that purpose, it was also the main reason why Shikarabe called Akira.

But it was a little different from Elena and Sara who were invited by Drankam.

Akira was walking in the lower district, his destination was the pub where Shikarabe was. He was walking through a relatively dangerous area within the slum city.

There were some drunk Hunters knocked unconscious beside the road. The only reason that no one attacked them was because there were people who were monitoring the area so that it would not turn into a lawless zone. Not to mention, trying to attack those Hunters might get themselves killed instead. These people could not complain if they got attacked when they were sleeping beside the road, and the people who attacked them also could not complain if they got killed instead.

Akira ignored everyone who was trying to offer their services, mainly about alcohol or girls, in that place and headed straight to the pub. It was a pleasure district maintained with the money that the Hunters gathered from risking their lives. A particular kind of nuance and splendour was maintained in that area so that those Hunters, who exchanged their blood and sweats for money, would be willing to spend their money in that place. That place became the reason why some Hunters could still face the next day as well as the reason why some Hunters fell from grace.

Akira never came to that area himself normally. Thus, he could not help but look around with a face full of interest.

Alpha was walking next to Akira while evading the people who walked past him. Even if she collided with someone, her image would go through their bodies, so there should be no problem at all. But even so, she still evaded those people while walking beside him.

Akira found that weird and asked her about it.

“Alpha, is there any need for you to evade colliding with people? There should be no problem even if you collide with any of them, right?”

“It’s because of a different reason.”

“Is it because it makes you feel sick when that happens?”

“No, but it’ll make you feel sick. Well, I don’t think it’s a problem though if it doesn’t bother you at all.”

Alpha then walked to one of the Hunters there and fused her body with that Hunter. The moment that happened, her face half-fused with the head of that Hunter and it made her look like a weird looking humanoid creature.

Akira frowned. It was true that it looked disturbing.

“I’m sorry, can you keep evading people like before?”

“Told you.”

Alpha returned beside Akira and smiled happily.

The equipment carried by the Hunters around them varied. Some of them carried huge weapons, those Hunters must have headed straight to the pub after they returned from the wasteland. Some of them even carried relics with them.

Akira himself only brought his augmented suit, AAH assault rifle and A2D assault rifle. He left his CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun attached to his vehicle and his ammo-filled rucksack back home.

He thought that he would not be allowed to get into the pub if he carried his usual weapons as if he was going to the wasteland, that was why he left most of his equipment back in his home. But he started to think that he should have brought those weapons with him.

Akira eventually arrived at the pub where Shikarabe was waiting for him. It was a fairly huge 3-storied pub.

When Akira entered that pub, the master of that pub frowned and told him to leave.

“This is not a place for a young boy like you. You should go back home.”

But Akira calmly gave a flat reply.

“You should say that to the person who told this young boy to come to this place. Someone by the name of Shikarabe should be here, do you know him?”

“No idea, but you can go ahead and look around… Good grief, who is this fool, who told a young boy like you to come to this place?”

Although he complained, the master of that pub gave his permission for Akira to come into his establishment. Since he did not get kicked out, Akira proceeded to look for Shikarabe inside that pub.

The pub was fairly big and there were a lot of Hunters present. It would be a huge pain in the neck to look for Shikarabe among all those Hunters.

“Where exactly is Shikarabe…? Should I try calling him?”

Akira pulled out his information terminal, but Alpha suddenly said to him.

“It seems that he’s on the second floor. Let’s go.”

Although Akira was a bit interested as to how Alpha did that, he stopped himself from asking any questions about it because he thought that he should get used to it. Even before Akira bought an information-gathering device, Alpha was already able to tell him the exact location of enemies around him even when they hid behind an object. Thus it would be weird to question how she did that now.

Akira had learned a lot of things from Alpha thanks to her classes. As he learned more and more about common sense from her, it reminded him more and more that she was an anomaly.

But to be honest, Akira did not really care who or what Alpha really was. The important thing to him was whether she was his ally or not, although she might be only helping him since she was in contract with him.

That was why Akira decided not to ask too much about Alpha. He prioritized on the most important part as he thought that there was no reason to needlessly ask about her techniques. It was so that he would not deplete his luck and that his days with Alpha as his ally would continue.

Akira followed Alpha’s instruction as he headed to the second floor and right to Shikarabe’s table. Just like she said, Shikarabe was really on the second floor.

Shikarabe quickly noticed Akira. He then waved to Akira and called out.

“Come over here.”

Shikarabe and his friends were sitting around a round table. Akira took the seat on the opposite side where Shikarabe was sitting. Shikarabe and his friends were sitting on the big sofa that was originally put there so that customers could sit with the server girls.

Shikarabe smiled at Akira.

“These two are my friends, Yamanobe and Velga. Yamanobe, Velga, this is Akira.”

Yamanobe looked at Akira with curiosity. While Velga looked at Akira with suspicion.

Akira did not care about them as he looked at Shikarabe’s eyes and asked him.

“So then, what is it?”

“Well, before that, do you want to order something first? Although this is a pub, they also serve meals other than the snacks for drinking alcohols.”

“No need. I’ll order something if it seems that it’ll be a long talk. Not to mention, I don’t know how much they cost too.”

Akira seemed to be cautious, Shikarabe smiled and said.

“I see. Let’s get into the main subject then. You heard about the bounty, right? We’re planning to hunt those bounty monsters. If we just want to kill them, we alone should be enough. But to be able to do that faster, with a better winning chance, and to take them all out, even us alone would not be enough. That’s why I’m recruiting for extra helping hands right now, and that’s why I called you here. I can guarantee that you’ll get paid handsomely, so, do you want to come with us?”

Everything that Shikarabe said up until that point was already guessed by Akira after hearing Elena’s explanation. So he calmly replied.

“That would depend on the terms of the contract. But if that was all, you could have told me when you called me, right?”

After Akira said that, Shikarabe’s expression turned serious.

“It would be bad if you make a decision without listening to what I have to say from here on. This request is not an official request passed through the

Hunter Office. It’s simply an offer between two Hunters. I want you to agree about this part first.”

Shikarabe and his friends waited for Akira’s reply with serious expressions. But Akira was not sure what exactly those words meant. Although he knew that it was a pretty important point, he did not know anything further than that.

Akira then asked back, also with an equally serious expression.

“…If I take that offer, what kind of down-side might I be facing? Tell me as much as you can. I’m sure you know this even without me telling you, but secrets like that are the main source of conflict in the future. And don’t give me that ‘I didn’t tell you because you didn’t ask’ thing. I’m not someone from Drankam, I’m just a Hunter who is used to working alone. That’s why I’m not really familiar with the conventions and other subtle things between Hunters.”

“Very well. Just tell me if anything still bothers you.”

Shikarabe then explained his offer in detail to Akira.

Requests that did not get passed through the Hunter Office were basically informal requests. To be more precise, even if Akira was paid by Shikarabe to help him fight the bounty monsters, it would not get written in his Hunter track record.

Furthermore, there was no insurance for such requests. For the requests that were passed through the Hunter Office, in case if there was a defect in the request or if the reward went unpaid, it would leave a record. Thus it would help force the Hunters to follow through with their contracts. And so without it, the only people who protect the contracts would be the Hunters who signed those contracts. There were cases where Hunters used violence to claim their unpaid rewards and got framed as robbers instead and got themselves killed in the end.

The trustability of such requests was so low that people usually took any of those informal requests as a scam.

Putting aside if the reward was worth that risk or not, Akira was offered a huge amount of money for that request. They would subtract their expenses from the bounty prize before dividing it equally among them. But Shikarabe and his friend were not included there. Although the final number of people was still subject to change, if Akira and the other 4 Hunters excluding Shikarabe and his friends were able to defeat a bounty monster, the rest of the prize money would be theirs after subtracting their expenses and Shikarabe's share.

As for the payment, Shikarabe would get the money from the Hunter Office first before distributing it to the other Hunters through bank transfer. Even if they failed taking out the bounty monster, Shikarabe would still pay 1,000,000 Aurum to Akira. But in this case, Akira would have to pay his ammo expense and the other expenses himself.

Akira thought carefully of Shikarabe's offer and asked everything that bothered him.

"There are some points that I want to confirm. First of all, for the expense, how much is acceptable?"

"I have no plans to put any particular limit. That's why I'll explain to you things that we won't accept. First, we won't include paying back your debt. If you can't join us because you have a debt to pay, we won't give you any money to pay for that debt. You'll have to pay that debt using the money that we pay you. Second, money for new equipment. It's to avoid Hunters who ask for compensation for buying equipment that is worth the same amount of money as the prize money. Just because the prize money is 500,000,000 Aurum, we won't give you any money if you buy yourself 500,000,000 Aurum worth of new equipment. After all, that would mean you would basically take away all the reward money from the bounty. But, we will reimburse you for the money that you spent on ammo or rental equipment… It would be a pain in the ass if you guys look for any loopholes. That's why for my offer, even if we are able to kill a bounty monster, leaving the expense aside, all three of us won't take even 1 Aurum more. I can guarantee you that."

"Second question. How many people would be on the team?"

“Including you, it’ll be at least 4 people. Although it still depends on how our negotiation goes with the other Hunters, I think it would go up to somewhere around 15-20 Hunters. We do plan to get as many people as possible, but we won’t go above 30.”

“Alright, is there any guarantee that you would really pay the reward?”

“None.”

Shikarabe gave a straight answer without any hesitation. Akira’s expression turned grim, it was as if Shikarabe and Akira were putting pressure on each other with their gazes.

After a short silence, Shikarabe then added.

“…If I have to be honest, I prefer to pay your reward than to have to fight you over the reward. If I really think that you don’t have enough skill to pose a threat to me, in the scenario that I don’t pay your reward, I wouldn’t bring this offer to you in the first place. After all, it would be useless to bring you with me if you’re really that weak.”

Akira stared at Shikarabe and thought. If he took that positively, it meant that Shikarabe recognized his skill. But if he took that negatively, it meant that Shikarabe would do that if he discovered that Akira was not that powerful. So in the end, depending on his performance, it could swing either way.

“…Lastly, why don’t you pass it through the Hunter Office? You could have offered me this request through an official contract, right?”

When Akira asked that question, Shikarabe frowned.

“Are you going to refuse this offer unless I tell you the reason?”

“Yes. After all, I don’t want to get roped into some troublesome conflict without realizing it.”

Shikarabe turned to Yamanobe and Velga. Velga smiled bitterly and said.

“It’s fine to tell him that, right? It’s only a matter of time before it gets out to the public. Well, I can understand if you don’t want to tell him though.”

Yamanobe also agreed with Velga.

“It should be fine as long as he’s not going to spread it around. He’s the guy that you picked, so if it’s possible, I don’t want to lose him just because we didn’t tell him about that thing.”

Shikarabe sighed, he then turned back to Akira.

“Don’t tell anyone, okay? It’s due to a problem in Drankam. So don’t tell anyone outside Drankam about this.”

Akira nodded firmly.

“Alright.”

Shikarabe judged that Akira was not lying. He then looked so annoyed as he said.

“…Well basically, there is currently a power struggle within Drankam.”

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Rebuild World – Chapter 92, People who kill too much and get broken

Index

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Drankam was one of the countless Hunter gangs in Kugamayama city. It was also a private military organization that focused on Hunter jobs.

There were many Hunters in Drankam. When it was just a union of a small clique of Hunters, it had no problem at all. But as it grew, factions started to form inside the gang, to the point that it sometimes disturbed the management of the gang.

As Drankam grew into a huge organization, the gang started to take in common people to make sure that the gang's management could continue smoothly. Although it gave a boost to its growth, it also worsened the faction problem.

Some frictions started to spark between the management and the other people in the gang. As they needed more Hunters to fill the executive positions, inexperienced Hunters started to flow into the gang. Those people who never stepped outside the safe city would give orders to the people who faced the dangers of the wasteland firsthand, they even complained

saying that the very people who went out to fight the monsters used too much ammo or medicines, or scolding them for bringing back bad relics or not enough relics to justify the expense. Although that might be the correct way to manage a big organization, it still rubbed the Hunters the wrong way.

Then there was one particular faction that started to rise lately. It was a faction of young Hunters that kept gathering influences. The very people backing up this faction were the people of the upper echelons who decided on the rule of how the gang will be organized, to be more precise, they were the people who made the new rule about prioritizing young Hunters. They were the Hunters with no particular past achievements, it was rare for these Hunters to get to the upper echelons position.

The young Hunter faction had a feud with the veteran Hunter faction inside the gang. Shikarabe was a part of the veteran Hunter faction, and so he was aiming to get the bounty monster in order to win that war of influence.

After listening to Shikarabe's story, Akira more or less understood the reason behind Shikarabe's offer. He then asked Shikarabe about the points that he did not fully understand.

"I understand that there's infighting inside Drankam. So, how exactly is that related to not passing this request through the Hunter Office?"

"It means that I'll have to go through Drankam's administration before I can get it to the Hunter Office, if I do that, some information might be leaked to the other faction. So it's to prevent that from happening. Moreover, it's better not to get this offer through Drankam so that we can adapt and make better adjustments in case if something happens. For example, if I try to bring along a rather suspicious Hunter with debt, the other faction or the office might cause some trouble. So that's basically it."

"That sounds rough."

Akira sympathized as he mumbled those words. It seemed that joining a big gang brought more trouble than he had thought.

Shikarabe then asked Akira.

“If you don’t have any more questions and okay with it, it’s about time I hear your answer.”

Akira thought for a few sec.

“I don’t mind taking your offer, but I have a couple of conditions. I always fight alone, so I want you to let me stay like that. I’ll still help you with your strategy, but don’t expect me to work together with another team. And also, I’ll leave if I judge that we don’t have any winning chance. Although I’ll ignore you even if you tell me to stay and fight, I’ll at least let you know when I leave. I don’t want to die after all. If you’re okay with these conditions, then I don’t mind taking your request.”

“Those conditions are rather a lot to ask for, you know.”

“I can say the same to you too. I’ll be an unofficial part of your team, even my name won’t be recorded. I have no plans to be your sacrificial pawn. So?”

This time, it was Shikarabe who took some time thinking. After a few seconds, he smiled confidently and said.

“Very well, we have a deal.”

Akira and Shikarabe made a deal there. Although Akira would act separately, he was added to Shiakarabe’s bounty hunting team.

Alpha looked a bit surprised by that.

“Akira, are you really okay with that? Weren’t we going to avoid meeting with the bounty monster?”

“I at least got him to agree that I can run in case if I think we have no winning chance… Or is it still too dangerous with my current ability?”

“It’s not like you’re going to fight it alone, so I don’t plan to stop you. It just caught me by surprise that you suddenly got so interested in doing

this.”

“Is that so? I think it should be relatively safe though, and since the reward is pretty good, I just thought that it might be okay to take the request. After all, it would be a problem to me if no one won’t take those bounty monsters out anytime soon since I can’t go to the ruin to gather relics.”

Alpha then thought. The reason why Akira decided to take that offer was mostly because of that conversation with Elena. For Alpha, anything that could greatly influence Akira action was bad news.

It was still tolerable for now. But no one knew how it would affect him in the future. Thus, Alpha decided that it would be better to come up with a way to mitigate it.

After that, Akira stayed in the pub to meet the other team members.

He moved to another seat since he would be blocking the next person negotiating with Shikarabe if he kept sitting on that chair that was across the table from Shikarabe. There was an order terminal fixed on the table where they were, Akira used that terminal to order some simple meal. He then waited for his meal to come while talking with Shikarabe about the details of his request.

Shikarabe had decided on a simple plan to hunt for the bounty monsters. The next day, at 4 in the morning, Akira would meet up with Shikarabe and the other Hunters outside the city before going to hunt for the bounty monster. As for which monster among the 4 bounty monsters that they were going to hunt, Shikarabe would gather information both from Drankam and from other routes and decide right before they went out on their hunt.

Although, in the worst-case scenario, someone might hunt the 4 bounty monsters before they could even try. But it was not like they could go right now. Shikarabe and his friends had a lot of things to prepare first. They were in the middle of making that preparation while gathering more Hunters. It seemed that they even planned to work overnight tonight to finish their preparation.

Not too long after that, a girl wearing a sexy dress came with the meal that Akira ordered. She was surprised to find a young boy like Akira there.

She then placed Akira's order on the table and asked Shikarabe.

"This is a pretty young newcomer, not to mention that this is the second floor. Shikarabe, are you the one who brought him here?"

"Yes. This guy will be busy today and tomorrow, so don't try to offer anything to him. Tell that to the other girls too."

That girl made a friendly smile and said.

"Of course we won't offer anything to a small boy like him. How about your friends?"

"I'm sure the master also told you that we're going to be busy too, right? He didn't tell you? Everyone in this table is out of question."

"What boring men! Why are you even on the second floor?"

"We have a lot of things going on too. When we finish this job, we'll throw a big party and spend a lot of money here. So wait until then."

"Don't forget those words, okay?"

She smiled seductively before leaving that place.

Akira was not sure what they were talking about, so he asked Shikarabe.

"Is there anything special with the second floor?"

"Well, the third floor of this building is a brothel. So the waitresses on the second floor also offer their service and will go to the third floor. So people who only want to drink would stay on the first floor in this building."

After hearing Shikarabe's explanation, he understood why he was told to leave when he was on the first floor. He looked at Shikarabe with a blaming gaze.

“…You shouldn’t call a boy to this place, you know.”

Shikarabe lightly laughed.

“Age doesn’t matter when it comes to being a Hunter. It’s not like I chose this place in order to annoy you, it’s just that it’s better to talk about an unofficial request on the second floor. So just ignore it.”

Akira sighed, he then decided to ignore the fact that he was on the second floor and started eating.

A group of 4 men approached the table where Akira and Shikarabe were. Yamanobe noticed them and waved his hand. They were the people that Yamanobe called and the people who accompanied them. Basically, 2 Hunters with debt, their observer, and someone sent by their creditor who would be the one negotiating with Shikarabe.

The observer and the person from the crediting company took a seat. The Hunters in debt stood behind them. The guy from the crediting company started first.

“Are we late?”

Yamanobe, who was dissatisfied, replied.

“Yeah, so you better bring the people that I asked you for making us wait like this.”

“Of course, if it was only random people, we can bring as many as you want. It’s hard to find the people who satisfy your requirements, you know. So like, just forgive us for being late. There are not that many Hunters out there who have enough skill to hunt bounty monsters while not minding taking an unofficial request not from the Hunter Office, you know?”

“Isn’t that why I paid you a lot of money? So if the people that you bring me are useless, I won’t let that slide.”

“I know, I know. Let’s start the negotiation.”

Yamanobe started his negotiation with Tomejima. Akira was still eating his meal while listening to them. The guy working as the observer then sat beside Akira. Akira knew him, he was the Hunter who Akira met in Higaraka Residence Ruin, it was Colbert.

“…Yo, been a while.”

Since Colbert talked to him first, it was not like Akira could just ignore him now.

“We meet again huh, Akira.”

“Observer for Hunters with debt, huh? Is it your main job?”

“Nah, just a side job. The company that guy is working for, I owed them the money that I spent to fix my arms which got eaten by the monsters. So it’s either I pay them the money or I have to do this kind of job for them. Since I want to fix my prosthetic arm too, I still need money. So then, why are you here? How about your job to escort Sheryl?”

“Being a Hunter is my main occupation. Sheryl’s escort is not.”

“I see.”

“Yeah.”

Akira and Colbert ended their conversation with that awkward closing. The air between them felt rather tense, but it was all blown away when Akira sighed.

“So that explains why you knew about Guyver’s debt, huh. I really hope you’ll do your job properly as an observer, you know. If you did back then, we wouldn’t have had to get in that trouble.”

Colbert just laughed and said.

“I know, I’m sorry. I never thought Guyver was that stupid.”

“Don’t tell me that Dale too…”

“Nah, he doesn’t have a debt and he’s not an observer for Guyver. He’s completely unrelated to us.”

Observers did a lot of things in the shadows to secretly watch over the debt-ridden Hunters. They even assigned some Hunters to join suspicious arbitrator companies. Then they got assigned on the same team as their target as if it was a pure coincidence.

Their front face was still an arbitrator company with proper permission from the Hunter Office, thus some other Hunters who were not related to that particular credit company also used their service. Dale basically was one of those Hunters. It was by pure coincidence that Dale and Colbert were assigned to the same team.

“I heard Dale sent a long complaint to the arbitrator company, but that was pointless. After all, it’s basically a creditor company pretending to be an arbitrator company in order to keep the Hunters in debt under its watch. Even if Dale caused a ruckus and told people how bad the company is, it’ll have almost no effect at all. It’s a half-dummy company, so it can just shed its old skin and restart again.”

“To think that Dale would get himself in that company, he’s really an unlucky guy.”

After listening to Colbert, Akira mumbled as if it has nothing to do with him. Well, it was about someone else after all.

But their exchange affected someone else who was present. It was one of the guys who were standing behind Tomejima. His name was Kadol, he was brought there to resolve his debt.

Kadol was already annoyed the moment he saw Akira. But he finally could not hold himself back as he suddenly interjected in the middle of the negotiation with a rude voice.

“Hey, is that boy also a team member?”

Tomejima quickly scolded him.

“Don’t interrupt like that! Just shut up and wait there!”

But Kadol ignored him as he said annoyedly.

“…I’m going to risk my life out there, you know?! So I don’t want a small boy like him joining the team and reducing my share of reward!!”

Everyone turned to Akira, who looked completely calm.

Kadol pointed his finger at Colbert and said.

“Moreover, isn’t that boy his acquaintance?!! Are all of you guys planning to cut my share and get them for yourself?!! Don’t fuck with me!!”

Tomejima suddenly came up with something. He saw a way to make him get the upper hand in that negotiation, thus he scolded Kadol and told him to shut up.

“Just calm down and shut up!! Don’t interrupt the negotiation!!… Colbert, you watch him!”

In order to hold Kadol back, Colbert stood up from his seat and stood next to Kadol. Tomejima then continued.

“…Well, uhh, I can understand him though. So yeah, adding a small boy like him as a member will only reduce our share, you know? Can you do something about that?”

“What exactly do you want me to do? If you’re here to negotiate, I’m sure you have thought of some terms too, right?”

“I won’t tell you to take that boy off the team, but I want you to reduce his share depending on his skill.”

Tomejima looked at Akira as he said that. He heard that there were a lot of young Hunters in Drankam, and he also heard that due to its preferential treatment, the gang loaned good equipment to those young Hunters regardless of their skill. He thought that Akira was one of those young Hunters.

Kadol more or less thought of the same thing as Tomejima, except it was worse. He thought that Shikarabe colluded with Tomejima by bringing that boy Hunter so that his reward share would be reduced.

Yamanobe then looked at Akira and Shikarabe. Akira was in contract with Shikarabe, thus he would need both of their agreements first to change the contract now.

Shikarabe looked annoyed as he checked on Akira, but Akira just started eating peacefully as if it was none of his business.

Shikarabe sighed and looked at Tomejima with a straight face.

“No, we already had a deal that his share is based on the number of people in the team. I can’t just change that to comply with your demand.”

Tomejima smiled bitterly and said.

“Whoa whoa. No matter how you look at it, isn’t it unfair for that boy to get the same amount of reward as the people that I bought today?”

Shikarabe made a serious face.

“If we divide the reward based on skill, no matter how we do it, it’ll only end up with a conflict. You guys bring us 3 people and we pay you 3 people worth of money. The contract will not change. To be honest, you should be happy that we assume you’re worth the money that we pay you.”

Shikarabe used themselves, i.e Shikarabe, Yamanobe and Valga, as the indicator when he said that, but Kadol thought that he was being compared to Akira.

Kadol, who thought that he was getting mocked, could not hold himself back as he shouted.

“Are you telling me I’m weaker than this brat?!”

Kadol still had some of his common sense left. But after his scream, Akira, who was still eating as if it was nothing, looked at him with an annoyed

face. Akira then sighed as if he was just a minor bother to him and returned back to eating. That exact thing blew the last shred of rationality from Kadol. It looked as if Akira was mocking him.

Letting the anger take his body, Kadol quickly grabbed his rifle and pointed its muzzle at Akira. He himself did not know for sure if he wanted to kill Akira or just wanted to scare him. He just moved purely following his emotion.

But Kadol's rifle was suddenly sent flying. He did not have the chance to even react as a muzzle was prodded into his mouth. It went so deep down to his throat and he found himself already lying on the ground.

Amidst the confusion, Kadol could see Akira standing in front with a rifle in his hand that extended to Kadol's mouth. Akira was also the one who sent his rifle flying. Kadol finally realized that he had lost his rifle. As he looked at Akira who was standing expressionless in front of him, he finally realized that his life was hanging by a thread.

As Kadol tried to fight back, Akira pushed the rifle deeper down his throat. Kadol coughed in pain, his face was filled with terror and he finally calmed down.

The people who only saw the result without knowing how that happened were all dumbstruck, while the people who knew how that happened were only a bit surprised and smiled with approval. The former was Tomejima and his men, while the latter was Shikarabe and his friends.

Especially for Shikarabe, he had a good look on Akira's move. There was no mistaking it that Kadol grabbed his rifle outside Akira's field of view. But even so, Akira was able to react to it. He quickly closed the distance between them, hit away Kadol's rifle from Kadol's hand with his left hand, then smoothly pulled out his rifle with his right hand and prod it into Kadol's mouth.

Colbert did try to stop Kadol, but Akira was even faster than him even though he was closer to Kadol than Akira.

Shikarabe smiled and thought.

[…He reacted to something that happened outside his field of view. It reminds me that he somehow was able to detect the monsters in the underground city, is it from the same technique? Is he always putting his information-gathering device to scan the area around him…? I don't think that's right. The way he moved might be thanks to his augmented suit and he's already using a different augmented suit compared to when we were in the underground city. Anyone would need a lot of training to be able to use the full power of their augmented suit, and he was able to achieve that for a new augmented suit in such a short time? Or is it all thanks to the quality of the augmented suit…? No, that's not it. For some reason, I feel like my intuition is always dulled when I'm around him.]

Although he was amazed by Akira's moves, he was also trying to find the reason why Akira could do that. His guess was not correct, but not entirely wrong either. His ability to make such a guess was proof of how good he was as a Hunter.

Although Shikarabe was the one who invited Akira to the team, Yamanobe and Valga actually were still suspicious of Akira's real ability. But their opinion was changed in an instant. They thought that it was as expected for Shikarabe to invite such a Hunter and approved that Akira would be an important addition to the team's power.

Akira was still pushing the muzzle of his rifle into Kadol's mouth, he was expressionless as he stared at Kadol. He then casually asked Shikarabe.

"Shikarabe, if I kill this guy, how much will it affect tomorrow's plan?"

Kadol tried to break away, he knew that Akira was not trying to scare him. Akira was seriously asking that question to Shikarabe.

Shikarabe was a bit surprised by that question, but he did not try to stop Akira.

"It won't affect much. It seems that this guy can't judge his own situation well after all. You can do anything with him."

The only reason why Akira had not pulled the trigger yet was because Kadol was already in a contract with Shikarabe. And if Akira killed him, it would lower his success chance for hunting the bounty monsters. But with that answer from Shikarabe, most of his worries were already resolved.

Akira's eyes suddenly turned dark and ominous. Kadol who was looking at those eyes was frightened. His life was hanging by a thread, but before the thread snapped, Shikarabe suddenly said.

"But if you kill that guy here, the master of this place will ask you to pay for cleaning the corpse and the blood. Not to mention that he might also ask for money to repair the bullet hole on the floor too. We won't help you pay that, you know?"

Akira then grumbled.

"It won't be counted as reimbursed expense?"

"No. You'll have to deal with the master, I'm sure he'll come here angry after hearing the gunshot. We won't help you with anything."

Akira sighed and pulled back his rifle. His desire to kill Kadol was not big enough compared to the aftermath that he should deal with later. If it was in the middle of the wasteland, Akira would have killed him. After all, if it was the wasteland, he could just pick a random place and dump the corpse there. A lot of people had the same line of thinking, that was why the civil order in the wasteland was the worst.

Akira turned back to Shikarabe and his friends.

"I'm leaving. I feel like it'll only cause me more trouble if I stay here. Not to mention, I have to wake up early tomorrow. Just to be safe, send me the position and time for the meeting tomorrow to my information terminal."

"Alright. Make sure to finish your preparation by then and don't be late, okay?"

"I know, see you tomorrow."

Akira then headed to the stairs. But he suddenly stopped and added.

“…And also, I don’t care if you want to pay that fool there, but it might be better not to expect him to return back alive, you know.”

“I totally agree with you.”

Shikarabe laughed as he said. The thing that Akira wanted to say was well conveyed to him. Akira then headed to the stairs and went to the first floor.

Yamanobe mumbled as he saw Akira off.

“That boy is really short-tempered. People like him tend to kill too much and get broken later.”

Valga also made his remark, but compared to Yamanobe’s remark which was rather negative, his remark was positive.

“There’s no guarantee that he would take that insult lightly. It was more or less an act of self-defence. I think it’s a good idea to keep that distinction in mind, you know?”

“Depending on where you put that line, you might be taking it too lightly. I mean like, look at the aftermath over there.”

Yamanobe then pointed at Kadol. With that easy to understand example right in front of him, Valga nodded in approval.

Kadol was about to pull himself up and retrieve his rifle. But before could he extended his hand, Colbert appeared and got hold of his rifle. Colbert then kicked him and knocked him unconscious with face down on the floor. But he managed to let out a scream of pain, so Colbert just told him.

“Just sleep there.”

Colbert then warned the other debt-ridden Hunter.

“You too, don’t try anything funny.”

As Colbert sent his glare to him, that hunter could not help but to give a firm nod.

Yamanobe and Tomejima laughed awkwardly.

“Now then, we were in the middle of a negotiation, right? Well, it’s true that I didn’t ask you in particular not to bring a fool who would point his gun at his teammate. We haven’t made any deal yet, and we haven’t made any detailed plan yet. It could even be said that we’re not teammates yet. So let’s keep that in mind as we continue our negotiation.”

Tomejima let out a cold sweat as he tried his best to look calm, his hard negotiation was just about to start.

__*__*__*__

Akira was on his way to the wasteland, the sky was dark, it was not clear whether it was in the middle of the night or early in the morning. He was heading straight to the meeting ground to meet Shikarabe and the other Hunters for hunting bounty monsters.

It was still a few hours until the sun rose. Although he slept sooner than usual the day before, he still did not get enough sleep for the day. He was driving his vehicle while trying to stay awake.

Alpha, who was sitting next to Akira in the driver assistant seat, said.

“I can do the driving if you want to get some sleep. I’ll wake you up when something happens, so don’t worry. Being sleep-deprived would affect your performance after all.”

“Is that so? I’ll be counting on you then… Wait, if I sleep, won’t it affect your driving? If I lose consciousness, you won’t be able to control my augmented suit, right?”

Akira remembered when that happened because of a stun grenade, thus he wanted to check that with Alpha.

Alpha just smiled and said.

“No problem. The vehicle is not like your augmented suit, it won’t affect me even if you lose consciousness.”

“I see, I’ll be counting on you then.”

Although Akira did not understand what exactly was different about his vehicle and his augmented suit, if Alpha told him that it would be okay, he was sure that it would be okay. Thus he decided to get some sleep.

Alpha smiled as she saw Akira starting to fall asleep. She then adjusted her driving so that he would not be late while also not interrupting his sleep.

After Akira got a good nap, Alpha woke him up.

“Morning, did you get a good sleep?”

“…Pretty much, yeah.”

Akira was still a bit dazed as he looked around to confirm the situation, the sun had still not risen yet.

“How about getting something to eat while you still have the chance? There’s no guarantee that you’ll have a chance to eat after you meet up with Shikarabe.”

“You’re right.”

Akira took out the Hunter ration from the pile of his stuff in the backseat. Half of that pile was ammo and other equipment but there was some food too.

The Hunter ration was completely made of a different material from the normal ration.

Although it tasted normal and had a normal texture, it would get completely broken down inside Hunter’s body and produce almost no waste. It also suppressed bowel movement and urine production. You could even use it in place of medicine. It was engineered so that it would not cause any harm in case it got mixed in the flesh and blood when your stomach got punctured

while still digesting the ration. It got digested so fast too and increased the sharpness of your mind. It was augmented with so many extra effects and safety features that you did not need in case you spent your peaceful and normal life in the city.

Akira had bought a lot of those rations to try using them. The ration that he had that day was a coffee and sandwich, both of them looked completely normal from the outside. Or to be more precise, the sandwich was soft and the coffee was warm, just like normal food. He made a long “hmm” and said.

“It’s normal. Well, that in itself is pretty amazing though.”

“If you don’t like it, you can choose something with better taste next time. Warm tasty food is important for your combat performance after all.”

“You have a point there. I have some surplus money too, I guess I can afford that much of luxury… Maybe.”

“It’s weird to hear that from a Hunter who doesn’t hesitate to use 2,000,000 Aurum medicine or pay 80,000,000 Aurum for equipment. It should be okay for you to get something better to eat daily, you know?”

“Even if you tell me that, it’s not like I have any complaints with my usual food.”

The food that he was eating on a daily basis back in his home was not that different compared to what he ate when he was still staying in inns. But even so, his food was still way better than most of the food in the slum city. Thus, at the moment, he was really satisfied with his current food. Of course, Akira himself wanted to eat something better, but he was still hesitating about paying a huge amount of money for that.

“Well, I won’t force you or anything. But, just remember that it should be okay for you to afford a little bit of luxury. At least enough for you to pick the Hunter ration you like.”

“Yeah, I’ll keep that in mind. In that case, I might as well eat some more, that was not enough to fill my stomach.”

Akira then extended his hand to the back seat and took another Hunter ration. Looking at that, Alpha just smiled bitterly.

Right after Akira finished his meal, the meeting ground started to come into his view. Shikarabe and his friends were already waiting for him there.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 93, The Rising Star of The Anti-Katsuya Faction

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Shikarabe and his friends spent the whole night preparing themselves and finally went out to the meeting ground. Shikarabe's APC was parked in the meeting ground with a few other vehicles parked around it.

Akira parked his vehicle near the other vehicles, he then stepped down from his vehicle and walked toward Shikarabe and his friends who were discussing their plan for that day near the APC.

Shikarabe quickly noticed Akira.

"Akira, you're here, huh. How are you today?"

"All good."

"I see, we'll start as soon as its time. Make sure that you finish all your preparation by then. Once you're done with your preparation, just stand by and you're free to do anything while waiting. I'm going to be busy for a while, if you have any question, just go and ask Yamanobe."

Shikarabe then pointed his finger toward the APC. The back door of that APC opened up and Akira could see the other Hunters who would go with him today, the other people who were waiting in their respective vehicles around that APC also looked like Hunters.

Akira then followed Shikarabe's order and went to the APC to do up his preparation. He then took some stuff inside that APC and carried them back to his own vehicle.

The stuff that he had taken consisted of a lot of things. A walkie-talkie and a communication code, rocket launchers designed to fight huge monsters, a configuration chart of the jamming smoke that Shikarabe had prepared, and extra data to adjust information-gathering devices. It also included the info about the bounty monsters that Shikarabe had gathered and CWH special ammo. Although Akira also brought with himself extra CWH special ammo, it was always good to get more ammo reserve, thus he thankfully accepted it.

Akira then used the close-range data transfer to download the new data. Since his information-gathering device was connected to Alpha, she was able to use the new data too. As a matter of fact, Alpha quickly analyzed the new data and had set the information-gathering device to minimize the effect from the jamming smoke.

Akira finished his preparation and waited for the time to pass. But if he just sat there and waited, he might start feeling sleepy again. Thus he followed Alpha's suggestion to do light exercise outside his vehicle to keep himself awake.

Alpha spread out and rotated her 4 limbs one after the other. She then turned around to bend her hip, then stretched her hands and stood skilfully on one leg. That posture further boosted her already charming figure. Although Akira had been used to it, the fact that he barely reacted to that scene showed that he was very insensitive about that kind of thing.

Akira was doing light exercises while still in his augmented suit, so when he did not stretch enough, Alpha would control his augmented suit to forcefully stretch his body.

“Alpha, that hurts!”

“Your body is stiff, it’s important to stretch your body to reduce injury and increase your performance. I guess it’s a good idea to keep doing your augmented suit training and regularly readjusting it.”

“P-please be gentle. O-ouch!”

“Don’t worry, you still have some medicines.”

Alpha smiled when she said that.

“That’s not a level where you can say that I don’t need to worry!!”

Akira kept complaining while doing his stretching, but he did not tell Alpha to stop.

Alpha spread her legs and bent forward to show how it is done. She spread her legs in a straight line and bent so much that her chest touched the ground, she looked completely alright in that position. While on the other hand, Akira gritted his teeth in pain while trying to imitate her, but he was barely able to do that.

That was when Shikarabe appeared.

“What are you doing?”

“You can tell, right? A light stretching.”

Shikarabe was actually asking Akira why he was doing light stretching right now, but Shikarabe then remembered something else and asked Akira.

“…I see. By the way, just out of curiosity, is that augmented suit a sync-type or a read-type?”

“Uhhh…”

Akira did not understand what Shikarabe was talking about, so Alpha answered that for him.

“Akira, it’s a read-type.”

“It’s a read-type.”

Hearing Akira’s answer, Shikarabe frowned a little and said.

“I see, I’m sure you’ll be fine, but be careful.”

Akira looked confused and asked Shikarabe.

“Be careful? From what?”

“There are Hunters out there who don’t do their research before using their augmented suits, you see. They think that anyone can use an augmented suit by just putting it on. So, in the past, I knew someone who bought a cheap augmented suit from the black market. He immediately used it without readjusting the augmented suit first, so he was still using an augmented suit based on other people’s data. Since he did not find anything wrong until then, after reaching the ruins he began stretching his body to check his augmented suit’s performance while killing time. Ah, by the way, his augmented suit was a read-type augmented suit, so it was still working based on the previous user’s data. So when he stretched his body, the augmented suit extended based on the previous user’s data and ended up tearing his ligaments.”

Akira frowned, looking a bit scared. Shikarabe then continued.

“A sync-type will not go further than what the current user can do, so something like that would not happen for a sync-type augmented suit. While the read-type augmented suit reads straight from the neuro-signals of the user, so it sometimes moves faster than the user intends. Since cyborg body has a different neural-signals than a normal body, incidents like that are not rare, you know.”

“…Don’t they have safety functions too?”

“I heard that the previous user had turned it off. There are a lot of Hunters who do something like that. After all, there are cases where they have to

move so fast to the point that it’ll tear their limbs and break their bones in order to survive. So the safety function is actually a problem when they face such a situation.”

“What happened to that person after that?”

“He took a lot of medicines and somehow was able to return back alive. But since then, he was traumatized and he never used augmented suit ever again, instead, he’ll only use physical strengthening modification and normal armour.”

Akira turned to Alpha, who just smiled as usual. He told himself that Alpha had mentioned about medicines just before teasing him.

He then decided to change the subject to banish that thought from his mind. He stood up and asked Shikarabe.

“…So then, why are you here? Are we going soon?”

Now that Akira mentioned it, Shikarabe remembered why he came there.

“Ah, that’s right. We’ll move out soon, but not yet. I just have something I need to ask you, can you give this guy a ride?”

A young Hunter was standing behind Shikarabe. He was more or less as old as Akira. He then introduced himself to Akira.

“I’m Togami, nice to meet you.”

“Akira… Shikarabe, I just want to make sure of one thing here. Do you need me to help him and watch over him or something?”

“Nope, you can just fight the way you want. That’s our deal. Togami will also fight the way he wants. There’s no need to try too hard working together with him.”

“If he’s too much of a deadweight, I might throw him off from my vehicle, alright?”

“I won’t stop you. But if it’s possible, throw him into my vehicle when you do that.”

To be honest, Akira wanted to refuse Shikarabe’s request. But it was not like he was really against it. Because of that, he tried to make a lot of excuses to Shikarabe, but in the end, he ended up accepting it. So then, although he looked rather displeased, it was not like Togami was against it either.

Akira gave up and let Togami into his vehicle.

“…Alright, if you’re okay with that, I’ll let him get on to my vehicle.”

“Sorry about that, we’ll be going soon. Don’t be late, okay?”

After that, Shikarabe left Togami’s equipment there and went back to his APC.

Akira and the other Hunters started moving to hunt for the bounty monsters. They headed to the dark wasteland with Shikarabe’s APC leading on the front.

Togami was sitting on the driver assistant seat on Akira’s vehicle. His equipment was crammed together with Akira’s stuff in the back seat.

Togami still looked as displeased as he was before he climbed onto Akira’s vehicle. It seemed that he was offended by that exchange between Akira and Shikarabe.

He arrogantly asked Akira.

“Hey, what did you mean back then?”

Akira still locked his gaze forward as he casually replied.

“What did I mean by that? It’s as you heard. Do you really need me to explain it?”

After hearing Akira's answer, Togami looked even more displeased than before.

"Are you kidding me? You said that as if I'm just a deadweight. What is your Hunter Rank by the way?"

"21."

Hearing that, Togami sneered arrogantly and said with full of confidence.

"21? And you dare to talk like that about me? I'm 27, you know!"

Akira glanced at Togami, but he quickly returned back looking forward again.

That reaction angered Togami even more.

"Oii!! Are you listening to me!?"

Now that it had turned into something too much of a pain to deal with, Akira just ignored him.

Alpha, who was sitting in the mid-air beside Akira, pointed at Togami and asked.

"Are you sure it's okay to just ignore him?"

"If he starts bothering me more than that, let's just throw him to Shikarabe's vehicle."

He casually answered Alpha's question with that. Since Shikarabe had already given Akira his permission, Akira really planned to do that.

Togami kept complaining to Akira even after that, but Akira just ignored him. It did not take long before he clicked his tongue, sat down, looked at the opposite direction from Akira, and shut up.

Shikarabe, Yamanobe and Varga were in the foremost APC. The APC could fit 10 people, they used the leftover space for their ammo and other stuff.

But even so, it actually still had enough space for Togami.

Yamanobe was the one taking the wheel. The navigation control unit was showing the area where the bounty monsters might be. The scouting groups from Drankam were actively broadcasting information that was received to that APC. Yamanobe picked a route where they could avoid any needless fighting.

Yamanobe then asked Shikarabe.

“Say, why did you take that boy?”

“Which one are you talking about?”

“Togami, I know just how strong Akira is from yesterday’s incident. I have no problem bringing him with us… But that Togami, it’s not like I’m going to say that he’s useless, but at the same time, is there any need to bring him along? Not to mention that he’s also one of those young Hunters, so why did you bring him here?”

Shikarabe looked obviously displeased as he said.

“Even for me, it’s not like I brought him here because I wanted to. It’s more like he was forced onto me. When we were discussing about the budget, they told me to bring him along if I want to get more budget.”

“…Forced to, huh? Are you sure it’s okay to really take him along with us?”

“Although they told me to bring him along, it’s not like we have to make sure that he returns back alive. It doesn’t matter if he dies. It would be a huge pain in the neck to have him here together with us, that’s why I have Akira take him.”

Shikarabe laughed, Yamanobe just smiled bitterly and said.

“Seeing what happened yesterday, I have a feeling that Akira would really throw him off his vehicle.”

Varga looked honestly confused as he asked Shikarabe.

“I get why we have to take him with us, but why is he hunting for bounty monsters with us in the first place? He can just join the other young Hunters, right? So why us?”

Shikarabe looked irritated. That expression was directed to the people in Drankam’s management. That look was enough to answer Varga’s question.

“It’s because Togami is a part of the anti-Katsuya faction.”

Shikarabe had a close connection with Arabe, one of the officers in Drankam. He heard a lot of things about the inner Drankam management from Arabe. Shikarabe then explained that to Yamanobe and Varga.

The young Hunters in Drankam were mainly divided into two factions. Katsuya faction and anti-Katsuya faction. Or basically, Katsuya faction and not-Katsuya faction.

Katsuya faction had the support from the officers who supported the young Hunters prioritization plan. These officers were well-organized way up to the upper echelons, thus most of the suggestions that they made in Drankam were approved. Thanks to the influence held by those officers and the track record left by the Katsuya faction, they rolled out a huge amount of capital for this bounty monsters hunting.

While on the other hand, the anti-Katsuya faction was basically all the other young Hunters who were not a part of the Katsuya faction. It’s not like they had formed an organization or something. Moreover, more and more people who had not joined the Katsuya faction yet started to get absorbed into that faction as long as they did not have any particular reason not to join that faction.

There was a need for the anti-Katsuya faction to gain some kind of power to reduce the Katsuya faction’s influence within the gang. The other factions who thought so started to get their eyes on young Hunters like Togami, and started gathering skilled Hunters who did not like Katsuya.

With the record of hunting a bounty monster, it would help them to fight against the Katsuya faction. That was why they sent Togami to help Shikarabe and his team. Other than Togami, there were also other young Hunters from the anti-Katsuya faction sent to hunt for bounty monsters.

Varga looked exasperated as he said.

“The heck, so it’s basically to annoy Katsuya, huh. Ahh, now that I remember it, you do hate Katsuya, right? Hm? If that’s the reason, then there’s a need to make sure that Togami will return back alive, right?”

“They did ask me that, but I refused. If he doesn’t have enough skill to return back alive without anyone watching over him, then the bounty hunting record will just be a meaningless record. They immediately shut up when I told them that.”

“Well, if they’re going to use him to fight Katsuya, he’ll need to be at least that strong… What is Katsuya’s current Hunter Rank again…?”

Varga tried to recall Katsuya’s Hunter Rank, but before he could, Shikarabe interjected.

“It’s 32. There are not that many Hunters out there who could reach Rank 32 at his age. It’s understandable that she’s got her eyes on him.”

The girl that Shikarabe was talking about was Mizuha, she was a Drankam officer and an avid supporter of the Katsuya faction. Mizuha was the one who pioneered the young Hunters’ preferential treatment and she was promoting it even now. And as more and more young Hunters grew stronger, including those who were in the Katsuya faction, Mizuha’s influence as the main supporter of that policy also grew bigger.

Shikarabe then mockingly said.

“That woman is planning to use Katsuya to advertise Drankam. That’s also one of the reasons why she sent Katsuya for hunting bounty monsters. She also formed a team of mostly young Hunters for hunting the bounty monsters, and of course, the leader of that team is Katsuya. If that team

successfully hunted bounty monsters, I bet she would announce it everywhere. A young skilled handsome Hunter, there's no doubt that the sponsors from the inner wall would be overjoyed to hear that."

Yamanobe laughed bitterly.

"That's true, that boy is rather handsome after all. People like us won't work for advertising the gang."

Varga, who was also laughing, noticed a signal from the detection device. He then said while still smiling.

"There's a monster on our way forward, should we use it to check this rising star of anti-Katsuya faction?"

Varga took his communication device and gave an order to Togami.

"Number 8! There's a monster forward! Go ahead and take care of it!"

All the Hunters in Shikarabe's team were assigned different contact numbers. Togami's was number 8, while Akira was number 9.

Togami was still staring at the wasteland with a displeased expression, but when he heard that order, he smiled boastfully and said.

"It's number 8! Roger that! I'll take care of it!"

Togami then turned to Akira.

"Hey!! Take me closer to that monster!!"

Akira did not say anything as he paced his vehicle faster. But because of that sudden acceleration, Togami lost balance and almost fell over from his seat.

Togami tried to regain his balance in panic and then said to Akira.

"Hey!! Drive more carefully, will you!! What the heck are you thinking?!"

Akira glanced at Togami, he let out a short sigh before returning his gaze forward again. Togami glared at Akira with full anger.

“You brat…”

Akira did not even bat an eyelash as he kept pacing his vehicle toward that monster without slowing down at all.

He was heading toward a carnivorous monster that was more or less as big as his vehicle. That monster quickly noticed the vehicles heading toward it, it immediately roared and ran toward Akira as it quickly closed the distance between them.

Akira did not even bother to look at Togami as he asked.

“So then, how close do you need me to get?”

“…Just stop somewhere nearby!”

Togami half sighed as he said that. Akira did not say anything as he slowed down his vehicle to a stop.

Togami thought that the other Hunters beside Shikarabe and his friends were Hunters without enough skills to join the bounty monsters hunt. He thought that they were there only to replace their lack of fighting power with numbers. After all, most of them did not look that strong, Akira was only a small boy while the other Hunters used weak-looking equipment such as a worn-out armour.

As a matter of fact, Togami was half correct. Lending good equipment for Hunters with debt might cause trouble in case those Hunters tried to use that chance to run away. Because of that, Shikarabe only lent them mostly worn-out equipment that they would throw away after one use. Those equipment would only fetch a small amount of money even if they tried to sell it and taking all of it while running away was not worth the trouble.

Togami thought that the reason why he was sent to join that bounty hunting team was because the higher official in the Drankam thought highly of his

skill. Although that was indeed correct, it was a completely different matter whether Togami correctly evaluated his own skill.

Akira's vehicle had gotten considerably close to the monster that they were aiming for. Togami took his rifle and jumped off Akira's vehicle, he then mockingly smiled at Akira and said.

"They told me to take care of it. I can do it alone, you just shut up and watch me from there. I'll show you the difference in our skill."

After he said that, Togami ran to a position himself at a vantage point.

Once he reached his destination, he took out the powerful rifle that was prepared for hunting the bounty monster and aimed at that monster. He then confidently pulled the trigger. Although he missed some of his shots, he shot a lot of bullets to compensate for it. The bullets pierced through that monster's skin, flesh, and bones. For such a large vigorous monster, bullets which did not pierce through its weak points could only inflict minor wounds, but with enough small wounds, they turned fatal enough to kill it. And so Togami was able to kill that monster in a short time, which was rather commendable.

While he was focusing his shots at that one particular monster, the other two monsters quickly closed the distance. Togami spread bullets at those monsters to slow them down and wound them. The other monsters slowed down because of the wounds, they quickly noticed their dead friend and faltered. Togami kept on shooting at the rest of the monsters, he took his time to kill them.

Togami thought that he had done well enough to showcase his skill to Akira. So he walked back to Akira looking forward to his reaction thinking that Akira should have understood his power now.

But it did not go as Togami had expected. Akira was still sitting on the driver's seat while looking forward, he looked bored. Shikarabe's APC then passed beside Akira' vehicle.

Togami stood beside Akira's vehicle with a displeased look on his face. He was waiting for Akira's reaction from that fight just now. No matter whether it was a good reaction or not, as long as Akira would give him a reaction, he would be satisfied. If it was praise, he would accept it. And if it was an insult, he would take it as Akira being jealous of losing against him. So no matter what it was, it would give him some satisfaction.

But on the contrary, Akira did not show any reaction at all. He was not just simply ignoring Togami, it was as if his behaviour saying that it was nothing special at all.

Togami did not try to hide his irritation as he asked Akira.

"…Hey, don't you have anything to say to me?"

"Get in here, quickly. They'll leave us behind, you know?"

Akira somehow sounded exasperated when he said that.

Togami's expression immediately turned worse, he was about to burst when suddenly a call for Varga stopped him.

"Number 8, number 9, you're going to get left behind. Did your vehicle get damaged from that fight?"

Akira answered back.

"This is number 9. The vehicle is okay. But for some reason, the number 8 isn't getting into the vehicle. Can I just leave him behind?"

"Is number 8 somewhere near you? Number 8, are you hurt and unable to move?"

Togami sounded annoyed as he answered back.

"N-no, I'm not hurt…"

"Then get your ass back!!"

Varga shouted at Togami and closed the call.

Togami gritted his teeth and was somehow barely able to hold his anger as he dragged himself back into Akira's vehicle.

Akira quickly started his vehicle and tried to chase Shikarabe. He was able to catch up with them in no time.

Akira was driving his car without saying anything, but he was actually talking with Alpha through telepathy. Togami sat next to him while looking in the opposite direction from him. Although Togami was about to burst back then, they did not say anything to each other while driving. Togami knew that if he caused trouble there, it might cause Akira to make a blunder and hurt both of them, that was why he was somehow able to calm down.

The sun had risen up and shone its light onto the wasteland. Alpha basked under the sunlight as she smiled at Akira.

That was the moment when night turned into morning. The area that the sunshine reached turned into morning while the area that was still blanketed in the darkness stayed as the night, it was the moment when morning and night existed at the same time. In that ephemeral moment, Alpha's hair and skin somehow gave off a fantasy-like glossy aura under the morning sun.

"It's morning, Akira."

"You're right."

"…That was a rather dull response, don't you have like… something more to say?"

"Even if you tell me so…"

Akira looked around him and Alpha, it was not like he did not show any reaction at all, but he did not have enough words to accurately describe the feeling that was swelling inside his heart.

"Well, it's really something else compared to the morning in the slum city."

That was all that Akira said. There were a lot of things that he needed to have so that he could say those words, and if it was the past Akira, he would not be able to say those words there.

For example, in order so that no one would kill him in his sleep, Akira had to carefully pick where he slept and he ended up sleeping in places where sunlight could not reach.

The other thing would be the leeway to see the sunrise. Since he had to keep himself away from any possible threats, he had to focus his attention to the places where the sunlight could not reach, like the dark and shady places where he could get ambushed.

There were still other factors too, but basically, the past Akira did not have the leeway to leisurely watch the sunrise.

Even now, Akira still did not have the leeway to leisurely watch the sunrise.

Alpha suddenly pointed her finger toward the wasteland.

“Akira, it’s more monsters. They already noticed you and they’re heading this way.”

Akira could feel an irritation that he did not understand himself well enough, he then obeyed that irritation as he quietly went to the backseat. He took a stance and aimed the CWH anti-material rifle attached in the back seat to that monster, he looked somewhat annoyed as he carefully took an aim at that monster and pulled the trigger without hesitation.

He was using CWH special ammo at that time, thanks to the high-level accuracy support from Alpha, the bullet pierced right through between that monster’s eyes which was its weak point. After that bullet broke havoc inside that monster’s head, it pierced right through its torso and vanished into the wasteland. The shockwave from that hit was enough to rip off that monster’s limbs.

A call then came in from the communication device, it was from Varga.

“Number 9, a big-sized monster is coming from the right. Judging from its moving speed, it’s only a matter of time before it catches up with us, go and take care of it.”

“Number 9 here, it’s done.”

“…Hah?”

A short expression of disbelief from Varga passed through the communication device. It took some time for Varga to check the scanner, and after he confirmed that the signal had indeed vanished, he sounded a bit surprised as he said.

“…Ahhh, I’ve confirmed it too. You’re doing great, keep that up.”

“Number 9, roger that.”

Akira still looked slightly annoyed as he returned back to the driver seat. Alpha smiled mischievously while staring at that him. Akira felt a bit embarrassed as he jabbed at her to hide his embarrassment.

“What?”

“It’s nothing. It seems that you really enjoy watching the sunrise. You became really annoyed when that monster disturbed you.”

“…Well, yeah.”

Although it was not like Akira was enjoying the sunrise, he awkwardly responded to Alpha’s question with that short answer.

Alpha was still smiling at him, she knew a lot more about Akira that Akira himself knew. Although he had gotten used to her charming outlook, the sight of her basking in the morning light was even more charming than her usual look.

Togami, who stared at Akira as he returned back to driving, was amazed by Akira’s move there.

There was another monster near the monster that Akira just killed. It was a 1-metre big spider monster with a steel body. Cameras were fixed on its head in place of eyes. That monster was looking at Akira through those cameras.

After Akira and the other Hunters left that place, that monster finally started moving while making clunking sounds.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 94, Hunters Who Worth More Than 100,000,000 Aurum

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By the time Varga told Akira to take care of the monster that he detected, Akira had already taken care of that monster. Even Varga was surprised by that. He then flusteredly checked his radar and confirmed that Akira was not lying, and so he was still shaken when he replied back to Akira.

Varga then curiously asked Shikarabe.

“Shikarabe, where in the world did you find that boy? Wait, that’s not right. How the heck did you discover his ability?”

“There was a chance when we worked together in the Kuzusuhara underground ruin. That was the trigger.”

“Ohh, that, huh. If I’m not mistaken, they found a big Yarata scorpion nest there and executed a big scale extermination operation, right? I heard that the Katsuya faction was able to gather a lot of reward and achievement during that operation. So Akira also participated in that operation, huh?”

Shikarabe shook his head.

“Nope, as in matter of fact, he withdrew from the underground city request on the third day. So he did not participate in the extermination operation. The reason why I was able to see his ability was when I got assigned to a team of Hunters to explore the underground city.”

“So, did he do anything amazing there?”

“Not really, he was at least not a deadweight to me and the other Hunters. That was all there was to it.”

Varga tilted his head.

“Then why did you invite Akira? Judging from what you just said, there’s no real reason why we should invite him for hunting the bounty monsters, you know? Does he have anything particular written in his Hunter history?”

Yamanobe joined in and refuted that guess.

“Nah, there’s nothing amazing written in his Hunter history. Since Shikarabe invited that boy and after seeing what he was capable of yesterday, I went to the Hunter Office’s site to check his Hunter page. There’s nothing interesting in particular written there. He’s just a Rank 21 young Hunter, he has killed a lot of monsters and went up a few ranks sooner than most of his peers. That’s all that is written on his Hunter page.”

Varga looked a bit confused as he asked Shikarabe further.

“Then why did you invite him? Is it that thing? That Shikarabe’s intuition thingy? You always say that a good intuition is a crucial aspect for a Hunter.”

Shikarabe laughed.

“I know well enough not to rope both of you in solely because of my intuition, you know. Well, it’s true that it was because of my intuition at first, but I decided to invite him after I got more information about him.”

Shikarabe then pulled out his information terminal, operated it, and then gave it to Yamanobe and Varga. Both of them looked at that information

terminal and checked the information displayed on its monitor.

Yamanobe looked slightly confused.

“Is this a copy from the Hunter Office’s webpage? I already checked it, you know.”

“You should already know why I went through all the work to get a local copy. It contains confidential information that you won’t be able to see normally unless you pay an information broker from the inside the Hunter Office. Look how it’s different from what you have read.”

Yamanobe then operated the information terminal to look for that difference.

“…There’s some difference in the request history. The details about the Kuzusuhara underground city request is really short… Hm?”

Yamanobe raised his eyebrows as he read through that short detailed description of Akira’s Kuzusuhara underground city request history.

“Confidential request from Kugamayama City Management… The details of the request… Is hidden. Ahhh, it must be a copy from someone who has no right to see this information, huh. The only available information that we can see is just a short summary of the request.”

Shikarabe then interjected.

“You can see the reward too, so check it out.”

Yamanobe and Varga checked the reward from that request. Both of them looked thunderstruck when they saw the number.

Yamanobe rechecked that number again to make sure that he did not misread it as he said.

“160,000,000 Aurum!? That boy is a Hunter who’s worth more than 100,000,000 Aurum, huh?!!”

That title referred to the Hunters who gained more than 100,000,000 Aurum in a single request. It was one of the indicators that showed the ability of a Hunter. Of course, there were not that many Hunters who could attain that title.

Although it was a customary title, if a Hunter had finished at least one request that earned that Hunter more than 100,000,000, Aurum or any other currency recognized by the Corporate Government, then that Hunter could claim that title.

But if a Hunter wanted others to treat him or her as a Hunter with that title, then he or she should find a way to prove it to other people. Thus it was hard for a Hunter who achieved that title from a confidential request, of course, that was excluding the people who knew about that confidential request.

Varga was honestly amazed as he said.

"…It says that 60,000,000 Aurum was used to pay for his medical bill. But it's still a reward that's worth more than 100,000,000 Aurum. There's no mistaking it, he's worthy of that title… No wonder he's that strong."

Varga then continued, but this time he sounded a bit suspicious.

"The only thing that bothers me is that this information is not set to be hidden by Akira himself. This information is not just simply hidden from public view, this means that it's basically forged public information. I bet it was forged after Kugamayama City Management made a formal request to the Hunter Office and Akira himself had given his approval too. What exactly happened?"

Shikarabe smiled and answered Varga's question.

"There was an incident the same day Akira withdrew from the underground city's request. The army sent from the Kugamayama city engaged in a battle against some relic thieves. Since the thieves were aiming for the relics in the underground city that were originally owned by the City Management, a

lot of Hunters got roped in that incident. You guys heard about that too, right?”

“Yeah, but I heard that the army was able to easily apprehend the thieves. It was written somewhere in a small corner in the news sites.”

“I bet that incident has something to do with that confidential part in his Hunter history. It’s just my guess though, but I believe that Akira was somehow connected to that incident and did something which made the Kugamayama City Management pay him 160,000,000 Aurum. Either that or it was bribe money to make sure that Akira won’t leak anything. I can’t really judge his ability, but looking at the reward that he received, I can make a guess that he’s at least as strong as us. Does that convince you?”

Yamanobe smiled confidently and said.

“Yeah. But still, hypothetically speaking, if we can’t pay him enough reward, you’ll be in big trouble right, Shikarabe?”

Shikarabe laughed.

“No need to worry about that, it won’t be a trouble if we get to beat one bounty monster. Let’s have Akira work hard for his own reward.”

After Shikarabe said that, they laughed together. Being over-optimistic in their betting was normal in Hunter’s line of work. As long as they went out to the wasteland, they were gambling with their lives at stake. And so, these Hunters expected a high return for the high risk that they were taking.

Akira was driving his vehicle while talking with Alpha, so from the outside, he looked like he was driving silently. Or at least, there was no conversation between him and Togami.

Togami always had an annoyed expression plastered on his face, but now his anger was no longer present. And in its place, he had a cautious and curious face as if he was looking at an unidentified object. He had been looking at Akira for some time now.

Alpha then asked Akira.

“He’s been glancing at you, you know. Are you sure you want to just leave him alone?”

“It’s a huge pain in the neck to react to that. And it’s not like I can just throw him off from my vehicle just because he’s staring at me, so let’s just leave him alone.”

Akira knew that Togami was staring at him, but he just ignored Togami. As long as Togami did not strike any conversation, Akira had no plan to say anything to Togami. He would not even reply to Togami’s question unless he had no other choice.

“If you don’t mind, then I don’t really mind him either, but it really doesn’t bother you?”

“To be honest, it does, but ignoring him is a hundred times better than getting into trouble with him.”

“We should’ve refused right from the start, this was a mistake.”

“It’s not like I have any other choice. The person who made the request told me to take him with me, and to be honest, I didn’t expect he would agree to that condition.”

Alpha smiled, she looked a bit regretful.

“It can’t be helped then. Let’s just wait until we get a chance to throw him to Shikarabe’s vehicle.”

“Honestly speaking, I hope we don’t even need to do that.”

Akira looked exasperated when he said that.

Togami was still staring at Akira.

Akira was able to discover a monster even before Shikarabe told him about that monster, he then sniped that monster from a moving vehicle and was

able to hit and kill that monster in one shot. If Togami asked himself whether he could execute the same feat, the answer was a loud and clear no.

In the first place, aiming from a moving vehicle was really difficult. Even if he was shooting from a stationary vehicle, sniping a monster from afar was already difficult enough. And even if he could hit his shot, he would need to either accurately snipe at the monster's weak point or use a powerful gun to be able to defeat that monster in one shot, both of these only increased the difficulty of executing such a shot. When you want to take out a huge monster, you would have to do both—use a strong rifle and hit the weak point—at the same time.

Togami was a Hunter skilled enough to be sent to hunt a bounty monster, but even if he overestimated his own ability, he was sure he could not execute the same feat as Akira just now.

Moreover, the person who did that was a Rank 21 Hunter who was supposed to be below his own Rank. Because of that, it really shocked Togami.

If it was a story that he heard, he would be able to just laugh it off as a joke or a lie, but Akira did that right in front of his eyes.

On the other hand, he could just think of it as a pure coincidence, a lucky shot that only happened once out of thousands of shots. That might be all there was to it, but Togami could not wrap up that incident as a lucky shot. The reason was because Akira did that so casually.

Akira did that as if it was nothing to him, he did it so easily and casually just because he could, it was as if he had just squatted a fly that passed in front of him. That was the only impression that Togami got from Akira's action. Also, Akira did not show any reaction after he executed that impossible feat and silently went back to driving.

As Togami kept on thinking and evaluating Akira, the image of Akira inside his mind was of an unknown boy Hunter who had a lower Hunter Rank than him. Since he could not admit that it was Akira's real ability, he could not hold his curiosity back and ended up saying something to Akira.

“…Oii, don’t get ahead of yourself just because of that lucky shot. I won’t ever admit that it’s your real ability.”

Togami actually wanted to confirm whether it was really a lucky shot or was it because of Akira’s aiming skill. But the words that came out from his mouth were completely different than what he actually meant.

Akira glanced at Togami and casually replied.

“I see.”

After he said that, Akira returned his gaze forward and continued driving. Normally, people would take his reply as an affirmation to what Togami just said. While on the other hand, it was a feat that Akira would not be able to execute without Alpha’s support, so it could also be understood as an affirmation from that point of view. Akira kept training himself every day so that he would be able to do the same thing on his own without Alpha’s support.

Togami laughed awkwardly after hearing Akira’s answer.

“…Hahaha, As I thought, it’s just a lucky shot, huh. Don’t surprise me like that. Ahh, now that I think about it, there’s no way a Rank 21 Hunter can do that in the first place.”

Togami laughed as if he was trying to convince himself, but since he himself was still not fully convinced by it, his laugh was somehow stiff and awkward.

⎯⎯*⎯⎯*⎯⎯*⎯⎯

Drankam had a base in the Kugamayama city’s lower district. Somewhere near that base, a lot of Drankam’s young Hunters were preparing themselves to hunt for the bounty monsters. They were preparing their vehicles and equipment to go out to the wasteland and filled their APCs with supplies.

Elena and Sara boarded one of those vehicles and waited until the dispatch time while looking at the scene around them. They were the Hunters assigned to help the young Hunters from Drankam to hunt for the bounty monster. Their job was to fight under the other's orders. Both of them had already finished their preparation yesterday, so they had nothing to do but wait after they received the contact device specially used by Drankam members.

Sara looked at the other Hunters who were going to join them in hunting the bounty monsters and mumbled.

"There are quite a lot of them, but most of them are young Hunters. Some of them are even as young as Akira, well, it's not like I'm discriminating against them because of their age though. But it makes me worry with this many young Hunters. I wonder if they really understand that they're going to hunt for bounty monsters. It's not like we're going to hunt common strong monsters, you know?"

The longer someone was working as a Hunter, the more and more obscure his or her age became. But even so, it was rather obvious that the Hunters in that place were mostly young Hunters who were not even considered as adults yet.

Most of the Hunter equipment was designed to be used by adults, thus they were not perfect for young Hunters. As long as it was not some kind of fetish, even cyborg Hunters would not prefer to have a child's body.

Due to that, most of the young Hunters who looked like young children were really young children. And as young Hunters, they did not have long experience being a Hunter, the same thing could also be said for their skill too. Of course, there were some exceptions though.

Sara was observing those young Hunters preparing themselves while waiting. To be honest, she thought that most of those young Hunters were not ready to join the hunt for bounty monsters.

Elena then spoke to her as if she was trying to reassure her.

“Both their numbers and their equipment should be enough to defeat a bounty monster. Seeing the vehicles prepared for this expedition, it seems that they assume they’ll be able to successfully take down the bounty monsters. Although, I’m not really sure if the reward from the bounty is enough to bring them profit after preparing all of these equipment. Not to mention, they also pay other Hunters like us to help out too and it’s not like all of them are only young Hunters. So there should be no problem.”

Sara frowned a bit.

“…Depending on how you look at it, it sounds as if we’re here to look over these young Hunters though.”

“There’s no need to do that, it’s obvious that we’re here to look over these children. Leaving the bounty monster aside, the reward that we will receive this time depends on the young Hunters who can return back alive, you know. So, our reward will get a huge hit if the leader of the team gets killed. Since it’s not an escort request, there’s no need to try too hard protecting these children, but if we want to keep our reward, we should make sure that the leader returns back alive or take out the bounty monsters fast. Ah, this is confidential info though, so don’t tell anyone, okay?”

“Alright… I did hear that Drankam had a policy to prioritize young Hunters, but I never thought that they would go this far. To think that they would send young Hunters and their guardians to fight bounty monsters… Just what exactly is Drankam thinking?”

Sara sounded a bit bewildered when she said that.

Elena then jokingly replied.

“We might be looking down on them, you know. All of them might be as strong as Akira.”

“That in itself is scary.”

“Now that you mention it, that’s true.”

Elena and Sara then laughed together after that exchange.

They then noticed a group of young Hunters heading in their direction. Elena smiled at the Hunter leading that group.

“Team leader Katsuya, is it time to go?”

They were the team assigned to Sara and Elena. It had Katsuya as its team leader, then Katsuya’s close cliques, and some other Hunters who got roped in his shenanigans as the members. The members of Katsuya’s team were relatively high ranking members, they looked at Elena and Sara with a meaningful gaze.

Katsuya was a bit embarrassed since Elena called him team leader.

“Yes, we’ll start soon. Uhhmm, we’ll be in your care for today.”

Katsuya and Elena then nodded at each other, Elena smiled and said.

“We’ll be in your care too. Let’s give our best out there.”

“Both Elena and I will work hard for receiving the reward, so no need to hold back when you want to give us orders.”

Sara also smiled and joined their conversation.

“I’ll also give my best out there not to drag both of you down.”

After Katsuya said that and smiled, his face turned serious.

“Elena-san and Sara-san are actually assigned under my team, I might be an inexperienced leader, but please don’t move on your own since it might cause confusion. As long as it’s not an emergency, please stick to my orders.”

Katsuya was proud of himself for getting chosen as a team leader. He planned to give his best to turn his hunt into a success. In order to do that, he could not let Elena and Sara make their own moves although he was

close to them. He said that with a serious expression to make sure that Elena and Sara understood well what he was trying to say.

Elena smiled and replied.

“Don’t worry, we’ll properly follow your orders.”

Both Elena and Sara did not seem to get offended at all. Katsuya’s expression relaxed as he looked relieved.

But there were people who got annoyed by that exchange between Katsuya and Elena. Among them was a young girl by the name of Lilina who was standing next to Katsuya.

Lilina did not even try to hide her displeasure as she shouted.

“Katsuya! You’re the team leader, so at least tell them not to get ahead of themselves just because they’re your acquaintances! And tell them to just follow your orders!!”

Katsuya looked surprised as he turned to Lilina, both Elena and Sara also looked at Lilina with a dumbfounded face. While for the rest of the Hunters there, half of them felt the same as Lilina while the other half were simply taken aback by that sudden outburst.

If Yumina was present, she would have tried to arbitrate that situation and calmed Lilina down, but at the moment, Yumina was in the middle of doing preparation somewhere else.

Katsuya was still at loss on what to do there. Since there was no one to stop her, Lilina was still glaring at Elena and Sara as she said.

“Since both of you are here because of a request, you need to at least pay some respect to the requestor and the team leader!! If you make such a friendly exchange just because you’re close with Katsuya, it might affect the team’s morale, you know!? Shouldn’t both of you be more self-conscious that you’re here because we pay you?!”

Elena looked completely flabbergasted, but she quickly changed her expression and smiled bitterly at Lilina.

Lilina's expression turned even stiffer as she thought that Elena was mocking her. Katsuya who regained his composure flusteredly tried to stop Lilina.

"Lilina!! Just shut up!!"

But Lilina jabbed back at Katsuya.

"What do you mean by that?! Or more like, why did you let outsiders join our team in the first place?! Do you think that we won't be able to handle the bounty monster?! Are we really that weak in your eyes?!"

"T-that's not what I mean…"

Katsuya was overwhelmed by Lilina's sudden outburst. She then turned her gaze back to Elena and Sara, she then sighed and said.

"Just so you know, we can take one or two bounty monsters without your help!! So just be careful not to get in our way, okay?!"

After Lilina said that, she quickly turned and left.

Katsuya's gaze bounced back and forth from Elena and Lilina, who was leaving the premises.

"I-I'm really sorry!! Please excuse me!"

Katsuya then quickly tried to catch up with Lilina after he said that to Elena and Sara. Elena and Sara lightly waved at Katsuya and watched him walking away.

The other Hunters quickly followed Katsuya and left that place too. Now that Elena and Sara were alone, Sara smiled bitterly and said to Elena.

"This isn't going to be easy."

Elena laughed lightly.

“Let’s just properly do our job out there. If they really don’t need us, we should be able to take it easy.”

“Do you think we can really take it easy?”

“Oh my, I did say that we should just focus and do our job out there, right?”

They both laughed after Elena said that. Both of them understood that they would not be able to take it easy at all. As a matter of fact, they knew that they would need to work hard out there, otherwise, there would not even be any reward. Both Elena and Sara agreed on that point.

—*—*—*—

Akira and his group were traversing the wasteland. They did not get to meet much trouble on their way to their destination.

Togami had somehow calmed down. He did not do anything that bothered Akira, at least, other than glancing at Akira from time to time with a curious face.

Suddenly, Shikarabe’s voice could be heard from the contact device, he sounded really serious.

“We’ll soon arrive at the area where the bounty monster was spotted. Our target this time is Tank Tarantula. The bounty prize is 800,000,000 Aurum. Get yourself ready!”

Both Akira and Togami’s expression changed as they got psyched up for the upcoming fight. Both of them listened to Shikarabe with a serious expression.

“Number 2 and 3 will take the front position once the fight starts, all the other Hunters will need to protect number 2 and number 3. Attract the Tank Tarantula’s attention and keep it occupied so it won’t aim its attack on number 2 and number 3. You can check your and the others’ positions from the display in the communication device, pay attention to it as you circle the

target. Don’t use the rocket launcher until I give you my signal. Once number 2 and 3 finish their job, we’ll attack the target altogether. That’s all, are there any questions?”

After listening to that short description of the plan, Togami frowned and asked Shikarabe.

“It’s number 8. I need more information on the plan. Aren’t you going to give us orders as to where to go, where we should station ourselves, and when we can attack the target?”

“Other than the decision to withdraw, look around and make your own decision yourself.”

“So we basically can do anything we want to react to the situation, huh?”

“In the first place, we’re just a mix batch of Hunters. We’re not very organized that we can work together on a detailed plan. So make your own decision. But if it’s needed, we’ll also give you orders.”

Togami did not try to hide his displeasure as he said.

“…Give me a break, it’s your job to organize the team, you know?”

Togami was not exactly wrong there. Shikarabe’s orders were very open to interpretation, it basically discarded the advantage they got if they moved as a team. If they made a more detailed plan for them to work together, they would be able to more effectively dish out damages.

Shikarabe himself understood that fact. The reason why he did not do that was because he thought that it would be useless or might even be counter-effective. The only people who he fully trusted were his friends, Yamanobe and Varga. He did not trust that the other Hunters would properly follow his orders. He even thought that there was a good chance the other Hunters would get intimidated, scared, and eventually run away from the fight once they face the bounty monster.

Shikarabe did not expect any of them to do more than the least amount of work that they were needed to do. He did not believe even for a sec that the other Hunters would obediently follow his command. Rather than giving them a proper order, which they could not handle and instead pushed them to abandon the fight, Shikarabe thought that it was better to just give them rather vague orders.

But of course, it would be a whole different case if Shikarabe was gifted with a strong commanding skill. It would allow him to accurately identify the characteristics of the debt-ridden Hunters and Hunters with particular situations that he just met a few days ago and make sure that he only gave them orders that they could execute without much trouble. But Shikarabe himself knew well that he was not that good.

Shikarabe replied back with a strong tone to Togami.

“Is it that you can’t do anything unless I explicitly tell you what to do? If that’s the case, just make sure you don’t get in our way. Other than that, you can freely do anything you want. Anyone has any other questions?”

It seemed that no one other than Togami had any questions for Shikarabe. While Togami was enraged that he was not in a situation where he could ask any further questions.

“If no one else has any other questions, then that’s all. Make sure you work hard enough to earn your reward.”

Shikarabe then ended the call, but Togami did not stop glaring at the communication device.

They continued heading straight to their destination.

Shikarabe kept his eyes on the radar and the information display connected to his vehicle’s control device. The bounty monster was huge, so he should be able to easily notice it when it was somewhere close. He then spoke through the communication device again.

“Spread out, it would be bad if we stick close to each other like this.”

Shikarabe then turned to Yamanobe and Varga, they were number 2 and number 3.

Both of them were sitting on top of a wasteland bike inside the APC. The back door opened for both of them to go out. Yamanobe was carrying an anti-material sniper rifle while Varga was carrying a kick-backless hand cannon. An automatic reloading device was fixed behind their bikes and it was connected to their respective rifles.

Shikarabe threw a question at them.

“You guys ready?”

“Final check is done, I’m ready when you are!”

“Same here.”

Yamanobe and Varga smiled as they replied back to Shikarabe’s question. Both of them were a bit excited and nervous at the same time.

Shikarabe then asked them again.

“I don’t know how well the others will do their job as diversions. I’ll also use this vehicle as a diversion, so, do you want to go out now while you have the chance?”

Varga shook his head.

“Nah, I want to confirm the position of our target as close as possible before heading out. It would be a bad thing if we go out first and then get attacked first instead. This APC is already reinforced, right?”

“Yeah. It would be able to take some beatings. If it becomes dangerous to stay in this APC, I’ll give the order to withdraw. You guys need to be careful out there too, alright?”

“I know. It’s also Hunter’s job to return back alive. I have no plans to get killed because of greed.”

They then laughed together. Hunters always put dangers and possible rewards on a scale before making any decisions. Some Hunters decided to take more risk chasing for more reward and got killed instead. Up until now, Shikarabe and his friends were able to always return alive and they had no plans to break that streak now.

Shikarabe’s gaze returned back to the display. It suddenly showed a dangerous threat, it was from the bounty monster.

Shikarabe swiftly shouted at the communication device.

“I found the Tank Tarantula!! Get yourself ready!!”

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Rebuild World – Chapter 95, Tank Tarantula

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Akira was able to locate the Tank Tarantula sooner than Shikarabe and his friends. It was all thanks to Alpha's detection ability.

Alpha pointed her finger toward the vast wasteland.

"Akira, the bounty monster is over there."

Akira grabbed his binoculars and looked at the direction where Alpha was pointing at. He quickly spotted a huge monster in that direction.

"That's the 800,000,000 Aurum worth bounty monster, huh… It's huge!"

The Tank Tarantula was a spider-like monster as big as a 3-storey house. 16 legs extended out from its abdomen and its whole body was covered in reinforced plating. The upper portion of its abdomen was equipped with 2 big cannons that you would usually only find on tanks. There were wheels and caterpillar tracks outfitted on the bottom part of its body.

It used one of his legs to push a scorched half-destroyed vehicle into its mouth and munched on it. The hard vehicle frame was easily crushed under its gigantic teeth before getting swallowed into its huge body.

“It’s eating a vehicle… Is it in the middle of a meal?”

“It might be one of the vehicles of the Hunters who tried to hunt it. If you approach it carelessly, your vehicle will meet the same fate. So let’s be extra careful.”

“If it only eats metal, did the Hunters escape? Or did they get eaten first?”

“Monsters like that are usually omnivores. Moreover, Hunters’ weapons and equipment are usually made of metal, and I’m sure it won’t even bother to separate them.”

“Well, that’s true. Even if it’s not an omnivore, I have no plans to feed it my vehicle.”

Akira spent a lot of money on his vehicle. Thus he had no plans to let the Tank Tarantula eat it.

“The amount of food that monsters eat is usually proportional to its size. If you leave it alone, it’ll only grow bigger and bigger with time, and with that, the amount of food it eats will also grow. Usually, monsters will get eaten by the other monsters before they can grow that big. But this one came from Yonozuka station ruin where it had an abundant amount of food.”

Akira remembered when he went to Yonozuka station ruin, he found a hallway filled with the leftover of battles but no corpses. When it was still small, the Tank Tarantula must have eaten the corpses and grown to a size where it could still fit the hallway. It then must have escaped the hallway to the surface and eaten all the wreckage around the area as it grew even bigger.

They approached the Tank Tarantula carefully while closely observing it. Its metallic exoskeleton body looked extremely tough and its huge powerful legs looked strong enough to crush a vehicle. Not to mention that the twin cannons on its back looked extremely powerful. Akira looked completely amazed by the appearance of that powerful-looking monster.

“But then again, if I can defeat that monster, it would earn me 800,000,000 Aurum, huh. I wonder how strong of a monster it is to be worth that much.”

“The amount of the bounty prize is not decided based on how strong a monster is. But at least, there’s someone who wants that monster dead as soon as possible to the point that they would even pay you 800,000,000 Aurum. It might be because it’s sitting on an important trading route, or it might be because it attracts strong monsters to gather in that place and worsen the monster distribution. There are basically a lot of factors that decide how much a monster is worth. And when you add the fact that it’s a strong monster that Hunters’ can’t easily kill, then it would be identified as a bounty monster. Think of it as a monster that’s way stronger than any of monster that you’ve fought until now.”

“You don’t have to tell me that, it’s rather obvious from what I can see. Like hell I would stand having monsters like that roaming the wasteland.”

“If you go further to the east, you can find a lot of monsters like that, you know?”

“I-I see.”

“And there are a whole lot of Hunters who can defeat that level of monsters without having much trouble. That’s why, even if there are monsters like this in that area, those monsters would not be identified as bounty monsters.”

“I guess there are still a lot of things out there that I don’t know, huh…”

Akira sounded contemplative as he mumbled those words.

Shikarabe’s voice came out from the communication device, he told everyone to start the battle. Akira quickly pulled himself together, Alpha smiled at him invincibly.

“We’ll start the fight against the bounty monster soon, are you ready?”

“Of course!”

“Alright then, let’s start!”

“Ah, wait for a sec.”

“What’s wrong?”

Alpha seemed a bit curious.

“There’s one thing that I want to make sure first.”

Akira turned to Togami and said.

“I won’t follow orders, I fight the way I want. Shikarabe had agreed with that too. I won’t try to work together with you, if you want to board off, then this is your chance.”

Togami who was already in a bad mood quickly exploded when he heard Akira’s words.

“Hah!? Are you kidding me?!”

“So you’re staying, huh? Got it then.”

Akira then turned to Alpha.

“Let’s start!”

“Roger that. If he gets thrown off the vehicle, it would all be his fault. So there’s no need to help him and just leave him alone.”

Alpha smiled when she said that as she took over the control of Akira’s vehicle and immediately turned up its speed.

Togami could not help but shriek as the vehicle suddenly accelerated and pushed his body deeper into his seat.

Since they were going to fight a bounty monster, Alpha’s driving was rather rough. Akira, who was wearing an augmented suit with Alpha’s support, could move around with no problem. But that was not the case for Togami.

Akira moved to the back seat, took his CWH anti-material rifle, and aimed at the Tarantula Tank that was still quite far away from them.

Although with its big size, the Tank Tarantula looked just like a blip with naked eyes from that distance. Not to mention there was the shaking and swaying from the vehicle too. Akira aimed at the Tank Tarantula through the aiming device on his rifle, Alpha added a lot of extra information in his vision.

Akira fixed the TP line created through Alpha's support such that it accurately targeted the Tank Tarantula. He focused his concentration and compressed the time as much as possible, the moment he felt the shaking from the vehicle slow down, he fixed his aim and pulled the trigger.

The bullet pierced through the air and flew straight to its target. It pushed against the air barrier formed on its tip due to its velocity which reduced its power on its travel before hitting its target.

But when it did, it just ricocheted after hitting the hard metallic exoskeleton of the Tank Tarantula.

The Tank Tarantula had already noticed Akira and the other Hunters. But since it was in the middle of its meal, it chose to focus on its meal rather than the Hunters that were still rather far away from it. Now that it received an attack, albeit a harmless attack, it quickly shifted its attention to Akira.

The huge cannon on the Tank Tarantula's back started to move. It was as if the Tank Tarantula was trying to aim its huge cannon.

Akira noticed its movements through his aiming device.

"Did that one hit?"

"It did, but it didn't inflict any damage. It won't do any damage no matter how much you shoot at it unless you go closer."

"I see, then I need to get closer first. My job is to keep it occupied as a diversion, so let's do my job properly."

“Well, you’re doing fine, it’s already focused its attention on you. My driving will be a bit rougher to evade its cannon, so be careful.”

“Roger that!”

Akira shifted his left hand from the rifle to grab his vehicle.

The Tank Tarantula already fixed its aim at Akira, its big cannons spewed out huge warheads with a loud bang. The kickback shifted its huge body, but not enough to throw it off-balance. It was able to hold off the powerful kickback using its multiple legs. But it did not stop there as it shot multiple warheads in succession, the huge warheads drew multiple parabolic lines on the sky as they flew toward Akira.

They rained down and created craters around Akira. Alpha quickly finished her calculation and predicted where those warheads would hit the ground, she then ignored the people on Akira’s vehicle as she controlled it to move away from the fallout area.

The sudden acceleration threw Akira and Togami off-balance. Akira used the power of his augmented suit to get a secure grip on his vehicle and avoid getting himself thrown off the vehicle while still standing. As for Togami who was sitting on the driver assistance seat, he got himself pushed between his seat and the door, thus he was also able to avoid getting thrown off.

The explosions from the warheads that rained down from the sky threw dust, smokes, and rubbles to the air. The shockwave and the pounding from the explosions shook Akira’s vehicle. It even threw the vehicle off the ground, but thanks to Alpha’s driving capability, it was able to land safely and all its luggage was also undamaged.

Alpha smiled casually.

“It seems that it has a bad aim. In this case, we can safely approach it.”

“That’s good to hear!! By the way, can you keep us further away from the warheads?!!”

Akira could feel the shaking transmitted through his legs. If he was not grabbing on his vehicle with his left hand, he might have been thrown off the vehicle by now.

“Don’t worry, with that level of firepower, we can at least take one direct hit.”

“You’re talking about the vehicle, right?!”

“Well, even if you’re using an augmented suit, there’s no way you can handle that warhead, you know. That’s unless you buy a better one.”

“Don’t be crazy, just how much do you think it would cost?”

“If you can defeat that Tank Tarantula alone, you should get enough money to buy one.”

“I don’t have that kind of money!!!”

“In that case, you should gather more money. Let’s work hard to earn that much.”

“Yeah, I can’t agree more!!”

Looking at Alpha who was smiling like usual, Akira got a bit worked up.

Shikarabe looked at that exchange between Akira and the Tank Tarantula through an on-board camera. The scene of Akira fighting against the Tank Tarantula that was border-line reckless was shown in a big monitor inside Shikarabe’s vehicle. Shikarabe, Yamanobe and Varga who were looking at that monitor seemed to be enjoying the show.

Yamanobe smiled and said.

“Not bad at all! As expected of a Hunter worth more than 100,000,000 Aurum. He’s doing pretty good there.”

Varga smiled casually.

“He’s doing a good job as a diversion. It might be sooner than we planned, but we should head out too. Shikarabe, open the door.”

Shikarabe pushed the button on the terminal and opened the rear door of the APC. He then left some words for Varga and Yamanobe.

“No need to be reckless, return back as soon as you finish your job.”

Yamanobe smiled and answered back.

“I know. Even for me, I can’t help but get a little excited after seeing that. But I have no plans to put myself in danger just to show off my skill.”

Varga laughed mockingly.

“I have no plans to crash and burn in glory, that’s the job for another person.”

Looking at how both of them reacted, Shikarabe looked relieved.

“Number 2, operation start!”

“Number 3, operation start!”

Yamanobe and Varga jumped out from the vehicle on their bikes. They accelerated their bikes while still on the air, the wheels were spinning furiously as they landed on the ground. Both of them left Shikarabe’s APC behind and separated into two teams as they headed to the Tank Tarantula.

Akira kept heading toward the Tank Tarantula while avoiding the warheads. In the middle of that, he also kept on sniping the monster using his CWH anti-material rifle loaded with CWH special ammo. Thanks to Alpha’s driving skill and her ability to predict the warheads’ trajectories, Akira’s vehicle was still doing fine.

When the CWH special ammo hit the Tank Tarantula’s armour, it bent and eventually stripped off that armour plating of the Tank Tarantula. As that armour part fell down to the ground, another undamaged armour plating was exposed under it, it was then pushed out and replaced the stripped off

armour plating. At the moment, Akira realised he could not inflict any meaningful damage to the Tank Tarantula.

Akira tilted his head while still looking at the Tank Tarantula.

“My shots did hit, right?”

“They did. It at least inflicted some damages, enough to strip off the armour plating from that monster.”

Akira made a long hum. Until now, he was able to defeat anything that he met with one shot using CWH special ammo. The only exception to that was the powered armour that he fought in Kuzusuhara ruin the other day. But even when he was fighting against that powered armour, the CWH special ammo obviously affected the powered armour when they hit. Unlike that powered armour, the CWH special did not seem to have any effect on the Tank Tarantula. It reminded Akira that it was indeed an 800,000,000 Aurum bounty monster.

“I really have no other choice but to get closer, huh?”

“It’s dangerous to get any closer than this. You’ve done your job well as a diversion. I’m sure Shikarabe has some kind of plan, so let’s keep our distance while keeping it occupied.”

“That’s true. Alright then, I’ll leave the driving to you, please drive safely.”

“Roger that.”

“It’s kind of weird to say this myself, but you do get the ‘drive safely’ part, right?”

Alpha smiled mischievously.

“Oh my, I always drive safely, you know. Or like, did you get hurt somewhere?”

“Well, no.”

Alpha was not lying, Akira himself knew at least that much. It was just a matter of standard between her and the people on the vehicle that she was controlling. Moreover, Akira himself was rather preoccupied with the monster, so he had no leeway to worry about other things.

Togami was desperately grabbing on to the blazing vehicle. Both of his arms and legs were used to keep himself inside the vehicle so that he would not get thrown off-board. He kept his mouth shut since he felt like he would bite his own tongue if he tried to say something.

As for Akira, he was able to adjust his posture before the vehicle swayed thanks to the support from Alpha, thus he was able to stand without much trouble in the intensely rocking vehicle.

But that was not the case for Togami. Alpha's rough driving and the shockwave from the warheads threw his body around, he desperately grabbed onto the vehicle as he felt like he would be thrown off-board the moment he loosened his grip. He did not even have the leeway to aim at the Tank Tarantula.

Togami finally understood why Akira asked him if he wanted to stay. Just like he said, Akira did not care about Togami. Even if Togami got thrown off-board, it did not seem like Akira would stop to pick him up. Togami understood that fact very well.

And if he wanted to complain, he felt like he would bite his own tongue the moment he opened his mouth. And if he lowered his guard even for a second, he felt like he would be thrown off. He already had his hands full making sure that he would stay inside the vehicle.

Togami faced a lot of trouble in just turning his head toward Akira from the assistant driver seat. While Akira only looked a bit challenged as he kept on sniping at the Tank Tarantula.

[…Wh-what the heck is with this boy!? Is this really the power of a Rank 21 Hunter?! You gotta be kidding me!! Like hell I would accept someone like him as only a Rank 21 Hunter!! What the heck is going on here!? How the hell did I get roped in this situation?!]

He was utterly confused and kept on cursing his situation, that was all that he could do there.

The Tank Tarantula did not stop spewing warheads toward the Hunters who interrupted its meal. After all, there was nothing more obnoxious than those people who kept attacking you although it was barely effective at all.

Its first priority was Akira, then Shikarabe. Shikarabe was also shooting at the Tank Tarantula using rifles fixed into his APC. Although each shot was enough to blow a monster into minced meat, for Tank Tarantula, it did not have any effect at all. But at least, it was able to prevent the Tank Tarantula to stay where it was. With those continuous shots, the Tank Tarantula could not get a good aim.

Among the Hunters, the number 4, Nergo, was a Hunter with a battle cyborg body. It was obvious from his appearance that he was a cyborg as he raised up all his 4 arms equipped with powerful weapons and released a volley of warheads at the Tank Tarantula.

Nergo joined the hunt not for the prize, but he was aiming to make a connection with the Hunters from Drankam. The only thing that he asked in exchange for his participation in that hunt was to credit his name in that bounty hunt. As such, unlike the other Hunters who joined the hunt for money to pay for their debt, Nergo had to properly contribute to the hunt.

Just like Akira, Nergo exchanged shots with the Tank Tarantula in a rather close range as he kept on shooting at it with his huge guns. With his advanced driving skill, he evaded the warheads from the Tank Tarantula's big cannons, readied his own big guns, and released huge warheads back at the Tank Tarantula.

The other Hunters started shooting at that Tank Tarantula too. They were contributing to the fight just like Shikarabe expected them to, i.e. they were not helping at all.

As warheads from the Tank Tarantula landed around those Hunters, they repositioned themselves in panic and started shooting at the monster again, but their attacks did nothing other than revealing their position to the Tank

Tarantula. Since the Tank Tarantula was shooting at them, it at least recognized those Hunters as enemies. Or it might be just trying to immobilize them and eat them later.

Yamanobe and Varga kept on heading toward the Tank Tarantula without even shooting at it. Although they had prepared themselves to face some bombardments, it seemed that the diversions were working better than they expected so that they did not have to worry about the warheads.

After Yamanobe got close to the Tank Tarantula, he stopped his bike and looked at Nergo.

“There are other Hunters who are working as hard as Akira, huh. If he’s that powerful, he should’ve been able to strike a deal with the Drankam management instead. From what I heard yesterday, he doesn’t seem to be in so much trouble anyway… And with that power, there’s not even any need to hunt for a bounty monster, right? He can still acquire some money on his own like that, right? Or is it that he doesn’t have the money to do that?”

Although it bothered Yamanobe a bit, he decided to forget about that for now.

“Hey hey, remember that we’re in the middle of a job. It’s all thanks to the diversions that we’re not having a hard time, so let’s quickly finish our job here.”

Yamanobe was still on his bike as he raised up his rifle, aimed it at the Tank Tarantula, and pulled the trigger. The bullet-like projectile spewed out from the rifle’s muzzle, hit the Tank Tarantula, and stuck on its body. It was a small device wrapped in strong sticky glue.

He did not stop there as he kept on shooting at the Tank Tarantula. Since the sticky projectiles were completely harmless, the Tank Tarantula was ignoring him while more and more of those sticky small devices got stuck on its huge body.

“This is number 2, marking done.”

Varga's voice could be heard from Yamanobe's communication device.

"This is number 3, roger that. You can go back first."

"It would be bad if you miss your shot, so I'll stay."

"Yeah yeah."

Varga laughed and said that in response to Yamanobe's joke.

Varga was approaching the Tank Tarantula from another direction. Thanks to the diversions, he was able to get pretty close to the Tank Tarantula and the Tank Tarantula would not attack him as long as he did not attack it, but the Tank Tarantula might aim at him if he got any closer. After that short exchange with Yamanobe, he then decided to get closer.

While still on the top of his bike, he quickly closed the distance to the Tank Tarantula, he then aimed his kickback-less cannon at the Tank Tarantula and pulled the trigger before the Tank Tarantula could aim its huge cannons back at him. The projectile from the cannon exploded before it hit the Tank Tarantula's body and covered the area in thick smoke.

With the help from the automatic reloading device in the back of his bike, Varga kept on shooting that smoke warhead while still moving around. He shot some of the bullets to thicken the smoke around him while the rest went straight to the Tank Tarantula.

After that, Varga sped his bike out from within that thick smoke. The Tank Tarantula tried to shoot at him, but it could not get a good aim due to thick smoke. As such, the warheads just landed randomly around the area away from Varga.

If it was only normal smoke, the Tank Tarantula would not have any trouble aiming at Varga. The smoke not only blocked the visible light but also dulled all light spectrum as well as sound. Thus preventing any information to be perceived correctly and completely throwing the monster's aim off.

The smoke that Varga used was an advanced jamming smoke.

Varga then contacted Shikarabe.

“This is number 3, I’m done here too.”

Now that their victory was almost guaranteed, Shikarabe smiled and said.

“Roger that, get away from that place. You’ll also get blown off if you guys stay too close.”

Varga and Yamanobe swiftly replied back.

“Understood.”

“Just start the barrage.”

Shikarabe then changed the broadcast to all the Hunters there.

“This is number 1! You guys can use the rocket launcher now! Make sure to get close enough to get a lock on the Tank Tarantula! Pull the trigger together on my mark!! And don’t be late!”

Akira looked at the Tank Tarantula that was covered in smoke.

“Smokescreen, huh? I can’t spot the monster at all now.”

“That’s jamming smoke, you know. Since they gave us the information about the smoke beforehand, you can still check the insides of the smoke.”

Alpha then enhanced Akira’s vision, thanks to that, he was able to see clearly the Tank Tarantula inside that thick smoke. Akira was a bit surprised by that.

“Whoah, I can see it very clearly though. And it’s not like it can look at us too, right? Jamming smoke is really nice.”

“It seems that they’re using a pretty high-quality jamming smoke. It blocks as much information as possible for the Tank Tarantula while suppressing its effect on the information-gathering device at the same time. There are many cheap jamming smokes out there that are nothing more than just

normal smokescreen. It seems that they spent quite a lot of money on this hunt… I just hope there will still be enough money to share after subtracting the equipment expense.”

“…I-it would be okay, right?”

Akira sounded worried.

Shikarabe then contacted everyone again to get the rocket launcher ready. Akira quickly put down his CWH anti-material rifle and started preparing his rocket launcher.

Due to the jamming smoke, the Tank Tarantula shot its cannons to a direction where there was no one present. It did stop shooting and tried to escape the smokescreen, but since some of the smoke canisters were stuck on its body, it did not take long before it got wrapped in a thick smoke again.

Since it was unlikely to get shot in that situation, Alpha stopped the vehicle. Togami was finally able to stand up.

“…H-hey!”

Togami actually wanted to complain to Akira, but Akira misunderstood him and threw a rocket launcher and its ammo to him. Togami was somehow able to receive it, but it did throw him off-balance again.

Akira quickly finished preparing his rocket launcher, the aiming device on the rocket launcher already indicated that it had locked on its target and that the homing feature was already on.

Shikarabe voice then could be heard from the communication device.

“We’ll start the barrage in 15 seconds!! This is the reason why we brought you guys here!! So if you don’t join the barrage, we’ll reduce your share of reward!!”

Togami started preparing his rocket launcher in panic.

“5! 4! 3! 2! 1!”

Akira was ready to launch his rocker launcher, Togami was barely able to catch up with him.

“Zero!!”

Together with that count, Akira and the other Hunters pulled the trigger.

Countless missiles soared and flew towards the Tank Tarantula. When they got close enough to the Tank Tarantula, they flew up to the sky, gathered up, recalculated their trajectories, and then hit the Tank Tarantula almost simultaneously.

They exploded with an amazing bang and blew everything around the area away. A blinding light flashed through the wasteland followed by a huge raising smoke, the shockwave finally reached Akira and the other Hunters.

Akira stood against the already weakened shockwave as he looked at the explosion with a dumbfounded face.

“…That was amazing. So you need to go this far to defeat a bounty monster, huh?”

Alpha then warned Akira who thought that he had already won.

“Akira, we don’t know if we defeated it or not.”

Akira inadvertently turned to Alpha, from the outside, he looked like a suspicious person who suddenly looked in a direction where no one was present. That was just how surprised he was.

“Eh!? No no no, there’s no way it survived that explosion!? And even if it did, there’s no way it’s fine after taking that explosion head-on. So we can just take it easy later while showering it with more missiles to deliver the finishing blow…”

Alpha then pointed her finger toward the Tank Tarantula.

“Look.”

Akira turned his gaze to the Tank Tarantula. Since the smoke was blown away by the explosion earlier, he was able to clearly see Tank Tarantula even without Alpha’s help.

Although it took the explosion head-on, it still survived.

Some of its legs were already blown away. The cannon-like object perching on its back was also missing. A chunk of its huge torso was completely destroyed as well as its caterpillar tracks and wheels on its lower body. But even so, the Tank Tarantula tried to force its legs to move just to get them broken and crumbled down with a loud bang.

Akira dropped his jaw and said to Alpha.

“I-it can still move even after taking that attack?! No, wait, it seems that it can no longer move. It should be okay, right?”

Shikarabe suddenly gave his next order through the communication device.

“One more time! We’ll execute another barrage once we get the guidance device attached on its body!! Make sure that your rocket launcher is ready!!”

Yamanobe voice was heard next.

“Number 2 here. Roger that, I’m on it.”

Then followed by Varga.

“This is number 3. What about me? Should I put the jamming smoke again?”

Shikarabe quickly answered Varga’s questions.

“Wait for a sec, let me check for a bit… It seems that it no longer has any long-range weaponries, it should be fine without the smoke. So save the

smoke for the next bounty monster. Or you can use it later if things get dicey."

"Roger that. It seems it did lose its huge cannon after all, so I guess there's no need to put up the smoke, huh… What the heck is that?!"

Varga's sudden surprise was conveyed to everyone through the communication device.

Everyone in that place had a different reaction after watching that explosion, some of them thought that they already won and relaxed their guard, while some of them did not lower their guard thinking that it was still alive. Although there were differences, all of them thought that they already had the upper hand and they could just take it easy from there.

But a sudden turn of events that was out of their imagination suddenly happened in front of them. The Tank Tarantula's abdomen that was already crushed, suddenly cracked open and vomited hundreds of small Tank Tarantulas.

The tiny spiders quickly crawled out and flooded the area. Although they were tiny, it was only in comparison with the big Tank Tarantula. In reality, some of those so-called tiny spiders were even 2 meters long. Those tiny Tank Tarantula used the caterpillar track and wheels equipped under them to run toward Akira and the other Hunters.

The small cannon fixed on their backs moved and aimed at Akira before firing a warhead at him. It landed somewhere near Akira's vehicle and exploded. Although they were way weaker than the big Tank Tarantula, even a durable vehicle for exploring the wasteland would not be able to take that many shots from those tiny Tank Tarantulas.

Alpha quickly mustered the vehicle back on. The countless tiny Tank Tarantulas released another barrage that landed behind Akira's vehicle. When that happened, Togami started screaming.

While standing on top of the rocking vehicle, Akira aimed his CWH anti-material rifle and pulled the trigger. The released CWH special bullet hit

one of the tiny Tank Tarantula and blew it to small pieces.

Akira’s face turned grim.

“It seems that CWH special ammo works on these monsters! So is it like their body is weaker than the big one?! But there is just too many of them!”

Their number was just too large, destroying a few dozens of them would not change the situation much.

Alpha’s face also looked grim as she said.

“But even so, you’ll at least need to shave its number. Aim for the next target, quickly!”

“I know!”

Akira quickly took an aim at another Tank Tarantula and pulled the trigger, the CWH special ammo pierced through that Tank Tarantula and blew it to small pieces.

The other Tank Tarantulas just trampled over its dead brethren’s pieces as they pushed forward while shooting at Akira, but Alpha was able to evade those barrages easily thanks to her advanced driving skill.

The explosions from the warhead propagated through the air and reached Akira’s skin. He just gritted his teeth and said to Alpha.

“You won’t let them hit us, right?”

“Of course, don’t worry.”

“I see.”

“If it’s only that much, we can at least take some shots and still be safe, you know.”

“You’re talking about the vehicle, right? Then how about me?!!”

“If you don’t want to get hit, then do your best in reducing their number. The chance of you getting hit falls by a lot even if you are only able to take out a few dozen of them.”

“Okay okay!! I just need to keep shooting at them, right?!!”

Akira got a bit irritated there, but he tried to keep himself calm as he took his aim. He focused his concentration, compressed his time perception, and aimed as best as he could before pulling the trigger. With Alpha’s support added to his aiming, he was able to hit his shot without wasting even a single bullet.

But even so, his situation was still dire. While he was taking out the tiny Tank Tarantulas, some of them were able to get closer to him and their shots were getting more and more accurate. As a matter of fact, his situation was getting worse with time.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 96, High Ammo Expense

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While the Hunters were having a hard time fighting the Tank Tarantulas, Shikarabe barked his order through the communication device.

“Just leave the monsters that are running away alone!! It’s not like you get any bounty money from destroying them! If they’re protecting the big Tank Tarantula, they might scatter off if we defeat the big Tank Tarantula!! So just focus your firepower on the big Tank Tarantula!! Number 2! How’s the marking going?!”

“This is number 2!! I was able to stick some guiding devices on its body, but the smaller Tank Tarantulas are destroying the guiding devices… Wait for a sec?! I spot one of the smaller Tank Tarantula carrying the guiding device away!! And it’s going in your direction with the guiding device!! If we shoot the rocket launcher without changing the target setting, some rockets will go in your direction!!”

“Dammit!! The big Tank Tarantula can’t move, right? Although it’ll reduce the power, it can’t be helped then, change the target setting to the big Tank Tarantula’s coordinate!! Number 2, focus on cleaning up the smaller Tank Tarantulas!! To all the Hunters with a rocket launcher, get ready to shoot the

rocket launcher in 1 minute! Keep your eyes on the counter in the communication device for the timing!!”

The sound in the communication device changed.

“59, 58, 57…”

The same count down was broadcasted to all the Hunters through the communication device. Although all the Hunters heard that, they were too preoccupied with something else to prepare their rocket launchers.

Akira’s face turned grim while shooting at the monsters around him. He gritted his teeth hard so that he would not inadvertently say something and bite his own tongue. He was in a situation where it would not help no matter how he cursed or screamed as a swarm of small Tank Tarantulas were trying to board his rocking vehicle controlled by Alpha.

Using the advantage of the telepathy that allowed him to talk even in the middle of such a fierce fight, Akira questioned Alpha about the current situation that he thought to be so unfair.

“Alpha!! Why are they aiming for me?!”

“It’s not only you, they’re also swarming Shikarabe’s vehicle too.”

“That’s because Shikarabe is the commander in this operation, right?!! He’s also riding a big and strong vehicle that looks intimidating, so no wonder why it’s sticking out in this situation! It even has that machine-gun equipped too!! While my vehicle is not that different from the others! So why is it only me?!”

At first, the smaller Tank Tarantulas that poured out from the big Tank Tarantula seemed to be expanding in all directions and tried to attack anything that they could find. But after they spread out a bit, they started to focus their attention and attack on Shikarabe and Akira.

Of course, the other Hunters were also getting attacked too. But it was rather obvious that most of the smaller Tank Tarantulas focused on Akira

and Shikarabe.

Alpha just smiled bitterly and said.

“Well, it might be because they first thought that both of you were somewhat easy to attack. But after a short time, it’s rather obvious that both of you can easily take out the small Tank Tarantulas without sustaining much damage. So the algorithm inside them might have set you and Shikarabe as strong enemies to defeat first. You can just think of it as bad luck.”

Akira got a bit annoyed and said smiling.

“Is it because of my bad luck?! Well, if you say so, then we can’t do anything about it, right?!”

Akira himself knew that he had bad luck. So if Alpha said that it was because of his bad luck, he could not do anything else except hoping that her support would be able to handle his bad luck.

On top of that rocking and swaying vehicle, Akira used his augmented suit to absorb the swaying and placed his leg against the vehicle’s frame to reduce the kickback from the CWH anti-material rifle as he kept on shooting at the smaller Tank Tarantulas closest to him. In that extremely dangerous situation where a slight shift of his centre of gravity would easily throw him off the vehicle, Akira kept on shooting as if he was possessed by a berserker.

Although the area around that place was already filled with Tank Tarantulas that was turned into scraps, their attacks did not slow down at all.

“Alpha!! No matter how you slice it, there are just too many of them?!! I already killed a whole lot of them, you know?!! The other Hunters are also fighting back and Shikarabe’s machine gun should’ve killed a whole lot of them too!! Why aren’t they slowing down at all although we’ve killed so many of them?!!”

Akira, Shikarabe and the other Hunters had killed a lot of small Tank Tarantulas. But it did not seem that the pressure from the small Tank Tarantulas was dying down at all.

“Even if the stomach of that big Tank Tarantula is filled with these small Tank Tarantulas, there should be a limit on how many of them can fit there!! This number doesn’t make sense at all!! I know that I have bad luck, but no matter how bad my luck is, it’s not like they’re replicating themselves, right?! And even if that big Tank Tarantula is producing these small Tank Tarantulas from the metals that it ate just now, it still doesn’t make sense, you know?!!”

Alpha seemed to be hesitating as she said.

“About that though, I have bad news.”

“What is it?! Are they really replicating themselves?!!”

“That’s not it, these small Tank Tarantulas are also coming out from somewhere else other than the big Tank Tarantula. They’re gathering here from around the area too. If that big Tank Tarantula is like a queen ant, then it might have produced all these small Tank Tarantulas and spread them around this area. And so it might be calling all the small Tank Tarantulas in the area back to protect their nest.”

“Would spiders normally do something like that?!”

“No idea. But again, normal spiders won’t have big cannons or caterpillar tracks growing out from their body. So they might be basically 2 different things.”

Akira frowned.

“S-so, we have no other choice but to take out all of them? If that’s the case, how many of them are left?”

The seemingly endless swarm shaved on Akira’s physical and psychical stamina. He could feel the creeping death coming closer, but he tried to

brush that off by shredding the Tank Tarantulas to pieces using the CWH special ammo.

But that only worked assuming that the enemy number is limited. And since the situation there did not support that assumption, it greatly discouraged Akira.

“I have no answer for that. If Shikarabe’s guess is correct, they’ll scatter once we defeat the big Tank Tarantula. But let’s keep fighting assuming that you need to kill all of them. After all, even if Shikarabe’s guess is wrong, everything will be fine if you just kill them all.”

The countdown for the rocket launcher could be heard from the communication device.

“…6, 5, 4…”

Akira prepared his rocket launcher in panic. There was no need to take an aim, he just needed to pull the trigger and the targeting setting would take care of the rest. He then waited for the signal from the timer and pulled the trigger.

“…1, 0.”

Including the rockets launched from Akira’s rocket launcher, about 10 rockets soared to the sky before they changed their direction and flew toward the big Tank Tarantula.

All the small Tank Tarantulas focused their cannons at the rockets, in the end, only 6 rockets reached the big Tank Tarantula. Unlike the first barrage where they used guiding devices, this time they were not using any guiding device, thus the rockets hit the big Tank Tarantula not at the same time and in different places. But even so, the big Tank Tarantula once again was swallowed in explosions.

Unfortunately, the big Tank Tarantula survived that too. Or at least, the small Tank Tarantulas still stayed there to protect the big Tank Tarantula.

The countdown started again from the communication device.

“59, 58, 57…”

Akira twitched.

“That’s one hell of a monster, no wonder it gets a bounty on its head. But well, I bet we can kill it if we can execute the same barrage as that first barrage.”

“And in order to do that, you need to kill the small Tank Tarantulas that prevents you from doing so. You also need to note that not everyone will be able to participate in the next barrage since they have their hands tied dealing with the small Tank Tarantula.”

It was an extremely difficult thing to participate in the barrage while fighting back the small Tank Tarantulas. Thus there were only a small number of Hunters who could participate in the next barrage.

“So basically, we need to clean up the small Tank Tarantulas, huh?”

“Yep, that’s right. I’ll give you my support, so you should give your best too.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

There was no other way. Akira decided to believe that was the only way to get out of that situation as he continued fighting desperately.

The more monsters Akira took out, the more they would set him as a dangerous target and the more they focused on him. As more and more Tank Tarantulas swarmed him, Akira would defeat them which caused more monsters to focus on him. Though, Akira himself did not realize that cycle.

Although Alpha knew about that cycle, she decided not to tell Akira since she thought that there was no meaning in telling him.

Now, the reason as to why the monsters focused more on Akira was because of how good his aim was while he was moving on his vehicle. He

would snipe a monster far away from him even before Varga told him to do so, and that attracted the attention of the small Tank Tarantulas which saw that. Because of that, albeit only slightly, the monsters in that area focused more on Akira compared to the other Hunters.

If Akira did not do that, his threat level would be evaluated as the same compared to the other Hunters; a fact that even Alpha did not know about.

It was all Akira's bad luck. That was all there was to it just like what Alpha declared.

Togami was clinging for his life, due to the violent driving. He desperately grabbed on anything that he could find to make sure that he would not get thrown off-board from that violently swaying vehicle while trying to shoot at the small Tank Tarantulas around him.

But unfortunately, he could not do that. It was extremely difficult to shoot from a violently shaking vehicle, not to mention that the spiders were moving around rapidly. Thus he decided to shift from taking precise aim to just shooting randomly. But in the end, it only served to hold back the small Tank Tarantulas. Of course, some of the bullets hit the monsters, but it only killed a few dozen small Tank Tarantulas.

He also was not able to participate in the rocket barrage. He could not say anything since he might bite his own tongue. Although he joined the hunt hoping to prove his skill, he could not do much there.

[…Dammit!! This is pathetic!! So pathetic!!]

Togami kept on cursing on his own patheticness while shooting at the small Tank Tarantulas.

Some of the small Tank Tarantulas rushed toward Akira's vehicle. It might be because they had run out of cannon ammo, they did not shoot at all while rushing toward Akira.

Akira kept on shooting at the Tank Tarantulas starting from the one closest to him. Even if they did not shoot their cannons, his vehicle would still get

damaged if they collided their body with his vehicle with their momentum. And it would be extremely dangerous if his vehicle stopped in that situation.

Then here Akira made a mistake in his priority. Up until now, he prioritized the monsters nearest to him based only on their distances, but he should have considered the length of their bodies too.

While he was focused on a 1-metre long spider, a 2-metre long spider suddenly rushed toward him. But before it could crash its body onto Akira's vehicle, Akira quickly shot and destroyed its legs.

In the next moment, it detached its stomach from which thousands of smaller Tank Tarantulas poured out.

A few dozen Tank Tarantula flew toward Akira's direction. By pure reaction, he punched some of them back. But of course, he could not punch all of them, some of the small spiders got onto his vehicle.

Akira looked at those Tank Tarantulas in panic.

"What the heck are they?! There are even more of them?!"

Alpha quickly gave Akira an order.

"Akira! Get the Tank Tarantulas off the vehicle, quickly!! Otherwise, they're going to eat your vehicle!!"

Akira shifted his focus in a panic towards the Tank Tarantulas on his vehicle. They had already started munching on the vehicle's armour plating and seat. Alpha enhanced Akira's vision and showed the priority number on those monsters.

It would be the end if the spiders ate the vehicle's control device. Akira gathered all his focus, compressed his time perception as much as possible, pushed his augmented suit to the limit, and took out the small Tank Tarantulas as quickly as possible.

He kicked the tarantula eating the seat, pulled the one munching on the control wheel and threw it off-board. He then aimed his CWH anti-material rifle at the one eating on the bonnet, but he switched to AAH assault rifle in panic and shot the Tank Tarantula. If he used his CWH anti-material rifle special ammo there, it would have been extremely bad. He carefully aimed his AAH assault rifle in an angle that would blow the Tank Tarantula off his vehicle.

There were still many Tank Tarantulas on his vehicle, Akira tried to knock them off as fast as he could with his AAH assault rifle. There was no need to kill them, his main aim for now was to get them off his vehicle.

Akira was taken aback when he caught Togami aiming a high calibre rifle at the Tank Tarantula on his vehicle.

“Don’t!!!”

Akira inadvertently shouted at him and quickly kicked the Tank Tarantula that Togami was aiming at off his vehicle.

“What the hell are you doing?! Don’t shoot the vehicle with that rifle!! You’ll destroy my vehicle!!”

Togami flusteredly replied back.

“We don’t have the time for that now!! Like hell a wasteland vehicle is going to get destroyed because of that!!”

“It’s my vehicle, you know!?”

In reality, Togami was correct there. But Akira thought that Togami was using the same powerful ammo as his CWH anti-material special ammo, that was why he shouted at Togami when he saw Togami aiming at his own vehicle.

While they were debating there, the Tank Tarantulas did not stop munching on Akira’s vehicle.

Alpha then gave Akira another order.

“Akira, I’ll try to rock the vehicle and throw the Tank Tarantula off-board. Tell that boy not to get thrown off-board too.”

At first, Akira did not understand why Alpha said that, but the moment he did, he immediately shouted to Togami.

“Get a hold on something!!”

But Togami was so surprised when Akira shouted at him that he could not follow Akira’s order.

Alpha suddenly made a sharp U-turn. The inertia threw the small Tarantulas that were latching on Akira’s vehicle off-board together with Togami. Akira extended his hand to Togami who was flying in the air, but he could not reach Togami.

Togami flew and landed hard on the ground. His augmented suit was able to protect his body, but Akira’s vehicle did not slow down as it left Togami behind without any weapons.

“What the fu…!!”

Even before he could finish his sentence, his face froze. A 2-metre long Tank Tarantula suddenly leapt at him. It was not clear whether it was because that Tank Tarantula ran out of ammo or because it needed food, but that Tank Tarantula was trying to eat him.

Although it was not official or anything, Togami was someone hailed as a skilled Hunter among the anti-Katsuya faction. He quickly used the full power of his augmented suit to deliver a kick towards the Tank Tarantula and push it away from him. But that attack was only enough to stagger and slow down that Tank Tarantula for a few seconds.

The thought of death accelerated Togami’s mind as time seemed to be running slowly around him. The scene of a Tank Tarantula approaching him in slow motion was reflected into Togami’s eyes. In that slow-motion world, Togami was trying to scream.

But at the next moment, Akira suddenly appeared in his field of view, he drove a diving kick with both of his legs straight at the small Tank Tarantula that was approaching Togami. That powerful dive slammed that Tank Tarantula to the ground and drove its huge body into the ground.

In front of Togami, who was dumbfounded by that sudden turn of event, Akira stood and aimed his CWH anti-material rifle at the monster that was lying under his feet and pulled the trigger. The CWH special ammo made short work of that Tank Tarantula as it ripped through its torso and shredded it to small pieces.

But Akira did not stop there, he immediately started shooting at the other Tank Tarantulas surrounding him with his CWH anti-material rifle. The small Tank Tarantulas that were trying to attack him quickly turned to scraps.

Akira's vehicle made another sharp U-turn to pick-up Akira back. Akira grabbed Togami and jumped into his vehicle with perfect timing before the small Tank Tarantulas were able to swarm them.

Akira's vehicle then made another sharp U-turn and quickly left behind the Tank Tarantulas that were chasing Akira. He then just threw Togami in the back seat, it was obvious from his face that Togami could not process what just happened.

Alpha smiled bitterly.

"Akira, that was dangerous, you know?"

Akira's face looked grim as he answered back.

"It can't be helped, we can't afford to lose any fighting power in this situation!"

"But it doesn't seem like he can give you much support even if you have him on board, you know? Not to mention that he was even a bother."

"You're right about that, it leaves me with one option."

Akira lightly smiled.

“I’ll contact Shikarabe and throw him to Shikarabe’s APC.”

Just like Akira, Shikarabe’s APC was also getting swarmed by the Tank Tarantulas. And when he shot those Tank Tarantulas, even smaller Tank Tarantulas would pour out from the dead Tank Tarantula. Not to mention, the machine gun fixed on his APC could not shoot the Tank Tarantulas beside the APC.

Shikarabe noticed that the vehicle’s durability shown in the control device was slowly falling down, he then clicked his tongue and said.

“It can’t be helped, huh. I guess I have no other choice but to take care of it myself.”

Shikarabe turned on the autopilot and left the steering wheel. He opened the back door of that APC to shoot down the Tank Tarantulas that attached themselves on the APC, but he then noticed Akira’s vehicle heading his way.

When Akira got close enough to Shikarabe’s APC, he then grabbed Togami and threw him over to Shikarabe’s direction. Shikarabe caught Togami and pulled him inside his APC while Akira did not slow down at all as he left Shiakarabe’s APC behind.

Shikarabe laughed.

“That boy literally threw Togami to my vehicle. He really meant what he said, huh?”

Togami was still dumbfounded since Akira threw him, so Shikarabe lightly kicked him to get him back into reality.

“Welcome back. You came just at the right time. You can drive an APC right, Togami?”

But Togami still could not process what just happened. Shikarabe grabbed him and shook his head to force him back.

“Togami!! Can you drive? Or not? Give me an answer!”

“I-I can drive.”

“Take the wheel now. The auto-drive function is not that smart after all, call me if you find any troubles.”

After he said that, Shikarabe grabbed the ceiling, swung his body through the opened back door of the APC, and landed on the top of the APC. He then immediately shot down the Tank Tarantula latching on the side of the APC. The Tank Tarantula that Shikarabe shot would then landed and rolled over on the ground, shredded to small pieces.

Togami, who just came back to his senses, rushed to the steering wheel in panic.

Akira was surprised when he looked at Shikarabe.

“That’s amazing how he can do that. He’s on top of a vehicle, you know? Isn’t he afraid what would happen if he falls off from there?”

Alpha just smiled and replied.

“Don’t just look at him, you have your own job to do. The number of small Tank Tarantulas is slowly decreasing.”

“Ah, you’re right.”

“Since there’s no need to worry about that boy anymore, I’ll go even faster than before. Make sure to be careful, okay?”

“Wait for a sec, we’re going to go even faster?”

“Yep, here I go.”

Akira’s vehicle suddenly sped up, Akira flusteredly tried to balance himself.

All the hard work by the Hunters there seemed to be bearing fruit, the situation slowly turned for the better for the Hunters. Akira leaked out some

cursing as Alpha controlled the vehicle so haphazardly that it would not be strange if the control device was broken, but he did not stop shooting at the small Tank Tarantulas around him.

If it continued at that rate, it was only a matter of time before the Hunters won that fight. But that was unrealistic, after all, they would run out of ammo at that rate if they did not try to change the flow of the battle.

After hearing that explanation, Akira sounded doubtful as he asked Alpha.

“Are you sure? Are we seriously going to lose?”

“Yep, we’ll lose at this rate. If we can do another barrage just like the first one, I believe we can end the fight though. I’m sure Shikarabe also did not see this coming at all.”

“Then why are we not pulling back at all? If we don’t have any chance to win, we’ll only spend more ammo the longer we drag this fight.”

“That’s because it’s not like we have no chance to win. Moreover, if only the other Tank Tarantulas did not come, or if only there were not as many Tank Tarantulas, we would have won by now. That sense of so close from winning must have caused them to delay the withdrawal. I’m sure they’ve also used the ammo reserved for the next bounty monster in this fight, that must be also what prevented them from calling the hunt off. Assuming that we’ll win this fight in the end, I think it’s the correct choice to continue the fight.”

“But we’ll lose at this rate, right? So what’s the big plan?”

“I think Shikarabe will tell you the next plan soon.”

Alpha’s guess was correct, Shikarabe quickly gave a new order through the communication device.

“Everyone, listen!! The next barrage will be the last barrage. If we can’t defeat the bounty monster with the next barrage, we’ll pull back from here! Change the setting on the rocket launcher, set the air-time to max before

you shoot the rockets. Use all the rockets that you have for the next barrage. Once you shoot the rockets, focus on destroying the spiders that are trying to shoot down the rockets. Next one is the last one!! So put your back on it! If we can't kill the bounty monster here, you guys won't get any money!!"

Akira lightly laughed and let out a big sigh, his face turned serious.

"Alright then, whatever happens, the next one is the last barrage. If it's possible, I want to win this. I'll give my best shot."

Alpha smiled.

"It seems that you have calmed down now. That's a good thing."

"Well, I'm more or less used to this kind of thing already. The only problem is whether I can get money in the end or not. After all, I don't want to get used to achieving losses."

"I'll also provide my best support. Well now, let's prepare for the final attack… Or at least that's what I want to say here. Someone is approaching."

Akira tilted his head and proceeded to look around, he found a vehicle approaching him while shooting the Tank Tarantulas that were swarming that vehicle. It was Nergo's vehicle and Nergo was inside it.

Nergo drove to Akira's side and said to him.

"Yo, I'm Nergo. Is it okay if we go together? I've already used most of the rockets that were given to me, you see."

Beside Akira's own share of rocket launcher, Togami's share of rocket launcher was also still left in Akira's vehicle. And since Togami could not join the barrage from before, his share of rocket launcher was still mostly unused.

"Well, that would help me a lot. So sure, I don't really mind."

"Thanks."

Nergo then jumped over to Akira's vehicle. Nergo's vehicle was barely disturbed when he jumped off and he also barely made any sounds when he landed on Akira's vehicle with his leftover rocket launcher.

Akira was surprised when he saw that. Nergo then said to Akira.

"What's wrong?"

"Ah, no, it's just that you did that so casually that it surprised me for a bit."

"I spent quite a lot of money on this body, you see. Ah, right, we're in the middle of a battle here, I need to get back to my job."

Nergo then started shooting at the monsters around him, Akira flusteredly followed suit.

"By the way, you're Akira, right?"

"Yep."

"I saw you fight. You're really skilled. As you can see, I'm a cyborg. So like, by any chance, are you a cyborg too?"

"No, mine is a normal human body. I'm just putting an augmented suit on top of it."

"I see, so you're an augmented suit user, huh?"

Nergo took a good look at Akira while still shooting the monsters around the area without having much trouble. In contrast to that, Akira was having a hard time answering his question in that situation.

"W-what?"

"It's nothing, sorry for staring at you. That's just a how I am, you see. I can't help but to get interested in strong people like you. But still, even though there's your augmented suit, it's still amazing that you can do those moves with a normal human body. Did you ever get an organ upgrade or something similar? Or maybe it's out of a hard training regime?"

“I’m not using nanomachines to enhance my body. As for training… Well, I do but I train myself. So if I have to say which one, I guess it’s because of my training.”

“I see, that’s pretty amazing.”

Akira frowned, he seemed to be weirded out.

“W-what’s with this guy? Alpha, do you know anything about him?”

“Just like you can see, he’s a cyborg. And judging from his move just now, it seems that it’s a pretty high-quality cyborg body. I guess that’s all. While as for why he’s interested in you, well, you’re doing pretty well although you’re just a boy. So it’s normal if he’s a bit interested in you.”

“I-I see.”

Akira still felt a bit weirded out there, but he decided to just drop it and focus more on the enemies in front of him. He was in the middle of the battlefield and right before they would launch the last coordinated attack, so it was not like he had a lot of leeways there.

Nergo did not say anything in particular after that and continued shooting accurately at the monsters around them.

Suddenly, Shiakarabe’s voice could be heard from the communication device together with the countdown.

“Get ready, it’s the time!! Keep shooting until I give an order to pull back!! If you don’t participate until the very end, I’ll judge that you didn’t contribute at all in this battle!! So don’t expect to get any money even if you can return back alive!!”

“5, 4, 3…”

Akira and Nergo readied their rocket launchers. Akira used both of his hands to carry one rocket launcher, while Nergo used each of his 4 arms to carry 4 rocket launchers. Akira was a bit intimidated when he saw Nergo like that.

“…2, 1, 0!”

Together with the countdown, Akira and Nergo released a barrage of rockets. There were basically 5 rocket launchers spewing rockets on top of that one vehicle. The other Hunters also tried their best to participate in that barrage after Shikarabe threatened them. In the next moment, the rockets crowded the sky in that area.

Akira put down his rocket launcher and was about to reload but Nergo suddenly stopped him.

“I’ll do the rockets, I have more arms after all. You should focus on the small Tank Tarantulas.”

“O-Okay.”

Akira picked up his CWH anti-material rifle and started shooting at the spiders that were trying to shoot down the rockets. Thanks to Alpha’s support, he barely wasted any ammo.

Behind him, Nergo did not stop shooting rockets to the sky while looking closely at Akira’s movement.

Countless rockets soared to the sky. After flying upward for some time, they reoriented themselves toward their target. The small Tank Tarantulas tried to shoot them down, but thanks to Shikarabe and the other Hunters there, most of them could not shoot down the rockets. The rockets then hit the huge Tank Tarantula almost simultaneously and created a bigger explosion than the first barrage.

Akira frowned.

“If this doesn’t work, we really have no chance to win.”

Alpha smiled.

“That’s true, but it seems there’s no need to worry about that. Look at that.”

The big Tank Tarantula exploded to small pieces and the other small Tank Tarantulas around it suddenly stopped moving. Some of them that were running crashed to each other as if they lost control of their bodies.

“It seems that the control device on the big Tank Tarantula is destroyed, so the smaller Tank Tarantulas have stopped working. It’s alright now.”

“We won, right?”

“Yep.”

Akira let out a big sigh. Rather than the excitement of the victory, it was more out of relief.

Nergo sounded casual as he said to Akira.

“It seems that we have successfully defeated the big Tank Tarantula. That’s good. I’ll excuse myself then. We’ll see each other again if we’re fated to meet again.”

He then jumped back to his own vehicle and left Akira.

Akira sounded unenthusiastic as he asked Alpha.

“So, in the end, just who exactly is that guy?”

“No idea. Well, it has nothing to do with us anyway.”

“Well, that’s kind of true… Ahhh, I’m so tired.”

Akira looked super tired as he dragged himself back to the driver seat. Alpha smiled and tried to cheer him.

“You did great there, Akira.”

With this, the 800,000,000 Aurum bounty monster was defeated by Shikarabe’s team.

The other Hunters also stayed there after they defeated the bounty monster. Unlike when you killed a normal monster, there were a lot of things to take care of after you defeated a bounty monster.

Shikarabe contacted the Hunter Office to inform them that he killed the bounty monster. He had made some arrangements beforehand so that he could use the powerful communication device in his APC to hook up with Drankam's communication line to reach the Hunter Office.

In order to confirm the kill, the Hunter Office would send some people to check the leftover wreckage or the dead body of the bounty monster. They would then handover the reward there or check the member of the team that defeated that bounty monsters, basically, there were a lot of things to do.

The ownership of the dead body or the leftover wreckage of the bounty monster would be transferred to the Hunter Office. It was in order to dissect the monsters that were set as bounty monsters. If it was a biological monster, it might be the result of some kind of mutation. And if it was a mechanical monster, it might have some rare materials or metals or machines. All of them would be carried to the lab for more inspections and research.

Of course, it was not like they would not pay anything if there was no corpse or leftover wreckage. Hunter Office knew well that telling the Hunters to gather the leftover after they turned the monster into small pieces would only cause a needless fight.

But there were cases where the Hunters who defeated the bounty monster refused to give away the ownership to the Hunter Office, which in that case, there would be some negotiations. Depending on the result, the Hunters might even not receive any bounty prizes at all. Sometimes, there were Hunters who had no trouble with money at all, they hunted bounty monsters just for the sake of fame. These Hunters sometimes did not receive any bounty prize, and instead, they would preserve the bounty monster to decorate their homes.

Shikarabe and the other Hunters stayed there in order to take care of those things. But not all of them were resting. Shikarabe gave orders to some

particular Hunters who were barely useful in the previous battle, mostly, they were Hunters who joined the hunt in order to pay for their debts.

Shikarabe told those Hunters to gather the pieces of the big Tank Tarantula in one place, that included its cannon, legs and armour plating. It was not like they were doing that because they had to, after all, if they left those pieces alone, the Hunter Office would gather those pieces themselves.

But even so, Shikarabe still told them to do that. It was for the sake of speeding up the administration process in the Hunter Office. With the Tank Tarantula down, there were still 3 bounty monsters. Most of the Hunters there thought that it was the end, but Shikarabe thought that he was just getting started.

Akira was resting while having his lunch. Since he took his breakfast early in the morning that day, it was rather late for lunch. He leaned on his vehicle in a relaxed manner as he savoured his portable Hunter food.

Alpha was sitting in front of Akira while also enjoying her food. Of course, it was all just images. It was only to fit the mood.

Akira was eating the sandwich in his hand while watching the sandwich that Alpha was eating.

“…For some reason, that sandwich looks pretty delicious.”

“Want to have a bite? Say ahhhh…”

Alpha smiled when she said that as she offered her sandwich to Akira. The soft-looking bread, fresh looking vegetables, sauce-covered meat, everything about that sandwich looked delicious. There was a bite mark left by Alpha too.

Akira frowned.

“Can you stop teasing me like this?”

That extremely delicious-looking sandwich was not real. Even if Akira extended his hand, he would not be able to even touch that sandwich, and of

course, it was impossible for him to taste it.

In front of the smiling Alpha, Akira returned back to eating his sandwich while pouting. Although it was the same sandwich that he had this morning, he somehow felt that it was lacking this time.

“Alright then, that’s it. I’ll eat something delicious once I return from this hunt. Let’s just forget about the price and treat me with something delicious.”

Alpha who listened to Akira’s statement smiled and said to him.

“That sounds like a good idea. You need to at least get a taste of that level of luxury. It seems that it was worth showing that to you.”

“What lies. You were just poking fun at me, weren’t you?”

“Oh my, I’ll never lie to you, you know. Not now, not ever.”

Alpha seemed to be having so much fun there. Akira just went back to eating his sandwich without saying anything back.

Shikarabe and his friends were also taking a break near Shikarabe’s APC. Togami was also with them. The Hunter Office was collecting the names of who defeated the bounty monster, and it was 4 names–Shikarabe, Yamanobe, Varga and Togami.

Shikarabe sounded annoyed as he mumbled.

“They’re late. How much longer until the people from the Hunter Office are here?”

Shikarabe wanted to hunt the next bounty monster as soon as possible. But he could not afford to move away from that place until he dealt with the aftermath of the hunt with the Hunter Office’s staff.

Yamanobe tried to calm Shikarabe down as he gleefully said.

“Calm down. We got our minimum target. We can take our time hunting the rest.”

Varga joined in.

“At least we got the first bounty monster, there’s no news about someone else taking out the other bounty monsters. Just think of it as a small break so we can hunt the next monster in our tip-top shape. Leaving us aside, even if we go now, I’m sure the others are tired that they won’t be much of help, you know?”

After hearing the other’s opinion, Shikarabe finally calmed down.

“…You’re right, I guess I’m too impatient, huh. That’s so not like me at all.”

Shikarabe might have gotten too excited after killing a bounty monster, that was what he thought as he took a breath to calm himself down.

Yamanobe laughed and said.

“But still, that Tank Tarantula was really strong. The 800,000,000 Aurum prize is a scam. That one should have at least 1,200,000,000 Aurum prize money.”

Varga laughed.

“No no no, I want at least 1,400,000,000 Aurum. It has been quite a while since I had such a difficult fight. Not to mention that we got some dead Hunters too. How many got killed in that fight?”

“5 Hunters. All are debt-ridden Hunters and I heard one of them was killed since his observer shot him when he tried to run away.”

“So it’s basically 4 Hunters, huh. Well, considering that we fought a bounty monster, I think we did well.”

Yamanobe and Varga were in a good mood. But that was not the case for Shikarabe. Yamanobe, who noticed that decided to ask him.

“What’s wrong? You don’t seem that happy.”

“The bounty prize… It’s 800,000,000 Aurum, right?”

“Yep. It’s true that it’s rather unfortunate we can only get that much money after defeating such a powerful monster. But it’s not like we don’t get any profits either, right? Not to mention that none of us got injured too. Result-wise, I think it’s not that bad, you know?”

Shikarabe looked a bit annoyed thinking of what was coming and at the same time, a little worried as he said.

“We spent more ammo than we expected. So subtracting the ammo expense from the 800,000,000 Aurum and dividing the rest among the number of Hunters alive… I’m just wondering if Akira would be happy with that number. Unlike Nergo, Akira did not join the hunt just for connection or renown. It’s purely for money… Although we did agree on that contract, thinking about his share, I’m not sure if he’ll be happy about it.”

The unexpected ammo expense was also proof of just how hard that fight was. It was as well the very reason that would cause trouble for the incoming negotiation. The trouble caused by that unexpected ammo expense could have been avoided if there was enough money. Being a Hunter was not a cheap occupation after all.

Yamanobe and Varga looked at each other and smiled. Varga then said to Shikarabe.

“Well, negotiating with him is your job. So good luck with that.”

Although Shikarabe was the leader of the team that had defeated a bounty monster, he did not seem happy at all as he let out a sigh.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 97, Contribution During The Battle And Evaluation

Index

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Togami was fiddling with his information terminal, he was trying to see Akira's Hunter record.

Akira said that his Hunter Rank was 21. After knowing that Akira's Rank was lower than his, Togami started mocking Akira. But now, he was hoping that it was actually just him making a bad joke there.

Togami had seen Akira in action up close and felt the difference in their skill. He experienced it firsthand and understood the fact that Akira was too strong for a Rank 21 Hunter. But that was not the biggest problem yet.

The biggest problem was how Akira was so casual about it. He did not show even a trace of pride, snub, or self-confidence in his own skill. Although he was strong, he was not prideful of his own skills at all.

[…Don't tell me that it's normal to be that strong for a Rank 21 Hunter, or is it? No, that can't be normal! He's definitely weird! He's abnormal!! So there's just no way…]

If it was normal for a Rank 21 Hunter to be as strong as Akira, then there would be no problem at all. But if that was the case, if Akira's strength was considered normal, then it would mean that Togami was weak according to that standard. For Togami, who always thought that he was a skilled Hunter and prided in that, it was a bitter pill that was too hard to swallow.

Togami tried to check Akira's Hunter Rank while half praying. But his expression showed that his prayer was not answered. According to the record from the Hunter Office, Akira was indeed a Rank 21 Hunter.

Togami was still in a shocked state as he asked Shikarabe.

"Uhmmm… There's something I want to ask."

Although Togami was a part of the anti-Katsuya faction, he was still a young Hunter. So in short, he was a type of Hunter that Shikarabe hated. Since Shikarabe had no particular impression on Togami yet, he still saw Togami as one of the young Hunters that he did not like.

Shikarabe sounded annoyed as he said.

"What?"

If it was the usual Togami, he would have lashed back when Shikarabe said that to him. But not this time, his face looked tense as he continued.

"About that Akira… Who exactly is he?"

"What do you mean by that? He's a Hunter that I paid to join the hunt. I know that he's not from Drankam. But I have no plans to listen to your complaints about taking in a Hunter who is not from our gang."

Togami flusteredly tried to correct Shikarabe who was misunderstanding him.

"That's not what I meant! That guy, I won't accept that someone like him is just Rank 21, you know?! It's definitely strange!!"

Shikarabe was a bit surprised but he quickly understood what Togami was talking about. He smiled mischievously for a few split seconds, then his face immediately returned back to normal.

“Hunter Rank is an indicator of how good a Hunter is in his job, but it doesn’t show how strong they are in a fight. If you have great stealth skill, you can avoid any monsters and return from an old-world ruin with a big load of relics. And if you can bring expensive relics back to the Hunter Office, you’ll be able to raise your Hunter Rank despite having no skill in fighting at all. And conversely, even if you have an amazing fighting skill but you have problems bringing back relics from the ruins, then your Hunter Rank will be low. But well, I bet it’s rare for you to find that kind of Hunter though. It’s unavoidable to encounter monsters when you go to the old-world ruins after all. So it’s important for them to learn how to fight. For those Hunters who are good at fighting but bad at exploring the ruins, they would increase their Hunter Rank through taking monster-hunting requests. That’s why it’s not fully wrong to decide the skill of a Hunter from his or her Hunter Rank.”

After Shikarabe said that, he smirked at Togami.

“But, uh, what can I say? Let’s say that there’s someone who thinks Hunter Rank is proportional to fighting skill. That guy has always been taking easy requests to increase his Hunter Rank, and when he finally works together with another skilled Hunter, he realizes that he’s actually slowing his partner down. Let’s say that person misunderstands his own skill since he has always been focusing only on increasing his Hunter Rank, I’m sure it’ll give him a shock when he sees how the skill of his partner is so different compared to what he was expecting. Even more so when his horrible personality made him not to doubt his skill but instead look down and mock his partner… Ah, I’m not saying that guy is you though, Togami. After all, it’s completely a matter of individual personality. But well, it’s not like I want to say bad things about the gang that I belong to, but the truth is that kind of Hunters have been increasing lately in Drankam and it’s true that people have started saying bad things about Drankam. Something like the Hunters from Drankam are nothing but incompetent Hunters with powerful equipment. But I don’t think you’re one of them, okay? After all, I invited

you to join the hunt for the bounty monster. I have no idea what indicators they used when they picked you, but if the people in the upper echelon picked you, so maybe they're not mistaken, just maybe."

Togami did not say anything as he listened to Shikarabe. But his face turned pale as he said.

"…I'll go and get some fresh air for a bit."

Togami only said that before he left Shikarabe, he seemed a bit wobbly as he left that place.

"Just come back before the Hunter Office staff is here."

Shikarabe said that and saw Togami off.

After Togami left, Varga who had been holding back, exploded in laughter.

"Shikarabe, you do have a bad personality, you know. No matter how you think about it, Akira is the one who is abnormal. That kid is right, it's weird for someone as strong as him to be just Rank 21. There's no way a Rank 21 Hunter can be worth more than 100,000,000 Aurum, you know?"

Shikarabe just laughed and replied.

"Don't be rude. I wasn't lying, you know? And I did say that it was not the case for Togami, right? So I'm not responsible for how he takes that, alright? If he takes my words the way I meant it, then there should be no problem."

Yamanobe smiled and joined in.

"But he's a part of the anti-Katsuya faction, right? Aren't you supposed to be liking that guy?"

"It's fine. He just doesn't like the fact that Katsuya has girls surrounding him. Not to mention that it's true he's getting advantage from that young Hunter preferential treatment program, and he indeed got ahead of himself back then. People like him will change the moment Katsuya recognizes his

skill or praises him. I can guarantee that. So from that point of view, he might as well be a part of the Katsuya faction."

"Ahhh, you're right about that. That's a totally possible outcome."

It seemed that Shikarabe's anger on the Drankam's young Hunters had subsided as he and his friends laughed together.

Varga then returned back to his serious mood as he asked Shikarabe.

"Shikarabe, I want to confirm what's our plan after this. Are we going to hunt for the next bounty monster?"

"I haven't really decided yet. It depends on how our situation will turn out. Although we used most of our reserve ammo, we might be able to procure a refill depending on the route that we take. It also depends on whether we will hunt the next bounty monster alone or we will join the other team."

"What will we do about the other team members if we join the other Hunter team? We hired them without the Hunter Office's approval, they might cause trouble if we bring them when joining another team, you know?"

"To be honest, I want to hunt for the next bounty monster only by ourselves. But if we join another team, we won't be bringing the others. As Varga said, it'll only cause more trouble after all. So I'll be just bringing Hunters from Drankam, which basically means the three of us plus Togami. Not to mention that the record in the Hunter Office also only has our names as the people who defeated the Tank Tarantula."

Yamanobe sounded disappointed as he said.

"I see, to be honest, I hope we can at least bring Akira and Nergo, you know. Those two contributed more than I thought they would in the last fight."

It was all thanks to Shikarabe, Akira and Nergo taking all the heat from the Tank Tarantula that Yamanobe and Varga were able to approach the Tank Tarantula without any troubles. Originally, they had put an extra gimmick to

force the other Hunters to get close to the Tank Tarantula in case they refused to during that fight.

The vehicles used by the other Hunters were prepared by Shikarabe and his friends. They rigged those vehicles so they could control those vehicles from Shikarabe's APC. Of course, they installed that gimmick to force the other Hunters to be the decoys. Although in the end, they did not resort to it, they did make preparation for such a thing.

Yamanobe thought of something and voiced out his idea.

"How about bringing the other Hunters together with us by hiring them through a formal request?"

Shikarabe instantly replied back.

"That sounds like a bad idea that would cause a lot of trouble during the negotiation. So if you're going to do that, make sure to take care of the aftermath too, okay? I won't help you though."

"Me neither. I guess that's indeed a bad idea, huh?"

Yamanobe quickly stepped down without much resistance. In terms of its reward and difficulty, hunting a bounty monster was a very sensitive subject. So if Yamanobe brought along Hunters who were not from Drankam, it meant that he would have to negotiate with the other factions too. Even Yamanobe would not want to have to face that.

The Hunter Office's staff arrived not too long after that.

Shikarabe and his friends finished the administration work and loaded the leftover wreckage from the Tank Tarantula that they had gathered beforehand into the Hunter Office's truck.

After they finished their business with the Hunter Office, they still had to take care of some administration stuff in Drankam. Shikarabe used his information terminal to contact someone from Drankam but sounded unhappy as the conversation went on.

“… I see… Alright then, I’ll send you the meeting coordinate… Yeah, I’ll take over the Hunters from that side too, we’ll go once we’re ready… I get it, okay!! Don’t give the leader position to those people! Just don’t!!”

Shikarabe then cut his call with Arabe. Varga looked at Shikarabe and asked him.

“So, what was that?”

“There’s only 1 bounty monster left. The team sent by Drankam to hunt the multi-turrets Maimai has failed. The multi-turrets Maimai itself has been defeated by another team. As for the overgrown snake… It seems that Katsuya’s team defeated it.”

Shikarabe sounded annoyed as he continued.

“As for the last one, they said that we need to group up with the rest of the Drankam teams to hunt for the last bounty monster—the Big Walker. Retrieve the rest of the equipment that we distributed to the other Hunters.”

Yamanobe tilted his head and asked Shikarabe.

“Sure, so then, why are you upset? The Katsuya faction splurged a lot of money for Katsuya to hunt the overgrown snake, so even you also expected that they’ll be able to take out that bounty monster, right?”

Shikarabe sounded really annoyed as he replied back.

“According to how we are going to form the new team and how big it is going to be, Katsuya might be the leader of the new team, you know!? The upper echelons are having a debate about that right now. The Big Walker’s bounty prize is 3,000,000,000 Aurum! So the leader of the team that takes out that 3,000,000,000 Aurum bounty monster will earn a lot of prestige, you know!! I would rather die than working under that boy!!”

Both Yamanobe and Varga nodded in agreement. Both of them knew well just how Shikarabe hated Katsuya.

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Both Elena and Sara looked exhausted as they were traversing through the wasteland. They were sitting on the driver seat and the driver's assistant seat in their vehicle respectively.

Not too far from them, there was the corpse of a big snake that Katsuya's team just defeated. It looked like the same snake that Elena and Sara met in Yonozuka station the other day except that it was even worse.

Its mouth was so huge that it looked like it could swallow a whole powered suit or a vehicle in one go. Its width was more or less as big as a small building and it was as long as a few dozen trailers.

That huge snake was a mix-match of all the monsters that it had eaten. A part of its scale was covered by fur from a biological monster, while other parts were covered by armour plating from a mechanical monster. There was even a tire too, it might have been from one of the Hunter vehicles that it had eaten.

The Hunter Office staffs were trying to move the big snake's carcass using heavy equipment. A group of young Hunters gathered not too far from them, they looked thrilled for being able to defeat the snake. But some of them looked sad since their close friends got injured or even killed in the previous fight.

A Hunter Office staff was talking with Katsuya on the spot, he must have a lot of things to talk about as the leader of the team that defeated the bounty monster. Behind him, Mizuha, the woman who supported the Katsuya faction, was standing while listening to their conversation.

Elena and Sara were not a part of Drankam, they used that excuse to take a rest in a different place not too far from Katsuya and his team. But actually, that was also an order from Mizuha.

Sara looked at Elena who was sitting in the driver seat, she sounded really tired as she asked.

"…Elena, is it okay if I whine a bit?"

Elena also sounded equally tired.

“…Sure, go ahead, although, I feel like I know what you want to whine about.”

“…Is that so? Well, I’ll take that offer then…”

Sara took a long breath and started whining.

“To be honest, the job this time isn’t worth all that hard work at all…”

“I can’t agree more with you… That was my mistake… I’ll have to be more careful about the contract term next time…”

“It’s fine… It’s not your fault…”

“Thanks… I’m glad that you’re my partner…”

Both Elena and Sara still looked super tired while they were showing their appreciation to each other.

Elena and Sara had exhausted their physical and psychical stamina. Of course, they had spent their stamina during their fight against the bounty monster. To be more precise, it was because the fight placed too much burden on Elena and Sara.

The nervousness when they hunted for the bounty monster, the fear when they encountered the bounty monster, and the chaos that ensued after that because of their lack of experience, it was almost impossible for the young Hunters to work as a team in such a battle.

Katsuya’s order was cut mid-way multiple times, it was because he always went to help his team members when the bounty monster smashed their vehicles.

There were even some young Hunters who kept shooting at the bounty monster up close although Elena and Sara warned them that they were too close and they needed to pull back. Those young Hunters refuted Elena and Sara by saying that it was not an order from the leader of the team, Katsuya.

While it was correct for them to only follow the orders of the leader, they ended up having to sustain heavy injuries because they fought the bounty monster up close.

It was Elena and Sara's job to make sure that as many young Hunters as possible return back alive. Thus they worked extremely hard to pick up those young Hunters and carry them to a safe place.

Elena and Sara tried their best to help out in that fight as they circled around the bounty monster. They were actually gathering information about the bounty monster as well as helping out the other Hunters. Although it looked like a dull job, it was actually a very important job.

But to some of the other young Hunters, it seemed like Elena and Sara were just going around doing nothing.

It was true that the ones who defeated the bounty monster were Katsuya's team, they were also the ones who shot a lot of rockets at that snake. So at a glance, it seemed that they were the ones that contributed the most during that battle. It was as if they would be able to defeat the bounty monster even without having Sara and Elena around. That was of course if their rockets could hit the bounty monster without the guided targeting provided by Elena.

But in reality, that was also possible. Katsuya and his team actually carried a huge amount of rocket launchers, enough to compensate the low accuracy with sheer numbers. And without Elena and Sara, that accuracy would drop even lower, which meant that they would have taken more time to defeat the bounty monster, thus they would have sustained more losses in that battle.

But not everyone present there thought so. Especially those people who wanted to boost a particular person's achievement and renown.

Both Elena and Sara seemed to be extremely tired.

"Elena… What's the plan after this again?"

“…For now, we just need to standby here until they finish their talk with the Hunter Office about the bounty monster. After that… Well, it depends on the situation.”

“…I see.”

“…Want to use some medicines?”

“I’m already using medicines…”

“I see…”

Even if the medicine could help recover some of their physical stamina, it could not recover their psychical stamina. They still could quickly react if they suddenly got thrown into a fight, but as long as there were no monsters around, they wanted to get a good rest there.

They then saw Katsuya and his friends approaching them, they also could see Mizuha with them.

The moment Elena saw Mizuha, she quickly straightened up the seat that she had set as flat as possible. After all, it was her job to handle the negotiation. While on the other hand, Sara who was in the driver’s assistant seat still had her seat stretched back, that was just how tired she was.

As Mizuha saw Sara still lying on her seat although Sara knew that she was coming, she looked slightly offended. But then she spoke to Elena without showing it.

“Elena-san. I want to talk about the request though, is it a good time now?”

“Sure.”

Elena was actually tired, but when she replied she wrung together all the focus that still remained within her. She could not afford to negotiate while being half-dazed for the sake of Sara too.

Mizuha then explained to Elena about the aftermath of defeating the bounty monster, then she shifted to discussing the reward money based on the

survival rate from that bounty hunting. She conveyed that the survival rate was lower than she had expected.

Mizuha then asked Elena a question.

“So, about this survival rate, do you have any excuse?”

“No, just subtract the reward as we’ve agreed beforehand.”

Elena’s expression did not change as she said that, Mizuha’s expression turned slightly stern.

“…Is that all?”

“…Yeah, but if you want me to say something, then about the survival rate, what’s your explanation for that?”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s exactly like I asked you. It’s not like you asked me the same question without knowing the meaning behind that question, right?”

Elena and Mizuha stared at each other without saying anything.

Elena thought that she and Sara properly did their duty. She believed that both of them did their best to help defeat the bounty monster. They did not think that they caused needless loss because of their incompetence. That was exactly why Elena refused to apologize for the low survival rate.

So she discreetly returned the question to Mizuha, to know if Mizuha thought that the low survival rate was caused by Drankam’s incompetency.

Mizuha then answered Elena’s question.

“Explanation, huh. Nothing.”

Mizuha had prepared a huge amount of money for that bounty monster hunt. She bought expensive equipment and gathered the people who would use that equipment. Although some of them had a rather low Hunter Rank

to join such a hunt, she prepared enough equipment and vehicles to compensate for the lack of experience and skill.

So if the survival rate was worse than she expected, she thought that it should not be because of her lack of preparation. Basically, it must be because of something else.

“I see.”

Elena only replied with that short sentence and returned back to staring at each other without saying anything. Although they did not communicate through words, both of them at least knew what the other person was thinking about.

Elena believed that the horrendous survival rate was because Drankam sent inexperienced Hunters for hunting a bounty monster. While Mizuha thought that it was because Elena and Sara did not do their job properly. Both of them at least understood very well that they were blaming each other.

Looking at both of the people, who he always looked up to, staring at each other without saying anything, Katsuya felt a bit uncomfortable. Thus, as the leader of his team, he interrupted.

“U-uhm, we’re here to talk about what to do from here on, is that okay?”

Both Elena and Mizuha turned to Katsuya. Katsuya flinched when the stare that they were giving to each other just now shifted to him.

“W-well, uh, we’ll be ready to move out soon, so I thought this is a good place to decide that…”

Elena realized that her tiredness caused her to be short-tempered there, thus she took a breath to calm herself down. Mizuha also decided to hold back her displeasure to show respect to the leader of the team that just killed a bounty monster.

Mizuha smiled to Katsuya.

“You’re right. Well then, Katsuya, please explain it to them.”

Elena waited for Katsuya’s explanation with a calm expression. Katsuya felt relieved as he started his explanation.

There was only one bounty monster left. In order to hunt for that bounty monster, they would group up with the rest of the Drankam teams. They still did not know who would be the leader of the new team. Since they would be moving to the meeting ground soon, he wanted Elena and Sara to come along with him again, but depending on the result, someone else might be the leader for the new team.

“So that’s basically the gist of it. Elena-san and Sara-san, please come with us for the next hunt too.”

Elena listened to Katsuya’s explanation without saying anything. After she understood the situation, she thought of all the possibilities inside her mind and came to a conclusion.

She then asked Mizuha.

“Mizuha-san, is what he said correct?”

“Yes, all Drankam teams will group up and hunt for the last bounty monster, the Big Walker. Since it seems that the other Hunter teams are also pooling up their fighting power to hunt for the Big Walker, we’re in a hurry here.”

Elena took a deep breath and said.

“I see. In that case, as we agreed beforehand, we’ll take our leave here.”

Katsuya was surprised hearing Elena’s answer, Mizuha was also making a similar face.

He then flusteredly asked.

“Elena-san!? Wait for a second, are you going to leave?”

Mizuha tried to hide her displeasure and calmly asked Elena.

“Can you tell me your reason?”

Elena calmly replied.

“Our contract is that we’ll accompany and provide support to Katsuya’s team while hunting for the bounty monster. In case if the situation changes, then we’ll have to negotiate a new deal. And if it happens during a fight, we’ll provide support until the fight ends before negotiating a new deal. Now that the team is going to be reorganized to the point that the leader might even change, not to mention that grouping up with the other teams means that there might be infighting which might evolve to a real fight, I believe that this is enough reason to see that the situation has significantly changed and there’s a need to negotiate for a new deal. So with that laid out, I decided that we’re going to take our leave here as stated in our original contract.”

“Don’t you think that we have the right to negotiate too?”

“Of course. If you want to make an offer after I’ve made that decision, you’re welcome to try. That is, if Drankam thinks that it is worth spending time negotiation with us.”

Elena and Mizuha lightly smiled at each other. From afar, they looked like they were getting along, but looking up close, unless you were a dense person, it was obvious that they were showing hostility toward each other.

Having Elena and Sara leave his team here means that the fighting power of his team would diminish. Both personally and as the leader of his team, Katsuya really wanted to avoid that.

Katsuya made a begging face as he asked Elena.

“Elena-san, do you really have to leave no matter what?”

Elena looked apologetic.

“I’m sorry, but yes. I think you can clearly see it, we’re exhausted. We’re not in a state that we can provide meaningful support. We might even just

slow you down. So according to our principle as Hunters, it’s not right to accept a request under this state.”

“I see…”

Katsuya looked very disappointed.

Mizuha also confirmed that there was no room for negotiation there, thus she gave up on bringing Elena and Sara along. Her expression then returned back to formal as she smiled and said to Elena.

“I understand. Although it’s a bit abnormal, our request ends here. We hope that you’ll be working with us again the next time we need your help. And please don’t forget to return the equipment that we lent you.”

“We’ve already returned all the equipment that we received from you including the unused ammo… Sara, we’re going home, so at least say your goodbye.”

Elena shook Sara to wake her up, Sara then slowly fixed her posture.

Although she was not planning to sleep there, she was so tired that her mind was a bit hazy, she could actually quickly fall asleep if she wanted to. She then reconfirmed what she heard.

“…We’re going home?”

“Yep.”

“…Okay.”

Elena smiled at Katsuya.

“So then, we’ll be parting ways here. Katsuya, I know that it’s not easy to be the leader of a team, so make sure to keep calm and give your best out there.”

Sara also smiled at Katsuya, she still looked very tired.

“…Katsuya, good luck. And also, be careful. Returning back alive is the biggest victory for a Hunter.”

Katsuya just smiled back and said.

“Yes. Elena-san and Sara-san too, please be careful on your way back. We’re in the middle of the wasteland after all.”

As Elena turned on her vehicle, suddenly someone shouted at her as if to stop her.

“You have no right to say that!!”

Everyone in that place focused their attention on to the source of that shout. It was Lilina. Lilina, who was behind Katsuya, pushed aside the people in front of her until she came right in front of Elena.

Sara sounded annoyed as she looked at Elena and asked her.

“Elena, did I say anything strange?”

“It might be just me. But I don’t think either of us said anything strange though.”

Elena also did not even try to hide her displeasure when she answered Sara’s question.

Lilina vented her anger and shouted as if she was close to exploding.

“Both of you!!”

Both Sara and Elena looked back at Lilina, who was glaring at both of them.

“I know it, you know!! Your duty was to protect us!! And your reward depends on how many of us survived that fight!! If only both of you properly did your job, there’s no need for them to die back then!!”

“About the details of our contract, due to non-disclosure agreement, I can’t really tell you though…”

Elena glanced at Mizuha when she said that, so Mizuha replied to Lilina in Elena’s place.

“They’re hired to increase the survival rate of the whole team and it’s true that in their contract, their reward depends on the resulting survival rate compared to the expected survival rate.”

“That means that I got it right, am I not?!”

After listening to Mizuha’s explanation, Lilina shouted at Elena again.

“Leaving aside why you even interpreted that, as your escort, we did our best to increase your survival rate during the fight, you know?”

“Save the bullshit! 8 people died in that fight! But even so, you are saying you did your best back there?! And now you’re saying that you’re going to leave the team midway?! What exactly is going on inside your heads?!”

Elena could feel a slight headache, as she tried to understand what Lilina meant. As she dug deeper into Lilina’s way of thinking, her headache got even worse before she finally drew a conclusion and checked it with Lilina.

“So in short, you who believe that being able to return back alive is the most important thing as a Hunter, think that we abandoned our duty or at least not taking our duty seriously since we prioritized our survivability, huh? And you want to say that if only we followed Katsuya’s orders and did our job better, then no one would have died in that fight, right?”

“That’s right!! So how are you going to take responsibility for that?!”

Lilina shouted even louder than before.

Elena and Sara looked so exhausted as they let out a big sigh. Elena then replied as the representative of her team.

“If you want to complain, direct that to the people who hired us. I’m sure they’ll at least give you some answers. See you then.”

Elena only said that before she accelerated her vehicle.

Lilina saw them off as she shouted at them.

“Wait!! Are you running away now?!”

Elena did not slow down at all, in fact, she even paced her vehicle faster.

Lilina then went to Mizuha. Her expression was showing her anger and sadness for losing her friends.

“Mizuha-san!! Why would you even hire those people?!”

Mizuha looked apologetic as she said to Lilina.

“We hired them since Katsuya vouched for them. He said that they’re skilled Hunters, but it seems that I put too much trust in them. I’ll properly take care of the rest, so just calm down, okay?”

Mizuha tried to calm Lilina down with a gentle voice. Lilina somehow calmed down thanks to that, but she still sounded displeased as she said.

“…Alright, I’ll trust you on this.”

Lilina slightly bowed and returned back to preparing to leave that place.

Katsuya looked conflicted as he saw Elena and Sara off. He was so surprised that he missed his chance to say anything before Elena and Sara left.

Mizuha looked at his expression and frowned. Katsuya’s conflicted expression showed what he was feeling deep inside his heart, and that included a lingering affection toward Elena and Sara.

Mizuha tried to smile and spoke to Katsuya.

“Katsuya, you should finish your preparation to leave this place too.”

“…Understood.”

When Mizuha spoke to him, Katsuya remembered that he was the leader of his team. Although a lot of things were going through his mind right now, he still had to do his duty as the team leader at the moment.

Katsuya turned and started walking back to his team.

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Elena and Sara were traversing through the wasteland in their vehicle.

Elena had set the vehicle on auto-pilot heading back to Kugamayama city. Since she left the driving to the control device, the vehicle was shaking more than before. If Elena was taking the wheel, she would have been able to adjust the acceleration and pick a better route, but Sara knew that Elena was also tired, thus she had no plans to blame her.

Elena and Sara were slouching on their seats. Since no one else was there, there was no need to keep up their appearances. It also showed just how exhausted they were. But they were at least rested enough to have a normal conversation.

Sara mumbled.

“Seriously though, that wasn’t easy at all.”

Elena couldn’t agree more with that.

“Yeah, you can say that again. That was really tiring in all sense.”

“Lilina, was it again? At first, she said that they don’t need us, then after that, she said we didn’t work hard enough. If they really could do that themselves, there was no need for our help, right? Do they even have any idea of how much you worked just to cover them?”

It was rare for Sara to sound so angry. It seemed that she did not like the fact that Elena was overburdened during the last fight.

Elena smiled bitterly.

“Looking at that, I feel like she’ll still have something to complain about even if we sacrifice ourselves to protect Katsuya’s team. Something like ‘these Hunters are pathetic to get killed by something like this’.”

Maybe it was because she was tired that Elena said something so mean that did not fit her character at all.

Sara just smiled bitterly to that rare side of Elena.

“I can see her doing something like that. Although she complained a lot about us being their escort, in the first place, she should realize the fact that they’re so weak to the point that they needed escorts in that battle. Or at least, the people in the upper echelon think that they’re not strong enough to go alone without an escort. It’s such a huge luxury to go hunting a bounty monster with escorts, you know? I wonder if she’s some kind of a rich lady who always has escort everywhere she goes since she was little, that might be why she thinks it’s normal to have escorts.”

As Elena listened to Sara’s mean joke, she remembered about a certain rumour within Drankam. It was about a rumour that there was a real rich lady in Drankam.

Up until now, Elena never took that rumour seriously, and even if it was true, it had nothing to do with her. That was why she did not care much about that rumour.

“Elena, what’s wrong?”

“Hm? It’s nothing. If it’s true that there’s a real rich lady in that gang, then the young Hunter preferential treatment program might have been created for that rich lady.”

“Ahhh, that does make sense. It might cause a problem if that rich lady alone got preferential treatment, that’s why they use that program as an excuse. That’s an interesting way of thinking, but… Isn’t that too much work to do just for the sake of one person?”

“I know, that’s just something that passed through my mind.”

Sara thought that Elena was joking as she lightly laughed, Elena also replied with a laugh.

Elena then continued.

“If this mysterious rich family is not supporting Drankam’s young Hunters, then all of those expensive equipment for the young Hunters would have to be paid by Drankam, you know. I don’t think that those young Hunters would do enough work to pay for those expensive equipment, which means that the more veteran Hunters would have to pay for them… I heard that there’s a gap growing between the young Hunters and the veteran Hunters, I guess I now know where’s that coming from.”

“Moreover, there are young Hunters who behave like that. It’s rather expected that a gap would grow.”

“The most important thing is not that there are young Hunters who behave like Lilina. With that many young Hunters in the gang, it’s to be expected to find at least one of them like her. The real problem is the fact that no one even tried to stop them. All of them agreed with her, although they didn’t express it, they at least agreed with what she said back there. I’m sure all of them back then at least agree with that girl to some degree, including that Drankam officer.”

“That basically means that most of the young Hunters in Drankam think like her, right?”

“Well, I at least don’t think that all of them think like her though.”

Both Elena and Sara thought of the same thing and took a deep breath. Sara then mumbled.

“I really really understand now why Shikarabe would complain about it.”

“Yeah, I totally agree.”

Elena just smiled bitterly when she said that.

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The Hunter Office staff finished checking the dead corpse of the overgrown snake. It was also for the sake of transporting the snake, after all, it was hard to transport that snake without knowing its weight.

The staff looked a bit confused when he saw the result of his scanner. A fellow staff who noticed that asked him a question.

“What’s wrong?”

“About this though, look at this cross-section view of the inner part.”

“This is… Empty… Huh?”

There was a big long hollow cavity inside the snake. Both of the staff looked confused.

“It doesn’t seem like its digestive tract, nor does it seem like someone gouged it out. What is this, was there something inside that cavity before?”

“No idea, but one thing for sure, this is not a leftover body from moulting.”

The other staff replied to that joke with a laugh as he said.

“So you’re saying that this whole thing is just skin? That’s just impossible. Moreover, it has ‘snake’ in its name because it looks like a snake, it’s not like it’s really a snake, you know.”

“Yeah, if I’m not mistaken, it’s one of those monsters that evolve depending on what they eat, right? Well, anyways the real examination will be done by those researchers after we take this huge thing to the lab.”

They then laughed together as they continued their job.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 98, Mocking Laugh

Index

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Akira was heading back to Kugamayama city.

The request for hunting the bounty monsters from Shikarabe ended after that fight against the Tank Tarantula. Although Akira did prepare himself to head out for the next hunt, Shikarabe decided to decline the offer because of his circumstances. So then Akira returned all the equipment that he received from Shikarabe and quickly headed back home.

As for the other Drankam Hunters, they quickly proceeded to the meeting ground. Nergo also accompanied Shikarabe and the other 2 Hunters from Drankam to the meeting ground, it seemed that he negotiated with them and made a deal so that he could go along as one of the Drankam's Hunters.

As for the rest of the Hunters, they had left the place. Akira did not know whether they also headed back to the city through a different route or they went to finish another request somewhere, but for now, he was heading back to the city alone.

Akira was listening to Alpha's commentary about his previous fight against the Tank Tarantula.

“So, as I’ve explained to you, that was the gist of that fight. The Hunters fought as planned and then won as planned. Although it’s as simple as that, it was rather impressive that they could turn their plan into reality like that.”

“After listening to your explanation, it sounds as if Shikarabe, Yamanobe and Varga could have won by themselves if they got lucky.”

“To be honest, their chance of victory was not zero. One thing for sure, if the Tank Tarantula does not call for reinforcement like back there, they have a good chance to defeat it all by themselves. I bet the reason why they hired you and the other Hunters is simply to get a better chance at victory as well as to increase the safety and reduce the time needed to defeat that Tank Tarantula. Although it seems that something a bit complicated is going on inside Drankam, he also made preparations to quickly move to the next bounty monster which means that it’s already within his original plan. So I’m sure the real reason was to shorten the time needed to defeat the bounty monster.”

Akira felt both amazement and admiration after hearing that.

“So, if they’re not hard-pressed with time, they would have hired fewer people or they might have even hunted the bounty monster alone, huh… Those bounty monsters are really strong and it’s amazing how Hunters would still hunt for them. I guess that’s why those Hunters get renown from hunting bounty monsters, huh?”

That would explain why so many Hunters went out to the wasteland hunting for the bounty monster, and it seemed that Shikarabe and his friends’ skills were on a different level compared to those Hunters.

“If I have to be extremely picky, I would say that the only bad thing about that hunt was that it expended too much money. They prepared a lot of one-time-use equipment, so I’m sure they’ve spent quite a sum of money to prepare them. It’s true that they’ll still get some profit since we did take down the bounty monster, but if we had failed, it would have caused a huge loss.”

Akira remembered that the contract was that the equipment expense would be subtracted from the reward before it was distributed. He felt a bit worried.

“… Did we… Use that many ammo?”

Alpha smiled.

“We did. For example, those sticky devices that Yamanobe shot at the Tank Tarantula, those are not only guiding devices, those are also mini information-gathering devices. They must have used those devices for both guiding the rockets as well as to analyze the Tank Tarantula to find its weak points or parts of its body that are more brittle than the rest of its body. I’m pretty sure those devices are more expensive than the mini information-gathering device that Elena used in Yonozuka Station Ruin. I bet they analyzed those information using the analyzer installed in their APC and then used the analysed information to adjust the rocket targeting system in order to increase its firepower. Not to mention the rockets, they must be pretty expensive. And if they got the other equipment from renting, then it must have been pretty expensive too.”

Akira then remembered his short conversation with Elena. If he remembered it right, Elena’s mini information-gathering device was about 10,000 Aurum per canister, while the sticky device that Yamanobe used should cost more than that. Since those sticky devices would have been destroyed when the rockets hit the bounty monster, they were indeed only one-time use equipment.

“In order for all of those rockets to hit their target at the same time, the rocket warheads must have been equipped with an advanced guiding device. Of course, they’re way more expensive than the warheads without a guiding device. Then that firepower too, that must not be cheap. And yet, they’ve used a lot of those rockets in the last fight.”

Akira remembered when the Hunters initiated a coordinated rocket barrage at the Tank Tarantula. It was true that they were pretty powerful rockets. It was rather obvious that one rocket would have taken a whole lot more money than just one cheap rifle bullet.

“If we were to consider the possibility of them buying an automatic reloading device fixed on their bikes especially for this hunt, it means that they would have spent even more money, you know?”

“Wait for a sec, that thing is not included in the equipment expense, right? Just like the other newly bought equipment right before the hunt?”

Alpha just smiled at Akira who was looking for an excuse to suppress the equipment expense.

“Akira, there are a lot of ways of selling things in this world. For example, when you sell a huge amount of consumables, you can sell the tool that you need to use those consumables together with it for cheap. And even if the customer gets that equipment for free, the cost of that equipment is well covered by the amount of profit you gain from selling the consumables. In our previous hunt, they were using special grenade launcher rather than usual cannon, so that might also increase the equipment expense.”

Akira hung his head low, it seemed that the equipment expense was way more than he had expected.

“I wonder how much the total is, and how much of the bounty prize will be left after subtracting it. Remember that it’ll still get divided for multiple heads after that, you know? So you can look forward to the final reward that you’ll receive.”

Alpha’s beautiful face was beaming with a teasing smile when she said that.

The bounty prize was 800,000,000 Aurum. Even if it was distributed to multiple people, it should give a huge sum of money. That was what Akira unconsciously thought, but after listening to Alpha’s explanation, Akira hung his head low in dejection.

Alpha thought informing Akira about that would reduce the chance of conflict between him and Shikarabe in case the reward money from Shikarabe was lower than what he was expecting.

Akira tried to find a reason to point out that his reward might still be higher than that.

“It’s not like it has been confirmed that the equipment expense would be that big, right? If it really takes that much money to defeat that bounty monster which is only worth 800,000,000 Aurum, then no one would have even tried to hunt for that bounty monster in the first place. So like, isn’t that guess just too pessimistic?”

“The bounty prize doesn’t always fit the strength of the bounty monster, you see. It’s hard to judge how difficult it would be to defeat a bounty monster unless you try to fight it yourself. That 800,000,000 Aurum bounty on that Tank Tarantula is based on the size and the approximated fighting strength of the other Hunter teams that failed to hunt it. If back then Shikarabe decided to pull back, it would have meant that his team had also failed hunting that bounty monster, and I bet it would have increased the bounty prize even more. If I have to make a guess, it could have gone up somewhere to 1,200,000,000 Aurum.”

Akira made an annoyed face.

“So in short, that would mean we were desperately trying to defeat a bounty monster that was severely underestimated and so we can only get that heavily undervalued bounty prize…”

“That might be exactly the case. And if that’s true, well, tough luck, right?”

Akira obviously twitched as he let out a big sigh.

“…I’m not bothered at all. I just need to go out to the wasteland to hunt for relics to earn money. Once all the bounty monsters are gone, I can once again safely go to the old-world ruins. That battle is basically for that goal in mind. Shikarabe and his friends also paid for the equipment and ammo expenses too. So it doesn’t bother me all that much.”

Although it was obvious that it was bothering him, Akira said those words to cheer himself up.

Akira checked the bounty monster information in the info bulletin of the Hunter Office site through his information terminal. The bulletin had been updated to announce the bounty monsters that had been defeated. It was Tank Tarantula, Multi-turrets Maimai and Overgrown Snake. There were pictures of the bounty monsters when they were still kicking and alive put right beside the picture of their corpses or leftover wreckages. It also included the Tank Tarantula that Akira had defeated.

“So there’s only 1 bounty monster left, and according to Shikarabe, Drankam pooled all its Hunter team to hunt for that last bounty monster. I guess all the bounty monsters will be defeated today. So let’s head back home, get a good rest, and get ready for exploring old-world ruins starting from tomorrow.”

Suddenly Alpha accelerated Akira’s vehicle. Akira let out a shriek of surprise as his body was pushed against the seat.

“Alpha!? What’s wrong?”

“Shhh!!”

Alpha looked grim when she said that. The moment Akira noticed that, he quickly raised his guard. Alpha would only make that face when something really bad happened, he might even be in a life-threatening situation right now.

Alpha kept pacing Akira’s vehicle to its top speed. After about 10 seconds keeping Akira’s vehicle on its top speed, she eventually said something still with a grim expression.

“It’s not working, it’s catching up with us.”

Alpha slowly decelerated the vehicle. Akira looked at Alpha with a serious face.

“Akira, calm down and look behind you. I’ll handle the steering, so no need to worry.”

Akira slowly turned his head. There was something long and thin far far away from his vehicle and that thing was chasing him. Although it looked small, it was because of the distance between them. In reality, it was actually ginormous.

Akira reached out to his binoculars and took another look. He could see a familiar monster in the direction he was looking. It was a monster that he saw not too long ago.

Akira's face turned grim. The monster looked similar to the one that he had met in the Yonozuka station ruin's entrance as well as one of the pictures in the Hunter Office bulletin, and that monster was chasing him right now.

It was the overgrown snake.

Akira immediately rechecked his information terminal. The overgrown snake was indeed included among the bounty monsters that had been defeated, there was even a picture of its dead corpse in the Hunter Office bulletin. He then looked at that monster one more time through his binoculars. Although it looked smaller, it looked like nothing but the bounty monster overgrown snake.

Akira then asked Alpha.

"T-the bulletin said that they've defeated that monster though?! What the hell is going on here?!"

"There are many possibilities, it might be another monster of the same type, or the bounty monster might have cloned itself, or it might even be one of its children. Judging from its size, it might be one of the overgrown snake's children. After all, it looks smaller compared to the original bounty monster."

Akira looked at the overgrown snake's picture in his information terminal one more time to compare it with the snake that was chasing him. It was as Alpha said, the snake chasing him was smaller compared to the bounty monster. But with that being said, it was still way larger than his vehicle. Thus Akira could not take that monster lightly.

“Akira, unfortunately, it’ll catch up with us at this rate.”

“Can’t we break away from it? If that snake is really of the same species, it might as well qualify as a bounty monster if we’re not lucky, right? Do I have a winning chance if we fight it?”

“If we keep running until this vehicle runs out of energy, it might give up on chasing us. Do you want to try and do that?”

Akira’s face still looked grim as he moved to the back seat of his vehicle. It was true that the snake might give up, but if that was not the case, once his vehicle ran out of energy and could no longer move, that snake would eat his vehicle along with him in it. Not to mention, he knew he had bad luck.

Akira smiled bitterly and said to Alpha.

“I guess I have no choice but to fight, huh… Back then when I refilled my supply, I did buy extra ammo just to be safe if I encountered a bounty monster in the wasteland, but why in the world would I really get to meet a bounty monster now?”

Akira had indeed filled his vehicle with ammo, he bought a lot of CWH anti-material special ammo and DVTS minigun extended magazine. It would give him an advantage when he fought a strong monster, but using those ammo against normal monsters would only cause him to lose money. And to be honest, just for today, he really did not want to end up in the red.

Alpha smiled and said to him.

“There’s nothing to worry about if you’re prepared. It was a correct decision to restock your ammo back then.”

Seeing how Alpha was smiling like usual, Akira regained some of his calm and composure. He then smiled bitterly and replied to her.

“I really hope that it’s just a needless fear sometimes, you know. When I have a bad feeling, I’m more than happy to have that bad feeling completely miss its mark. After all, most of my good guesses always miss,

so I hope sometime it would happen when I have a bad feeling too, you know.”

Alpha smiled back and asked Akira.

“So this time, what’s your intuition saying?”

Akira smiled confidently.

“It depends on you.”

Alpha smiled back invincibly.

“Yep, that’s the correct answer. If you know that, then just leave the rest to me. I’ll show you that my support can offset your bad luck, just like always.”

Akira and Alpha smiled at each other full of confidence. Akira had made his resolve there.

He then aimed his CWH anti-material rifle toward the overgrown snake. He supported his CWH anti-material rifle with both his hands while aiming at that overgrown snake through the aiming device on top of a shaking vehicle. He then concentrated his focus as much as possible to the point that it felt as if he could accurately recognize the pattern in which his vehicle was swaying.

To top it off, his aiming was augmented with Alpha’s support. When he pulled the trigger, the CWH special ammo which flew out through the muzzle went straight toward the overgrown snake. Although it was so far that its huge body looked like just a small dot from Akira’s point of view, the bullet ripped through the air and hit the snake’s head.

But the moment that happened, the snake’s scale easily repelled the bullet as it left a dent on that particular scale.

Akira reconfirmed what just happened through the aiming device.

“I got a hit there… right?”

“It did hit. It was at least enough to annoy that snake.”

“That’s all the damage that I can inflict using a CWH special ammo, huh? Those bounty monsters do have really hard bodies, don’t they? What should I do then?”

“We have no other choice but to increase the firepower. Akira, get your resolve ready.”

Akira smiled lightly.

“If resolving myself can get my shots stronger, I’ll do it as much as you want. Resolve is my responsibility after all. I thought I’ve made my resolve though, was it not enough?”

Alpha smiled invincibly and said to him.

“That will be enough if what we are going to do next won’t faze you. Alright then, let’s do it.”

Alpha suddenly hit the brake, while on the other hand, the snake increased its speed as it was closing in on Akira.

If the distance to the enemy lowered the firepower, then they just needed to reduce that distance. It was simple logic. The closer the enemy got, the easier it would be to kill that enemy. That applied both to Akira and that snake.

Akira gritted his teeth and was somehow smiling in that situation, he was not fazed at all.

The monster which was only a small dot in his binoculars now had become big enough to be seen with naked eyes. The overgrown snake did not move like a snake, it was more like a long connected vehicle. If Akira took a better look at it, he would notice that it had countless wheels and caterpillar tracks under it. It looked as if it forced its separate compartments to move forward together although they had different speeds and shapes. Due to that, its huge body seemed to be wiggling up and down just like a snake.

Akira took another aim at the overgrown snake. This time his shot hit the snake's weak point and peeled off its scale. But compared to its huge body, it was nothing but a scratch.

Alpha slowed down the vehicle even more. The overgrown snake was close enough for Akira to hit it even if he just shot randomly at it. He took another shot at the snake. This time, the CWH special ammo peeled off its scale and ripped off a small portion of its flesh, but it was far away from a fatal wound as it did not even slow the snake down.

Akira frowned.

"It's not working even if it's this close, huh! Is it that thing?! Is it that it has some kind of force field armour?!"

"That's not it. It's simply because it has a very hard scale. It didn't produce any light when you hit it, right? So it's not a force field armour."

"Seriously, just how hard its scale can be!?"

"It won't cause any meaningful damage unless you get even closer. This is it Akira, this is where you really need to steel yourself."

Seeing how Alpha was smiling like usual in that situation, Akira got a bit annoyed.

"So my resolve is still not enough, huh?! Alright alright!! I get it already, let's do this!!"

Akira guessed that the snake would not slow down and it would keep closing into him. His guess was correct, or to be more precise, it was 200% correct.

Alpha suddenly accelerated the vehicle to make a 180 turn and she sped up the vehicle even more as it was heading straight to the overgrown snake.

Akira thought that Alpha would slow down the car to let the snake get closer, but instead, they were heading straight toward the snake at a high speed.

He grabbed the frame of his vehicle so that he would not get thrown off. Although Alpha controlled his augmented suit to prepare him for that beforehand, it was so sudden that he was still surprised by it.

Now that both Akira and the overgrown snake were heading towards each other, they quickly closed the distance between them.

“Akira, get your DVTS minigun ready.”

Akira shifted his hand from grabbing the frame of his vehicle to get the DVTS minigun attached to his vehicle. The overgrown snake was already right in front of his eyes, it opened its huge mouth filled with sharp teeth as it was going to swallow Akira and his vehicle whole, while on the other hand, Akira gritted his teeth tight.

The overgrown snake made a slight change on its move to add extra momentum in order to leap on Akira. Alpha was able to precisely catch that slight move through the information-gathering device.

Alpha then used her advanced driving capability to swerve the vehicle to the side and barely avoided the overgrown snake’s teeth. The vehicle did not slow down as it passed beside the snake’s head and just continued going forward beside the snake’s body.

When the snake opened its huge mouth right in front of him and he swerved to the right and barely avoided it, Akira got a good long look of its intimidating mouth up close in a slowed-down world which caused him to make a grim face.

Inside that slow-moving world due to Akira’s concentration and high tension, Alpha was the only one that was moving around normally. She then smiled at Akira and said.

“Shoot!”

In order to not get thrown off the vehicle, Akira fixed his position and tightly grabbed his DVTS minigun. In that situation where his vehicle was severely tilted to the side, Akira looked desperate as he pulled the trigger.

The DVTS minigun spewed countless bullets at the sides of the snake in a close distance. Akira did not let go of the trigger. In order to make the minigun portable, it was equipped with an extended magazine that could house way more bullets than it looked. As long as that magazine still had ammo inside it, the revolving muzzle would not stop spewing powerful bullets that could easily turn a normal monster into minced meat in one cycle.

Akira was close to the snake, so close that he might be able to kick the snake from his vehicle. In such a close range, the countless bullets from the DVTS minigun ripped through the snake's abdomen and threw pieces of its flesh to the air. Akira left a trail of flesh and metallic wreckages behind him. Those parts were the result of all the things that the snake had eaten until now. The DVTS minigun basically drilled through its body and threw pieces of the snake's huge body around the area.

Due to Alpha's advanced driving skill, Akira was able to maintain his distance beside the snake's huge body. The snake passed beside Akira at such a high speed as he left a long straight wound-mark on the snake's side after releasing a huge amount of bullets at its body.

Akira did not let go of the trigger right until the very end of the snake's body. Then after that, the vehicle still moved forward due to inertia and made another 180-degree turn before stopping. The magazine in the DVTS minigun was already completely empty.

"Akira, reload a new magazine!"

Akira was still a little bit dumbfounded when he pulled the trigger on his DVTS minigun, but when Alpha gave him his next order, he quickly returned back to reality. He immediately loaded a new magazine to his DVTS minigun and asked Alpha.

"T-that wasn't enough to kill that snake?"

"It did some damage, but it's not enough to kill it. We'll do it one more time."

“J-just how many times do I need to do that again?”

“As many times as it takes to kill it. So let’s keep giving our best until we can kill that snake. It’s better than letting yourself get killed by that snake, right?”

Akira was put off when he saw Alpha smile as she said that.

He finished loading a new DVTS minigun extended magazine. The overgrown snake was trying to make a turn, at least, it did not seem like it was going to run away anytime soon.

Akira got desperate and shouted.

“Alright alright, I just need to do it, right?!!”

“Yep, that’s right. Let’s go!”

Alpha immediately drove the vehicle again, and Akira tightly grabbed his DVTS minigun. He was planning to do the same thing again and again until the snake died.

Every time Akira passed beside the overgrown snake, the ammo that he brought with him was greatly reduced. But even after exhausting that much ammo, it was still not enough to kill that snake. As his ammo reserve started looking dangerously low, Akira, who had made his resolve looked a bit worried.

“Alpha! We’ll run out of ammo soon!!

“This snake is really strong. Is it not running away since it knows that this won’t be enough to kill it? If only it has some kind of a weak point.”

Akira smiled bitterly.

“‘I’ve already used this much ammo on that snake, if it really has a weak point, I’m sure as hell that I hit it at least once, you know? Or is it that I didn’t get that lucky hit at all? Is it because of my bad luck? I even shot that many bullets to its head!”

“In that case, we can just destroy it to the point that luck doesn’t matter at all. It’s coming, one more time!”

“Roger that!”

Akira knew his situation would not change no matter how much he complained. Although he had inflicted that much damage, the overgrown snake still did not show any signs of retreating.

Akira knew well that such behaviour was normal for a monster. But since it looked like a big snake from outside, he wondered if it would feel fear and run away like a usual snake. Unfortunately, his wish did not come true, at least that was the case until now, and that wish will probably never come true.

He prepared himself for the next barrage, which was also his final barrage.

Alpha mustered the vehicle’s engine one more time. And just like last time, she planned to swerve past beside the snake. Their surrounding area was already filled with leftover wreckages of that overgrown snake.

The overgrown snake had eaten Hunters’ vehicles which included the ammo inside those vehicles. Those explosives were absorbed into the snake’s body and each of Akira’s barrage caused those explosives to spread around on the ground of that area. Unfortunately, some of those explosives started exploding for some reason.

The explosion itself was not that big, at least, it was not enough to cause any damage to both the snake and Akira’s vehicle. But it was enough to deflect the vehicle’s direction even with Alpha’s advanced driving capability. And due to Akira’s bad luck, one of those explosions happened right before the snake leapt at him.

The shockwave from the explosion caused the vehicle to shake for a few split seconds, leaving it impossible to control. The overgrown snake easily swallowed Akira’s vehicle with Akira still on it in that split seconds.

Since the snake had closed its mouth, no light was able to reach its insides. Akira was still standing on the back-side of his vehicle that was almost flipped over after the snake swallowed it. He could only hear the strange sounds which were produced as some kind of liquid touched the body or the wheel of his vehicle.

Akira's vision was totally pitch black. A similar thing had happened when he entered a certain basement in the Higaraka Residence Ruin. At that time, he entered a room with no light source at all, it was also pitch black. But back then, even inside that pitch-black room, he could still see Alpha clearly. Her figure was the only thing glowing with colours back then, but that was not the case this time.

"Alpha!"

Akira tried to call for Alpha. But there was no reply, his vision was still filled with darkness.

He noticed and understood his situation, he had lost all of Alpha's support there.

She once explained to him that there were places in the old-world ruin where her support could not reach him. Akira was always connected to her through his ability as someone who was connected to the old-world domain, so he bet that there must be something in the old-world ruin that blocked his ability to connect to the old-world domain. He thought that must be the case right now too.

A part of the snake body must be blocking Alpha from connecting to him.

Akira could not see anything inside that total darkness if he relied solely on naked eyes. He no longer had the support to maximize the power of his augmented suit and no one was giving instruction to him that would provide him with an advantage in such a dangerous situation.

He was all alone inside the snake's body. He no longer had the support that allowed him, an untrained slum boy with minimum equipment, to win

against a fully armed veteran Hunter. He no longer had the miracle that allowed him, a Rank 21 Hunter, to be worth more than 100,000,000 Aurum.

Akira started hearing banging sounds, it seemed that the snake had started crushing his vehicle from its sides. He no longer had the driving support that would help him get out of that dangerous situation. As the strange liquid dripped onto his augmented suit, it made a sizzling sound. It was the liquid produced by monsters to digest vehicles and mechanical monsters. It was only a matter of time before it melted his augmented suit too. In case if his augmented suit's control device got melted, the augmented suit would start moving on its own and that would spell doom for Akira.

He understood the reason why he was inside the overgrown snake's body right now. It was not because Alpha made a mistake, it was simply because of his bad luck. To be more precise, it happened because Alpha's support could not win against his bad luck.

Akira had spent his lifetime-worth of his luck when he met Alpha and he had been relying on Alpha's support to overcome his bad luck up until now. But to be honest, somewhere inside his mind, he knew that one day he would not be able to rely on that. He always thought when that happened i.e when he lost Alpha's support, that would be the moment he died. And now he was facing that very moment.

In the midst of that dangerous situation, Akira compressed his time perception as much as possible. It had been just a few seconds since the snake swallowed him. Because he could not see anything inside that total darkness, there was nothing that could help him gauge just how slow his time perception was right now. He did not notice that everything around him was already running in an extremely slow time.

Inside that pitch-black world, Akira laughed.

"So my resolve to charge straight to this snake is not enough, huh! Alright alright! I get it! Steeling my resolve is my responsibility, yeah?!!"

Akira screamed on top of his lung and laughed as hard as he could. He was mockingly laughing at his bad luck that caused this predicament.

The voice that he produced while in that extremely time-compressed state was severely distorted, he might not be able to properly listen to sounds in such a state. But it was not a problem, his outburst was just a statement, or to be more precise, it was a declaration of war against his bad luck that caused this unfortunate situation.

He was there screaming all alone and he was the only person there to listen to his screams. But that was okay, it was a statement to ridicule, resist and fight back against his own bad luck.

Akira probed around for his DVTS minigun's handle. When he found it, he gripped it tightly and pulled the trigger.

The loud sound of gunshots reverberated through the snake's insides. The muzzle flash illuminated Akira's surroundings as he released bullets indiscriminately through the inner walls of the snake's insides. The already grotesque insides of the snake were turned even more grotesque as the countless bullets ripped through its flesh and fanned out meat and blood in Akira's surroundings. As the pressure vanished, his vehicle returned back to its original shape.

Akira quickly grabbed a tube-type medicine and emptied its content on top of his head. With this, it would buy some time until his head got digested, after all, unlike his limbs, his head was not covered by his augmented suit. The medicine paste that covered Akira's head made a hissing sound as it made contact with the snake's digestive liquid.

He then swallowed a handful of medicine pills as if he did not care about their side-effects. It was in order to help prolong his body's durability under that constant stress. He forced his body to move past its own limit inside that world where time was extremely compressed. The nanomachine inside his body immediately kicked to action as he forcefully moved his body with the help of his augmented suit way above the capability of a human.

Akira reached to the driver seat and set the vehicle to auto-drive mode through the vehicle's control device. His vehicle received a simple order as it spun its 4 wheels as fast as it could to drive forward. Since there was no way back, there was no other choice but to move forward.

Akira was grinning in that situation, but he did not let go of his finger from his DVTS minigun's trigger. There was no need to take an aim, his bullets would hit the snake no matter where he aimed. He kept on spewing bullets in all directions as he drove through the inside of the snake while cackling.

Unlike the exterior part of the snake's body, its inner part was way weaker. The flying bullets wreaked havoc inside its body as if they tried to push the outer scales inside-out.

The overgrown snake screamed and wriggled in agony. Although it was wriggling up and down, Akira who was inside its body could not feel it since he did not even know which way was up.

But even so, Akira did not stop coursing through the snake's body. The kickback from the DVTS minigun pushed his vehicle downward, thus exerting pressure and preventing the wheel from spinning. But with that being said, his vehicle still forcefully pushed forward while being under such pressure. The violent shaking that caused its body to collide with the snake's inner wall and the digestive liquid that was dripping from the snake's inner wall shaved the durability of the vehicle.

Even on top of that violently shaking vehicle, Akira did not let go of the trigger and laughed like a mad lad. He had exchanged the empty magazine for a new one many times as he fired ammo randomly inside the snake's body.

The overgrown snake that was wriggling violently eventually fell down and stopped moving. But even so, bullets were still flying out from the inside of its body. And then, from a weakened side of its huge body, a vehicle flew out with Akira in it.

As it flew out with a lot of momentum, the vehicle landed on its side and flipped over, throwing Akira off-board. He then landed and rolled over on the ground.

"…I'm out?"

Akira was lying on the ground facing upward, the big blue sky was presented in front of him, he finally realized that he was outside.

“Akira! Are you alright?!”

Alpha looked at Akira with an extremely worried face. He stared at her, dumbfounded. The image of Alpha in his vision was slightly blurred. After she called his name a few times, her image finally returned back to normal.

“… Uhhh, welcome back, Alpha.”

“I-I’m back?”

To that strange reaction from Akira, Alpha could not help but give that awkward answer.

“Alpha, can you check if that snake is dead for good?”

“Eh? Ah, sure, wait for a sec… It’s alright, it’s dead for good.”

Akira laughed a bit.

“That’s good news. If even that didn’t work, then nothing would have worked.”

It was rare for Alpha to look so confused, she then asked Akira a question.

“Akira, what exactly just happened?”

Alpha did not know what happened during the time when her connection to Akira was cut. Although it seemed that Akira survived the fight, it was important for her to get the gist of what had happened when she lost her connection to him as soon as possible.

“…Sorry but, can you put that for later? And also, can you check if there are any monsters in the area?”

“Alright, make sure to tell me all the details later.”

“Ahh, and also, you did say that we just need to destroy its body to the point that I won’t need to rely on luck, right? I’ve done it for you, but I’m super tired right now because of that.”

Akira smiled confidently when he said that. He then relaxed his body as he was still lying on the ground while looking at Alpha’s face. It was really rare for Alpha to look as confused as she was now.

According to her calculation based on the situation right before she lost connection to Akira, there was a 100% chance that he would be killed. He should not have been able to return alive from that situation without her support.

But even so, Akira managed to return alive. He once again overturned her calculation.

Akira, who was under her grasp, had started to change. She kept on recalculating whether his growth that exceeded her expectation was a good thing or not. She focused all of her processing power on the recalculation to the point that she neglected to control her expression.

Athena13: Akira is a real mad lad!!!

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Rebuild World – Chapter 99, Dealing With The Aftermath

Index

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The Hunter Office sent some staffs to where Akira was. It was because Akira had reported to the Hunter Office that he found a monster that looked like the bounty monster, which should have been defeated, still roaming in the wasteland. That was enough of a reason for the Hunter Office to at least check it.

The staff that the Hunter Office sent was Kibayashi. The moment he heard that a strange report reached the Hunter Office and it was from Akira, he quickly jumped in.

After Kibayashi reached Akira, he listened to Akira's explanation and more or less understood what had happened. He then laughed hard. He tried to suppress his laughter before he said to Akira.

"So you killed it? This snake? All by yourself? After it ate you? Y-You, b-blasted your way out from its inside…"

Kibayashi could not hold back his laughter, it seemed that he found what he just said himself really funny.

The adrenalin that was coursing through Akira's body during that fight had already calmed down. What was left after that fight was only the tiredness and worry for all the ammo expense that he had incurred in that battle. Not to mention that he had lost his vehicle too.

Akira looked annoyed as he replied.

"…Yeah, you have a problem with that?"

It seemed that somehow Akira's reaction amused Kibayashi even more. Kibayashi could not stop laughing for a while, he eventually stopped and amusedly said to Akira.

"It's all good that you're as reckless as ever. You're just so interesting."

"Is that so? Well, thanks."

Akira pointed his finger at the overgrown snake.

"So then, what's the result after you checked it? Is that thing a bounty monster or just a normal monster?"

"Well, unfortunately, that thing is not a bounty monster. We have no idea if it's just a mutated monster of the same species or maybe one of the children of the bounty monster, but the conclusion is the same, it's not the bounty monster. I know that you worked super hard to kill it and I'm sorry to say this, but the Hunter Office would not categorize a monster that you can defeat alone as a bounty monster. But well, we'll at least pay you some reward money for killing it though. Ah, right, you didn't take the bounty hunting request, huh. But don't worry, we'll treat you as if you had taken the bounty request, I can at least do that much for you."

"Well, thanks."

From the other's point of view, it was a monster that could be killed by a Rank 21 Hunter if that Hunter tried hard enough. Akira could understand that fact, but it still annoyed him.

Kibayashi looked at the annoyed Akira, he then smiled and said to Akira.

“You looked pretty displeased. But well, I guess that’s to be expected huh? Since you worked so hard to kill a monster that looked like a bounty monster but still you wouldn’t get that much money out from it.”

“Yeah, I used quite a lot of my ammo in that fight, you know. I’m getting a huge loss out of this. Not to mention that my vehicle is totally wrecked. I just bought that vehicle recently.”

“In that case, we can reimburse some of your money. If you sell that pseudo overgrown snake’s dead body to me, I’ll negotiate with the Hunter Office to at least reimburse your ammo expense.”

“Then how about my vehicle!?”

Akira suddenly reacted to that promise, but Kibayashi shook his head.

“I’m sorry, but no matter how you slice it, there’s no way we can reimburse your vehicle.”

“…I see. Well, it already helps me a lot if you would pay me my ammo expense though… So then, can I go back home now? To be honest, I’m super tired right now.”

Akira looked super duper tired when he said that, but suddenly his face twitched.

“Ah, right!! I have no vehicle now!! Dammit!!”

Akira shouted loudly, Kibayashi then tried to calm him down.

“Calm down. I’ll at least give you a ride back to the city. You do look so tired after all. You can take a nap there, I’ll wake you up when we arrive.”

“…Is that so? Thanks… Haaah.”

“Don’t mention it, I can at least do that much for you.”

Even after he calmed down, Akira looked completely opposite of Kibayashi who seemed to be having fun there.

Kibayashi decided to head back to the city with Akira while the other Hunter Office staffs stayed behind to analyze the snake's corpse.

Akira was sleeping like a log in the backseat of Kibayashi's vehicle. Another Hunter Office staff member was sitting in the driver's assistant seat next to Kibayashi. That particular staff suddenly asked Kibayashi a question.

"Are you sure it's okay to make that promise to this boy? Looking at that dead corpse, he must have used quite a lot of ammo, you know. Although you did say that you'll add some bonus, I don't think you can reimburse his ammo expense just from the reward of monster hunting requests though?"

Kibayashi laughed merrily.

"It's fine. I got to see an interesting battle record after all. So you don't need to worry about it."

"Haaah, I see."

There was an air of superiority from the way Kibayashi laughed. The Hunter Office staff found that weird, but since he knew about Kibayashi's bad reputation, he just decided to forget about it.

In reality, the overgrown snake that Katsuya's team defeated and the overgrown snake that Akira defeated were one and the same. The overgrown snake was actually a snake inside a bigger body. The relatively smaller snake was the real body, it used everything that it ate to construct its outer body. It was analogous to a human inside a powered suit.

The one that Katsuya's team defeated was that powered suit. While the real body detached from its outer body and escaped. And to cover its escape, it set the outer body to rampage around.

While the one that Akira defeated was the snake's real body. Although to be more precise, it actually had an even smaller body inside it, but Akira killed it before it could detach and escape since he scattered all of those bullets from inside the snake's body.

Kibayashi actually knew that the one who actually defeated the overgrown snake was Akira and not Katsuya's team.

He also knew that Akira did not know about that. That was the reason why he was really amused by that situation.

Kibayashi had no plans to report that to the Hunter Office since he knew that it would be useless. The Hunter Office had already broadcasted the news that the overgrown snake had been killed. Retracting that statement and announcing that another Hunter actually defeated the bounty monster would definitely cause a dispute, it would be a huge problem since Drankam was also involved.

While on the other hand, it was true that Katsuya's team defeated a powerful monster that might as well be considered as a bounty monster. So it was not worth the trouble making a correction to that announcement.

[Well, I'll at least reimburse your ammo, that way, I'll be able to enjoy your reckless act again.]

Kibayashi was already interested in Akira, and with what happened this time, he got even more interested. He smiled as he was looking forward to the next time he would be able to see Akira do another crazy thing.

After returning back to his home, Akira took a dip inside his bath. He looked much more dazed than usual as if most of his soul was sucked by the warm bath.

The moment he arrived back home, he quickly fell asleep and only woke up in the middle of the night. But even so, he was still extremely tired. He was stuck in a situation where he was awake and sleepy but could not fall asleep. Thus he dragged his body out of the bed and went to the bathroom in a semi-conscious state.

Akira looked so tired that it would not be strange if he suddenly fell asleep anytime. So, Alpha who was inside the bath with him, just like always, warned him.

“Akira, be careful not to fall asleep here. It might even be a good idea if you get out of the bath. You might drown if you fall asleep here, you know.”

“…It’s alright. I took so many… medicines back there.”

“That’s the medicine to heal wounds, right? Not the medicine that would help you breathe underwater. Moreover, when exactly did you take them?”

“…Back there… That time… Ahh, right, Alpha, you weren’t there.”

Akira was still completely in a daze when he said that. The effect from the medicines that he took when inside the snake had completely waned and he had completely forgotten that Alpha was not there when he took those medicines.

Alpha was smiling like usual, but she then carefully asked Akira a question.

“Ah, right, you promised me that you’ll tell all the details later, right? This might be a good time for that, what happened back there?”

“Well…”

Akira was about to say something, but he stopped. It was not like he did not want to explain it to Alpha, it was more because he did not have the communication ability to do that.

He gave up explaining what had happened with words, so instead, he sent the scene of what had happened straight to Alpha through telepathy. Akira chose that option since he could send visuals, line of thinking, and even feelings through telepathy.

But in the end, it was just a reconstruction of Akira’s memory. The accuracy of that information was very low since there was nothing but hazy pictures of the inner wall of the overgrown snake only illuminated by the flash muzzle from his DVTS minigun. Moreover, it was subjective information based on Akira’s point of view, not to mention, it did not contain the full information about his mental state at that time. It was a rather confusing

scene, it was as if he was inside a dream-like state until the moment he broke out from inside the snake's body. It contained no more information than that.

Although it did not explain everything, that was all that Alpha could extract from him. In conclusion, she could not get the information that she was actually looking for from him, and Akira himself actually had no idea what kind of information she wanted from him.

"That must have been rough."

"Yeah, you can say that again."

Akira's expression relaxed as he said that.

"But well, I didn't expect to be able to do that, I was sure I'm going to die there. But again, since I had the time to think that I was definitely going to die, I guess it showed that I didn't instantly die after it ate me. So I might have actually not been in that much danger back then."

Alpha sounded apologetic as she said to Akira.

"It would have been really helpful if I was able to give you support, I'm really sorry."

But Akira replied casually as if it did not bother him at all.

"Things like that are bound to happen from time to time. I'm glad I trained myself to know what to do when I lose your support. It was really useful in that situation."

Alpha thought that Akira must have acquired some level of confidence after getting out of that situation with his own power. That in itself was not a problem, it was good news for her since it meant that he was getting stronger. But if that confidence lessened his dependency on her, then there was a need to remove that. She should do something about it before he thinks that he could go on his own without her support.

She smiled.

“I’ll give you my utmost support whenever I can, so you can keep on relying on me.”

Akira smiled in return.

“Of course, I’ll be counting on you.”

“In that case, there’s one thing that I can help you with right this second. There’s a call from Shikarabe. I’ll connect you, so you can just talk normally from here.”

After she said that, Akira could suddenly hear Shikarabe’s voice. He was connected to his information terminal through Alpha.

“It’s Shikarabe. I need to talk to you about the reward, do you have time now?”

“Sure.”

“If you have the time, do you want to talk in-person? I’m in that pub from last time.”

“I’m inside my bath right now, so let’s talk over this call. Or is it something that might cause trouble between us so you’d rather talk about it in-person with me?”

“It depends on you. Well, I’ll put it straight for you. Our original contract is that you get your share of reward from the bounty prize, subtracted by the equipment expense, and then divided by the number of the heads. But well, the equipment expense is higher than we expected. So in the end, to be honest, your share of reward does not fit your contribution in that battle.”

Akira’s expression turned stern.

“Are you contacting me to warn me that my share of reward might be pretty small?”

“Whoah there, there’s no need to get angry here. I’m recognizing your contribution in that battle, you know? But with that being said, I have no

plans to give you a bonus either. I want to avoid having to readjust everyone's share after the request is done. Increasing or reducing the reward at this stage will only invite a dispute. It's a matter of money after all, so I hope you can understand."

Akira did not say anything. He got what Shikarabe was saying and he understood it well. But it was only enough to suppress his anger, not completely erasing it. Shikarabe also understood that fact from Akira's silence.

"But just like I said before, I recognize your contribution in that fight. I myself am not happy to just close this matter by giving you a small amount of money. So about that, is it okay if we pay you with something else other than money?"

"Something other than money?"

"Yeah, for example, how about a vehicle?"

"A vehicle?!"

"There are other things that we can offer you too. Drankam invested a lot of money in this bounty hunt. Thanks to that, we got a lot of new equipment like guns or new augmented suits. The gang also lost a lot of equipment in this hunt, so we're planning to buy their replacements in bulk. The gang is also planning to replace the lightly damaged vehicles which are still usable after a little bit of TLC. I can give you one of those slightly damaged vehicles as your reward. The document will say that you bought that vehicle on the same day we originally planned to pay your reward. We'll also include some money to repair and make some adjustments on that vehicle. You might be able to get a better vehicle if you use the same amount of money to buy a new one. So in short, I might not be able to give you extra money, but I can use my connection to get you something else on top of your reward money. But well, if you prefer money, I won't force you though…."

Akira suddenly sounded desperate as he said to Shikarabe.

“No, the vehicle is good!! I’ll take the vehicle!! Please make it a vehicle instead!!”

Shikarabe was a bit weirded out by that sudden change of character from Akira.

“I-I see. Alright then, I’ll start working on it. I’ll contact you again later about when and where I’ll hand it over to you.”

Shikarabe then closed the call. Akira looked really happy, Alpha smiled bitterly at him as she said.

“That was good news.”

“Yeah. This way, I don’t have to explain to Shizuka-san how I got my vehicle destroyed so quickly! I can also save money to buy a new vehicle later. This is great, really lucky!”

Akira thought that he would end up in red after that day’s bounty hunting. But with this, there was no need to worry that it might affect his Hunter work in the future. And now that there was no more problem to worry about, he loosened up and continued enjoying the bath in a good mood.

Shikarabe was drinking together with Varga and Yamanobe in the pub where he met up with Akira before. Among all the girls who were serving his table, some of them were the girls that he promised to call when he celebrated the bounty hunting. Shikarabe was a man of his words.

After he finished his call with Akira, Yamanobe smiled at him and asked.

“How was it? Does it seem that we don’t need to fight Akira?”

“Yeah, it was even somehow anticlimactic. It seems that he’s really in need of a vehicle.”

“Vehicle? But like, he already has one, right? Why does he want another one? Did his vehicle get damaged during that fight against the Tank Tarantula? But he just went back normally on his vehicle after that, right?”

“No idea, well, it doesn’t really matter. Now that we have nothing to worry about, let’s get another drink!”

Shikarabe just continued drinking and celebrating with his friends. Of course, he had no idea that Akira fought a pseudo overgrown snake after his hunt together with Shikarabe and lost his vehicle in that fight.

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There was a marketplace for Hunter equipment in the lower district of the Kugamayama city. There were also different facilities in that area, like a repair shop to fix or readjust prosthetics, or a facility that looked like a combination of factory and hospital. A lot of Hunters with prosthetics gathered near the hospital while the cyborgs gathered near the factory, and in between those two, there was a shop that could help Hunters exchange normal organs for a battle oriented cyborg body.

Nergo was in that place. He rented an expensive individual room, where he could use the material that he brought himself, to fix the part of his body that got damaged during his fight against the bounty monster. Although from the outside his limbs looked just fine, sometimes sparks could be seen jumping out from his limbs. He was in the middle of fixing those parts.

Just then Nergo received a secret call. He answered that call through a device that would allow him to speak without making any sound.

“It’s me.”

A troubled voice, which seemed to be a male’s, returned from the other side.

“…Uhhh, what should I call you now, again?”

“It’s Nergo. I don’t want to hear you calling me ‘brother’.”

“So it’s Nergo this time, huh? It was Kein last time, wasn’t it?”

“That’s the name that the great cause gave me, while as for my original name, I’ve already given up that name to the great cause. As such, I have no

name. There’s no name that refers to me and the great cause refers to us, therefore we’re brothers.”

That guy sighed exasperatedly.

“I don’t mind changing names all the time, but can you at least let me call you brother. That way I won’t get your name wrong, you know.”

“No, you’re lacking achievement and zeal to call me brother. Especially, your blunder in the Kuzusuhara ruin was fatal. Because of that Hunter, whom we mistook to be an agent from the city, we’ve failed to steal the relics from the Kuzusuhara underground ruin. If only you gave us more detailed information beforehand, we could have avoided that failure.”

That man quickly replied back to Nergo, in his voice, there was a trace of mockery toward the hard-headed person that he was talking with.

“You still call me brother but you won’t let me call you brother, huh? I don’t really understand your way of thinking. Just so you know, I work super hard both for my own and for the world’s sake. Not to mention that I also helped out to deal with the aftermath of that incident, right?”

“If only our plan proceeded without any problem, there was even no need to deal with the aftermath, you know. Helping out dealing with the aftermath does not erase your blunder.”

The other guy sighed, he then started speaking in a higher spirit to fix the mood.

“Well, putting that aside for now, so, how was it? Although I’ve given you the information that I gathered, you still went undercover and infiltrated Drankam to confirm it, right? Did it go well? I was the one who made that fake record, so there shouldn’t be any trouble.”

Nergo changed his mood.

“About that though, I finished confirming the subject. Today I met the subject by pure coincidence, the subject is not Katsuya. It’s another Hunter

by the name of Akira. He’s a pretty strong Hunter, but he’s not a Hunter with a cyborg-boy body. The information that you gave me is correct, he’s not an agent from the city. That news about him was fake news to disguise the City Management’s blunder.”

“I told you so. There’s no harm in trusting me more, you know? Now that you’ve confirmed it, are you going to pull out from Drankam now?”

“No, I’ll continue infiltrating Drankam. When we planned to infiltrate Drankam, we also made a plan to make propaganda inside Drankam in order to convert the Hunters in here. After all, it would look strange if I suddenly distance myself after joining the bounty hunt with the excuse to make a connection with Drankam.”

“I see, well, it’s all good that everything is going well. Well then, I’ll go and gather data about Drankam. I’ll send it to you later once I’m done.”

“Wait, I have a question.”

The other guy replied in a good mood.

“What is it? You can go ahead and ask me anything. It’s important to talk and understand each other. It’s the thread that binds people together after all. So if you can’t do that, then you’re just the same as those monsters out there. After all, we can’t understand them and they can’t understand us.”

“Why are you looking for people who can connect to the old-world domain?”

“Why, you ask? Isn’t that obvious? It’s because they’re useful to have around, you know? That’s also the exact reason why the Corporate Government and the Nationalist are looking for them.”

“Let me change my question. Why are you looking for them in Kuzusuhara ruin? No wait, are you actually looking for someone you know was in Kuzusuhara ruin once?”

That man did not answer back, Nergo then continued.

“We know just how skilled you are and we know that the Corporate Government also knows about your skills. We know that the Corporate Government even sent you an offer hoping to get your skills on their side. If you just wanted to look for the people who are connected to the old-world domain, you can just climb the ladder in the Corporate Government and search the whole Eastern District. With your skills, I know you can get the right and the power to do that much, so why did you refuse their offer just to stay in Kugamayama city? What exactly makes you stay in this city?”

After a short silence, the other guy answered back in a fashion that sounded as if he was joking.

“It’s for the sake of people’s happiness. That’s also the reason that you, Nationalist, always use, right? You Nationalist think that it’s difficult to bring that happiness into reality under the rule of the Corporate Government, that’s why you’re supporting the forming of nations, right? So that’s also my reason and that’s exactly why I’m helping you. That’s all, later then.”

“I really hope that you’re not lying.”

The secret call ended. Although Nergo’s face was a cyborg part that rarely showed any emotion, he twitched a bit there.

Nergo was once called as Kein. And one day, he would also abandon that Nergo name. That nameless man there retraced his conversation just now.

[…It’s true that you’re skilled, but you don’t have a great cause to steer that skill, and that makes it pointless. That’s exactly why I won’t let you call me brother. To be honest, I do want him to convert, but I’m not really sure now.]

A woman near Nergo suddenly spoke to him.

“Nergo-san, how are you feeling?”

Nergo smiled at her.

“Thanks to you, I didn’t find any broken parts. I’m just doing fine-tuning right now. Mizuha-san, thank you so much for introducing this good repair shop to me.”

Mizuha smiled back to him.

“Don’t mention it. We’ll be working together from now on, it’s normal to help out a colleague.”

“I can’t thank you enough, I couldn’t really do any proper maintenance in the previous place that I frequented. Ah, talking about gratitude, I really need to say my thanks to that Katsuya too. If it wasn’t for him, I might have died by now. If it’s possible, I want to thank him directly, or is it like it’s not a good idea for a new member to do that?”

Nergo was saved from a dangerous situation by Katsuya during the fight against the Big Walker.

Mizuha was a bit surprised. Nergo joined the gang through Shikarabe, so she thought that he would share the same view as the other veteran Hunters in the gang.

Nergo was a skilled hunter and he had no disdain toward Katsuya, so it might be a good idea to bring him to her side. As Mizuha thought so, she smiled at him and said.

“Don’t worry, it’s okay. I’ll ask Katsuya to free up some of his time so I can introduce you to him.”

“Thank you so much.”

Nergo smiled when he said that.

It was true that Katsuya saved Nergo. But no one knew that Nergo actually intentionally put himself in danger in order to get closer to Katsuya’s faction.

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In one of the tall buildings within the inner wall of the Kugamayama city, a man who just had a call with Nergo smiled.

“I do think that your zeal to your belief is pretty amazing, you know? But no, it’s not enough. You guys don’t have the power to put your idealism into reality. But you know, I have that power, if only I can go to that place one more time.”

That man was clenching something in his right hand. It was a black card with a big symbol on it.

“I have the key. I just need to walk through the door now. If only I have the means to do that, I’ll be able to go to that place one more time.”

That symbol was the national symbol of an old-world nation. The Kuzusuhara ruin was once the capital city of that nation and that card was something that man had gotten from deep inside the Kuzusuhara ruin. It was a highly valuable relic that he got by using the Corporate Government’s special force.

They baited the monsters inside the Kuzusuhara ruin to Kugamayama city and manipulated the City Guard to kill those monsters. After that incident, the danger level inside the Kuzusuhara ruin dropped temporarily, they used that chance to go into the ruin while also bringing weapons from the frontline. That card was something so valuable that he could only get after he put that much effort.

But there were not that many people who knew the real worth of that card, as in matter of fact, he might be the only person who understood the real worth of that card.

“It’s not like I’m looking for people who are connected to the old-world domain. I’m looking for the entity behind them. That one girl that prevented my dream from coming to reality, I’ll make sure that she won’t be able to do that again this time.”

His expression turned ominous.

“You’re looking for the next one, right? But those people who can see you, those people who can connect to the old-world domain, there are not that many of those people out there. Or maybe you already found one? But even if you did, it’s not easy to go there, so I should still have some time.”

That guy stared outside the window toward the Kuzusuhara ruin.

“Like hell I’ll let you get there before me.”

The man who was glaring through the window was Yanagisawa.

The hunt for the bounty monsters had brought different effects to different people. Some of those people had their lives turned over that day, while some people just continued their lives without much change. Some of them received profit while some of them incurred loss, but as long as they returned alive, they would have to face the upcoming days. Just like what they had always been doing, and just like what they would be doing from now on.

That day, all the bounty monsters were killed.

The next day, Akira went to the same entertainment district that he visited the other day.

Although it was a little too early before the usual prime time for the entertainment district, that place was already overflowing with customers. Akira thought that some of the shops in that place must be so popular that Hunters would go there no matter the time.

Akira went to the same pub where he met up with Shikarabe and the other Hunters. But this time, the one who called him there was the person who Colbert was working for, it was Tomejima.

Tomejima wanted to discuss with Akira about that incident where Akira was about to kill Kadol, a debt-ridden Hunter. Akira had heard everything from Colbert, to be honest, he could just ignore it, but Akira had a feeling that it would turn into something really troublesome if he did. So, although it was a pain in the neck, he decided to go to that pub to meet Tomejima.

In the middle of his way to that pub, Alpha suddenly asked Akira a question.

“Akira, it’s not like I’m against negotiating with them, but what’s your plan? Are you going to just accept some kind of compensation money and call it done?”

Akira looked unsure.

“…Hmmm, I really have no idea. To be honest, I don’t have any good plans. I’m sure it’s not like they’re willing to give me a lot of compensation money after all. But letting it go just because he pays me a small amount of money will only cause trouble in the future too.”

If he let go of the person who tried to kill him just because of a small amount of money, it would definitely pose a danger to his life in the future. After all, it meant that his life was only worth that much.

The most important thing for protecting himself was to make the other party think it was not worth the risk. Or at least, that was that Akira thought.

“It would be great if we can find a good middle ground though.”

“Well, they are the ones who came to strike a deal with you, so let’s just leave that part to them. And of course, we’ll remind them that they’ll regret it if they try to do anything funny.”

“You’re right.”

Unlike last time, Akira brought with him CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun just to be safe.

Akira did not trust Tomejima as much as he trusted Shikarabe and his colleagues. Moreover, he had confirmed from his last visit that the owner of the pub did not mind Hunters bringing in guns with them. Of course, he had no plans to cause a ruckus there, but that might not be the case for Tomejima. After all, that incident with Kadol happened once before.

Akira came a little bit too soon before the entertainment district showed its glamorous and sensual side that he once saw before. So he was looking around, observing the other side of the entertainment district, as he was walking toward the pub that he was heading to.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 100, Striking A Deal

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On the second floor of the pub, Tomejima, Colbert, and a young girl by the name of Viola were sitting on the same table, waiting for Akira.

Tomejima checked his watch, it was still 15 minutes before the meeting time. He had been checking his watch multiple times now. It showed how much he hated this period of wait. It was somehow obvious that he wanted to postpone the negotiation as much as he wanted to finish it at the earliest.

Looking at that, Viola tried to calm Tomejima down.

“You’re so restless. How about calming down for a bit? You won’t be able to do a proper negotiation if you don’t calm down.”

Tomejima looked at Viola, obviously annoyed.

“Just shut it, I know it already… I did let you sit on the same table but don’t say anything. If you do something that causes me more trouble, I’ll have you take responsibility.”

“I know. I won’t bother you. I just want to meet this Hunter Akira. Although I have no plans to help arbitrate between you two, I’ll at least help

you calm him down in case if anything bad happens. You're okay with that, right?"

Viola smiled, she looked amused. That was a smile of someone who enjoyed conflict.

Viola was not Tomejima's co-worker, she was not working for the pub either, nor she had any connection with the brothel on the third floor. She was just someone who had some kind of connection with Tomejima and had him let her attend the negotiation too.

After Tomejima finished making a deal with Shikarabe, he immediately started gathering information about Akira. Viola was one of his information sources and all of the information about Akira that she gathered was all important information, none of them was useless.

Akira killed Sibea, a former Hunter who fell from grace, and all of the officers from his gang before taking over Sibea's gang in the slum city. He then let his lover be the leader of that gang and was controlling the gang through her. Then, when that gang got in some trouble with Shijima's gang, Akira killed the person that Shijima sent and dragged his dead body back to Shijima's base. Akira also got involved with some kind of trouble with the young Hunters from Drankam somewhere in the lower district's main road and they almost had a fight there.

Tomejima who received all of this information thought that Akira was an extremely dangerous person. He killed without hesitation without even thinking of the consequence, he was the epitome of your usual maniac. Although it seemed that he had enough common sense to avoid trouble with a big gang like Drankam, it seemed that he was barely able to do that.

The company that Tomejima was working in was not as big as Drankam. If Akira really planned to wage war against it, he had no idea how far Akira would go before he would stop.

Tomejima once heard what Yamanobe thought about Akira, someone who went crazy from killing too many people. Tomejima could not agree more with those words. That was why he wanted to make a deal with Akira first.

Depending on how Akira saw it, he might see the incident from last time as one of Tomejima men trying to kill him. Even Tomejima himself did not want to get roped into trouble with Akira just because of what Kadol did.

Tomejima had no idea why Viola wanted to attend that negotiation, but it was true that she knew a lot about the other side, the dark side, of the lower district. Thus in order for him to finish his negotiation with Akira peacefully, he let Viola attend that negotiation.

That was also the reason why he picked that pub to negotiate with Akira. After all, Akira at least stopped himself from killing Kadol the last time he was in that pub.

As for the reason why Colbert was also present, it was to help him contact Akira. Tomejima also thought that if Colbert, who was Akira's acquaintance, was also present, Akira would at least hold himself back from getting violent. Just to be safe, he also asked Shikarabe, but Shikarabe refused since he had a lot of things to take care regarding the bounty hunting.

Viola smiled bewitchingly at Colbert as she asked him.

"Say, won't you tell me more about this Akira boy?"

"I already told you what I know, didn't I? It's not like I'm that close to him. I've told you everything that I know about him. I'm sure you've also done some investigation about him anyway, right? So, isn't it like you know more about him than me?"

"I want to hear it straight from the person who knows him, you know. Even if I did some investigations about him, it's not like I hear or see him myself. That's also the case with the incident regarding Kadol. From what I gathered, it seems that Akira is a pretty strong Hunter. But if that's true, then why Kadol would try something that stupid? You were there when that happened, right? Do you know anything?"

"No idea. Isn't it because he's stupid? The reason why stupid people do stupid things is simply because they're stupid, right? There might be no

deeper reason behind it, you know?“

“And I do want to know about the reason behind that. It might be true that the only reason a stupid person does stupid things is simply because that person is stupid. But it’s just to be safe, you know. So like, won’t you tell me anything?“

Seeing how Viola asked him with full curiosity, Colbert thought for a bit before replying.

“Let’s see. Kadol thought that Shikarabe only invited Akira to increase the number of heads and reduce Kadol’s share of the reward. That’s why he tried to kill Akira in order to increase his own share. And it’s true that Akira does look weak and full of openings… Wait, no, is it because he’s short-tempered? Even if he’s hard-pressed because of his debt, he would normally think through and at least pick somewhere else to do that…“

“Does this Akira look weak from a glance?“

“At that time, Shikarabe was complaining about the situation in Drankam lately. He said that the gang has been accepting more and more incompetent young Hunters and giving them good equipment, so Kadol might have thought that Akira was one of those Hunters, huh? Wait, but I’m sure he knows well that it would bring more trouble than it’s worth if he kills a Drankam Hunter… Or is it because he’s stupid that he didn’t think that far, huh? But again…“

Colbert kept thinking about the reason why Kadol did something so stupid back then while making rounds retracting and creating new guesses.

Viola got the information that she wanted from the way Colbert reacted to her question. Akira looked weak, or at least, he looked weak enough to make Kadol not hesitate when he tried to kill him. While in reality, Akira was strong enough to easily kill a Hunter that Tomejima deemed skilled enough to join the bounty hunting.

Viola thought that this Akira must be a pretty interesting fellow as she smiled while waiting for Akira to arrive.

Just like last time, when Akira entered the pub, the master of the pub warned him with a serious face.

“This is not a place for a little kid like you, go home.”

“You should’ve said that to the person who called this small kid here. That guy’s name is Tomejima, do you know where he is?”

Akira replied with the same answer as before. But this time, the master’s reaction was different.

“…Are you Akira then?”

“Yep.”

His face turned stern, it seemed that Tomejima had told him about Akira beforehand.

“…Tomejima is on the second floor, the same seat as before. Just to remind you, don’t cause any trouble in my establishment.”

“I have no plans to start one.”

“I don’t really care about that, if any of you cause trouble here, that’s all the same to me. So yeah, don’t cause any trouble, you get it?”

“Got it.”

Just like last time, he then started grumbling, but unlike last time, his face looked grimmer.

“…Good grief. Calling a brat to a place like this, what the heck is he thinking?”

Akira did not know for sure there whether the master of that place said brat referring to his age or his action from last time.

Akira went to the table where Tomejima was waiting for him. The moment Tomejima saw Akira, he made a rather stiff smile at Akira. It was because

Akira brought more weapons than last time.

Akira was carrying heavy rifles used for fighting monsters that normal humans would not be able to even lift without the help of an augmented suit. It was easy to forget the power of those weapons when one negotiated with a Hunter with a good personality. But when those weapons were carried by a dangerous person like Akira, it reminded Tomejima of how powerful they were. He understood why the Corporate Government would even spend a lot of money to improve the moral standard of the Hunters.

Tomejima tried his best to smile at Akira with his stiff face.

“Thanks for coming, have a seat.”

It would be bad to come off too strong and it would be fatal to come off too weak. Tomejima tried to regain his composure as he tried to poke for Akira’s reaction.

Akira looked around without taking the seat that Tomejima offered. He then spotted a chair without a backrest, so he dragged that chair to the table and sat on it. After all, it would be hard to sit on a chair with a backrest with his rifles on his back.

Although Tomejima tried his best to stay calm, he twitched a bit. Looking at how Akira was reluctant to let go of his rifles, Tomejima kept telling himself that it was at least harder to reach compared to if Akira put his rifles somewhere near his hand.

“Since you’re here, I guess it’s okay to assume that you plan to peacefully negotiate with me, right?”

Akira was obviously being careful with Tomejima. He stared at Tomejima and replied.

“I have no plans to cause trouble here. The master below also warned me not to cause any trouble after all.”

“I-I see.”

Tomejima thought that Akira was being honest. Or to be more precise, he wanted to believe that it was the case. It was unclear how much it guaranteed his safety, but at least, it reduced the chance of Akira suddenly shooting and killing him there.

Tomejima thought that he was really glad to have informed the master of that pub beforehand, he felt a sense of relief and regained some of his calm.

But even so, his smile was still stiff. Akira was not ready to let go of his rifles during a negotiation although it was some kind of common sense among the good Hunters to do that. But if he looked back, the first person who broke that common sense was the Hunter who accompanied him to that pub last time. And right now, he had to start negotiating with such a dangerous person who was sitting right in front of him.

Tomejima then continued.

“Well, at least, listen to what I have to say here. First and foremost, we have no wish to be hostile with you. This is the most important point. That’s why we want to resolve this incident peacefully if it’s possible. So, up until this point, you do agree with us, right?”

“Yep. There’s nothing better than to resolve this incident peacefully.”

“That’s great, I’m glad to hear that.”

Tomejima carefully proceeded while looking closely at Akira’s reaction.

“…So then, about Kadol though. Ahh, he’s the guy who tried to attack you last time. So like, if it’s possible, I want you to let him go. Although he’s already carrying a lot of debt in the first place, as compensation for that incident, he was even made to pay for the equipment of the people that I sent to join Shikarabe’s bounty hunting, you see. So basically, if he dies, then we will have to shoulder more of his outstanding debt. It would be troublesome for us if he doesn’t stay alive and work hard to pay for his own debt… Well, that’s basically where we stand, Akira, what about you? What’s your plan with Kadol? Do you want to kill him no matter what?

Since you let him go last time, it’s not like you really want to kill him, right?”

Akira thought about it one more time. His opinion about Kadol was a little complicated, but in conclusion, he actually more or less did not care much about him. He did not think that it was worth the trouble looking for him just to kill him. But if he met him somewhere in the wasteland by pure chance, he might just go and kill him. That was all that he felt about Kadol.

If he met Kadol in the wasteland by pure chance and Kadol ran away from him as fast as he could, Akira had no plans to chase him. But if Kadol started to shoot at him, he might as well kill Kadol without a shred of hesitation.

But if he let Kadol off just because Tomejima asked him to do so, he felt that it might cause more trouble later down the road. Once he reached that conclusion, he then carefully asked Tomejima a question.

“If I let him go, what do you have to offer to me?”

“…That’s why we’re here. Do you have any demand?”

“Even if you ask me so, I have nothing particular in mind.”

Tomejima fell silent thinking that Akira actually had no plans to do any negotiation with him at all. Akira simply had nothing to demand from Tomejima as it was too much of a hassle for him to try to think of anything. But even so, if Tomejima asked him to be merciful and just let it go, Akira might throw the peaceful negotiation out of the window. Tomejima had a lot of experience in negotiating with Hunters, so he at least knew that much.

Akira then continued.

“You come up with your offer, I’m bad with that kind of thing after all.”

To be honest, Tomejima wanted to resolve the incident with money, but he could not afford to point that out to Akira. After all, it was something that involved Akira’s life.

If Tomejima offered a small sum, it might anger Akira. After all, no matter who it was, everyone wanted to put a high price on his or her own life, so it would be understandable if Akira did not want Tomejima to put a cheap price tag on his life. While on the other hand, even if he offered a lot of money to Akira, there was a limit on how much money he could pay Akira.

And even if he put that money on Kadol's tab. Kadol had already been carrying a lot of debt to the point that he was close to his limit. If he put more burden on Kadol's shoulder, Kadol might decide to run away instead. And if that happened, he bet that Kadol would try to run away to the neighbouring city just to get killed by the monsters midway. So in the end, Tomejima would not be able to gather any money from Kadol and he would have suffered a huge loss.

While on the other hand, in case if Akira demanded a huge amount of money from him, he would have to deal with it. Hypothetically speaking, if Akira asked for 10,000,000,000 Aurum and Kadol could not pay for that, and if Akira demanded Tomejima to pay in Kadol's stead, in that case, then Tomejima would have to resolve himself to fight against Akira.

Akira just sat silently waiting for Tomejima's reply. Tomejima did not know what to do there, should he suggest to solve the incident with money? Or should he somehow push Akira to ask for money? Or instead, should he suggest something else other than money?

That was when Viola interjected.

"In the credit company that Tomejima is working, in case if a debtor with a huge debt is killed by someone, then the company might demand that person to pay for the debt that the debtor has. And if that's impossible to do because of the strength difference, then the company might sell the debt bond at a cheap price to another company who can do that. It's one of the things that they do to compensate for their loss, you see."

Akira's gaze shifted from Tomejima to Viola as he asked her a very short question.

"So?"

“That’s all. I just want to let you know in case you didn’t know. If this negotiation doesn’t proceed at all, then both of you would be in trouble. And if I have to add something, it’s normal for creditor companies that usually deal with Hunters to have some soldiers to collect debts from those Hunters. And those soldiers have a reputation to uphold too. It would not be worth the trouble, you know?”

Akira did not change his expression as he asked Viola.

“To me, it sounds like you’re saying that if we don’t reach a compromise here, Tomejima will sell the credit bond to someone else cheaply and I’ll be forced to pay for Kadol’s debt. Since it’ll only cause trouble for both sides, you’re saying that I should let it go without any compensation, or at least be merciful during this negotiation, am I correct?”

Viola smiled and replied.

“I leave the interpretation to you.”

“I see.”

Akira’s gaze returned back to Tomejima. His gaze was a bit more intimidating than before, he kept staring at Tomejima without saying anything.

Tomejima tried to probe the real reason why Viola suddenly interjected as well as confirming how Akira reacted to it.

Viola did not say anything after that. She just sat there to witness how the negotiation would proceed.

After a short silence, Akira let out a big sigh. He then stood up from his chair.

Viola smiled at Akira and asked him.

“Oh, does this mean that both of you have a deal here?”

“No, we have no deal.”

Akira only said that to Viola and turned to Tomejima.

“Since you’re not saying anything, then you’re okay with that, right?”

Tomejima flusteredly said.

“Whoah, wait for a sec there!?”

It was true that Tomejima did not say anything, and what Viola said about his company was also correct. He was actually thinking about how to use that to lead his negotiation with Akira in a better direction. He was thinking of talking about the terms that both of them could agree on from now on, but he did not expect that Akira would just suddenly get up from his chair.

Viola was also a bit surprised, she then flusteredly said to Akira.

“You’re pretty short-tempered, aren’t you? It’s important to have patience while negotiating, you know?”

Akira did not reply as he prepared himself to leave the place. Tomejima did try to stop him, but Akira just ignored Tomejima as he headed to the stairs and left the pub.

After exiting the pub, Akira let out a big sigh. He himself knew that he was acting out of pure emotion back there.

Beside him, Alpha was smiling at Akira. There was a trace of exasperation on her usual smile. Akira looked at Alpha’s expression and tried to make an excuse.

“…It feels like they think I would take their offer with a little more push, I just don’t like that.”

“That’s true, I agree with you.”

“I feel like at that rate, they’ll just pay me a small amount of money to solve that incident, and I feel like it’s a really bad thing.”

“That’s true.”

“To be honest, I have no plans to look for that Kadol just to kill him. It just isn’t worth the hassle.”

“That’s true, it would only cause more trouble.”

“…Ahh, this actually might be a good chance for me to check how much other people are willing to pay me to avoid getting into trouble with me. But if I make a bad precedent here, I think that in itself is really no good.”

“That’s right, but those are just excuses, right?”

Akira fell silent. Alpha was smiling at him like usual, it might be just him over-thinking that she looked angry from his point of view. But even so, Akira could not help but feel a bit awkward as he walked through the entertainment district.

After a few steps, Alpha suddenly stood in front of Akira who seemed to be still bothered by what had happened.

“It’s not like I’m angry at you. I do respect your will, after all, I didn’t stop you back then, right? I’m not really bothered by the fact that you broke the negotiation there. Even if you had started a fight since there was something that you just couldn’t forgive or let go of back there, I still wouldn’t mind it. I would have given you my utmost support if that had happened. But again, if you decided to do that just to carefully probe for my reaction, you could have tried to be more careful back there, you know?”

“…Yes, I’ll be more careful.”

“Very well.”

Alpha smiled satisfied after hearing Akira’s reply. Akira who saw that was finally able to calm down.

She then made a suggestion to him.

“Since we’re already in the entertainment district, how about we grab something to eat here? You did say back then that you’ll treat yourself something delicious without worrying about the price, right?”

“Ah, you’re right. Alright then, let’s look for a shop with delicious food.”

“I can help you search through the network, what kind of food do you want?”

“In that case then, make it a sandwich. A real delicious one.”

Akira remembered the sandwich that Alpha ate the other day. It looked extremely delicious but there was no way he could eat that, after all, it was nothing but an image of a sandwich.

Alpha smiled.

“I don’t know if you can find that level of sandwich here, but I’ll at least give it a search.”

And so, Akira just forgot about his exchange with Tomejima and enjoyed strolling in the entertainment district. Finding a good shop was the second priority for him at the moment.

__*__*__*__

On the second floor of the pub, Tomejima was glaring at Viola.

“This is all because you went and said that unnecessary thing, you know!! What are you going to do with this now?!”

Viola kept up her calm demeanour as she said.

“How can I say it? He’s really a short-tempered boy, or more like, he has no patience at all. Even if he’s strong, it won’t take long before someone kills him.”

“I don’t care about that!! It’s all your fault!! Don’t you understand that!?”

“It’s not like you can afford to keep silent forever, right? I know it’s not like you can suggest to him to resolve it with money yourself, right? I know that you were also hoping Akira would break after listening to my explanation. Akira also did say that he thought you agreed since you didn’t say anything

back there. If you had stopped me mid-way, I'm sure he would have not left like that, you know? Or am I mistaken?"

Tomejima was taken aback since Viola was absolutely correct.

Colbert, who was just listening to them until now, finally opened his mouth.

"So then, what's your plan now? Akira has gone back, so if you don't need anything else from me, I'm going back home too. Ahh, by the way, just to let you know, I don't care if you want to fight Akira, but I'll not lend you my hand, not even to help you contact him, and of course, I won't be Kadol's observer or bodyguard. I won't accept your request to be your bodyguard either. So if you need one, go look for someone else."

After Colbert said that as if it had nothing to do with him, Tomejima flusteredly said to him.

"Wait, leaving Kadol aside, how about me? I have nothing to do with that incident, you know?"

"It's up to you how you are going to put Kadol back on your leash, but what if he does something as stupid as trying to kill Akira again? And what if Akira mistook that aggression? Do you think he would not act because someone would suffer a loss with Kadol's death? I don't want to get roped into such things."

Tomejima's face turned grim, he then shouted at Viola again. This time he sounded even more dreaded than before.

"Viola!! It's all your fault!! I'll have you take responsibility for this!!"

Viola still kept her calm as she said.

"Don't worry, I understand. In that case, how about I buy Kadol's debt bond, that way, his problem will be shifted from you to me. Let's see, I'll buy it for 50% discount."

Tomejima was taken aback and lost his composure. He unconsciously considered Viola's suggestions and calculated its benefit.

“…Kadol is still alive and it’s not like we know for sure Akira is going to kill him, a 50% discount is too much.”

“Who exactly do you think is willing to buy the debt bond of someone chased after by a Hunter who even killed a bounty monster? If you were in my shoe, how much are you willing to pay for it? I bet you’re only willing to buy it for cheap, right? Or are you going to sell the bond to someone else without telling the situation? It would be really bad once it leaks out, you know. Or is it that you have the confidence you can find someone else who would properly control that stupid guy and takeover his bond? You know that you can’t, that’s why you’re panicking, right?”

Tomejima looked very desperate, all of Viola’s guesses were indeed correct.

Viola gave a fake pitying smile to Tomejima. She then gave him another push.

“I feel responsible for what happened too, you see. That’s why I’m offering to buy that bond for 50% since I’m sure no one would be willing to buy it. I’m willing to pay for your loss and take responsibility. As someone who is working with money a lot, I want you to at least understand my sincerity here. But just to let you know, I believe I already took responsibility by making this offer. It’s up to you if you’re not going to take this offer, but don’t expect me to make another offer, okay?”

Tomejima frowned, he was using all of his brainpower to calculate the loss and benefit from that offer.

“…But still, half price is too small. 60%, how about 60%?”

“Sure, I do plan to get along with you in the future too. So, I’ll take it at 60%.”

“…Dammit!!”

Although they had a deal there, Tomejima still looked unsatisfied. After all, although he was able to minimize his loss, he still lost money there.

Tomejima and Viola used their respective terminals to go through the documents and finalized their deal there.

“So then, I’ll take my leave here. I look forward to making more deals with you in the future.”

Viola smiled when she said that before leaving that place in a good mood. Tomejima still looked a bit annoyed as he saw her off.

He was still pouting as he operated the terminal on his table to order something to drink. It was obvious that he was going to drink his sorrow away.

Colbert then stood up from his chair.

“I’m going home too. I understand how you feel, but don’t drink too much, okay?”

“If you do, then you can at least accompany me drinking here. I’ll pay for you too.”

“No thanks, I have no plans to get roped in to drink away your sorrow. If you need company, just call someone from the first or the third floor. Later then.”

“…Tch!”

It seemed that he lost quite a lot of money that day, Tomejima did not try to hide his displeasure as he clicked his tongue.

When Colbert left the pub, Viola was waiting for him.

He did not say anything and just extended his right hand to Viola. She also did not say anything back as she handed over an envelope filled with money to him.

The reason why Colbert fanned Tomejima’s worry was because he had a deal with Viola beforehand. Colbert was hired by her.

Viola was smiling as she smugly said to him.

“It’s easier to pay through transfer, you know. Is it okay if I transfer your payment next time?”

But then Colbert said shamelessly.

“As an upright Hunter, I want to avoid transfer history from a suspicious source in my bank account, you see.”

Viola teasingly smiled at him and said.

“An upright Hunter, huh? Well, I know that different people interpret those words differently. So I have no plans to dig any deeper.”

Colbert checked the money inside his envelope before putting it inside his chest pocket. He then remembered something that bothered him and asked Viola about that.

“I’m just asking this out of curiosity, what are you planning to do with that bond that you just bought? Both trading bonds and lending money are not your real job, right? Just like you’ve explained to Tomejima, it would be near impossible to resell that bond, are you planning to keep the incident about Akira a secret and sell that bond to the other competitor companies?”

Viola smiled.

“I have a lot of plans with it. But I haven’t really decided what I’m going to do.”

Viola sometimes did arbitration between conflicting organizations, her skill was highly regarded for that. But Colbert knew that sometimes she would sow the seed of fire herself, fan those flames, put gasoline on them, and then extract money out from both parties. She would go around manipulating everyone as if it was not her responsibility.

Colbert decided that he should refrain from taking requests from Viola for the time being. No one could tell for sure if she would use that bond that she bought from Tomejima to cause more trouble or not. But he bet that she

was going to cause more trouble and he had no plans to get roped into trouble that involved Akira.

Colbert reminded himself to be very careful since he knew that getting roped into such a thing would definitely not be worth it.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 101, The Clash Between The Current World and The Old World

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Akira found himself in a white world. Although it was hazy, he quickly noticed that it was a dream and he knew that he would forget what happened there once he woke up.

Not too far from him, there was Alpha, and just like last time, it did not seem that she had noticed him. But there was something different compared to last time.

Akira noticed that there were multiple Alphas present. To be more precise there were 2 Alpha, both of them did not seem to have noticed him.

Then, in that place, there was also another boy. Both Alphas did not seem to have noticed that boy either. Both Akira and that boy noticed each other, but since it was hazy, they could not tell who the other person was. But both of them thought of the same thing, the other person somehow looked familiar.

The Alpha near that boy spoke first.

“Just to be safe, we’ve agreed beforehand that we’ll operate as separate units to encourage different bias and that we’ll temporarily stop communicating with each other. So I’m sure you have a good reason as to why you broke our original agreement.”

The Alpha closer to Akira replied.

“But of course. To be more precise, the load on your side interfered with my calculation ability, thanks to that, the subject under my care almost got killed.”

“I see, according to the log, that’s precisely when the subject under my care took a very dangerous action. At that time, the subject under my care was trying to save a certain cyborg that he just met for the first time, and in order to do that, I had to use more calculation power. I believe that is the cause.”

“I want to suggest that the resource divided between us be fixed. So that it would not suddenly change and something like that would not happen again in the future.”

The other Alpha looked a bit surprised at what Akira’s Alpha just said.

“Is that really necessary? It’s true that it’ll reduce the chance of interfering with each other, but it’ll definitely reduce our calculation ability. Moreover, the subject under your care is still alive, right? So basically, although he went through some dangerous situation, it was still under your estimation, right? So, why do you still have anything to complain about?”

After the other Alpha asked that question, Akira’s Alpha just shook her head and said.

“According to my calculation, he should have been dead there. When my connection to the subject was cut, something must have happened and he got lucky so that he was able to survive.”

“Unlike the subject under my care, I heard that the subject under your care is not that skilled. Luck, or anything that happens out of pure chance, you

know well that those things can’t overturn our calculation, right?”

For some reason, Akira’s Alpha sounded a bit annoyed as she said.

“That evaluation is not correct. The subject under your care is rather gifted, so it’s not like the subject under my care is incompetent. I’ve been training him and he’s been putting effort too, he’ll eventually get himself strong enough. You should fix that assumption to correct your calculation. And also, the subject under your care is a skilled Hunter, right? In that case, you should just quickly increase his strength and take him to the commander’s office. Moreover, if he’s really that good, then there should be no problem lowering your support ability for a bit, right? And you should give the leftover unused resource to me.”

The other Alpha shook her head.

“I can’t accept that suggestion. Although he’s skilled, he tends to get himself into difficult situations and it’s really hard to control him. It might be because of his special characteristic, he is always surrounded by a lot of people which makes it harder to encourage him to pick individualistic action. Not to mention, he has a very merciful nature; if I bring him there now, there’s a good chance that the same thing would happen as the 480th trial. It’s unfair to use the subject under your care who is already a lone-wolf with a twisted personality as a standard. I have a lot of things I need to deal with, you see.”

Both of them were staring at each other without saying anything, that silence was created by their favouritism toward the subject under their respective care.

The other Alpha then said.

“I approve your suggestion about the resource distribution. Is there anything else you want to talk about then?”

“Nothing, by the way, the subject under your care is garnering a lot of attention though, are you okay with that?”

“It’s something for me to worry about, not you. The subject under my care is too gifted, although I try to make it as natural as possible, he just keeps piling achievements after achievements. And it might also be because of his nature, even if someone close to him gets killed, the other people around him would not blame him, thus pushing him even further from being egocentric. Since more and more people are laying their eyes on him, I’m still in the middle of calculating whether to reduce the number of those people or do something to erase their effects on my subject.”

“Is that so? Well, good luck, until next time.”

“I’ll contact you again if something comes up.”

They then finished their discussion there.

Akira’s consciousness started to blur, the world around him suddenly turned pitch black and he woke up from that dream.

After Akira woke up, Alpha quickly greeted him.

“Akira, good morning!”

Akira did not reply to Alpha, he just stared back at her. Alpha found that weird.

“What’s wrong?”

Akira did not remember anything from his dream. But he felt that something was bothering him for some reason.

“Nah, it’s nothing. I feel like I just had a strange dream. Inside that dream, I feel like you were there… Or maybe not…?”

Akira tilted his head when he said that, to which, Alpha teasingly smiled and said.

“Oh my, you think of me so much that you dream of me, huh? I’m happy to hear that. I don’t know what kind of dress I was wearing in your dream, but

if you like it that much that you dreamt of it, you can just tell me and I'll be happy to change into that dress, you know?"

Akira decided to drop that subject there before it turned into something more complicated.

"Nah, it must be just my imagination. That's it then, this subject ends here."

"That's just too bad, you don't need to try to run away, you know? It's normal for your desire to surface within a dream…"

"We're heading to the wasteland starting from today. So stop with the stupid talk and let's get ourselves ready to head out."

Akira forcefully changed the subject as he hopped off from his bed. He had completely forgotten about the feeling that something was bothering him.

Akira drove his new vehicle to the wasteland. It was a vehicle designed for traversing the wasteland. It was the bonus that Akira got from Shikarabe on top of the prize money for helping him hunt the bounty monster.

After he received that vehicle from Shikarabe, Akira went to the repair garage that Shizuka recommended to give a full check and readjustment for that vehicle. And with a special control device installed on it, just like last time, Alpha could access the vehicle and control it.

When Akira asked Shizuka for a repair garage that she would recommend, she was a bit surprised. She thought that Akira must have done something that damaged his newly bought vehicle to the point that he had to take it to a repair garage. She worried about Akira and decided to ask about the vehicle's condition from the repair garage where Akira fixed his vehicle. She was much relieved when she heard from the repair garage that it was nothing but light damage and there was nothing to worry about with a little bit of TLC and readjustment. She did not realize that Akira's previous vehicle was badly damaged and that he had already changed to a new vehicle.

Akira had recovered from his fatigue after fighting the bounty monster, he also had replenished his ammo, and with no bounty monster roaming the wasteland any longer, he returned back to searching for undiscovered ruin.

“Alpha, how far is the next place?”

“Still about an hour from here.”

Akira was watching the navigator in his vehicle’s control device and mumbled.

“It’s still that far, huh. As I thought, we might have taken too much detour.”

Akira’s destination was another place recorded in the Lion Steel corporation’s information terminal. Learning from the last time, he took a detour this time before heading to his destination. But because of that, he took more time to reach the location.

“You’re right about that. We should have taken a detour only after knowing for sure that the place we’re heading to has an unexplored ruin, or at least, after finding good evidence pointing the existence of an unexplored ruin there. After all, it would only be a waste of energy if the indicator that we’re chasing is pointing at an empty space.”

“That’s true, let’s do that next time. And I’m sure no one is tailing us after we took that much detour.”

“I’ve also expanded my searching range compared to last time, so there’s nothing to worry. I’ve also rewritten the software of the control device, so I’m sure that there’s no pre-installed tracking program in it.”

“You didn’t have to go that far, but well, it’s good to be careful.”

Akira changed the direction of his vehicle to head straight to his destination. So now he should be able to cut the time by quite a lot. After that, he remembered something that was bothering him.

“By the way, Alpha, why does that dress have so many gaps and holes?”

Just like usual, Alpha was wearing a very revealing but charming and sexy dress. She was wearing a bodysuit that was divided into pieces, each piece was connected to the other pieces by a small connector or a small piece of cloth. Moreover, there were also holes with unknown use on that bodysuit. Her skin was exposed in between those openings, her undies were even peeking through one of those gaps.

“This? This is a bodysuit designed so that you can freely replace its part to conform to your body shape. It’s made especially for those with a cyborg body that can freely exchange their body parts.”

“Then what about that hole on your back?”

“This is to connect to external equipment. There are many extension parts such as external parts for a humanoid weapon, or propulsion device that can propel you to the sky, or maybe big portable cannons, or other types of heavy weapons.”

Akira imagined all kinds of things from Alpha’s explanation. At first, he only imagined a humanoid weapon, but eventually, his imagination resulted in something that was an amalgamation of humans with different types of weapons, he then decided to stop there.

“That bodysuit and the talk just now, they’re about the old-world stuff, right? As I thought, the old-world is just really weird. It’s not something that you can easily try to imagine.”

Alpha smiled at Akira and said.

“You should be able to imagine it from the old-world stuff that you can find around you, you know? You should be able to find something similar if you look in the old-world ruins.”

Inside Akira’s mind, he imagined Alpha with a huge weapon on her back, so huge that it did not fit her size at all. He imagined a lot of different things connected to those holes to justify the existence of those holes.

Akira both felt surprised and exasperated at the same time.

“…I see, so those kinds of things were normal in the old-world, huh?”

“I think you can find them even in the current era too. Someone might find those kinds of stuff in the old-world ruin and use them. Then some companies would see that and try to produce an imitation of those devices, so it might be normal for those Hunters in the frontline of the eastern district to be using those kinds of devices, you know?”

There were a lot of things from the old-world that existed in the current era, many of which were things they could never imagine. So it would not be strange to find things that someone could actually imagine because the technology of the old-world would have allowed them to create those things.

“…I guess there are still a lot of things out there that I don’t know, huh?”

Although Akira mumbled those words, he also said to himself there must be a limit on how weird it could be.

Not too long after that, Akira reached his destination. At the first glance, it was only a huge grassland; the indicator, which was based on the information extracted from the Lion Steel corp, was pointing under that grassland.

Akira looked at that indicator with the help of his enhanced vision and mumbled.

“Another underground facility, huh? Compared to Yonozuka station ruin, this one is even deeper. Alright then, let’s return back here some other time.”

Akira quickly gave up on searching the underground ruin. After all, if he found another unexplored ruin like Yonozuka station ruin, it might cause him another round of trouble. So he refused to make the same mistake for the second time.

Alpha, who understood what Akira was thinking, just smiled at him and said.

“I’m okay with that. Until you have the ability to get out of the underground ruin with your own power and no support from me, it might be a good idea to refrain from exploring underground ruins. We still have other places to check out too, so there’s no need to take an unnecessary risk.”

“In that case, it’ll mean I won’t be going to explore any underground ruins for the time being.”

“About that, there’s nothing we can do but to look forward to your growth. Now then, for the next place though, the nearest place from here is actually pointing at a ruin that is already explored. Do you want to check it out? Or do you want to go to the next place instead?”

Akira took some time thinking before he made a decision.

“Let’s go there. This is a good chance since I want to take a look at the other ruins too. After all, in terms of already discovered ruins, I’ve never gone to the other ruins except Kusuzuhara city ruin and Higaraka residence ruin. So then, what is the next ruin?”

“It’s Mihazono city ruin.”

Akira quickly prepared himself to go to Mihazono city ruin, but he did not go straight from there to Mihazono ruin. Instead, he headed back to Kugamayama city first. This was until he could get some connection to the city. It was in order for him to take regular monster-hunting requests from the Hunter Office. After all, he could not access the Hunter Office website unless he got some connection signal from the Kugamayama city.

After he entered the Kugamayama city’s connection range, Akira took out his information terminal and finished his registration for the regular monster-hunting request. Up until now, he had been leaving that part to Alpha, but the current Akira started to be able to do it by himself.

While he was doing that, a question popped up inside his mind and he asked Alpha about it.

“Say, Alpha. Why does the Hunter Office have this regular monster-hunting request?”

“Why, you ask? It’s because the Hunter Office keep issuing it, of course.”

“Aahh, that’s not what I meant. I do understand why they are issuing that request for patrolling around the city. For that request, basically, the people in the inner wall are paying money to protect the city and make sure that the city is safe. And when they place requirements to bring back the monster’s corpse, no matter whether it’s from a biological monster or a mechanical monster, they can extract materials from those corpses and exchange it for money. I do understand that part. But then, for Hunters who kill monsters in a faraway place that has nothing to do with the city safety and those Hunters also don’t have to bring the corpses of the monsters that they defeat back to the city, who would pay for their reward? Well, this didn’t bother me the last time I took the regular monster-hunting request, but now that I think about it, I just wonder about its profitability, you see.”

When Akira curiously asked that question, Alpha was actually a bit surprised by that, but she then laughed amusedly.

“…What?”

“It’s nothing, I just realised that you’ve started thinking about something like that, it shows the result of my education. So I’m really happy to find out how much you have improved.”

Seeing how Alpha was laughing, Akira felt both embarrassed and a bit annoyed at the same time.

“Well, thanks for that.”

“Don’t pout, I’m actually praising you, you know? And it’s not like I know the exact insider information about the Corporate Government, so whatever I say would be basically just a guess from me. Are you okay with that?”

“Yeah, I’m okay with that.”

“Very well. If I have to put it simply, the Corporate Government is paying for that reward for the sake of the whole Eastern district.”

Starting with those words, Alpha began her explanation of her guess to Akira.

The regular monster-hunting request did not designate a particular monster or number as its target. The place, time, type, or the number of the monsters were not particularly determined in that request. And even if the Hunters returned back without encountering any monsters, they would still get paid the minimal sum as a reward.

There were all kinds of monsters roaming in the Eastern district. The Hunters who took that regular monster-hunting request from the Hunter Office could get rewarded only by handing over information about where and when they encountered those monsters. The Hunter Office would then analyze all the information that it gathered from the Hunters into something that could bring profits.

The result from analyzing that information could be used for so many things like constructing threat level maps depending on the monsters roaming in certain areas, mapping out the safe trading route between cities, or maybe adjusting the Eastern district reclamation plan. All of them were very important agenda.

While on the other hand, it also worked to cull the monsters that seemed to be multiplying endlessly no matter how many the Hunters killed. For every single monster killed out there, the safety of the wasteland would improve and people would be able to carry stuff across the wasteland safer.

Akira listened to Alpha with full interest.

“Those people in the Hunter Office do think about a lot of things, huh?”

“There are also many other ways to use that information. As an example, they can use it to look for new unexplored ruins, like the Yonozuka station ruin that you discovered the other day. A lot of monsters are flowing out through it, so the monster encounter rate around the entrance to that ruin

must be pretty high. If the City Management decides to check that place, they should be able to find the entrance into the ruin."

"And if the City Management discovers a new undiscovered ruin first, they'll be able to gain a lot of profit from it. Then they can sell the relics found there in the nearby cities and use that money to pay the Hunters, that way the city would prosper, I see now…"

Compared to when he was living in the slum city, the current Akira started to notice things that were going on in the background. He was honestly amazed by it as he nodded deeply. It was also the result of Alpha's education that he started to grow not only as a better fighter.

Alpha smiled as she noticed how far Akira had grown. While at the same time, she always calculated whether that growth would give her trouble or not. She tried to suppress the possibility of Akira turning hostile in the future as much as possible.

As Akira was heading to Mihazono city ruin, a signal suddenly popped out in the detection range. When he checked that signal, it was not a monster but another vehicle. It was a big sized wasteland bus. That bus was equipped with a lot of machine guns on top of it and it seemed that it was filled with Hunters, there was Hunter Office symbol on the sides of that bus.

"They're heading the same way with us, huh?"

"It seems that it's a transportation bus from the Hunter Office. I think it runs between the Kugamayama city and Mihazono ruin."

"Those people in it, are they Hunters? There are quite a lot of them."

"It shows that there are still some unclaimed relics in Mihazono ruin which attracts that many Hunters. Let's bring back any good relics if we get to find any."

Akira kept staring at the Hunters inside that bus, it seemed that he was thinking about something.

“Akira, what’s wrong?”

“Say, Alpha, there are many Hunters exploring the old-world ruin to collect relics, right? And they’ve been doing this for years… Maybe even for a few hundred years, huh?”

“The precise number is uncertain and it’s different for each area, but the most recent record shows that it has been going on for at least 200 years.”

“Although Hunters have been carrying out old-world relics for that long, why are there still old-world relics left unclaimed out there? Aren’t there just too many of them no matter how you think about it?”

Including Akira, there were a lot of Hunters in the Kugamayama city. Although compared to the total population in the Eastern district, maybe only a small portion of them were Hunters, but there were enough of those Hunters out there to the point that the whole economy in the Eastern district was constructed around them. And those Hunters regularly carried a lot of old-world relics out from the old-world ruins back to the city. So Akira just thought that it was weird how there were still old-world relics left in the old-world ruins.

But Alpha just casually replied.

“They do get exhausted. If you look at the current Higaraka Residence Ruin, Hunters have already taken all of the expensive relics from that ruin and so that ruin is left with nothing but cheap relics right now. And this is true everywhere you go. Even for the western area of the Eastern district, which borders the territory owned by the Allied Nations, I heard that there are even hardly any cheap relics left in that region. That’s why the Corporate Government keeps pushing further and further to the east seeking new ruins and new relics even though the monsters are getting stronger and stronger the further they go east. But of course, as the risk increases, the number and the quality of the relics are also getting better and better, that’s why it seems that it worth the risk.”

“I-I see.”

Akira’s expression turned slightly stiff. If the relics in the Eastern district was exhausted, it would definitely change Hunter’s line of work, he vaguely felt worried about that.

Looking at that, Alpha just smiled at him and said.

“Don’t worry, although it’s just my guess, I believe that the old-world relics around this area will not get depleted anytime soon, at least, they won’t be depleted in your lifetime. Of course, they’ll eventually get depleted if the Hunters keep carrying them out from the ruins, but there’s a reason why it won’t get depleted anytime soon.”

“And why is that?”

“I don’t think there’s any need to explain it, but carrying out relics while fighting the monsters roaming in the wasteland is not an easy thing to do. Because of that, it’s close to impossible to carry a huge amount of relics out from the ruin in one go.”

“Well, that’s true. And that’s exactly why we have people working as Hunters, right?”

“Moreover, among all the old-world ruins, some of them have self-repairing function. It’ll fix damaged buildings and maintain everything inside those buildings, this also includes replenishing equipment and any other objects that the Hunters take out from those ruins. There were even times when it constructed a new ruin in the middle of the wasteland, you know. It seems that the large-scale maintenance equipment of the old-world era is still functioning well.”

“Oohh!! That’s amazing!! But if there are ruins that can replenish the relics inside it, won’t the Hunters and the soldiers from the Corporate Government flood those ruins?”

“Most of the time, the self-repair function of those ruins also fix the security facilities and the factories in those ruins. Those factories would then endlessly produce security equipment to chase away any intruders. Some people also say that it’s the real reason why the number of monsters

in the wasteland won’t get reduced no matter how many monsters the Hunters kill, after all, the mechanical monsters are basically the security equipment produced by those factories. So of course, they would normally attack people too. Seeing from the other perspective, they are basically security measures to prevent people from intruding and stealing things from the area that they are guarding, so that means that they are functioning as intended.”

“Well, if you put it that way, that’s kinda true. From their point of view, Hunters are basically robbers.”

Akira mumbled those words as if he just realized something profound. He did feel a bit of an unpleasant feeling, but he then continued in order to expel that unpleasant feeling.

“But it’s not like I can stop working as a Hunter, I guess it can’t be helped, huh. The people who owned those facilities are already long gone. So as long as they don’t come back to haunt me, they won’t be able to complain. So it should be okay, right?

“…Yep.”

Although Alpha was smiling, there was a trace of confliction in her smile that caused her smile to turn a bit stiff. She inadvertently showed that expression to Akira who was already trying to move on from that subject. But she quickly returned her face to her usual expression before he could notice it.

Just like Kuzusuhara ruin, Mihazono ruin was a ruin of a city. To be more precise, the whole ruin and the area surrounding it were referred to as Mihazono ruin.

Although it was a pretty big ruin, it was not as big as Kusuzuhara ruin, and the monsters inside it were not as strong as the monsters inside the inner part of Kusuzuhara ruin. With enough equipment and skill, it was a rather safe ruin for Hunters to explore.

When Akira arrived there, he was surprised to find something which he did not expect at all.

“A parking lot… Wait for a sec, is it still operational?”

The parking lot was a simple lot with a roof. Its walls were decorated with the Hunter Office symbol. It seemed that the Hunter Office owned that parking lot.

Akira stopped his vehicle as he was looking at that parking lot, a guard noticed him and shouted at him.

“Hey, don’t park there. You’re blocking the way!!”

“Ah, I’m sorry.”

Akira obediently apologized and turned his vehicle back on, the guard who saw that then asked Akira.

“Is this your first time coming here?”

“Yes, this is my first time here.”

“I see. If you’re going to park your vehicle around this place, use the parking lot. A lot of Hunter Office vehicles are using this road, so it would disrupt the flow if you park your vehicle around this area. If you don’t want to pay for the parking lot, then you should park your vehicle somewhere further away from this area. At least as far as that building over there.”

That guy then pointed at a building not too far from their location. Akira tilted his head and asked that guy.

“…Is that really far enough? If it’s only that far, people won’t pay for the pa- Ah, but I see there are quite a lot of vehicles parking there, huh?”

The parking lot was already filled with vehicles. Only about 40% of the parking lot was used, so there was still quite a lot of open space there. But compared to its size, that parking lot was already pretty filled.

That guy then answered Akira’s question.

“It has a roof and it’s not that expensive. You can find Hunters and staff in the Hunter Office nearby and some merchants are also using that place. Moreover, there are a lot of people around here, we’re technically still in the wasteland, you see. I know it’s rather concerning to say this myself, but there are people who are up for no good out here. But even so, I’m sure they know better not to try to steal the vehicles parked in the parking lot owned by the Hunter Office. Furthermore, there are guards and security cameras in the parking lot. Well, there are times when some stupid people tried to mess with the vehicles in the parking lot, but all of them ended up pretty tragically. So that’s basically why a lot of people decide to use the parking lot. If you want to use the parking lot too, the counter is over there.”

That guy then pointed his finger toward a reception counter near the parking lot and went back to his station.

Akira thought for a bit and turned to Alpha.

“Let’s try using it once, I guess.”

“Yep, let’s do that. The Hunter Office made that parking lot for the Hunters who come to this ruin, so let’s use it.”

Akira headed to the reception counter, he then finished the administration work and parked his vehicle inside the parking lot. For the Hunters with a bank account, the parking fee was automatically debited from the bank account. It might be a means to avoid the Hunters postponing their parking fee payment.

The person at the counter warned Akira that even if he forgets to inform the Hunter Office before leaving the parking lot, the parking fare would still be automatically deducted from his bank account.

Akira unloaded his stuff from his vehicle, he also took his CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun with him. After he finished his

preparation to head out, he then went to the area near the Hunter Office just outside the parking lot.

There was an Exchange Centre in that area. Akira saw some Hunters exchanging their relics. Inside that Exchange Centre, he also saw some Hunters loading leftover wreckage of mechanical monsters onto a cart. It would be too much of a hassle bringing them all the way back to the Kugamayama city, but it would not be that much trouble to bring them to that Exchange Centre.

Even the mechanical monsters were also considered as the old-world relics. They were filled with old-world technologies that could not be reproduced by the current world's technology. If the Hunter brought its leftover wreckage back, it might be worth more than bringing back cheap relics.

Around that place, there were also merchants with selling stands and rentable carts. Hunters would usually use those carts to transport dead mechanical monsters. They might be the merchants who came all the way to this place using the Hunter Office's bus to open their shops there.

A Hunter Office's bus arrived and stopped near the Hunter Office, Akira then saw Hunters boarding off from that bus. Including Akira, all Hunters in that place were focused on a group of 3 Hunters.

The reason as to why that group was gathering so much attention was because of their appearances. One of them was a young girl that looked more or less of the same age as Akira. She was wearing an augmented suit while carrying a big rucksack and multiple rifles. It was not a rare sight in the old-world ruin. Her silky and well-maintained hair was also something normal to be found for women Hunters who were doing well in her job. Although her beauty was above average, it was not enough of a reason to grab other Hunters' attention.

The ones standing out were the other two girls. One of them was carrying a huge long sword aside from her rifle. While the other one was carrying a small pistol-like gun and a big power glove as if it was originally a part of a powered suit. There were not that many Hunters out there who prefered to fight monsters close range. That was why it was rare to find those types of

weapons. Moreover, those two girls were beautiful and had some kind of unique charm of their own. It was to be expected for those weapons to attract some attention, but it was still not enough of a reason for them to attract that much attention there.

The real reason why those two attracted so much attention was because both of them were wearing maid outfits. And to top it off, from a glance, it seemed that those maid outfits were made of high-class fabric that gave off a luxurious vibe.

Those girls were really sticking out in that place. If it was back in the Kugamayama lower district, they would only gather some attention and that would be the end of it. But they were outside the city, they were in the wasteland. The Hunters in that place saw them with suspicion rather than pure curiosity since they seemed to be out of place.

That group of 3 were Reina and her battle maids.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 102, Two Maids and Their Master

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Reina and her maids knew that they were attracting people's attention. The differences in their expressions showed how they felt about it. Shiori prioritized her master and her duty over other people's gazes, Kanae was smiling as she did not even give a care at all, while Reina looked slightly annoyed.

Reina looked at the other Hunters' reactions to Shiori and Kanae and sighed.

"…As I thought, we're attracting a lot of attention."

The other day when they were walking through Kugamayama city lower district, they were also garnering attention. Though Kanae was the only person in a maid outfit at that time. So it was totally understandable that they were gathering a lot more attention with both Shiori and Kanae in maid outfits in the middle of an old-world ruin.

Shiori tried to cheer Reina up.

"We will attract less attention once we go into the ruin, so just bear with it for now."

Shiori understood that they were attracting a lot of attention because of their maid outfits and she understood that she was putting Reina in more unnecessary stress. But there was a reason why she kept her maid uniform on, after all, it was not like she could just take off her outfit just because it was attracting some attention.

Kanae smiled and said to Reina.

“We just need to get used to this. After all, once Milady becomes a famous Hunter, Milady will attract a lot of attention no matter what outfit Milady uses. So, like, this is a good chance to get used to it, right? Of course, that is if Milady doesn’t plan to be just one of those ordinary Hunters.”

Shiori glared at Kanae, so Kanae averted her gaze.

“Hm?”

When Kanae averted her gaze somewhere else, she caught a familiar face.

Most of the Hunters in that place looked at Reina and her maids with suspicion. Akira, who noticed that, understood that his common sense was correct the previous time and spoke to Alpha in a good mood.

“Alpha, I knew I was right. It seems that walking around in maid outfits in the middle of the wasteland is not normal even for the Hunters, you know.”

“That seems to be the case indeed. Well, common sense is indeed important, but it’s also important not to be held back by common sense. Sometimes you need to doubt common sense and be more open to different things. After all, you can expect weird things from the old-world culture.”

“I know… Wait, what were we talking about, again?”

Akira felt like Alpha just diverted the subject as he tilted his head. But she just ignored that and continued.

“It’s not like we have any business with them, so let’s just head to the ruin.”

“You’re right about that.”

Akira did feel for sure that Alpha was changing the subject, but he just decided to forget that and head to the ruin.

At that time when Akira was about to turn and was still looking in Reina's direction, Kanae's gaze met with his gaze.

Kanae smiled, she looked really excited as she suddenly called Akira with a loud voice.

"Yo there!! We meet again!!"

Reina and Shiori quickly noticed Akira too. Akira, who was about to leave that place, stopped. Kanae then approached him, half-running.

"Are you here to hunt for relics too? What a coincidence!! Ah, I'm Kanae by the way!"

Akira was a bit surprised since Kanae came at him with such a high spirit.

"…I'm Akira."

"I see!! Akira-shounen!! Nice to meet you!!"

Akira was actually a bit overwhelmed by that overly excited reaction from Kanae.

Reina and Shiori also came to Akira. Since Kanae noticed him, it was not like they could just ignore it and go somewhere else.

Shiori carefully spoke to Akira.

"…Akira-sama, it has been quite a while."

Reina also followed up by nervously giving her greeting to him.

"…Uhm, long time no see."

Akira was a bit flustered as he awkwardly replied.

“Y-yeah, it has been quite a while since the last time.”

With what happened in the past, Akira, Reina and Shiori, all 3 of them were not sure on how to interact with each other.

But then Kanae said to him with her still high-spirited attitude as if she could not read the mood at all.

“It’s actually our first time coming here! Do you usually come here?”

“No, this is also my first time.”

“I see!! What a coincidence!!”

Kanae replied back in such a high-spirit, she was sticking out so much as if she was in the wrong place.

Although at first, Akira was not really sure how to interact with Reina’s group including Kanae, after seeing how Kanae was behaving, he stopped worrying about it.

Akira lightly sighed. He then turned and spoke to Shiori, who might be the most worried person in that place.

“Back then, I was not expecting that you would believe what I said and help me out. So I’m already thankful enough that both of you decided to stay neutral. So well, yeah, you have my gratitude.”

“Thank you for your understanding.”

Shiori bowed deeply to Akira. For now, she was able to confirm that he had no grudge against Reina or her.

Although Shiori originally regretted the fact that she was caught completely off guard when Kanae suddenly called Akira, and that she could not stop Kanae back then, she started to think that it might be a good thing that Kanae did that.

Shiori took another close look at Akira. He was carrying better equipment compared to the ones that he was carrying in Kuzusuhara underground city.

She unconsciously assessed his fighting power. If she and Kanae fought Akira in a 2 vs 1 fight, there was no mistaking that they would be able to kill him. Although either she or Kanae would also get killed in that fight. But if Reina also joined in, it would be extremely difficult to win against Akira since she had to protect Reina. And honestly speaking, Shiori did not think he would let that weak point slip off when it came to that.

Thus Shiori concluded that it was not wise to be hostile against Akira.

Akira then casually asked a question.

“So then, what business do you have with me? If it’s just saying hello to an acquaintance, then I’ll head to the ruin now.”

“I understand, please be careful out there.”

Shiori was about to end their conversation there and let Akira go, but Kanae suddenly interjected.

“This must be some kind of fate to meet here!! So why don’t we go together?”

Reina and Shiori looked at Kanae in panic. Shiori was about to scold Kanae, but before she could do that, Akira quickly replied back.

“No, thank you.”

Reina looked a bit down since Akira replied almost instantly without any hesitation. She turned into the self-deprecating mode as she wondered if it was because she would only slow Akira down and it was something that could not be overturned even with the help from Shiori and Kanae.

Kanae giggled mischievously and said to Akira.

“Geez, you’re so cold. To think that you would refuse such an offer from a group of beautiful girls, don’t tell me that you’re already sick of girls in

your age.”

Akira seemed obviously exasperated.

“I just don’t want to stick out by walking together with people in those outfits. Moreover, it’s a hassle to fight over where to go and how to divide the money. Honestly, why are you even wearing that maid outfit here in the first place? You do know that you’ll attract people’s attention, right? Or is it that you have that kind of hobby?”

“It’s my master’s hobby, you see!!”

Kanae said that without any hesitation. Thanks to that, she sounded very convincing.

Akira glanced at Reina and looked obviously weirded out.

“…I-I see.”

Reina, who was down, quickly refuted in panic when she realized that Akira was misunderstanding the subject.

“That’s not true!! It’s not my hobby!!”

“Ah, right, of course.”

It was obvious that Akira did not believe her.

Shiori smiled bitterly and explained to Akira to correct his misunderstanding.

“To be more precise, it’s the hobby of our master, Milady’s father. We’re officially working for him. These maid outfits are practically the best armours that we have. Actually, when we requested equipment, the upper echelons sent us this maid outfits and rifles. We understood that we gathered a lot of attention with these outfits. But considering its quality as an armour and how it’ll help us protect Milady, I think it’s better to keep using this outfit although it attracts people’s attention.”

“By the way, we’re also using augmented suit under it.”

Kanae then lifted her skirt with her left hand and pointed at the black tight-looking augmented suit under her skirt with her right hand. There was a good chance that Shiori and Reina were also using similar augmented suits. As Akira thought so, he did not question it at all.

“So as we explained, this is not out of Milady’s hobby. I hope you can understand that.”

Shiori tried to confirm that Akira understood that point as she slapped Kanae’s hand that the latter was using to lift her skirt.

Akira’s expression suddenly changed as if he realized something.

“Ahh, I see. So that maid outfit must be an old-world relic, huh. I heard that old-world fabrics are so strong that they are often used in place of armour. And then you complement it by using an augmented suit under it, right?”

Akira used all of his knowledge to come up with a plausible explanation. After all, normally, it was unthinkable that a maid outfit could withstand a fight against monsters. But if it was an old-world relic, then it would be completely possible. That was what Akira thought.

But then Shiori rectified his answer.

“No, this is not an old-world relic. I heard that it’s specially ordered from a corporation that normally works on Hunter armour.”

There was a short silence before Akira asked another question.

“Do tell me if I’m mistaken… Honestly speaking, why would you need a maid outfit that can withstand fighting monsters? Maids are those people, right? They usually work to take care of a house, right? So why would you even need such a strong maid outfit? When you said it’s out of a hobby, does it mean that it’s that kind of hobby, like, putting maid outfits on Hunters?”

“No, I heard that every maid working in the main house is using the same type of maid outfit. This outfit might be a leftover from the main house.”

Akira frowned, he tried to make sense of all the information that he just received.

“…You’re talking about the guards, right? They’re just people trained in combat wearing maid outfits, right?”

“No, it’s true that some of them are guards, but the maids who mainly work on taking care of the house also get the same set of equipment. Moreover, all the maids in the main house are required to be able to fight, they even have to go through a specialized lesson for that.”

Shiori was a serious person in the first place, thus she answered Akira’s question sincerely without trying to lie nor to trick him. But that only caused him to question it even more.

Akira was confused as to why maids needed to be trained in fighting. They were in the inner wall of the city, so in his mind, that place should be a relatively safe place protected behind the wall.

Akira did not know if he was mistaken there, the inner wall might be not as safe as he thought to the point that the maids there had to learn how to fight, or it was just that his assumption about maids was completely wrong.

After hearing something that was the opposite of what he thought as normal, Akira mumbled.

“Is it my fault? Is it because my common sense is just wrong…?”

Kanae laughed and then said to him.

“It’s pointless to worry over such a thing. This world is a big place, that’s all there is to it.”

Akira looked at Kanae, she nodded deeply as if she tried to convince him.

Akira quickly decided to just forget about it and gave up thinking any further about that subject. Even if it was because his common sense was wrong, it was not like it affected him at all. He was going to explore the dangerous ruin from now on, it was not the time to worry himself about useless things.

Akira sighed, he decided to move on as he said to Reina.

“Well, that aside, I have no plans to work together with you. Putting aside your outfits and the problem about how we are going to divide the money if we work together, I don’t feel like joining a group consisting of 2 bodyguards for that one person in that group. I don’t really mind if you ask me to come with you as your bodyguard, but since I didn’t receive such a request, I have no plans to join you. So yeah, later then.”

After he said that, Akira just waved and left that place.

Reina, Shiori and Kanae just stood there and watched Akira leave. Once he was out of their views, Shiori immediately scolded Kanae since she was interrupted back then when she was about to send Akira off.

“Kanae, why did you do that?”

Kanae played fool as she said.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Why did you call him? What would you do if something bad happened?”

“Well, nothing happened and it’s good to hear that he’s not angry at us. So like, there’s no need for you to be angry, right?”

“I’m asking you why you did that. You remember what happened back then, right? So why did you do something so dangerous?”

Shiori had a very serious expression, an intimidating air was even exuding out from her. It was as if she was saying that she was willing to dispose of Kanae if Kanae kept exposing Reina to unnecessary dangers.

Kanae did not show any fear at all as she smiled and said.

“That’s exactly the reason, we eventually have to confirm whether he’s angry at us or not. Assuming that he’s still angry enough that he would kill us the moment he sees us, it was the perfect chance to ask him since there are a lot of Hunters in this place and we’re right next to the Hunter Office. And even if he did try to attack us, we would have the upper hand in this place.”

“…If that’s really the case, fine then.”

Shiori decided not to pursue that subject any further. It was because she knew it was a very good excuse as well as that it was only an excuse since she understood that Kanae loved fighting and she did that fully expecting that Akira would cause a fight there.

But with that being said, it was not like Shiori could just kick Kanae off the group. As long as she could not protect Reina on her own, Shiori could not afford to lose any fighting power.

It was unclear whether Kanae knew what Shiori thought or not, but she then casually said.

“Sure. Well then, Milady, let’s head to the ruin, shall we? Or do you want to take a break for a bit? It seems that there’s a cafeteria inside the Hunter Office.”

Since Kanae sent that question to Reina, Reina finally spoke up.

“…I’m not tired, let’s go.”

“Roger that.”

“Understood.”

Then they also went to the ruin a few minutes after Akira.

Akira was exploring the Mihazono ruin’s city area. He was able to see his destination since it was indicated by a pointer in his enhanced vision. To be

more precise, it was pointing at a floor in a high storey building visible from afar. It was pointing at the locations where Akira should be able to find the Lion Steel corp's terminal.

"Why is it in such a place?"

"I have no real answer why. It might be because the views from up there are pretty good?"

"Well, I bet the views from up there are indeed amazing. But unless the stairs in that building are still intact, there's no way I can go to that floor. Just so you know, I refuse climbing up the outer wall, okay?"

The pointer was pointing at a floor that was indeed so high, in case if Akira fell from that height, there was no mistaking it that he would be dead.

"Judging from the outer appearance of the building, it seems that the facilities inside it are still working, it would be great if we can find an elevator inside it."

"Even if we find one, do you think that it will still be functional? If we're unlucky, it might be an elevator from hundreds of years ago, you know."

"The possibility is not zero. The lighting inside the Yonozuka station ruin was still working too, remember? Although it depends on which era it was built, if it still has a fully operational self-repairing function, then there should be no problem with that."

"Is there any other possible problem then?"

"Even if it's still functional, there's no guarantee that we can use it. There's also the building's security to deal with and in the first place…"

Alpha then pointed her finger forward.

"We're not welcome in this ruin. So I wonder if we would be able to use the facilities inside that building."

Akira noticed mechanical monsters coming from the front of him. Or to be more precise, the monsters noticed Akira as its legs and hands extended out from their square bodies and they started moving toward his direction.

Akira lightly smiled and aimed his CWH anti-material rifle.

“You’re right about that one.”

He then pulled the trigger, the piercing ammo easily pierced through the monster’s torso and destroyed the machines inside it.

The security guards that were patrolling the city area of Mihazono ruin would attack any intruders that they could find even now. It might be out of mercy and ethical design concept that those monsters would not grow rifles on their bodies and start shooting at the people.

Akira was solely relying on his skill as he explored the city area of Mihazono ruin. He was also using his augmented suit with his own skill only. The current him was not receiving any support from Alpha.

Moving his body and his augmented suit in-sync would allow him to lower the burden on his body even in the case when he solely used the power of his augmented suit to forcefully move his body and give him a superhuman strength for a split second. Akira was moving carefully to train his body while not lowering his vigilance. It was a training so that he would still be able to move around even when he lost support from Alpha.

The city area of the ruin was littered with wreckage and crumbled buildings, it reduced the width of the road and transformed the city into a labyrinth. But Akira sometimes could see new buildings right beside the crumbled buildings or strangely clean area beside piled wreckage, it was completely different compared to the outskirts of the Kuzusuhara ruin.

Akira saw such scenes and he indeed found it weird.

“Alpha, why are some areas so clean while others so dirty? For some reason, the difference between those two areas somehow looks too unnatural.”

“Maybe it’s based on the difference of the security and maintenance facilities handling those areas. So for those dirty areas, it might be because the security and the maintenance drones tend to go to those areas and Hunters tend to fight there.”

“So basically the clean areas are relatively safer, huh?”

“But don’t drop your guard just because you’re in a clean area. Those places might be clean because the self-repair drones are working hard in those areas, so it doesn’t mean that there is less fighting in those areas. While for the dirty areas, it might be because it’s abandoned for years since the self-repair drones in that areas are inactive.”

“Well, at least for searching relics, it might be better to go to the clean areas.”

“That’s true, want to have a go?”

Akira thought for a bit before answering back.

“I guess not this time. After all, it seems like we can find better relics in that high building we’re heading to. And even if we’re going to have a look, let’s do that on our way back instead. We might be able to find a lot of relics in our destination after all, and that’s exactly why we’re heading there in the first place.”

“You have a point there. Don’t drop your guard and carefully move forward. Let’s only hunt for relics if something happens and you decide to stop going to that building.”

Alpha agreed with Akira’s idea. If they got unlucky, they might be retreating while running away from the monsters, so it was unwise to increase his luggage since it might be fatal when that happened. At the moment, that decision was not a mistake, it would only become clear whether it was the correct decision or not later.

Akira checked the contour around his destination and confirmed the location of the monsters using his information-gathering device. From

there, he picked a relatively safe route using the wreckage and rubbles around him. Every time he picked a wrong route, Alpha would immediately point it out and correct him.

“Alpha, what is my mistake this time?”

Akira did not understand the reason why Alpha picked a different route than the one that he picked, so he decided to ask her. When he did that, she enhanced his vision to help him temporarily see everything around him.

“The red areas are dangerous areas. The thicker the red, the more dangerous it is. The route that you picked passes through one of those very dangerous areas, you see? It’s better to avoid that place.”

“I see. So then, how exactly can I accurately identify such an area without your support?”

“Well, you have no other choice but to somehow see it.”

That vague answer from Alpha caused him to frown in confusion as he looked in her direction.

“Somehow? Like, how exactly?”

Alpha seemed to be confused as well.

“Hmm, I can’t really say anything other than that. You somehow need to be able to correctly judge the danger of an area only by the limited information that you get after checking out that area. Like the buildings located in the direction that’s not covered by the wreckages or the rubbles in an area, the condition of the walls on those buildings that are facing to your direction, the existence of windows in those walls, the possibility of finding monsters inside those buildings and if those monsters would try to shoot you from those directions, the accuracy of those monsters. There are a lot of details that you need to factor in. It’s difficult to explain everything only using words, if I have to do that, it might take a whole day and I won’t even be close to finishing. And even if I just show you through visuals since it’s the fastest way to let you know, it’s still not an efficient way to do it, you see.

It’s still difficult to convey the reasons why an area is dangerous even if I do that. Of course, I can add oral explanation too, but you’re already past that level. You can already identify and make decisions based on all the information that I can add through an oral explanation.”

With Alpha’s support online, Akira could get notified if he was in a dangerous situation and she could take control of his augmented suit to evade an ambush. But when he did not have that support, then he would have to do something about it using his own power. He had to detect dangers and avoid it using his own skill.

But at the same time, that remark also showed how much Akira had grown. He was already able to detect and react to dangers that could be easily explained through an oral explanation.

“So basically, I just need to get enough experience so that I can intuitively detect dangers and deal with it, right?”

“Yep, that’s correct. There’s no other way but to gather enough experience and sharpen your intuition. Of course, I will give you my help to effectively gather that much-needed experience. As you can see, I’m enhancing your vision like this to let you know which area is dangerous.”

“Intuition, huh. Well, I’m good at sensing troubles, so I guess I have no other choice but to rely on that gift.”

Akira once again checked his surroundings with the help of that vision which allowed him to see the danger level of the areas around him. Although he did not realize it, his guessing skill was actually getting better just by looking around using that enhanced vision. He then picked the safest route based on that vision as he continued moving forward.

Akira was moving slowly and carefully through the Mihazono ruin. Although he was relatively slow, he was doing way better compared to when he took 1 hour just to move forward 100 meters back in the Kuzusuhara ruin. He kept on pushing forward with Alpha sometimes giving him some pointers.

Most of the monsters that Akira met in that ruin were mechanical monsters. Although some of them had the appearance of biological monsters, they scattered out machines when Akira's bullet pierced through their bodies. He sometimes also encountered monsters that looked like normal big dogs, but they would run straight to him with a speed that obviously would not be possible for a dog. And when he shot at them, they would again scatter metallic parts and their dead wreckage would reveal the machines inside them.

Akira looked at them and tilted his head.

"So it's a robot dog, huh? This place is filled with nothing but mechanical monsters"

"It might be because there's nothing around this place that can be used as a food source for the biological monsters. Either that or the maintenance drones make sure that this place is clear of those biological monsters. By the way, those trees beside the roads are made of metal, you see. And since it's made of those nanomaterials, the biological monsters cannot use them as a food source."

Akira looked at the trees on the roadside. According to Alpha, the green leaves on those trees were made of metal, while to him, they looked completely like natural leaves. But there were cyborg humans and animals out there, so if it was using the old-world technology, it might be completely possible to create mechanical plants. Akira kept staring at those roadside trees that would never wither.

"It's fully understandable for biological monsters to be multiplying somewhere, but how about the mechanical monsters? Where are they coming from?"

"I believe it's from the factories. This place is a city area, after all. So once the Hunters destroy enough drones, it might send a signal to the factories to produce replacement drones."

"If that's the case, then once we take control of the factories, this place will be a safe ruin, right? So why don't they do that already?"

“I can’t really answer why. It might be because the security is too strong that they can’t take control of those factories. They might even intentionally leave the factories alone since the mechanical monsters are one of the sources for material. I don’t really know the answer to that question, but someone from the City Management or the Hunter Office should be able to give you a better answer.”

“Well, I guess they have their reasons, huh?”

If it was possible and if it was an important thing, they would have done that by now. And it was not like they would explain the reason why they did not do that to a common Hunter. Akira bet that he would be able to know that reason once he got to a higher position and had enough influence. But for the time being, it was something that was impossible for him as much as it was something that was not important to him. As Akira thought so, he decided to just forget about that subject and move on with the exploration.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 103, Autonomous Weapons

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A small flying drone just flew over Akira's head. But it did not try to attack him, either because it could not see Akira, or because it did not have any weapon to shoot him with, or maybe it was just a reconnaissance drone that sent his location to the other mechanical monsters.

Alpha suddenly stopped Akira.

"Akira, stop and get inside that building. It might be a bit dangerous if you keep going forward."

"Roger that."

Inside the room that he was passing through, Akira noticed that there were tables and stationeries that, unnaturally enough, were neatly organized. He tilted his head in confusion.

"Those things look pretty well maintained, I might be able to get a lot of money if I bring them back, right?"

But Alpha shook her head.

“They might be left here because the current technology has no problem reproducing them. I think you can easily buy similar stuff from the stands in the city.”

“So basically, no one would risk their lives just to bring them back home since you can easily buy them with a small amount of money, huh?”

“I bet you can get a lot of money from bringing back the autonomous maintenance system in this building, but it’s very hard to bring that system back. Not to mention that system might even be embedded into this building. If you can seize the building, you might be able to get a building that automatically maintains itself, but with all the mechanical monsters roaming around this building, it might be not worth the hassle. But if we’re talking about the area near the Hunter Office, that might not be the case. As in matter of fact, the Hunter Office might have already seized some of the buildings in that area.”

Akira made a ‘Hmmm’ sound, he then thought of something.

“But like, isn’t it a good idea to seize some of these buildings and use them as resting places for the Hunters? The Mihazono ruin is a very big ruin, so it would be great if we have some resting points inside this ruin.”

“The security drones might react differently to some Hunters who only stay inside a building for a short time compared to a group of Hunters trying to take control of a building. After all, it’s to be expected that they would use a different level of strength to just chase off some intruders compared to when they fight people who try to capture a building.”

“So that’s also a no, huh. Well, if it was possible and if it was worth all the hassle, they would have already done that by now.”

“Yep, that’s correct.”

Akira once again looked around the room. Although the well-organized interior somehow gave off a safe feeling, in reality, that place was more dangerous than the back alley of the slum city. He thought that it would be a

very difficult task to return back alive from that place without Alpha's help. Thus he recomposed himself before starting to move forward again.

Once Akira reached the 14th floor, he looked outside through one of the windows to confirm the area around his destination building. It was a pretty tall building that could be seen from anywhere inside the Mihazono ruin and it was located in the middle of a big clearing. Although the buildings in the Mihazono ruin city area were densely packed in blocks, for some reason, there was no building in that clearing.

When Akira peeked through the aiming device on his rifle, he could see a few dozens of mechanical monsters roaming around that area as if they were guarding that place. They looked different compared to the other mechanical monsters inside that ruin. Some of them were autonomous monsters that looked like a vehicle equipped with big-sized missile launchers, while some of them looked like big cannons with legs. All of them were patrolling around that one building that Akira was aiming for as if they were guarding it.

After Akira confirmed what he saw, his face turned stern.

"So those monsters are the reason why you said it'll be dangerous if I continued moving forward, huh. They are on a different level compared to the small mechanical monsters that I fought on my way here. And it's obvious that they're guarding that building."

"I bet the other mechanical monsters that you fought are the security drones stationed in the city area. While those mechanical monsters are specialized for protecting that building. Their weapons and command protocols are completely different compared to the other mechanical monsters."

"So is it like someone intentionally stationed them to protect that particular building?"

"It might be that they are just following the orders that they received from years ago. But it's also perfectly possible that they're under the control of a still-active artificial intelligence that's managing that building. Or maybe it's just simply because those monsters are under a separate security system

compared to the other mechanical monsters. There are many possible explanations."

"It's a really interesting subject, but how exactly is that related to me?"

Akira actually did not really care about the difference between the systems controlling the mechanical monsters there. He was only interested if it would cause him more trouble or not, or if they would try to kill him or not.

But Alpha denied that.

"It actually has some effects on you, you know? If they're really under the control of a separate system, it's likely that they don't share the same information as the other mechanical monsters, and that would affect the action that you need to take. Akira!! Get away from there!!"

Akira moved quickly following Alpha's order, he did not even have to ask why since he could see the reason through his aiming device. The missile pod monsters suddenly launched missiles in his direction.

The missiles were also equipped with a homing device. They flew chasing after Akira who was running through the rooms inside the building. The first wave of missiles destroyed the wall where Akira was taking cover and opened a path for the following missiles to go right into that building. As they raced through the insides of that building, seeking for Akira, they destroyed walls and any other obstacles on their path and forcefully carved a way to find Akira. And eventually, they found Akira when he was running through a long hallway.

"Shoot them down!"

"Roger that!!"

Akira made a 180-degree turn as he grabbed and aimed his DVTS minigun, he quickly fixed his footing, confirmed the missiles heading in his direction, gathered his focus, compressed his time perception, and finally pulled the trigger.

With the help from Alpha’s support, the bullets spewed out from the DVTS minigun’s muzzles accurately shot down the missiles in front of him. The missiles that were shot either immediately exploded in the middle of their flight or ricocheted and crashed into the inner wall of that building before exploding. Either way, they released a blinding light together with a loud banging sound and a lot of smoke when they exploded.

Although Akira was able to evade a direct hit, the explosion blew his body. He crashed really hard into the wall behind him, so hard that he made a crater and left huge cracks on that wall. Akira’s augmented suit could not fully absorb the impact as it propagated into his body. He then fell to the ground. Although he was able to stop himself from falling flat on his face with his hand, he immediately coughed out blood after that.

Akira could feel sharp stinging pain running through his body, but his consciousness was still completely intact. He quickly tried to reach out for his medicines. Although due to the impact of that crash, his body was moving way slower than his brain was telling it too, the augmented suit was still able to operate normally. Thanks to that, he was able to take the medicine without trouble.

Akira forced the medicines down his throat although they tasted like nothing but blood. The expensive medicines showed its worth as the pain inside Akira’s body quickly subsided. It might be just because of the painkiller, but it would not take that long before his wounds were healed.

Akira pushed himself to stand up and smiled bitterly. He was able to see the outside of the building through the small gaps between the smokescreen in front of him, it showed just how hard those missiles were chasing for him.

“That was close!!”

“We need to move quickly. I’m not sure if they’ll do that again, but it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

“Roger that.”

Akira blazed through the rooms to leave that place. He frowned when he saw just how bad the rooms had turned into.

He took a rest inside a floor that was not damaged from the previous missile barrage. There was no following barrage after that and he was able to safely evacuate from that place.

The medicines that he took a few minutes ago were already working. He was resting there until he could return back to tiptop shape, or at least, that was what Alpha told him to do and he had no objection at all. He took a rest there while vaguely feeling the nanomachine fixing his body.

Akira suddenly said.

“But still, for the security drones of the ruin to do something like that. If they’re really security drones for this ruin, I really hope they don’t try to destroy the ruin that they’re protecting. It’s not like I was bringing a tank in their direction, you know? So why exactly did they go that far just to kill one Hunter? It really isn’t worth the expense, right?”

Alpha then answered Akira’s question.

“As I said before, it might be because they’re under the control of a different security system. The mechanical monsters that attacked you just now are protecting that one building and not the whole Mihazono ruin. That’s why they don’t hesitate to destroy other buildings.”

“Wait, now that you mention it, is that clearing because those monsters destroyed any buildings around the building that they’re protecting? Ah, but I didn’t see any rubbles there though…”

“The other maintenance drones might have cleaned the leftover rubbles from that area, you know. And of course, they could not rebuild the destroyed buildings. Or maybe the other buildings were built in that place only on a fixed regular interval, and when they were built, the Hunters used them as covers so those monsters destroyed them during their fights. So the reason as to why this building is still intact, it might be because it’s barely outside their active area.”

“Wait, does that mean that they extended their active area back there? Is it because they found someone aiming at them? Is that why they shot missiles at me? And then the reason why they didn’t try to pursue me is because they think I’m dead so they returned back to their usual active area?”

“That’s a plausible explanation.”

Akira let out a big sigh. The other day, although only at the very end, he was able to get out of a dangerous situation using his own power, that was why he started to feel confident in himself. But now he felt like he received a painful punch in the gut saying that he was nowhere strong enough to challenge those autonomous weapons.

Alpha then looked at him with a serious expression.

“Akira, I’ll ask you this while I still have the chance, what are you planning to do? Are you still going to try and get to that building? Or are you planning to retreat?”

Akira was about to answer that he was thinking of retreating, but he suddenly realized something and looked at her with a confused face.

That missile barrage just now almost killed him. He thought that it would not be strange if Alpha suggested him to retreat and strongly told him not to continue. But even so, that question just now sounded as if she was telling him that it was also okay to continue.

Akira looked at Alpha with a serious face as he asked her a question.

“What will you do if I say I want to continue? You will not stop me?”

“If you want to continue, I will not stop you. But of course, other than my support, you’ll need some more preparation and resolve before trying to challenge that place.”

“That barrage just now almost killed me, you know.”

“That one was sort of an ambush after all. But thanks to my support, you didn’t get any fatal injuries, right? So there’s no problem. You said it before

yourself, remember? Since you didn't get killed instantaneously and had enough leeway to say that it was really dangerous, it means that you're not in that much danger in the first place. So by that standard, that one just now was not that dangerous."

Looking at how Alpha was smiling like usual, Akira hesitated and still looked a bit confused as he said to her.

"Well, uhh, it's true that I did say that. But still, when you say I need to resolve myself, how much resolve do you mean? If it's the same amount of resolve that I had when I fought that pseudo bounty monster, I would rather choose to retreat for now."

"You don't need to go that far. Compared to back then, you just need to put in a little more effort than usual, that's all you need. And like I said before, that barrage just now caught you off-guard, it was like an ambush. So if we properly make a plan, prepare ourselves well, and with my support to top it off, we would be able to handle that kind of barrage just fine. Of course, I won't say that you would be able to kill those mechanical monsters easily. And there's no mistaking it that you would use more bullets and medicines than usual. So that's the level of resolve that you'll need."

Akira stared at Alpha's smiling face while thinking that there was no need to call a retreat right now and he must have enough winning chance. As long as he did not slow Alpha down, he should be able to win using the predicted amount of ammo and medicine.

The rest depended on Akira's decision. It was not a mistake to avoid a fight that he might lose. While on the other hand, it was also not a mistake to take the risk to challenge a fight that was winnable to continue with his exploration.

But Akira knew he had to become stronger, he had to eventually do that request that Alpha asked of him. He had to take responsibility for the advance payment that he was already receiving from her. He had to return all the debt that he had piled up from Alpha, or at least, he had to make the effort to do so.

Moreover, if he hesitated in risking his life there, then what would be of his Hunter work?

Akira made his decision.

“We’ll continue. If I decide to run away from enemies that I have a good chance to defeat, then I would need to stop working as a Hunter.”

Alpha smiled full of confidence.

“Are you sure? Like I said before, you’ll need to resolve yourself, you know.”

“Resolve is my responsibility. So let’s do this.”

Alpha smiled even more.

“Very well, let’s go then. I couldn’t give you my support last time, so I’ll show you again how great it is to have my support.”

Akira prepared himself for the upcoming fight. He followed Alpha’s instruction to return to the first floor before climbing that building from bottom to top. Every time he visited a new floor, he would check the area with his information-gathering device before moving to the next floor. And it was not like he checked the whole floor, he only checked the side of that building which was facing the skyscraper.

After reaching the top floor of that building, the 27th floor, Akira finalized his preparation. He attached the extended magazine on his DVTS minigun, exchanged the piercing ammo inside his CWH anti-material rifle into CWH special ammo, he also took extra medicine beforehand to make sure that he would still be able to move his body even if he broke his bones doing some crazy manoeuvre, and to top it off, he put some medicines inside his mouth so he could just swallow it anytime.

He had his CWH anti-material rifle in his right hand and DVTS minigun in his left. He only carried extra magazines with him and left his other rifles

and his rucksack on the rooftop so that they would not hinder his movement. He carried as little as possible without sacrificing his firepower.

Akira stood on top of that building which was facing the skyscraper that he was aiming for, he was standing at the edge of the exact opposite side that was facing that skyscraper. He took some deep breaths to prepare himself.

Alpha smiled at him before confirming for the last time.

“Akira, are you ready?”

Akira made a serious face as he said.

“Yeah, let’s do this.”

Alpha smiled back full of confidence before telling him to start.

“In that case then, let’s go.”

The battle had started.

Akira ran straight to the very end of the rooftop as fast as he could and jumped off.

While still falling, Akira aimed his DVTS minigun at the autonomous weapons around the skyscraper and pulled the trigger. The extended magazine allowed him to continue pulling down on the trigger for a long time without the need for reloading. The loud banging sounds coming from the bullets flowing out from Akira’s DVTS minigun echoed through the wasteland as they flew straight at the autonomous weapons that he was aiming at.

The kickback from his DVTS minigun pushed Akira toward the building’s wall. He then used both of his legs to propagate the kickback against the building’s wall. The continuous shots pushed his body toward the wall to the point that he was able to stand flat on it. He then did not let go of the trigger as he ran down the building’s wall just like that.

Countless bullets rained down on the autonomous weapons near the skyscraper. The bullets rained down on the mechanical monsters' super hard body as if they were trying to drill a hole on those bodies. But due to the loss of momentum because of the distance those bullets travelled and the force field armour that ricocheted them off the monsters' bodies, none of them was able to cause any serious damage to monsters' inner parts. But it was at least enough to make those monsters notice Akira as their enemy.

The cannons on their bodies immediately turned toward Akira who was running down the wall. Then in order to shoot their cannons, they temporarily lowered their force field armours.

The moment they did that, CWH special bullets immediately slipped in and hit them right before they could shoot their cannons, it caused the gunpowder inside their bodies to explode prematurely and took out their cannons from the inside. Akira shot those bullets beforehand by following Alpha's instruction. Those bullets hit the cannons with unrivalled accuracy although those cannons were not even directed at Akira when he released those shots.

When their cannons were destroyed, the control unit inside the monsters' bodies recognized it as a fatal damage and it also recognized that they had lost their means to fight back. As such, the other autonomous weapons that were still untouched diverted their force field armours to the badly damaged autonomous weapons, thus temporarily reducing the power of their force field armours.

During that split second when their force field armours were weakened, the CWH special bullets that Akira had shot beforehand hit them in succession. The first hit opened a hole in their armour while the second bullet went straight for their control units. The autonomous weapons that had lost their control units immediately stopped working without being able to react at all.

Once Akira destroyed some of the autonomous weapons, the rest of the autonomous weapons quickly recognized him as a threat. They immediately started to make their moves to deal with that threat.

Countless missiles launched from the missile pods aimed at Akira. While the ones with cannons immediately aimed their cannons and released shots at him. The countless missiles flew straight up for a few seconds to gather momentum before readjusting its trajectory to head straight for Akira, while the warheads released by the cannons just went ahead first and flew in a straight line to him.

Akira used the kickback from his rifles to push against the wall and gain traction to run down the wall. He then used the different contours of the wall to jump to the side or even jump straight down to avoid those missiles and warheads. So instead, they hit the building's wall, turning it into rubbles and filled the area where they landed with smokes.

Akira was desperately running down the building's wall, he could feel the shockwave from the explosions coming from all directions as he said to Alpha.

"Please please please, make sure that I won't get hit, okay? If I get blown away off the wall, there's no mistaking that I'll die, you know?!"

It was his first time running down along a wall. Because of that, he really relied on Alpha's control through his augmented suit to be able to do that. Although he was able to see the predicted trajectories of the missiles and warheads coming at him with his enhanced vision, he did not have the leeway to react to them and decide which route was the safest. It took everything that he had to just follow Alpha's instruction.

Alpha was sliding sideway parallel to the building as she smiled and replied.

"It's true that it's extremely dangerous if you lose your footings. That's why you need to keep running to spread the incoming missiles and warheads over a wide area. And also, don't stop shooting. It would be impossible to move quickly around the wall without help from the kickback. So just resolve yourself and keep running."

"Didn't you say that I don't need that much resolve for this fight back then?!!"

“That’s relative compared to when you fought the pseudo bounty monster. I did say that you’ll need some more resolve than usual, remember? But compared to when you had to get out from inside a monster with your own power after it ate you, it’s not that big of a resolve, right? Or is it that it was not that much of a difficult thing to get out from inside that monster?”

Alpha smiled amusedly. Akira looked at that smile and believed that he was not in as much danger as he thought as he flusteredly replied back.

“That there!! You’re comparing it to the wrong occasion!!!”

“Stop playing around and start shooting.”

“Okay okay!!”

Akira aimed his DVTS minigun at the missiles coming at him while still running on the wall and pulled the trigger. The countless bullets rained down on those missiles and made them explode in the middle of their flight, the shockwave from those explosions then threw the other missiles off-flight and disrupted their targeting.

Some of those missiles flew way off and hit the other buildings, some of them collided with the other missiles and exploded, while some other missiles landed away from Akira and left a big hole on the building’s wall.

While at the same time, Akira aimed his CWH anti-material rifle toward those autonomous weapons. Since Alpha did all the aiming, he just had to point it in the general direction of his target and hold the kickback from it. But since he was holding it with one arm, he could not fully take the kickback and each shot put his body in extra burden.

Thanks to the medicines that he took beforehand, Akira did not feel much pain. But since he was pushing his body past its limit with the help of his augmented suit and withstanding all the shockwave from the missiles that exploded near him, his bones were grinding against each other and micro-wounds were tearing his muscles. Those injuries were healed almost instantaneously only to be formed again right after that. That cycle continued until either the medicines ran out of its effect or the battle ended.

Akira could feel the strange feeling of his body going through that cycle while experiencing his first battle where he was running down a wall while fighting, he went through all of that inside his compressed time perception. To be honest, he wished that it was his first and his last time going through something like that. He was currently somewhere around the 18th floor. If he was free-falling, he would have been way closer to the ground by now.

The autonomous weapons spread their missile pods and launched countless small-sized missiles to the sky. Those missiles went up in a straight line before readjusting its course to head towards Akira. By fanning out their missile in a big arc, they targeted the whole area around Akira while reducing the possibility of him shooting them down and suppressing the loss from secondary explosions.

Akira saw the missiles fanned out in front of him.

“Alpha!! Is it possible to shoot them down?!!”

“Nope, that will be impossible. They’re too spread out. But it’s alright.”

“Well, that’s good to hear!!”

Akira forced himself to make a smile as he continued shooting. If Alpha said that it would be alright, he had no other choice but to believe that and continue fighting. And of course, he trusted Alpha. After all, if he did not trust her, he would not be doing something like this in the first place.

Akira kept on running down along the wall while moving around to just barely evade the incoming warheads from the autonomous cannons. While at the same time, he kept sniping the autonomous weapons’ weak points using his CWH anti-material rifle. The autonomous weapons that got shot on their engines, or their weapons, or their control units turned into just a pile of wreckage that posed no threat whatsoever. Akira destroyed those powerful autonomous weapons with utmost efficiency as if it was those autonomous weapons that were trying to match with Akira’s action.

But due to their firepower, even if only one of them were left, it would be enough to kill a normal Hunter. The autonomous weapons would not

retreat, as long as Akira did not destroy every single one of them, they would keep on trying to kill him.

As those countless missiles headed towards Akira, he aimed his CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun and pulled the trigger. The kickback from his shot and the shockwave from the missile that he shot blew him right into one of the windows on that building.

All the missiles collided with the wall where Akira was just a few seconds ago. They exploded almost synchronously as they released a loud bang. But since their explosions were more spread out than before, their firepower was greatly reduced compared to when they were focused on one small area. The building that was created with the superior old-world technology was left only with cracks after that amazing explosion.

Alpha quickly gave Akira her next instruction. Akira had already checked all the floors in that building beforehand. So Alpha used that information to move him into the safest location on that floor.

Akira, who was barely avoiding those missiles, was running through inside that building. In the middle of that, Alpha said to him.

“Akira, swallow the medicine that you already have inside your mouth.”

“Roger that, is the effect from the ones that I took beforehand already waning?”

“You might not notice it since you don’t feel any pain, but your body is already in pretty bad shape. If you don’t want your limbs torn off in the middle of the fight, make sure to take your medicines.”

Akira swallowed the medicine inside his mouth and loaded new magazines into his rifles. He then followed Alpha’s instruction and jumped out of another window. He was already on the 10th floor, the ground was not too far away down, and the enemies left were also not that many.

Alpha knew the enemies’ location. When Akira jumped out of the window, he immediately started shooting again. The CWH special ammo easily

pierced through the autonomous weapon’s hard armour and destroyed its weak point. That was one more monster around the building turned into scrap.

Akira only had 10 floors left. He kept on running down the building while shooting at the autonomous weapons. After a few shots, he finally reached the ground. The moment he landed on the ground, he quickly fixed the aim of his CWH anti-material rifle.

“That is the last one!!”

As he heard those words from Alpha, Akira spotted his last target, adjusted his aim, and pulled the trigger. The CWH special ammo flew in a straight line toward that autonomous weapon and almost immediately followed by a blinding light of the force field armour released right where the bullet landed on the autonomous weapon’s body.

Akira had showered that autonomous weapon with bullets using his DVTS minigun when he was running down the wall, thus its force field armour was already considerably weakened. The CWH special ammo pierced through the armour and bore a hole right into the autonomous weapon’s control unit and shred it to pieces.

As that autonomous weapon made the last squeaking sound, the area was finally shrouded in silence. All the monsters present were already dead.

Akira did not move as he was still monitoring his surroundings. As silence returned to that place, he finally stood up.

Alpha who was floating next to Akira smiled and reported their victory.

“Akira, that’s the end, we won.”

Akira’s first reaction to his victory was a long and big sigh. He then looked up at the building that he jumped off from and smiled bitterly. After that, he turned to Alpha who was smiling smugly.

“So how was that? Did you get just how great my support is?”

Akira smiled bitterly at her.

“Yeah, I got a good feel of it. So, since I already got a good feel of how great your support is, I would prefer not to go through something like this again.”

Alpha smiled mischievously at him.

“Oh, there’s no need to be reserved, you know? I’ve promised you to give you my utmost support as an advance payment, moreover, you know that I’m your ally, right?”

“If it’s possible, with that support that you’re so proud of, can you make it so that I don’t need to go through something like this again?”

Seeing Akira, who looked rather displeased, Alpha tilted her head and said.

“To be honest, I did consider a lot of things before I gave you my support, you know? After all, if you die it would be a huge issue for me too. So before I made that suggestion, I already ran all the calculations for your safety and I even confirmed and respected your wish too. But you know? If you keep counting special rare occasions in your calculation for your safety, it would be impossible for you to go out to the wasteland.”

Akira tried his best to replace his displeased expression with a bitter smile. He knew that he had terrible luck, and it was true if he assumed that he would be swarmed by monsters the moment he stepped out of the city, then he would not be able to go out to the wasteland. What he needed was not the ability to evade bad luck, but the ability to stomp that bad luck down.

“…Alright, I got it. I hope that you’ll keep providing your support so I can deal with a situation like this easily.”

“Of course. Just leave it to me. Now then, let’s go and get the stuff that you left on the rooftop so that you can get a better advantage if anything happens after this.”

Alpha smiled and pointed her finger up. Akira had left his rucksack filled with ammo and other equipment on the rooftop together with the other rifles that he did not use in that battle.

Akira looked up. Now that he looked at it, the 27 storey building was indeed a very tall building. And now he had to climb the stairs back to the rooftop.

“…Stairs again, huh?”

“Yep. But don’t worry, you can go down through stairs this time, or is it that you want to jump off again?”

Alpha smiled teasingly. Akira instantly refused.

“No thanks!”

Alpha just giggled amusedly seeing how Akira got a bit annoyed there.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 104, Proof of Strength

Index

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Akira was standing at the front gate of a tall building. The name of that building was written on a huge metal nameplate near it.

“So this building is Seranthal building, huh?”

“There’s a map of the floors too. The Lion Steel Corp branch is on the 57th floor. This one.”

“Let’s go then. It would be great if we can find a lot of old-world relics there, I’m in a deep red right now.”

Akira had not found anything that could bring him money that day yet. If he could not find anything to cover for his ammo expense, he would have risked his life for nothing and end up with a loss.

Akira tried to calm his worry by telling himself that since he had to take out all of those powerful autonomous weapons just to get there, there must be expensive relics inside that building.

Alpha suddenly made a suggestion to him.

“You should be able to get some money if you submit the record for that general monster-hunting request. So, do you want to do that?”

“No. If I do that, I would need to submit a full battle record too, right? If I give that battle record to the Hunter Office, it would be troublesome if they start sending difficult requests to me.”

It might be just him overthinking it, but he remembered that he might have tried too hard when he helped out the Hunters in the Kuzusuhara underground ruin which ended up getting him sent into the Yarata Scorpion nest in the underground city.

No one could tell what kind of difficult request would get sent to him if the Hunter Office judged his skill based on that fight against the autonomous weapons. He had no wish to jump over a high building and run on its wall while shooting at the enemies again for the second time. Or at least, he had no wish to do that again unless it was really necessary.

Alpha smiled teasingly.

“Is that so? Honestly speaking, if you give it to that Kibayashi guy, I’m sure he’ll get a good laugh out of it and you can get an extra bonus on top of your reward.”

“No thanks!”

Akira reacted almost immediately, it was not like he was working as a Hunter just to amuse Kibayashi.

“Let’s just go in and head to the 57th floor for now. There might be some mechanical monsters inside but I’m sure they’re not as powerful as the ones that we fought outside.”

Akira changed gear and headed inside the building.

⎯*⎯*⎯*⎯

Reina and her 2 maids were hunting for monsters in the Mihazono ruin. Due to Shiori’s suggestion, they focused more on hunting monsters rather

than hunting relics in order to familiarize themselves with the danger level of Mihazono ruin.

As long as they stayed near the Hunter Office branch, they would be able to almost immediately send an emergency request in case anything bad happened. Due to Shiori's suggestion, they were being careful while doing their best hunting for monsters instead of relics.

But to be more precise, Reina was the only one who was trying really hard there. Shiori was only there to accompany Reina, so she was there to match Reina's movements. So in short, she was holding back. She actually could just quickly dispose of all of the monsters and explore the area but avoided doing so. Shiori's goal was to help Reina overcome her self-contempt, and realize that she was not a useless burden.

As for Kanae, she did not even contribute to the fight. She just stood there next to Reina, looking bored.

Reina fixed her aim to ball-like mechanical monsters with legs and arms. Although it was just a maintenance drone that was cleaning up the city area from rubbles and wreckage, it would still attack Hunters when it spotted them. Thus, their kind were still considered as mechanical monsters. There were occasions where they even used the rifles that the Hunters dropped, they were pretty bothersome mechanical monsters.

Reina pulled the trigger. She used piercing bullets to destroy the monsters' limbs first before aiming for its torsos and proceeded to finish it off. It was a rather safe way to fight. Shiori then evaluated her performance.

Reina smiled, there was a shred of bitterness in her smile.

"That was a good shot."

"…Yeah, thank you."

Reina knew well that it was not just empty lip service from Shiori. But since she was in self-deprecating mode, when someone as strong as Shiori

complimented her, it sounded as if she was so weak to the point that doing something like that was enough to make Shiori compliment her.

In reality, if Reina's skill was indeed that low, there was no way Shiori would bring her to Mihazono ruin in the first place. After all, Mihazono ruin was a rather dangerous ruin filled with mechanical monsters. Reina was actually stronger than most of the other Hunters of the same Hunter Rank, she was basically stronger than common Hunters.

But not only was she surrounded by powerful people like Shiori and Kanae, who received proper training, the scene when Akira, who was more or less of the same age as her, fought evenly against Shiori was still on her mind. Because of that, Reina could not help but be disappointed in her own skills.

Looking at Reina, Shiori felt a pang of pain. She realized that her compliment was counter-effective, so she stopped herself there.

Reina then moved the leftover wreckage of the monsters that she defeated to a cart with help from Shiori. Kanae did not even offer her help. Reina looked a bit annoyed as she said to Kanae.

"You really won't give me any help, huh?"

Even when Reina was glaring at her, Kanae did not seem to care much as she smiled and replied.

"Milady, like I said so many times before. My duty is to ensure your safety, not helping out when hunting monsters or carrying monsters. To be honest, Ane-san is also not obligated to do that, you know?"

"…Well, that's true, but still…"

"My duty is to get Milady away from danger in case anything bad happens. So, I hope you won't count me to always help you in all fights. And I also won't help to carry the dead mechanical monsters. I have my hands full with guarding you so I don't have any leeway to do something like that."

Reina understood Kanae’s argument although she was not fully convinced by it. She directed a bit of that anger onto herself, for not being able to do her Hunter work without bodyguards. She made a conflicted face as she looked at Kanae. Kanae just lightly smiled while looking back at her.

Shiori suppressed her desire to defend Reina, instead, she expressed her opinion about Kanae.

“Milady, Kanae is someone skilled enough to be sent as Milady’s bodyguard. Think of her as a shield or a lifeline in a dangerous situation. And just because that shield or lifeline is a very reassuring one, that does not mean that we can put Milady in needless danger. When she looks like she has nothing to do like that, it also means that we’re in a rather safe situation where she can just relax.”

“That’s so cruel. I’ll properly do my duty for which I’m paid for, you know?”

Shiori looked at Kanae with a serious face.

“Of course, if you’re not, I would dice you to small pieces after all.”

Shiori grabbed the sword that she was carrying, it seemed that she was being serious there.

But even so, Kanae was still smiling like usual. It was because she knew Shiori would not actually pull out her sword there, and even if she did, that in itself would be interesting too. Moreover, the possibility of the latter one was pretty high.

Shiori sighed exasperatedly, her expression returned back to normal as she turned to Reina.

“Milady. The cart is almost full. Let’s head back to the Hunter Office first.”

“Alright… Hm?”

Reina saw a cloud of smoke rising from afar. It originated from a tall building in the deeper part of Mihazono ruin.

Shiori also noticed smoke from watching Reina's reaction. She quickly pulled out her information terminal and checked the area that she guessed around where she saw that smoke. If it was some kind of dangerous anomaly, she would need to evacuate Reina from there as soon as possible. After all, anything could happen in an old-world ruin.

Shiori finished confirming the information and explained it to Reina.

"It's from an area near the Seranthal building. I bet there are some Hunters trying to seize that building. It should be alright as long as we steer clear from that area."

"It seems that they're having a pretty big fight there. Is the inner part of this ruin really that dangerous?"

"No, it seems that the monsters near the Seranthal building are much stronger compared to the other monsters in the ruin. They might be a part of the security system dedicated to protecting that building. Since the monsters guarding that building will always get replenished after some time, there are not that many Hunters who can challenge that area. There are also rumours saying that we can find a lot of expensive relics inside that building."

After hearing Shiori's explanation, Kanae just smiled amusedly as she tried to provoke Reina.

"That sounds interesting, If the Hunters win, there won't be any monsters left around that area, and even if they lose, they would have inflicted a lot of damage on those monsters too. So no matter which one it is, it should be easy to go to that building right now. Milady, how about we take a look there later?"

Shiori glared at Kanae.

"Kanae, just shut up. Milady, even if there are no monsters left around that building, I can't recommend going there."

Shiori stopped Reina while making a serious face. Reina felt that there was another reason other than her lack of skill as to why Shiori said that. So she

curiously asked Shiori a question.

“Well, if you say that, I don’t mind not going there. But why? If there are a lot of expensive relics there and there are no monsters around it, it should at least be worth a check, right?”

“Milady, have you ever heard about the old-world ghost?

“It’s about that story of ghosts that roam the old-world ruin, right? They say that they only roam around famous ruins. There are a lot of different patterns about its story though. Some say that they’re ghosts of the Hunters who died in the ruin and they would attack other Hunters. Or that they control monsters in the ruins to kill other Hunters. Or that they would guide Hunters who get lost inside a ruin to an exit. I heard that there’s one in the Kuzusuhara ruin too, the beguiling ghost, was it again? If I’m not mistaken, it would lure Hunters into a dangerous area by baiting them with information of a secret place filled with relics just to get those Hunters killed, right…?”

Shiori then added to that.

“That’s correct. Sometimes it causes a big ruckus that prevents the Hunters from exploring the ruins, there are even times when the Hunter Office dispatched a formal investigation. Most of the investigation results were made public, some of them said that it’s just the Hunters trying to kill each other over relics, or it’s caused by the still-active facilities inside a building. Basically, it’s not a big mystery once the cause has been made clear.”

“Well, that kind of story is not rare. So, what’s with it?”

“There’s a similar ghost story in this Mihazono ruin, and that story centres around that Seranthal building. Putting the cause aside, it’s true that there are a lot of Hunters who died around that place and no explanation has been found even right now. As such, it still stays as a ghost story. We can’t afford to let Milady go to such a dangerous place.”

Reina started to get scared and curious at the same time, she then asked Shiori.

“Okay, let’s not go there then. So, about that ghost story though, what kind of story is it?”

Shiori then started explaining about that ghost story to Reina with a serious face. Reina, who listened to that story, looked slightly scared.

__*__*__*__

Akira, who was standing on the first floor, looked surprised when he took a quick look around the first floor of the Seranthal building. There was a receptionist counter and the interior of that building looked clean. It was obvious that it was properly maintained, there was not even a speck of dust on its floor as it perfectly reflected the light that was shining on it. He also spotted some undamaged chairs, which might be put there for guests.

When Akira looked at that receptionist counter, he thought that it must have been owned by a giant corporation. He had the same impression when he entered that big building sticking to the inner wall of the Kugamayama city, but at the same time, he felt that it was strange for him to feel like that in such a place. Akira scanned the big atrium while having such a conflicted feeling.

“This place is pretty clean.”

Akira was a bit overwhelmed by that contrast between the interior of that building and the area outside. Alpha then warned him to keep his wit.

“It seems that this building is still functioning well, so I bet the maintenance robots regularly clean this place. There might be some security robots too, so be careful.”

“Understood.”

Suddenly Akira spotted a girl, he quickly reacted by pointing his rifle at that girl. Although he did not instantly shoot, he had his finger ready on the trigger.

Akira’s expression looked stern. He spotted that girl standing in a place that he had already checked beforehand. His information-gathering device also did not detect her at all, there should be no one over there.

Even when Akira pointed his rifle at that girl, she only smiled at him. She was wearing an old-world dress that might have been used to welcome guests as a receptionist, one thing for sure, it was not for battle.

But it was normal for old-world dresses to have completely different qualities compared to their outlooks. It was really dangerous to judge based only on their appearances. Thus although that girl was unarmed, Akira did not lower his guard at all.

Alpha then explained to Akira.

“Akira, that’s just a hologram. It’s not real.”

Akira looked a bit surprised as he asked Alpha.

“It’s not real? So like, she’s the same as you? Wait, is it closer to that hologram from the Higaraka residence ruin, huh?”

“My image is created by information projected into your vision, so I’m closer to augmented reality and not the same as that hologram. That hologram is projecting its image on a fixed space. So a normal human should be able to see her just fine. But even if people can see her, she’s not real. Even if the information-gathering device detected her, it’s nothing but optical data.”

Akira rechecked the signal from his information-gathering device. There was a contrast between the optical sensor and the heat and vibration sensor. Thus, the display on his information-gathering device was telling him to be careful interpreting that data.

“I see. So it’s basically produced by old-world technology, right?”

“Yep, that’s correct.”

If it was not real, then there was no meaning pointing his rifle at it, and of course, it was not like it could hurt him. Thus Akira lowered his rifle.

That girl then walked toward Akira, she then greeted him and said.

“Dear customer. The building is closed at the moment, so we can’t allow anyone without the proper authorization to enter. So please leave the building.”

Akira could hear her words clearly. He was surprised by that and asked Alpha.

“Alpha, I can hear her though, she’s definitely not real, right?”

“She only sounds like she’s talking to you up close, the sound itself is not originated from her. It came from somewhere else and generated through a complex calculation to make it sound as if she’s close to you.”

Akira could see a big difference between the optical sensor and the sound sensor data in his information-gathering device. Although it looked like that girl was talking to him, it seemed that was not exactly the case there.

Since that girl spoke to Akira, he thought that it might be possible to talk with her. So he tried to say something to her.

“Uhhh, I’m actually heading to the 57th floor, you see…”

“Please allow me to repeat myself. The building is closed at the moment. Only the first floor is opened for the other customers who already made an appointment beforehand. Normally, the whole building is closed including all the floors, so please leave the building.”

It seemed that he could indeed talk to her and it also seemed that she really wanted Akira to leave.

“How do I make an appointment?”

“During the time when the building is closed, each floor has its designated contact person who accepts appointment applications. We on the first floor

don’t accept a direct application. So please leave the building.”

Akira tried to ask a lot of things to that hologram even after that, but all ended the same. To put it simply, there was nothing he could do there and that he should leave the building. He could not get any meaningful information out of it.

Alpha then told him to stop that meaningless negotiation.

“Akira, let’s just ignore her and continue. She’s only acting as a receptionist of this building. There’s nothing you can accomplish by asking her. Or is it that you want to leave the building?”

“You’re right, let’s go.”

Akira just ignored that hologram and decided to go deeper into the building. As he peeked into the other hallways and was about to leave that place, that girl suddenly warned him.

“Warning! The facility is guarded by security allowed to kill in case of illegal intruders. So please leave this place.”

Akira stopped. He then turned to that girl and said with a stern face.

“If that’s the case, you should’ve said that before those monsters outside the building attacked me, you know?”

That girl did not say anything back, she just vanished.

Akira twitched, he understood that he was at fault there. He was the one who forced his way into that building. But this was a part of his job as a Hunter. It’s all already in the past, he just shook it off and continued exploring the building.

Akira was humming in front of an elevator. Although he found one, he could not use it. Nothing happened even after he pressed the buttons on the panel nearby.

Although Akira hardly ever saw any elevators around the place where he lived, he understood how it worked. To be more precise, he experienced using one when Shiori invited him for a meal in the high-class restaurant. That restaurant was located in a high building where he got an amazing view from inside of that restaurant.

Akira pouted for a bit as he said to Alpha.

“Is it broken? Or is it that it won’t let me use it? Which one do you think it is?”

“Maybe the latter one. Even if you can use it, I don’t think it’s a good idea to use it. After all, it might just shut you inside to die after you enter, you know? And it seems that it’s not an easy thing to pry the door open even with your augmented suit.”

“Yeah, I wouldn’t want that to happen. It can’t be helped then, I guess there’s no other choice but to go with stairs.”

Akira gave up and headed to the stairs, he already knew where it was after glancing at the map of the first floor.

Akira hoped that he could just go climb the building through the stairs. But it did not work out well for him. After a few floors up, he found himself blocked by a reinforced door. He might be able to force it open using his augmented suit or tear down the door using CWH special ammo. But forcing his way up like that would cause him to spend more time and energy. So he just gave up that idea and searched the floor for another staircase that he could use.

He did find another staircase on that floor, but just like last time, after a few floors up, he was greeted by another reinforced door. Every time that happened, Akira would look for another staircase to climb the building.

Each floor had a different look. Some of the floors were left ransacked as if Hunters had taken any and every relics out from that floor, while some of the floors looked brand new as if it was just opened recently. Akira’s eyes

sparkled when he saw the many relics in the well-maintained floors. Every shop on those floors was filled with old-world relics.

“Lucky!! It was really worth all the hassle coming to this building! Alright then!! Let’s take them home!!”

Akira happily started working, he pulled out another rucksack from the one he had on his back. He then happily stuffed all the relics on the shops’ displays into that rucksack.

From the other’s point of view, he looked like a robber robbing a shop. And from the old-world point of view, there was no mistaking that Akira was an armed robber. So it was only to be expected that the security drones would come and try to kill him.

Akira just smiled bitterly as he said.

“Well, it’s true that I’m just digging out and gathering relics to take them out from this ruin. But this does feel like I’m robbing a shop.”

Alpha giggled.

“Well, you did force yourself in by destroying those autonomous weapons guarding this building, so you’re actually already robbing here. But let’s just swear not to rob any shops that are still in business and just think of this as putting all of these products that no one would ever come to buy into good use.”

“That in itself is an amazing excuse though. But I guess there are a lot of Hunters who gather old-world relics with that excuse, so I can understand why they stationed those autonomous weapons to guard the relics.”

Akira, who was smiling bitterly when he said that, suddenly turned quiet. His smile had vanished from his face and his hands that were putting relics into his rucksack suddenly stopped. He then asked Alpha.

“Alpha, there’s something I want to ask. It’s about the mechanical monsters that we’ve defeated outside. Though I was able to defeat them thanks to

your support, they're actually strong monsters, right? Or at least, that's what I thought about them. After that first barrage, I even thought of pulling back, they're at least that strong from my point of view."

"Yep, they're powerful autonomous monsters. You have no winning chance against them without my support. After all, although you did win, it was a rather fierce fight. You do understand that too, right?"

"Yeah, I got that very well. So like, why did you judge that I should be able to defeat those strong monsters? Well, it's true that it did put me in more burden and I used more ammo than usual, but you predicted that, and we won as you predicted too. Or at least that's the vibe that I got back there. So against such strong monsters, how did you judge and under what basis did you decide it was possible to win against them?"

"Oh my, that's quite a question there. Do you have anything you want to complain about my support? You can just say it and I'll readjust."

"No, that's not what I meant. There's nothing that I want to complain about. It's just that… What can I say… You were smiling like usual during that fight, it feels like you know even if I did that 100 times, I'll still win 100 times. So like, I just want to know on what basis, or at least the reason, why you can be so sure."

Akira seemed a bit hesitant when he said that, but he looked serious.

Alpha did not say anything for a while, she then smiled and asked him.

"You really want to know, don't you?"

It was her usual smile, but for some reason, Akira felt there was something else behind that smile.

"Yeah, I want to know."

"It'll take a very long time to explain it orally, you know…"

"In that case, make it short and you don't need to tell me everything, just tell me enough to at least convince me."

Alpha confirmed Akira's expression and answer. She then said.

"Very well, if I have to shorten my answer, it's because they are mechanical monsters. If they were biological monsters, I would have definitely stopped you."

"Is it really that different, mechanical and biological monsters?"

"Yep, or at least, that's the case for my support. Moreover, those autonomous weapons were simple machines, they were made in accordance with their blueprints and they moved precisely as their original program. There were no abnormalities in their bodies or behaviours, unlike those biological monsters which continuously mutate their bodies and change their judgement logic. Thanks to that, it's easy to predict their moves. Because there's no randomness in their patterns, I can easily make an accurate prediction just from a few observations. And without randomness and arbitrary action that tends to happen with the biological monsters, the calculation becomes very easy. That's why, even if it seemed very dangerous in your point of view, it was a very safe situation and that fight was totally winnable from my point of view."

Alpha then continued her explanation. Due to his limited knowledge, Akira actually had some problems understanding her explanation. But he at least more or less understood her reasoning.

As long as Alpha knew the original blueprint and the behaviour program of those monsters, she could get a highly accurate result by running simulations based on those information, and she would be able to accurately follow that simulation by controlling Akira's augmented suit. By splitting up the whole battle into smaller ones of highly accurate 2-player zero-sum game simulation, Alpha could map out the best decision to take during that fight.

Although it seemed that Akira fought that battle desperately, from Alpha's point of view, it was more like following an already finished script.

It would be extremely difficult to do the same against biological monsters. Due to the randomness of the biological monsters' behaviours, Alpha could

only make inaccurate predictions.

Akira tried to understand something outside that explanation as he asked Alpha.

“Uhhh, so basically, since you know the enemy’s weak point and behaviour well enough, it’s an easy thing to defeat them, huh?”

“More or less, yes.”

Akira seemed to be thinking about something else, so Alpha paused there before she asked him again.

“Was that explanation not enough? Do you want me to explain in more detail?”

Akira shook his head.

“No, that’s good enough. At least now I understand that you didn’t judge I could win that fight out of some vague reasons.”

“Oh my, how rude. There’s no way I would guarantee your safety out of some vague reasons, you know.”

“My bad. I got to understand a lot of things since I started taking your lesson. Just think of it as the result of my growth, you have my thanks.”

“Is that so? Well, I’m glad to hear that. If you question my instruction, it would be troublesome during a dangerous situation, you see.”

“Yeah, I know. I just got a little bit curious there. Well, compared to this mountain of old-world relics, it doesn’t really matter though. Although it was dangerous, it was worth the risk.”

“That’s true, let’s carry back as much as we can.”

“Yeah.”

Akira returned to his job stuffing old-world relics into his rucksack.

Akira’s question was not fully answered yet. To be more precise, although his last question was answered, it only led to more questions that were still unanswered. He understood the basis of Alpha’s judgement, but he still had no idea why she used those as the basis of her judgement.

The old-world factories that were considered as old-world relics were still producing autonomous weapons even right now. Normally, the blueprints used to produce those monsters and the program installed inside their control units should be a secret. There should not be that many people who had access to them even during the time when those factories were built, and of course, there should be even fewer people who knew those secrets now.

But for some reason, Alpha knew about them. Akira thought that he should be able to know the reason if he just asked her, but he decided to hold himself back from asking that question. It was because he felt that Alpha would not want him to ask that question.

Alpha did ask him for confirmation back then. That was because she actually did not want Akira to ask that.

Alpha was actually under a leash. There were things that she could not do without Akira’s permission, so it was only to be expected that she had other limitations too. That might also be the reason why she could not say no when Akira asked her that question, she might only be able to give a vague answer to point out that he would regret knowing the answer to his question.

That was why Akira did not pursue any further. He felt like if he asked that question, Alpha might turn hostile against him, that’s why he decided to just shelf that question.

All the questions that welled up thanks to his curiosity were starting to leak out. Nonetheless, Akira continued to suppress them. After all, compared to the usefulness of Alpha’s support, those questions were worth nothing to him. Or at least, that was the case for now.

The real reason as to why Alpha told Akira to fight those autonomous monsters was simply to give Akira a good feel of how great her support was, it was to strengthen that impression on him. Though, Akira did not realize that at all.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 105, Akira and Carol

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Akira filled his relic rucksack up to the brim, he then once again headed to the Lion Steel Corp branch office on 57th floor. This time, since he was carrying a rucksack filled with relics, it was hard for him to walk through the small hallway with that rucksack on his back.

On his way there, he saw all kinds of things; some of the floors were properly maintained while some of the floors seemed abandoned. Akira seemed to be a bit bothered by those scenes and he asked Alpha.

“Alpha, why aren’t all of them in the same condition?”

“I think it’s because of the cleaning drone, or to be more precise, because it depends on whether the maintenance drone is still active or not.”

“So basically, the floors are decrepit because the maintenance drones in those floors are inactive, huh. But there were some shops that looked clean yet there were no relics inside though. I guess that means the drones won’t go as far as to replenish the relics. But then again, some shops are still filled with relics, so why is that?”

“Those shops might have a self-replenish function.”

“And who would replenish those relics?”

“I bet some drones carry them from a still-active factory somewhere.”

“No no no, if there’s a factory nearby, someone would have discovered it by now, right? It would definitely cause a big ruckus when the companies or the Hunters flood that place…”

“That factory might be located somewhere very far away, even somewhere near the frontline and no one has found it yet. Either that, or it’s located somewhere near but the security is so powerful that they can’t seize that place. There are many possible explanations.”

“Hmmm. If that’s the case, I bet the Hunters would attack those drones on their way here though.”

“They might be guarded by some special escorts. Or they might be using the underground train to carry the relics. Or might even be flying through the sky.”

“Underground train, huh. That sounds plausible. The Hunters would not be able to attack them in the underground tunnel after all.”

Excluding some special transportations, the main transportation used in the Eastern district was all above ground. That’s why Akira naturally thought that they would have used above-ground transportation. After all, even Katsuragi frequented the frontline using his trailer. But those drones should be able to use other types of transportation with the help of the old-world technology, as such, Akira did not further question that possibility.

As Akira was spending time talking with Alpha while climbing the stairs, he was once again greeted by a reinforced door leading to the 26th floor. So just like last time, he went to look for another stair on the 25th floor. But this time, there was something different.

“Akira, be careful. Someone is here.”

Alpha pointed her finger toward the hallway, Akira's goggle that was showing the information from his information-gathering device also indicated that it detected something over there.

As Akira moved forward carefully, that person finally noticed Akira too. It was not rare to meet another Hunter inside the old-world ruin, but the real problem was whether that Hunter was friendly or not.

If that Hunter decided to steer clear and kept his or her distance, then there was no need to get bothered by that. But as Akira thought so, that Hunter was instead coming toward him.

The 25th floor was a pretty decrepit floor, there were wreckages and rubbles scattered around the place and someone was using those rubbles to hide themselves while approaching Akira. When Akira pointed his rifle at that person, that person suddenly spoke from behind the rubble.

"I have no wish to fight you. My name is Carol, I'm a Hunter. I'm not a monster, so don't shoot, okay?"

Akira was receiving Alpha's support at that moment, so he thought that there was no need to be overly cautious since it might cause them to quickly become enemies. So, he slowly lowered his rifle.

"Alright."

Right after Akira said that, a girl who introduced herself as Carol came out from behind a pile of rubble.

She was wearing a bodysuit customised for women. A huge hand-held cannon was dangling on her holster, she was not carrying anything in both of her hands at the moment, not even a knife.

Compared to Akira, who was carrying CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun, Carol was very lightly armed and looked rather careless about her own safety.

Looking at Carol’s behaviour, it could be inferred that she was either so strong that she could be casual or that she was just a careless fool. Akira thought that she was the former. After all, she was inside a building that had given him a hard time just to get in. Akira had no plans to underestimate her, but looking at how she approached him empty-handed, Akira also lowered his guard.

Carol smiled as she walked toward Akira. She then scanned Akira’s equipment from his augmented suit, CWH anti-material rifle, and his whole appearance before returning her gaze back to his face.

“I’ve given my name, so like, can you at least tell me yours?”

“It’s Akira. So then, why are you talking to me?”

“Well, there’s no particular reason. I’m just here to say hello to another Hunter inside the same building and on the same floor. After all, you don’t want either of us to shoot at each other thinking that the other person is a monster, right?”

“Well, you’re right about that.”

Akira agreed with that opinion and it was the right answer for those who wanted to avoid fighting. He unconsciously lowered his guard further. Carol noticed that and took another step closer to him.

“Well, since we’ve met here, how about we talk for a bit? I want to do some information exchange too after all.”

Carol smiled at Akira as she made that suggestion.

Akira and Carol then did a light introduction to each other. It seemed that Carol was a Hunter who frequented the Mihazono ruin and she had visited this building a couple of times before.

Akira then asked about the hologram girl that he met on the first floor. If Carol had really explored that building for numerous times, she might know something that he did not know.

But Carol just casually said.

“Oh, you’re talking about Seranthal, huh? You can just ignore her. Although she says a lot of things to you, she can’t do anything else than that.”

“Seranthal? Isn’t that the name of this building…?”

“She’s an artificial intelligence in charge of this building. She will warn you to get out of the building, but in the end, she’s just a hologram, so she won’t be able to hurt you at all. The most she could do is just stopping the elevator.”

“Wait, so it’s her fault that I can’t use the elevator?”

“Maybe, yep. Although, honestly, it would be a huge help to explore this building with still-active facilities if we can use that elevator. But since it doesn’t seem that Seranthal would accept any negotiations, that would be impossible. Well, it’s true that from her point of view, we are nothing but robbers, so I guess it can’t be helped.”

Carol then smiled, Akira smiled bitterly back at her.

“You’re right about that. By the way, how did you get in here? The entrance of this building is guarded by those bothersome powerful monsters, so like, you shouldn’t be able to get in here without defeating them first, right?”

Akira thought that there might be another safer route that he could take to avoid fighting those monsters, or it might be just because of his usual bad luck.

Carol made a rather smug expression, she then smiled at Akira as if she was teasing him and said.

“Since you asked me that question, it means that you defeated those monsters, right? You’re pretty good, aren’t you? You’re quite strong, and I do like strong Hunters.”

“Well, thanks. So then, how did you get in here?”

“This building actually has a backdoor, you see. And I used that to get in here, do you want to know?”

Carol smiled mischievously at Akira.

Akira was relieved to know that he did not waste his ammo only because of his bad luck. He then said.

“Yeah, if you would tell me.”

Carol smiled bewitchingly.

“It won’t be free, you know. Let’s see, how about 5,000,000 Aurum? I think it’s pretty cheap for a piece of information that would let you get in here without fighting those powerful monsters, right?”

Akira thought for a bit, it was true that it was a cheap price considering that he would not have to fight those powerful monsters every time he wanted to visit that building.

But Akira might not be visiting that building ever again. After all, the only reason why he came there was for the Lion Steel Corporation’s information terminal and not for gathering relics.

In the first place, if he had trouble getting to that place, it simply meant that he was not ready to go there, that was all there was to it. Thus he refused that offer.

“Thank you for the offer, but no.”

Carol’s smile did not vanish.

“Oh my, you don’t like the price? Or you can’t trust me?”

“At least, I don’t think it’s the amount of money that you would normally pay to a Hunter whom you just met in an old-world ruin.”

“That’s true. But I won’t give you any information unless you pay me. After all, there are people who try to run away after getting information out from

me, you see.”

“Yeah, I bet there are people who would do that.”

Every person had a different way of judging the price of a piece of information. And there were a lot of factors that decided whether 2 people could make a deal or not, the trust between each other was one of them.

If that information from Carol could really help Akira getting inside the Seranthal building without fighting the powerful autonomous weapons, 5,000,000 Aurum was actually not a huge sum of money. But there were chances that Carol was lying or the backdoor was too small for him to carry relics out from that building.

Moreover, Akira had no reason to trust Carol nor to make a deal with her.

It was obvious to Carol too that Akira had no plans to accept that offer. She kept her smile up as she said to him.

“But I guess that applies to me too, huh. I can understand that you’re hesitating to pay me money. So, in order to deepen our trust for each other, how about we make another deal before talking about buying that information again?”

“Another deal? If it’s about relics, I’m gathering them myself, so I won’t buy any from you. I’ve also properly explored the other floors, so I won’t buy any information about hidden rooms too.”

Carol smiled bewitchingly.

“That’s not it, I did say that it’s to deepen our trust, right?

She then grabbed her bodysuit’s fastener, which ran from under her neck down to her stomach, and lowered it down while smiling at Akira.

“I’m selling myself, what do you think? This must be some kind of fate to meet here, so I’ll only ask a cheap price.”

Akira could see Carol’s skin through a small opening in her bodysuit that wrapped her whole body, She was showing her skin to Akira while smiling at him, trying to seduce him.

Akira was a bit surprised by that sudden unexpected turn of events, but that was all. He did not get embarrassed nor flustered. He just casually refused Carol’s offer.

“No thanks. That aside, it won’t be strange to find a monster somewhere near, you know? Are you really okay in the head?”

“If that’s what you’re worried about, it’s alright. There won’t be any monsters here normally. Either it’s because this place is outside the mechanical monsters’ patrol area or that they already abandoned this building, as for the biological monsters, the mechanical monsters out there guarding this place would kill them before they can get in here. There’s no way I would do something like this in the first place if that’s not the case, you know.”

“Even if you say so, we’re still in the middle of an old-world ruin. There might be another Hunter around.”

Carol, who already unfastened the fastener on her bodysuit all the way down, sat on a table near her and tried to seduce Akira.

“There are people who get more excited about doing it in places like this. I myself don’t really mind, but if you’re bothered by it, we can go to a small room somewhere. Moreover, if we become comfortable with each other, it might help me loosen my mouth, you know. And if you’re seriously thinking of actually buying that information, I might give you a taste for free.”

Since Carol kept putting out better and better offers, Akira actually started to get suspicious of her.

“You seem to be pretty motivated doing this. If my intention is to deceive you and not buy that information, you would lose quite a lot, you know?”

“I did tell you, remember? I like strong Hunters. So I’ll at least do this much to invite a Hunter who can defeat those powerful monsters outside all by himself.”

“Why do you assume I did that alone? I might have done that with the help of other Hunters.”

“That’s just my guess. It’s highly unlikely for you to explore this ruin that you don’t know much all alone. If you came here with someone else, although it might not be as strong as those monsters guarding outside, you should’ve been exploring this ruin with the assumption that there are powerful monsters inside this building, right? But even so, you’re here alone, that’s why I assume that you’ve defeated those monsters outside alone too, was I mistaken? Is it that you actually came here with a team of 10 Hunters or so and the leader told you to go ahead and explore this building, that’s why you’re here although you don’t want to be? If that’s the case, then it won’t be free. After all, that would mean that you’re not a strong Hunter. So, what is your answer?”

Carol was smiling while waiting for Akira’s answer. Akira thought that it would be pointless trying to lie.

“No, I came here alone.”

“I knew it. I have confidence in my deduction skill, you see. So, if you’re still bothered by me offering myself for free, you don’t need to worry about that. Once you have a taste, I’m sure you’ll be back for more. And don’t worry, I’ll help you squeeze out a lot of things from you for a long time.”

Carol smiled seductively when she said that.

Akira more or less understood her reasoning, but for some reason, there was something that was still bothering him. So he turned to Alpha.

“Alpha, what do you think?”

Alpha was surprised.

“What do you mean by that? Akira, are you seriously thinking of taking her offer?”

According to Alpha’s calculation, Akira would definitely refuse. But since he said something that sounded as if he would accept it, Alpha immediately put up her guard.

But in reality, Akira’s reaction there was still under Alpha’s prediction.

“That’s not what I meant. You did say before that you can tell if someone is lying, right? So I’m just asking that from your point of view, do you think that she’s lying? For example, is she actually planning to bring me somewhere and kill me or something?”

Something like that was common even in the dangerous areas outside the city and since they were in the middle of ruin, it would be an easy thing to just throw the corpse somewhere. If that was the case, then Akira would need to carefully watch his back when he left that place.

“Ahhh, so that’s what you meant.”

Alpha was relieved now that she understood why Akira asked that question. Akira was still as distorted and paranoid as usual to the point that he was suspecting an unknown girl, who was inviting him, was actually planning to kill him.

Alpha’s face turned to her usually calm face.

“I’ll put this out first, I do that by watching the slight change in people’s faces, so it’s not like I can really read their minds. It’s true that she seems to be scheming something. She said that she’s offering herself to you for free because she wants to get you addicted to her and leech off your money though.”

Akira took a look at Carol again. Carol was a young girl with a good body and beautiful face, then to top it off, she was smiling with confidence to seduce him. Looking from his point of view, it was understandable to find former Hunters who got addicted to her and spent all of their money on her.

“Whatever it is, it won’t be much trouble as long as I don’t take her offer.”

“That’s true.”

Akira once again refused Carol’s offer.

“I’m sorry, but I’ll have to refuse.”

Carol looked obviously surprised. It was rare for someone to refuse her offer after she went that far.

“Geez, you’re no fun. Or is it that you actually hate something like this? Although you’re not adult yet, you’re not that young to be so innocent, right?”

“I’m at an age where I still prefer food over women. Moreover, a lot of things happened to me in the ruins and I’ve been living a rather cowardly life until now. That’s why I have no plans to let go of my rifles or to take off my augmented suit here.”

Carol immediately gave up seducing Akira, she understood that there were Hunters out there who got hurt so badly in the ruins that it made them paranoid to the point they would never let go of their rifles. It was extremely dangerous to force those Hunters to let go of their rifles.

“Is that so? That’s just too bad. We Hunters can die anytime and since you’re my type, I just thought to give you a good time, that’s all.”

Carol was being honest when she said that, but the things that she could not say out loud were kept inside her heart as she smiled bitterly at Akira. She then pulled back the fastener on her bodysuit all the way up while looking at Akira, it did not seem that he showed any regret at all.

[…If it’s a boy of his age, it should be easy to bait him using his desire but… Is it that he’s actually younger than he looks?]

Carol looked at Akira with curiosity. But she could not see that someone with a more voluptuous body and in a sexier suit was standing next to that Akira.

It was rather vague whether Akira refused because of the anti-honeytrap training from Alpha, or it was because of his originally distorted personality.

Akira then decided to leave Carol and head to his original objective, the 57th floor.

“I need to get back exploring the building, later then.”

“Is that so? I’ll be staying around here for the time being, so if you change your mind, just look for me. I’ll be waiting for you.”

Carol just said that and lightly waved at Akira.

After Akira left Carol, he went back to searching a staircase on the 25th floor. Now that he remembered it, he should have asked Carol if she knew where he could find the staircase on the 25th floor, but he decided not to turn back to look for her. After all, it would be a hassle if she misunderstood and thought that he had changed his mind.

It did not take long before Akira found a stair, but it only went up until the 30th floor. The door to the 31st floor was shut close.

Akira sighed.

“Again, huh? What a pain in the neck.”

“It can’t be helped. Let’s look for another stair.”

Akira then started exploring the 30th floor. He did not spot any monsters at all. Carol might have said the truth when she told Akira that there was no monster inside that building. Akira lowered his guard as he was exploring that floor.

Alpha suddenly told Akira with a stern face.

“Akira, move over there and stop.”

Alpha was pointing at a location not too far from him. He glanced at Alpha's expression and moved forward carefully to the location that she was pointing at.

"Alpha, is it more enemies? According to Carol, there shouldn't be any monsters inside…"

"It's not monsters, but don't lower your guard."

Akira followed Alpha's instruction, he kept his guard up as he moved carefully. He did not feel any abnormality, he did not see anything strange, and there was nothing detected in his information-gathering device. But he did not lower his guard, he thought that there must be something that caused Alpha to tell him to be careful.

Alpha's face turned serious. Akira understood that it meant he was in a dangerous situation.

"…As I thought, the accuracy of your information-gathering device is bad, and it keeps falling down even right now. Is this from the colourless mist?"

Akira frowned the moment he heard something from Alpha that he could not just let slip.

"Alpha, is it the colourless mist?"

"The accuracy of your information-gathering device has been falling for a while now. I thought that it's to be expected to have some disruptions due to the building's structure or the relics inside this building, that's why I've been ignoring it. But it's already falling so bad that such an explanation won't work anymore. If it's really just because of where you're standing, there should be some change after you move to a different place, but that didn't work. That's why it must be because of something else and I guess that's because of the colourless mist. The colourless mist must have suddenly gotten thicker, that's the only guess that I can come up with."

Although Akira still looked stern, he asked a question to Alpha as if he was trying to calm himself down.

“Something like that is completely expected to happen inside an old-world ruin. Moreover, it’s not like it’s fatal, right?”

“At the moment, yes. But it’ll be really bad if the accuracy keeps on falling like this.”

“There’s nothing we can do about it, let’s just move on carefully.”

Akira calmly replied with that.

Alpha, who once saw how Akira got so flustered when he knew that the colourless mist around him was suddenly getting thick, just smiled and said to him.

“Oh my, you’re pretty calm, aren’t you? I thought that it might cause you to panic if I delay it for too long, that’s why I decided to tell you sooner than usual, but it seems that it was not needed, huh?”

“It’s not like the situation will get better if I panic here, you know. I just need to move carefully so I won’t get killed. Thank you for telling me sooner than usual, thanks to that, I can handle the situation much calmer.”

“I see, that’s good to hear. You’ve really grown stronger, I’m really happy to see that.”

“…Right, thanks.”

For some reason, Alpha sounded like she was actually teasing Akira, so he just replied back casually to her. But in reality, Alpha knew that he forced himself to reply casually to hide his embarrassment.

__*__*__*__

When Akira was on the 10th floor, there were other Hunters gathered near the Seranthal building.

Akira’s battle with autonomous weapons was a rather big fight. Because of that, most of the Hunters in the Mihazono ruin noticed that fight.

When Hunters defeated the powerful monsters guarding the Seranthal building, there were basically 2 types of Hunters who entered that building.

The first type was those Hunters who worked together to defeat the powerful autonomous weapons, they would send some Hunters from their team into the Seranthal building after their battle. While that small group of Hunters was gathering relics inside the building, the rest of the Hunters would stand guard on the building's entrance to prevent any other Hunters from entering.

It was in order to avoid having to fight against other Hunters over the relics as well as to prevent other Hunters from leeching off their hard work of defeating the guardian monsters. After all, there were many Hunters who were thinking of taking some relics out from the Seranthal building without helping to defeat the powerful monsters guarding that place.

Ammo expense, medical expense, wage cost, it basically took a lot of money to defeat those powerful autonomous weapons. So in order to end up with a profit after the battle, they could not afford to let other Hunters leeching off relics from them.

Those Hunters who could defeat the powerful autonomous weapons were basically strong Hunters, so if they guarded the entrance to the Seranthal building, the other Hunters could not get in. And when they left that building, the powerful monsters would be back guarding that building again in no time.

While the second type of Hunters who would get into that building showed themselves when there was a small opening left by those Hunters who were guarding the building. At the exact moment when the small group of Hunters that was previously sent to scavenge the building returned back to the entrance, these second type of Hunters would focus their firepower to open a hole in the security net to let their own group of Hunters slip through. It was the preferred way of sending Hunters into that building for those groups which were confident in their concentrated firepower.

Whichever it was, it was difficult to send Hunters into the building except for the original group who defeated the powerful monsters guarding it. But

if someone successfully did that, they would be able to get back rewards worth of all that hard work.

There were also Hunters who tried to negotiate with the Hunters guarding the entrance. There were also Hunters who used the smallest opening that they could find to charge head-on. While on the other hand, there were also Hunters who sneaked around to carry the wreckages of the autonomous weapons in secret.

Although it was rare, there were Hunters who exhausted their resources to defeat the powerful autonomous weapons and headed back home right after that. The reason was unclear, it might be just out of a whim, or they might be just venting their stress on those monsters, or it might be just those Hunters testing the new weapons developed by some corporations.

But all of those reasons were of no importance to the other Hunters. The most important thing was that the other Hunters would have a good chance to enter that Seranthal building after someone defeated the guardian monsters. The other Hunters in Mihazono ruin hoped that would be the case when they noticed that big battle between Akira and the mechanical monsters. That was why a lot of Hunters came to the Seranthal building to check.

One of the scout Hunters who was sent ahead checked the front entrance of the Seranthal building. He then confirmed the wreckages of the autonomous weapons and checked if there were any other Hunters guarding that place. After he finished, he contacted his other friends with a big smile.

“It’s me!! Tell the others too, quickly!! The monsters guarding the Seranthal building are dead! And there’s no Hunter guarding the entrance! We can get the relics from the building or carry the wreckage, either way, it’ll bring us a lot of money!! …Ah, and also! Come here, quickly!! Before the other Hunters come here first!! I saw some of the other Hunters scouting this place too!! Hurry up!”

Just like him, there were other Hunters calling their friends to hurry over. That place was quickly filled with Hunters in no time. Some of them were carrying the wreckages of the dead autonomous weapons that Akira

defeated while some of them went inside the building hunting for relics. In short, all the Hunters in that place were busy.

When some of those Hunters just went ahead to explore the building, there were some who just waited on the first floor for their other friends to arrive. Seranthal, the holographic girl, kept giving warning to those Hunters.

"…Dear customer. The building is closed at the moment, so we can't allow anyone without the proper authorization to enter. So please leave the building… Warning. The facility is guarded by security allowed to kill in case of illegal intruders. So please leave this place…"

For those Hunters who already knew about Seranthal building and that holographic girl, they just ignored that warning.

But there were Hunters who could not ignore her. One of those Hunters was waiting on the first floor for his friends to arrive, but since his friends were taking too long, he started to get more and more irritated. Although at first, he was ignoring Seranthal, the repeated warning from her drove that Hunter mad and he eventually blew.

"Good grief!! Just shut up!!"

"Warning, the building is…"

"Shut up!!!"

He then pointed his rifle at Seranthal. Although he knew well there was no meaning in doing that to a hologram, he still pulled the trigger. He was basically that irritated.

The bullet flew through that hologram and hit the wall behind her. Fortunately enough, there was nobody there, so no one got hurt.

But releasing a shot in that place was a serious matter. The other Hunters around him immediately pointed their rifles at him, he panicked and raised both of his hands.

“I-I’m sorry! She’s just so noisy that I couldn’t hold it back! That was all!! I’m sorry, okay!”

“…You’re a dead man the next time you do that.”

The other Hunters looked at him full of killing intent. Of course, he wanted to avoid any needless conflict too. It was a rare chance to be able to get into that building, so he had no plans to waste an opportunity to strike it rich without much struggle. Thanks to that, he was barely able to get out alive from that situation. If that shot had hit someone, he would have been dead by now.

“O-Okay, I understand. I’m sorry.”

He just kept on apologizing. The other Hunters around him then clicked their tongue and lowered their rifles. He finally could let out a sigh of relief.

Because of that incident, no one was paying any attention to Seranthal’s warning. Even when Seranthal changed her warning, no one there noticed it.

“Confirmed multiple intruders. Confirmed the intruders trying to kill the employees and staff of the building. Confirmed the destruction of the building. Changing to protocol D. Die you scum!”

After Seranthal said something that was unthinkable to be said to a customer, she quickly vanished. Not too long after she vanished, some Hunters in that area noticed that Seranthal had gone. But no one was bothered by that at all.

Silavin: Wow! Seriously? The author is really good at playing out a realistic situation. But like… when can my boy Akira finally get a break?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 106, Ghoul Building

Index

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When Akira was talking with Carol on the 25th floor, a small change started to happen around the Seranthal building. Or to be more precise, a change had already started and the Hunters in that area had noticed it.

Some of the Hunters there chose to carry the leftover wreckages of the dead autonomous weapons. Rather than risking having to fight the other Hunters over the relics inside that building, these Hunters chose to harvest the leftover wreckages of the autonomous weapons that Akira had defeated.

They had no idea who defeated those monsters, but since that person just left them there, they assumed these wreckages must be trash for said person. Those Hunters thought that person must have ignored those wreckages aiming for the relics inside the Seranthal building.

Those Hunters were guarding their prized loots while waiting for the arrival of the truck to carry the wreckages. They kept checking their information-gathering device and killed any small fry mechanical monsters that approached them. They were planning to carry those wreckages, so they could not let other mechanical monsters consume their prized find.

At first, they looked relaxed, but their expression suddenly changed, a look of astonishment flashed on their faces. There were quite a lot of mechanical monsters heading their way, and the number just kept increasing endlessly.

One of them then said.

“Hey, something is strange, don’t you think? Why are so many of them coming here?”

“I heard that those powerful monsters guarding the Seranthal building will always be back not too long after you kill them. So the mechanical monsters might be swarming here to gather the wreckages to rebuild these guardian monsters. I guess, if we take into consideration the size of the guardian monsters, it’s to be expected that they would need to bring a lot of those small mechanical monsters to carry these huge wreckages.”

“I see, that does make sense.”

“These wreckages might contain something valuable that they’re trying to retrieve it, so I’m sure these wreckages will fetch a lot of money.”

As they imagined the amount of money that they might earn, those Hunters started to smile.

The Hunter who was worrying also smiled after hearing what his friend said. The mechanical monsters coming to their direction were all weak monsters, so he thought that he must have been overthinking it. When that guy thought so, suddenly a loud bang echoed from afar. It was immediately followed by repeated gunshots. It was the sound of Hunters fighting monsters.

The source of that sound was moving closer and closer to those Hunters waiting for the truck. They eventually could see some Hunters running toward their direction.

The guy who was so worried just now was utterly dumbfounded as he said.

“A-aren’t there too many of them?”

There was a swarm of monsters following behind those Hunters, who were running toward the Seranthal building. The Hunters who were desperately fighting those monsters were swallowed one by one by that swarm. Distorted by the fear, the Hunters used grenades and explosives at a close range, close enough to even injure themselves. Those explosions would take out a bunch of monsters and open a hole in that swarm, but it did not take long for that hole to be covered by monsters again.

The Hunters around Seranthal building started shouting at each other.

“R-run away!!”

That guy shouted as if he was saying to everyone in that area.

“R-run away? To where exactly?”

The mechanical monsters were swarming the Seranthal building from all directions, there was no opening where the Hunters could run to. All of the Hunters in that area were running toward the only location where they might have any survival chance, it was the only location where they might be able to defend themselves, it was the Seranthal building.

All the Hunters who were still alive outside the Seranthal building quickly gathered inside the building, they were able to temporarily push back the swarm. The entrance to the Seranthal building turned into a bottleneck, the Hunters focused their fires there to repel the monsters that were trying to enter the building.

But suddenly, the mechanical monsters made a huge push, as if they gathered their numbers first before delivering the push. They kept pushing forward no matter how many of their fellow mechanical monsters were killed in front of them. As the monster swarm kept pushing their way into that building, they shoved the wreckages of their dead brethren aside to open up a road or just trampled them into small pieces and slowly closed the distance between them and the Hunters.

A Hunter suddenly shouted.

“Hey!! Someone, just anyone, relay the situation to the other Hunters upstairs!! It’s not the time to be looking for relics!!”

“We’ve already been doing that!! But we can’t get any contact at all!! Is it the colourless mist?!!”

“Hah?!! Why now of all time?!!”

“Hell if I know!! I can’t do anything about it, I just can’t contact them!!”

Without the help of the Hunters who were looking for relics upstairs, the Hunters in the first floor had no chance of winning. But since they could not get any contact, they could not call for help.

“…It can’t be helped, I’ll go and call them back.”

One of the Hunters said that and left the other Hunters.

“I-I’ll go too!”

“Me too!!”

Some of the Hunters followed suit and left that place.

The first guy really went to call the other Hunters to get back, but that was not the case for the other Hunters who followed him. They were just running away from that place, thinking that it was too dangerous to stay there. They wanted to get into safety since it was safer to join the rest of the Hunters who were hunting for relics upstairs.

Then, some of the Hunters who noticed that also followed behind them with the same excuse rather than trying to stop them. Although it was only a portion of the Hunters there that went upstairs, it was enough to make the frontline crumble.

The monsters that were held back until now quickly flooded into the building. They used their cannons, guns, and their powerful mechanical bodies to kill the Hunters. The Hunters who could not stand the situation started running away out of fear and the ones who were trying to hold the

monsters on the first floor were overwhelmed as they slowly retreated to the second floor.

It only took a few seconds for the monsters to completely seize the first floor.

＿*＿*＿*＿

Akira was searching the 30th floor. Since his information-gathering device was getting less and less sensitive, he continued his search carefully to make sure that he would not get ambushed. Alpha was guiding him to take the safest route while looking for a stair to go up.

“Akira, it’s about the sensitivity of your information-gathering device… It seems that it’s not because of the colourless mist.”

Akira looked happy, but his expression quickly turned into one of confusion.

“That’s good to hear… Right? Wait, it’s not like the sensitivity returned back to normal either, huh?”

“Yes, the sensitivity is falling down even now. I think it’s because of this building.”

“This building? But didn’t you say just now that it has nothing to do with this building?”

“What I meant back then is the layout of the rooms and the hallways inside this building. It’s not limited to the old-world ruin alone; when the government or big corporations negotiate about some secret stuff, they would use a special room that prevents any information from leaking out in any forms to the outside of that room. And we’re in a similar situation to that, it’s highly difficult to even scan your surroundings using your information-gathering device at the moment. If my guess is correct, this building might have some kind of feature that blocks signals.”

“So you mean that signal blocking function suddenly turned on, huh. But why so suddenly?”

“I have no answer to that question.”

Akira stopped and thought. He then asked Alpha with a serious expression.

“Should we pull back for now? Although we can’t get to our main goal, I’ve already gathered quite a lot of old-world relics today.”

Alpha thought for a bit before answering that question with a big smile.

“If you think so, then let’s retreat. I guess it’s better to cut it short before your bad luck goes off again.”

“Roger that.”

Akira smiled bitterly and turned around, just when he was about to swing his leg forward, Alpha suddenly signalled him to stop.

“What’s wrong?”

“Someone is coming. That person is running in this direction, it seems that he’s in a hurry. At this rate, he will reach here soon.”

Akira pointed his gun in the direction where Alpha told him that person was coming from. It was to be safe just in case if it was an ambush.

But that person was Carol. As she was running through the hallway, she spotted Akira and shouted at him while still running.

“Akira!! Help me!! Do something about them!!”

As Akira peeked behind Carol, he could see small mechanical monsters with half-destroyed bodies chasing her. He found that weird, but he decided to at least give Carol a help.

“Are you out of ammo? Get out from my shooting line.”

Carol quickly ran out of Akira's line of sight. Akira then aimed at those monsters using his A2D rifle and shot them. As the piercing bullets hit the monsters' half-destroyed bodies, it turned them to scraps and blew them to pieces.

Akira could only consider those monsters as weak and started to ponder. [If they were this weak, Carol should be able to defeat them without my help, there was no need to ask for my help.]

He found that weird as he mumbled. "If it's only that much, she should have done something about them herself-"

But before he could even finish his sentence. A swarm of monsters suddenly gushed in from the hallway where Carol came from.

Akira quickly pulled out his DVTS minigun and showered those monsters with bullets. Although it was able to make quick work for the smaller mechanical monsters with weak armour, the monsters with thicker armours kept pushing forward against the raining bullets.

When Akira was about to change to his CWH anti-material rifle, Carol who had already stood beside him shot them first. The bullet that she shot pierced the monster's thick armour and sent it flying back. It only took one shot to kill that thick armoured monster. Although she was using nothing but a hand cannon, it might have the same firepower as a CWH anti-material rifle. But she could not use it for continuous shooting, thus it was not a suitable gun to fight a swarm.

"We need to run away!"

After Carol said that, she immediately started running again, leaving Akira behind.

Akira quickly followed Carol, Alpha was floating beside him while smiling bitterly.

"It seems that we're too late. Akira, your bad luck is really fast."

“You can say that again!!”

Akira was chasing Carol with an irritated face.

Unlike Akira, who came to the Seranthal building for the first time, Carol had come there numerous times in the past, thus she was able to keep running without getting lost.

Although the situation inside that building was completely different from what Carol had known, Carol placed her bet that the layout of the building did not change as she kept running forward without checking whether there were monsters in front of her or not. The monsters were coming from below, so as long as the layout of the building did not change, the monsters should not be able to circle their way around Akira and Carol.

Akira was still running behind Carol when he asked her a question.

“Carol, what’s going on here? What happened downstairs?”

“Mechanical monsters are gushing out from below. A swarm of monsters is climbing the building while fighting the Hunters on their way. They’re having a fierce fight downstairs, although it’s not that bad, it’s not a good idea to go downstairs right now.”

“Is it that the other monsters from outside are coming inside this building since I killed the monsters guarding this building?”

“I don’t know. Well, I guess that’s the case for the Hunters, but… I actually thought you used an opening in the monsters guarding this place to kill some of them and sneaked into this building, but judging from what you said just now, you killed all of them, right? And you did that alone on top of that. You’re a really interesting fellow, how did you kill those guardian monsters?”

Carol seemed to be honestly interested when she asked that question, Akira’s face turned stern as he said.

“I can’t tell you. It’s my secret trump card after all.”

And even if Akira told Carol the truth, it would only end up with Carol questioning his sanity or suspecting that he was just simply lying. So he decided to deflect that question, he did not tell any lie there.

It seemed that Carol was not expecting Akira would tell her anyway, so she just smiled as she said.

“Is that so? If we’re not in this situation, I would love to spend more time to loosen your lips, but it’s not the time for that. And also, even if someone destroyed all the autonomous weapons outside, it won’t cause the other mechanical monsters roaming the ruin to flood this building.”

After that, Carol’s expression turned cloudy.

“…Or at least, that should not cause something like this. The mechanical monsters inside the Mihazono ruin are security drones with fixed patrol areas that they’re protecting, there’s no way they would go outside their designated area. That’s why, in Mihazono ruin, you sometimes can save yourself by entering a nearby building when you encounter powerful monsters. Thanks to that, this ruin is a relatively safe ruin for the Hunters to explore. That’s the real reason why so many Hunters frequent this ruin, enough for the Hunter Office to build their branch in this ruin.”

Akira frowned and asked a question.

“Then why is this happening right now?”

Carol twitched a bit and then screamed.

“Like hell if I know!! That’s how it has always been up until now!! I’ve never found monsters inside this building and the monsters outside have never tried to enter the building!!! Even if those Hunters ran to this building from a group of monsters, those monsters would not even try to enter this building to chase those Hunters!! So if there’s any reason why this is happening, I want to know that reason too!!”

Although there was no way for Akira and the other two to know it, the reason was actually very simple. It was simply because the manager of that

building, Seranthal, had given permission for those monsters to enter that building. And at the same time, she also requested for reinforcements to take out the intruders. Because of that, all the monsters in that ruin answered that request and quickly gathered there to kill all the Hunters inside.

Akira was still running as he said.

“As I thought, old-world ruin is really scary. No one can say for sure what will happen.”

As Carol looked at Akira who was still calm, she regained some of her calmness. She then smiled bitterly and said to him.

“…You’re right about that, I put too much trust on my experience coming to this place.”

Akira then asked another question.

“By the way, I understand that we can’t head downstairs, so where exactly are we heading now? It’s not like we can find a way to escape if we keep going upstairs, right? Are you planning to make a stand somewhere? Or are you just running randomly from those monsters?”

“Nope, I did tell you before, right? I know a backdoor, we’re going to use that backdoor to escape.”

Akira was so surprised when he heard that unexpected answer, he then asked another question.

“…So the backdoor that would allow us to escape this building is located upstairs?”

“Well, I won’t tell you to trust me. It’s completely up to you if you believe me or not… Of course, I won’t tell you to not follow me in this situation, after all, I’m sure that it’s meaningless even if I tell you so… Haah…”

Carol exasperatedly sighed.

If Akira kept following her, obviously, she would end up guiding him to the location that she could sell for 5,000,000 Aurum. But she had no plans to tell him not to follow her even if he did not pay her. In that situation where she was being chased by a swarm of monsters, it would be bad if Akira turned hostile too.

As Carol was cursing her bad luck since she would be losing a piece of information that she could have sold for a huge amount of money, Akira suddenly said something that she did not expect at all.

“If you tell me not to follow you, I’ll go somewhere else though. Should I do that?”

Carol suddenly stopped out of surprise. Because of that, Akira could not stop in time and ran past her. He then stopped in panic and looked back at her in surprise.

“Don’t stop now. We need to run, right? Or is this where the backdoor is?”

Carol looked at Akira with a face saying that she was both surprised and suspicious. She then asked Akira a question with a dead-serious tone.

“…Are you being serious?”

“Yeah. I have no plans to create more enemies in this situation. You look pretty strong after all.”

Carol stared at Akira. She was trying to judge if he was lying from his tone and expression. Then according to her experience, she found that Akira was being serious there.

Carol was quite surprised. Although she was in a rather precarious situation, she ended up standing still in that place for a few seconds.

Akira more or less had the same thought as Carol. He had no time to deal with her in case she turned hostile in that situation. But there, rather than thinking that they had no other choice but to work together, Akira’s line of

thinking was so twisted that he chose to keep his distance away from others in case they started trying to kill each other for some reason.

“…I’m not really sure what’s going on in your head, but if you’re going to stay here, I’ll go ahead and leave you.”

After he said that, Akira immediately turned around and was about to leave. If they stayed there, it was only a matter of time before they would be swallowed by the incoming swarm. So they had no other choice but to keep running at the moment.

Seeing Akira start running ahead, leaving her behind, Carol snapped back to reality. She then smiled and chased Akira. Once she caught up with him, she smiled at him and said in a good mood.

“This way.”

Akira then said to her, just to make sure that she understood.

“I won’t pay you any money, you know?”

Even when Akira said those words that did not show any wish to compromise, Carol kept smiling.

“I know, that’s why, how about we make a deal instead? If you escort me out alive, I’ll not ask any payment for sharing the information about the backdoor, what do you think?”

“So you would give away that 5,000,000 Aurum information just for that? You’re being rather generous here.”

“Well, it’s not like I can bring any money to the afterlife after all. That’s why I don’t plan to be stingy about it, I’ll also pay for your ammo expense.”

It was a good thing if Carol would help to escape that building, and Akira had nothing to complain about that deal. Thus he immediately replied.

“Alright.”

Carol smiled.

“We have a deal then. I’ll be counting on you, be sure to properly protect me, okay?”

Although it was a sudden request, it did not change the fact that it was still a request. So Akira answered back firmly.

“You don’t even need to tell me. Since I’ve accepted that request, I’ll be sure to do it properly.”

“That sounds so reassuring.”

They then continued running inside that building with Carol guiding the way smiling.

As someone who had already explored that building several times in the past, Carol was able to navigate inside that building which had a complex layout without getting lost. As for the monsters that were closing up from behind, it was Akira’s job to deal with them.

It was obvious from a look that the mechanical monsters were designed for killing purposes rather than being equipped for apprehending people. These monsters were equipped with wheels on their legs to ride over rubbles, which allowed them to quickly close their distance to Akira. Considering that there were a lot of obstacles scattered inside that building, they were traversing the building at a relatively high speed.

Akira aimed and shot those legs before starting to run again. After losing their mobility, those monsters were turned into extra obstacles blocking the hallway. Akira accurately shot those monsters down one by one, and thanks to Alpha’s detection support, there was no need for him to look back to take a careful aim. When he released his shot, he just turned back without losing much momentum, released a shot, and then ran again to catch up with Carol.

Carol saw Akira’s skill and smiled.

[As expected of someone who can kill all the guardian monsters alone, he’s indeed strong. It’s rather amazing for someone his age. Well, that’s of course if he’s as young as he looks.]

There were many Hunters whose age couldn’t be determined with a look. Their body was the main tool for the Hunters, thus it was not rare for Hunters to take anti-ageing treatment to maintain their bodies in tip-top shape. The medicines that they consumed might also have effects on their cells. Sometimes, it accelerated their ageing, and sometimes, it had the opposite effect. Of course, they could reverse that through treatment, but there were Hunters who intentionally did not take that treatment.

There were also Hunters with full cyborg bodies, these Hunters had a completely different look compared to their ages. After all, cyborgs could switch their bodies as many times as they wanted, it was impossible to judge a cyborg’s age solely from the looks. Because of those reasons, there were many Hunters who had completely different ages compared to their outer appearances.

As Carol was helping Akira shoot back at the monsters chasing them, she asked him a question.

“Say, Akira, how old are you?”

“No idea.”

Carol thought that Akira simply did not want to answer that question.

“I see, well, if you don’t want to tell me, I won’t force you though. After all, I’m also keeping my age a secret. I sometimes gave a random answer when other people asked about my age.”

But Akira casually replied.

“That’s not it, I really have no idea. I don’t know my own age, after all, I’ve spent quite a large portion of my life not even knowing the current date. And no one ever told me when I was born and how old I’m right now. That’s why I don’t know my own age.”

“…I see.”

After hearing that, Carol decided not to pursue any further. It was a common thing among the Hunters who originated from the slum city to not know their own age. And some of those Hunters did not like it when people inquired.

Carol did not think that Akira was lying. Although it sounded as if he just casually answered back, it might be just him putting up a front. Whichever the case, it was not worth antagonizing him just to pursue that question, thus she asked a different question.

“By the way, have you been doing Hunter jobs for a long time? It’s up to you to decide the starting line.”

There were many Hunters who only started actively doing Hunter jobs years after they received their Hunter ID. There were also those who had been doing Hunter jobs for a long time before actually getting formally registered as Hunters. Then there were those who did not include the time when they were below Rank 10 in their history as Hunters.

Because of that, many Hunters had different time spans when they started doing Hunter jobs for real compared to how long they registered themselves as Hunters. Some of those Hunters were sensitive when asked about the period when they started working as Hunters. Because of that, Carol left it up to Akira to decide.

Akira hesitated for a bit before replying back.

“…Not that long. Pretty short, that’s all I can say.”

“Is that so? Then you’re a fresh Hunter, huh. It’s amazing for a fresh Hunter to be as skilled as you.”

“I just got lucky.”

To be more precise, it was all thanks to Alpha. Akira thought that he did not lie there since he did get lucky for meeting Alpha.

Carol thought that Akira was trying to be humble, so she teasingly said to him.

“Oh my, luck is also a skill, you know? Especially for us who might get killed anytime.”

Akira smiled bitterly.

“Is that so? Then it means that my skill has really gotten worse, huh.”

“It’s not a problem as long as you get to return back alive. You have no plans to die here too, right?”

“Of course.”

Akira and Carol hurried up to escape the situation that they were in before they ran out of luck.

Thanks to Carol guiding him, Akira was able to quickly find the stairs to go up. But just like last time, he encountered a lot of locked doors preventing him from going further, and every time that happened, they had no other choice but to look for another stair in that floor.

Akira annoyedly mumbled.

“Why are there so many locked doors? Is it that someone is bullying us or something?”

Carol giggled.

“If it’s really someone bullying us, that would be Seranthal then. According to her, as the manager of this building, this building is actually closed after all. So I bet that originally all of these doors were actually closed, the ones that are open must have been opened forcefully by someone in the past.”

“Ohhh, I see.”

It was not an easy feat to open a locked old-world door. Whether they opened it through brute force or through hacking, either way, both required

a ton of effort. There were Hunters who set the doors so that only they could open those doors, and there were Hunters who decided to just tear those doors.

The doors that Carol and Akira were passing through were doors that were left open either because they were torn down or because their control panels were toasted. Of course, there were no Hunters who would spare their resources to fix those doors.

“Wait, does that mean that most of the doors on this floor are locked?”

Carol confirmed Akira’s guess.

“Unfortunately, that’s indeed the case. We’re aiming for 45th floor, but once we reach the 40th floor, we’ll have to change stairs every single floor up.”

“I don’t know who exactly opened these doors, but, did they do that intentionally to make it more difficult climbing this building? What a pain in the neck, what exactly were they thinking?”

“They might intentionally do that so they can sell the map of the layout at a high price.”

“That sounds plausible.”

The more difficult and confusing an area was, the higher the price of the map of that area. After hearing Carol’s explanation, Akira thought that it did make sense as he sighed.

Akira and Carol were shooting back at the mechanical monsters chasing them while running. Thanks to Carol’s precise guide, they were able to get to their destination in the shortest time and the monsters who tried to encircle them could not get ahead of them. It caused Akira and Carol to start assuming that the only monsters in that building were all behind them.

Although it was only for a few seconds, Akira lowered his watch to whatever that was in front of him. With all the monsters coming from

behind him, he had no leeway of focusing his guard on what was in front of him. So, it would be unfair to consider that as carelessness.

But it did not change the fact that they did not put much attention to what was in front of them. It was then, something happened.

Akira was climbing the stairs past the 40th floor behind Carol who was right in front of him. When Carol saw that the door to the 41st floor was locked, she quickly turned to the door leading to the 40th floor.

The moment she stepped into the 40th floor, Carol immediately froze. Akira who came from behind her was also the same. There were already multiple mechanical monsters there waiting for them.

Those mechanical monsters had a long body, legs and arms extended out from those bodies, and there were rifles perched on their backs. Then to top it off, multiple monsters were watching that door where Carol and Akira just came out from.

The shock caused Carol to freeze up. There should not be any other way to reach the 40th floor except for this particular stairway that she and Akira just passed through, so Carol did not expect to find any monsters on that floor.

Akira was also surprised by that, he could not help but to freeze up too, although only for a few split seconds.

Everything happened in slow motion. When Carol saw the rifles of the monsters in front of her pointing at her, she realised that she had no chance in evading them. Strangely enough, she did not have the time to feel fear as she calmly assessed her situation.

Then in the next moment, Akira suddenly jumped into Carol’s field of vision. He stood in front of Carol with his back facing the monsters as if he was covering her. And almost at the same time, she could hear gunshots coming from the monsters behind Akira.

Bullets showered Akira’s back, his augmented suit went to full power to take in the impact of those bullets. Then, while still facing his back against the monsters and receiving the bullets, Akira turned his arm, which held his rifle, a bit past the limit of his joints and started shooting back at those monsters.

Akira was shooting back in a difficult position, normally, none of his shots would hit. But due to Alpha’s support, Akira defied that logic and accurately shot the rifles perching on those monsters.

Carol immediately moved to help Akira. She used him as a shield and grabbed her hand cannon that was more or less as strong as CWH anti-material rifle and started shooting at the monsters in front of her.

It did not even take 10 seconds for them to make short work of those monsters. When the shooting stopped, all the monsters were dead. Thanks to Akira covering her, Carol was unharmed. But then, Akira coughed out blood and fell to the ground.

After confirming that all the monsters were dead, Carol hurriedly checked on Akira.

“Akira, are you alright?!!”

Although the bullets could not pierce through Akira’s augmented suit, his augmented suit could hardly dampen all the impact from those bullets. As a result, his inner organs were injured and blood was dripping out from his mouth.

Akira pushed himself away from the ground and spitted out all the blood that was left inside his mouth. He then put down his rucksack, pulled out his medicines, and quickly swallowed them. As expected of expensive medicines, they immediately went to action and showed their results.

Akira’s face distorted in pain as he mumbled.

“M-my…”

He looked completely devastated.

“My relics…”

The relics that he was carrying on his back had served as his shield when he was showered by the bullets, and now they turned into scraps scattered on the floor.

Silavin: Ahhh!!!! The loot!

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Rebuild World – Chapter 107, An Unexpected Backdoor

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As Akira watched the scene laid in front of him, he hung his head low. All the relics that he had collected had turned worthless. The rucksack that he had used to carry the relics had also turned unusable. There was no point in carrying them around any longer.

“Although I did my best collecting them and carrying them with me all the way here…”

Carol looked shocked when she asked Akira a question.

“Uhh, Akira, are you okay?”

Akira turned surprised, he could not believe what he just heard.

“A-are you seriously asking me if I’m okay after seeing this?!!!”

“I mean, are you injured?”

“Ahh, that, huh. No, I’m alright. I coughed out some blood, but this much is nothing and I still have enough medicines with me.”

Akira was saying that he was injured but it was nothing serious. Carol sighed in relief after confirming that he was alright. But at the same time, she was also a bit surprised by how he was taking in their situation as she thanked him.

“Uhhh, by the way, thank you for saving me. Thanks to you, I was able to get out alive from that.”

“Don’t mention it, I’ve accepted that request after all… But still, I worked super hard to be able to get in here, you know…”

Akira even had to run on a building’s wall to be able to defeat the autonomous weapons guarding that building, and the result of that hard work was now scattered in pieces right in front of him. The shock was pretty devastating for him.

Seeing Akira like this, Carol could not help but smile. The current Akira did not look like a Hunter who could immediately react to that sudden turn of events and jump in front of her to protect her. That young boy, who ignored the fact that he just coughed out blood as he immediately swallowed medicines, appeared so meek and devastated now while looking at his relics that were shredded into pieces.

As Carol thought that it was just the nature of being a Hunter, she could not help but let out a giggle. Akira who noticed that glared at her.

“This is not funny at all. All my hard work just to get in this building is now all in vain, you know?!!”

Carol apologized while still giggling.

“I’m sorry, I really am sorry. As my thanks, I’ll pay for the relics that you lost. Let’s say, how about 40,000,000 Aurum? I’ll transfer the money once we’re out of this place.”

Akira looked dumbfounded.

“A-are you sure?”

“Of course, you lost those relics for protecting me after all. So it would be really bad if you blame that on me and abandon me.”

Akira still could not believe it, so he asked the same question again.

“A-are you really sure you’re okay with that?”

Carol smiled and replied.

“Yeah. If you’re not satisfied with that number, we can negotiate after we get out from here. But I think those relics should be worth around that much. Since I’ve brought back relics from this building a few times before, I more or less know the worth of the relics in this building. So, even if you say that they should worth more, I won’t easily offer you more money, you know.”

Akira looked perplexed as he said.

“Ah, no, that’s not it, I’m okay with that number. Uhhh, thank you.”

“Don’t mention it… Or at least that’s what I wanted to say, but it’s too soon for that. If you want me to pay you that money, make sure to protect me until we escape this building, okay?”

Akira answered back with a serious expression.

“Of course. Since I’ve accepted your request, I’ll properly protect you regardless of that deal.”

Carol smiled happily at Akira.

“I’m counting on you. So then, let’s go… Do tell me if it hurts to move your body around.”

“It’s okay. I used expensive medicines back there after all. I don’t feel any pain right now. Although, to be honest, I want to take a break until the medicines completely heal my injuries, but it’s not the time for that, so let’s hurry up.”

They could not afford to stay in that place for too long. The longer they stayed there, the closer the swarm would be. Akira and Carol immediately started running again.

While he was running through the 40th floor, Akira asked Alpha.

“Alpha, thank you back there.”

Akira’s move back then was mostly thanks to Alpha’s control. He actually could not react in time, and even if he did, he was not sure if he could have protected Carol.

“Don’t mention it. It’s my job to provide you with my support. That aside, are you really okay?”

“It’s true that I don’t feel any pain. It still feels weird when I move my body though, but it’s not the time to worry about that now. More importantly, is my augmented suit okay after taking that barrage? That’s more important, right?”

“It’s okay. Although it did temporarily boost the energy consumption, your augmented suit should be functioning normally right now.”

“I see, that’s good to hear.”

“But still, it’s great that she would pay for the relics that were destroyed.”

“You can say that again… By the way, was that the only way out?”

Had Alpha detected those monsters beforehand, Akira might not have lost his relics back there. He thought so as he threw that question to Alpha.

Alpha just smiled and said.

“The layout of the floors in this building is blocking my detection. If you’re okay with taking those bullets head-on instead of using the relics as your shield, and if you’re also okay with me forcing your body to move even if you’re badly injured just like that time when you fought the relic thieves, then the answer is no.”

Akira twitched and said.

“Well, I wouldn’t want you to do that though.”

Now that Alpha confirmed that Akira had nothing to complain about her support even after losing his relics, she smiled and said.

“You only got light injuries and someone is offering to pay for the relics that you lost, so you just need to return back alive now.”

“Yeah, but then again, what do you think about this back door on the upper floor?”

“I don’t know the answer to that question. Since she asked for 5,000,000 Aurum, I bet there’s really a backdoor. So for now, let’s just place our trust in her.”

“You’re right. It’s not like I can go downstairs anyway, the way upward is the only way forward. Let’s just put our bet on her and continue.”

Although Alpha’s ability to detect enemies was reduced, it was not that bad in detecting enemies on the same floor as them. So, even though they encountered more monsters after that, Akira was able to detect them first and snipe them before they could attack the duo.

Carol was shooting at the monsters in front of her when she voiced out her question.

“But still, where are all of these monsters coming from? They shouldn’t be inside this building though…”

Akira who was shooting at the same targets then answered.

“They’re here now, so it doesn’t matter. Let’s just kill them and move on. One thing for sure, we have quite a lot of monsters chasing us from behind.”

“Well, you’re right about that…”

There was an elevator door not too far from them. For the sake of moving people and stuff around that building, the elevator door there was pretty big. Except for those people with the right permission, no one could use the elevator. That was why Akira and Carol were forced to climb that building using stairs.

But then that elevator door suddenly opened without making any sounds. Akira quickly reacted to that by pointing his rifle in that direction. Carol also did the same although a bit late. Both of them pulled the trigger almost simultaneously and started shooting at the rifles peeking out from the inside of that elevator.

Although both of them were surprised, their expression stayed stern. Akira's face then turned grim as he said.

"Now we know how they got here first. So this is the reason, huh."

What was left behind that elevator door was nothing but the dead wreckages of the monsters that the duo just killed. These monsters were using elevators to get ahead of Akira and Carol.

"What's going on here!? So the manager of this building is letting these monsters use the elevator?!"

"That seems to be the case."

"To think that the manager of this building has also turned hostile… Nah, I guess it's too late to be surprised about that by now, huh?"

All the Hunters inside that building were basically intruders, so that was to be expected.

Akira saw Carol's grim expression, he then asked her a question.

"Does this have anything to do with the backdoor that we're heading to?"

"None. To be more precise, they might have predicted where we're heading and sending monsters ahead of us, but it should be still alright."

“Is that so? In that case, we should hurry up then, at this rate, they’ll surround us.”

“You’re right, let’s go. But seriously, from one thing to another, we’re really unlucky today. Today is really a bad day… Akira, what’s wrong? Are you hurt somewhere?”

Carol noticed Akira’s weird reaction and asked him if he was okay. Akira, who just slightly twitched, returned his face to normal.

“It’s nothing, I’m okay.”

Carol was a bit bothered by Akira’s strange reaction, but it was not the time for that as she quickly returned back to guiding the way forward.

Alpha, who had a good guess of what Akira was thinking, just smiled at him.

“It’s alright, it’s all going to be fine as long as you can return back alive. So let’s just head back home and have a good laugh at what happened today.”

“You’re right.”

Even if it was true that Carol was roped into Akira’s bad luck, there should not be any problems as long as they could return back alive. They knew that being a Hunter was a dangerous occupation. Once they returned back alive from that place, everything that happened that day would be an amusing story that they could laugh off in the future.

Luck was also a part of Hunter’s skill. So those who could fight back against their bad luck were indeed skilled Hunters.

Akira and Carol continued running inside the Seranthal building, heading to the backdoor that Carol told Akira about. Now that they knew there were monsters ahead, they did not get caught off guard again as they carved their way forward through the monsters blocking their way. It was all good and fine up until that point, but the further they went forward, the grimmer their expression became.

Akira looked at the cause of that and said.

“There’s just too many of them!!”

“There’s no end to these monsters. Looking at this situation, I guess the Hunters downstairs are all dead, huh…”

The mechanical monsters that were chasing Akira and Carol from behind had increased in number, enough to even fully block the whole hallway. These monsters must have passed through the Hunters downstairs, and now they came upstairs to kill Carol and Akira, who were still alive inside the building. There might be some Hunters making their stand in some small rooms, but they were the minority among all the Hunters who came inside that building.

Akira was holding back the monsters behind them using his CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun while Carol was clearing the way forward. As the wreckages of the dead monsters in the front of the swarms blocked the hallway, all the monsters behind them slowly pushed their way through those wreckages and crept closer and closer to Akira and Carol.

Akira and Carol somehow reached the 45th floor, they finally reached their destination. The stairs that they took to get there were already filled with wreckages, there was no way to go downstairs now.

“Carol, how far until we reach the backdoor? This is already the 45th floor, so it should be somewhere on this floor, right?”

Carol had a grim expression as she said.

“Go right and then left. There, we’ll find a big door.”

Akira peeked toward that direction. Countless monsters were already waiting inside that hallway. And right when Akira peeked at them, the elevator door near those monsters opened and delivered extra reinforcements. The duo looked totally disheartened.

Akira sighed and said with a serious face.

“It can’t be helped, we need to break through them.”

Carol was so surprised. She thought that it was impossible to break through that blockade.

“…Breakthrough them? Right there? With that many monsters?”

“If we take too long shaving their number, this floor will be flooded with monsters before we can move forward. Not to mention, I don’t have much ammo left. If we don’t break through them in one go, our fates would be sealed as the time passes… Look there, they got even more reinforcement.”

The elevator door opened again and delivered even more monsters inside that hallway. Akira believed that they would not stop sending monsters there anytime soon.

Carol looked at that and made her resolve.

“…Alright.”

“I’ll go in first then you help me from behind.”

“Are you sure?”

“Since I’m your bodyguard, it’s not like I can take cover behind you, right?”

Looking at Akira, who said that so flatly as if he was only stating a fact without a trace of anger or hatred, Carol smiled happily and said.

“…You’re right, I’ll be counting on you.”

Akira swallowed some medicines beforehand and put some ready inside his mouth, he then reloaded new magazines into his rifles. He stood in the middle of the hallway with his CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun ready on his hands. He was ready to go.

“Alpha.”

“Ready when you are.”

Seeing Alpha who was smiling like usual, a question popped out inside Akira’s head.

“You said that it’s easy to fight against mechanical monsters back there, so I can put my hopes up, right?”

“Of course. But you better get your resolve ready, Akira.”

Akira forced himself to make a confident smile. Right after that, he jumped out into the hallway where those monsters were waiting for him. He gathered his focus and compressed his time perception, inside that slow-motion world, Akira made his resolve, aimed the rifles on both of his hands toward the monsters in front of him, and pulled the trigger.

The special ammo of his CWH anti-material rifle easily pierced through the monsters’ thick armours and blew the inside of their bodies, it then went further and pierced right through the monsters behind them too. While the shower of bullets coming out from Akira’s DVTS minigun only had enough power to dent their armours, it was strong enough to destroy their limbs and guns. The monsters that were thrown back blocked the other monsters from aiming at Akira, the dead monsters blocked their way forward, and the destroyed guns blew up and took out the monsters near their vicinity.

Alpha used all the information that she got from Akira’s information-gathering device, she then analyzed it, processed it, and used it to confirm the position of all the enemies and their lines of sight. Since they were on the same floor as Akira and pretty close to him, even with the reduced sensitivity, Alpha was able to detect even the slightest move that these monsters made.

Alpha took control of Akira’s augmented suit, enhanced his vision, and corrected his aim to take out the first monsters with the highest possibility of inflicting serious injury to Akira. While at the same time, she maximized the effectiveness of the DVTS barrage to lower the monsters’ firepower. As the explosions of their guns took out the monsters around where those explosions happened, the dead monsters turned into obstacles that slowed

down the other monsters' movements. Alpha fully grasped the situation of every single second of that battle as she kept Akira and Carol from the monsters aim and guided Akira to make the best possible sequence of action.

Akira was running forward in that situation where even the smallest slip up could cause the enemies' shots to concentrate on him and immediately kill him. His augmented suit forced his body to move to its utmost limit to the point that it was almost enough to kill him. His muscles and bones could not take the burden as they were screaming in pain. The moment the medicines that he had taken in beforehand healed those injuries, the augmented suit would place even more burden on his body again.

Akira was pushing forward inside that slow-motion world, bullets were flying from behind and in front of him, he could hear the sounds of those flying bullets and he could feel the wind pressure grazing his skin as those bullets flew past near him. In the middle of that, Akira focused to feel the movement of his augmented suit and tried his best to match his body movement with his augmented suit, so as not to slow down Alpha's control over his augmented suit.

Thanks to his enhanced vision, Akira could see the next location he needed to position himself, the next action he needed to take, and the next target that he needed to take out first. He tried his best to follow Alpha's guidance that was produced through processing a huge amount of information and after a huge amount of complex calculations.

Inside his enhanced vision, Akira also could see the predicted trajectory line of the monsters' aims. Alpha sometimes gave him order to pass through positions where he would get hit by bullets. But even after knowing that, Akira would still push forward and take that route without hesitating. Then, as expected, he would grit his teeth and take in the bullet while making sure that it would not break his balance as he focused himself to follow the next order.

It was of course impossible to evade all the enemies' shots. As such, Akira just brushed that off as he understood very well he needed to take some of

those bullets and make sure that they did not cause any fatal injuries in order to return back alive from that place.

Alpha's orders were important, even if they were directing him to soak up those bullets. Akira placed his trust in Alpha as he kept on fighting. He stepped over the dead monsters in front of him and continued pushing forward.

Thanks to Alpha's support, Akira kept on shooting at the monsters in front of him with the utmost efficiency while at the same time reducing the efficiency of the monsters in front of him with his barrage.

Carol, was following behind Akira while giving as much support as she could, she kept telling her body to keep moving since it kept stopping out of astonishment from the scene happening in front of her.

Carol did not expect that Akira was that strong.

[…So strong!! I knew all along that he's strong enough to kill the monsters guarding this building alone, but I never thought that he's this strong!! Amazing!! Really amazing!!]

Carol did not know about Alpha. Thus, she thought that it was purely out of Akira's skill alone. Although it was out of Carol's wrong evaluation, in her eyes, Akira looked like a very attractively strong Hunter.

Carol unconsciously smiled. It was a rare smile different from the attractive smile that she usually used on someone who she wanted to seduce.

After pushing through that fierce fight, Akira and Carol stood in front of the door that they were aiming for. Although the battle only lasted for 5 minutes, for both of them, it felt like forever. Akira himself was already low on ammo and medicines.

Akira faced his back toward that door and fought the monster chasing him while Carol rushed toward that door and opened it. After she checked everything, she shouted at Akira.

“It’s all green!! Hurry up!!”

Akira quickly went inside that door and the door almost immediately shut. The monsters on the other side of that door released a barrage of bullets, Akira could hear those bullets hitting the thick door from the other side. It was a close call.

After escaping that dangerous situation, Akira finally had the leeway to relax and reassess his situation. As he scanned his surroundings, he was taken aback and said.

“We’re outside?”

Akira was already outside. Some of the floors in the Seranthal building had platforms and those platforms were actually landing platforms, Akira was standing on one of those platforms.

Akira flusteredly asked Carol a question.

“Is this the backdoor?”

“Yes, did that surprise you?”

“Wait for a sec, how exactly are we going to escape from this place? I can’t fly, and of course, I don’t want to jump down from this height.”

Even for Akira, who was experienced in jumping down a tall building, he did not want to jump from that height. And putting height aside, Akira had no plans to jump from a tall building two times in a day.

Carol, who saw Akira get a bit worked up, found it amusing as she giggled and said.

“I can’t fly too and I have no plans to kill myself by jumping from this height. It’ll start to move soon, so let’s just keep that door closed.”

Carol then moved a pile of wreckage and put it right next to the door, preventing it from getting opened. It was a pretty heavy pile of wreckage and it was positioned to get stuck on the door. Thus, it would be really hard

to open the door from the other side. And even if the door was destroyed, that wreckage would then be turned into a blockade.

Carol then said to Akira.

“Come over here.”

Akira followed Carol into the landing platform. It was pretty huge for a landing platform on top of a building.

Although Akira never saw it for himself, he was wondering if there was this so-called airplane in that place and that Carol was planning to escape from that building using it. But as he scanned the platform, he did not see anything that might be that so-called airplane.

As Akira started to feel uneasy, he then asked Carol with a worried face.

“Carol, can you tell me now where are we heading to? And how are you planning to escape from this building?”

“We’ll be there soon. It’s faster if you see it for yourself. Even if I explain it to you now, I don’t think that you would believe me anyway.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“You’ll get it when you see it. Ah, there it is, it’s that thing over there.”

Carol then pointed her finger. But Akira could not see anything in the direction she was pointing, there was nothing but the runway there.

“…I don’t see anything though?”

“It’s foggy so it’s hard to see. Look closely, don’t you see a shadow in the middle of that runway?”

Akira stared closely in that direction, it was true that he saw some kind of silhouette, but it did not resemble anything that he knew of. He then tilted his head.

As Akira was wondering what was there, Carol already walked ahead toward that thing. When she did that, suddenly, the image around her started to get distorted.

Akira looked at that in confusion. The rift then widened, when he peeked into that rift, he finally realized that it was some kind of door. As he peeked deeper into what was behind that door, he could see that it led to another place. Or at least, the place behind that door was not another landing platform.

Alpha smiled and explained to Akira who was completely surprised by that.

“To think that you wouldn’t be able to see it unless you get this close, this is a pretty high-grade optical camouflage. Akira, this is a delivery drone. I bet this is from the old-world. The reason why you can’t see it is because of its optical camouflage. It’s also equipped with other camouflaging devices, even your information-gathering device would not be able to detect it unless you get close enough to it.”

It was an old-world delivery drone. From Akira’s point of view, it looked like the interior of that delivery drone was floating in the air. But when he approached it while already knowing that there was a delivery drone there, Akira started to recognize the outline of that delivery drone.

The door of that delivery drone was completely open and it led into a platform, connected to a storage room inside of it.

Carol stepped into that storage room and called Akira.

“Akira, come on, get in here or you’ll get left behind.”

Akira snapped back to reality and followed Carol into that storage room. The door was still open even after he went in, but not too long after that, it closed on its own.

The storage room inside the delivery drone was pretty spacious, but there was nothing other than Akira and Carol inside it. Seeing Carol relaxed there, Akira also lowered his guard.

He then asked Carol who was already resting.

“Carol, explain to me what’s going on here. First of all, is this thing safe?”

“Maybe yes.”

“Maybe?”

“The fact there are monsters inside the Seranthal building alone is not normal. That’s why I can’t say for sure if this thing is safe or not. But if this won’t work, then nothing will and we’ll have no other choice but to climb down the building’s wall.”

“…I see, I understand. So then, what will happen next?”

“Once the time comes, this thing will start flying on its own… Just wait for a bit.”

Carol then opened her information terminal and checked something.

“15 minutes. We have no other choice but to wait for 15 more minutes. Ah, and also, don’t get too close to the door, it might open the door if you do that.”

“Okay. So basically, this delivery drone is that backdoor, right?”

“Yep. It seems that it regularly visits multiple buildings, and this Seranthal building is just one of them. If it follows the usual schedule, the next stop will be a landing platform in the Mihazono ruin factory district. So we’ll get off there and… Well, will you escort me back all the way to the Hunter Office? I would be really happy if you would do that for me.”

“Sure, I’m planning to head that way too anyway. So I can at least escort you back to the Hunter Office.”

“Thank you.”

Carol smiled at Akira, he felt there was something else bothering him in that smile. But it was not anything ominous, it simply felt different

compared to the smile that she had when they spoke to each other inside the Seranthal building, that was all there was to it. So he just decided to ignore it.

While waiting for that 15 minutes to pass by, Akira reloaded new magazines into his rifles. He no longer had that much ammo left. He still had some reserve ammo left in his vehicle, but he left his vehicle in the parking lot not too far from the Hunter Office. He could not replenish his ammo until he could get back to his vehicle, so until then, there was no way he could face another swarm of monsters like before.

Akira hoped that nothing bad would happen from here on out as he swallowed more medicines. The only thing that he could do right now was to get himself well prepared in case anything bad happened while hoping that it would be unnecessary.

After all, whether something bad would happen or not, was something Akira had no control over.

After 10 minutes, there was another turn of events. The monsters that were chasing Akira and Carol broke through the door and the wreckage blocking the door. They were quickly flooding the landing platform.

Akira was looking outside through a small window in that storage room. It was because he was keeping eyes on the situation outside and he wanted to see the view outside when the delivery drone took off.

Seeing those mechanical monsters gushing out into the landing platform, Akira's face twitched as he mumbled.

"…Give me a break."

Carol who noticed that also peeked outside. Her face turned pale the moment she saw the monsters flooding the landing platform.

"…It's alright… They shouldn't be able to see us from the outside… Moreover, this delivery drone is using an optical camouflage in the first place… And it's time to take off soon… It should be alright…"

All the words that Carol mumbled were all her wishes, Akira could understand that after seeing her expression. Although she was trying to stay calm there, her smile was crooked and cold sweat was running down her face, she was also slightly shaking, showing what she was actually feeling uneasy.

If the mechanical monsters got close enough to the delivery drone, its door might open. They might even be able to see the delivery drone too. Moreover, in the first place, the delivery drone might not take off if there was something blocking it. There were so many uncertainties.

Akira tried to reorganize his mind, he took a deep breath and let out a long sigh before asking Alpha.

“Alpha, what will happen if those monsters get into this storage room?”

Alpha kept smiling like usual.

“When that happens, I’ll have you ready to re-experience what you did today.”

After hearing the answer that he had completely expected, Akira’s face distorted. It seemed that he really hated that idea.

“…Thought so. Well, I guess I should be thankful that I, at least, still have a way to get out from this place alive.”

Depending on the situation, Akira might have to run down a building’s wall again. The only difference between riding off and just simply jumping down the wall was that the former had a better chance of survival. After all, he had no wish to get himself killed. Of course, he did not want to do that again if it could be helped, but the monsters chasing him did not care about that.

Carol looked at Akira. He seemed to be very annoyed and exasperated as well as a little nervous. From what she could see, Akira did not seem to have given up, he did not even seem scared at all.

“…Akira?”

Carol herself had no idea why she called Akira’s name.

Akira, who was watching the door that was leading outside, turned to Carol and casually replied.

“Yes? Ah, if the monsters come here, we’ll have to get out of here. So you get yourself ready in case that happens.”

“Eh, ah, okay, sure.”

Carol was so dumbfounded that she was barely able to reply back. Akira returned his gaze back to the door. She kept staring at him for some time even after that, but weirdly enough, she then started to smile.

Akira, who noticed that change in Carol, frowned and asked.

“…What?”

“It’s nothing. It seems that you haven’t given up at all.”

“Of course. You too, right? “

Carol who already regained her composure confidently smiled and replied.

“Obviously.”

Carol reloaded her gun while smiling, she then stood next to Akira in case he needed her support.

[…He’s still calm even in this situation. He seems to be still planning to fight back. And to top it off, he’s skilled, he’s really my type.]

Akira and Carol just stood there in silence. The sound of the monsters outside the delivery drone was starting to get louder and louder as they approached and surrounded that delivery drone.

Akira and Carol could clearly hear the sounds that those mechanical monsters were making outside the delivery drone. Normally, hearing those sounds would shave the spirit of the people who were listening to them. A normal Hunter might start screaming right about now. But even so, Carol and Akira just stood there in silence while listening to those sounds.

Not too long after that, the delivery drone suddenly started moving. It was time for it to take off. The sounds that it was making drowned the sound coming from the mechanical monsters outside. After the delivery drone took off from the landing platform, it headed to the Mihazono ruin's factory district.

Akira quietly watched the situation outside through the small window. He could see the monsters that swarmed the Seranthal building. Their images kept getting smaller and smaller to the point that he could not see them any longer.

Once they realized that they were saved, they sighed in relief at the same time as if they had planned that beforehand. Then the next moment, Carol jumped and hugged Akira.

"We did it!! We're saved!! We're saved!!"

Carol seemed to be delighted. Because of their height difference, Akira's head was pushed right into Carol's chest.

Akira dropped his rifle and tried to push her away.

"Okay okay!! I got it already!! So just let me go!!"

"It's fine, right? Let's celebrate together!!"

"Just let go of me! I don't know whether it's your augmented suit or that you have an augmented body, but hugging me with that much power is hurting me, you know!!"

Akira was really in pain. Just like Sara, Carol also had an augmented body, thanks to that, she was able to handle the kickback of a powerful gun

without any trouble. While the armour that she was using was a reactive armour that would harden in response to an external force. So having those hard layers in the shape of breast pushed against his face, caused Akira to feel pain.

“Whoops, sorry.”

Carol realized that Akira was really in pain and quickly let him go.

Akira coughed after getting released from that pain. He thought that Carol let him go since she had regained her composure, but that was not the case. It was true that Carol regained some of her composure, but compared to her usual state, she was still in a high mood.

Carol quickly pulled down the fastener in front of her down to her stomach. She then used that opening when Akira was surprised to hug him again. But this time, Akira’s face was buried into her well-endowed breasts.

Carol smiled happily as she said.

“This won’t hurt you now, right?”

It seemed that Carol was still high after escaping that life-threatening situation. Akira did not seem to try to pull himself away from her, and since it seemed that it would be pointless to say anything to her in this situation, he just gave up and let her do whatever she wanted.

Alpha smiled teasingly at Akira and said.

“Hmmm, as I thought, you react differently when it’s something that you can actually touch.”

Akira casually replied to Alpha just like usual.

“Shut up.”

Carol, who did not know about that short exchange between Akira and Alpha, kept on hugging Akira happily.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 108, Food Over Women

Index

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A few minutes had passed since the transport drone had left the landing platform of the Seranthal building. Carol had already calmed down after she got too excited when she finally realized she had gotten out of that dangerous situation alive. Since Akira felt like Carol would keep hugging him if he just left her be, he quickly pulled himself away a bit forcefully when her hug relaxed a little.

Carol peeked at Akira's expression. He did not seem to be angry, as a matter of fact, it looked like he was in a rather good mood. But for someone who just got his face buried in between a beautiful girl's wonderful breasts, he did not seem too delighted.

As her side job, other than being a Hunter, Carol had slept with a lot of other Hunters. For the sake of her main job and her side-job, she enhanced her body with nanomachines and spent a large sum of money that could be used to buy multiple augmented suits just to enhance her beauty.

Carol had absolute confidence in her own beauty, after all, there were Hunters who went crazy after experiencing her beautiful body. But even so,

Akira was not that interested in her body. She understood that very well after peeking at Akira's face and she felt a sense of defeat.

Carol smiled as to not show that in her face as she said to Akira.

"Geez, you're no fun. There's nothing wrong with enjoying it a bit more, isn't it? I don't mind if you want to do it later too, you know. And as I said, it's free of charge."

"No thank you. Moreover, you were the one who hugged me in the first place, not me. And I'm still in the middle of a job too. You're paying me to be your bodyguard, remember? So don't get in my way when you're the one who gave me that request."

"You're so earnest, aren't you?"

"Do you prefer to have someone not earnest escorting you instead?"

"You have a point there. Alright, I won't bother you again."

Since it seemed that Akira would only get annoyed if she continued, Carol decided to back off there.

After getting himself away from Carol, Akira returned back looking outside from a small window. For him, the view from a flying drone was entertaining enough.

Carol kept looking at him. Akira, who was looking outside with sparkling eyes, looked like a small boy from her point of view. He did not seem like he was that powerful Hunter who showed such amazing skill inside the Seranthal building.

[When I look at him like this, he looks like nothing but just a young boy. But even so, he's not that young that he has no interest in girls, right?]

Carol still had her fastener pulled down, showing her bountiful breasts. Unless she was told otherwise, she kept her fastener down hoping that Akira would change his mind. Normally, her beautiful skin and valley

peeking out from that opening would gather the attention of any healthy young boys.

But even so, Akira kept his eyes fixed on the views outside. It seemed that the views outside were way more interesting for Akira.

Carol who got hit by another sense of defeat then made a bit of a sharp remark.

“Is the view outside that amusing?”

“It is.”

Akira answered back casually and instantly, there was no trace of hesitation at all.

Carol replied back, she sounded even more annoyed than before.

“…I see.”

Akira felt the faint pressure coming from Carol and realized that he gave a wrong answer just now. He then looked at Alpha who was smiling at him. So he decided to throw a different subject to change the mood there.

“We’re heading to the landing platform in Mihazono ruin’s factory district, right? How long until we get there?”

“It should be around 15 minutes.”

“…That’s pretty long. This is an old-world transport drone, right? So like, I think it should have been able to fly faster though.”

“That would be scary and dangerous, even if it’s possible, I hope that it won’t go that fast.”

Akira, who felt that reply from Carol was rather weird, returned his gaze back at her and asked.

“Why is that? We can get there faster, you know?”

Carol thought that reaction was a bit unexpected, but she quickly realized the reason.

“Ahh, I see, you don’t know about it, huh. By the way, what comes in your mind when I say Hunter’s transport vehicles?”

“A car or maybe a tank. And if I remember it correctly, there are Hunters with powered suits if we go further to the east, right?”

“All of them are ground transportations, right? Didn’t you ever think that it’s weird they don’t use combat drones or combat helicopters? Or why other than the Hunters, even the city defence squad and the corporate militaries don’t use them too? The cities also use trucks to trade and transport materials between them. Don’t you think it’s weird that they don’t use flying drones? Why do you think that is?”

“…Now that you mention it, that’s kind of weird. Why is that?”

Akira could not come up with any answers.

Carol then smiled smugly and explained.

“It’s because the monsters would attack them. The higher and the faster you go, the more powerful the monsters that would attack you.”

Carol did not realize it herself that she was actually feeling happy that Akira was looking back at her again as she explained to him why people did not use airplanes in the eastern district.

There were all kinds of monsters living in all kinds of places in the eastern district, and according to the area where they lived, they posed different levels of danger. But they roughly had 2 common features.

First of all, their strength depended on whether they lived further to the west or to the east. In most cases, the closer they lived to the frontline bordering the unexplored area in the far east, the more powerful they were. And the closer they were to the western area bordering the Federation of Nations’ central district, the weaker they were.

The other indicator would be the height where they usually roamed. Of course, there were monsters who roamed the sky, and the higher they were, usually, the stronger they were.

There were many factors that affected the encounter rate with the monsters, the usual indicators were the bigger, faster, and higher you go, the higher the chance for you to meet monsters.

So in short, the faster they flew in the eastern district's sky, the higher the chance for them to meet such powerful monsters, which would be fatal. There were also cases where it might even attract stronger monsters that would not usually roam in a particular area. Because of that, it was prohibited to use any kind of flying vehicles around the city. And if there was anyone who did that without proper authorization, the defence squad would take them down without warning, suspecting that they were trying to attract strong monsters to attack the city. As a matter of fact, such a thing had actually happened a few times in the past.

Because of this, the main means of transportation in the eastern district were land transportations although, technology-wise, the eastern district had no problem building airplanes. And back when the Corporate Government had a huge war against the nationalist, they were normally using airplanes.

Akira, who was listening closely to Carol's explanation, then applied that newly received information to the flying drone that they were riding.

"Wait? Doesn't that mean this thing is dangerous?"

"That's why it's equipped with sophisticated camouflaging features and is moving at a slow speed. As you said, it can fly way faster so that we can reach our destination way quicker, but its speed is mainly determined by an ignorable chance to meet any powerful monsters."

"So that's why, huh."

Akira nodded.

Carol was completely cheered up after seeing Akira listening closely to her explanation. And in order so that he would not start looking outside again, she tried to come up with a more interesting subject.

“By the way, Akira, do you know that the old-world ruins are not only located on or below the ground? You can also find old-world ruins in the sky too, you know?”

“In the sky? Like, a floating ruin?”

“There are many types though, like a floating fortress or just a flying ship. It’s from those stories where Hunters sometimes notice that there’s a huge shadow cast on the ground but they can’t see anything in the sky when they look up, that might be because of the camouflaging features. There are also theories saying that the ever-present colourless mist in the eastern district is hiding all the floating structures that are already there since the old-world era. Other theory says that when the colourless mist suddenly thickens, that’s because a floating object is passing through.”

“…I see. It sounds like we can find some amazing relics if we can somehow get to one of those floating ruins.”

“It seems that there are a lot of Hunters who are looking for floating ruins, you know. I heard that even the Corporate Government is sponsoring those Hunters. Moreover, it’s on a whole different level of difficulty and a lot of high ranking Hunters are actually doing exactly that… As I thought, it has some kind of romanticism in it.”

Carol was talking, filled with interest. Among the Hunters that she had slept with, one of them told her that he dreamt of finding a floating ruin. The last time she heard from that Hunter was when he was talking happily to her that he got recruited into the search squad through his connection. She never met that Hunter again since then, that Hunter might as well already be dead by now.

Although Akira was interested in that story of floating ruins, he still analyzed that information realistically.

“Romanticism, huh? Honestly, I don’t really get it. It’s not like I’m out in the ruin chasing renown after all.”

“You’ll understand once you’re older.”

“Is that so?”

“Yep.”

Akira tilted his head, Carol smiled at him.

As Akira and Carol were talking about Hunter stuff, they eventually arrived on a landing platform. After packing their stuff up, they then stood in front of the door of the storage room and the door automatically opened.

Carol remembered that she had not pulled up her fastener yet, so she pulled it back all the way up to her neck before stepping off the transport drone, Akira followed suit afterwards.

Once they boarded off, the door closed automatically. It then turned invisible again unless you got close enough. If anyone saw them, it would look like Akira and Carol just appeared out of nowhere.

The Mihazono ruin’s factory district was filled with factories and warehouses. Although most of them had already turned into rubble, some of them were still in operation. It was a dangerous area filled with security drones.

Basically, the landing platform where Akira and Carol were was clean of anything. There were only some cracks in the platform, nothing more. There might be other transport drones there too, but those were invisible to Akira and Carol.

Carol stretched out her body once and said.

“Well then, can you escort me to the Hunter Office, now?”

“Sure… Which way is the Hunter Office?”

It was Akira’s first time coming there, so he had no idea which way to go. Fortunately enough, the landing platform was located in between the ruin and the wasteland, so if they followed that boundary, they should be able to find the Hunter Office sooner or later.

“This way.”

Carol smiled as she guided the way.

As Akira was walking the boundary between the ruin and the wasteland with Carol guiding him, Carol suddenly asked him a question.

“Akira, what are your plans after this? Are you going to hunt for relics again?”

“No, I’m planning to stop for today and get a good rest. I’m too tired after going through all that, so I have no power left to hunt for relics. So, don’t ask me to extend the escort, okay?”

“Don’t worry. I’m also planning to wrap up for today. So, basically, you’re free after this, right?”

“…Well, yeah, but I want to get a good rest. I’m really tired, you know.”

“Want to take a rest with me?”

Carol smiled mischievously at Akira. Even for someone as dense as Akira, he understood that she was inviting him.

“No. I want to rest.”

“Don’t be that uptight, we both went through that dangerous situation together after all, right? Although you’re under my request to escort me, it’s true that you did save my life. So I want to repay it.”

“You’ve already paid me for escorting you, and you said you would also pay for the relics that I lost, so I have no plans to ask you for any more reward. Well, if you’re still bothered by it, you can buy me some meals. But I won’t accept a cheap meal, okay?”

There was a trace of irritation and frustration in Carol's bitter smile, she then became a bit obstinate as she said.

"If you think that would be enough to reward someone who saved my life, it would hurt my pride."

"Then treat me to a meal expensive enough so that it won't hurt your pride. For example, I don't mind going to one of those 1,000,000 Aurum per meal restaurants. Although I have no plans to eat there myself, I would be more than happy to go there if someone would pay for it. I did tell you, remember? I'm at the age where food is much more interesting than girls."

Carol seemed a bit cheered up as she smiled.

"…Geez. It can't be helped then. If it's in one of those facilities near the Hunter Office branch, I don't mind treating you to a meal."

"Are you sure? Well, I'm glad I asked you to treat me."

"I want to return my debt as soon as possible and I don't want to wait until you're interested in girls."

"Alright then, we have a deal here. So let's hurry up and get back."

"I don't mind if you want to pick up the pace, but make sure to properly escort me, okay?"

"Of course."

Akira then happily swung his legs toward the Mihazono ruin's Hunter Office branch.

Carol just giggled and followed behind him when she saw him showing his child-like side befitting of his age to her.

There were restaurants built near the Hunter Office branch located on the outskirts of the Mihazono ruin. Hunters were allowed to bring in their heavy weapons inside those restaurants when they ate their meals, so as to be expected, those were not high-class restaurants.

But as if to betray their outer appearance, some of those restaurants were actually selling high-class meals. A full course meal in those restaurants could cost above 100,000 Aurum. Although those meals were pretty delicious, in the end, it was the wasteland price, so its price was rather swollen compared to if they were served in the city. It was understandable to be that pricey since they would have spent money to manage the place and transport the ingredients all the way there, but still, expensive things were expensive.

The restaurants in that place were roughly divided into 3 areas, then the customers who went to those restaurants were assigned to different seats depending on the price they pay for their meals. They were roughly categorized to the Hunters who paid 1,000 Aurum, 10,000 Aurum, and 100,000 Aurum for their meals. It was not like there was a strict ruling about it, so it was not compulsory, but if they took a different seat, they would feel a bit out of place and might feel uncomfortable, except for those people with steel-nerves.

It was an easy thing to identify the skill and the success of a Hunter depending on how much that Hunter would spend on his or her meal. Because of that, grouping Hunters' seats like this would allow them to be seated together with the other Hunters with more or less the same skill level. So, it was not rare for the regulars of a restaurant to recognize the faces of the Hunters around them, although they did not know each others' names. It was also common for them to strike a conversation with the other Hunters eating near them, and if they got along well, they might even form a team later.

But then, because of that, when someone new came in and ate in a seat for expensive meals, it would garner a lot of attention from the other Hunters. And that day, the new face was Akira.

Akira was sitting in front of an expensive-looking table and meals befitting for that table were lined up in front of him. That scene made Akira beam up as he gobbled up those meals while occasionally voicing out his amazement, he was in a really good mood there.

Carol was sitting across Akira. Although it was less than what was in front of Akira, her meal was worth about the same price as his.

Carol rested her palms on her cheeks as she smiled and asked Akira.

“Is it tasty?”

“Yeah, it’s delicious.”

Akira happily nodded, after confirming which Carol smiled satisfied.

“That’s good to hear, it seems that my pride is safely salvaged.”

Carol, who was looking at Akira eating his meal for a few minutes, eventually started eating her own meal.

[But still, Akira looks like just a normal boy during times like this. He doesn’t seem like a strong Hunter at all.]

Carol’s evaluation was correct. In all reality, Akira was not that strong of a Hunter in the first place. It was all thanks to Alpha’s support. If he relied on his own skill, it would still take a few years of training and hard work before he could sit on that seat.

“But still, you eat quite a lot, don’t you? I don’t mind paying for all of it, but don’t leave anything behind, okay?”

“Don’t worry, my appetite is growing bigger and bigger lately. So I won’t have any trouble finishing all of this food.”

Akira just answered back casually. But after Carol pointed that out, a question popped up in his mind.

“Now that I think about it, I actually really start eating more and more lately.”

Alpha interjected.

“It might be because your body is trying to compensate for the nutrition that you didn’t get when you were in your accelerated growth period.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve been living in the slum city for years, so you’re in a constant malnutrition state. Because of that, you must have been stuck in a slowed growth rate for quite a long time. So in order to compensate for that, your body might be demanding a lot of food right now.”

“Is that really something that you can solve simply by eating a lot of food?”

“I think you’ve gone through a special treatment so that you can solve that problem just by eating a lot of food. You have gone through that 60,000,000 Aurum treatment before, remember? They might have identified your impeded growth was due to an unhealthy environment, and so they might have done something to your body which allows you to get you back to your optimal state just by eating a lot of food, though they might have also done that so that they can charge you more money too.”

Akira suddenly stopped eating his meal.

“…It’s not like they did anything weird to me, right? I’m actually okay, right?”

“Well, it’s true that you’re getting back to your healthier body state, so it’s alright. Moreover, wounds and fatigue won’t get properly recovered or healed unless you eat food and get ample rest. After all, there’s a limit on how far the medicines can help you. Since it was a treatment to get you back to health, so it shouldn’t have any bad side-effects. As long as you earn enough money to satiate your hunger, you should be fine.”

“I see, well, I guess it’s alright then. I also got that after going through an expensive treatment, so I guess it should be fine, huh?”

Akira then continued eating without worrying about it anymore. Carol, who saw Akira pause momentarily, found it weird.

“Akira, what’s wrong?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

“Is that so? By the way, there’s something I want to ask you, I don’t mind if you want to keep eating while answering my question. Is that okay?”

“What is it? I don’t mind as long as it’s not a request in which you’ll refuse to pay for my meal if I don’t accept it.”

Carol giggled lightly.

“Don’t worry. Well, it’s indeed a request but I’ll still pay for this meal even if you refuse it.”

Akira stopped eating. He could feel that it was something serious from the way Carol asked him, he then stared at her with a serious face.

“So, what is it?”

“I don’t mind if you want to continue eating, you know?”

“I’ll hear you first and if it’s something not that important, then I’ll continue eating. So, go on, what do you want to ask of me?”

Strictly speaking, Akira still seemed to be in a good mood, but there was a trace of cautiousness in his face. It was obvious that he was being paranoid. He looked at Carol with distrust, as if he was suspecting that she was going to bring more trouble to his plate. Although it was just a hunch, there was no mistaking it.

Carol had no idea if it was simply because there was a flicker in Akira’s feeling and it was expressed in his eyes, or it was because Akira was actually suppressing his feeling and it was leaking out.

[…This situation… It’s dangerous if I say anything wrong here.]

Carol intentionally changed into a more serious face before continuing.

“I’ll say this straight. Akira, will you work together with me?”

Akira did not reply immediately, he was just silently staring at her. He was trying to guess any possible meanings behind those words. Carol understood that very well when she looked back at him.

After a short silence, Akira finally opened his mouth.

“…Let me get this straight, do you mean working together with you as a team of Hunters?”

“Yes.”

“Sorry, but no thanks.”

Akira only said that and immediately returned back to eating. His tense aura was gone in a snap and the mood quickly returned to normal.

Carol sighed in relief when she noticed that Akira had lowered his guard, although she also regretted the fact that he refused her offer.

“Is that so? That’s really unfortunate. Well, it’ll only cause trouble down the road if I force it, so I’ll just give it up here. Would you at least please tell me the reason?”

“It’s simply because I’m more comfortable moving alone. I am used to moving around out of whim or based on situational decisions. Now that I think about it, I can be a bit random most of the time. I won’t be able to do that if I work together with another Hunter, you see. Even for today, I only decided to go to Mihazono ruin just this morning and it’s simply because I thought about it when I was visiting another place. So like, you know, I won’t fit to work together in a team, right?”

Most of the Hunters decided beforehand where to go and properly prepared themselves before actually heading there. And if Akira was in a team, then he should think about how to divide the reward and the profit too. Not to mention, when one of the team members was not feeling well, there was a chance that the expedition had to be cancelled too.

Akira always turned to Alpha and asked for her opinion before making any decision, and of course, he could not use that reason if he had to explain his decision to other people. If he worked with someone for a long time, it was almost completely guaranteed that he would be treated as a troublesome team member who always made sudden random decisions on his own.

Carol tried to guess Akira's way of thinking from his answer.

[Akira is the type of Hunter who focuses more on the downsides of working together in a team rather than the advantages that he can get from doing that. He's one of those who get suspicious of people who stay together with them for long rather than feeling safe. Back then in the Seranthal building, he also seriously thought of moving separately from me; given that I know the layout of the building well, and that we were in such a dangerous situation. He might be thinking that I'm planning to kill him since he knows about the backdoor now. But, on the other hand, if it's out of a request, he would even shield me using his own body… This boy is broken… Or more like, seriously, what kind of moral value is this boy following?]

Carol had experienced spending a night together with some Hunters with distorted personalities. Because of that, she knew how to handle these kinds of people very well. But the Akira in front of her was unlike any other Hunters that she had dealt with. So, in order to look for the right way to handle Akira, she made a friendly smile and asked him a question.

"So you're that kind of Hunter, huh? Well, I tend to work alone too, so I can understand your argument. But like, were you always working alone until now?"

"Not really. It's just that I never really worked together as a team. I've explored ruins together with other Hunters too, I also accept requests that need me to work in a team. Is that not the case for you too?"

"Me? Well, I did a lot of stuff in the past. I've formed a team together with the other Hunters, there were also times when I joined an already established team of Hunters. But at the moment, I'm working alone. There were a few things that happened with my last team which caused the team to break down, you see."

Carol said it as if it was none of her business. But in reality, the reason why that team broke up was because of her. The guys, who got roped into her side job, did a lot of bad stuff in order to get the money to buy her.

Some of them even sacrificed their equipment and ammo budget and became nothing but a burden to the team, some of them would cause a fight when dividing the reward money. Eventually, the mood in that team became so bad that they broke up in the middle of exploring a ruin.

It was not like Carol intentionally did that, but she also did not try to stop the situation from getting worse. She thought that it was all their own responsibilities.

“Even if I want to make another team, it’s not like I can do that with just any Hunters. After all, there are Hunters who are only interested in forming a team because of my side job, that in itself is fine though, the real problem is when they demand a discount or even demand it for free just because we’re on the same team. I just don’t want to work together with those kinds of people neither for my real job nor for my side job.”

“That sounds rough. Oh, this one is also really tasty.”

Akira was at least properly listening to Carol’s story, but his attention was more focused on the food in front of him.

Carol was indirectly saying that she was interested in forming a team with Akira because she evaluated his skill highly. But since his attention was all on his tongue and stomach, it was rather vague whether Akira got it or not.

Carol smiled in resignation as she mumbled.

“…He’s really just a little boy.”

Akira, who was still gobbling the food in a good mood, flatly replied.

“Hm? Isn’t it obvious that I’m just a boy? Oh, this one is not bad at all…”

“…Well, you’re not wrong about that.”

Carol regretfully mumbled as she thought that if only Akira was more of an adult and his interest in food was shifted towards girls, he might have given a different answer there.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 109, Words without lies

Index

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Carol had already finished her meal, she was only sitting there sipping her after-meal tea. While on the other hand, Akira was still enjoying the meal in front of him, it was simply because he took his time to enjoy each and every meal that he ordered and he did order quite a lot of meals.

Carol had also already transferred the 40,000,000 Aurum compensation money that she had promised for the relics that Akira had lost. Akira then casually confirmed it, said his thanks and returned back to eating.

Normally, the amount of money that a Hunter earned regularly was proportional to his or her skill. So it was not strange that it did not faze Akira when he received that amount of money since he was strong enough to kill the automatic weapons. But compared to that, it was completely different from when Akira was lamenting over the relics that he lost when he shielded Carol.

Carol had no idea how in the world Akira killed the autonomous weapons. The more she thought about it, the more she was confused, and the more she was interested in the young boy in front of her.

Alpha then said to Akira.

“Akira, you got a message from the Hunter Office.”

“A message?”

Akira pulled out his information terminal and checked the notification message from the Hunter Office. It was an emergency SOS request from the Drankam, to be more precise, it was a request to join the rescue team sent to rescue the Hunters trapped in the Seranthal building.

The situation inside the restaurant started to get agitated. When Akira glanced at Carol, she was also focusing on her own information terminal. And it was not only Carol, but all the Hunters inside that restaurant were also checking their own information terminals. It seemed that the notification message was sent to all the Hunters in the area.

Akira could hear some Hunters around him talking.

“They’re asking me to go inside that ghoul building? It’s that building that would eat anything that goes inside it no matter whether it’s a Hunter or monster, you know? I have no plans to go there myself.”

“Is that so? I don’t mind taking it though.”

Hearing what their friend said, the other Hunter snorted and said.

“Whoah there, what are you talking about? It’s the Seranthal building, you know? It’s one of the 7 great mystery of Mihazono ruin. It’s exactly because Drankam knows that they can’t challenge that building even after they prepare themselves, that’s why they’re issuing this request. And looking at the details of the request, the corpses of the monsters will be owned by the Drankam, the ammo expense is paid by ourselves, and the basic reward is small. So, is there any reason why we have to take this request? I bet that SOS request was sent by one of those Hunters through the insurance company contracted with Drankam, and I’m sure even Drankam only sends their Hunters although they don’t want to because they’re in a contract with that insurance company. Some of those insurance companies usually have contracts with private security companies or Hunter gangs to make sure that they would definitely take the SOS request issued by that insurance

company. After all, normally, no one would want to take on such a dangerous request. Like seriously, who would want to take this dangerous request with such small reward?”

The other Hunter just smiled and shook his head before replying.

“Well, it’s true that it’s not a profitable request. But let’s think carefully here, if we look at it as a request from Drankam that would give us a boost in our Hunter Rank, it’s actually not that bad. After all, nothing bad can come from raising our Hunter Rank. Moreover, we can get this SOS request participation written in our Hunter Record. I heard that you get a big Hunter Rank boost if you take an emergency request issued by the Hunter Office due to the Hunter ethics improvement program from the Corporate Government. I also heard that some corporations, which is mindful of its public standing, tend to choose Hunters who participated in such emergency requests. And to top it off, although it’s not like it’s my aim, for those Hunters who want to form a connection with Drankam, this might be a good chance for them.”

After hearing his friend’s opinion, the other Hunter then interjected.

“Hmmm, Drankam, huh? It has grown into a rather big gang and I heard that it has a good standing with the City Management at the moment after completing those bounty requests. So, I guess it’s understandable that some Hunters want to join that gang. But I heard that it focuses only on accepting young Hunters lately and it rejects application by most of the common veterans. Ahh, I see, so those Hunters who got rejected might take this request as a chance to prove their skill, huh.”

“It seems that Drankam is deepening their relationship with the Kugamayama City Management and the Hunter Office. So for those who want to hop on the bandwagon, this might be a good chance. Drankam itself has its reputation to uphold, so I’m sure they’ll also properly prepare their Hunters for this request. It’s indeed as you said, for Hunters who want to improve their track record and get a boost in their Hunter Rank, this is actually a perfect chance to do just that.”

“Hmmm, so you’re planning to take this request, huh?

“It’s as you said, it’s a dangerous place that it has even become an urban legend… So if only someone would accompany me there.”

That Hunter then smiled bitterly at what his friend said.

“…Alright alright, I get it, but you’ll pay for the ammo, okay?”

“I’m glad that I have a partner who would understand.”

After those Hunters finished their meals, they took a short rest there before leaving the restaurant. They were close enough for Akira to hear their conversation, so basically, they were paying more or less the same expensive meal as Akira, which meant that they were powerful Hunters able to afford such a luxury.

After listening to those Hunters, Akira said with interest.

“It seems that people react differently to this kind of request, huh?”

Alpha at least tried to confirm it with Akira.

“It seems that I need to educate you about that too. So then, what’s your plan? Are you planning to take that request?”

Akira then answered back with the exact answer that Alpha had predicted.

“No. I’m done for today. I’ve gathered enough money for the day and I’m already tired right now.”

Akira then returned back to his information terminal to refuse the request.

Carol suddenly asked Akira a question.

“It seems that you got that message too. I’m refusing that request though, how about you, Akira?”

“I’m refusing it too.”

Carol smiled since Akira gave the same answer as her.

“Thought so. I have no plans to go anywhere near that building for the time being.”

As Akira placed his information terminal aside and was about to take another bite of the meal in front of him, suddenly a notification reached his information terminal, it was a call from Shiori.

“Akira here. I’m sorry but I’m in the middle of eating right now. If it’s not an emergency, can you call me again later?”

“I’m really sorry, this is an emergency. I’ll keep it short, so can you please give me some of your time?”

“Alright, what is it?”

“Akira-sama, I want to make a request to you to escort Milady. As for the period of the request, if it’s possible, I want you to start from right now and it’ll be until we can guarantee Milady’s safety. At most, it’ll take the whole day today. And since we don’t have much time right now, if it’s possible, I wish you’re okay with postponing the negotiation about the reward to later. But please don’t worry, I swear on my loyalty for Milady that I would definitely pay you with a suitable reward.”

“…This has something to do with that emergency request to the Seranthal building, doesn’t it?”

“It seems that you’ve heard it as well. Yes, Milady decided to accept that emergency request. So I want to ask you to protect Milady during that request-“

Akira immediately interjected.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t take that request.”

Shiori went silent for a few seconds.

“…Is it okay if I ask why? If it’s because we don’t agree on the reward beforehand, we can quickly decide on the advance payment and I’ll immediately transfer it right now. And if it’s hard for you to meet up with

us right now, I don’t mind if you meet up with us later. If it’s something that we can help with, we’re willing to make compromises.”

“The answer is still a ‘no’. I won’t take that request and I don’t plan to negotiate about it.”

Akira could feel that Shiori was a bit surprised and bewildered on the other end of the call as he continued.

“Ahhh, it’s not like I refuse because I don’t like you or anything. The reason why I won’t take that request is simple, it’s because I don’t want to go anywhere close to that Seranthal building, I don’t want to die after all. So, sorry about that.”

Shiori sounded very serious as she carefully asked Akira a question.

“…Is the Seranthal building so dangerous even Akira-sama would say something like that?”

“Well, it’s at least dangerous enough for me to refuse any request that doesn’t promise me enough money. Of course, it might be just me being a coward though. I can’t tell you the details, but something happened that causes me to hesitate to go anywhere near that building. That’s why I won’t accept that request. I’m sure you have your own reason as to why you need to go there, which in that case, make sure to be extra careful. It’s in the middle of an old-world ruin after all, so anything can happen. For example, your information-gathering device might lose sensitivity inside that building and you might suddenly not be able to use your information terminal there. Or if you’re not careful enough, you might get surrounded by mechanical monsters without you realizing it or you might even find the monsters using the facilities inside that building. So yeah, I won’t accept it, later then.”

Akira only said that and ended the call. He then put his information terminal aside one more time before returning back to eating again.

Carol was curious about what that call was for. But it might annoy him if she needlessly butted into his business there, so she was putting on a smile

indicating that she was not bothered at all.

After Akira cut the call, Shiori looked at her information terminal with a grim face. Kanae approached her and asked a question.

“We’re ready to go. Ane-san, how is it? You’re trying to invite that young boy Akira, right?”

“I got rejected.”

“That’s really unfortunate. I actually wanted to see that boy’s skill from up close. So then, what is with that face? You look grimmer than usual for someone who just got her request rejected.”

“The real problem is the reason why he rejected it. He rejected it without giving me any chance to negotiate saying that he doesn’t want to die so he would refuse to get anywhere close the Seranthal building.”

Unlike Shiori, who looked really concerned, Kanae was smiling amusedly.

“I don’t know why exactly Akira would say that, but if someone as strong as Ane-san would even go that far to say something like that about that place, then it seems that this will be interesting.”

Shiori glared at Kanae.

“…I’ll at least go and recommend Milady not to take the request. As for you, go and recheck our equipment… No, redo the preparation. Make sure that we have enough equipment to survive a ruin exploration in a ruin with zero survivors.”

Kanae smiled and said.

“Roger that. But isn’t it impossible to change Milady’s mind at this point? This request is basically a compulsory request, if Milady won’t participate, she might get kicked out of the gang. After all, some people from the Katsuya faction hate Milady since they think Milady abandoned Katsuya back then. That’s also exactly the reason why Milady could not participate

in the bounty hunting too, remember? But well, I guess that was a good thing from Ane-san and Milady's point of view though."

Among the young Hunters in Drankam, Reina was actually keeping herself in a delicate neutral position in between the Katsuya faction and the anti-Katsuya faction. That was also the reason she came to Mihazono ruin only with Kanae and Shiori. The Katsuya faction treated her as if she was from the anti-Katsuya faction while the anti-Katsuya faction treated her as if she was from Katsuya faction. Because of that, she was having trouble making friends in Drankam.

"One of the requirements for Milady to be allowed to work as a Hunter is that she must be a member of Drankam. So Milady might take it as telling her to stop working as a Hunter if Ane-san tries telling Milady to change her mind, right?"

Kanae said those words as if it was none of her business. Shiori was still glaring at Kanae as she said to her.

"…I know. But I'll still recommend Milady not to go there. It'll at least let Milady know that we're going to a very dangerous location."

"Alright then. I'll go and redo the preparation. I'll reorganize the prepared equipment with the assumption that we'll end up in the red this time… It has been quite a while since the last time I fought without worrying about the expense, I can't help but look forward to this."

Kanae smiled happily when she said that.

Reina was about to head over to a location that would even make Akira refuse Shiori's request without further discussion. While on the other hand, Kanae seemed to be looking forward to it. Shiori was fed up with Kanae.

Shiori instantly grabbed the sword dangling on her hip and Kanae quickly reacted to that by keeping her distance from Shiori. Shiori killed the emotion inside her and was exuding an ominous aura. She then said in a low voice while oozing out the anger within her heart.

“There’s a limit on how much I can bear with your behaviour.”

Kanae kept smiling.

“It’s so like you not to pull out that sword here you know, Ane-san. Ah, that’s a compliment by the way. It’s good that you stay calm. That’s why they trust Milady to you and that’s also why Milady really trusts you.”

Kanae stared back at Shiori while smiling. If Shiori really pulled out her blade and tried to kill Kanae there, it would lower their fighting power for protecting Reina. But Shiori knew well that Kanae was smiling at her not because of that.

Kanae was actually smiling because she did not mind either way whether Shiori would pull out her blade and try to kill Kanae there, or that she would not pull out her blade there which meant that she would get to go and fight monsters later. Kanae would not make any provocation if the latter were to happen. It was because it was her principle and courtesy toward the people who employed her, it was her attitude toward her own job. But if that came from Shiori, then she would be happy to respond.

Shiori let go of her blade and said to Kanae.

“…Go.”

“Roger that.”

Kanae just smiled and went to reorganize their equipment.

Shiori took a few deep breaths, reminding her of her loyalty to Reina, and finally regained her composure. She made sure that she could put on her usual smile to her master before going to try convincing Reina.

Akira returned all the way back to the Kugamayama city together with Carol. Due to Carol’s request, he dropped her near the red light district of the lower district.

Carol, who just stepped off from Akira’s vehicle, invited him.

“Since this is a good chance, how about coming with me to get some drinks?”

Akira shook his head and said.

“Sorry but no thanks. I keep myself away from alcohols since they lower my decision making skill and reaction speed.”

After all, there were many occasions where drunk people came into the slum city and ended up as dead corpses. Akira had seen something like that happen in front of his eyes numerous times before, so he had no wish to put in even a drop of alcohol inside his body. And now, after knowing that a disruption in his consciousness would also affect Alpha’s support in controlling his augmented suit, he was actively avoiding alcohol even more.

Although there was a type of drug sold in the eastern district which would instantaneously snap someone out from a drunken state, Akira had no plans to drink any alcohol to the point that he would need that kind of drug.

Alcohol and women, these two things were the gate to ruin a man, and Carol was really familiar with both of them, but both gates were shut closed in case of Akira. Carol could not help but to smile bitterly and said.

“…So you don’t drink alcohol and don’t play with girls, huh. That’s a pretty healthy lifestyle you’re having.”

Akira looked slightly irritated as he said.

“A Hunter’s biggest asset is their body, so it’s a good thing to have a healthy body.”

But then Carol smiled seductively and said.

“I don’t think it’s wise to abandon worldly leisure though. If you change your mind, you can give me a call anytime. I’ll be waiting for you, I don’t mind if it’s about my main job or my side job, see you then.”

After saying that, Carol went and vanished into the red light district.

Akira realized that Alpha was watching him with a big smile, so he awkwardly said to her.

“…What?”

Alpha kept her big smile.

“It’s nothing.”

“…Seriously, what is it?”

“Do you want to know? Do you really want to know?”

Akira hesitated, but this time, it sounded like Alpha was teasing him and that she actually wanted him to ask her. So he went and said.

“Yeah, I really want to know.”

Alpha smiled happily and answered Akira’s question.

“I’m happy that it seems my anti-honey trap training works really well. Even with a beautiful girl tempting you with her body right in front of you, you barely gave any reaction at all. But actually, that might be a problem in itself though.”

“…I see.”

Akira only gave that short reaction and turned his vehicle back on. But he was not heading back to his home.

“Oh, are we not going back home?”

“I want to replenish my ammo and medicines first, I did use quite a lot of them today after all.”

First, Akira went to Katsuragi’s trailer, and in order to reach it, he had to go out to the wasteland again.

In the middle of traversing the wasteland, Alpha was still smiling at him. Akira was bothered by it, so he decided to ask her again.

“What now? Is there anything more you want to say?”

“Do you want to know?”

“Yes, I do want to know.”

Akira thought that it must be another unimportant thing. Alpha then said with still a big smile on her face.

“Today, you really expressed your trust in me with your body.”

Akira was so surprised that it interrupted his driving.

“I’m really happy, you know. After all, there’s no way you can jump off a building and run on its wall if you don’t trust me.”

As Akira somehow regained control of his vehicle, Alpha continued.

“It’s not like I doubted you when you said that you trust me, but still, it really gives a strong impression when you actually show it with your body. After all, there are a lot of people out there who, although they don’t lie when they speak, would lose their bravado when they have to prove it with real action.”

Akira stopped his vehicle to check if his vehicle was okay.

“It’s great that we deepen our trust for each other, it would allow me to provide you with more support. So yes, let’s keep working hard together from here and on. I’ll be in your care, Akira.”

Akira restarted his vehicle and slowly drove it forward. He then kept her eyes forward as he said to Alpha who was smiling happily next to him.

“…I see.”

“As I thought, it was the right choice to talk about this when Carol is not around.”

As Alpha was still smiling next to him, Akira snapped at her as if he was trying to hide his embarrassment.

“…Yeah, you can say that again!!”

Akira replied loudly to hide his embarrassment and he kept doing that in the middle of his ride to Katsuragi’s trailer.

After he finished buying medicines from Katsuragi, Akira headed next to Shizuka’s shop to replenish his ammo. In the middle of his way, Akira remembered what Katsuragi said to him.

“Destructive force, huh…”

Akira bought quite a lot of expensive medicines, it showed that he was wounded badly enough for him to use that much medicine. Since it would be bad for Katsuragi if he lost one of his regulars, he suggested to Akira a set of equipment with high destructive power.

Kill before getting killed. That was the basics of fighting monsters. Katsuragi told Akira that what he currently lacked was the destructive power to do that.

Akira’s main firepower was his CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun. Although he was able to defeat the autonomous weapons with those guns, it was true that he had some problems fighting the mechanical monsters inside and outside the Seranthal building.

Akira was heading to Shizuka’s shop while thinking of asking for Shizuka’s opinion about it. Moreover, it seemed that Akira also had no plans to pay Katsuragi more money although he was the one who made that suggestion to Akira in the first place. It was just simply a matter of trust.

When Akira arrived at Shizuka’s shop, it was right when Shizuka was about to close her shop. The sky had already darkened, save for the shops that

were only open at night, normal shops would already be closed at that time.

Akira stopped his vehicle in front of Shizuka's shop.

"Shizuka-san, are you already done for the day?"

"Akira, well, yes, but it's fine, come in."

"Is it really okay?"

Shizuka smiled at Akira and said.

"Of course. After all, I want to increase the chance of you getting promoted from being a regular candidate to a real regular to my shop."

"Thank you very much."

Akira parked his vehicle in the shop's parking lot and went inside the shop. After he went in, Shizuka flipped the signboard of the front door and went inside too. Because the sun had already set, she could not notice that Akira brought a different vehicle than the one that he bought from her shop just the other day.

After listening to the ammo that Akira ordered, Shizuka then asked a question.

"Akira, you're ordering nothing but extended magazines though? Are you sure about this? It might get a little expensive, you know?"

"It's okay. Even it might get a bit expensive, I want to carry more extended magazines."

For Hunters who often fought powerful monsters, running out of ammo in the middle of a fight was fatal. And there was a limit on how much ammo they could bring with them when they were exploring a ruin far away from the city. So in order to solve this issue, there were all kinds of extended magazines sold in the eastern district.

One of them was a magazine filled with hair-sized bullets that would change into a normal size bullet when shot. These kinds of bullets, which were created by using technology extracted from analyzing old-world technology, allowed Hunters to pack way more bullets into a single round. And thanks to the old-world technology, this kind of modification did not lower the firepower of those bullets. This technology was often used for guns that consumed a lot of bullets, like a minigun.

And of course, that kind of magazine was more expensive than the usual magazine. Some of them cost 2 to 3 times more than a usual magazine and depending on its quality, some of them even cost 10 times more. So if they had no plans to go somewhere dangerous where they had to use those kinds of extended magazines, it would be much more profitable to buy normal magazines.

Shizuka stared at Akira. There was no mistaking that Akira had a reason as to why he would pick extended magazines in place of normal magazines even if it would need him to spend more money.

Shizuka smiled at him, she was putting extra pressure on Akira with that smile as she asked.

“So then, what kind of dangerous stuff did you do through this time?”

Akira got flustered a bit.

“Well, it’s not exactly like I did something dangerous intentionally. It’s just that I encountered a lot of monsters, so I had to run away and used a lot of ammo to get away from them. I could get my reserve ammo if I was in my vehicle, but I was inside a building at that time. So… Yes… This is an insurance, it’s just to be safe.”

Akira was somehow able to say his excuse and it was not like he made any lies there.

According to Shizuka’s intuition, Akira was actually carefully picking his words so as not to make her worry. But she also knew that he did not lie at all. So basically, Akira did meet powerful monsters that he could not defeat

or he ventured to a dangerous place that he could not handle, and when that happened, he properly did his best to run away instead of fighting back.

Shizuka's expression loosened as she gently smiled at him.

"I see. Well, it's fine then if that's the case. It's better to abandon your relics and save your own life rather than dying with relics on your back. As long as you return back alive, you'll get another chance. So I'm glad that you're okay."

Akira made an invisible sigh. It seemed that he did not have to explain the fact that he did crazy things like jumping off a tall building and running on its wall. And of course, even Shizuka's sharp intuition could not notice that far.

Akira then decided to change the subject while he had the chance.

"Shizuka-san, do you think that I'm lacking destructive power?"

Shizuka looked surprised.

"Destructive power? What do you mean by that?"

"Well, it's just that one of my acquaintances told me that I'm lacking firepower. Fighting monsters is basically boiled down to killing those monsters before getting killed. And it seems that if I have trouble fighting monsters, that means I lack sufficient firepower. Honestly speaking, since I'm carrying 2 guns that I won't be able to use without the help of my augmented suit, I thought that these 2 guns would be enough. But am I really lacking firepower?"

After hearing what Akira said, Shizuka thought for a bit before answering back.

"…Let's see, I think it depends on your line of thinking. It's true that if you fight a swarm of monsters, you would need more firepower no matter how much firepower you already have. There are also cases where areas that were originally relatively safe suddenly get filled with powerful monsters.

But of course, it’s not like you need to prepare yourself for something like that all the time. After all, it might hurt your wallet if you do that… If it’s okay for me to say something for my own benefit, I would say that you indeed lack of firepower and I would suggest you buy more equipment from me though.”

Shizuka smiled mischievously.

Akira thought about it seriously and made his decision.

“Alright, I understand. I’ll buy more equipment.”

Shizuka was surprised, she then looked a bit troubled.

“…Uhmmm, there’s no need to force yourself, you know?”

“I don’t mind, after all, I’m buying new equipment so that I won’t have a hard time fighting monsters. Well, it’s true that I don’t have so much money that I can carelessly spend, but rather than putting my life in danger, I would rather put my wallet in danger. So, I’ll take a gun that you would recommend me.”

Now that Akira had gone and said it, it was not like Shizuka could back out and not recommend him anything. So in order to answer his trust, she smiled and said.

“Alright. Let’s see, if it’s for the current you… Wait here for a bit.”

Shizuka went to the warehouse after saying that. Not too long after that, she returned with a rifle that she picked for Akira.

“It’s A4WM automatic grenade launcher. Since it shoots out grenades, you don’t need to aim precisely at your target. It packs quite a lot of punch that would work against monsters with strong armour. And you can use it for indirect fire too, depending on the type of grenades that you load, you can bounce the grenades off the wall and shoot the monsters on the other side of a corner. If you’re looking for an addition to your current equipment, I think

this is the perfect choice for you. It's only downside is the ammo expense though, after all, it shoots out grenades."

"I see, so, how much does it cost?"

"About that though, give me a sec."

Shizuka went to the warehouse one more time. She then returned back with grenade launcher magazines and other extra equipment.

"I think you already understand this, but you can't use it without ammo and there are a lot of grenade magazine types that you can use. I'll sell the gun and the ammo as a set, so listen to my explanation first about the characteristics and the power of each type of grenades magazine and their respective price before deciding which one to take, okay?"

Even after listening to Shizuka's explanation, Akira was not sure which one to buy. So he ended up deciding based on the firepower and the size of the grenades as he picked the most expensive set.

Akira then loaded his new equipment and his reserve ammo into his vehicle. After that, he said his goodbye to Shizuka who was seeing him off outside the shop.

"Thank you very much for today, I'm sorry for coming here after you closed the shop."

"It's fine. Not to mention, you also bought some equipment from me. So don't worry about it. Be careful on your way back, okay?"

Shizuka waved her hand, Akira lightly bowed and turned his vehicle on.

As she saw Akira off, she mumbled.

"…Like I said, in the end, he did buy some of the equipment that I'm selling, so this is fine."

Shizuka was answering her own question there. Although she might have missed a business opportunity there because she was concerned about

Akira’s wallet, result-wise, there should not be any problem. In the end, she was still a merchant and Akira was still her customer.

As Shizuka’s merchant side made that excuse, her other side just exasperatedly let it slide with that excuse. She then changed gear and returned back to her shop to properly close it. This time, she took more time than usual closing her shop.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 110, A Knock-off Rich Lady's Envoy

Index

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Sheryl went to a high-class looking building in the lower district of Kugamayama city. For the sake of her gang's business, there was some stuff that she had to do in the Hunter Office's main branch.

Sheryl took off her wasteland coat and handed it over to Erio. When she did that, everyone around her was amazed by her appearance. She was clad in a high-class old-world dress that was refitted just for her, which had cost 1,500,000 Aurum.

With Sheryl's dress even giving a sense of dignity, it would be expected for the people who saw her to mistake her as someone from the inner wall. It was extremely difficult to see through that disguise and notice that she was from the slum city. Sheryl moved so naturally as if the mood around her did not affect her at all. With that amazing dress boosting her already attractive body, Sheryl looked like a rich lady. The armed young boy and the armed man next to her only served to deepen that misunderstanding since they looked like Sheryl's bodyguards, those two were Erio and Darris.

Erio could not completely hide his nervousness, the nuance of the Hunter Office's main branch overwhelmed him as he looked around nervously

while breaking into a cold sweat.

Sheryl then said to Erio to calm him down.

“Erio, take a deep breath and try to calm down. It’s not like this place is dangerous. As a matter of fact, this place is way safer than the back alley of the slum city. So there’s no need to be afraid.”

“A-alright. But still, I’m sure you can understand it, right? Or more like, how can you be this calm?”

Erio looked at Sheryl who did not give off any nervous vibe and he could feel a sense of admiration and amazement. Sheryl was also a slum city child, just like him. Judging from that point of view, both of them were not supposed to be there. It was common for slum children to be kicked out from a building by some armed guards.

[…Well, Sheryl became the boss of the gang after she negotiated with that Akira, that in itself is amazingly brave. It reminds me again that she’s unlike those common slum children… But now that I think about it, those common slum children won’t even think of striking a deal with the Hunter who destroyed their own gang, huh…]

The girl who was once just a common slum city girl in the past had become a beautiful girl clad in a beautiful dress as if they were living in completely different worlds. Seeing that girl in front of her, Erio somehow felt a bit complicated.

Sheryl then warned him.

“If you stay like that, there’s no mistaking that someone would call the guard to kick you out. So try to act casual.”

“I know… I know, but….”

“Take some deep breaths until you can calm down.”

Darris smiled bitterly and said.

“Can I go now? I know you guys are having a hard time here, but I’m busy, you know.”

Sheryl replied.

“Sure. Thank you very much for taking us here.”

“Alright, later then. I’ll still be somewhere inside the building. If anything happens, you guys can just call me, and if you can’t reach me, just call Katsuragi. We’ll meet up again when it’s time to head back.”

“Okay.”

Darris glanced at Sheryl, smiled, and said.

“…Well, as long as you have that dress and stay here, I bet no one would cause you any trouble. This place is the Hunter Office after all, so I’m sure no one here is foolish enough to cause a ruckus. But still, women are scary, they can completely transform. Had I not known you in the past, I would’ve been fooled too. Geez, scary scary…”

Sheryl smiled gracefully.

“I’ll take that as a compliment. It’s a dress that I received as a present from Akira after all.”

Darris smiled bitterly and waved his hand at Sheryl before leaving. Although he took her there due to Katsuragi’s order, he had no plans to accompany her doing the troublesome administration work. So, he was planning to pass time in the shops upstairs.

A strong looking bodyguard had left that knock-off rich lady’s envoy. While the weak-looking bodyguard still looked quite nervous. Everyone’s attention in that area focused on Sheryl and Erio. The main branch of the Hunter Office was often visited by people from both outside and inside the wall. Sometimes, there were even people from companies too. As such, even if Sheryl was indeed a rich lady, it was not a rare sight at all.

Sheryl looked at Erio and said.

“Do you want to talk about something for a little while until you can calm down? If you are this nervous, people won’t believe that you’re my bodyguard. And if that’s impossible for you, I still need you to do your job properly to protect me. That’s exactly why I brought you here with me, you know?”

“Yeah, I know…”

Erio was there to protect Sheryl. At a glance, he seemed to be using a pretty good armour and he was carrying a powerful gun which could be used even without an augmented suit. Sheryl got that equipment by making a deal with Katsuragi. So, looking at Erio, most of the Hunters in that area would think that he was a pretty well equipped young Hunter.

But it was all just a disguise, his armour was needlessly heavy with almost no worth as protection, the aim on his gun was defective and his gun was broken that it might explode when used, Katsuragi even warned them not to try using it since that would be extremely dangerous. Going out to the wasteland with that equipment was simply suicidal.

Erio himself had no skills to protect Sheryl in the first place, but it was still safer than coming alone. Although it was only for putting up an appearance, it was still way better than having nothing. And of course, inside that Hunter Office building, there was no one foolish enough to think of testing Erio’s skill. After all, causing trouble inside that building was the same as picking a fight against the Hunter Office.

Erio tried to think of a subject to talk about to help him calm down, but he ended up thinking about why they were there in the first place.

“By the way, I wonder what Akira-san is busy with. If he would accompany you, you won’t even need me here.”

Sheryl calmly replied back.

“…It’s for a Hunter job.”

“Well, I already know that much. But like, I wonder if it’s that important to even turn down your request.”

“…It’s not like I pleaded with him to accompany me. Moreover, I can’t just keep asking him to come with me every time I want to go to the lower district, right? Although I asked Katsuragi-san to have Darris-san accompany us this time, I eventually would rely on you and the other gang members. So you better get used to it while you still have the chance.”

“Of course, but still… Hunter job, huh…”

Erio thought that it was perfectly understandable for a Hunter to be busy doing his or her Hunter job. But it could not be something that important, at least, it would not be enough for a reason to refuse a request from Sheryl, Akira’s lover, to accompany her for a bit and to make sure that she was safe.

[If Alicia asks me the same thing, I would definitely prioritize her as long as I don’t have anything too important.]

As Erio thought, ‘if it was him and her girlfriend’, he looked a bit confused, his expression was saying that he found something weird.

Right at that moment, Sheryl suddenly stopped smiling and whispered to Erio.

“Erio, are you, by any chance, suspecting my relation with Akira?”

Her calm voice hid her anger, the usual sparkle in her eyes that would mesmerize any boys had disappeared. She sent a cold and dark gaze to Erio.

Erio flusteredly refuted.

“No! Of course not! It’s a misunderstanding!! It’s the opposite!! I just thought that although both of you are so close, it was rather unexpected that you would give up… I mean… I mean it is a reason to go on a date with him! But well, I guess that’s understandable, after all, it might be best to stop bothering him all the time… I mean… it must have been a sudden request to Akira, and he was busy, right?!”

Erio was being desperate, it was rather unclear whether there was a need to change his wordings like that or it was just simply because he was trying to come up with an excuse on the fly.

Sheryl herself understood that her gang could not survive had Akira not supported her. That's why Erio was trying his best to readjust his wordings since he thought that he might worsen the relation between Akira and Sheryl.

Sheryl understood that very well, but that was not enough to abate her irritation.

Sheryl did try to push her request when she asked Akira, but she was coldly rejected. Akira did not even consider her request, he had no intention to change his current plans just because Sheryl and her gang asked him something. So, he flatly rejected Sheryl's request.

But her current irritation actually stemmed from her uneasiness. She was feeling uneasy about whether she could become someone important to Akira before he changed his mind. She was doing her best to do that, but she did not know whether she would even make it or that she was even already too late. She had no idea if that was the reason why her request was rejected this time.

Sheryl somehow returned her expression back to normal, she then smiled and said to Erio.

"Well, I guess that's fine. If that's the case… Just so you know, unnecessary misunderstanding tends to cause trouble later."

"Y-yeah, I'm glad that I can clear up that misunderstanding. I'll be more careful next time."

Erio sighed in relief. His nervousness coming from being inside the Hunter Office had also disappeared.

Sheryl had finished half of the administration work beforehand. She just needed to wait for the Hunter Office to finish their part of the work. Sheryl

and Erio were sitting on a bench on the first floor of that building while waiting for the Hunter Office to finish.

Sheryl was spending her time thinking about her plans for the future. To be more precise, she was thinking about what to do to sell the relics that Akira asked her to. She was working on her information terminal to reevaluate, revise, and refine that plan.

If she could make that plan successful, she might be able to be someone not worth abandoning to Akira. It might also be a chance to deepen their relationship even more. Sheryl thought so as she put her best efforts working on her plan.

As Sheryl was extremely focused working on her information terminal, somebody suddenly called her.

“…Oh, as I thought, that’s really Sheryl! Sheryl!!”

A group of 3 Hunters walked toward Sheryl. It was Katsuya who looked rather happy, Yumina who just smiled bitterly, and the as expressionless as always Airi.

When Sheryl noticed them, she stood up from her bench. She then smiled and greeted Katsuya who came all the way next to her.

“Long time no see, I’m glad that everyone seems to be doing well.”

Katsuya looked at Sheryl’s smile and blushed. That dazzling smile decorating her pretty face was the result of Sheryl’s hard work training herself.

Katsuya stood in front of Sheryl and happily said.

“I didn’t expect to see you here. I’m really happy to be able to see you again.”

After he said that, Katsuya noticed Erio next to Sheryl.

“…Uhhh, who’s that guy?”

Erio got flustered when Katsuya looked at him. It might be just him, but for some reason, Erio felt that Katsuya's gaze at him was not a friendly one.

Erio's equipment and appearance was the epitome of what most Hunters usually mocked Katsuya and his team for. Just an inexperienced young Hunter using good equipment, or a stupid young Hunter misunderstanding the power of his own equipment as his own skill. Or at least, that was what Katsuya thought, and that might be unconsciously irritating him. Or it might be simply because he did not like the fact that a guy he did not think suitable for Sheryl was standing next to her. Whichever it was, Katsuya could not give a friendly gaze to Erio.

They then introduced themselves to Erio.

"Ahh, I'm Katsuya, a Drankam Hunter. My Hunter Rank is 36."

"I'm Yumina. I'm also a Drankam Hunter just like Katsuya."

"Airi, same."

Erio panicked even more, the people standing in front of him were not just Hunters by appearance, they were real Hunters. Moreover, it seemed that Katsuya was putting some kind of pressure on him. Although there was no way he would kill him, it was still scary for Erio.

Erio tried his best to make a calm expression as he nervously said the line he had previously decided with Sheryl beforehand.

"…I was told not to speak."

Erio only said that and looked away from Katsuya's group. It might be because he was too nervous that he sounded rather rude.

Katsuya got even more irritated by Erio's answer. He might have thought that it sounded like an answer that someone would give to mock other people.

Sheryl apologetically said to Katsuya.

“My apologies, he’s my bodyguard. He was told not to talk with other people unless it’s absolutely necessary since it might disrupt his duty as my bodyguard. So please let me apologize in his stead.”

Sheryl bowed to Katsuya and his friends, Katsuya flusteredly replied.

“Ah, no. If that’s the case, it can’t be helped then, right?”

Katsuya looked at Airi and Yumina, asking for their support.

“Yep, it can’t be helped if that’s the case. We’re sorry too.”

“Duty is important, it can’t be helped.”

Yumina and Airi returned back to their usual self as they saw Sheryl bowing to apologize to them.

Sheryl raised her head and smiled while thanking them.

“Thank you very much… As for him, well, it might be rude to say this, but please don’t interact too much with him. He’s not used to his job yet, that’s why he’s high-strung right now.”

“It’s alright, you don’t need to feel bad about it.”

Katsuya blushed when he said that.

[Well, Sheryl did say that if I annoy her acquaintance, it might cause her to hate me too. So let’s be careful about that. Alright then.]

If he left a bad impression on Sheryl’s acquaintance, it might also leave a bad impression on Sheryl too, and vice versa. Katsuya then threw a friendly smile at Erio.

Seeing how Sheryl was smiling at Katsuya’s group and how Katsuya’s group’s behaviour changed in a snap, Erio sighed out in relief while also feeling slightly scared at the same time.

But that fear was not of Katsuya’s group, that fear was of Sheryl.

[…I bet Sheryl is planning to trick them too, right? People don't usually treat slum children like that, so I'm sure they at least think that we're from the lower district. In the worst-case scenario, they might be even thinking that we're from the inner wall… Seriously though, is it really that easy to trick people?]

Now that he thought about it, Sheryl actually also did the same thing to the Hunters that she met in the Higaraka Residence Ruin. Back then, Erio did not notice it since he was too nervous being in the middle of the wasteland. But now that he looked back, Sheryl actually did the exact same thing.

Erio knew Sheryl for quite a long time, he already knew her since the days when they were together in Sibea's gang. Because of that, he knew her very well.

But he could not say that with confidence now. Erio noticed that the current Sheryl was completely different from the past Sheryl.

When Erio was kicked out from the gang, Sheryl was actually thinking of a way to let Erio return back to the gang. He knew that from Alicia, it might be out of Sheryl's pity toward someone who she had known well for a long time.

But if Erio got kicked out from the gang now, he was sure that the current Sheryl would just forget about him. Even if Alicia pleaded, Erio bet that Sheryl would not accept him back to the gang as long as he did not directly ask Akira to vouch for him.

Erio could not afford to make any mistake there, so he decided to keep his mouth shut to make sure that he would not leak any important information.

Katsuya smiled at Sheryl and asked her a question.

"By the way, what are you doing here? Are you waiting for someone?"

"No. I came here to complete some administration work. Right now I'm just waiting until they process their side of work."

“So, you’re free right now…? In that case, do you want to hang out with us?”

Sheryl was surprised, but she quickly returned to her usual smile.

“Are you trying to hit on me?”

Katsuya flusteredly replied.

“Eh?! Ah, no, uh, it’s not like I’m hitting on you or anything…”

Katsuya casually invited Sheryl, he did that almost purely out of habit.

Sheryl smiled bitterly as she apologetically said.

“Katsuya-san. I understand that you invited me without any ulterior motives. But, honestly speaking, I don’t think it’s something that you should do when you’re already accompanying another girl, you know? That would be rude very rude, not to me, but to the girl whom you’re accompanying.”

Sheryl shifted her gaze towards Airi and Yumina. Katsuya followed Sheryl’s gaze to them too. Yumina somehow looked exasperated as she sighed. While for Airi, she looked slightly conflicted.

Yumina smiled bitterly and said to Sheryl.

“Don’t worry, this guy is just like that. You can say that it’s his habit.”

“…Humans can really get used to anything.”

Airi vague mumbling somehow sounded pretty convincing. Sheryl then replied with a bitter smile to both of them.

Katsuya could feel a slight pressure coming from the girls. He then flusteredly tried to defend himself, but instead, he sounded like he was only making excuses.

“No, well, uhh, you know, it seems that I offended you this time, so I just thought that if you’re free, I could make up for it. Not to mention that we could not talk to each other that much the last time we met, right? That’s all there’s to it.”

Yumina looked at Katsuya, although it was only an excuse, Katsuya was not lying. Moreover, he did feel sorry for what happened too. Yumina could read that far since she had been together with him for quite some time.

Yumina was not sure what to do, but she eventually decided to go along with Katsuya’s plan. In the first place, they were actually out in the city that day to cheer up Katsuya. So she decided to just let him do what he wanted to do.

[…Well, I guess it’s fine, huh. It might cheer him up for a bit talking with someone else who’s not working in Drankam.]

Yumina then cautiously asked Sheryl.

“Well, it’s not really that comfortable talking while standing like this. So, do you have time to hang out with us for a bit? We’re actually thinking of taking a short rest too.”

Sheryl looked surprised.

“Is that really okay? I might be a bother to both of you.”

“It’s fine, we’re the one who’s inviting you anyway.”

Sheryl thought for a bit, it was an easy thing to refuse that offer. Erio also felt uneasy about their offer. But since it might cause them to doubt Sheryl’s identity, he decided to not say anything there.

While on the other hand, if Sheryl refused that offer, she might be missing a good chance to gather valuable information. If she could get some valuable information from Katsuya and his friends, she might get some insight to help her plan to sell her relics.

Not to mention, Akira was quite happy with the information that she gathered last time. Thus Sheryl reached a conclusion.

Sheryl smiled gracefully and said.

“In that case, please let me accompany you.”

Katsuya smiled happily when he heard Sheryl’s answer.

They then moved to a cafe inside that building. After all, for the sake of the administration work that she was planning to finish that day, she could not afford to leave that building.

They found an empty table and took a seat on that table. Erio was the only one who was not sitting, he was just standing-by next to Sheryl without saying anything.

Since lunchtime was getting closer, Katsuya, Airi and Yumina ordered some meals for their lunch. While Sheryl only ordered a cup of coffee.

Leaving Erio who was standing there as Sheryl’s bodyguard aside, Sheryl was the only one not ordering a meal, so then Katsuya casually asked her a question.

“Are you sure you’re okay not ordering anything else? Just a cup of coffee?”

“Yes, please don’t let it bother you.”

Sheryl was smiling like usual when she said that, but Katsuya somehow felt there was a slight disturbance in that smile. So he inadvertently asked her a question.

“…I actually chose this place since it’s pretty cheap considering the quality of the meal they serve here. Do you, by any chance, not find it to your liking?”

Sheryl’s dress was obviously a high-class dress. It was an old-world relic fitted exactly for her, so of course, she was giving off a different vibe

compared to the other people with common dresses.

Even Katsuya could not imagine how much that dress would cost him if he tried to buy one. So considering the usual expense of the people who would casually use such a dress, Katsuya was worried if he had picked a cafe that was too cheap for Sheryl's standard.

Sheryl lightly shook her head, she looked slightly embarrassed as she said.

"No, that's not it… Uhh, the reason as to why I didn't order any meal is not because I don't like the food in this cafe… It's… Uhh, to keep my body's proportion under control, so…"

Katsuya could not catch what Sheryl was implying, so he just tilted his head and asked further.

"Your body's proportion?"

Yumina and Airi immediately jabbed at him.

"Katsuya, shut up!"

"Katsuya, you should think before you speak!"

As Yumina and Airi were glaring at Katsuya, he finally noticed it. He immediately flusteredly tried to come up with an excuse.

"Ah, no, I don't think you're fat, you know. And I do think it's rather healthy not to be too skinny…"

"Geez, Katsuya, just shut up, will you?"

"Katsuya, you should really put more thought before you speak."

Yumina and Airi once again immediately shut Katsuya up. Thanks to that, Katsuya realized that he only made it worse, so he decided to just shut up as not to make it even worse.

Yumina smiled bitterly and apologized to Sheryl.

“I’m sorry. I know that I’ve been saying this again and again, but that’s just his habit. I know it sounds like an excuse, but he did not mean to offend you at all. He just… What can I say, tend to go too far… Well, I know that it’s not good at all, I wonder if the effect from the last scolding has worn off.”

Yumina glared at him. Katsuya somehow understood what she wanted to say, so he then apologetically said.

“I’m really sorry… I’m sorry, Sheryl.”

Sheryl tried to show that she was not angry as she smiled at Katsuya and his friends.

“Please don’t worry about it. It’s also partly my fault for doing something that might cause a misunderstanding. Since we’re here, let’s not worry too much about it and enjoy ourselves.”

Katsuya and Yumina smiled and blushed when they saw Sheryl’s smile. Yumina then tried to hide her embarrassment by changing the topic.

“Very well then, let’s talk about something else.”

After that, meals and drinks were delivered to their table. They then started talking to each other while enjoying their meals and drinks.

Sheryl slurped her coffee as she sighed in relief since she was able to keep her image.

[…It seems that it somehow leaked on my face, huh. I’m glad I was able to dodge it. But still, we’re really living in a different world, huh. For them, this cafe is a rather cheap cafe. I wonder how much I need to earn to be able to feel the same.]

The coffee that Sheryl ordered cost her 1500 Aurum per cup, seeing from the perspective of someone who used to live in the slum city, it was an extremely expensive cup of coffee. But even so, it was actually the cheapest thing on the menu of that cafe, and of course, it was not like she could just

order water and leave. So after a lot of thinking, Sheryl decided to just order a cup of coffee in the end.

Inside that small cup that Sheryl could easily fit her hand into, it was only 70% filled with coffee. She spent 1500 Aurum for that cup of coffee, honestly speaking, she had a lot to complain about that cup of coffee as she put a lot of the free sugar and milk inside that coffee and mixed them together.

After putting so much sugar and milk inside her coffee, which would definitely cause a certain group of coffee lovers to rage, Sheryl's coffee turned into a very sweet liquid. When she took a slurp, the sweetness quickly spread through her tongue and softened her expression. Her brain might have been seeking sugar to help clear her mind.

Up until now, Sheryl had never ever been in a situation where she could use sugar without worrying about the cost, and since she had spent 1500 Aurum for her coffee, she used so much sugar as if she was trying to make up for that price. Thus her coffee turned into a very sweet liquid.

Katsuya and Yumina were so surprised when they looked at Sheryl who used a lot of sugar on her coffee and how her expression turned softer when she took a slurp of that coffee. But on the other hand, they could understand why Sheryl would do that. It might be something that she had to do so that she could keep her body shape under control.

Sheryl noticed Katsuya and Yumina's expression.

"…Uhmm, is there any problem?"

Yumina carefully asked.

"Uhh, isn't that too sweet for you?"

Sheryl looked a bit confused.

"Yeah. It's sweet."

"No, that's not what I meant… Uhh, sorry, it's nothing."

Yumina was about to ask if it was not too sweet, but she realized that there was not even any need to ask that question as she stopped herself.

Sheryl still looked a bit confused as she shifted her gaze from Yumina to Katsuya. Katsuya noticed that and flusteredly asked.

“Uhmmm, do you like sweet things?”

“Yes, I love them.”

Sheryl smiled, there was no lie in her smile. Although it was a dazzling smile, Katsuya somehow felt pressured by that smile. It must be because he was overwhelmed by how Sheryl could smile like that after drinking a coffee with that much sugar without showing any difficulty.

“I-I see, well, I can totally get that. A lot of my Hunter friends are girls and all of them like sweet things. Well, we move around a lot as Hunters, so I guess it helps with recovering their energy and healing the wounds. That’s why I think there’s nothing wrong with eating a lot of calories. I know some girls who always eat a lot…”

Katsuya then kept on talking while trying not to touch the subject about Sheryl’s palate and hoping that he was not making a weird face. Yumina and Airi did not seem to plan on stopping him any time soon.

When they thought about that cup of coffee, they knew that it must be extremely sweet and could not help but to imagine how it would taste if they took a slurp of that coffee. Thus they were trying not to look at Sheryl’s cup in order to avoid thinking about it.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 111, A Shackle That Binds Down the Heroes

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As they continued talking to each other, the subject slowly shifted to Katsuya's group's work as Hunters. It was because Yumina and Sheryl intentionally pushed the conversation in that direction.

Katsuya's story started from when he was having a hard time just after joining Drankam. He already showed a glimpse of his talent right after he joined. The veteran skilled Hunters of the gang noticed that rare talent, so they sent Katsuya with the other Hunters to explore ruins and fight monsters. Then eventually, he grew strong enough to be recognized as one of the Drankam officers.

Katsuya and his friends had also formed a rather influential faction inside Drankam. Recently, he had even gotten to command a Hunter team to hunt for the bounty monsters. Katsuya took the command and his team was able to successfully hunt a bounty monster. It was a rather amazing track record that showed his talent as a Hunter.

Sheryl exaggerated her surprise before asking more questions to Katsuya. In the middle of their conversation, she praised, complimented, and applauded him frequently. She applauded Katsuya's ability to make decisions in a hard situation, or how he fought bravely in the dangerous battlefield, or how he tried to save his friends without caring for his own safety.

Sheryl listened closely with full interest, she showed a worried face when he talked about how he faced a dangerous situation, and she showed a happy face and praised him when he talked about how he and his friends made a big achievement.

Sheryl realized that Yumina kept bringing up subjects that would make it easier to praise Katsuya. Although she did not know the reason, she decided to jump wagon that subject and kept praising him.

Although Sheryl's compliments were all intentional, they neither felt out of place nor weird at all. They did not feel forced either. Sheryl's speech skills was so high that there was no flaw in it. But the response from Katsuya was rather dull.

At first, Katsuya started talking with full vigour as if he was boasting about his story, and when Sheryl praised him, he would blush and smile. But as his story went on, his expression started getting cloudy and he started to sound less and less excited. And when he talked about his hunt for the bounty monster, even when Sheryl complimented him, he just awkwardly laughed.

Sheryl thought that she might have complimented him too much and annoyed him instead, but when she looked at Airi and Yumina's expression, she noticed that it was not the case. Both of them looked worriedly at Katsuya, basically, both of them knew why Katsuya looked so down and Sheryl thought that must be the case.

Sheryl showed a puzzled face, she looked a bit at loss and worried at Katsuya's reaction as she was considering her options. She might have to wait for some time before her business there was finished, but she could say that it was about time for her to leave and withdraw from Katsuya's group. Although that would mean she would leave in the middle of a bad mood, it

was still a choice that she could pick to leave before the mood got even worse.

But it seemed that Katsuya was starting to climb the ranks in Drankam, so she decided that it might be a good idea to stay there longer and use that chance to deepen their relationship and gather more information from him.

Sheryl sounded apologetic as she asked Katsuya.

“…Katsuya-san, I’m really sorry but did I say something that offended you? If that’s the case, my apologies.”

Katsuya became flustered when Sheryl suddenly apologized to him.

“Eh?! Ah, that’s not it!”

“Is that so…? It seemed that your mood got worse every time I said something…”

Sheryl replied while lowering her voice. She hung her head as if she was down.

Katsuya looked at Yumina, asking for help.

Since Yumina was worried about Katsuya, she made a serious face and changed the subject.

“Katsuya, if that’s not the case, I think it’s better if you properly explain it to Sheryl”

“Eh? Ah… You’re right.”

Katsuya was stumbling over his words while Yumina just kept staring at him.

Katsuya also reacted in a similar way the last time Yumina asked him what’s wrong when she saw him looked so down. But when that happened, he always apologized for making her worry and said he was alright without telling her anything.

Yumina herself actually had a guess as to why Katsuya was feeling down. But she could not say that herself.

After Sheryl checked with them, she was relieved that it was not her fault that Katsuya seemed depressed. She then smiled awkwardly and both intentionally and naturally looked worried for Katsuya and said.

“I won’t force you to tell me. It’s enough for me to know that it’s not because of me. But if there’s anything that bothers you, I’m all ears. I will listen if you want to share it with me. I heard that it might help you feel at ease if you share your problem with someone else. Although I might not be able to support you like Yumina-san and Airi-san, I can at least listen to your worries and complaints. So, if you’re okay with it, I’m willing to listen.”

Katsuya glanced timidly at Sheryl. Sheryl locked her gaze at Katsuya while smiling at him.

Katsuya was not sure what to do. It was obvious that he was hesitating from telling about his worry to anyone else, he looked conflicted as his gaze wandered around. Then eventually, his gaze returned back to Sheryl. The moment he looked at her gentle smile one more time, Katsuya opened his mouth.

“…Sheryl, do you think that I’m a great Hunter?”

“Yes.”

“…Are you sure?”

“I’m sure different people would have different indicators to decide whether someone is a great Hunter or not. But from my point of view and from what I heard from your story just now, as long as it was not a lie, I do think that you’re a great Hunter.”

“…I see.”

Katsuya paused for a bit, he then looked dispirited as he said with a voice that expressed his distress.

“…I don’t really know anymore if I’m that great of a Hunter.”

He then slowly continued talking.

Katsuya had admired Hunters for a long time. He had heard stories about Hunters and when he imagined that scene, his heart would flutter.

They worked so hard to get stronger and went to explore the dangerous, but more than that, wondrous old-world ruin together with their comrades that they trusted. They then fought against swarms of monsters that were way out of their leagues and explored undiscovered ruin without any guides, they had to go through a lot of ups and downs together with their comrades to be able to return back alive with valuable relics in their hands. Sometimes, they splurged on their reward money to throw a big celebration or when they discussed how to use their reward money to step up their power as Hunters. Those were the common stories of all those successful Hunters in the eastern district.

Katsuya imagined himself going through all of those things, he promised to himself that he would be one of those successful Hunters one day. Fortunately enough, he was blessed with a suitable talent to reach that and he was blessed with friends that he could trust and good luck.

His luck, comrades, and talent pushed him further up. He quickly climbed the ladder into a great Hunter and distinguished himself from all the other common Hunters.

Then finally, Katsuya, who had become one of those successful Hunters stories in the eastern district, had to face the darkness behind all of those glorious stories. It was the reason why people did not even try to accomplish it although they would be able to attain great wealth if they succeeded.

“…At first, wait no, it’s not exactly at first, huh. Basically, the moment when I realized it was when we took that request to face the monster swarm

flooding out from the Kuzusuhara ruin heading to Kugamayama city. Some of my friends died back then, I've known them well, we've eaten together in the same cafeteria in the past, we've gone through hard training together, we've worked together to explore ruins and hunt monsters. Some of them were blown into small pieces by cannons, some of them eaten alive by monsters, some of them ran out of medicines and died from nonfatal wounds… They died… and I couldn't save them."

Hunter's job was indeed an extremely dangerous job. It was a common thing for them to get killed on duty, so there was nothing strange about it at all. The stories of those successful Hunters were basically the stories of those Hunters who survived. Due to his rare talent, Katsuya and his friends had forgotten that truth. But it was only a matter of time before they had to face it.

"At that time, I thought that it would be alright as long as I can be strong enough, it would be fine as long as I can be powerful enough. So I tried my best and I thought that I'd become the great Hunter that I aspired to be back then. Then, they gave me the responsibility to command a team to hunt for the bounty monster and we successfully hunted the bounty monster. I'm sure a lot of people think that I'm a great Hunter, but… It was no use, I lost a lot of my friends… I couldn't save them too. I do feel happy when you say that I'm a great Hunter. But, like, you know, when you call me a great Hunter it also makes me feel conflicted… That's all."

Yumina looked at Katsuya who was speaking as if he was confessing his sin. Her guess was correct, Katsuya was lamenting the friends that he had lost, he was lamenting the fact that he could not save them. But Yumina could not think of any words to cheer him up.

Getting killed was an occupational hazard for Hunters. Thus, it was better for those Hunters to stop mourning for their dead friends, forget about it, and move on. At least that's what Yumina thought, but she could not say that to Katsuya. After all, she was also one of his friends and she might be one of his friends that would get killed too.

Yumina could not say those words since it might cause him to just forget about her and move on when she got killed.

Airi also guessed the reason why Katsuya was depressed, but she thought that it was just a common problem, that was why she did not say anything. In the first place, she did not lament the death of her friends as much as Yumina and Katsuya. It was a common thing for people to die, especially in their line of work. So, there was nothing to be surprised about. Even if they were her friends that they just laughed together yesterday, after all, it was a common scene in the world where she was raised.

Airi looked up to Katsuya since he was the one who saved her from such a world. Moreover, she did want him to lament her if she got killed. She did not want Katsuya to just quickly forget about her when she died or think that she might have died just because he did not see her for some time. That was why she could not tell him to get used to losing friends.

From the outside, it looked like Sheryl was sympathizing with Katsuya but she was actually organizing that new information in the back of her head and thinking of how she should react to his story.

Katsuya thought that everything would be fine as long he worked hard enough. After all, he had the rare talent to accomplish that, he had done that in the past, he experienced that first hand, and he was likely to do that again in the future. Although Sheryl had no proof, she was sure that it must be the case.

No matter where and when he was born, it was very likely that Katsuya would work himself hard and reach success and happiness. Then loving him and getting loved by him would mean getting a share of his success and happiness.

Sheryl then thought that there must be 2 kinds of people around him. Either those that accepted him and cared for him, or those that rejected him and hated him to death. Either way, it showed that they were interested in him. There must be something in him that caused people around him to not be able to just ignore him. Leaving aside those sociopathic people who did not care about other people, normal people would not be able to just ignore Katsuya’s existence.

Sheryl then smiled bitterly, but she kept it inside her heart and did not let it show on her face.

[I wonder if he's one of those people who are too talented and have to face hardship because of their talents. Honestly speaking, I can't sympathize at all, but let's leave that aside for now and think about how I should react. Well, I can just pretend that I can't find any words to say and just keep quiet, but…]

After a lot of thinking, she finally decided on what to do. Then she made a rather serious face and said to Katsuya in a strong tone.

"Katsuya-san, I'll tell you what I think after listening to your story. If it's wrong or if I say something that I should not, I hope that you can just let it slide or just mock me and laugh it off."

Katsuya, who was hanging his head low and looking down, raised his head and looked straight to Sheryl with a serious expression. He felt a bit overwhelmed with her staring at him as he was waiting for her to continue.

Sheryl was staring straight at Katsuya with a serious face, but she then smiled and bowed deeply to him.

"Thank you very much for protecting the city. I can only give you and your comrades as well as all of your friends that you lost my deepest gratitude for protecting the city. Thank you very much!"

Katsuya, Airi, and Yumina were extremely surprised when Sheryl suddenly thanked them. Sheryl then raised her head and stared at Katsuya before continuing.

"Had that swarm of monsters from the Kuzusuhara ruin not been stopped, I bet the city would have suffered extensive damage. And if those bounty monsters were left alone, they would have slowly killed the city. I'm sure each Hunter has his or her reason to fight for protecting the city, some of them might have done it for the sake of money, some of them might have done it for the sake of renown, or it might be just because it was one of their jobs, some of them might even have done that because they had no other

choice. But it did not change the fact that they had put their lives at stake and some of them even lost their lives in that fight. Thus I feel greatly indebted to them."

Katsuya realized that he was really moved by Sheryl's reply, but he did not know the reason why.

"As long as you work as a Hunter, there's a risk for you to get killed. It could even be said that it's their own responsibility for taking that occupation. I bet the Hunters need to resolve themselves to take that risk when they decide to be Hunters. But with that being said, not everyone is blessed enough to work as a Hunter. I'm sure there are people who don't have the skills and get killed in no time. Then, even for those Hunters with proper skill and equipment, they might also get killed simply because of bad luck. And I believe for those Hunters who died because you couldn't save them, it was simply because they were not lucky enough to get saved by you."

Katsuya realized that he felt as if a burden was lifted off his shoulder. But he did not know the reason why.

"I don't know the detail of your relationship with the friends that you have lost. But if you feel proud that you have risked your life together with them, if you feel proud that you were able to fight alongside them, please never forget about them. But if that's not the case, if their deaths only chain you down, then please forget about them this instant."

The moment Katsuya heard Sheryl telling him to just forget about his dead friends, he immediately shouted in anger.

"Are you seriously saying that I should just forget about them?"

But it did not faze Sheryl at all, she kept staring at Katsuya's eyes with a serious face as she continued.

"If you're proud of them, then it should be fine. I'm sure that it would even help you down the road. It would give you the courage to push through difficult situations. It would help you stand up again in a hopeless situation.

But, if it only serves as a burden to you, it would eventually kill you one day. It would one day trip you when you have to step forward and get you killed. It would drag you down when you have to retreat and get you killed. So just forget about them. You can go ahead and scream as much as you want then just forget about them. You can go ahead and curse me as much as you want then just forget about them."

Katsuya did not say anything back while listening to what Sheryl was saying. He was still feeling sad for the friends that he had lost. But the thing that was born from that sadness was no longer something that was blaming him.

Sheryl relaxed her expression and said.

"…I won't tell you to keep on living for the sake of dead people. But, I'll tell you to keep on living for the sake of the other people who are still alive. The other two are really worried about you, you know?"

Katsuya felt a bit at a loss as he looked at Yumina and Airi. It had been such a long time since the last time he saw Airi and Yumina making those faces, indicating that they were truly worried about him.

Katsuya then turned to Sheryl again. He then made a smile filled with resolve and optimism as he said.

"I won't forget about them, I'll always remember them."

Katsuya somehow looked like he was finally able to move on, Sheryl then replied with a smile.

"You're a nice person. Honestly speaking, I was expecting you to get angry at me and tell me to just shut up since I'm only a stranger to you."

Katsuya looked surprised as he said.

"…Then why would you say something like that?"

Sheryl just smiled and answered back casually.

“It’s because I thought that it would at least make you feel better once you get angry and vented everything that you’ve been keeping to yourself until now. And if you vent to a stranger like me, it at least won’t affect your relationship with the people who are close to you. But it seems that there was no need for me to worry about that.”

It left a big impression on Katsuya. Sheryl helped him to move on from all of his accumulated grieve that he had kept inside his heart since the day he lost his friends. She prioritized helping him in moving out of worry even though the words that she said there might anger him, a Hunter who had even successfully hunted a bounty monster, a Hunter who was strong enough to easily kill a common civilian. Katsuya felt slight amazement as he stared at Sheryl.

Sheryl then stood up from her seat.

“Unfortunately, it seems that it’s about time for me to leave, so please excuse me.”

Sheryl lightly said her goodbye.

“Ah…”

Seeing Sheryl was about to leave that place, Katsuya inadvertently tried to stop her, but he himself did not know the reason why he did that.

“…Uhmm, can we meet again some other day?”

Sheryl looked a bit surprised, but she then smiled smugly and teasingly said.

“Are you trying to hit on me?”

Katsuya was so flustered that he could not give any concrete reply to that. Sheryl then mischievously smiled and said.

“I’m just joking. We should be able to meet again if we’re fated to. Yumina-san and Airi-san too, please be careful out there and until we meet again”

Sheryl once again said goodbye and left that place together with Erio.

Katsuya, Airi, and Yumina who were left continued eating their lunch. Yumina and Airi glanced a few times at Katsuya.

“…Uhmmm, is there anything wrong?”

“No, it’s nothing. I’m just glad that you cheered up.”

After hearing Yumina’s answer, Katsuya then apologized to her and Airi.

“I’m really sorry to have worried both of you… I should’ve talked about it to both of you sooner.”

“We’re teammates, after all, there’s no need to hold back. You can tell us sooner next time.”

“Of course.”

Katsuya gave a firm nod. The shadow that plagued him lately had completely vanished.

Yumina sighed, the girl who she met only twice was able to easily clear Katsuya’s worry. Yumina was amazed by that. Although she did not show it on her face, she actually felt discouraged by it too. But that was not the most important point here, Yumina was focused on something else.

[…I guess that was a mistake, huh… Ahhh, no no no, I should not think like that. Katsuya was cheered up, so it should be fine.]

Yumina kept telling herself that at least Sheryl was not looking at Katsuya as her love interest, that was why it should be fine.

After finishing the rest of the administrative work, Sheryl walked through the streets of the lower district and headed back to her base. She had met up with Darris beforehand. But after telling Darris what happened, she decided to take a detour to avoid meeting Katsuya again.

Sheryl realized that Erio was looking at her. Ever since she finished her business in the Hunter Office, he had been glancing at her with a conflicted expression.

Sheryl was weirded out by that as she lightly snapped at him.

“Erio, what is it? You’ve been glancing at me. Do you have anything you want to say to me or something?”

But Erio then replied as if he was trying to run away.

“Ah, no, it’s nothing.”

Half of the reason as to why he kept glancing at Sheryl was out of fear. He was fearful of how she was able to completely trick Katsuya and his friends. It was because he noticed how much the person that he knew well, had changed. But, he did not have the courage to say that in front of Sheryl.

But then, Sheryl sounded irritated as she replied back to Erio. It might be because she did not like the fact that he was not being honest there.

“You won’t behave like that if it was nothing, right? So just tell me already, what is it?”

Erio understood well that it would be a bad idea if he kept trying to say that it was nothing. Thus he decided to ask Sheryl something that had been bothering him.

“…Back then, you said all of those things to that Hunter… Katsuya, was it again? So like, how much of them were your true feelings?”

“My true feelings?”

Sheryl looked flabbergasted after hearing Erio’s question, her face was saying that she did not understand the meaning behind that question. But after she had that expression on her face for a few seconds, she suddenly seemed to have realized something and said.

“…Ahhh, I see!! By any chance, do you think that I was really worried about Katsuya and sympathized with him, that’s why I tried to cheer him up? Don’t be stupid, I don’t care about his story at all. As a matter of fact, the main point that I was actually saying to him was for him to stop moping around and move on, you know? Although I did overly dramatize it though. You got hooked to his story too much, you know. Were you so bored just standing next to me that you could not help but to listen closely to our conversation?”

Erio was rather surprised by her answer as he said.

“I-is that so? But well, I do feel sad when I lose my friends too. So when I realised that even a strong Hunter felt the same, I sympathized with him for a bit though…”

Sheryl frowned.

“Erio. Get a better grip of yourself, will you? We’re not in a position to feel pity for them, you know? Seriously though, sympathy? Do you really think that such a thing could exist between slum children like us and a successful Hunter who had even hunted a bounty monster? I bet you’re just mistaking it for your feeling of wanting to be like him.”

“W-well, now that you mention it, that might be true…? No, but still, like, you know, don’t you think that it might be a good idea to get close to them and get them to support us just like Akira?”

“So then what? Will you be satisfied if he mourns when you, me, Alicia, and the other children get killed? That’s obviously not the case for me though.”

“Neither for me as well…”

“In the first place, what do you think we can give back to them if we get them to support us? It’s already a miracle to have Akira supporting us, you know? Even right now… I’m at loss on what we can give back to him.”

Sheryl was about to say that she still could not repay for everything that Akira had done for the gang and she had no idea how long Akira would keep helping the gang, but she somehow was able to change her wordings.

When he heard that, Erio hung his head low. It was because the hope that he was unconsciously having was crushed with no mercy at all by Sheryl.

“…You’re right, I’m sorry. I just thought that it would be great if they could do that. But I guess the reality is not that kind, huh.”

“It’s all good that you understand now. And if you really understand it now, you should be more thankful to Akira. It’s all thanks to his support that we’re not dead now, you know…? Well, of course, except for that fool. That fool even dared to be so rude to Akira and tried taking me hostage, that’s why he’s dead now. You got spared once, so you should be extra careful.”

“I know, I don’t want to die after all.”

Sheryl nodded in satisfaction after hearing Erio’s response. She then added an extra warning.

“Erio, I’ll give you one other warning besides that one just now. In case if you never break up with Alicia, you should never let her get close to that Katsuya.”

Erio’s face stiffened. He then asked Sheryl in panic.

“W-what do you mean by that?”

“It’s just my intuition. Since both of you are officers in my gang, I’m sure there’ll be a lot of occasions where both of you accompany me, it would be bad if Alicia gets to meet Katsuya by pure coincidence. There is a chance that she will fall for him, you know. Judging from what I heard back then, it seems that Katsuya has a habit of saying things that invite misunderstanding to girls. After all, he’s a kind young handsome powerful Hunter with a lot of money and talent. Even though it seems there are a lot of girls around

him, if he treats Alicia kindly… I'm not sure if she can just give up on him, you know?"

After saying that, Sheryl sent a deep meaningful gaze to Erio. Erio's face turned pale, he must be imagining what she just said. After she confirmed that, she then made a serious face and thought.

[It seems that Erio was really pulled to Katsuya's side although he was only listening to our conversation from behind me. Well, it's true that it's a rather amazing story of successful Hunter, so it's no surprise that Erio admired him, but… I wonder if that's all there is to it. Or maybe he felt that weird feeling that I also felt back then? In the worst-case scenario, he might even propose a crazy idea like kicking Akira out and hiding behind Katsuya and his friends for protection. I brought Alicia into the conversation to prevent him from getting too close to Katsuya, but… Looking at his reaction, I guess that was unnecessary, huh…]

As Sheryl kept on thinking about it and Erio kept making a pale face, Darris who heard their conversation thought about something else.

[I don't know just how strong that Katsuya guy is, but leaving him aside, Akira himself is pretty crazy… He fought a swarm of monsters twice on the same day. I didn't think about it much since he saved us, but back then, he was not using an augmented suit and was able to fight a swarm of monsters with just his flimsy AAH rifle. He was even able to save us in the end. Well, it's true that back then, we had a machine gun as our main firepower, then Elena and Sara saved us on our second encounter with the monster swarm that day, but there's no mistaking that Akira did very well in both fights… As I thought, it's really weird. Katsuragi is also bothered by that sudden change in Sheryl's behaviour but… Sheryl is indeed a competent person and there's nothing strange about it, As for Akira… It's true that he's a powerful Hunter, but… There's just something not right about him.]

All of them had their own thoughts as they walked back to their base.

On the night of that day, Katsuya was lying on the bed of his personal room as he remembered what Sheryl said to him. That time when he had only met

her once, he yearned to meet her again. And, on their second encounter, she was able to clear his worry.

Lately, Katsuya could not get a good sleep since he always had nightmares where his dead friends blamed him. His regret for not being able to save them, his feeling of guilt, they unconsciously turned his dead friends into ghosts. But after listening to what Sheryl said to him, they had been turned back to his important friends that he was proud of. He was sure that he would not see those nightmares anymore.

Katsuya's heart was gnawed by his regret and guilt. Although it pushed him to get stronger as fast as he could, it only chained and bound him down. Thus preventing him from showing the true value of his talent.

But now, it had completely disappeared. It left a big hole in his heart, and the feeling for a certain someone was slowly filling that hole.

"We didn't exchange contact numbers but… I wonder if we can meet again one day?"

Katsuya lightly smiled and closed his eyes, he was then peacefully lulled to sleep.

That night, Sheryl was lying on the bed in her private room and recollecting what happened that day.

She looked back at everything that she said that day, analyzed them to find any flaws that she should fix next time. Then she remembered how much Katsuya grieved for his dead friends.

It might be due to the creeping sleepiness that she started to think about unnecessary things.

As questions welled up inside her head, they were quickly followed by her own answers. Although she was answering her own question, there was a good chance that her answers were correct. Sheryl's face then twitched.

Her question was short and simple–if she got killed, would Akira mourn for her death? And the answer was an obvious resounding ‘no’.

She then immediately stopped herself from thinking of any reasoning or assumptions that she could think of to refute that since it felt like she could spend eternity just thinking about those things.

[…Let’s think about something else, there are still so many other things that I need to worry about.]

If she kept thinking about that, there was no mistaking it that she would get a nightmare that night. As Sheryl thought so, she immediately tried to think about something else. She tried her best to fight back against the sleepiness to think about other subjects, and in the end, she fell asleep without thinking about anything.

Inside that white world, she heard a voice.

“Stop thinking about unnecessary things.”

And then, that voice vanished.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 112, A Guide

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In the middle of the night, when the morning was still hours away. Alpha was trying to wake up Akira who was sleeping on the bed of his house.

“Akira, wake up.”

Alpha’s voice was transferred directly into Akira’s head. Although her voice was gentle, it was pretty loud. After all, it was not like she could wake Akira up by shaking him.

Akira was still groggy as he scanned his surroundings. It did not take long for him to notice that it was still in the middle of the night. Although he went to sleep earlier than usual last night, it was still way too early for him to naturally wake up, he still had not gotten enough sleep. Looking at Alpha, he understood that he was not in immediate danger. He then sounded slightly irritated as he asked Alpha.

“…What now? It’s still night, you know? What’s wrong?”

“There’s a text message from Elena. I don’t mind if you want to ignore it for now since it’s still in the middle of the night and I don’t mind ignoring

the other messages coming after this too, but don’t blame me since I’ve properly woken you up, okay? “

Akira tilted his head, confused. He thought that Alpha must have checked the message first before deciding that it was better to wake him up. Or at least, she must have thought that he might get angry if she waited until morning before telling him about that message.

Akira yawned while reaching for his information terminal that he left not too far from him. He was still sleepy as he operated his information terminal.

In short, the subject of Elena’s message was a request. There was a big battle going on in Mihazono ruin, so the Hunter Office was issuing requests to assist, support, and to save the Hunters who were on the battlefield. It seemed that Elena and Sara accepted a good deal for that request through the mediator company that they were registered under. The message was basically an invitation for Akira if he wanted to join in that request too.

The body of the message said that Akira was allowed to either move alone or move together with Elena and Sara. Of course, he was free to refuse if he had some other things to do. So if he was interested, he could give them a call.

Akira read that message a few times. He thought about a lot of things as his expression turned stern.

“Alpha, do you think Elena-san and Sara-san are going to Seranthal building?”

“I don’t know. After all, it seems that the situation in the Mihazono ruin has greatly changed. But, I do think that there’s a good chance this huge battle is taking place near the Seranthal building. You still remember that short notice from the Hunter Office yesterday, right? So I’m sure some of the Hunters headed to the Seranthal building. Then that request might be to help those Hunters who couldn’t retreat from the battlefield.”

Akira remembered what happened back then. Indeed, it was true that when he was stuck inside the Seranthal building, he could not make a call outside.

“Can they contact the outside after they went inside that building?”

“They might be able to do that now. Either that or that request was issued beforehand to help them retreat in case they don’t return back after some time. Basically, it’s one of those time-based emergency requests. And of course, it might also have nothing to do about that at all.”

Akira did not say anything as he stepped off from his bed and started making preparations to head out.

Alpha at least asked for a confirmation.

“So, you’re taking that invitation from Elena and Sara, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Although we had to go through all of those things yesterday?”

“…This and that are two different matters.”

Alpha sighed exaggeratedly, but Akira just ignored that as he continued with his preparation.

Akira’s reaction was within Alpha’s range of expectations. It was proof that she had a better understanding of his behavioural pattern. She was happy that all of the information that she had collected to control and manipulate Akira combined together with her computing power was able to give an accurate prediction of his action.

But her prediction also gave one more notable result. Even if she tried to stop him, there was a good chance that Akira would still decide to meet up with Elena and Sara. And even if she refused to give her support, there was still a good chance that he would still go.

Back then, Akira saved Elena and Sara in Kuzusuhara ruin, then not too long after that, Elena and Sara saved Akira when he was attacked by a

swarm of monsters when he was together with Katsuragi.

From Alpha's opinion, that made them even. But for some reason, from Akira's perspective, he was still carrying 2 debts to Sara and Elena. If Alpha could precisely understand the reason why he decided so, she would be able to more easily manipulate Akira. But for now, she had not even the slightest guess. As long as Akira was still thinking that he had not returned that debt yet, Elena and Sara would still sit on the top of his priority list.

Alpha kept staring at Akira, in the back of her head, she was thinking that she had to do something about it.

Akira put on his augmented suit as he asked Alpha to operate his information terminal.

"Alpha, call Elena-san for me."

"Sure… It's not getting connected. She's outside the reachable area."

"But her message reached me, right?"

"There's no guarantee that the message reached you the moment it was sent, you know. It might have been delayed due to the route that it took or the load on the device. It might be also be coming from how calls are treated differently compared to text messages."

"It can't be helped then, at least send a message to them that I'm accepting their request. It should be possible to at least do that, right?"

Akira thought of his message and sent it to Alpha through telepathy. After all, it was faster than saying it out loud.

"Got it, it's already sent. I'll also frequently check if I can get a connection with their information terminal too."

"I'm counting on you."

After Akira put on his augmented suit, he grabbed his information terminal and his rifles before heading to his vehicle. He then checked the medicines

and ammo reserve left on his vehicle before grabbing extra medicine or ammo that he needed. Since he did not know what he would be facing, Akira decided to bring a lot of extra ammo.

After checking everything, Akira sat on the driver seat and was about to turn on the vehicle, but he suddenly stopped.

Alpha who was sitting on the driver assistant's seat looked at Akira with a questioning expression.

"What's wrong? Did you change your mind?"

"No, I just thought of something right before heading out."

Akira then pulled out his information terminal and operated it. Alpha who knew well what he was doing looked slightly surprised. Akira was making a call, it took 10 seconds before the person that he was calling picked up the call.

The sound of the person that he was calling could be heard from Akira's information terminal.

"It's Carol here. I never thought that you would call me this soon. Well, it's true I'm happy that you did, but it's rather rude calling me this early unless it's not about my side job, you know? So like, it's okay to take it that it's about that, right?"

Carol began with a sweet voice as if she was tempting Akira.

But Akira casually answered.

"Sorry, but it's about your main job."

Carol then mischievously replied back.

"Oh my, is that so? In that case then, is it okay if I close the call here?"

"Well, I can understand that. Sorry for calling you this early. Later then."

Akira then ended the call, Alpha who was next to him just smiled amusedly.

Akira then put aside his information terminal and turned on his vehicle. Right when Akira just drove out from the garage, a call from Carol reached his information terminal.

Alpha smiled as she pointed at Akira's information terminal and said.

"I'll do the driving."

"You sure? I'll leave it to you then."

Akira trusted the driving to Alpha as he let go of the wheel and picked up his information terminal to answer the call.

"It's Akira."

Carol sounded a bit annoyed.

"…There's no need to suddenly cut your call like that, you know. Can't you at least try being kinder?"

"I'm in a hurry here. So I don't have the time to negotiate at all. So basically it's about your main job, I take it that you're willing to listen then, right?"

"Of course. Since you just ended the call like that, I can't help but get curious. So, what is it?"

"Carol, you have knowledge about Mihazono ruin including the Seranthal building, right? I want to buy some information from you. If you're willing to sell some, just tell me the price. If you're okay with a bank transfer, I'll immediately transfer the payment to your bank account. But if you prefer cash, I don't have any with me and I don't have the time to get some right now, so I'll be paying you later."

"There's no need to worry about that. So, what kind of information are you looking for exactly? Your description just now is way too vague."

“It seems that there’s an ongoing big battle in Mihazono ruin and there’s a good chance that the Seranthal building is in the centre of that battle. I need any information that might help me fight battles, search around that area, and save people who might be stuck there which includes escape routes or any other things that might also help me survive that place. I know that it’s still rather vague but I can’t make it more detailed than this. Although I’m heading to Mihazono ruin right now, it’s not like I have any particular destination at the moment after all.”

After listening to everything that Akira just said, which did not make much sense, Carol thought for a bit and said.

“Well, even if you tell me so, I have no plans to get into trouble with you. After all, we need to decide a lot of things too, like how am I going to send that information to you, or how accurate it is, or how are we going to decide on the price of the information, right? I can sell you the map of Mihazono ruin that I have right now, but it might not be in a format that you can open, I’ve also added some notes to that map, and some part of it is even encrypted. In the first place, I never make a copy of any important information like the one that I taught you yesterday except inside my brain.”

Akira was convinced by what Carol said to him. As in matter of fact, now that he thought about it, it was completely understandable. The reason why he did not think about putting that in his explanation was because Alpha and Shizuka always interpreted his vague questions or requests so he did not have to explain everything.

Alpha always stayed beside Akira and understood what he was trying to say, while Shizuka always came up with a good rifle that was close to what he was looking for although he only gave Shizuka a vague description. Akira thought that he might have gotten too used to it, as he reflected on that and felt thankful to Alpha and Shizuka.

Akira had no time to slowly talk about it with Carol, thus he immediately gave up on that idea and said.

“…You’re right. Just forget what I said, sorry to have called you so early. Later then.”

When Akira was about to close the call, Carol suddenly interjected.

“Wait for a sec, are you really going to just end the call? Just wait for a bit.”

“What?”

“Let me get this straight, you’re going to Mihazono ruin again, which means you might have to go to a dangerous place. As a matter of fact, there’s a good chance that you’ll have to go to the Seranthal building again, that’s why you’re looking for any information about Mihazono ruin that would help you survive that place, right?”

“Yes.”

Carol sounded slightly amused as she made a suggestion.

“In that case then, how about hiring me? Let’s say, how about 10,000,000 Aurum? If you end up having to use information that is worth more than that, we can talk about the price later. So, what do you think? I think it’s a pretty good offer.”

Akira was a little bit surprised by that unexpected offer from Carol. But he immediately questioned back without showing any confusion nor hesitation.

“I’m driving my vehicle through the Kugamayama city lower district right now, can we meet up in a few minutes?”

“Sure, I’m also in the lower district right now. As for the preparation… Can you give me 40 minutes?”

“I’m not going to be your bodyguard this time. I’m not expecting you to help in fights either, but I’ll still have you at least protect yourself. So don’t expect me to cover you like yesterday.”

“That’s fine. Although, I would be really happy if you would protect me. But if something like that happened again, you can just subtract from my

reward money. Are you okay with that?”

Akira immediately replied.

“I understand, I’ll hire you then. Send me where to meet up and make sure that I can reach that place with my vehicle. If you don’t have any ride to go to Mihazono ruin, I’ll give you a ride.”

“I’ll take that offer then. I’ll immediately send you where to pick me up after this, later then.”

Carol’s voice sounded extremely inviting before she closed the call.

Alpha then asked Akira.

“Are you sure it’s okay to do that before asking for Elena and Sara’s permission?”

“I’m hiring Carol myself, so I’m sure that it’ll be okay. But well, if Elena-san and Sara-san are angry because of that, I’ll just keep my distance away from them while making sure that I can immediately meet up with them when they ask me to.”

Alpha was wondering if that was even the problem, but she decided not to pursue that question. After all, if this hurts Akira’s relationship with Sara and Elena, then it was a rather good turn of event for her.

“I see, well, it doesn’t really matter. By the way, Carol has sent you the meet-up place. I’ll take the wheel until we reach that place.”

Akira then headed to their meeting place.

Carol was taking a shower inside one of the rooms in a mansion located in the lower district. She had a nanomachine augmented body, not only it enhanced her physical abilities oriented for fighting, but it also enhanced her figure to the point that it would attract the attention of any men. And since she had spent a lot of effort and money on it, as expected, her figure was extremely seductive.

The warm water that she was showering with was not just warm water, it was even mixed with medicines that were adjusted for her body. Those medicines would heal even the smallest wound that she got from her usual lifestyle and left her with flawless glowing skin.

Carol then stepped outside the shower room and stood in front of a wall equipped with blowers which blew a strong wind to remove any water droplets left on her body. After that, she went to another room where she stored all of her clothes.

After she entered that room, Carol put on a bodysuit that stuck tight to her skin prior to putting on an augmented suit on top of it. It was an old-world augmented suit designed for women.

Although it covered all of her skin from her neck down, it had a seductive design comparable to being naked. After all, the design of her augmented suit left almost nothing to imagine about what was under it.

As she was putting on her armors, fasteners, belts, and any other accessories, she also holstered her huge gun and put on her information-gathering device. She then stuffed ammo into her rucksack and carried it on her back. After she was done putting on everything, she checked her own reflection on a mirror and smiled bewitchingly. The reflection on her mirror showed a girl who could effectively work her way against both monsters and men.

“This will do… Only 10 minutes left, huh. I guess I’ll hurry up, I feel like Akira would just leave me behind if I’m late even for a bit.”

Carol, who more or less understood a bit of Akira’s personality, smiled bitterly.

Akira was waiting for Carol in their meeting place.

The meeting place sent by Carol was located near a relatively small area in the lower district, so in short, it was a place with expensive rent. The safety in that area was maintained by a private security company that regularly patrolled the area, they checked any suspicious person in the area and

disposed of them when needed. It did not even matter if that suspicious person was armed to the teeth like a Hunter. It was an area filled with people who had no problem paying for such a service.

One of the guards also asked Akira why he was there. When Akira said that he was waiting for another Hunter, the guard glanced at Akira's vehicle and equipment before leaving him alone.

It reminded Akira how much he had changed as he said to Alpha.

"If I looked like a new Hunter, I bet that guard would have shooed me, huh."

"Well, that shows just how much you've grown as a Hunter. So let's keep this up, and for that sake, let's make sure to only take actions that would bring you profit."

Alpha there was actually warning Akira.

"Eh? Ah, right, of course."

Akira sounded as if he was caught off guard for a sec, but immediately returned back to his usual self. He then continued as if he was trying to dodge that subject.

"I'm sure it's not like Elena-san is offering a request that might cause me loss instead of profit, so don't worry about that."

"Well, that's fine if you think so. But just in case if you forget about it, you're already in red for hiring Carol for the sake of your safety, you know?"

Akira nodded and firmly replied back.

"Of course."

Although he said so, Akira was actually placing profit in a pretty low place in his priority list. Akira unconsciously looked away from Alpha, of course, Alpha noticed that he was not really prioritizing profit this time.

Honestly speaking, Alpha actually had no problem with losing money. Her real qualm was with the fact that he decided to take action knowing that it would cause him a loss, it showed just how much Elena and Sara's existence affected Akira's course of action.

But of course, if working together with Elena and Sara caused Akira a huge enough loss for him to start keeping his distance away from them, then Alpha would not have anything to complain about.

But Elena invited Akira believing that it would be a profitable request. Having a Hunter that Akira thought he was indebted to offering him a profitable request, in which he would get properly rewarded for it, Akira felt thankful and slightly delighted as it also strengthened Elena's presence in Akira's priority list.

Not too long after that, Carol showed up. When Alpha saw Carol, she thought that Carol might bring some good change to the relationship between Akira and Elena and Sara that she could look forward to.

Carol smiled at Akira and said.

"Sorry, did you wait long?"

"You're 5 minutes early, so it's all good."

Carol smiled bitterly seeing how Akira replied casually as if he was not really waiting for a girl.

"Geez, although you're meeting up with a beautiful girl like me… Can you get a bit more excited and give me a more normal reply?"

"I'm sorry, I'm bad with common sense. I'm still working on that one though. Well, just hop on."

Carol put her rucksack on the back of Akira's vehicle and sat on the driver assistant's seat. Akira then immediately turned on his vehicle and stepped on the gas.

Akira and Carol once again headed to Mihazono ruin. Although Akira did try to contact Elena and Sara while he was still within the reception area of Kugamayama city, he could not get any connection at all. Since there was nothing he could do about it, he just sent a text message saying that he hired a Hunter who knew well about Mihazono ruin before driving outside the city's reception area.

Akira was driving his vehicle toward Mihazono ruin at a high speed through the dark wasteland. At that rate, he would be able to reach Mihazono ruin before the sun rose.

On their way, Akira explained the current situation to Carol. After understanding what was going on, Carol looked a bit surprised as she said.

"I get what's going on here, but are you sure you're okay bringing me along?"

Akira then replied.

"That would be for Elena-san and Sara-san to decide. If they don't want me to bring along someone that they don't know, we'll be moving separately. And since I can't get in contact with them, we haven't decided on how to divide the reward. I have no plans to make you work more than as a guide, but if you're planning to receive a reward from someone else, you better properly do your work for the reward that you're receiving."

Carol smiled bitterly since Akira's answer was not exactly answering her question.

[Well, it's true that it's also important, but… I'm actually asking him if it's okay for him to bring another girl when he's going to meet up with a girl. Well, I guess it's true that being a Hunter has nothing to do with gender. Or is that he thinks it's better than bringing another guy with him? Either way, I'm working for Akira this time, so I guess that has nothing to do with my gender.]

Akira was the one hiring her and bringing her with him, so all the responsibilities lie on him.

As a matter of fact, that gave Carol an excuse to just dump the responsibility to Akira in case anything happened. She smiled confidently as she thought so.

“It’s fine, I’m actually used to that kind of negotiation after all.”

“I see.”

Carol smiled as if there was nothing to worry about, Akira saw that and thought that it should be fine. So then he moved to his next question.

“But still, after all that happened yesterday, I didn’t think you would accept to be my guide. We might have to go to the Seranthal building again, you know?”

“I can say the same to you too, right? After all, it seemed that you too had a hard time yesterday.”

Akira sounded as if he was trying to evade that question as he said.

“About that… Well, isn’t it fine? I’m planning to meet up with some powerful Hunters today, so I just thought that it should be fine this time.”

Although he was not lying, that was not his main reason. Moreover, it did not seem like Akira was heading to the Mihazono ruin against his will. Carol at least noticed that much. Not to mention, this time, Akira was going to meet up with other female Hunters. It made her want to make a lot of guesses, but judging from how Akira treated her yesterday, she decided to hold back her imagination.

One thing for sure, Akira was someone who did not react that much to seduction. If he was someone with a strong desire, he would not have treated Carol the way he treated her yesterday. Or at least, that was what Carol thought.

“I see. As for me, the reason why I accepted your request to be your guide is because I know I can handle the situation like yesterday as long as I properly prepare my equipment. Yesterday, I only carried equipment

designed for stealth and avoided fights. After all, it's a ruin that I know well. But I admit I was careless."

Akira looked at Carol and scanned her equipment. The augmented suit that she was using this time looked better and stronger than the one that she was using yesterday.

"Wouldn't it have been better if you used this augmented suit yesterday too?"

"This one has a pretty high consumption rate, you see. If I use it all the time, it'll definitely affect my profit. If I know that it's a relic that I can just sneakily take out, I would rather carry a lighter set of equipment like yesterday. I know it's important to make sure that you're ready for the unexpected like what happened yesterday. But if you use that as a standard every time you go out, it will cause you a loss, then it would be meaningless, right? But this time, not only did you say that you would pay me, but you also said that there's a big battle going on in the Mihazono ruin. That's why I'm bringing these equipment set this time just to be safe."

Akira was convinced by that explanation as he nodded.

"I see, it's true that it's important to watch out for that kind of expense."

Akira looked closely at Carol's equipment, to be more precise, he was looking at her augmented suit. But of course, her beautiful figure also got into his views when he did that.

When Carol saw Akira looking closely at her, she changed her pose as if she was showing her body to him. She then smiled seductively as she was watching carefully for any reaction from Akira.

"If you're interested in my body, feel free to ask about my side job and I can give you a good taste of it."

Akira was at loss for a moment since he did not understand the meaning behind Carol's words, but it did not take long for him to finally realize it. He then asked her a question.

“…Hmmm? Ah, no, that’s not what I meant. I just thought of something when I saw that augmented suit, is that augmented suit from the old-world?”

Carol’s mood turned sour since it seemed that Akira was actually not interested in her body at all.

“Nope, it’s not. Why do you think it is?”

“I just thought that it has a similar design to an old-world battle suit that I once saw in the past. But I guess I’m mistaken, huh?”

“Well, it’s true that the designer of this augmented suit used an old-world design as a base. This kind of image is important in business after all.”

“Ohh, I see.”

Akira answered back casually. But there was something in that short exchange that caught Carol’s interest, so she then asked Akira a question.

“By the way, Akira, old-world battle suit can cost way more than a common tank, you know. So where exactly did you get to see one?”

Akira was caught off guard. As far as he could remember, it was from the old-world battle suit that he saw Alpha using multiple times in the past. But of course, he could not say that to Carol.

“….I don’t really remember. Maybe it’s somewhere in the network.”

“But it sounded as if you saw a real one and not only from an image though?”

“That’s just your imagination.”

“Is that so?”

Akira thought that he was able to successfully trick Carol, but of course, Carol knew better than that.

[…I’m 100% sure he actually saw a real one. Not to mention that he’s that powerful although he’s still so young, this boy is a really mysterious boy. I guess I’ll try asking the Hunters that we’re going to meet later.]

Carol then returned her pose and looked at the wasteland that was still shrouded in darkness. Although she only met Akira yesterday, his skills, power, experience, and that conversation just now, made her curious. There was no doubt in her mind that Akira was an intriguing boy. But of course, if she just normally asked him about that, Akira would not tell her anything.

[I’m sure I can get him to tell me a lot of things on top of a bed, but unfortunately enough, he’s not interested at all.]

Carol slightly smiled when she thought about it.

Alpha then warned Akira.

“Akira, if you think that you were able to evade that question, you’re sadly mistaken, okay?”

“W-well, it’s true that it’s not like I’ve ever seen a real one though. So that excuse should be just fine.”

“It’s true that she would not know about my existence from that answer and I think she won’t be able to infer that you can connect to the old-world domain from it too. But I can guarantee you that it piqued her interests on you even more. So be sure to be careful not to say anything careless to Carol.”

“Roger that.”

Alpha smiled satisfied when she got that straight answer from Akira.

“Leaving that aside, Akira, if you’re interested in old-world battle suits, I can put it on as many times as you want. Maybe something like this?”

As she said that, Alpha’s appearance changed into an old-world battle suit.

The battle suit that Alpha used, was made of a thin material that stuck really close to her skin and thus pronouncing her body line. There were some strange openings on that battle suit where Alpha's skin could peek out. Some parts of that augmented suit had a strange-looking material that looked like it was made of metal or rubber. A type of glowing material was mixed into its fabric which made it look as if Alpha was surrounded by a wall of light.

The battle suit seemed like it was not designed for functionality in the first place. Moreover, unless the one wearing it was already used to old-world design, they would need extra courage to even just put that battle suit on. But even so, it was obvious that it was far more advanced than the current battle suit. After all, it was an old-world battle suit.

Alpha was smiling seductively in that battle suit, which made her look even more charming than being naked. Moreover, her beautiful face and charming figure were the results of reconstructing Akira's preference. Although it was true that Akira had already gotten used to all kinds of attires that Alpha would use, it was all only under certain situations like when they were in the middle of a fight or a training session. In those situations, Akira had built up a level of resistance to the point that he was able to ignore it. But on the other hand, it also meant that unless he was in those particular situations, Akira would still show some level of reaction.

Akira looked away from Alpha who was on the opposite side of where Carol was sitting. His face turned stiff to hide his embarrassment as he returned his eyes to the front. He sounded irritated as he said.

"…Can you at least do that later?"

"Sure, it's for later then."

Alpha was smiling mischievously watching how Akira reacted to her attire.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 113, The Changed Mihazono Ruin

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Akira and Carol reached Mihazono ruin right before the sunrise. There were a lot of vehicles parked near the Hunter Office. Among the normal vehicles brought by the Hunters, there were some trailers owned by weapon merchants, portable clinics, and trailers used by Hunter gangs as their temporary base.

A traffic officer stopped Akira and said.

“All the parking lots near the Hunter Office branch are controlled under strict regulation to make sure there is smooth traffic. I don’t mind if you are just passing through to the ruin, but make sure not to block the way when you do that. And, if you want to park your vehicles around here, make sure that it won’t block the way too. Do note that the parking lot inside is already full.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll at least tell you this. If you’re here to hunt for relics, you might want to pick another day.”

“I know. I can tell just by looking at it.”

Akira gazed at the Mihazono ruin when he said that.

The loud banging sounds of battles kept resounding endlessly from the Mihazono ruin. There were some places where smoke was rising into the sky. Flashes of lights illuminated the ruin that was veiled in darkness. The Mihazono ruin showed a completely different side compared to the one that Akira saw yesterday.

“I guess you’re right about that.”

That officer then left Akira.

Carol suddenly asked Akira a question.

“So then, what are we going to do from here?”

“We’ll meet up with Elena’s team. The real problem is how exactly are we going to find them… It’s not like we can just dive into the ruin looking for them without any clues.”

Akira made a stern look, he then asked Alpha.

“Alpha, we’re in Mihazono ruin now. So like, we still can’t contact Elena-san?”

Alpha shook her head.

“No, I still can’t establish any connection at all. There is still no reply from your last message and I still can’t connect your call. If I have to make a guess, it might be because there are too many signals around this area that interferes with the communication line. Or maybe, the comm relay in this area is already turned off.”

It might be a waste of time if they just waited for Elena and Sara without doing anything. After a bit of thinking, Akira then turned to Carol.

“Carol. If you were looking for a certain Hunter inside this ruin, where would you go?”

“Look for them? Can’t you call them or something?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you have any clues where they might be?”

“Sadly, no.”

“Have you decided where to meet beforehand?”

“I could not manage to contact them even before we made the decision.”

Carol looked at Akira with a slightly pitiful gaze.

“….Akira, are you one of those people who tend to decide on a whim and move first, and then think later?”

“…Yes.”

Akira replied back with a feeble voice, he sounded a bit ashamed after Carol pointed that out. Alpha, who was next to him, tried her best to hold back her laughter.

Carol looked a bit disappointed as she looked at Akira, she thought that she might have overestimated his strength. But she then decided to just forget about it and started to think for an answer to his question. She was hired as a guide by Akira, so she thought that she should at least do her job properly.

“Looking for other Hunters, huh? Do you have anything that can uniquely identify both of your positions? For example, if both of you know each other’s information terminal’s identification code, you can set the local connection to the maximum hoping you can find each other. And if the other Hunter notices you, then, he can also set the local connection to the maximum and make a call with your information terminal. But, there’s a good chance that the mechanical monsters roaming around this ruin would notice your location if you do that though. And since you’ll need to set your information terminal to constantly broadcast signals, it’ll be pretty dangerous.”

Some of the monsters in the wasteland could detect the signals broadcasted by the information equipment often carried by the Hunters. They could use that to ascertain the locations of those Hunters and attack them. The only reason why Hunters could send signals across the wasteland was because they were using the comm relays buried under the ground. After a lot of trials and errors, they managed to create comm relays that could withstand monsters' attacks.

Unlike in the middle of the wasteland, the ruins had denser monster distribution and fewer escape routes. Thus, broadcasting strong signals inside a ruin was extremely dangerous. The only people who would do that would be fatally wounded Hunters who could not get out from the ruin using their own power. But even so, they would only do that for a few seconds just to let the rescue squads know their location.

Akira tried to imagine what would happen if he were to do that. Inside his mind, he imagined that he would end up in a situation where he was surrounded by a huge number of monsters. And then, unfortunately enough, Elena tried to contact him in that situation which caused some of those monsters to head toward her location. Although he might be able to break the encirclement and force his way to Elena's location, it did not change the fact that he would still drag Elena and Sara into more trouble.

Akira then cut his imagination there.

"That would be too dangerous so, let's not do that."

Carol then made another suggestion.

"In that case, your only choice will be either diving into the ruin and looking for them or wait for them near the Hunter Office branch. If they are taking that emergency SOS request, I'm sure they'll be back here after rescuing some Hunters."

As Akira was still thinking about which option to take, Alpha suddenly pointed her finger toward the parking lot near the Hunter Office branch.

"Akira, look over there."

When Akira looked toward the direction that Alpha pointed, he saw a vehicle that looked somehow familiar to him. It was the APC that Shikarabe used when they were hunting for bounty monsters.

“So? What do you want me to do with that?”

Akira thought that it was the same APC model owned by other Hunters. But Alpha knew for a fact that it was Shikarabe’s APC.

“That’s Shikarabe’s APC. If Shikarabe is inside it, how about you try contacting him? He might be able to help you find Elena and Sara.”

Akira pulled out his information terminal and called Shikarabe through the local connection. The call almost immediately got through.

“Shikarabe’s speaking. Is this you, Akira? You’re calling me through a local connection though, does that mean that you’re somewhere nearby?”

“Yeah. I’m just outside the parking lot near the Hunter Office branch. I want to contact Elena-san and Sara-san but I can’t get any connection at all. Do you know where they might be?”

Shikarabe sounded exasperated as he said.

“That’s what you get from using a cheap connection line. Wait a sec, I’ll connect you.”

After Akira waited for a bit, Elena’s voice suddenly came out from his information terminal that was connected to Shikarabe.

“It’s Elena. Can you tell me where you are now?”

Akira then explained where he was to Elena. He then told her that he hired Carol, the fact that he tried to contact her but couldn’t, and that he had sent a message to her.

“…Wait for a sec there… Ahh, yep, I got your message. I see, it seems that the signal priority change also affected the connection line that I’m using, huh. So, basically, you want to meet up with us first, right?”

“Yes, please.”

“Alright then. In that case, come here together with Shikarabe. We’re actually working in a team with Shikarabe right now. If you follow him, you’ll be able to meet up with us. We can talk in more detail later after we group up. We’ll be waiting for you.”

“Understood.”

Shikarabe’s voice suddenly interjected.

“Akira. If you’re going to follow me, come and help me carry the wounded Hunters. I’m parking my APC in the parking lot near the Hunter Office. You already know my location, right?”

“Yep, no problem. Will be there in a sec.”

Akira then turned his vehicle back on and drove off.

Shikarabe’s APC was parked in the parking lot near the Hunter Office. The backdoor of the APC suddenly opened up and wounded Hunters came out from the inside of that APC.

Shikarabe could be seen carrying out corpse bags filled with dead Hunters. The corpse bags were not closed completely as it let the face of the Hunter inside exposed. The faces peeking out from the corpse bags clearly showed that no life remained in them.

When Shikarabe saw Akira’s vehicle approaching the APC, he then pointed toward the inside of the APC.

“You’re finally here. Help me carry out the wounded too. There’s no need to help those who can still walk on their own.”

Akira stepped inside the APC and looked around, there were numerous corpse-filled bags exposing the ‘deceased’ face. Meanwhile, some in the corner, which were folded, empty.

Akira then asked Shikarabe a question.

“…Fatally wounded Hunters, huh. For now, I just need to carry those who can’t walk on their own, right?”

“Yeah, just leave it to the doctors to check if they’re already dead or not. We don’t know if any of them have suspended-state devices installed inside their body. So, just assume that they’re all just fatally wounded until the doctors say otherwise.”

Akira remembered the scene of a clinic in the Kuzusuhara city that he visited in the past. That time, the doctor in that clinic, Yatsubayashi, treated even Hunters who had lost half of their body as only badly wounded.

If Hunters with such a level of injury could still be saved, there was no way an amateur like him could judge the wounded Hunters in the APC. Thus, Akira just thought all of those Hunters inside the corpse bags as only fatally wounded, and started carrying them out of the APC.

Carol, who was behind Akira, followed him inside the APC. When Shikarabe saw her, he suddenly shouted in surprise.

“….Geh?!”

Carol smiled mischievously at Shikarabe.

“Geez, you don’t need to be that mean, you know. Long time no see by the way.”

Shikarabe, who just realized that he was flustered, tried to contain himself.

“W-well, right… So, why are you here?”

“Akira hired me. Don’t just stand there, you have bags to carry, right?”

Carol then left Shikarabe and followed Akira. Shikarabe kept staring at Carol as she walked toward his APC.

“Why in the world would Akira hire that woman?”

Shikarabe was still a little bit bothered by that as he returned back to his job carrying the corpse bags.

Akira and Shikarabe then handed over the fatally wounded Hunters to the Hunter Office, they had no reason to worry about how many of those Hunters were still alive. Even if some of them were already dead, the Hunter Office would handle them appropriately. One thing for sure, the Hunter Office would handle them better than just leaving them inside the ruin.

Shikarabe then closed the back door of his APC and looked at Akira with a gaze saying that he wanted to say something to Akira. It was not like it was a gaze of hatred or anything, but it was undeniable that he did not appreciate the fact that Akira brought Carol together with him. His gaze was saying that he honestly did not know what to do about the current situation. Although Akira did not notice it, there was also a trace of pity in Shikarabe's gaze.

Akira looked at Shikarabe and tilted his head in confusion, he then asked Carol.

"Carol, you know him?"

"Yep, well, a lot of things happened between us."

"I see."

Akira at least understood that Carol and Shikarabe were acquaintances. In reality, Akira was actually trying to find a roundabout way to ask her the reason why Shikarabe looked at her with such a gaze.

But Carol only gave a short answer that only confirmed that they knew each other. Akira had no idea if she did not catch his real intention or that she just simply did not want to talk about it, or it was simply that she did not care about it.

Akira then shifted his gaze to Shikarabe, his gaze was asking for an explanation from Shikarabe.

But Shikarabe did not answer that gaze as he said.

“Let’s go then, just follow me.”

Shikarabe still looked a bit bothered as he returned to the driver seat.

Akira returned back to his vehicle and sat on the driver seat, he then glanced at Carol to check her reaction. It did not seem like he did something that worsened her mood. As in matter of fact, it looked like she was a bit amused by the situation.

Akira prioritized grouping up with Elena for now, as he just shelved that subject and followed Shikarabe from behind.

Akira, Shikarabe, and Carol went inside Mihazono ruin. There were countless wreckages of dead mechanical monsters scattered around. There were almost no biological monsters inside the Mihazono ruin, so all the blood splatters should be from the Hunters. After all, other than those monsters, there were also Hunter corpses scattered here and there. But those corpses were already crushed into an unrecognizable mush, the monsters might have trampled over them, or it might be because of the Hunters who drove over them.

The further they proceeded into the ruin, the more prominent the leftover of fights surrounded them. They were pretty standing out although it was still dark. It would have given a more solemn scene once the sun was up.

Alpha then told Akira that there was a monster approaching.

“Akira, there’s a monster from behind. It’s a vehicle with a long-range rifle, they came from the alleys.”

“Roger that.”

Akira let go of the wheel and moved to the backside of his vehicle. He then took off the CWH anti-material rifle fixed on his vehicle and aimed it to the back. There were no monsters visible.

Carol saw Akira move to the back and aim his rifle. But she could not see any monsters in that direction and her information-gathering device did not pick up any signal from that direction either. She thought that it might be because the vehicle's information gathering device caught something, but when she checked it, it also did not show such a signal.

So Carol decided to ask Akira if he detected any monsters.

"Akira, is there-"

Akira suddenly pulled the trigger. Gunshot echoed through the ruin and cut Carol's question short, the bullet from the muzzle flew straight and hit a monster that just came out from behind an alley. It pierced through the monster's torso and threw its body into the air. It then landed and rolled over on the ground with half of its body destroyed.

Alpha then warned Akira.

"A24 type, huh. Akira, be careful."

"You don't even need to tell me, but is it okay if I ask you why did you warn me?"

"That monster is designed as a city guard, it's built exactly as the blueprint. Thus, it's a well-equipped monster."

"How much is it different to the other mechanical monsters that I faced until now?"

"If you compare it to those cannon insects that you fought in the past, those cannon insects are like failed product made by putting a big cannon on a faulty blueprint while the A24 type is a well designed and well-equipped monster."

Akira inadvertently twitched.

"That's a huge difference."

“That’s why, keep your guard up. Don’t put your guard down just because its size is relatively small or because it looks like the other monsters that you’ve fought before.”

“Roger that.”

Akira decided to be extra careful this time as he took another aim. His vision was enhanced by Alpha’s support, thanks to that, he was able to clearly see and aim at the monsters that were hiding in the alleys just with his naked eyes. It even showed the time left until those monsters jumped out from the alleys and the points that he should aim at.

Akira followed Alpha’s instruction and shot down the A24-type that appeared from the alleys one by one. He was able to deal enough damage to render them unable to fight by leaving them half-destroyed or even completely destroyed in one shot. Thus, adding more wreckages on the road. It did not take that long for Akira to take care of all the monsters there alone.

Alpha smiled and praised Akira.

“Good job. You did well.”

But Akira, who thought that there was no way he could hit those shots without Alpha’s support, smiled bitterly and said.

“I don’t have any complaints at all, all of my shots hit their targets… I wonder how long it would take for me to be able to do something like this on my own. I guess I still have a long way to go, huh.”

“Don’t worry. You’re actually getting better. Your aim barely needs any readjustment from me compared to before. I’m sure it won’t take long before you can accurately snipe from this range.”

“I see, it’s good to hear that all my training are not for vain.”

Akira then remembered that Carol was about to say something back then. So he lowered his rifle and turned to her.

“Sorry, what were you saying again?”

Carol smiled, she was hiding the shock inside her heart as she praised Akira.

“It’s nothing. You’re really good at shooting. I didn’t know you’re that good from yesterday.”

“Well, yesterday we’re in a situation where all my shots would hit no matter where I aimed after all.”

Akira remembered when he was trapped inside a Seranthal building as it was getting flooded by monsters, his face twitched a bit when he remembered that.

Carol smiled amusedly and asked Akira a question.

“That rifle, can I take a look at it?”

“Sure.”

Akira then handed over his rifle to Carol.

Carol checked the rifle that she just received. From the outside, it looked like she was just lightly checking out that rifle, but deep inside, she was actually closely checking that rifle including its production code, its parts, and its condition.

Carol then aimed Akira’s CWH anti-material rifle to the back. When she gazed through the aiming device, she could see nothing but the usual information from a normal aiming device. There was nothing in particular that surprised her, she confirmed that it was just a normal rifle.

Carol then handed it back to Akira, she smiled at him and said.

“Thank you, that’s a pretty good rifle. I wonder if I can aim as good as you as long as I use this rifle.”

“I think anyone would be able to do that with enough training.”

Akira did not really think it through when he said that. He only thought that if he would be able to do that with enough training, then everyone should be able to do that with enough training too.

Carol then casually replied.

“Really?”

“Yes, but of course it’s assuming that you use an augmented suit that would help you suppress the kickback. Even I too have no plans to use this rifle without an augmented suit. I’m pretty sure that my hand would get ripped off if I do that.”

Carol then smugly pointed at her augmented suit.

“If that’s the case, then there’s nothing to worry about. Look here, my augmented suit is actually a pretty advanced one after all.”

“Well, it does look like an advanced augmented suit.”

Akira looked at Carol’s augmented suit and nodded.

Akira put his CWH anti-material rifle back and returned to the driver seat. Carol also returned back to her seat.

Carol pretended to look casual as she kept observing Akira.

[That CWH anti-material rifle, is a normal rifle, and judging by the information shown in its aiming device, its aiming device works in tandem with his information-gathering device… It has no auto-aim function. Or at least, it’s true that it has no support function that would allow him to normally hit all of his shots at the same time those monsters show themselves from behind the alley even when he is shooting from above a moving vehicle.]

There were some rifles sold in the eastern district equipped with auto-aim function to help with aiming. Some of them could automatically move when the user pulled the trigger, to ensure that the trajectory of the bullet would hit the target. Or, they would not allow the user to shoot a bullet even

if they pulled the trigger when the calculated trajectory of the target will not hit a monster.

Carol thought that Akira's accurate sniping was due to the auto-aim function of his rifle. But it did not seem to be the case. It might as well be due to the feature installed in his augmented suit, but Carol judged that it was also unlikely since such a feature usually relied a lot on the feature installed on the rifle and she should be able to find such a device installed on that rifle if that was the case.

[In the first place, how did Akira detect those monsters? I bet he already noticed the monsters even before he let go of the wheel. Although I have a pretty good information-gathering device, I didn't get any signals at all even when he started taking aim. What would he do if the one jumping out from the alleys were not monsters and instead Hunters on bikes? Or did he know for sure that they were monsters? Did he notice that they were monsters with long-range weapons, that's why he decided that he needed to take them out as soon as possible? Since when did he know that…? Was it right from the start?]

Detecting enemies was a crucial skill for Hunters. If they could discover and ascertain enemies' positions quickly, they would be able to evade having to fight them, and even if they decided to fight those monsters, that would give them the upper hand.

Carol was a Hunter who preferred to evade fighting as much as possible, because of that, she invested a lot in her detection ability. The reason why she tried to seduce Akira yesterday was because she knew for sure there were no monsters around.

Carol was pretty surprised by Akira's ability to shoot, but more than that, she was very surprised by his ability to detect enemies.

When Carol praised Akira's shooting skill and asked if she could borrow his rifle, she was actually checking for his reaction. She was testing if Akira would boast about his skill or his rifle. She was wondering whether he would credit that to his own skill, or to his hard training, or to the features installed on his rife.

There were many Hunters who would boast about their talent, or skills that they acquired after working hard, or their advanced rifle. After all, it made them feel good talking about their hard work or their advanced equipment with other people. Carol was actually an expert in coaxing those kinds of people into leaking information.

If Akira was one of those people, Carol might be able to harvest information from him. But Akira did not show such a sign at all. It did not seem like he wanted to boast about his equipment or his skill at all.

Carol then reflected. She admitted that Akira's shooting skill was amazing, but that was all there was to it. In contrast to that, his detection skill was way above amazing.

If it was only amazing, she could just use that to praise and coax Akira into telling her any valuable information that he had. But that was not the case when it was more than amazing. In that case, she needed to make sure how he would react to other people who tried to dig for the secrets behind such an ability first. After all, there were people who would go as far as to kill the other people who knew their secret to make sure that it would not leak.

If that person was a man, Carol could wait until they were close enough before asking for such information, or she could wait for a situation where she could casually ask that question without any risks. Of course, she would use her side-job to help her do that.

Carol had the skill and experience to cajole someone. She was confident that she could fight them back in a situation where both of them were naked and unarmed. No matter whether they were a cyborg or a person with enhanced bodies, Carol was confident she could accurately judge their strength after sleeping with them at least once.

Carol then sighed.

[…So basically, I can't use that method on Akira… Although it's true that he's still just a boy, strangely enough, he has less interest in women compared to the other boys of his age.]

Carol glanced at Akira. The current Akira did not show any childish vibe of a young boy that he showed yesterday when he was watching the scene outside with sparkling eyes from inside a flying drone. It could even be said that he gave off the intimidating aura of a skilled Hunter, he even looked somehow more mature.

[Well, it would be troublesome if he won't grow more mature in the more important aspects. Although, honestly, he doesn't seem to be that young to be more interested in food rather than in women. I wonder if it's because he's only interested in a certain type of women.]

Carol's guess was correct. Akira's interest was completely biased. No matter whether it was a man or a woman, the only thing that interested him was whether they were enemies or not. For now, he saw Carol as not any enemy. For him, that fact took precedence over gender and appearance.

Carol did not doubt her charm at all. After all, she was really proud of it and she had used that charm on a lot of people in the past. But that was exactly why her pride was hurt when Akira showed almost no reaction at all when she tried to use her charm on him.

She sounded a bit irritated as she suddenly said to Akira.

"Akira, what kind of girl do you like?"

Akira was a bit confused by that sudden question as he asked back.

"What's with that sudden question?"

"It's because it seemed you're not interested at all when I invited you. Normally, that won't happen to most of the people that I Invite, you know?"

"Isn't that because you only invite those people who seem to be likely to accept your invitation? I'm sure those people with girlfriend won't readily take on your invitation."

"Well, for the sake of common sense, I won't try inviting people with girlfriends though. But of course, it's a different story if they invite me first.

Because of that, I won’t take responsibility if they break up with their girlfriend.”

Carol smiled when she said that.

Akira looked a bit disgusted as he said.

“You are quite a bad individual.”

“It just shows how charming I am. That’s why I’m interested in your fetishes since you won’t even consider my invitation.”

“Stop calling it a fetish. But well, even if you ask me so…”

Akira himself knew that he was very unfamiliar with that kind of talk. When he was giving a ‘hmm’ sound, Alpha then suddenly pointed at herself with full of confidence. Akira immediately stopped pondering.

“Nope. I don’t even have the slightest idea.”

“But you should, right? After all, you have a perfect example here.”

Alpha could freely change her appearance, and so she chose to match her appearance with Akira’s preference. So in short, her current outlook was the mirror image of his taste. Akira knew that very well as he replied.

“Yep, no idea at all.”

“You’re pretty stubborn, aren’t you? If you have anything to complain about my appearance, there’s no need to hold back, you can just tell me. I can change my appearance as much as you want, you know.”

Alpha smiled mischievously.

Carol frowned as she looked curiously at Akira.

“…You don’t seem to genuinely have no idea at all though?”

“Well, that’s because I feel like a certain someone would try to match it if I say it here.”

“Ahhh, I see… You won’t tell me because you don’t want to, huh? But just so you know, I’m someone who can keep a secret.”

“Still, no.”

“I see, that’s just too bad. I wonder if it’s because it’s something that you can’t say out loud. But if that’s the case, I can help you overwrite it if you would take my invitation even if it’s only once, you know. I would recommend you do that if you have a rather peculiar fetish.”

“Like I said, stop making it sound as if I have a weird fetish.”

Akira looked so annoyed while Carol was smiling amusedly.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 114, Carol's Negotiation

Index

Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

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Akira, Carol, and Shikarabe eventually arrived at the meeting site. It was one of the many destroyed buildings inside the Mihazono ruin, but in front of that particular destroyed building, Elena and Sara were standing guard.

Inside that building, there were Hunters who Elena and Sara had saved. They were the remaining Hunters who could not fit in Shikarabe's APC in one go. The reason why Shikarabe limited the number of people inside his APC was not based on the open space inside the APC, but it was more based on the number of unknown armed people that he was okay putting inside the same APC with him. So it was more of a matter of his personal safety.

As for the reason why Elena and Sara stayed behind with the remaining Hunters, it was simply because those Hunters desperately asked them to since they were afraid of getting abandoned. After a lot of consideration, Elena decided to take their request. It was because of her good nature and how pitiful those Hunters were. Furthermore, there was also the detail of her contract, and most importantly, it was because she knew that she could kill them all in case they tried to do anything funny.

Those Hunters sighed in relief when they spotted Shikarabe's APC. When Shikarabe parked his APC near them and opened the back door, those Hunters immediately flooded the back door together with the relics that they carried with them.

Shikarabe then stepped off from his APC and asked Elena.

"Anyone need the corpse bag?"

"Nope. There's no fatally wounded Hunters and no dead bodies."

"I see. If they're really okay, they should just barricade themselves somewhere. Because of them, I had to go back and forth with no escort, you know."

Shikarabe looked annoyed, to which Elena responded with a light smile as she said.

"They're paying with their money in exchange for safety and we're receiving that money for our reward. That's all there's to it."

"Well, you're right about that."

Akira and Carol also stepped off from Akira's vehicle and headed towards Elena and Shikarabe. Although Elena and Sara were planning to welcome Akira with a smile, their expression turned conflicted when they saw the girl next to Akira. It was because Carol was using an augmented suit with a design that was obviously inviting the opposite sex.

Elena and Sara did hear beforehand from Akira that he would be bringing another Hunter. But they did not expect him to bring Carol, who was obviously flaunting her charm there.

Akira then greeted Elena and Sara.

"Elena-san, Sara-san, I'll be in your care for today… Is that okay? Although I do want to join the team, if me bringing another Hunter is a bad thing, I don't mind moving as a different team. And even if we decide to work as one team, I'll take responsibility if Carol causes any trouble."

Elena looked a bit troubled as she said.

“Uhhh, wait for a sec, let me calm down for a bit… Alright then.”

Elena knew that she must be making all kinds of faces there. She then told herself that she needed to make decisions with a cool head since she was the team leader.

She then looked at Carol, she tried to throw away her preconception, or at least, put it aside for now, as she spoke to Carol.

“I’m Elena, and this is Sara, my best friend.”

Sara awkwardly smiled, it was obvious that she could not completely move on from the shock.

“I’m Sara, nice to meet you.”

Carol smiled and introduced herself.

“I’m Carol. Nice to meet you.”

Elena then continued as Carol was still smiling.

“We’re working as a team of 3 with Shikarabe at the moment. The team leader is me, so if you want to negotiate about the reward, you should talk to me.”

“Okay, but please talk about that with Akira. I’m working under Akira at the moment so I’ll prioritize his orders too.”

“Well, now that we’ve gathered here, I would like to take command of the whole team though.”

“It’s not like we’re already formally formed a team, right? Moreover, you haven’t even made a deal with Akira on how to share the reward, right? So I think it’s only normal for me to prioritize on the contract that I’ve made beforehand.”

“Well, you have a point there.”

Elena and Carol were smiling at each other. For some reason, Akira could feel the awkward mood around them. But he could not tell the reason why.

Elena then smiled at Akira and took a step closer.

“So then, Akira, let’s start the negotiation.”

“O-Okay, please be gentle.”

Akira could feel some kind of pressure coming from Elena as he was questioning if she was standing a little too close.

Shikarabe then interjected.

“If it seems that it’ll take some time… No, even if it does not, how about we go back first? Whichever the case, we need to transport these people after all. No matter whether we’ll move as one team or not, I’m sure both of you need to talk it out first before deciding. So, both of you can finish that in the middle of our way back. Moreover, it’s easier to handle the contract process if we do it near the Hunter Office.”

Elena then calmed herself one more time.

“…You’re right. Okay then, Akira, you’re okay with that too, right?”

“Yeah.”

Akira then returned to his vehicle with Carol. Elena and Sara watched Akira’s back with a conflicted face.

They then once again drove through the ruin. Akira asked Alpha a question while driving the vehicle.

“Alpha, what do you think was that?”

Alpha casually replied.

“I don’t think there’s any need for you to worry about that. Even for Elena, there are times when she has a bad mood and it’s normal that there are people who just don’t go along well with her.”

“Hmmm, I guess you’re right about that.”

“I’m sure both Elena and Carol could differentiate between their jobs and their personal feelings. I’m sure it’s just that because they were thinking about what to do with the contract. Don’t worry. I think it won’t go as far as causing a fight. Moreover, it seems that you really trust them, so I bet you have no plans to complain about the details of the contract and the way they’ll share the reward. But for Carol, it’s their first time meeting each other. So to get a better deal and to make sure not to get swindled, it’s nothing strange for them to show off a little bit of intimidation like that.”

Akira was fully convinced by Alpha’s explanation.

“I guess you’re right about that too.”

Let’s say there was a certain girl who liked a certain boy, although it was not as far as love, that girl pretty much liked that boy and she thought that boy also liked her back to some extent. But when they planned to meet up, that boy brought another girl, who was a beauty in a seducing attire. Akira was still so socially inept that he could not imagine what those girls whom he was going to meet might feel.

There were a lot of reasons why Akira was socially inept. He grew up in an environment that did not give him the chance to learn such a skill, he originally already had a distorted character, and to top it off, although Alpha knew it, she always came up with another excuse to convince Akira while keeping him unaware about that aforementioned fact. Of course, Alpha did that intentionally, after all, it was better for her if Akira stayed that way.

Alpha looked and smiled at Akira who was successfully tricked by her words.

They were driving through the Mihazono ruin toward the Hunter Office branch. Midway, they were communicating with each other using the local

connection of their information terminal to talk about the details of the request and the current situation.

The request that Elena and Sara took was an emergency request. Basically, it was a request to save the Hunters who could not get out from the ruin on their own. The request did not come from those Hunters, it came from the individual insurance companies that those Hunters were registered in.

There were all kinds of insurance for the Hunters. Most of them offered a subsidy in case those Hunters got badly injured. But in order to get their injuries treated, they needed to return back alive first. Thus, in order for them to return back alive, the insurance companies offered all kinds of service in case those Hunters went into a ruin and could not come back on their own. When those Hunters sent a request or when they were out of reach for a certain period of time, the insurance company contracted to those Hunters would dispatch a squad to help them.

Some of the insurance companies had their own special squad to send, but most of the insurance companies usually either made a request to the private security companies that they were contracted with to send their squads or sent that request to the Hunters. And that was how Elena and Sara received that emergency request.

By getting such an insurance before going out to the ruins, in case if they got attacked by monsters and could not return back on their own, these Hunters could just barricade themselves somewhere while waiting for a rescue squad. Or at least, in the worst-case scenario, the rescue squad would retrieve their bodies instead of leaving them in the wasteland.

Akira then asked a simple question to Elena through his information terminal.

“So basically, this request is made by the insurance company for Drankam and then Drankam distributed it to us, am I correct?”

Elena refuted that.

“No, this one comes from a completely different source. It seems that there was a lot of things going on with Drankam, including that similar request that Drankam made yesterday. But our request this time has nothing to do with them.”

Akira sounded a little confused.

“Is that so? But if that’s the case, it’s weird that Shikarabe is with you…”

Shikarabe sounded a little irritated as he said.

“It’s true that Drankam also dispatched rescue squads and it’s true that they sent me a request to be added to that squad. But I declined it and decided to join Elena and Sara’s team that has nothing to do with Drankam management.”

“Why did you do that?”

Shikarabe shouted as if he was venting his anger.

“The leader of Drankam’s rescue squad is Katsuya. Even if it’s on name only, I refuse to work under him.”

“…I-I see.”

Akira flinched back a bit when he heard Shikarabe shout. Shikarabe did not stop there and even started complaining. But after a few minutes of complaining, Carol suddenly interjected and stopped him.

“Shikarabe, you should stop here. If you want someone to listen to your problems, I can do that for you after we finish our job here. I can even give you extra services depending on how much money you would pay me, you know?”

“No thanks. I have no plans to spend my hard-earned money on you.”

“Isn’t it fine? I’ll listen to your problem, so you can at least buy me some drinks.”

“I know that you won’t stop there, that’s why I’m not taking your offer. Elena, you can continue.”

Shikarabe honestly declined Carol’s invitation and asked Elena to continue with her explanation.

Elena scanned through the rescue list that she received from the company which issued the emergency request. As the leader of the team, Elena carefully checked all the requests on that list and picked some of them. She chose the rescue requests based on the location of the targets, the number of the people, and the amount of reward for those requests. They then would head there to retrieve those Hunters, it did not matter whether they were dead or alive, and then transported them over to the Hunter Office.

As for the rewards, Shikarabe would receive 50% of the share, then Elena and Sara would receive the remaining 50%. The reason why Shikarabe received a bigger share was simply because he was the one who prepared the APC to transport the Hunters that they rescued. After all, an APC was the perfect vehicle to safely carry those fatally wounded Hunters who could not move on their own while they were still alive. Because of that Elena and Sara had nothing to complain about their reward distribution.

And now with Akira joining in, they would distribute the reward evenly between Shikarabe, Elena and Sara, and Akira and Carol. To be more precise, Shikarabe, Elena, and Akira would each receive 33% of the reward. And then from there, Elena would share her reward with Sara as well as Akira would share his with Carol.

Carol and Elena then discussed the details on how they were going to distribute the reward, their discussion went very smoothly since none of them were trying to impose any difficult conditions on each other. As for Akira, he had no interest in how to distribute the reward, thus, he just accepted Elena’s suggestion. But since Carol was working under Akira, she started negotiating with Elena, it turned into a rather in-depth negotiation.

The thing that surprised Akira was the fact that not only Carol, but even Elena too, was against the fact that he just accepted Elena’s suggestion as it

was. When they were done with the long and difficult negotiation, they already arrived at the Hunter Office parking lot.

After they disembarked the Hunters inside the APC and handed them over to the Hunter Office, they moved their vehicle to make sure that they would not block the way. After they stepped off from their vehicles, Shikarabe suggested taking a short break.

“Let’s take a break here, one hour should be enough. I’ll check the APC and replenish ammo reserve during the break, not to mention, some of the APC’s armour is already stripped off too.”

Elena replied.

“Sure. Let’s meet up again here after 1 hour. I’ll also short-list the requests during the break.”

It was the perfect time since Elena and Sara were also thinking of taking a short break too. When Shikarabe was about to head back to his APC, Carol followed him.

“Shikarabe, I’ll help too.”

“…No need, go back and leave me alone.”

Shikarabe answered back almost immediately. Carol smiled and just ignored it.

“It’s fine, isn’t it? Akira, let’s meet again after 1 hour.”

Carol lightly waved at Akira, she then put her hands on Shikarabe’s shoulders and pushed him into the APC together with her.

Akira just watched Shikarabe and Carol go inside the APC. But he then noticed a gaze behind him, it was from Elena and Sara.

When Akira turned around, Elena smiled at him while Sara’s smile was a little bitter.

Elena then said to Akira while still smiling.

“Well, I guess we should go too.”

Elena’s smile was gentle. Together with her beautiful face, that smile was a very lovely smile. But for some reason, Akira could feel some kind of pressure coming from that smile.

Akira flusteredly shifted his gaze to Sara. Sara smiled at him, it was an amused but mischievous smile.

“At least let’s go somewhere else where we can relax first, are you okay with that?”

“S-sure.”

Akira nodded. After all, he had no reason to decline, and even if he had, it might be not easy to decline that offer.

Even in that situation, there were a lot of merchants gathered near the border between Mihazono ruin and the wasteland. As a matter of fact, a lot of those merchants came to Mihazono ruin exactly because of the current situation in the Mihazono ruin, it was the time where they could reap a lot of profits.

Shikarabe brought his APC into one of the supply depots to replenish his ammo reserve and put up new armour plating for his APC. Carol was also there, helping him.

The supply depots were shops that specialized in selling consumables for the Hunters. And with a huge ongoing battle in the Mihazono ruin, it was only to be expected that the Hunters would consume a lot of expendable goods. So some merchants who sold their goods in the ruins decided to sell expendable goods rather than spending efforts trying to sell rifles that might not sell that well in the ruins.

Shikarabe was replenishing his ammo reserve and the armour tile of the APC in one of those supply depots. He just needed to leave those ammo and

armour tiles near the supply entrance on the side of the APC and the APC would automatically load them. It was a very convenient function that saved Shikarabe from the troublesome work. Sadly enough, Akira's vehicle was not equipped with such a function.

Carol, who was together with Shikarabe, gathered quite a lot of attention. Not only she already had a beautiful figure, to top it off, she was also wearing a sexy old-world design augmented suit. It was only to be expected for her to attract a lot of attention from the opposite sex.

But it would not be the case if they went further to the east, Carol's attire would only attract a small amount of attention. It was because the people to the east were already used to old-world relics. A lot of people would say that Carol's attire was rather too extreme, but that was only the opinion of the people who were from around Kugamayama city. And if she would go to the eastern frontline, no one would even be bothered by her attire. After all, just like in the case of Akira, who had gotten used to old-world design from Alpha's attire, the Hunters in the eastern frontline had also already gotten used to old-world design.

Some Hunters did try to strike a conversation with Carol, but she refused all of them saying that she was busy. They left her alone after she gave them her contact number. Those Hunters were lucky at the moment since they were able to meet a beautiful Hunter. But it was a different story whether that luck would last after that. After all, meeting Carol might be the trigger that would destroy their lives or cause them any other kinds of troubles down the road.

Shikarabe frowned, he looked like he had given up. His stiff expression was not caused by annoyance, it was more because he was trying to control his facial expression. After all, he knew very well about Carol's nature.

Shikarabe went inside his APC and operated the control device of the APC to execute an automatic system check. He then lightly leaned over while confirming the result. That was when Carol slowly approached him from behind as not to alert him and slowly hugged him. She wrapped her arms over his neck.

Shikarabe stopped operating the control device and asked Carol.

“What are you doing?”

Carol whispered in Shikarabe’s ear.

“We’re done with replenishing the supply, so like, you have time for a small talk now, right?”

“I still have to do the check-up, so don’t bother me.”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? You just need to wait for the check-up to finish, right? So it’s not like you have anything to do right now.”

There were leftover blood and the scent of dead bodies left inside the APC. Although the ventilation was on, that scent might as well stick there as long as no one did a thorough cleaning and even an anti-deodorant could only go as far as to reduce the scent, not completely erasing it.

But even so, with Carol getting close enough, the sweet fragrance from her body wafted to Shikarabe. It was a sweet fragrance that would easily melt logic and reasoning.

Shikarabe irritatedly said.

“…What do you want to talk about? Let me tell you this beforehand though, I’m not the same person that you know in the past…”

Carol sported a charming smile and said seductively.

“Oh my, I did pay my price though. It’s so rude to say that as if I forced you to give me that information. Even you did enjoy it, right?”

Carol’s hand crawled to Shikarabe’s chest.

“Moreover, it’s not like I’m planning to extract information about Drankam this time. I know that it seems there are a lot of things going on inside Drankam lately, but I have no plans to talk about that this time. So don’t worry, okay?”

Shikarabe lowered his guard. Carol did not let that go as she faintly smiled.

“What is it then?”

“I want to ask about Akira, you know him well, right?”

“Well, it’s true that I know him, but it’s not like we’re close or anything. We have only done Hunter jobs together twice in the past. Unfortunately for you, that’s all I know.”

“That Hunter job, did you do it together out of coincidence? Or did you invite him to that job? If it’s the latter, we’re talking about you here, so I’m sure you did some investigation about him.”

Shikarabe did not say anything back, it was because he wanted to avoid leaking out any information to Carol. But Carol immediately saw through that as she smiled seductively.

“So, it’s the latter, huh. In that case, there are a lot of things that you can tell me about Akira, right? Don’t worry, I’ll properly pay you. I don’t mind paying you with money, but if you want, we can finish a quick one before the break is over, you know?”

Carol then twirled around and stood in front of Shikarabe, her body blocking his views.

Shikarabe shifted his gaze to the monitor showing the result from the APC automatic check-up. The result said that the system was all green, with that, he lost his chance to refuse her saying that he had to fix the error.

He then turned to Carol again, she was smiling seductively and charmingly. It was a hard smile to resist for those who had a taste of her.

Carol operated the APC control device, the back door of the APC slowly moved until it was fully closed.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 115, Trigger Happy Boy

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Akira just followed Elena and Sara as they took him into a cafeteria near the Hunter Office branch.

They parked their vehicles outside the parking lot. Although it was outside the parking lot, some guards would patrol and guard the area when asked, like how they guarded the parking lot. And just as the case with the parking lot, the patrol was also charged based on duration.

Elena and Sara sat facing Akira, all of them ordered some light meals before taking their seats.

Both Elena and Sara were smiling, but there was something strange behind their smiles. Sara seemed to be bothered by Akira's new friend while Elena was looking at him as if she was inquiring about something that she did not know.

Elena then spoke.

"So, what is your relationship with Carol…? It doesn't have any deeper meaning than that, okay? It's just that we'll be working with her after this, so I want to know more about her, that's all."

For some reason, Elena was making excuses for her question. She herself did not know for sure why she did that.

Akira then answered Elena's question.

"Well, even if you ask me, there's nothing special, we're just fellow Hunters. And about her, uhh, I just met her not too long ago. So, honestly, I don't really know much about her. But it seems that Carol and Shikarabe know each other, so it might be better to ask that question to Shikarabe."

Elena did not get any valuable information about Carol and it did not seem that Akira was trying to hide anything. Sara then asked a question.

"In that case, is it okay if we ask you some questions? You can just tell us if you don't want to answer. But if you do answer, please don't lie since it might cause trouble later. Is that okay?"

"Okay."

"Thank you. So, first, since when did you know Carol?"

"I just met her yesterday."

Elena frowned and asked.

"…Yesterday?"

"Yes."

Elena and Sara seemed rather troubled. Sara seemed hesitant as she said

"…Akira. If that's true, then it means that you're bringing someone you don't really know, someone you just met yesterday, to work on this request, you know…?"

"Ahh… That… Does sound… That's indeed the case, huh."

Akira sounded disheartened as he replied back with broken words. Elena and Sara looked even more troubled than before.

Although it was already obvious, working together with other Hunters in a team meant that they had to really trust each other. After all, there were cases where they had to leave their back or might even trust their lives on the hand of their teammates. That was the exact reason why the arbitrator agencies with a good reputation would prosper.

Akira once told Elena and Sara that he once got attacked by other Hunters in the same team, that was why Elena and Sara thought he well understood the importance of that problem. Even this situation was also caused by the fact that he could not contact Elena and Sara earlier, it was still a rather unexpected situation for them.

Akira sounded apologetic as he said to Elena.

“…I’m really sorry. As I thought, is it better if we don’t move in the same team this time?”

Hearing how Akira suddenly sounded so apologetic, Elena flusteredly replied.

“Uhh, you don’t have to go that far. We’re also happy to get more helping hands and if she’s really a troublesome Hunter, Shikarabe would have stopped us too. Ahhh, and also, as you said, you’ll take responsibility if Carol tries to do anything funny, right?”

Akira replied back with a serious face.

“Of course, I’m the one who brought her here after all.”

Sara suddenly asked Akira a question.

“When you say you’ll take responsibility, how far are you actually planning to go?”

Akira thought for a bit before answering back.

“Well, let’s see. If it’s a problem that can be solved with money, I’ll pay. If it’s an amount that I can pay right away, I’ll immediately pay. If it’s not,

either I pay it in form of a request or I'll ask to wait until I get enough money."

After listening to Akira's answer, Elena and Sara thought for a bit. Although he straightforwardly replied with a serious face, it somehow felt lacking. Akira did not say any exact amount of money that he was willing to pay, even if he said that he would pay no matter how much he would be asked, it was not like he would pay just any amount. There were many people who would take back what they said when an exact amount of money was specified, moreover, there were many problems in this world that could not be solved with money.

Sara then continued.

"Is that all?"

"If Carol causes anything that puts Elena-san or Sara-san in danger, I'll take the responsibility and kill her myself."

Akira replied casually, there was no trace of resolve or determination in his words. But that was the exact reason why Elena and Sara knew that he was being serious.

Akira was the type of person who could just casually kill others. He did not fear or hate or feel excited about that act, he did not need faith or determination or resolve to execute the act, he did not hesitate, he did not let himself get carried away by it, he did not let it affect him at all, he was simply absolutely impartial on the act of murder. In the eyes of people from the inner wall, his openness toward murder was extremely unethical and abnormal.

Of course, Elena and Sara would also kill people when needed. As a matter of fact, they did murder people a few times in the past. But in the end, it was because those people tried to attack them, it was for the sake of self-defense.

Elena made a serious face as she said to Akira.

“Alright, but is it okay if we ask you for one thing? If she does put us in danger, can you just leave how to deal with it to us? If it’s possible, I want to avoid any kind of in-fighting. We have a reputation to uphold too after all.”

“I understand, please feel free to ask for me if I’m needed.”

Akira replied without showing any hesitation.

Sara was staring at Akira, she seemed a bit troubled as she thought.

[It’s true that it’s rather weird for Akira to bring with him someone that he just met yesterday, but more than that, I’m more interested about that reason… I don’t want to believe it, but don’t tell me he…]

Sara then asked Akira a question to confirm her guess.

“So then, what exactly happened yesterday? Can you please tell us everything including when you met Carol?”

“Okay.”

Akira then told Elena and Sara all the information that he thought they would want to know. He told them that he went to Mihazono ruin yesterday, he then entered the Seranthal building and met Carol inside that building. All of a sudden they were swarmed by monsters and somehow was able to escape the building. He then lost his relics for protecting Carol. But she compensated for his lost relics and treated him for lunch. Of course, Akira did not say anything about Carol’s side job.

“The information that Carol had really helped us escape the Seranthal building. Moreover, with someone who knows well about this ruin, I thought that we would be able to safely complete today’s request. That’s why I hired Carol.”

“That must have been hard. To be more precise, is it okay if I ask you how you escaped Seranthal building?”

When Sara asked that question, Akira hesitated to answer back.

“Uhh… Do I really need to answer that question no matter what?”

“I won’t force you. If you don’t want to answer, you can just say it.”

“Uhhh, that’s not exactly the problem. Although I came to know about it because of an emergency, it’s information that I paid money to get, so…”

Elena sounded convinced as she said.

“Ahhh, I see, so basically we just need to pay you money, right?”

Akira flusteredly shook his head and said.

“Ah no, I don’t really mind telling Elena-san and Sara-san for free, but… I was just thinking if it’s okay for me as a Hunter to give such information for free to another Hunter. What should I do about such information normally? Since I already paid for it, I wonder if it’s okay if I spread it around without permission. What do you think, Elena-san?”

Elena was taken aback when Akira asked her that question. It was because she did not expect him to be that careful about dealing with such information. After all, in the past, he did share information about an unexplored ruin to her and Sara casually. Sara was also surprised by that unexpected change.

Elena thought that it was a good thing if Akira had changed because he had that talk with her. She then happily told him about her own opinion.

“It depends, if you agreed beforehand not to spread it when you bought it, then, you shouldn’t spread it. But if you don’t have such an agreement, I think it’s okay for you to tell other people. With that being said, you still need to have some kind of implicit agreement with the person from whom you got that information. After all, there’s a chance that person will sell the next piece of information at a higher price since the last one spread widely among the Hunters. For that one, well, you can only learn that from experience.”

“…This is really difficult.”

“If you don’t know what to decide, it’s safer if you keep it a secret. There’s no need to leak it out just because we asked you. Which in that case, is it okay if we ask you how much it cost and whether it was worth paying that money?”

“It was 5,000,000 Aurum and I think it was worth that money. Although, I can only say that since I was able to escape the building thanks to that information.”

Sara pondered, “hmm…”

“5,000,000 Aurum, huh. If you say it is really worth that much, I have no plans to refute it but… Just because you were able to escape danger because of that, I don’t think that’s enough of a reason to blow it out of the proportion that much. Are you sure it was really worth it?”

“Yes. Although, in the end, I didn’t pay even a single Aurum for that information since I accepted her request to escort her back. Either way, I was in a situation where it was bad if Carol got killed, so the timing was good too.”

Elena smiled confidently.

“You’re pretty good.”

Sara also smiled, she seemed a bit surprised. Akira blushed as he got flustered.

After Elena and Sara asked a lot of questions about Carol to Akira, they decided that there should be no problem adding Carol to the team. Although she did ask Akira to escort her to escape the Seranthal building, it was not like she did not fight at all. Moreover, it seemed that she did change her equipment into something more suitable for fighting this time. And in the first place, if Shikarabe thought that she would only slow them down, he would have rejected that suggestion.

It might be true that Carol knew a lot of things about Mihazono ruin, or at least, it was true that she had information that helped Akira to survive and

return back alive from the ruin. Thus, Akira thought that it would be helpful to have her around if they wanted to explore Mihazono ruin.

Sara felt relieved that her fear was proven to be wrong, she then apologetically said to Akira.

“Let me apologize to you first, I’m really sorry. To be honest, I thought that Carol seduced you and is tricking you right now. I just thought that… Well, I’m sorry to put it this way, I just thought that Carol is cajoling and manipulating you for her own benefit, you see.”

Elena also apologized to Akira.

“…Sorry, I actually thought so too. You did tell us that you basically work alone, remember? That’s why I was so surprised when you suddenly brought with you another Hunter, it just somehow bothered me.”

At first, Akira did not understand what exactly Elena and Sara were talking about. He just sat there with a confused face. But after a few seconds, he realized what it was all about. It was true that it would not be strange for Elena and Sara to think like that after seeing Carol’s attire. He then smiled bitterly and said.

“Uhmm, I’m sorry to make you worry. But it’s alright. I think I’m the type who doesn’t get baited by something like that.”

Sara smiled mischievously.

“Is that so? Then I might as well test you.”

Sara stood up from her seat and moved next to Akira. She then leaned her face close to his while smiling and staring at him.

Akira obviously started getting flustered.

“W-whoah, Sara-san?!”

Sara kept staring at Akira’s face while moving her face closer and closer. The closer she got, the more flustered Akira became.

Akira then turned to Elena, asking for help. But Elena just smiled bitterly at him and said.

“Looking at you now, I don’t think you’re okay at all though? Maybe you want to get used to it while you still have the chance?”

Sara then pulled back her face. Akira sighed, he was still blushing as he said.

“…Give me a break!”

Sara smiled teasingly at Akira.

“If you want to get used to it, I can help you, you know?”

“No, thanks!”

“Oh my, you don’t like it?”

“…Please just stop.”

Akira replied back in a strong tone to hide his embarrassment. Looking at that him, Elena and Sara just smiled.

Alpha was also smiling, although, deep inside, she was a little bit disappointed since it seemed that bringing Carol along did not disrupt Akira’s relationship with Elena and Sara.

Akira, Elena, and Sara went back to their meeting point. Not too long after that, Shikarabe’s APC arrived right on time. Shikarabe and Carol then stepped out from the APC. Shikarabe seemed a little irritated while Carol looked somehow in a good mood.

According to Elena’s experience as a Hunter, she thought that Shikarabe was the type of person who preferred to come early and wait for other people to arrive, but since this time he came just right on time, Elena found that weird and asked them a question.

“You’re cutting it pretty close this time, was there any problem?”

Carol smiled and answered Elena’s question.

“Nope, we did replenish the supply and had a good rest before coming here.”

Shikarabe did not say anything. The other Hunters there directed their gazes on Shikarabe. He noticed that tried to calm himself down before opening his mouth.

“…There’s no problem with the resupply. If I have to say anything, well, the cost of the armour plating and the ammo was more expensive than I expected.”

“If the negotiation took most of your time and you didn’t get much rest, I don’t mind waiting for some more time for you to get adequate rest.”

When Elena said that, Carol immediately replied in place of Shikarabe.

“It’s fine, we did have a good rest after all, right? Or was that not enough?”

Carol glanced at Shikarabe. Shikarabe averted his gaze from her as he said.

“…It’s alright. So then, how about you guys? Did something happen?”

“Nothing. By the way, I’ve picked our next request.”

“In that case, let’s get working. With the sun already up, it’s much safer than during the night. With that being said, there should be more people competing for the rescue requests now though.”

“You’re right, everyone, let’s go.”

They then returned back to their respective vehicles. Carol returned back to Akira’s vehicle and sat on the driver assistance’s seat. She then looked at Akira in a good mood. Since it was not like she was glaring at him, Akira just ignored her and started his vehicle.

They were heading to the building in the Mihazono ruin where the Hunters who sent the rescue request barricaded themselves inside. Elena and Sara

were in the front, Shikarabe's APC in the middle, and finally Akira and Carol in the rear. They intentionally took a wide road as they drove through the ruin. After all, there was a good chance that if they picked a narrow road, it might be blocked by the wreckages of the dead mechanical monsters.

But even on that wide road, there were wreckages of huge mechanical monsters that almost blocked the whole road. There was a huge tank-like object with multiple legs lying on the side of the road with countless holes on its torsos; around it, there were pieces of humanoid weapons that must have fought that huge tank assorted with huge empty ammo cartridges scattered around.

Akira frowned when he saw that.

"Say, Alpha, correct me if I'm wrong, but these huge monsters don't really roam the city district of Mihazono ruin normally, right?"

Alpha who was sitting on Akira's vehicle's door with her leg extended outside the vehicle turned her face to Akira.

"Well, that's indeed the case, at least until yesterday. If this is a normal thing in Mihazono ruin, I wouldn't have suggested you to come here."

"Thought so… What exactly happened for it to change all of a sudden?"

"I'm sure it's because the security drones increased their alert level for some reason. Judging by the fact that they're dispatching the A24-type drones inside the city district, I'm sure it's not just for simply driving out common robbers."

"Common robbers…? Ahh, the Hunters, huh. Well, if it's about them, there is always a lot of Hunters coming to this ruin every day after all."

It was as Akira said, a lot of Hunters came to the Mihazono ruin every day, at least, enough for the Hunter Office to decide to build a branch in that ruin. Honestly speaking, he thought that must not be the reason, but Alpha suddenly said something that refuted his guess.

“There’s a limit for everything. There might be a limit set on the drones, which proactively try to reduce the number of Hunters inside the city ruin. That limit must have surpassed yesterday, so there are a ton more.”

“I see. But if that’s really the case, I really hope it would have gotten triggered when I’m not in this ruin though.”

Alpha just smiled at Akira who was complaining.

“I think it’s nothing strange considering your bad luck. Honestly speaking, I’ve already given up resisting your back luck. So I suggest that you give up too, okay?”

Akira smiled bitterly at Alpha. He could see Seranthal building in the direction that he was looking, it was a huge building that stuck out from the rest even from afar.

Carol noticed Akira was smiling bitterly in the direction where the Seranthal building was. She then smiled lightly and said to him.

“It was really rough yesterday, wasn’t it? I wonder if that was some kind of omen that the ruin would turn like this?”

“That might be true. Carol, you know a lot about this Mihazono ruin, right? Do you have any guess?”

“Unfortunately, I have no guess at all.”

“So we really have no idea of what’s going on, huh? Well, that’s not surprising at all though.”

“There must be some Hunters who came here to investigate the reason behind the current situation. Those Hunters who usually sell maps often explore the inner part of the ruin too. If they can find out the reason behind the current situation and sell that information to the Hunter Office, I bet it can fetch them at least 10,000,000,000 Aurum.”

Akira was flabbergasted when he heard that amount of money.

“I-Is it really worth that much?”

Akira himself knew that it would be a pretty expensive piece of information, but he did not expect it to be such a huge amount.

Carol, who noticed Akira’s expression, just smiled teasingly at him and said.

“Oh my, it’s a piece of information related to the safety of the Mihazono ruin, you know? At the moment, there’s still no news saying that the monsters from inside the Mihazono ruin are going out into the wasteland, but there’s no guarantee that it’ll stay that way. When a lot of monsters flood out from the ruin, it might greatly affect the monster distribution in the wasteland. Because of that, some routes that are originally considered as safe might turn dangerous, and if that kills the trading flow of the city, it’ll also give a huge hit to the companies that depend on those trading routes. So with that information, the Hunter Office can take an initiative to prevent such situations from happening. After all, just think about it, even if you pay 100 Hunters 100,000,000 Aurum each to take out all the monsters that are flooding out from the ruin, do you think they can really accomplish that?”

“Nope, I don’t think they can.”

“Yep, so that’s basically the gist of it. Moreover, leaving that aside, if that amount of money is enough to keep the ruin that’s already under the control of the Hunter Office to the point that they built a branch office in that ruin, then I bet they would have no complaint paying that amount of money. Depending on the quality of the information and how the negotiation goes, it might even cost even more than that.”

Akira sounded amazed as he said.

“So there’s something like that too, huh. I never thought that kind of work is also available for Hunters. Wait, does that mean that you’re actually that kind of Hunter?”

After all, there were not many Hunters who knew about the invisible transport drones in the landing pads of some buildings in the Mihazono ruin. So, if Carol was one of those Hunters who worked as a map dealer, then it was not surprising for her to know about those transport drones.

Carol then smiled smugly and answered Akira's question.

"My main Hunter job is hunting relics and selling them while I also work as an information dealer on the side."

Akira looked at Carol with wide eyes, he seemed to be honestly amazed by her. A question suddenly popped up inside his brain.

"…Wait for a sec, you did tell me that some Hunters intentionally opened only a few doors in between floors in the Seranthal building so that the other Hunters who explore that building would easily get lost inside that building. And it was done in order to increase the price of the map of the Seranthal building, right?"

"Oh, yep, I did tell you that… But no, I don't do something like that."

"Really?"

"Yep."

Carol answered back with a bright smile, Akira could not read whether she was lying or not.

Elena's voice suddenly came out from Akira's information terminal.

"Akira, we'll enter an area where a lot of monsters are roaming around. We'll basically try to pierce through the swarm, so make sure not to get left behind, okay? I'll leave the monsters on the flank to you. If it's too hard for you, we'll temporarily withdraw. So make sure to contact us beforehand, okay?"

"Understood. Elena-san and Sara-san too, if things get dicey, please immediately withdraw."

Elena then replied as if she was provoking Akira.

“Oh my, if we immediately head back because of something like that, we won’t be able to get money from the request that we could originally complete, you know? Are you okay with that?”

If they got too reckless, they would get killed and that would be the end of them. But if they were too careful, they would not be able to get money and would eventually die out of starvation. Being Hunters meant that they should be able to decide whether they could get enough money to justify the danger that they would face. Elena thought that Akira’s words just now sounded too pessimistic, that was why she tried to lightly poke at Akira.

“I don’t mind. Elena-san and Sara-san’s safety is much more important than money.”

Akira answered back in a straight-forward and casual manner. There were a few seconds of silence before Elena replied.

“…Don’t worry, I have no plans to die here. So I don’t think I would make a blunder about that. Thank you for worrying about us, good luck, Akira.”

Right at the end of her sentence, Elena sounded like she was in a good mood. After that, she cut the call.

“Alpha, can I leave the driving to you again?”

“Sure, there’s no need to be in such a hurry, I’ll tell you if I detect any monsters.”

“There’s nothing to lose for getting myself ready sooner.”

It seemed that Akira got a bit excited, Alpha thought that it might be because of that reply from Elena just now. She then suddenly pointed her finger.

“Akira, use the A4WM grenade-launcher this time. I want to gather some data first while we still have the chance.”

“Roger that.”

Akira returned to the back seat and grabbed his A4WM grenade-launcher, it was a gun that he had not tried to shoot even once before. Although he was planning to get used to it by testing it in the wasteland, he did not expect that he would have to use it right on the next day after he bought it. At the moment, he was in a rather safe situation, so it was a good chance for him to get used to his new gun.

Carol looked around and asked Akira a question.

“Akira, did you find a monster somewhere?”

“Nope, my information-gathering device didn’t detect anything in particular. How about yours?”

“There’s nothing in mine too. Geez, stop scaring me like that.”

Carol thought that Akira somehow found monsters that she could not detect. Although with the sun up right now, it was far easier to check the surroundings compared to when it was during the night, there were a lot of rubbles and wreckage around where monsters could hide.

“Even if you tell me so. It’s not like I’m trying to scare you or anything. You also heard that order from Elena-san just now, right? I’m just getting myself ready for the upcoming battle.”

“Well, it’s fine if that’s the case. By the way, since I left it to you to take care of all of the monsters last time, can you leave the next ones to me? I’ll show you that I’m different from yesterday.”

Carol was smiling smugly filled with confidence when she said that.

The front-most vehicle in that group was Elena and Sara’s, Elena was driving the vehicle. She was also the one operating the vehicle’s information-gathering device and its machine gun. As for Sara, who was sitting next to Elena, her job was to take care of the monsters that the machine gun could not take out.

There, Sara was looking in Elena's direction while smiling teasingly at her. Elena's face turned stern for a bit as she said.

"…What?"

Sara then amusedly said.

"It's nothing. It's just that it seemed Akira is worried about us."

Elena's stern face was basically her trying to hide her embarrassment. She fully understood that Sara knew that too but if she did not do that, she knew that Sara would start teasing her. That was why she could not relax her expression.

In their team, Elena was the one who was responsible for negotiation. Because of that, she learned a lot of skills used for negotiating such as probing for ulterior motives, reading behind words, detecting lies, digging for real motives, or judging for cost and benefit of a deal.

Elena had the experience of negotiating with problematic and dangerous people like those who were so prideful that they had no ulterior motives at all, or those who would casually make a bad suggestion with a smile, or those people who tried to strike a deal while also planning to betray that deal right from the start. Thanks to that, Elena was able to more or less read the real intention behind people's words.

And of course, Akira's words were not an exception. Elena unconsciously tried to probe what was behind those words and she came up with the conclusion that Akira was not lying at all, he was not trying to act cool nor trying to woo her. He was only simply stating his real feelings. Elena knew that very well as she tried to look even deeper for the reason why he said that.

If it was true that Akira felt Elena and Sara's safety was more important than money, then he would not complain at all and just follow her if she told the team to withdraw right now, which at that point, Akira would not get even a single Aurum. Or more like, he would be already in red since he had to pay for Carol's reward. If he would really do that, it meant that Akira

did not take Elena’s invitation to work on this request for the sake of money.

To top it off, Akira knew that Mihazono ruin was a dangerous ruin. As a matter of fact, he even went as far as hiring Carol as insurance, so there should be no mistaking it.

Which then, the real question would be why Akira would accept Elena and Sara’s invitation. At least, it was not for money. Although he still needed money, it was not his first priority. In order for Elena to pull out the answer, she did not immediately reply to Akira back there.

Akira was there to help out Elena and Sara. He knew that Mihazono ruin, or at least the Seranthal building, was a very dangerous place. As such, he was there to make sure that Elena and Sara would not need to go through what he had gotten through. He must have decided to accept their invitation thinking that if he was around, he would be able to at least be of some help to Elena and Sara.

If Elena and Sara were able to contact Akira, it might have been the end of it once she told him the details of their current situation. He might have decided to come exactly because he could not contact Elena and Sara back then.

Having a young Hunter who just started working not too long ago worrying about her, it could even be said that she was having a Hunter below her worrying about her. So there was no way Elena did not feel anything about it. Even she had her pride as a Hunter.

But even so, Elena was delighted that Akira came there to help her, she was so happy that it betrayed her pride as a Hunter. As a matter of fact, Akira had been saving her life and Sara’s life ever since their first meeting. If Akira had not saved her back then, she would have been raped and then killed. So, it might be too late for her to be saying anything about her pride as a Hunter.

The feeling that Akira and Elena had for each other was basically a form of love for close friends and as fellow Hunters, they felt indebted to each other

for saving each other's life. Or at least, for Elena, she did not look at Akira as a target for her romantic feeling. She thought that should also be the case for Akira too. After all, their age gap was simply too big.

But even so, when someone whom she considered as a close friend came to help her disregarding profit and loss and even risked his life to help her, it was only natural for her to feel happy. There was nothing strange about it.

Elena herself knew that she was in a very good mood, while on the other hand, she also understood very well that getting too happy would affect her ability to judge and make decisions. That was why she was making a stern face. Moreover, with the person who knew her inner feeling sitting next to her while smiling at her, Elena could not afford to relax her expression.

She then warned Sara with a serious face.

"If you know that he's worried about us, you should be extra careful too. Don't forget that you got saved by him back then in Yonozuka station ruin, okay? I'm sure you're not thinking of making him save you again, right?"

Sara replied in a serious voice.

"I know. I've vowed that I won't ever make the same mistake again."

"That's good then."

Right at that moment, the sensor installed in their vehicle suddenly showed a reaction, it was showing that there were a lot of monsters ahead. Elena checked the display of the radar while saying to Sara.

"…It would take forever to kill all of them. We'll try to force our way through. Sara, are you ready?"

"Ready when you are."

Elena accelerated her vehicle to open up a road for the other vehicles behind her. The machine gun on their vehicle and Sara's gun started shooting almost at the same time as they were laying waste to the monsters ahead of them.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 116, Rescue Operation

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Akira's vehicle suddenly accelerated. Due to that sudden acceleration, the inertia hit Akira and Carol. Akira was able to keep his balance thanks to Alpha's support via his augmented suit, while Carol was also able to keep her balance thanks to her own skill and her augmented suit.

Carol kept her eyes on Akira to watch his movements closely, right at that time, Alpha explained the current situation to Akira.

"Akira, there are multiple monsters ahead and Elena is planning to just focus their firepower on the front to create a way forward. Since it'll leave the other monsters on the left and right untouched, be extra careful. If those monsters decide to attack us, they would surround us from both sides, so let's take them out first before they can do that."

"Roger that."

Akira then said to Carol.

"Carol, we have incoming monsters."

"Got it, just leave it to me."

Carol had already got some incoming enemy signals in her information-gathering device. She then smiled and readied her gun. Suddenly Akira said to her.

“I’ll be joining in too.”

Carol sounded a little bit offended as she replied.

“You really don’t trust me, do you? It’ll be fine, just leave it to me.”

“That’s not the problem. Or more like, I hired you as a guide in the first place. Of course, I’m thankful if you help me in fighting the monsters too, but there’s no need for you to proactively fight them.”

Carol just giggled and said.

“Oh my, I won’t be able to ask for a reward from you if I don’t contribute during the fight too. Now that I’m here, I don’t plan to be just content with my reward as a guide alone, you know.”

Akira smiled back.

“Got it. That also means if I can take out most of the monsters alone, then I only need to give you a small reward, right?”

“No worry, I’ll squeeze you dry.”

Akira and Carol smiled confidently at each other.

At the moment, the road inside the Mihazono ruin was filled with mechanical monsters. Their sizes and strength greatly varied from one and another. Elena’s team blazed through that ocean of monsters focusing their firepower only on the monsters blocking their way forward, while some of the monsters were slammed by their vehicles before getting crushed under the wheels. If they slowed down even for a bit, there was a good chance that the monsters would immediately swarm them. Thus, they had no other choice but to keep pushing forward even if it meant that it would damage their vehicles.

The destroyed mechanical monsters left piles of metallic wreckages on the road. It would be really hard to drive through that road if they were using a normal vehicle. But of course, it did not pose any problem at all against the powerful vehicles designed to be used in the wasteland. As long as the pile of wreckages did not fully block the road, their vehicles should be able to forcefully push the way forward.

For those mechanical monsters, no matter how much the other monsters were destroyed, and no matter how damaged their bodies were, that would not stop them from fighting back, at most, it would only change their priority target. But if the Hunters got away far enough from them, those mechanical monsters would stop attacking and instead search for other targets closer to them. And of course, for those mechanical monsters with high mobility, they might as well decide to keep pursuing the Hunters in that case.

Some of the monsters that they passed were monsters with a lot of legs equipped with wheels. Those wheels suddenly spun so fast that it raised a cloud of dust before it started accelerating to chase for Akira and the other Hunters.

Of course, compared to Elena and Sara who were carving their way forward, those wheeled monsters were way faster since they were chasing Akira through an already cleared road. It would be incredibly difficult to lose them without shooting at them.

Akira aimed his A4WM automatic grenade-launcher at the enemies behind. He took an aim through the aiming device and was about to pull the trigger.

But before he could completely pull the trigger, the monster that he was aiming at suddenly got blown away and rolled over the ground. The impact left a big dent on that monster’s body as it then collided with another monster and exploded.

Every time a gunshot echoed from beside Akira, one of those strong looking monsters would get blown away and then destroyed. It was Carol’s handiwork, she was carrying 2 pistols, one in each hand. The size of the pistol was huge compared to its grip, it seemed to be completely impossible

to carry those pistols with one hand. But even so, Carol was carrying one in each of her hands as she kept shooting at 2 different targets. Amazingly enough, all of her shots hit their targets.

Akira looked at Carol, he was obviously surprised. Carol turned to him and smiled confidently before returning back to shooting.

Alpha seemed pretty amazed as she said.

“I see, she’s indeed as strong as she said she is.”

“You can say that again. I need to hurry up or all of my shares will be taken.”

“Carol is taking out all the monsters starting from the ones in the front, so you should focus on the monsters on the behind.”

“Roger that.”

Akira’s target priorities that were shown in hin enhanced vision suddenly changed. He followed that indicator and took another aim before pulling the trigger. But the launched grenade did not hit his target, instead, it landed just in front of his target, but even so, that was enough to blow away the monsters around the impact area.

Akira frowned.

“A miss, huh. I guess I need to aim a little bit higher.”

“As long as I don’t have enough data for shooting with that A4WM automatic grenade-launcher, I can’t give you my usual support. And since you’re shooting out grenades, at least keep in mind not to damage your own vehicle, okay?”

“Got it, just stop me if it gets dangerous.”

Akira took another aim and pulled the trigger. Some of the launched grenades landed just right next to his target, some of them landed on the wall of the buildings on the side of the road, some of them hit the other

monsters that he was not targeting at. Although it was to be expected that it would be really difficult to aim accurately from a moving vehicle, Akira's accuracy there was even worse.

"I just can't get any clean hit."

"It's not surprising at all. It's your first time using that gun after all. But even if you miss, it at least slows down the monsters chasing us, so just keep on shooting."

"I guess that's just how important training is, huh."

Although Akira's accuracy was pretty bad, it at least would not cause any trouble thanks to Carol. His accuracy was completely different compared to when he was using CWH anti-material rifle, it was as if he was a completely different person, and he kept shooting with that accuracy until the situation calmed down.

__*__*__*__

Inside a certain building among all the buildings in the Mihazono ruin city district, a lot of Hunters barricaded themselves.

Those Hunters gathered in a hall near the entrance and they barricaded the pathways leading to other rooms. As for the entrance to that building, they used their own vehicles to block the way in. Their vehicles were already destroyed by the monsters, so those vehicles were basically useless except as a barricade, preventing monsters from flooding in.

The building itself was pretty strong, thanks to that, as long as the entrance was properly barricaded, the building itself could handle the monsters' attacks. Though due to the exact same reason it was also difficult for those Hunters to escape from that room.

The Hunters in that building were taking turns to rest, but even so, all of them looked exhausted. The monsters were roaming just outside of the buildings and some of them already filled the halls and the rooms inside that building. If they were unlucky, the barricade might get destroyed,

which would result in those monsters immediately flooding into the room. They were not in a situation where they could relax at all. With no means to get extra ammo or medicines, their life span only extended as far as how long their current ammo reserve would hold.

No one there tried to escape from that building. Some of them did try but they were quickly killed by the monsters that were roaming just outside the building.

Their only hope was for someone to come and rescue them, but of course, chances for that was really slim.

One of the Hunters who were on guard duty asked one of his friends who was operating his information terminal while taking a rest.

"…Is there any change?"

The other guy did not say anything, he just shook his head.

"… I see."

The Hunter who asked that question actually knew well enough that there was no need to ask that question. After all, if there was a change in their situation, the other guy would definitely show some reaction. The only reason why he ended up asking that question even though he understood that very well was simply because he was still clinging to that slim hope.

The Hunters had been barricading themselves inside that building for half a day. They went inside right before the sunset, at that time, they already lost half of their team members.

They were attacked when they were running into that building, they were attacked when they were putting up barricades, some of them got fatally wounded during those fights, and some of them tried to get out from that building only to get killed. Some of them died during the battle, some of them died while screaming in pain and agony, some of them went on a suicidal rampage before getting killed. The leftover survivors were already

in extreme stress. Even if one of them decided to try to get out of that building, they already had no strength nor spirit to stop that person.

But even so, they still had some hopes to return back alive from there. After all, after they completely exhausted their options, they decided to send an emergency SOS request. So someone might come to rescue them. If they kept buying more time, someone might eventually come to rescue them.

All the surviving Hunters did not have the courage nor spirit to try challenging the monsters outside. As their ammo reserve got shaved bit by bit, their already exhausted morale clinging to that slim hope of returning back alive also got shaved bit by bit. They could only cling on that slim hope while waiting, every single second felt so long to the point that it could drive them mad.

That guy kept his eyes on the information terminal in front of him. Suddenly a call came into his information terminal, he immediately pulled himself together and checked his information terminal to reconfirm if it was only an illusion since something like that had happened multiple times before.

There was a sudden call through a local connection. That man then checked the location of where that call came from and started laughing. He had no idea whether it was a dream or an illusion or reality. But, whichever the case, his next action was the same. He operated his information terminal to accept that call, and when he did that, a girl’s voice could be heard from his information terminal.

“We’re Hunters that accepted the SOS request from Alhain insurance company. Are you Cocolens-san?”

That guy was flabbergasted. Although he heard everything that girl said very well, he was in no position to process that information.

“Can you hear me? This call should be connected to Cocolens-san who is in contract with Alhain insurance company though? Or am I mistaken?”

That guy started panicking. He was still so confused if this was only a dream or an illusion.

“Are you wounded to the point that you can’t talk? In that case, can you give the information terminal to someone that we can talk with? I want to confirm the situation over there.”

That guy could not say anything back, the girl then continued.

“Can you hear me? If you can’t talk and there’s no one around, can you at least send me a text message? Or is it that this information terminal is set so that it automatically accepts local calls even if the owner is already dead? Hello? Anyone there?”

That guy finally snapped back to reality. He realized that the girl’s voice was real. Right in the next moment, that guy used all his leftover voice to scream at his information terminal.

“Save us!!!”

That guy’s voice echoed through the hall, all the Hunters in that hall turned to that guy.

The girl’s voice from that guy’s information terminal was Elena’s voice, she was heading to where that guy was.

Elena and her team kept pushing their way forward inside the Mihazono ruin. The road was wide but it was filled with monsters. If they stopped even for a few seconds to fight those monsters, they would be surrounded by so many wreckages from the monsters that they would kill to the point that they would not be able to drive their vehicles through those wreckages.

Akira and Carol were shooting at the small tank monsters chasing them from behind as if they were competing against each other. Number wise, Carol was leading Akira. But even so, there were still enough monsters for Akira to be able to shoot enough grenades to get a good feel of his A4WM automatic grenade-launcher, so Alpha should have gotten enough data during that battle.

Akira suddenly complained.

“Aren’t there too many of them? There’s just no end to these monsters.”

Carol answered Akira’s question.

“It seems that the Hunter Office is building up a defense line around its branch using their influence. So that might be the reason why the monster density outside the defense line is so high.”

“So, the Hunter Office is doing something like that, huh? How did you get a hold of such information?”

“I heard from Shikarabe when we were taking a break. It seems that during the night, they dispatched humanoid weapons inside the predetermined line of defense to clean up all of those powerful autonomous weapons behind the line of defense. It seems that they’re focusing on barricading the main road and securing the safety around the area at the moment. I also heard that the squads dispatched by Drankam are participating in that operation.”

Akira remembered the wreckage of a huge monster surrounded by humanoid soldiers that he saw not too long ago. That might be the leftover from the battle last night. But at the moment, they were outside the defense line, thus they might encounter that huge monster somewhere.

Akira looked a bit annoyed.

“Is the situation outside the defense line like this no matter where we go? If that’s the case, I can see why no one would accept that SOS request without taking any insurance. I really get it now why people are taking insurance.”

“I’m sure those insurance companies did not expect something like this to happen either, so I bet they’re losing a lot of money at the moment.”

Akira was having a conversation with Carol while fighting the monsters. Compared to yesterday when they had to fight a swarm of monsters inside the Seranthal building, their current situation was way better. Normal Hunters would be desperately fighting the monsters in that situation, it

really showed just how strong Carol and Akira were compared to those common Hunters.

Elena then gave orders to everyone in the team through the information terminal.

“Our rescue target this time has barricaded himself inside a building 200 metre ahead. Shikarabe, stop your APC in front of the entrance to that building and carry everyone into your APC regardless if they are still alive or not. The rest of the team will hold the entrance and keep the monsters away from the entrance. Since the rescue target is staying in a room close to the entrance, there’s no need to go too deep into the building or securing the escape route leading to the entrance of the building.”

Shikarabe then asked a question to Elena.

“How much time do I have for getting them into my APC?”

“10 minutes. If some of them are taking too long, just leave them behind.”

“Is there any priority target?”

“That would be a Hunter by the name of Cocolens, he’s contracted with the insurance company that issued this request. In case if he’s already dead, bring his body into the APC, or at least, bring back his information terminal. And in case we can’t find his information terminal, you have 5 minutes to look for it, just give it up if you can’t find it in 5 minutes.”

“Can’t you get in contact with him?”

“Well, at least I was able to get in contact with someone who claimed to be that person just now.”

Shikarabe sounded obviously annoyed.

“…Got it. Roger that.”

Shikarabe had been working as a Hunter for a long time, thus he knew what Elena was talking about, that was also the case for Carol and Sara too. The

only person who did not understand what was going on there was Akira.

Elena then asked Akira.

“Akira, are you okay over there? It seems that there are more monsters than I predicted. There’s no need to be reckless, okay?”

Taking that question from the positive point of view, it sounded as if Elena was worried about Akira out of care. But taking that from the opposite point of view, it sounded as if she was worried about Akira who was the weakest in the group, and Carol, who Elena did not know well. If Akira gave a worrying answer, in the worst-case scenario, Elena might stop their rescue operation there.

Akira then firmly replied back.

“I’m good, no problem at all over here.”

Elena then excitedly said from the other side of the information terminal.

“I see, in that case, let’s go.”

They headed straight to the building where the Hunters were barricading themselves with Elena leading in the front.

All the monsters surrounding the building where the Hunters were, suddenly shifted their attention to Elena and her team. The monsters with guns and cannons aimed their long-range weapons at Elena and the other Hunters, while the monsters only equipped with close-range weapons started running towards them.

Then, right as they fixed their aim on Elena and her team and was about to shoot, they were suddenly blown away and turned into a pile of wreckage due to the barrage from Elena and her team.

The machine gun fixed on Shikarabe’s APC spewed out countless bullets. That machine gun was strong enough to injure even a bounty monster when used from up-close. Thus, those bullets could easily pierce through the monsters’ armoured body and blow its innards to pieces.

Elena and her team released a barrage of bullets to all the monsters surrounding that building. Sara readied her automatic grenade launcher and started shooting too. As countless grenades rained down from the sky, they exploded and blew the monsters to smithereens.

Akira and Carol shifted their aims to the entrance of the building and started shooting at the monsters who were trying to crawl their way into the building.

The monsters tried to force their bodies through the big entrance into the building, there were so many of them that they almost completely blocked the big entrance that was wide enough for few vehicles to pass through at the same time. But Carol's barrage and Akira's grenades made short work of them and blew them to pieces, thus turning them to just metal wreckage.

As the other monsters tried to push their way forward while trampling the wreckages leftover of their dead comrades under their feet, Akira used the other rifles fixed in the backside of his vehicle to push those monsters back, leaving them either completely destroyed or half-destroyed. Thus turning them one by one to just another metal wreckage.

The area around that building immediately turned into a battlefield riddled with explosions and gunshots.

The Hunters inside that building saw the battle happening outside through the small openings of the barricaded entrance.

"They're here!! Someone actually came to save us!!"

"Quickly, open the entrance door!! We won't be able to go outside with the barricade there!!"

"For those Hunters with an augmented suit, help me move away the vehicles blocking the entrance!!"

"Leave the wounded near the entrance!!"

The Hunters there immediately sprung to action. If they let go of this chance, they would have no other chance to survive. Everyone in that building understood that very well. They squeezed all of their leftover physical power and spirit to start working again.

After they cleared the monsters around that building, Shikarabe stopped his APC just right in front of the entrance, the back door of the APC opened and he stepped out from the APC.

The entrance was still blocked by the vehicles that the Hunters left there. One of the Hunters from inside the building was trying to desperately squeeze his way out through a small opening in that entrance.

Shikarabe then just stood there and released a powerful kick at those vehicles, blowing them a few metres aside.

Shikarabe then shouted.

“We’ll leave in 10 minutes!! Get everyone inside the APC, it doesn’t matter if they’re alive or not!! And also, which one of you is Cocolens?!”

When one of those Hunters passed aside Shikarabe and was about to enter the APC, Shikarabe suddenly grabbed that guy and stopped him. That guy immediately shouted.

“Wh-what!? Just let me in already!!!”

“You guys that can still move are for later, get those who can’t move on their own first.”

That guy then shook off Shikarabe’s grab and went to the APC.

“Shut up!! I’ll definitely return back from here!!”

Shikarabe immediately grabbed that guy and threw him back into the building. That guy landed hard on the floor and lost consciousness as he rolled over on the ground.

Shikarabe glared at the other Hunters, few Hunters who were about to do the same thing immediately stopped.

“I’ll say it one more time!! Get everyone inside the APC regardless if they’re alive or not!! Either it’s only a corpse, or it has lost its head, or it’s nothing but a head, it doesn’t matter, just get everyone inside the APC! And also, which one of you is Cocolens? Or at least, which one of you was on a call with us not too long ago?”

One of the Hunters who was helping a wounded Hunter to stand up pointed his finger.

“…I-It’s that guy over there.”

Shikarabe then signalled that Hunter who just answered his question to get inside the APC. That Hunter sighed in relief and boarded the APC. The other Hunters started helping the Hunters who could not move on their own regardless if they were already dead or not.

Shikarabe looked at the Hunter who spoke to Elena not too long ago, that Hunter looked completely terrified.

As Shikarabe was getting their rescue target and the other Hunters into the APC, Akira, Carol, Elena, and Sara were still fighting the monsters outside. The number of monsters just outside the entrance to the building site and around that building already decreased significantly.

Akira lightly sighed.

“Well, after killing this many monsters, it’s not like we’ll get another wave of monsters, right?”

Carol smiled and said.

“Akira, do you think I can get a lot of rewards this time?”

Akira just smiled bitterly at Carol, but he sounded a little bit amused as he said.

“At this rate, I’ll have to pay you a huge amount of money.”

Carol smiled satisfied.

“It seems that I was able to show you that I’m not the same as yesterday. So, it means that I can look forward to my reward, right?”

“I can’t say anything for now. And also, it’s too soon for you to relax, don’t drop your guard just yet, okay?”

Akira and Carol smiled confidently at each other.

Alpha then gave Akira an order.

“So then, to make sure that you won’t lose your share of reward, let’s go kill some monsters. Akira, change back to CWH anti-material rifle.”

“Roger that. Geez, even after we killed that many, there are still some extra reinforcements, huh.”

Akira then changed back to his CWH anti-material rifle as ordered, he obviously looked annoyed.

“Well, to be more precise, it’s not like they’re new monsters. They’re already here right from the start.”

Alpha then pointed her finger toward the building. When Akira also looked at the building, his vision immediately enhanced. Thanks to that, he was able to see the monsters that were hiding behind the walls of that building. He immediately aimed his CWH anti-material rifle at that building.

Carol noticed that and aimed her guns toward the building too, but she did not see anything that resembled a monster. She could only see a strong-looking wall, a pile of dead monsters scattered around it, and Shikarabe and the other Hunters carrying wounded Hunters into the APC as well as Sara and Elena who were standing guard near them. There was nothing suspicious at all.

Carol then looked at Akira. He was aiming at the building with a serious look.

When she looked back at the building, a monster suddenly jumped out from one of the windows on the third floor. She was a bit surprised by that, but she was surprised even more when Akira immediately sniped that monster, it then just crashed into the ground and stopped moving.

The other monsters immediately started jumping out from the other windows too. Akira was able to snipe them down one by one accurately. The sniped monsters then fell off regardless of the damage from the impact of the sniping and crashed into the ground. Some of them crashed into the APC and made a loud banging sound which caused the Hunters inside the APC to start screaming.

Akira was able to firmly grasp the location of the monsters thanks to Alpha's support, and with her aiming support, he was able to snipe the monsters' weak points only with one shot. He kept shooting down the monsters that jumped out from the building one by one.

Elena and Sara immediately noticed that and started helping out, Carol also did the same. The pieces of the destroyed mechanical monsters rained down from above.

Carol then thought as she kept shooting at those monsters.

[Again, Akira was able to detect enemies faster than anyone else. How exactly did he do that? We didn't notice them at all until those monsters started jumping out from the building. But it doesn't seem like he's carrying a powerful information-gathering device either. I wonder if it's that intuition that those top-ranking Hunters have.]

Although Carol only checked Akira's equipment based on its outlooks, from what she could gather, she did not think he was carrying a powerful information-gathering device and it did not seem like he was faking the appearance of his equipment either.

There were many Hunters among the top raking Hunters who could accurately detect enemies' locations which were not supposed to be detected unless with a powerful information-gathering device. They themselves could not exactly explain why they could do that. Since they could not exactly explain it to the other Hunters, people just called it as intuition.

[There's also that too. During the fight, he fully left the driving to auto-drive. Although there were that many monsters and we were in such a situation, did he really trust the auto-drive function that much? Or is it that he was driving the car through remote driving? Is that even possible in the first place?]

There was a limit on how good an auto-drive function could be. Unless it was supported by a specially designed control device, it would be almost impossible to traverse the old-world ruin fully relying on the auto-drive function. Even more so when they were in the middle of a fight. In the worst-case scenario, relying on the auto-drive function could throw Akira and Carol off the vehicle.

It was not impossible to remotely drive the car with the help of a camera or something else to see what was in front of the vehicle and displaying that video in the goggles. But the real problem was whether Akira was able to do that or not. Watching both in front and behind him, driving the vehicle, and fighting the monsters chasing the vehicle from behind, most Hunters would not be able to do all of those things at the same time. Or at least, Carol could not do such a feat.

[If I trust my intuition, I don't think that's the case though… But I feel like it's a bad idea to poke Akira about that… Seriously, this boy is a real enigma.]

Carol was smiling confidently while thinking about all of those things in the back of her mind.

She had gathered some information about Akira from Shikarabe, she knew that Akira was a Hunter who was worth more than 100 million Aurum, she also knew that he participated during the bounty monster hunt at

Shikarabe's invitation, and he did very well during that hunt. She also knew that that information must be true and she knew well just how strong Akira was judging from what happened yesterday inside the Seranthal building. That information really pulled up her evaluation of Akira to the point that she was sure he was one of those top-ranking Hunters.

Hunters risked their lives in order to obtain money. Some of them went to dangerous old-world ruins to bring back relics and sell them for money, some of them obtained money from accomplishing difficult requests. Carol felt pleasure making those Hunters spend their hard-earned money just to be able to sleep with her.

Carol thought that she gave a pleasure worthy of that money. Even if those Hunters, who once slept with her, would try to go to a more dangerous ruin or challenge a more difficult request to be able to sleep with her again just to meet a foul end, she would just laugh it off. Or more like, she might as well feel happy knowing that some Hunters would even try to go over their limit and do something reckless just to be able to sleep with her again.

As Carol thought how much money Akira would be willing to spend on her if she seduced him, she could not help but smile, but her face suddenly twitched with unpleasantness for a split second.

[…But until now, Akira didn't show any interest in me though. Shikarabe also has no idea about the type of girl that Akira might like. Moreover, it seems that when Shikarabe invited Akira to a pub that was in the same building as a brothel, Akira did not seem to mind at all. Those Elena and Sara, if Akira is going along with both of them, that means that it's not like he has no interest in girls at all. I don't understand, what about me that he doesn't like. Figure wise, I think I'm more or less as beautiful as those two though, is it because he has some kind of particular fetish or something?]

Carol decided to stop thinking about that and focus on the current battle. The situation that they were in did not allow her to divide her attention any longer.

Akira and the other Hunters were able to deal with the incoming monsters for a while, but as more and more monsters started to jump out of the

building from the higher windows. The wall of that building started to get covered with monsters. Some of them even started to latch their bodies on the wall of that building and shoot at Akira and the other Hunters. Although they prioritized the monsters with long-range weapons, the number of bullets raining down from above their heads just kept increasing.

“Judging from this situation, I’m sure that building is filled with monsters up to the brim. I’m glad we only need to fight the monsters from the outside.”

Carol focused on the monsters in front of her while smiling and shooting at them. Although she did not have enough leeway to think about something else in that situation, she was not hard-pressed either since she came there with her expensive powerful equipment.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 117, After The Rescue Operation

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After the situation suddenly worsened, Elena finally decided to pull out sooner than she planned. She had a grim face as she said to Shikarabe.

“Shikarabe! We need to withdraw now!!”

“Roger that!”

Shikarabe immediately replied with a firm answer without asking any question to Elena. It was because he understood they were not in a situation where she could leisurely answer his question.

Shikarabe then shouted to the other Hunters inside the building.

“We’re leaving soon!! If you don’t get into the APC now, we’ll leave you behind!! So hurry up!”

Shikarabe picked up a guy who was lying on the ground, he was the guy that Shikarabe threw not too long ago. Since no one carried him, he was left there lying on the ground until now. Shikarabe just thought that it would leave a bad aftertaste if he just left that guy there since he was the one who knocked that guy unconscious.

After Shikarabe gave off that sudden announcement, a Hunter said in a panic.

“Wait for a second!! We still have some relics inside…”

Shikarabe just ignored that Hunter and went back to the APC, he then threw the guy that he was carrying inside and quickly got on the driver seat.

The Hunters who stood there carrying relics looked sadly at their relics before leaving it behind and running into the APC. It was because they understood well that Shikarabe was serious when he said he would leave them behind.

The back door of the APC started closing even before all the Hunters in that place were able to get inside, and when Shikarabe immediately started the engine, the remaining Hunters started running toward the APC in a frenzy.

Shikarabe suddenly accelerated the APC. It blazed as fast as it could out of the building site under the barrage of bullets coming from above. The entrance to the building site was half-filled with wreckages of dead monsters. But he just smashed his way through using the momentum of his APC.

Elena, Sara, Akira, and Carol followed behind Shikarabe. Numerous monsters flooded out from the building such that the surrounding area was filled with them, some of them even started chasing Akira. But Akira was way faster than them, and by shooting down the monsters that were leading the pack chasing for Akira, they were turned into obstacles that slowed the monsters behind them even more. Thus it was an easy thing for Akira to get away from those monsters.

After they opened up some distance from that building site, Alpha smiled at Akira and said.

“It should be fine now, you did well back there.”

Akira sighed in relief. It seemed that he was able to escape from the dangerous situation for now as he went back to the driver seat and relaxed

for a bit.

“Say, Alpha. Is that building also filled with monsters just like the Seranthal building from yesterday?”

“I can’t exactly grasp the situation inside that building. But looking at what happened just now, I think that’s highly possible.”

“I wonder where all of those monsters came from.”

“I can come up with a lot of theories, but well, I think there’s a warehouse somewhere nearby filled with those monsters and they were suddenly dispatched at the same time, and also factories nearby also suddenly started producing those monsters at a high rate. After all, most of those mechanical monsters were all the same type.”

“Then why did something like that suddenly happen?”

“No idea. As a matter of fact, if you know the reason why, you can sell that information for 10,000,000,000 Aurum. If you’re interested, we can try to investigate later, you know?”

Alpha was smiling confidently at Akira when she made that suggestion. But he instead made a displeased face and replied.

“…No thanks.”

“That’s a wise decision.”

Carol, who saw Akira relaxed back, also lowered her guard. She then returned to the driver’s assistant seat and said to Akira while smiling at him.

“That was pretty dangerous. They’re just simply too many of them.”

“It’s still better than yesterday. This time we could run away using a vehicle after all.”

“Well, you’re right about that. As expected, even I too don’t want to get through the same thing as yesterday again.”

Akira and the rest of the team were driving through the Mihazono ruin, they were in a situation where they had enough leeway to chit chat. None of them were injured during the rescue and they were able to rescue the Hunters inside that building. They just needed to return back to the Hunter Office now. It seemed that they did well in that rescue operation. They just blazed through the road while crushing the leftover wreckages of dead monsters scattered around under their wheels.

In the middle of their way back to the Hunter Office, Akira checked his information terminal that he put in his vehicle. It was showing that he received an emergency SOS request sent through a local connection.

Elena had told him beforehand to just ignore those emergency requests, after all, they had to prioritize finishing the contract that they had taken first and make sure that they would get the reward before thinking about the other requests. That was all there was to it. Even if those Hunters who sent the emergency SOS request were barricading themselves somewhere near, Akira could not afford to stop every single time to save them, he had no responsibility to do something like that nor he had the leeway to do so.

But it was not like they completely ignored those requests, Elena at least forwarded that SOS emergency request to the Hunter Office. If those Hunters were lucky, someone would accept that request. Although it was a completely different problem whether anyone would take that request which had no guarantee of getting paid with the promised reward, even the person who sent that request might as well already be dead by now.

That was why Akira did not even think of checking the details of those emergency SOS requests. It just aroused his interest for a bit, that was all there was to it.

Alpha noticed that, she then said to Akira.

“If it bothers you, I can just erase those notices.”

“You’re right, please erase them.”

After he said that, the notices on his information terminal immediately vanished. Alpha erased them.

Akira then tried to come up with another subject as if he was trying to forget something that was bothering him.

“But well, there are still so many of those requests left, huh?”

“I’m sure it’s because most of the Hunters thought that it would be safer if they barricaded themselves inside a building, I bet that’s why a lot of them decided to do that. I think that’s indeed a good option in case they can’t return back on their own. I bet some of the Hunters who decided to barricade themselves inside the Seranthal building from yesterday are still alive even right now.”

“Well, even if that’s true, it’s impossible to get out from there in that situation, you know.”

“As I said, it’s indeed a good choice only if they have given up returning back on their own.”

“…Ahh, if the situation inside the building gets better later, I guess they still have some hope, huh.”

Akira had no idea in what situation those monsters would leave the Seranthal building. They might have already left the building since Akira left yesterday, but they might be still there even now.

Since Akira had no plans to go there and check it himself, he just decided to forget about it.

Elena and her team were able to return back to the Hunter Office without encountering any trouble. Although they encountered some monsters on their way back, they were only in small packs, so they could handle those monsters just fine. It was either because they killed most of the monsters in that route when they were heading out to save the Hunters, or it was simply because those monsters were in the middle of fighting another group of Hunters, that was why there were only small packs of monsters.

Elena and her team parked their vehicles in front of the Hunter Office's parking lot. Akira, Carol, Elena, and Sara stood in front of the backdoor of Shikarabe's APC. The door itself was still closed.

Akira thought that the door would immediately open, but it did not seem that it would open anytime soon. Right when he thought that it was rather strange, an armed group approached them. The guy who was taking command of that squad compared the data in his information terminal with the data in Elena's information terminal. After that, he asked Elena.

"You guys are the Hunters who took the C32 area rescue request, right? Are the rescued Hunters inside that vehicle?"

"Yep, can I just leave the rest to you then?"

"Of course, just leave the rest to us."

"Shikarabe, open the door."

After she said that, the back door of the APC slowly opened up.

As the rescued Hunters looked around, they realized that they were back in the Hunter Office, all of them looked really relieved. But in contrast to that, some of those Hunters were making a grim face while hanging their heads low. They looked really desperate as if they were driven to the corner.

The squad commander then stood in front of the opened door and said to the Hunters inside the APC.

"We're from Alhain insurance company. We'll escort you to an emergency clinic to check if any of you need any treatment. I hope that all of you will cooperate and follow our orders. If any of you having trouble moving on your own, please let us know."

Those Hunters then slowly boarded off the APC one by one following the instruction from the people from Alhain insurance company. Some of them could walk on their own, some of them could only walk with the help of others, some of them could not walk and had to be carried with a stretcher.

Among all of those walking Hunters, one of them looked extremely pale and worried. He was breathing roughly and his hand that was holding his gun was slightly shaking. He was keeping his distance from the other people around him, especially from the people from Alhain insurance company.

Another Hunter in front of him asked a staff nearby.

“Uhh, excuse me, I want to contact my friend but I can’t seem to get any connection from here, can you help me?”

“It depends on the situation of your friend. If it’s only a problem caused by the connection line, you might be able to call your friend inside the temporary clinic. You can use Alhain insurance company’s communication line there after all.”

That staff shifted his focus from that nervous Hunter to another Hunter who asked him that question. When that nervous Hunter noticed it, he made his resolve and suddenly started running.

But when he started running, another Alhain soldier who was standing guard in his blindside immediately held him down. That soldier locked his movements by pushing him down on the ground. He looked like he was in pain on the ground as his weapons were taken away from him. The other guards came and cuffed both of his hands and legs, thus rendering him harmless.

The other Hunters in that area looked at that guy being secured by Alhain’s soldiers. One of the Alhain soldiers then turned to the other Hunters, smiled, and said.

“Please stop trying anything that might cause misunderstanding. Don’t try to leave without our permission until you finish all the administration work with us. I hope all of you will cooperate.”

Akira was watching when that incident happened, he looked pretty surprised by it. But the other Hunters looked completely normal as if they

expected something like that to happen. It clearly showed the difference in their experiences as Hunters.

It did not take long for Shikarabe and Elena to hand over all the Hunters that they rescued to Alhain insurance company.

Elena was negotiating with someone from Alhain insurance company when Shikarabe called Akira to come in from inside the APC.

“Akira, come and help me check if any of them left anything behind.”

“Sure, what should I do if I find something?”

“If it’s a relic or a piece of equipment, just leave it outside the APC. If it’s a body or limbs, gather them all inside a corpse bag and put them outside. You can find the empty corpse bag under the seat.”

Akira frowned. He did not expect that limbs or torso would be included in the list of things that he might find.

“…Okay.”

“Thanks, I’m counting on you.”

Akira used his information-gathering device to help him scan the inside of the APC. He found 2 rifles left under the seat. Fortunately enough, no one forgot to bring their limbs or torsos out with them.

It only took a while for them to finish searching the inside of the APC. That was when the commander of the squad from Alhain insurance company said to Elena.

“Thanks for the hard work. If it’s okay with you, would you take another request from us? Actually, we lost contact with the Hunters who took the rescue request to area C47. Since you’ve finished the rescue request to area C32 from us, we’re willing to give you an extra bonus for the reward if you’re willing to take this request.”

“Just leave it in the request list for me, I’ll think about it.”

“I see. Well, if you end up taking it, we’ll be counting on you.”

After that, the squad commander left with the rest of his squad.

Elena and his team moved their vehicles to another place first as not to block the way to the Hunter Office before they grouped up again to discuss what to do next.

“First thing first, let’s take a 1-hour break to replenish our supplies. So make sure to use this time to properly replenish your ammo and other expendables. And also, can you guys tell me your impression about the last request that we just took? Although it’s kind of weird for me to say it myself since I’m the one who decided to pick that request, that last one was harder than I thought it would be. That’s why I’m thinking of picking an easier one for the next request.”

Akira agreed with Elena’s opinion as he said.

“It’s true that the last request was pretty dangerous, so I think that is a good idea.”

Shikarabe made a stern face and said.

“We did decide to withdraw sooner than we planned. I believe that, including me, we underestimated the difficulty of that request. So I think it’s a good idea to take an easier request, it doesn’t matter even though it means that we would get less reward out of it.”

Sara frowned and seemed slightly worried as she said.

“Judging from the number of mechanical monsters that were flooding out from the inside of that building, it means that we really need to think about the escape route in case if our rescue targets barricaded themselves deep inside a building. Honestly speaking, I don’t want to fight that many monsters in a closed space.”

Carol smiled bitterly.

“And in case if it’s a bigger building, it might be better to just forget the idea of going inside that building right from the start. I don’t want those monsters chasing me inside such a building after all.”

Elena believed that all of the Hunters gathered here were relatively successful Hunters, and some of them hated the idea of taking a request with low reward. But looking at how they reacted to her idea, it seemed there should be no problem prioritizing safety for now.

“Got it then, so for the next request, I’ll decide on an easier one.”

Akira glanced at Carol, she was using a rather expensive augmented suit that regularly used a lot of power. If they kept taking cheap requests, she might end up facing a deficit. So he thought that Carol might not like that idea.

But that did not seem to be the case at all, thus he decided to stop worrying about it.

Carol noticed that Akira was checking on her. It was true that she had no complaint taking easier requests with relatively small rewards and she had no reason to fake that. Carol’s attention was all focused on Akira, so she had no interest at all about the small reward.

Akira was putting the armour plating in one of the supply depots. It was a manual job, a pretty boring and bothersome work. But if he was careless, he would have to pay for it with his life. He knew that very well, thus he spent extra effort focusing on putting on those armour tiles.

Akira lost more armour plating than he expected. When he found a part of his vehicle clearly exposed, his expression turned grim.

“I lost quite a lot of armour plating this time.”

Alpha casually replied.

“It’s no surprise after taking on those attacks. If you don’t want to take them bare, head-on, make sure to properly install all the armour plating.”

“You’re right. I did buy a pretty expensive type of plating this time, so it should at least be pretty durable. I don’t regret it, it’s an important expense.”

Dealing with armour plating was a tricky business. Of course, the more expensive it was, the more durable the plating would be. But if Akira wanted to get even better plating, the cost-value ratio would drop fast. This time, he bought expensive armour plating that Alpha recommended. It was the second most expensive armour plating in that supply depot. The price gap between that armour plating and the most expensive armour plating in that supply depot was huge.

Carol was also there helping Akira putting on the armour plating. She then asked Akira a question.

“Akira, what’s your plan after this?”

“I still haven’t thought about it at the moment. But I’m planning to just take it easy until the break time is over.”

“Is that so? In that case…”

“Ah, now that I think about it, I guess I’ll do some workout.”

Carol actually was about to invite Akira to a meal or something, but she was cutoff midway with that sudden statement from him. She could not help but express her surprise.

“Eh?”

“I’ll be done with the armour plating soon, so how about you, Carol?”

“…I’ll be done soon too.”

Carol still had her surprised face when she said that.

After they finished putting on all the armour plating, Akira really started working out. Carol just stood there watching him with a flabbergasted face. He seemed a little bit in pain as he slowly stretched his body. Carol then asked Akira a question.

“Is it okay if I ask you why would you be working out right now?”

“I heard that increasing the flexibility of my joints and my muscles is good for my health and it can help strengthen my body. Actually, I have a pretty stiff body, you see. And also, this works as my augmented suit training too.”

“…I-I see.”

Carol actually was not asking about the benefit of working out, she was asking why Akira started working out right now. Or at least, according to her experience, there was no guy that would actually start working out during a break time together with her. She then thought that it might be just out of whim and decided not to ask any further.

Moreover, it did seem that Akira decided to do that really out of whim. Not to mention, talented individuals usually had a different way of thinking compared to common people and Akira might be one of those.

Well, it was not like it caused her any trouble and she felt that she would not be able to get along with Akira if she let things like that bother her. Thus, Carol decided to just ignore it.

There were a lot of occasions where Akira had to shoot his rifle from a weird position in order to be able to get out of dangerous situations. He often had to injure his own body to continue fighting, sometimes he had to twist his body past the rotation limit of his joints, sometimes he had to keep on shooting while tearing his own muscle with each shot, sometimes he had to hold back the strong kickback that caused micro-cracks in his bones. He would use medicines to keep his body functioning in those situations while he kept on fighting.

In order to minimize those types of injuries, Akira had to increase his body’s strength and flexibility. Although he did that out of whim, it was indeed something that would be useful for him in the future.

If Carol asked more detail about that, she might be able to understand why Akira did that. But since she started to identify him as a boy with a weird

personality, she lost her chance to know more about him.

If that quirkiness was able to hide Alpha's existence, if that would cause people to ignore his weird actions, then it might be a good thing both for Akira and Alpha.

Carol decided to just forget about it as she said to Akira who was stretching his body.

"My body is actually pretty flexible, you know. Want to see?"

Akira stopped stretching and turned to her. After Carol confirmed that Akira was looking at her, she smiled confidently as she raised her right leg while still standing. She kept raising her right leg until both of her legs almost formed a straight line while keeping her balance standing on one leg.

Carol knew very well how to show off her beautiful body to seduce someone. And the augmented suit that she was using had a design that invited gazes from the member of the opposite sex. Carol, who was standing on one leg with her right arm intertwined with her right leg, looked so beautiful and bewitching.

Akira, who was watching Carol, looked a bit surprised and praised.

"Oooh!! That's amazing!!"

Akira was simply amazed by Carol's ability to stay in that position, he knew that he could not do something like that. Unfortunately enough, unlike what Carol wanted, he was not getting amazed by the beauty of her body. But even so, Akira was still amazed by her body, so she decided to just accept that compliment.

Carol returned back on her right leg and said.

"Thank you, it's pretty amazing, isn't it?"

"How exactly did you get your body that flexible?"

“Well, I think you have no other choice but to regularly stretch your body every day. Although, in my case, it might be also because of my nanomachine enhanced body.”

“Is that so? But now that I think about it, if someone else tries to put on your augmented suit with your data still left in it, I’m sure it would cause a big disaster.”

Akira remembered about his conversation with Shikarabe the other day and frowned. Carol was interested in that remark, so she inquired about that subject further.

“Oh, what do you mean by that?”

“Well, Shikarabe told me once that if I put on an augmented suit that still contains another person’s data, it might cause my body to twist in a strange way that it would tear my muscle.”

Akira then told Carol what Shikarabe told him in the past. Carol seemed to be listening closely to his story and agreed with what Shikarabe had told him. She then added to that information.

“That’s not the worst-case scenario yet. There are a lot of cyborgs who also use augmented suits, right? Those cyborgs have joints that are way more flexible than normal humans. So if the past user of a certain augmented suit is one of those cyborgs and a normal person uses that augmented suit and tries to move, his limbs might make 180 degrees turn and it would break his body. In the worst-case scenario, it might completely tear his body to pieces.”

Akira imagined something like that happening to him. The image of his body turned 180 degrees and just laid there in the middle of the old-world ruin unable to move was pretty scary.

“T-that would be horrible.”

Akira could not help but voice out his impression, Carol smiled lightly at that him and said.

“Well, basically, if you don’t want something like that to happen, you better only get all of your equipment, not only your augmented suit, from shops that you really trust. And be extra careful so you don’t get any weird equipment from the black market.”

Akira then thought.

[I buy my equipment from Shizuka-san’s shop, so it should be alright. Although I buy my medicines from Katsuragi, I’m sure he won’t sell me any dangerous drug since he knows what I’ll do to him if he does that. It should be alright… Right?]

“Well, I think there’s no need for me to worry about it.”

“Is that so? If you’re worried about something, I can introduce you to shops that I recommend, but it seems that I don’t need to do that, huh…”

“Yeah. It’s alright.”

Akira returned back to stretching his body. He was stretching his body following Alpha who was in front of him. Alpha sat down on the ground and spread her legs, she was leaning forward to the point that her breast touched the ground while looking at him. Akira seemed to be in pain as he was trying his best to do that too, but his body was not flexible enough and he was barely able to do it properly.

Alpha then smiled at Akira.

“Want me to help you?”

“No thanks.”

Akira sounded displeased when he said that. He knew that he would be able to stretch his body even more if Alpha controlled his augmented suit. But he got a bit scared after listening to Carol’s explanation just now.

“Don’t worry, the augmented suit that you’re using right now is designed so that it can’t make 180 degrees twist.”

“Do you really think it would make me feel safe by telling me that? I’ll do the stretching myself.”

Akira did trust Alpha, but this and that were two different things. So he kept stretching with his own ability which also served as a training for operating his augmented suit on his own.

He properly differentiated and felt the movement of his limbs under the augmented suit and the movements of his augmented suit as he tried to match both of those movements. In order to minimize the damage to his limbs while increasing the efficiency of his powerful augmented suit, he tried his best to match the movements of his body with his augmented suit to get the best performance. Even stretching his body like that was already a difficult thing for Akira. There was nothing that he could do to fix it except training.

Akira kept on working out until Elena and Sara came as their break time was about to end.

After Elena and Sara arrived, they were just having a chat with each other while waiting for Shikarabe. As for Akira, he was asking questions to Elena about the detail of the request that they took last time, about why the people from Alhain insurance company were waiting for them when they returned, the guy who was trying to run away back then, and the other things that piqued his interest.

Elena then offered an explanation to Akira based on her guess. The Cocolens guy who they had to save back there was someone who was contracted with Alhain insurance company. According to that contract, if they lost contact with him after a certain period of time, or if he sent a rescue request, the company would dispatch a squad to escort him to safety.

After they arrived at the location based on the information obtained from Alhain’s investigation, Elena first tried to look for Cocolens’ location based on his information terminal. Fortunately enough, she was able to make a call with that guy. But after she asked him some questions to check the situation over there, she found something weird.

The information that Elena obtained beforehand said that there should be only 8 people, but there were more than a dozen survivors and more than 20 dead Hunters. It was not strange since he might group up with the other Hunters before they barricaded themselves inside that building, but the problem was that he did not say anything about that during his call with her.

And then after Elena asked that person some more questions, she started to get suspicious if he was not the real Cocolens and started to make guesses as to why he would lie there.

If she was being optimistic, that guy might be under immense stress, and with the real Cocolens not around, he thought that the rescue team would not come unless he assumed that name. Thus, he ended up doing that in panic. If that was all there was to it, then it was not a big problem at all. Elena could just simply rescue them and normally escort them back to the Hunter Office.

But if she was being pessimistic, it might have been a perilous situation for Elena and her team. Cocolens and his team might have been killed, not by the monsters, but by the other Hunters who then took their equipment. Which in that case, it would mean the Hunters who barricaded themselves inside that building were the ones who killed Cocolens' team and they were trying to call for help using Cocolens' name. They might have been planning to attack Elena and her team and take their vehicles to escape from that building. Although it was only a guess, it would be really bad if that was the case.

Although she had to be extremely careful there, she did not have the leeway to wait for confirmation first. There were too many of them to transport in one go, but they might riot if she told them that only half of them would be escorted back to the Hunter Office first. Thus she pushed dealing with the aftermath including the confirmation to Alhain insurance company.

"Normally, we would ask them to show their Hunter IDs, but I decided not to do that in order not to provoke them too much. Our request is basically saving Hunters who can't return back on their own. So we have no obligation to do anything more than that, that was why I left the aftermath to Alhain insurance company and they also gave us their approval."

Akira nodded and said.

“So it’s not that simple, huh. It’s not like we can just go out there and save those Hunters.”

“Yep, that’s correct. There’s no guarantee that the Hunters we’re going to rescue are good Hunters. Moreover, most people tend to make bad decisions when they’re pushed to the corner like offering a big reward that they can’t pay when they send out an emergency SOS request. And when they have to pay more than what they have in hand, they’ll end up drowning in debt. People like that sometimes immediately try to run away the moment they are escorted to a safe place, and when that happens, in the worst-case scenario a shootout will occur between them and the people who rescued them. That’s why you too need to be careful out there okay, Akira?”

“I understand, I’ll be careful.”

Akira nodded firmly and deeply. Elena was happy to see that since it seemed that, as a senior Hunter, she was able to teach something useful to Akira, who was a junior Hunter.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 118, Bad Girl

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Carol was keeping her eyes on Akira as he was talking with Elena and Sara.

Carol was, objectively and subjectively speaking, a beautiful girl. And even when they were compared to her, both Sara and Elena were pretty beautiful too. So, looking from the outlook alone, Sara and Elena were not that much different from Carol.

But even so, Akira reacted very differently when he was with Elena or Sara compared to when he was with her. Carol thought that Akira had no interest in girls at all, but now she had to change her opinion after seeing that.

[I wonder where this difference comes from? Is it just because he has known both of them for longer? Is it just that he's bad at dealing with people that he doesn't know very well…? No, I don't think that's the case.]

Carol immediately rejected the guess that came up in her mind. Thanks to her long experience dealing with a lot of people, she at least knew that she was heading in the right direction and that might give her a hint on how to seduce Akira.

If it was only because Akira had never experienced the allure of the opposite sex, then she might need to find another way to approach him. As Carol thought so, she decided to keep that in mind, at least for now.

[Well, there's no need to rush myself. It has only been 2 days since we met. I'll just slowly and carefully approach him to make sure that he won't cut his relation with me.]

Shikarabe arrived right on time. The other Hunters there looked a bit surprised when they saw him step out from his APC with an irritated look.

Shikarabe then said.

"Sorry, am I late?"

Elena replied.

"Don't worry, you're not late, you came just on time. So then, you look pretty annoyed though, what happened?"

"Nah, it's nothing."

"If it's really nothing, as the team leader, I at least want to know the reason, alright?"

Shikarabe frowned and looked at Elena. Elena looked back at Shikarabe without changing her expression. After a few seconds of silence, Shikarabe sighed and said.

"…Since I'm here in Mihazono ruin right now, the people in Drankam are telling me to at least join the Drankam team even if it's on name only, and it was not easy refusing them. That's all."

It seemed that Shikarabe really did not want to work under Katsuya even if it was only on paper to the point that he even hated the idea of explaining it to other people.

Elena and Sara smiled bitterly. Both of them understood Shikarabe's hatred toward Katsuya and they knew well that he really hated Katsuya's gut. As

in matter of fact, there might be a part of them that sympathized with Shikarabe.

Carol smiled smugly, she knew very well that Shikarabe was a man who would not allow his personal feelings to get in the way of his job. Getting himself in a Drankam team in name only, would not cause him any loss, thus, it was only to be expected if Shikarabe accepted that demand. So, the fact that he did not do that showed that he was prioritizing his personal feeling, which was indeed a very rare thing for him. Carol thought that it was indeed strange and made her wonder who was this Katsuya who caused Shikarabe to even go that far.

Akira himself did not show any particular reaction. After all, for him, the in-fighting in the Drankam was none of his business as long as it did not cause any trouble for him or the other people that he cared for.

After they finished a short briefing of their next request, they then headed back into Mihazono ruin.

They did not find any particular trouble from there. Since they decided to lower the difficulty of the rescue requests that they accepted, they did not have to fight a swarm of monsters in narrow places nor they got to encounter any relatively powerful monsters. They just went back and forth from the Hunter Office branch to the Mihazono ruin to escort the Hunters that they rescued without any trouble.

Since they took easier requests, the reward that they received from each request was lowered too. But it was compensated by the number of requests that they took. So, looking at the total rewards that they got that day, considering the difficulty of the request, it could be said that they were making a killing here. There might be some Hunters who had to suffer because they started taking easier requests instead, but that was not their fault since being able to effectively convert risks into profit was one of the essential skills for Hunters.

As they kept the cycle of taking rescue requests and small breaks, the sun eventually set, and Mihazono ruin was once again veiled in by the darkness of night.

Elena and her team returned and parked their vehicles somewhere near the Hunter Office branch, they then stepped off from the vehicles and discussed what to do next.

Everyone there looked tired. Especially Elena, Sara, and Shikarabe who had been rescuing Hunters since the previous day, they needed to take a proper rest soon.

Elena looked obviously tired as she said.

“So then, let’s break up here and meet up again tomorrow to work together with the same members again. Make sure to let others know if anything comes up.”

Shikarabe then said.

“I have some stuff that I need to do for Drankam, so I won’t be returning back to the city, instead, I’ll stay here in Mihazono ruin tonight. I’ll still stay inside the connection range, so there shouldn’t be any problem contacting me. Akira, you should really change your connection service from that cheap line soon.”

Akira thought of something and said.

“Wait, you’ll stay here? Are you still planning to go to the ruin again?”

“Even for me, I have no plans to go to the ruin again for the rest of the day. I’ll be staying in a Drankam facility nearby. Drankam actually built a temporary base nearby so their Hunters don’t have to go back and forth from the city. After all, it’ll take quite a lot of time to go on a round trip from the city. Well, it’s true that I can just sleep inside the APC, but since there’s a bed in that facility, it would be a waste not to use it.”

Sara then said.

“We’ll also stay somewhere nearby, to be more precise, in one of those trailer houses. Which means… The ones heading back to the city are only Akira and Carol, huh…”

Elena, Sara, and Shikarabe turned to Akira and Carol.

Elena looked at Akira and thought.

[If he was alone, I wouldn’t mind inviting Akira too, and I’m sure that Sara isn’t against it either, but…]

Sara looked at Carol and thought.

[…Of course, there’s no way I can invite Carol too since I don’t know her that well, and I’m sure that Elena would not want that too.]

Elena and Sara glanced at each other, both of them knew each other and had been together for a long time. It did not take much for them to understand what the other person was thinking.

Akira suddenly turned to Carol and asked her a question.

“I’m heading back to the city though, how about you, Carol?”

“Let’s see…”

Carol glanced at Shikarabe, Shikarabe obviously looked alerted and slightly frowned. She then smiled and said.

“I’ll head back to the city too. Akira, can you give me a ride?”

“…? Sure.”

Akira was a bit bothered by Shikarabe’s reaction. Although he was sure that there must be a reason for that, he simply decided to just forget about it. He then lightly bowed to Elena and Sara.

“Well then, I’ll be heading back now. I’ll be in your care again tomorrow.”

Elena lightly smiled.

“Be careful on your way back home, and make sure to get a good rest when you get home.”

Sara also smiled lightly and said.

“Don’t drop your guard yet until you reach the city, okay?”

Akira and Carol returned back to Akira’s vehicle. They then waved at the other Hunters who would stay behind and left that place.

After Akira and Carol left, Elena turned to Shikarabe and asked.

“Shikarabe, do you have some free time after this?”

Shikarabe guessed the meaning behind that question as he frowned and said.

“It depends. I’m really tired so I want to get a good rest as soon as possible.”

“It’s about Carol, I want to know more about her. You’re acquainted with her, right?”

Shikarabe’s face turned stern, his guess was correct. Elena and Sara who saw that were a bit surprised.

Shikarabe thought to himself without saying anything, some of what he was thinking got leaked on his face. He then carefully chose his words as he said.

“Well, it’s true that it might cause trouble if I try to evade your question about her without giving any good excuse or explanation, but I feel like it’ll also cause trouble if I explain everything about her. So I’ll only answer questions that won’t cause any trouble among us while we’re still taking the SOS rescue requests together. To put it simply, she’s not a good girl, but it’s highly unlikely that her bad personality and habit would cause any bad effects on the current SOS rescue requests that we’re taking. Her ability as a Hunter is also not something to scoff at, so I don’t think she would slow us down either.”

After hearing that answer, Elena and Sara made a troubled face. Elena then asked Shikarabe a question.

“Uhhh, she sounds like nothing but trouble though?”

“I leave it to you how you want to interpret it. And even if it’s true that she’s a problematic person, that doesn’t mean that her problem might cause us any trouble in this short time span when we’re working together. It’s true that I won’t invite her to my own team, but if someone else is bringing her along, I won’t kick her out since she’s pretty strong herself. That’s all that I can say as a team member. If you want to know more about her, I’ll tell you but only after we finish this request. See you tomorrow then.”

Shikarabe then left Elena and Sara.

Elena and Sara looked at each other. It was obvious looking from their face that they had no idea how to treat Carol now. At first, they thought that Carol was someone who would not cause any trouble, but that did not sound to be the case now.

Akira gave Carol a ride all the way to where they met up before going to the Mihazono ruin. Carol stepped off the vehicle and stretched her body while facing away from Akira. She then spun around and smiled at him.

“So then, see you again tomorrow… If you still have some time, you can visit my home, you know? I don’t mind even if you want to sleepover too. I can also serve you some simple food while you’re at it. That way, we won’t have to meet up first before going to the wasteland tomorrow.”

They were planning to go to Mihazono ruin again tomorrow and they planned to meet up in the same place as before.

Akira shook his head.

“No thanks, I’ll go back home. I can’t really relax unless I’m in my own home, you see.”

“I see, that’s just too bad… Seriously though, you refused even when a beauty like me is inviting you, you’re no fun at all.”

Carol smiled confidently at Akira, which Akira returned back with the same smile, filled with confidence.

“Sorry, I hope you get a good rest today.”

Carol saw Akira off and mumbled.

“No reaction at all even now, huh. Well, let’s be patient here.”

Carol thought it had been quite a while since the last time she felt pleasure in trying to seduce someone as she smiled amusedly.

Akira went straight for the bath when he got back home. He enjoyed the warm water as he dipped his body up to his neck inside the bath while letting the warm water heal his tired body. He had already finished cleaning up and taking care of his equipment before taking a bath. So he could just dive into his bed and sleep after the bath. Thus, fully recovering both his body and mind to face tomorrow.

Akira was more or less in a daze, or it could even be said that he was in a trance. Although there was a beautiful girl with a body that was adjusted to his preference taking a bath together with him without even a slip of cloth on her body, he barely paid any attention to her. This in itself could be said to be a not healthy situation.

Alpha, who dipped her body up until around the cleavage of her chest, suddenly stood up without showing any embarrassment and sat on the edge of the bathtub. Her beautiful figure that was blurred by the shaking of the water surface was in full view right now. The only thing that hid her body above her knees was the steam from the warm water and the water droplets sliding down her skin.

Since Alpha suddenly moved, Akira reacted to that and turned to her direction. He locked his gaze on Alpha’s extremely enticing body for a few seconds before returning his gaze forward as if he just lost his interest.

Alpha, who saw that, smiled at Akira and said.

“That reaction even when you’re in front of this beautiful body. It seems that it’ll take some time until the priority between girls and food in your brain switch places, huh.”

Akira was still half-dazed as he jabbed back.

“…Save that for later, will you?”

Akira was in the middle of enjoying his bath, he let the warm water take over his body while relaxing back. Thus, he had no time to react to Alpha’s teasing, he seemed pretty irritated to even only tell her to stop.

As Alpha thought that Akira might have gotten too used to naked girl’s body, she thought to herself that it was a necessary sacrifice. It might have rendered her beauty ineffective, but it was way better than having Akira seduced by someone else. So in order to compensate for that, she decided to improve her support for him.

“Got it. I’ll save it for later. So, putting that aside, I want to ask something though, how long are you planning to work together with Elena and Sara?”

“Even if you ask me so… I haven’t really thought about it. I guess until I find a good point to stop, huh? I’m sure it’s not like Elena-san and Sara-san are going to keep taking the SOS emergency request in the Mihazono ruin forever either.”

“So in short, you’re still planning to work with them at the moment, right?”

Alpha’s expression was saying that she did not hate that idea nor she was happy with it. Akira found that a bit weird as he asked her a question.

“Uhh… Is there any problem?”

“It’s not like I have any problem with it, but honestly speaking, in order to get you to accomplish the request from me, I rather choose for you to polish your skill in exploring ruins rather than saving people. If I can add more, you’ll have to be alone when you go to the ruin that I want you to explore.

Because of that, I want you to get more skilled in working alone rather than in a team.”

“Ohh, I see.”

Akira understood Alpha’s reasoning as he deeply nodded. In the end, Alpha only gave her support to him in order for him to accomplish her request. As a matter of fact, it was an advance payment from that exact request. Akira understood that working together with Elena and Sara was purely out of his selfishness. Thus he understood that working together with Elena and Sara did not polish the needed skill for him to complete Alpha’s request, so there was no surprise that Alpha would find that displeasing.

Akira then replied as if he was trying to make excuses.

“…W-well, I get properly paid and then I can use that money to buy equipment I need to explore the ruins. If you think of it as a period for me to gather money, it’s not that bad, yes?”

Alpha smiled at Akira, but that smile was giving a vibe as if she was scolding him.

“I’ll leave it as that then. Your main job as a Hunter is exploring ruins, just don’t forget about that.”

“I know.”

Akira answered back firmly, so Alpha smiled back satisfied. He then stroked down his chest in relief as he dipped himself deeper into the warm bath.

The next day. Akira picked up Carol and was heading to the Mihazono ruin as planned.

The sun was already up when they reached the Mihazono ruin, it was already well past morning. Akira got a good rest yesterday, thus he was back in his perfect condition.

Carol was sleeping in the driver assistant's seat. Before she went to sleep, she smiled and told Akira that he was free to do anything to her while she was sleeping, but he just ignored her.

Akira thought that Carol looked so defenseless when she was sleeping, which was different compared to when she was awake.

He looked at Carol as if he was interested in her. Seeing that, Alpha smiled at him and said as if she was scolding him.

"Just because she's asleep and she agreed to it, it doesn't mean that you should do something to her, you know? If you're okay with only an image, I don't mind helping you. So keep your hands off from her, okay?"

Akira frowned.

"Like hell, I would do anything to her. I just thought that she looks so different compared to when she's awake."

"Hmm, you're right about that. But it's the same for you too, or at least, that's the case lately."

"Is that so? Well, it's not like I can see my own sleeping face though… And what about that 'lately'?"

"When the first time I met you, it seemed like you always kept one eye open to watch for your surroundings, and you never fell too deep to your sleep. But lately, you've been defencelessly sleeping so deeply as long as I don't wake you up. So you too look very different when you sleep compared to when you're awake lately."

"…I see."

Akira sounded as if he was thinking deeply when he said that. Back when he had to sleep in the back alley of the slum city, he always hoped that he would be able to wake up the next morning when he closed his eyes. After all, it was not a strange thing if someone killed him and took all of his belongings in the middle of his sleep.

But right now, he could sleep on a comfy bed inside a house with an outer wall, moreover, Alpha would definitely wake him up if something came up. That was why he could sleep peacefully lately.

[…Now that I think about it, I'm living a pretty luxurious life now.]

Akira smiled bitterly as he once again realized how much his lifestyle had changed.

When Mihazono ruin finally came to his view, Akira shook Carol to wake her up.

"Carol, it's time to wake up."

Carol immediately woke up, she looked at Akira and mumbled.

"…We've arrived?"

"Yeah, the meeting point is just ahead."

"Hmmmh, I got good sleep, thanks."

Carol lightly stretched out her body to wake herself up as she smiled and said.

"So then, did you do something to me?"

"Nope."

"Oh my, that's just too bad. There's nothing to worry about, even if you do something, I'll at least still pretend to be asleep."

"Wait, you were pretending?"

"I was asleep. What I'm saying is that of course, I would wake up if you do something to me, but I'll still pretend to be asleep. After all, I sometimes get that kind of request."

"…I see."

Akira replied so indifferently as if he was not interested at all. Carol who saw that then thought.

[…He won't do anything even when I sleep and show him my defenseless side, huh. He's a pretty hard nut to crack.]

Carol thought that Akira was indeed a difficult person to seduce since he would not do anything to her even when she slept next to him and had already properly given him her permission to mess with her when she was asleep. That was rather unthinkable according to her experience.

[It seems that it's faster if I win his trust through doing good work as a Hunter, huh. I guess I'll put extra effort than usual this time.]

Carol thought that it seemed to be highly unlikely for her to be able to seduce Akira with light teasing. It might be faster to try seducing him again once she won his trust. As she thought so, she made the required adjustment in her plan.

Akira and Carol finally arrived at the meeting point. They arrived there way sooner than the meeting time, but Elena and the other 3 Hunters were already waiting. The extra Hunter was a young Hunter around the same age as Akira, he was standing next to Shikarabe.

Akira and Carol stepped off from Akira's vehicle and met up with Elena and the rest. Elena opened the conversation first.

"It seems that everyone is here. So yeah, let's work together again today… But before that, Shikarabe has something to say."

Shikarabe tried to hide his annoyance as he said.

"Because of my situation, I had to bring one more person. He's a Hunter from Drankam and his Hunter Rank is… Hey, what is your Hunter Rank, again?"

"It's 30. My name is Togami, I'll be in your care today."

Togami lightly introduced himself. The young Hunter boy that Shikarabe brought with him was the one that Akira was together with when they were hunting for the bounty monster.

Shikarabe then said in a more perky voice as if he was trying to hide his bad mood.

“Akira. If you have anything to complain about bringing this guy along, there’s no need to hold back. You can say anything you want, I’ll take it for consideration, you know?”

Shikarabe looked at Akira as if he was trying to send some kind of message to him through telepathy. Akira was a bit confused by that, he instead turned to Elena and asked.

“Elena-san and Sara-san, are you okay with him joining the team?”

Sara answered Akira’s question.

“I’m actually leaving that kind of thing to Elena and Elena decided that it’s not a problem as long as the other Hunters have no problem with it too. That’s why, in the end, it depends on you.”

Elena then added to Sara’s explanation.

“If you don’t like having him in the team, feel free to tell us. I have no plans to decide based on majority, so no pressure at all.”

Even if Shikarabe recommended Togami, Sara and Elena had no plans to let Togami in the team if Akira had something to complain about him. After all, they confirmed from yesterday that they had no problem accomplishing the requests only with 5 of them.

But on the other hand, they also had no plans to reject Togami if Akira was not against it. After all, it was the person that Shikarabe himself brought and Akira also did bring Carol to the team yesterday. So Elena could not reject Togami using that kind of excuse.

If it was someone that Shikarabe brought, even though he did not want to do that, that person would at least be skilled enough as not to slow down the team. Not to mention, they had a hard battle yesterday, thus it was a good thing to get more help. Thus, after a lot of thinking, Elena decided to accept Togami to the team.

Akira understood that if he rejected the idea of having Togami in the team, Togami might actually get kicked out of the team. Thus he thought carefully without saying anything.

“I don’t mind having him on the team. After all, I also brought Carol to the team yesterday.”

Carol then asked.

“Is there any need to readjust the reward distribution then?”

Elena answered that question.

“Nope. Just like how you’re paid from Akira’s share of reward, Togami will be paid from Shikarabe’s share of reward. He’ll also prioritize Shikarabe’s command just like you to Akira.”

“In that case then, I have no complaint either. After all, since Akira will take responsibility if I mess up, Shikarabe too will take responsibility if he messes up, right?”

Carol glanced at Shikarabe and smiled at him. Shikarabe frowned, he looked obviously displeased.

“…Well, I guess that’s how it goes, huh?”

Shikarabe looked at Akira as if he was expecting something, but he eventually gave up and sighed.

Akira was a bit bothered by how Shikarabe was acting there, so he decided to ask Alpha.

“Alpha, did I say anything strange here?”

“Nope, I think he was hoping that you would be against having Togami in the team.”

“But he was the one who brought Togami here, right?”

“It’s common when a Hunter has a different opinion than the people in the organization that Hunter is in. Shikarabe actually doesn’t want to bring Togami along, but he could not refuse the order from the gang that he’s in. That’s why he was hoping he could refuse that order with an excuse that most of the other Hunters in his team are against it.”

“That does sound plausible, I guess Shikarabe is having it hard, huh.”

Akira said it so nonchalantly as if he had nothing to do with it at all. Well, strictly speaking, it was indeed none of his business after all. But getting around troublesome things like that while getting the benefits from being in a gang would definitely help as a Hunter as well as increasing the survivability chance out in the wasteland. It was indeed one of the many important skills for Hunters to reach success.

Akira understood that very well, but he had the habit of looking down at such a thing. That was why he thought that Shikarabe’s problem had nothing to do with him. That was as far as Akira’s skill to get along with other people could go.

Elena also noticed Shikarabe’s reaction there, but she decided to just ignore that as she continued talking about today’s job.

“That’s decided then. Let’s go with these 6 people today.”

She had no plans to get involved in the in-fighting in the Drankam and it was not like Shikarabe asked her to reject Togami. Since Shikarabe would be responsible for him and as long as it would not affect the reward distribution, it was a good thing to have another skilled Hunter in the team. Thus, as the team leader, she had no reason to reject Togami. Elena tried not to include her personal feelings when she decided that.

They then accepted an SOS emergency request and went to the Mihazono ruin again, just like the day before.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 119, Togami’s Resolve

Index

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Elena and her team went to the city district of the Mihazono ruin again. Akira was driving his vehicle while looking at his surroundings, the area was cleaner than yesterday. Most of the wreckages from yesterday had been cleaned up, or at least, moved to the side of the road.

Akira found that a bit strange as he mumbled.

“The road is already cleaned, but who exactly did that?”

Carol answered his question.

“It might be the squad sent by the Hunter Office to secure the city district of the Mihazono ruin. I bet they cleaned the road for carrying supplies to the frontline.”

“Ahh, now that you mention it, they’re doing something like that, huh. If they finally completely secure the city district, I wonder if the SOS emergency request would stop coming.”

“It depends on how far they secure the city district. Although it’s only my guess, I think that squad would withdraw after they clean up some monsters

in the inner area of the city district. I believe they'll just clean up the monsters in the inner area that disrupt the Hunter Office from maintaining its branch and then they'll just check to make sure that no monsters are wandering into the wasteland before withdrawing, I'm pretty sure they won't do anything more than that."

"Is it okay if I ask you why do you think so?"

"Let's see. It's just simply because Mihazono ruin is too big of a ruin for the Corporate Government to completely secure and control, not to mention the area around it. After all, it's not an easy thing to keep their guard up all the time against the monsters that keep coming from unknown locations inside the ruin. But well, I'm sure it's possible for the Corporate Government to do that if they get serious, but I don't think the profit that they can get from doing so is worth the expense. Basically, they would have done that if it might bring them a lot of profit. As a matter of fact, they had done that in the past, the Corporate Government created Kugamayama city in order to secure Kuzusuhara ruin."

Carol continued.

"And even if some monsters from the Mihazono ruin wander into the wasteland, they're highly unlikely to cause any fatal troubles to the nearby cities, so I'm sure they just ignore it too. And even if they do, the cities would also dispatch their defense squad here. Whichever the case, I'm sure that the current squad will pull back after confirming the situation around the ruin."

As far as Akira could remember, the monsters had attacked Kugamayama city 3 times, he had no idea if those attacks happened because someone made a miscalculation or something. Although the inner wall was not damaged at all, those attacks did some damage to the lower district, especially to the slum city, but that might as well because it was designed to be so.

Akira listened closely to Carol's explanation.

Carol's explanation was actually the result of her analyzing the huge amount of information that she had gathered. Akira did not have that information, he did not even have the ability to obtain them, while Carol had both.

Akira who noticed that felt a bit of admiration toward Carol, and Carol noticed that thanks to her sharp senses toward such things.

As Akira showed amazement and interest in a piece of information that any veteran Hunters would know. It showed just how he was lacking in the basic knowledge of being a Hunter, and judging from his impressive fighting ability, that was a really strange thing. It was one of the downsides from quickly attaining power due to relying on Alpha's support.

Carol then thought.

[Akira is, strangely enough, clueless about the basic common knowledge for Hunters given that he's so powerful. I'm honestly curious why that is, but let's put that aside for later, as for now…]

Carol pretended to smile innocently at Akira.

"Akira, you're that kind of Hunter who doesn't do much research about being a Hunter, right? Like the popular ruins at the moment, or what kind of relics that you can sell for more money at the moment, or what kinds of equipment are famous right now, or what the other Hunters are doing, right?"

"…Well, that's true."

If he had to make an excuse, Akira could say that it had not even been that long since he learned how to write his own name. So forget basic common knowledge for Hunters, he was not in a situation where he could learn basic common knowledge for the people who live in the eastern district. Honestly speaking, Akira was interested in that kind of thing too, but since he spent most of his days training and studying, he had no time to gather such information.

“In that case then, I can help you learn about them. After all, it’s better if you know about those kinds of things to some degree.”

But Akira replied with a rather twisted answer.

“I’m already paying you 10,000,000 Aurum now. I have no plans to pay you more, you know.”

Carol smiled bitterly and said.

“I won’t ask you any money for sharing such kind of basic knowledge with you. I’m just thinking of casually telling you like for a subject in a casual talk.”

“…In that case then, it’ll be great if you can tell me about some.”

Although Akira hesitated for a bit, he decided to take that offer since he was indeed interested in it too.

“Got it. First of all, well, let’s see, since we’re in Mihazono ruin, let’s start with the basic knowledge about Mihazono ruin.”

Carol then started explaining about Mihazono ruin in a good mood.

Akira listened closely to Carol’s explanation. Carol thought that it was a good chance for her to gather approval points from Akira as she continued her explanation with a smile on her face.

Carol felt conflicted since Akira seemed to react to this far better compared to when she tried to seduce him with her beautiful body that she took pride in. But she decided to put that aside for now and continue to bring in subjects that might grab Akira’s interest.

Togami was sitting on the long bench inside Shikarabe’s APC. Inside that APC with a faint smell of blood and corpse, he was seriously working on his information terminal.

Togami was carrying powerful equipment. Although all of them were borrowed from Drankam, they could easily cost more than 100,000,000

Aurum if he had to buy them himself. Even among the equipment lent to the young Hunters of the Drankam, his rifle, augmented suit, information-gathering device, and even the ammo and the medicines that he was carrying were all high quality. Even Katsuya, who had the support of one of the high officers in Drankam, Mizuha, did not get that level of equipment.

Togami was recognized as one of the Hunters that successfully hunted a bounty monster with a small team headed by Shikarabe. Although some of the high officers inside Drankam knew the truth behind it, as long as Togami was recognized as such outside, they had to give proper rewards to him. As such, Togami was allowed to borrow powerful equipment.

If it was the past Togami, he would have been delighted knowing that Drankam finally recognized his skill, or he might even lash back complaining that it took too long for Drankam to finally notice his skill.

The past Togami believed that the people around him were underestimating him. The basis of that evaluation was the handful of Hunters among the young Hunters in the gang who were considered to be strong. As a matter of fact, he still thought so even now, that was why he was the rising star of the anti-Katsuya faction. That belief caused him to tend to overestimate himself, both for the better and for the worse.

But that confidence was crushed during the bounty monster hunt. So much to the point that he was suspicious if the high officers in Drankam allowed him to borrow powerful equipment just to spite him.

Since Togami finished that bounty monster hunt, he had been thinking if his pride up until now were nothing but empty. He had been thinking about it without being able to share it with anyone as he thought that all of his amazing achievements up until now as well as his pathetic performance during the battle against the Tank Tarantula were not because of his own skill.

After thinking about it for so long, he finally decided to wait for a chance to confirm his real skill. So, his next question was what kind of chance he could use to do so.

Even if he tried to work together with another young Hunter outside Drankam, he could not exactly use that to confirm his skill. It was because he could not take off his mind from Shikarabe's words when Shikarabe told him that he was just a fool who misunderstood his real skill just because he had a high Hunter Rank.

After some time, Togami regained his composure and realized that Shikarabe's words were actually referring to the people who got ahead of themselves, and not particularly referring to him. But even after he realized that, that was not enough to get his mind off it. It showed that he actually agreed with what Shikarabe said, albeit only to some degree.

After spending a lot of time thinking about it, Togami eventually came to a conclusion. If he could once again get in the same team with Shikarabe and perform as well as him, and produced results as good as him, it might help Togami reconfirm his own skill one more time.

Togami was originally scheduled to join the squad dispatched by Drankam to Mihazono ruin. But due to his request, he was suddenly transferred to Shikarabe's team. After all, he was recognized in public as one of the 4 Hunters who defeated the Tank Tarantula, thus Drankam at least allowed him to do that much.

So, in order to once again reconfirm his own real skill, Togami made his resolve and joined Elena's team. Togami then mumbled as if he was saying to himself.

"I'll once again reconfirm my skill in this request, I don't care if it turns out that I'm just a weakling who got ahead of myself. I just have to train even more. After all, I don't want to stay as a weakling forever."

Togami renewed his resolve there.

Togami then thought about the members of the team. It was Shikarabe, himself, Akira, Elena, Sara, and Carol, six people in total. After he thought about each person in the team, he then frowned.

[It’s a good thing that I got to meet Akira again, this is a good chance to look at his skill… But that Hunter with an augmented suit that basically invites men… Akira brought her to the team, right? What exactly is going on?]

Togami was surprised when he saw Akira was there too, but he was more surprised when he saw Carol next to Akira. Togami was moderately used to girls for someone of his age, but even for him, Carol’s augmented suit had a design that highlighted the beautiful figure wrapped under it. It was a rather provocative design for men around Togami’s age.

[Even that Katsuya, who everyone calls the leader of the harem squad won’t make the girls wear that kind of attire, right…? Does Akira have that kind of fetish or something?]

People used to say that great people had a particular fondness for pleasure, whether it was Katsuya or Akira, it was still unclear whether that was the case for great Hunters too. Togami groaned thinking that he saw a completely unexpected side of the person that shook his confidence.

Elena’s team moved deeper and deeper into Mihazono ruin city district. Right about the time Togami started making slanderous guesses about Akira behind his back, they encountered a group of people, it was the squad that the Hunter Office dispatched to secure Mihazono ruin city district.

Long sharp objects were installed on the side of the road, from there, a thin metallic wire-like object extended out. It was a simple force field armour wall. They were basically easy-to-carry pillars that had strong enough power to bounce back regular-sized warheads and cannons, it was common defensive equipment usually used for temporary bases built in the middle of the wasteland or inside a ruin.

There were heavily-armed people complete with tanks equipped with huge machine guns standing guard near that simple force field wall. They had enough power to make a quick work of a swarm of mechanical monsters.

Elena stopped her vehicle and negotiated with one of the soldiers guarding the wall. That person then told his men to temporarily lower the force field

wall. With the narrow metallic object blocking the road removed, Elena could pass through the road again.

That person then warned Elena.

“Be careful out there. We just got attacked by a huge monster just now, and the smaller monsters also keep popping up from time to time. Since you took that SOS emergency request, I’m sure you’re a skilled Hunter, but if you think that this is the same Mihazono ruin as before, you’ll only get yourself killed.”

That person pointed in the direction where Elena and her team were heading when he said that. In the direction that he was pointing, there was a wreckage of a huge dead mechanical monster, empty warheads and missile pods could be seen scattered around that wreckage. It must have been a pretty powerful monster.

“Thanks, we’ll be careful.”

Elena said her thanks to that person as she restarted her vehicle and stepped on the gas. Shikarabe and Akira followed behind her. After Akira passed over the force field wall, it immediately erected back up.

Akira looked around his surroundings while driving his vehicle after passing through the force field wall. The area around him was filled with rubbles, wreckages, and dead monsters. The situation inside and outside the force field wall differed greatly.

Akira scanned his surroundings and said.

“There are obviously more monsters than yesterday. Is it because they’re pushed out from the inner wall so the area outside becomes more dangerous?”

Carol, who was sitting next to Akira answered that question while also scanning around her surroundings.

“Well, with all of these monsters dead, the outside area might have become relatively safe though?”

“Maybe. If the monsters get more reinforcement, the same number as the dead here, safety would be a pipe dream. After all, it would come as no surprise if the factories produce as many new monsters to replace all of these dead monsters, you know?”

“I did hear that the cleaning drones of the old-world ruin gather the remnants of the dead monsters when no one is looking and then they use the material gathered to create new monsters. But since these wreckages are still here, it means that they can’t use them for material to create new monsters, right? So, I don’t think it’s that easy for them to produce replacement monsters.”

“There might be a warehouse somewhere filled with mechanical monsters, right? In that case, there’s no need to retrieve the dead monsters just to create new monsters. Furthermore, Mihazono ruin has a factory district, right? It won’t be strange if there’s a warehouse filled with monsters over there.”

Carol always gave a more optimistic guess while Akira always gave a pessimistic guess. She found that really weird as she looked in Akira’s direction. Akira who noticed Carol’s gaze then asked.

“…What?”

“Akira, for someone who always takes the worst-case scenario in mind to the point that I can easily call you paranoid, it’s strange that you tend to act without proper planning. Not only did you come to Mihazono ruin without first contacting Elena and Sara where to meet up, back there when we were chased by monsters inside the Seranthal building, you decided to go alone without any plans too. If you’re really that careful, you should think before you act.”

After Carol pointed that out, Akira was lost for words.

The reason why Akira was being paranoid was simply because he knew that he had bad luck, or at least, he thought he had bad luck.

He got unlucky and got attacked by former Hunters that had fallen off grace, he got unlucky and got roped into facing a swarm of monsters, there was also a time when he had to fight powerful relic thieves. In the first place, if he had good luck, he would not be living in the slums of Kugamayama city.

In reality, Akira was actually not as unlucky as he thought he was. After all, if he was really that unlucky, he would not have met Alpha and received that sudden power boost in the first place, which was in itself a very lucky encounter.

Moreover, he would not have visited Shizuka's shop where Shizuka was so nice to help him with a lot of things. He would not have met Elena and Sara in Kuzusuhara ruin, where both of them later saved him from a swarm of monsters. All of them were lucky events, so it was not like Akira always got nothing but unlucky events.

Strictly speaking, Akira simply had a twisted personality, or he might have put too much trust in Alpha's words when she said that he had used all of his lifetime worth of luck by meeting her.

While on the other hand, Akira also was not as reckless as Carol thought he was. Or at least, Akira thought so of himself. Due to the complicated order of priority that he abided by, he thought that it must be simply because he looked reckless from Carol's point of view.

But with that being said, Akira could not tell Carol the reason behind his order of priorities since it included information about Alpha as well as Elena and Sara. So instead, he tried to evade that subject.

"Well, it's not that simple for me too. Moreover, it's a good thing to be careful when exploring a ruin, right?"

It was easy for Carol to notice that Akira was trying to evade the subject, and she also noticed that there was something that he was not willing to

share. But she thought that trying to poke for that information would only worsen her relationship with Akira, that was why she tried to follow along with his intention to just let it slide.

“That’s true. But, it’ll be bad if you get too careful and because of that you get to meet monsters when your concentration is significantly lowered, so it’s not good to be too careful. Well, that’s all I want to say.”

“Ahh, I see, got it then. Don’t worry.”

Akira agreed with what Carol said and nodded. He looked relieved, it might be because he was able to successfully evade the subject that he did not want to talk about.

Carol was staring at Akira’s face and thought.

[…Although he had that incident in Seranthal building just the other day, I wonder why he would even come to Mihazono ruin again to meet up with Elena and Sara. Is it simply because they are his friends? Or is it that Akira actually has some feeling for them? Or one of them is actually Akira’s lover or something? But if that’s the case…]

Carol mumbled.

“…If it’s something that they keep secret, then there’s no need for me to hold back.”

“Did you say something?”

“Hm? It’s nothing.”

Carol smiled amusedly when she said that.

Elena and her team continued moving deeper into the city district of Mihazono ruin and away from the secured area.

The situation outside the wall was worse than yesterday. The condition of the road was so bad that it was hard to go through it. Even the vehicles

designed to explore the wasteland were only barely able to pass through it. Thanks to that, Elena and her team could only continue forward slowly.

Putting that drop in speed aside, they did not encounter any other problems, they did not even get to encounter any dangerous monsters. They only met relatively small monsters and they had no problem taking them out.

Akira suddenly asked Alpha a question.

“I don’t see that many monsters outside the wall though. Alpha, do you detect any monsters around?”

Alpha replied casually.

“Yep, there are some monsters.”

Akira was a bit surprised when he heard that.

“There are? You should’ve told me then, where are they?”

Akira looked around, but he did not spot any monsters around.

Alpha smiled and said.

“They’re scattered around the area. Since they don’t seem to be going to attack us, there’s nothing to worry about.”

Alpha then enhanced Akira’s vision. He could see mechanical monsters pass through the rubbles and wreckages. Some of them were on the other side of a building, some of them were inside a building, some of them were hiding under the wreckages on the side of the road. They were hiding in all kinds of places around the area. And just like Alpha said, they were not trying to attack Akira. They were just there waiting in silence without moving.

Akira was a bit confused by that.

“Why are they not trying to attack us?”

“I can come up with a lot of guesses. They might be just weak monsters, so they’re just observing us from where they’re hiding while sharing that information with the other monsters. Or they might decide not to attack us since they know they have a low chance of winning after seeing our armed vehicles. Or they might be waiting for extra reinforcement to gather their strength together before attacking.”

“So we’re basically safe for now, right?”

“They’re not attacking us, and even if they do, we should be able to easily take them out. So from that point of view, yes, we’re safe at the moment. But monsters are basically dangerous beings, that’s why people call them monsters in the first place.”

“Well, that’s true, but that’s not what I meant…”

Akira felt that he was not fully convinced by Alpha’s answer, but he did not know the reason why. Alpha also did tell him that they would not have any trouble fighting those monsters, so it might be okay to just ignore those monsters for now. In the end, he decided not to let those monsters bother him.

There was one monster that was outside the detection range of Elena and her team. Although it was damaged, it still had enough strength to fight. It was one of those huge monsters that fought the humanoid soldiers dispatched by the Hunter Office, so in short, it was an aggressive and dangerous monster, an enemy.

The scanning device installed in its body was showing Akira and the other Hunters’ positions. The image of Akira moving inside the ruin was transferred from its detection devices that were scattered around the area. That so-called S101 big-sized multi-legged tank had the main duty of destroying enemies of the same type, i.e. the tanks and the humanoid soldiers.

The image displayed in the S101 control device was Akira’s vehicle with Akira and Carol inside it. Alpha was invisible to that monster.

The S101 fixed its aim at Akira. The huge cannon that it was equipped with had enough power to destroy the humanoid weapons used for securing cities. It could launch a warhead at a high speed, it had powerful firepower, and it had a wide explosion radius. If Akira's vehicle got hit by that warhead even once, the people on that vehicle would not be able to get by unscathed.

Right before it launched a warhead, Alpha's image suddenly appeared in the control device of S101. Alpha showed some kind of symbol next to her, she pointed at that symbol while shaking her head.

The S101 confirmed that symbol and stopped from trying to attack Akira. It then immediately returned back to stand-by mode just like before it discovered Akira.

Elena and her team finally reached their destination. It was a 3 storey-building inside the city district of Mihazono ruin. They parked their vehicles next to that building, stepped out from their vehicles, and gathered together.

Elena made a grim expression as she checked her information-gathering device. She then lightly shook her head and said to the rest of the team.

"…Nope, no reply at all. Forget signal from local connection, I can't even find any trace of signals at all."

Elena tried to contact the rescue target, but sadly enough, she did not get any reply at all.

Shikarabe tried to analyze the situation as he said to Elena.

"Even if the rescue targets are all dead, I think we should be able to at least get some signals from their information terminals but… Does that mean that they got attacked by some powerful monsters and got all of their equipment destroyed? The target location is here, right?"

"If we follow the information from the request, yes, it's this building."

They then peeked inside from the entrance of the building. The interior of the building was pitch black, there was no light source at all. There was not even a trace saying that the entrance was barricaded either.

If the rescue targets were really in that building, then they should be barricading themselves somewhere inside that building. While on the other hand, there was also a chance that the information of the rescue targets was wrong and they were not in that building.

They peeked inside that building while having a conflicted feeling. They saw a lot of monsters flooding out from inside a building just yesterday, so they did not want to explore that building to search for the rescue targets if it could be helped.

But it was not like they could just return back without trying to do anything there. They came all the way to that building because they accepted a rescue request from the broker that Elena was contracted with. So in order to properly do their work based on the information given to them, even if the rescue targets were no longer inside that building, they had to at least check the inside of that building and properly confirm that there was no one in that building.

If that building was filled with mechanical monsters, they could use that as an excuse to make a guess that the rescue targets were already dead. But if that was not the case, if they had the option to check a bit inside of that building, then they could not afford to just return back without doing anything.

Elena sighed, her face turned stern as she said.

“It can’t be helped then. Let’s search the inside of the building. Sara, Akira, Carol, and I will go and search the building. Shikarabe and Togami will guard the building from the outside. Give us a call if anything comes up. If we don’t return back after 1 hour and you can’t contact me, then issue an SOS request for us.”

Shikarabe nodded and said.

“Roger that. If that happens, is it okay for me to decide where to issue the request?”

“Since we’re here because of the request from Alhain insurance company, you should first send the request to them to let them know what happened. Then after that, it’s up to you.”

Shikarabe seemed a bit dissatisfied as he said.

“Got it. Is it okay if I set a high reward offer for that SOS rescue request and take that request myself?”

Elena smiled and replied.

“Of course. That is, if you think that I will pay any amount of reward that you decide without resisting.”

Sara and Carol just smiled lightly watching that short exchange between Shikarabe and Elena.

Akira too was watching that short exchange filled with interest. In the back of that short exchange, there was a lot of underlying knowledge about how to handle an emergency situation and unspoken common senses among Hunters, and Akira had almost no knowledge at all about both of those things. He simply did not have enough experience working as a Hunter. Although he received a sudden power boost thanks to Alpha’s support, it did not instantly turn him into an experienced Hunter.

Togami somehow looked unsatisfied with that plan since he actually also wanted to search the building. After all, there was a good chance that nothing would happen if he just stood there guarding the building from the outside. He believed that was the exact reason why Shikarabe did not protest at all when Elena proposed to use most of the team’s firepower to search the building instead of guarding the building.

Togami joined Shikarabe because he wanted to reconfirm his skill. Of course, there was no guarantee that something would happen if he joined the team searching the inside of the building. But he believed that he should

be able to get more chances to reconfirm his skill by going inside instead of standing guard outside. Even if he did not get to find monsters, he could at least see how the other Hunters explored a dangerous place and compare that to himself.

After a bit of thinking, he then nervously asked Elena.

“Uhmm, if it’s possible, I actually want to search the inside of the building too, is that okay?”

Elena looked a bit surprised. She then shifted his gaze to Shikarabe.

Shikarabe then answered Togami’s request in place of Elena.

“No.”

It was a short answer that did not show any willingness to negotiate.

Togami looked at Shikarabe with a dissatisfied look, while Shikarabe looked back at Togami with an annoyed gaze, there was even a trace of mockery mixed in that gaze too.

“If you slow them down, I’ll be the one in trouble. So like hell I would let a dead burden like you to go with them.”

“…Alright, I understand”

Although Togami still looked like he could not accept it, he obediently gave that reply.

Shikarabe looked obviously surprised, he thought that Togami would lash back at him. But since Togami unexpectedly obeyed him, Shikarabe awkwardly felt relieved.

“W-well, it’s all good as long as you get it.”

Seeing how Togami properly stood guard there, Shikarabe tilted his head in confusion.

After finishing the preparation to go in, the rest of the team went inside the building. They were using a relatively powerful torchlight while exploring the building. The powerful light from the torchlight banished the darkness inside that building that the sunlight could not even reach, the light pierced deeper into the building through small openings and cracks. Elena told them to intentionally use powerful light so the rescue targets would easily find them if the rescue targets were still somewhere inside.

There were traces of battles inside that building. There were bullet holes both in the walls and the floors, there were also wreckages of dead mechanical monsters. But there were no blood marks nor corpses of dead Hunters. It seemed that the Hunters were able to get away from the monsters uninjured.

Akira moved carefully while searching the inside of the building as he asked Alpha a question.

“Alpha, do you find any monsters or the rescue targets?”

“I don’t detect anything inside my searching range.”

“I see. This building is a rather small building, so if you don’t find anything, the rescue targets might be really no longer in this place.”

Akira knew very well just how great Alpha’s detection skill was, moreover, Alpha also had a very wide detection range. So, after he knew that Alpha did not detect any monsters nor any rescue targets, Akira unconsciously lowered his guard.

But the other Hunters immediately noticed that Akira lowered his guard there. Normally, they would have scolded him for lowering his guard in the middle of a dangerous place. But since all of them knew just how unnaturally sensitive Akira was when it came to detecting enemies, they did not scold him at all.

Sara then asked Elena a question.

“Elena, do you find anything?”

“Nope. Even my information-gathering device doesn’t detect anything.”

Even Elena’s information-gathering device also agreed with Akira. So there might be really no monsters nor their rescue targets inside that building.

Both Elena and Sara already realized that Akira was someone who can connect to the old-world domain. But because of that, they always pinned the unnatural skill that Akira showed from time to time, like his astounding ability to detect monsters, as his ability as someone who could access the old-world domain. They did not even guess the existence of Alpha at all.

Sara looked at Akira one more time and scanned his current equipment. Akira was using an augmented suit that was way outside the reach of fresh Hunters, and he was carrying heavy weapons that normal humans could not carry unless with the help of an augmented suit. It showed just how powerful Akira was as a Hunter.

[When we met for the first time, Akira was carrying nothing but AAH rifles and he was just using a cloth that was neither an armour nor an augmented suit. But in such a short time, he got all of that equipment. Not to mention that his detection ability is more or less as good as Elena, then to top it off, his fighting ability is nothing to scoff at… At this rate, it won’t take long for him to surpass me and Elena. I wonder how long we can stay as his senior.]

Sara smiled bitterly, she felt a bit lonely when she thought that she did not have much time left until Akira became stronger than her, and when that time came, Akira would stop relying on her and Elena as his senior.

On the side, Carol confirmed how Elena and Sara reacted when they noticed Akira lowered his guard, she then thought.

[They continue exploring the building without showing any reaction even when they notice Akira lowered his guard, as in matter of fact, it seems that they also lowered their guards too. Judging by the information-gathering device that Elena has, I don’t think both of them are Hunters who would lower their guard because of something like that… Does that mean they know why Akira is so good at detecting monsters? Or is it that because they

know Akira for a long time and really trust him? Or is it that they're already used to it since they have worked together with Akira many times before?]

Carol knew that Akira had an unnaturally high ability to detect enemies, but she did not think that it was because he might be someone who could connect to the old-world domain. It was because she knew that being an old-world connector did not equal having a great ability to detect enemies. Of course, it was not completely unrelated, but that also did not give a definite proof either. Carol knew that very well.

That was exactly why Carol credited Akira's skill to detect enemies as one of the rare talents that those great Hunters had. She did not even consider the possibility that Akira might be able to connect to the old-world domain.

[…Honestly speaking, I want to ask a lot of questions about it. But I guess I should do that later and not here.]

If Carol tried to poke about that information from Elena and Sara here, of course, Akira would be able to hear her too, and it might cause trouble later down the line. If she wanted to gather information about Akira, she should at least do that somewhere where he could not hear her, and she should choose her words wisely as not to cause any suspicion.

Moreover, she should be able to deduce whether it was something that she could ask Akira directly or not by seeing how Elena and Sara would react to her questions. So for now, Carol tried to calm the curiosity that was welling up inside her heart as she tried to keep her poker face.

After they looked around the inside of the building, they ended up with the conclusion that no one was there. Elena then told the rest of the team to stop searching and head back to Shikarabe.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 120, Troublesome Stuff

Index

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After Elena, Sara, Carol, and Akira returned to Shikarabe, Shikarabe listened to their explanation and understood the current situation. He then sighed and looked disappointed. Although the SOS request that they took was considered to be completed after searching the target area, the reward was far less compared to if they returned back with the rescue targets.

With this, not only Shikarabe ended up coming all the way there while forced to bring along a burden with him due to the gang that he was in, but his first request of the day also ended up badly. He then let out all of his disappointment and psychical tiredness together with a sigh before continuing.

“So our first request for today is a dud, huh. I feel like today will be an unlucky day. So then, what’s the plan next?”

Elena answered his question.

“We didn’t use much ammo, so I’m thinking of heading to the next request-target right from here. Although, I don’t mind heading back too in case you guys used most of your ammo when we were not around.”

Shikarabe glanced at Togami, he thought that Togami would make a complaint. But unlike what Shikarabe was expecting, Togami was still standing there with a serious face while properly keeping his eyes peeled.

Shikarabe was wondering the entire time while waiting for Elena to return, he was waiting for Togami to act out. In the end, nothing happened at all, which indicated Togami had changed. This questionable fact made Shikarabe feel a little bit disturbed as he continued.

“We’re okay with that, after all, nothing happened at all when you were gone.”

Elena watched Shikarabe’s face closely. Although it did not say that nothing had happened, it did not seem that it would affect his performance during the rescue request either.

“I see, in that case, let’s hurry up and head to the next location.”

“…Hmm? Wait for a sec, I just got a notification from the Hunter Office, give me a few seconds to check it.”

Shikarabe noticed that a notification from the Hunter Office had reached his information terminal. As he pulled out his information terminal and was about to check it, almost at the same time the same notification reached Togami, Elena, and Sara too albeit a little later. Sara also pulled out her information terminal to check the details of that notification as she turned to Akira and said.

“It seems that we also got notification from the Hunter Office too. Akira, wait for a bit while we check the details.”

“Okay.”

The people who received those notifications started checking their own information terminals and they reacted differently when they read the details of that notification.

Elena and Sara looked obviously annoyed as if they just got roped into something troublesome. Togami on the other hand, seemed rather excited as if he just got something that he had been waiting for. While for Shikarabe, he seemed a bit panicked and extremely irritated.

Elena and Sara then started talking to each other. Shikarabe immediately used his information terminal to call for someone and he seemed to be negotiating with the person he was calling, he also sounded really displeased. While Togami just stood there waiting for Shikarabe to finish his negotiation.

Suddenly, a call reached Elena's information terminal. Elena stopped discussing with Sara and picked that call with a stern face, she then started talking with whoever on the other side of that call in a bad mood.

Akira frowned and asked Alpha.

"Alpha, do you have any idea what's going on?"

"Nope. But looking at this, one thing for sure, it doesn't seem to be anything good."

"Thought so…"

When Akira checked Elena, Elena sounded a bit angry, which was rather rare for her.

"…Leave that aside for now… Yeah, that's right. You should at least know where we are right now, right?! We're in the middle of the ruin, we're in a situation where we might get attacked by a swarm of monsters any second, you know?! At least give us some time to relocate!! Or are you actually trying to kill us or something?!!"

Elena then cut the call and immediately gave Shikarabe an order.

"Shikarabe, we'll head back now."

Shikarabe was still talking in his information terminal as he glanced at Elena and nodded to convey his affirmation. He then signalled Togami to

get into the APC with his hand and went to the APC himself while still on the call.

Elena, who was not even trying to hide her displeasure, was taken aback when she noticed that Akira was looking at her. She then lightly sighed to calm herself down before she apologetically said to Akira.

“Akira, I’m sorry, but is it okay if I tell you the details later? We need to return back to the Hunter Office for now. I’ll tell you the details after that.”

“Sure, I don’t mind, is it better if we hurry up then?”

“No, it’s fine. There’s no need to hurry up… After all, we have no obligation to go that far.”

Elena was only mumbling in a small voice in the last half of her sentence before she returned back to her vehicle. Sara smiled bitterly and followed behind Elena.

Akira turned to Carol. Carol seemed so relaxed and calm there. Unlike Akira who did not understand what was going on at all, it seemed that Carol had some inkling about the current situation.

Akira then threw a question to Carol.

“Carol, do you have any guess about that notification that the others just received?”

“Nope. But it’s not like I have no idea at all though. I gathered some information regarding the Mihazono ruin yesterday, so I at least have some guesses.”

“So, what is it?”

“Rather than making poor guesses, it’s faster if you hear it from someone who is directly connected to it. That aside, we need to hurry it up if you don’t want to get left behind.”

“Whoops!”

When Carol pointed that out, Akira immediately hurried up back to his vehicle, Carol followed suit behind him.

Carol looked at Akira and thought.

[Normally speaking, for a Hunter as strong as him, he should have the ability to gather that level of information. But it seems that Akira is basically an amateur in gathering information, huh… I wonder if I can make my move from that side?]

Seeing from how Akira was behaving yesterday and today, Carol was sure that Akira properly recognized Elena and Sara as beautiful girls.

Akira did say in the past that he had more interest in food than girls. But it was not like he had no interest in girls at all either, being able to confirm that was already a huge success for Carol.

So with that in mind, Carol compared herself to Sara and Elena, the 2 girls that Akira properly recognized as the member of the opposite sex. Although both of them were indeed beautiful, she did not think that her beauty would lose to any of them. As in matter of fact, Carol had gathered and spent a lot of money to polish her body, as such, she actually thought that she had a better figure than Sara and Elena.

Of course, it depended on the personal taste whether someone was attractive or not. But Carol did not think that the difference between her and Sara and Elena was that big as to make such a factor so important, unless Akira was only interested in a very limited type of girls. But according to her experience, she did not think that was the case at all.

Carol thought that there might be some kind of particular requirement for Akira to properly recognize someone as a member of the opposite sex. After all, unless that was indeed the case, it was unnatural for him to be so disinterested in her at all. But the reason why she thought so might simply be because she had absolute confidence in her own body.

But Carol had no idea at all what this particular requirement might be. Which meant that she either had to do something to investigate what this

particular requirement was, or she should change the way she approached Akira. Akira was indeed a Hunter who was very skilled at fighting, but in contrast to that, he was utterly lacking in knowledge as a Hunter. She might be able to get closer to Akira by sharing that kind of knowledge with him. And the closer she got, the easier it would be for her to investigate the type of girl that he liked.

“Well, I guess there’s no need to be in a rush here. Let’s be patient about this.”

Carol was sitting next to Akira, who was driving his vehicle, while smiling and thinking about her next plan.

Elena and her team were able to return back to the Hunter Office without any incident at all. They did not even encounter a single monster on their way back. Although they detected some monsters, those monsters let them pass through without trying to attack them. Akira who thought that those monsters called for reinforcements and were waiting to ambush them on their way back. So, that ending felt rather anti-climatic.

When they stepped off from their vehicles, some Drankam Hunters and Hunter Office staff were already standing by near the Hunter Office as if they were waiting for Elena’s team. Elena was obviously annoyed and sighed when she saw them.

Elena was going to negotiate with them from here. And judging by the fact that those people were already waiting for them there, it seemed that she would not have the chance to explain the current situation to Akira and Carol.

Elena then glanced at Carol and remembered that she was rather skilled in negotiation too. She then suddenly asked Akira a question.

“Akira, is it okay if I borrow Carol for a bit? From here, I’ll have to get into a rather, no, a really annoying and troublesome negotiation with those people.”

“I don’t mind though, but…”

Akira then checked on Carol. Although he hired her as a guide, she even helped during the battle too, and now Elena asked her to help to do some negotiation. Akira thought it would be way outside of the role that she was paid for, so it would not be strange if Carol refused.

But Carol just casually said.

“Sure, I’m okay with helping out.”

Akira was a bit surprised by that.

“Are you sure?”

“Yep, I’m here because you hired me. So I don’t mind doing that much.”

Akira slightly bowed.

“I see… Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Carol smiled at Akira as if it did not bother her at all while taking a note of that strange and sudden change of attitude from Akira.

Elena then said to Sara and Akira.

“Well then. We’ll be temporarily parting ways here. Sara, can you explain to Akira what’s going on for the time being?”

“Sure, I’ll leave the negotiation to you.”

Elena, Carol, and Shikarabe headed to the Hunter Office’s branch. But before Shikarabe left, he gave Togami an order.

“Togami! Take my APC back to Drankam temporary base!! After that, just wait for the next order from Drankam there!!”

Togami flusteredly replied.

“Wait for a second there! What will happen to me after this?”

“Like hell if I know?!”

Shikarabe sounded annoyed when he shouted back and just left it at that. Togami seemed like he could not completely accept it, but he then dragged himself back to the APC and did what Shikarabe told him to do.

Akira and Sara were told to move their vehicles so as not to block the way, so they did. After Akira relocated his vehicle, he stepped off from the driver seat and stretched out his body, that was when Sara came to him.

He then asked Sara a question.

“So then, what is going on? It seems that both Shikarabe and Elena-san looked pretty annoyed though.”

Sara seemed to be hesitating for a bit before she opened her mouth.

“Well, there’s just this troublesome thing. Although I said that, I’m not really sure what’s going on in Shikarabe’s side, but I think it’s the same reason why we’re also roped into this troublesome thing.”

“It’s that notification from the Hunter Office, right?”

“Yes, the content of that notification is a rather troublesome thing from the Hunter Office that we usually receive from time to time. So about that though… Well, it’s not that simple, but to explain it properly…”

“If it’s something that is hard for Sara-san to talk about, then there’s no need to do that.”

“Ahh, no, it’s fine. The message itself doesn’t contain secret information or anything like that, not to mention that Elena also told me to explain it to you. So I actually hope that you would listen to it.”

“I understand then.”

“So, about that, it’s basically a request to join the efforts to investigate this strange change in Mihazono ruin.”

Sara then started to explain the content of that massage from the Hunter Office to Akira. After listening to that explanation, Akira made a stern face.

“…So they’re sending a squad to Seranthal building, huh?”

“Yep. They put up all kinds of excuses for sending that squad and I don’t really know all the details. Some people said that it’s for investigating the source of this recent change in Mihazono ruin, others said that it’s for rescuing the people who are stranded inside that building, or it’s for taking control of that whole building. It is not even clear whether that information is true or it’s just someone’s guess. But one thing for sure, it seems it has been decided that a squad will be dispatched to that building, and it seems that it’s going to be a pretty big squad.”

Akira made a grim face as he remembered what he had gone through inside that Seranthal building.

“Uhh, is it possible to refuse it?”

“Well, although it’s not a compulsory request, I think it’s pretty unlikely.”

In order to give a boost to the defense squad from Kugamayama city that the City Management had dispatched, and to convince the people of the inner wall who paid them, the City Management decided to issue that request to the Hunters who had successfully hunted a bounty monster in the past.

With that monster swarm incident the other day and the appearance of the bounty monsters not too long ago, it seemed that the people in the inner wall were starting to feel insecure. But it was not like they could just demand the city defense squad to dispatch soldiers to solve it. It was difficult to readjust the strength of the city defense squad in case anything bad happened while making sure that the people in the inner wall felt safe at the same time.

Moreover, the hunt for bounty monsters also got pretty famous within the inner wall. And the story about the skilled Hunters dispatched to take down those powerful monsters that even warrant a bounty must have calmed down the people inside the inner wall. Not to mention, it would also increase the available budget for the defense squad, it was like killing two birds with one stone.

Because of that, although the request to join that squad was not a compulsory one, it was like half-compulsory. If the Hunters refused that request without a good excuse, it might cause them trouble later. After all, it might cause more unrest in the inner wall since they might think that even the Hunters who defeated the bounty monsters refused to take that request. Thus those Hunters were pretty much forced to take that request.

If the City Management had its eyes on a certain Hunter, there was a good chance that Hunter would have a hard time staying in that city. In the worst-scenario, they would not be able to sell relics and buy ammo. Thus eventually forcing them to go to another city.

There were not that many Hunters who were ready to face that consequence just to refuse such a request, at least, they would try to negotiate a suitable amount of reward for doing that request. In the first place, the City Management would not have issued that request if they knew that the Hunters would not take it. Moreover, losing skilled Hunters was also not something that the City Management wanted.

Sara explained everything regarding that subject plus some other related information that Akira might not know yet.

“Well, so basically, that’s it. That’s why Elena is trying to negotiate with the City Management about that troublesome request.”

Akira listened closely and understood Sara’s explanation, but a question suddenly popped out in his mind.

“I see… But, I never thought that Elena-san would be that angry, is it that the reward offered was really that bad?”

Sara hesitated for a bit before answering.

“…Well, that is… Uhh, you know. The reward is not that bad and I’m sure Elena is trying to pull it up higher too. I have no problem with the reward and I don’t think Elena has any problem with it either… It’s just that, well, they basically just cut in while we were doing another request and they’re bringing a request that is hard for us to refuse. Moreover, they even started trying to negotiate in the middle of the ruin where we might get attacked by monsters any second. So it’s no surprise that it causes Elena to get mad.”

“Now that you mention it, well, that’s true.”

Elena was also a human. It was only to be expected that she might get angry from time to time. And in this case, a request was pushed to her while she was in the middle of doing another request, it might completely throw her schedule and preparation into disarray. Elena might have also gotten angry because of her sense of responsibility as the leader of the team. Things did make sense if Akira saw it from that point of view.

Sara was relieved when she saw that it seemed Akira accepted her explanation, she then immediately tried to change the subject before Akira brought it up again.

“By the way, Akira, you didn’t get that notification? Didn’t you also hunt the bounty monster in Shikarabe’s team?”

This time, it was Akira’s turn to hesitate before answering.

“Ah, well, you see, I’m basically not allowed to talk about it, so…”

“I see, if that’s the case, I won’t pressure you. It just got me curious for a bit. I’m just wondering how did you perform during the bounty hunt.”

“I didn’t do anything big, as in matter of fact, I’m not even sure if I deserve the reward that I received.”

Akira thought that it should be fine to tell Sara that much when he said that.

Sara did not say anything for a while, it seemed that she was thinking about something. Her expression suddenly changed as if she just realized something, she then smiled and said to Akira.

“Ahhh, so basically you accepted a request from Shikarabe without going through the Hunter Office to help him as an extra personnel in order to hunt the bounty monster, and then you guys were able to successfully kill the bounty monster, huh.”

Akira gasped, Sara was able to accurately guess what happened just like that. As he looked at Sara with a surprised face, she looked back at him with a smile. He then asked Sara a question.

“…That was enough for Sara-san to make that guess?”

Sara smiled amusedly as she answered Akira’s question.

“Since you said that you’re not even sure the reward that you got matched your contribution, it meant that you properly received the reward, which meant that you took that request. At that time, the only request that Shikarabe offered you was only to help him hunt the bounty monster. Then, judging from the fact that you didn’t get that notification from the Hunter Office, that means that request is only a request among Hunters and the Hunter Office has nothing to do with it. Since Shikarabe hired you, it means that he knew you would at least pull your own weight. That’s why he didn’t hire you only to be a driver. When you said that you didn’t do anything big, basically it’s because the main firepower during that fight against the bounty monster was Shikarabe and his friends. Then as for you, in order to give support to Shikarabe and his friends, I bet you used expendable equipment that Shikarabe gave you to attack the bounty monster as well as trying to keep its attention off from Shikarabe. When you said that you’re not sure you deserve the reward that you received, I can make a guess that it’s at least not a small amount of money. Shikarabe himself would not pay that much money unless the bounty hunt was a success. That’s why I can say for sure that you were able to successfully kill the bounty monster… You can’t confirm whether I got it right or not, okay? It’ll violate your duty of confidentiality, after all.”

Akira hung his head low.

“…I’ll keep my mouth shut.”

“That vehicle is not the same vehicle that you bought from Shizuka, right? Is it a reward from Shikarabe? Although I’m not that knowledgeable about vehicles, that one is pretty expensive, you know. Although you received that as a reward, you still said that you didn’t know if it was worth it, huh. Akira, it must have been a hard fight.”

“I can’t say anything.”

“Akira, you’re an honest kid, aren’t you?”

Sara giggled seeing how Akira was pouting.

She then changed the mood and said.

“I’m sorry, my apologies. By the way, just so you know, the ones who can’t refuse that request are only Elena and me, so it’s completely okay for you. After all, that request didn’t get issued to you in the first place. I know that you’ve gone through something really bad in Seranthal, right? So if you don’t want to come, you don’t need to force yourself. After all, this wasn’t in our plan at all when we invited you.”

Akira’s expression returned back to normal.

“No, I’ll come along too if it’s okay with Sara-san and Elena-san.”

Although it was true that the situation had changed greatly from their initial plan. But for Akira, that was not the case at all. After all, he originally came to Mihazono ruin to help Elena and Sara.

Sara then asked Akira one more time.

“We’re more than happy to have you, but are you really sure it’s okay?”

“Yes.”

Sara's expression turned serious as she said to Akira.

"…Is it because you know you might be able to get some profit from it? Despite the danger, you are moving for profit?"

"Eh? Ah, yes. Yes, something like that. I want to get better equipment after all, so I'm in need of money right now."

Akira sounded a little surprised, but he immediately tried to match his excuse with what Sara said.

Sara did not say anything back for a few seconds, she then smiled and said to Akira.

"…I see, got it. But, there's no need to be reckless, okay?"

"I understand."

Akira answered back firmly.

As she listened to Akira's reply, Sara then thought.

[…This boy is really bad at lying. Or more like, he's bad at trying to trick people in general, huh?]

Sara confirmed that Akira did not decide to come with her for money.

Moreover, she guessed that he decided to come along in order to help her. Although it might be nothing but her wishful thinking, she had no proof that refuted it.

As Sara thought that Akira decided to set his foot again in a place where he almost got killed in order to help her and Elena, she felt both happy and pathetic at the same time. But even so, since she felt more happy than pathetic, she did not make a saddened face.

Sara decided to use that feeling as the motivation to grow stronger and smiled.

Akira was talking with Sara while waiting for Elena to return back from negotiating.

Akira then asked Sara a question.

“I wonder how long will it take until Elena-san finishes?”

“It depends on how hard the negotiation is, so, I don’t really know myself. But I’m sure the City Management doesn’t want to spend too much time on negotiating just to get late in dispatching the squad either. So I think it would end before afternoon even if it means that the negotiation fails.”

“Fail? But it’s not a request that you just can refuse, right?”

“Basically, yes. Which also means that there are exceptions. If they can’t agree on the conditions that we put on no matter what, then, we’ll refuse to take the request even if it means that we need to change our base of operation to another city. If I’m to make an extreme example, they might only pay us a small amount of money just to be expendable pawns. Well, I’m sure Elena will properly do her job so that something like that would not happen unless something unexpected happens.”

The one that Elena was negotiating against must be someone who was used to having a hard negotiation. If it was him, Akira would have been swept by the flow of the negotiation and forced to accept a very bad deal. As he thought so, he made a conflicted face and mumbled.

“…That sounds rough.”

“That’s why most of the Hunters hire other people to handle the negotiation for them. In my case, Elena would do that for me, that’s why I don’t have to do that. Akira… You’re bad with negotiation, right? In that case, it might be a good idea to hire someone to do that for you.”

“Hmmm, I see, I’ll think about it.”

Akira thought that he was not that great of a Hunter yet, so he would not get roped into such a troublesome negotiation, and he did not need people to

negotiate in his place yet. But one day, he might need one, so he just kept that in mind for now.

In reality, Akira was already someone who could easily get roped into troublesome stuff. The reason why he did not realize it himself was simply because he had no misgivings in killing other people and he did not care about the trouble that killing other people might cause. In the worst-case scenario, it was okay to kill, that kind of thinking was a normal thing in the slum city.

Normally, people would try to find a way to solve their problems peacefully, but Akira simply ignored that way of thinking. It had been etched into Akira's mind that the other person always guaranteed to look down on him and his life, there would not be any chance to negotiate, nor compromise. It might be also because of this that Akira was overly lax to certain people.

Although Akira had escaped the slum city, his mind was still somewhere inside the slum city where he knew no other way to protect himself except to kill.

That indeed had caused troubles for him in the past, but Akira always credited that to his bad luck, or at least, he understood that he reaped what he sowed when that happened.

Sara then turned her gaze to the Hunter Office. Elena was still negotiating there. Since there was still no call from Elena, it showed just how hard the negotiation that she was having over there.

[…As I thought, I bet they're bickering there.]

For Sara who very well understood Elena might be having a hard time, she imagined the scene of Elena trying her best negotiating in the Hunter Office's branch and sighed.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 121, Troublesome Negotiation

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As Sara had guessed, Elena was having a difficult time negotiating. When Sara explained the current situation to Akira, she deliberately hid some information including the reason why Elena was so irritated to the point that she raised her voice.

Although it had been decided that the squad sent to Seranthal building would consist of the Hunters that successfully hunted a bounty monster in the past. And with that many Hunters that would be sent to Seranthal building, they would need to have a clear chain of command so that they could work together effectively. But at the same time, this chain of command could be the source of another trouble.

The City Management was originally planning to use the same chain of command used during the bounty monster hunt. After all, it was to be expected that the Hunters who led the group that successfully hunted the bounty monster should at least have a good commanding skill. Even the group that was able to successfully hunt the Big Walker actually had a sudden team reconstruction before they were dispatched, and yet, they were able to kill the Big Walker with that team. The City Management thought

that the Hunters would sort out any problems regarding the chain of command by themselves.

In order so that the Hunters had the same chain of command in the field, they needed to take someone who was already a leader of a team or an officer from an organization or a gang. Thus, the City Management let the team with the most contribution during the bounty hunt to pick the squad leader.

Which in this case, meant the City Management left that decision to Drankam since Drankam bounty hunt team had contributed greatly during the bounty hunt. Most of the independent team from the Drankam were also able to successfully kill a bounty monster too. Moreover, the gang also contributed greatly in defeating the strongest bounty monster. Thus, it was no surprise that the City Management left the details of the investigation squad to Drankam. So, the current plan was to let Drankam decide the strategy and the leader of the team, then the other Hunters would work under Drankam's command.

But in the end, an unexpectedly lot of Hunters complained about that.

When the situation in Mihazono ruin suddenly changed, Drankam issued the SOS rescue requests to the Hunters around the ruin. This resulted in a lot of Hunters getting trapped inside the ruin. Most of the rescue targets for the current SOS rescue request were actually the Hunters who got trapped from the previous SOS rescue request.

Although they ended up judging the situation only from the result, this basically meant that Drankam had sent a lot of Hunters into the wasteland just to get them trapped there only for a small reward. There was not a small number of Hunters who fortunately were able to return back alive while their companions got killed back in the ruin, and most of these Hunters ended up holding a grudge against Drankam. Due to a lot of Hunters getting trapped in the ruin because of that SOS rescue request from Drankam, the current public opinion of Drankam had already significantly fallen.

While on the other hand, some people in Drankam were thinking of using this chance to increase Drankam's reputation in Kugamayama city.

There were a lot of other Hunter gangs in Kugamayama city beside Drankam. If Drankam was able to make the investigation a success with the strategy that Drankam itself decided, there was no mistaking that it would definitely make Drankam even more renown. So, if someone not from Drankam took the command and participated in that investigation and made it a success, it would give a boost to the reputation of the gang that Hunter was affiliated with.

Moreover, there were also Hunters who were worried if Drankam took command of the squad, people from Drankam might push the dangerous jobs to the other gangs.

Because of those reasons, a lot of Hunters refused to have Drankam taking command of the squad.

Then to top it off, there was also an in-fighting within Drankam itself.

Drankam had already dispatched its Hunters to Mihazono ruin, and that particular squad was formally commanded by Katsuya. So any reinforcement who joined that team would basically work under him.

Inside Drankam, there was friction between the young Hunters and veterans, there were also some young hunters in the gang who were members of the anti-Katsuya faction. Although they were not as bad as Shikarabe, a lot of Hunters in Drankam refused to work under Katsuya, enough for the gang not to be able to just ignore those Hunters. They demanded to shift the command from Katsuya to one of them or for the City Management to accept the extra conditions that they imposed for that request, and in order to do that, they even dragged the upper echelons in Drankam to get involved in the negotiation.

Then, to top it off, each Hunter had different aims during the negotiation. Some of them demanded as much rewards as they could get, some of them deliberately picked a fight against the other gangs in order to be able to

refuse that request while keeping their reputation, while some of them tried to get special favour in exchange for taking that request.

With all kinds of people gathered there, each of them was aiming only to bring profits to themselves, or to the gangs that they belong in, it was only to be expected for the negotiation to turn complicated.

At the moment, there were a lot of people gathered in the Hunter Office branch of Mihazono ruin including the negotiators from Drankam, leaders from various Hunter teams, and people from the request brokers that some of the Hunters were contracted with, Elena was one of them. They were trying their best to reach a consensus.

All of them gathered in the cafeteria of the Hunter Office branch. Carol and Elena were also there, Carol was sitting next to Elena on one of the tables in the cafeteria. Sitting opposite to them was a negotiator from Drankam by the name of Maeda.

Elena and Maeda were talking to each other with a stern face, while Carol was listening to them with a relaxed smile.

After that Maeda listened to a report from one of his co-workers, he then cut the call on his information terminal, sighed, and said to Elena.

“…I just checked with Drankam side again, and as I said, the answer is still a no. We can’t accept the conditions that you put up.”

“I see then. It means that we have no deal here, yes?”

When Elena said that, Maeda’s face twitched.

“You do know that we can’t have that here for the sake of both of us, right? It’s a request from Kugamayama City Management, you know? You do know well how angry they’ll be if we keep dragging this negotiation without any good reason, right?”

Elena did not waver at all, her expression did not change as she replied.

“Of course. I bet the City Management wants us to quickly finish this negotiation so that they can dispatch the squad to take control of Seranthal building as soon as possible.”

“If you understand it, can you at least lower your demand? The longer we drag this negotiation, the more the City Management would hate both of us.”

“Just to let you know, in order to save us from that, we already lowered our demand as low as we can, you know?”

“…You demand 5 times the original reward offered by the City Management and for us to pay some of that reward in advance as the condition to join the squad under Drankam’s command… Then you say that it’s already as low as you can go? You know that we can’t accept that demand no matter how you look at it, right?”

“That’s because we recognize this request is much more dangerous than Drankam is willing to admit. Like I said, it’s the lowest we can go. If we had more time, I would have demanded even more reward, you know?”

Maeda was staring at Elena with a stern face, there was no trace of deception in Elena’s expression and words. Maeda then sighed.

“…Seriously now, are you for real? This is a request from the City Management, you know? If you keep insisting on making such impossible demand, we have no other choice but to tell the City Management that the negotiation has failed because you keep making that demand. Are you sure you’re okay with it if the City Management thinks of you as a Hunter who can’t be reasoned with?”

Hunters spent their days fighting dangerous monsters in the old-world ruin, so in order to have a winning chance against those monsters, they had to bring along powerful weapons, and it would be an overkill using those weapons that were designed to kill monsters on humans. So, for the sake of maintaining order in the eastern district, the City Management had no other choice but to get those Hunters armed with powerful weapons under their control.

The cities of the eastern district, the corporations that were in control of those cities, and the Corporate Government that controlled those corporations, all of them were doing all kinds of things to maintain order in the eastern district. There were times when they made use of the Hunter Office to threaten the Hunters so that they would not get ahead of themselves and go on a rampage in the eastern district.

They sometimes had to reason with the Hunters and reminded them to keep their behaviours in check, or some other time, they had to convince some Hunters to not wreak havoc. There were even cases where they had to act as arbitrator between 2 Hunters in conflict or offer certain benefits to persuade certain Hunters. Or if nothing worked, they sometimes blatantly threatened Hunters to just stop. But the City Management would only do these kinds of things if they saw that those Hunters could be reasoned with.

As for those Hunters who could not be reasoned with, the City Management saw them as equal to monsters. Those Hunters were treated as threats against the public order in the eastern district, usually a bounty would be put for their heads and they would be killed by other Hunters.

Being recognized as someone that could be reasoned with was a very important thing in the eastern district where most of the people knew how to fight and powerful weapons were freely distributed around.

Although no one could tell what kind of effect it would bring if Drankam informed the Hunter Office that Elena was a Hunter who would only make one-sided demands and would not listen to other people, it was obvious that it would bring some level of harm toward her.

Most of the Hunters in Kugamayama city already knew that Drankam was deepening its relationship with Kugamayama City Management. So of course, Elena also knew about that too. Thus Maeda lightly threatened Elena there hoping that it would ease her demand.

But then Elena stoically said.

“You can go ahead and do whatever you want. But don’t you forget that I’ll also explain to the City Management why the negotiation with Drankam

side ended up in failure. I'm pretty sure that they can understand my reason, that's why, if it's possible, I hope you can just let me negotiate directly with the City Management."

Elena did not waver at all. Maeda who saw that put both of his hands on his face in frustration. Elena herself knew that Maeda was also stuck in a difficult position, but that did not mean that she should lower her demand just because of that.

"By the way, just to let you know, you're the one who suddenly butted in when I was negotiating with the City Management in the first place, you know? So I have no reason to play nice with you."

"We've been giving you requests through Drankam. Although it doesn't mean that you have the duty to accept all of our demands, you can at least make some compromises, can't you?"

Elena's face turned slightly irritated.

"You've used that favour entirely in the last request that you gave us. To be more precise, although we've agreed on it in the contract, we did not make any complaint when you cut a big part of our reward money last time."

Elena thought that she was keeping her poker face and that she was calmly assessing the situation, but in reality, her face was slightly changed and a part of her real feeling was starting to leak out, Maeda also noticed that.

Maeda was using a glasses-type information terminal. That information terminal was connected to Drankam's server and was showing information about Elena on its transparent display. To be more precise, Maeda was looking at Elena's request history.

Maeda picked the last request that Elena accepted and checked its detail. The record also contained the subject about the reward cut too. But it only said that both sides agreed on that reward cut and there was no problem with it at all.

[…What the heck is with this ‘no problem at all’, this is one heck of a problem, isn’t it? Who the f*ck wrote this report… Mizuha? That new officer who just got promoted from the administration department, huh? She’s an officer now though, is she that stupid as to write ‘no problem at all’ here? Or is it that someone from the other faction overwrote the report? Seriously though, I really hope they would stop roping me into this infighting problem between factions. It’s really making my job difficult. Wrong information like this is really fatal during negotiation.]

Although Maeda was a member of Drankam, he did not belong to either faction. To be more precise, he was more of a neutral faction, and this faction chose to keep itself from getting involved in the infighting.

[With more infighting inside the gang, more negotiations are happening lately. Most of the negotiators are ending up arbitrating among Hunters inside the gang, and so, fewer negotiators are available for negotiating with people outside the gang. Good grief, I really hope they would do something about this… Whoah. This is not the time to worry about that, I need to do something about this negotiation first.]

Maeda shook off his irritation while still lamenting how he got roped into such an annoying situation.

Drankam side could not afford to accept Elena’s demand. After all, Elena was not the only Hunter that Drankam had to negotiate with. If the other Hunters discovered that Drankam accepted Elena’s demand, they would use that information to demand more rewards too.

But with that being said, Drankam could not afford to have the negotiation break down there and let Elena negotiate directly with the City Management. Drankam was the one who used its connection with the City Management to butt in when Elena was negotiating with the City Management, as such, if he reported back to the City Management that he failed, there was no mistaking it that the City Management would lower its evaluation of Drankam.

But the more time he spent trying to reach a deal there, the worse the evaluation from the City Management would be.

Maeda, who had no idea what to do there, shifted his gaze from Elena to Carol. Although he was sure that Elena had the last say there, since Carol was sitting next to her, Carol might be able to somehow affect the direction of the current negotiation. Thus in order to change the mood, Maeda turned to Carol and spoke to her.

“Carol-san too, I’m sure you don’t think it’s a good idea to be stuck in this place forever, right? If we keep being stubborn here, no one would win, it’ll only bring trouble to both of us, yes?”

Carol was still smiling as she asked Maeda a question.

“In that case, can you at least tell us how Drankam organizes its Hunters and who will take the responsibility for making the plan?”

“…Will it even make any difference if we tell you?”

“You won’t then?”

“Like I said, it won’t make any difference, right?”

“It’s part of making compromises, no? If the one who will take command is a skilled and experienced Hunter, then we, as the Hunters who might be working under that Hunter, would feel safer, right? I want you to understand that we asked that much rewards since we feel uneasy about that part.”

“Are you saying that you can’t trust the leader that Drankam picks?”

“I won’t go that far though, but like, you know, a lot of Hunters are trapped inside the Seranthal building because of the last request that Drankam issued, right? I heard that it was enough to cause panic among the insurance companies.”

“So you’re saying that it’s Drankam’s fault? No matter how you look at it, no one could have predicted something like this would happen, yes?”

“It’s not like I’m saying that Drankam is at fault here. But, I want you to understand when we say that Seranthal building is a really dangerous place.”

“It’s exactly because we know it’s a dangerous place that we’re forming a big Hunter squad in order to save those Hunters inside the Seranthal building. We’re asking the other Hunters to work under the same leader here to prevent them from moving independently and cause trouble during the operation. I’m sure you can understand that too from reading the detail of the request.”

“We do understand that point. That’s why I’m asking you who will take the lead of the squad. If we know that the one taking the lead is a competent Hunter, we can feel safer following the orders from that Hunter. And if it’s someone that I know, I can also more or less predict that person’s commanding skill. Which in that case, I can explain to Elena and I maybe can even convince her too. That way, Elena might be willing to lower her demand and we might be able to finally find a compromise that we both can accept. Do you understand why I asked you that question now?”

After she said that, Carol threw a smile at Maeda. Maeda understood well that he was in a disadvantageous position there as he was barely able to react to her reasoning.

“….Yes.”

“I’m glad to hear that, so, will you tell us now?”

After Carol said that, Maeda suddenly went silent. Carol understood the situation that Maeda was in as she smiled at him and said.

“If you won’t tell me, I won’t be able to say anything to Elena, you know?”

Maeda hesitated.

“…We haven’t decided yet.”

“I don’t mind if it’s just a guess. If you can tell us of any particular person or any particular faction that might get chosen, it’s at least better than nothing.”

“…We’re still in the middle of discussing that.”

Maeda sounded as if he just forced himself to say that and he immediately hung his head low for a bit after he said that.

Carol was really happy that she got the answer that she was hoping for, but she did not show that on her face, instead, she made a rather troubled face and said to Maeda.

“I’m sure Drankam also understands the importance of this request since it came from the City Management, right? And I’m sure Drankam also understands very well that it should decide on the leader as soon as possible, right? If you guys can’t decide on the leader even in this situation, I can’t help but feel worried about your commanding skill. If you think the reward Elena demanded is to compensate for the danger that this request might cause us, then unfortunately enough, I don’t think that Elena’s demand is unreasonable at all.”

After listening to what Carol said, Maeda let out a long sigh. A part of him actually agreed with Elena and Carol’s reasoning. But, due to his position, he could not express it.

Maeda then complained inside his heart.

[…Ahh, I can’t take this. I don’t have anything that I can use to convince them. To hell with this, I’ll just let them negotiate directly with the City Management. I’m sure the upper echelons would make some complaints later, but it’s their fault in the first place for taking too long. It has nothing to do with me, it’s not my fault.]

Honestly speaking, Maeda was actually a dutiful person. But there was a limit to how far he could keep going. The infighting between the people in the upper echelons caused trouble to his job and he also agreed with some arguments that the other party was making, so he concluded that if he stubbornly tried to continue the negotiation there, it would be nigh impossible to achieve his original aim. It really lowered his motivation and caused him to start considering just letting Elena negotiate directly with the City Management.

From that sudden change in Maeda's behaviour, Carol immediately noticed that Maeda had given up on the negotiation. She then smiled at Maeda and said.

"This might be unrelated, but I think it's a bad idea not doing anything until the main squad is formed. At the very least, you guys could have sent some smaller squads ahead, yes?"

Maeda looked confused there for a moment, he tried to think what was the meaning behind those words before he said anything back.

"…Are you telling me that we should use you as a reconnaissance team and send you ahead in order to prevent the City Management from bothering us for the time being? Even if you said that to me, I have no right to say anything about the strategy used in this operation. And even if I have that right, that would be the decision that Drankam should make as a whole, not me alone. I can't let your team go for something like that, after all, we need you to join the main squad since there are not that many Hunters in Drankam who are skilled enough to be dispatched to Seranthal building. Not to mention, I'm sure only those Hunters who have something to complain about this chain of command would want to join that reconnaissance squad. In the first place, we don't have Hunters to spare for that squad, or at least, I can't spare you any Hunters to form such a squad."

Carol smiled mischievously.

"So basically, we can do that if we have someone who has a say on the strategy used by Drankam, or at least someone who has some connections with the upper echelons in Drankam, right?"

"…Well, that would be true, but…"

Maeda looked a bit confused.

Carol then pulled out her information terminal and called someone. The person that she was calling almost immediately picked up her call.

"Carol, what now? You should know well that I'm really busy, right?"

It was Shikarabe, he sounded like he was in a really bad mood, but in contrast to him, Carol replied in a good mood.

“Oh my, I called you thinking that I might be able to help you, you know… Are you sure you’re okay treating me like this?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m actually looking for more Hunters so that we can take that request from the City Management as an individual team though. I’m sure you’re also having a hard negotiation over there, right? I bet that you’re in a panic right now since at this rate you’ll get assigned to work under that Katsuya guy, right?”

After Carol said that, there was a few seconds of silence. From that silence, she confirmed that her guess was correct.

Shikarabe’s calm voice then could be heard from Carol’s information terminal.

“…Why do you think so?”

“It’s because you’re talking to me right now.”

“Hah?”

Shikarabe could not help but to leak out his real feeling there with that reaction. Hearing that, Carol then giggled and continued.

“The request from the Kugamayama City Management is basically issued to the Hunters who successfully hunted the bounty monsters not too long ago. But then I bet that because of some reason, those Hunters who were in your team when you hunted the bounty monster could not come to the Mihazono ruin at the moment. After all, if that was not the case, you would have picked those Hunters and already formed a team with them instead. I bet you’re trying to find replacements for those Hunters but you still can’t find enough people at the moment, right? After all, if you did, you would have been dispatched to Seranthal building by now. And if you’re already

heading to the Seranthal building, it would mean that the operation is already underway and you would not be roped into the infighting inside the Drankam about who should take the lead of the squad, which would mean that you would not have picked my call, right? But you did not ignore my call. Since you can't go with the same team that you were together with during the bounty hunt, Drankam must be trying to get you into another team, for example, another team that also has successfully hunted a bounty monster too. And then, that exact team that's also already in Mihazono ruin right now is the team that Katsuya leads. Since Drankam cannot afford to keep dragging out the request from the City Management, I bet that the officers from Drankam are pressuring you to join Katsuya's team, right?"

Shikarabe went silent again after Carol said that.

Carol's guess was completely correct. The upper echelons in Drankam were pressuring Shikarabe to join Katsuya's team.

The only thing that Carol got wrong was Shikarabe's actual plan. Carol thought that as this situation continued, Shikarabe would eventually break under the pressure from Drankam and join Katsuya's team.

But in reality, Shikarabe had no plans to join Katsuya's team no matter what. If his only option was to join Katsuya's team, he would rather accept that request from the City Management and head to Seranthal building alone. But of course, he wanted to avoid that if it could be helped, that was why Shikarabe was looking for more personnel for his team.

Shikarabe then sighed as if he just gave up there, he then annoyedly asked a question to Carol.

"Yeah yeah, you got that right. I'm more or less in that situation right now. So then, how are you going to help me out? I'm super busy right now, so I won't take any stupid ideas, okay? So then, tell me what do you have in mind."

It was not like Carol brought that subject to Shikarabe because she wanted to help him out. Shikarabe himself knew that very well, he also knew how

dangerous it was to get indebted to Carol. But he thought that it was way better than working under Katsuya, thus he decided to take Carol's offer.

Carol then explained her idea to him, Shikarabe registered that plan inside his head and analyzed it. He was not pondering whether to take her suggestion or not, he was pondering if it was possible or not. He then finally reached a conclusion.

"Alright. I'll convey that to one of the officers in Drankam who might agree with your plan. Tell whoever negotiator that you're talking with right now to let you talk with an officer from Drankam by the name of Arabe."

"Okay, later then."

Carol then ended the call and asked Elena.

"I ended up pushing the negotiation without your permission though, is that okay?"

Elena at least did not show any displeasure as she said.

"It's alright. I have nothing to complain about with your suggestion."

Elena's main goal was actually to avoid working under Drankam since it might get her in the same situation as the previous time when she accepted that request to hunt the bounty monster. Back then, not only did Elena and Sara have to cover for the rest of the team, they were even insulted for being useless and got their reward cut. Moreover, if things were to happen again this time, it would not only affect her and Sara, but it would also affect Akira and Carol too. That was why Elena refused to step back.

Of course, Drankam had its own indicators that it used to evaluate Sara and Elena, and it seemed that Elena and Sara's performance during that request was far below what Drankam was expecting from them. So from Drankam's point of view, it was simply that they had no other choice but to do what they did.

But if that difference was a fatal one, it would have been better if both of them stopped working with each other. It would have been better if Drankam hired other Hunters who could accept the evaluation that Drankam gave.

While at the same time, although it was not like Elena did not feel anything when Carol just pushed the negotiation without her permission, thanks to that, Elena was able to fulfil her main goal. So she had no complaints about it.

Carol smiled a bit smugly to Elena and said.

“Is it okay if I take it that it was worth it taking me with you here?”

Although Elena was a bit bothered by the way Carol was acting, she then said.

“…? Well, you’re right, you’re a big help. Thanks to you, it seems that we can avoid getting roped into a troublesome situation.”

“Can you please tell that to Akira too?”

“Sure, but can you tell me why you want me to do that?”

“It’s to increase my value in his eyes since he’s the one hiring me at the moment. Since I’ve been useful, it’s normal for me to want to let my employer know that I did well, right? After all, if Akira knows that I’m useful, he might pay me a lot of money later. So, will you do that for me?”

Although there was something that was still bothering Elena, she also understood that Carol had a good point there. In the first place, it was exactly because Elena did not agree with the evaluation that Drankam had about her that she did not want to negotiate with Drankam this time.

“…Sure… I’ll properly convey that to Akira.”

Carol smiled as she thought that it would leave a better impression on Akira if he heard it from Elena instead of hearing that from Carol herself.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 122, Worthless Life

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As Akira was waiting for Elena and Carol together with Sara, he suddenly received a call from Carol. The same also happened to Sara, except that it was from Elena.

Akira opened his information terminal and accepted the call. When he did that, Carol's happy voice could be heard coming out from his terminal.

"Akira, just want to let you know that we did pretty well over here, I'll tell you the details of the request later. I did my best to get a deal that you might like, you know."

"I see."

Since Akira only reacted rather flatly, Carol once again gave her report again, but this time she put more pressure to make sure that Akira was listening to her.

"…I properly did my job during the negotiation and got a deal that Elena is also satisfied with. If you think that I'm lying, you should ask Elena once we group up."

To be honest, Akira was actually not doubting Carol. He was a bit weirded out by the reaction from Carol as he thanked Carol.

“…? It’s not like I’m doubting you though. Thank you, you’re a big help.”

“You’re welcome. We’ll be waiting in the parking lot near the Hunter Office, can you pick us up together with Sara?”

“Alright, we’ll head there soon.”

Akira closed the call and returned back to his vehicle. Sara also got more or less the same report from Elena. Both of them then headed to the Hunter Office to pick up Elena and Carol.

Carol made a conflicted expression as she closed her call with Akira and stared at her information terminal. Judging from that short exchange, she was able to confirm that she scored some points to get closer to Akira. That in itself was well under her expectation and she was happy that she was finally able to make some progress.

But, during that conversation, Akira’s reaction was completely different when Carol brought up Elena too. To be more precise, Akira showed more interest in Elena’s situation rather than his own situation. Or at least, that was what Carol could catch from that short exchange.

[It seems that Akira really cares for Elena. From what I can gather from Shikarabe, it doesn’t sound like Akira has any reason to like Elena that much though… As I thought, I won’t be able to know the reason unless I directly ask either Akira or Elena, huh. But I feel like Akira would just try to play innocent if I ask him, either that, or I feel like Akira himself actually has no idea why he’s that invested either. Which means…]

Carol glanced at Elena. Personally speaking, she was better at extracting information from guys, but she had no other options in this case. The real problem was whether she had enough time to do that or not. Akira and Sara would arrive there soon and it would be better if she did not bring that up during the operation. And she did not know if she would have the time to ask Elena and Sara after the operation was done.

[…I guess I need to be more useful so that he would invite me again next time, huh. We're going to head to the Seranthal building after this, it's a dangerous building that the City Management even decided to gather Hunters who successfully hunted the bounty monster to send to that building. Although this is not out of our own volition, we're going to head to such a dangerous place together. I'm sure that it would at least get us close even if it's only for a bit.]

As Carol thought so, she remembered that she almost got killed the last time she was in that building.

[Well, let's focus on returning back alive for now.]

Being a Hunter meant risking one's life for money. But even so, it was not like those Hunters expected themselves to get killed. If it was possible, they wanted to at least have the right to decide when and where to die. Carol reminded herself of the dangerous place that she was going to head to from now on and pulled herself together.

After they grouped up, they then went to the city district of the Mihazono ruin. Since the Hunter Office had secured the area, they did not get to meet any monsters.

Elena already gave a detailed explanation about the current request right after they grouped up. Their main job this time was to scout the Seranthal building and check the inside of the building before the main squad that still had not fully established yet was dispatched there.

The composition of the team was the same as this morning. Akira, Carol, Elena, Sara, Shikarabe, and Togami. The only difference was that the leader of the team changed from Elena to Shikarabe.

But that was only for formality since it was a request that came from Drankam. On the paper, Shikarabe could not bring Varga and Yamanobe who were also present when they defeated the Tank Tarantula, thus, he was given other personnel to replace Varga and Yamanobe.

So in reality, the leader of that team was still Elena. Shikarabe used his connection with Arabe, an officer in Drankam, to convince Drankam's side so that he was allowed to do that.

With this, Elena had the highest say on what the team would do inside Seranthal building. But that did not mean they could not just leave Seranthal building without her consent. As in matter of fact, the other Hunters could freely explore the building and decide to retreat anytime they felt that they were in danger.

Akira looked around his surroundings while driving his vehicle.

The road leading to Seranthal building was cleaned of rubbles and wreckages so the main squad that would be sent later could quickly reach Seranthal building. He could see humanoid robots moving heavy rubbles and wreckages off the road. It was a scene that would make people who had an interest in robots to watch them cleaning the road for a while. But, Akira had no interest in such a thing at all.

Akira made a rather stern face when he suddenly said.

"…So, this is why we didn't encounter any monsters this morning when we went to that empty building, huh?"

The main road heading to Seranthal building was protected by walls so that monsters would not block the road. Those walls were tall and looked pretty durable, there were also some tanks and humanoid soldiers stationed around those walls as well as armed soldiers.

Carol who was sitting next to Akira expressed his agreement with what he just said.

"It seems that since most of the monsters in Mihazono ruin gathered around the Seranthal building, there are not that many monsters roaming in the other locations, huh. And it seems that a fierce battle is also still in progress around that building even now, I can understand why the City Management decided to dispatch Hunters who had the experience of hunting bounty monster."

Most of the tanks present were shooting at monsters. The warheads released by those tanks accurately hit the monsters, exploded, and turned those monsters into a new pile of wreckage.

While the humanoid weapons were pushing the medium-sized monsters back using their huge weapons that they were carrying, countless bullets rained down on those monsters and shredded them to pieces.

As for the armed soldiers, they were using the wall to shield themselves from the monsters while shooting back at those monsters focusing more on the small monsters that were hiding behind the wreckages and rubbles.

Akira looked at the ongoing battle around him and frowned, he then mumbled.

"…Are we really going to be okay?"

Akira skipped most of the details in his question there, but Carol immediately answered that question while looking relaxed.

"I think that it'll be alright. Looking at the current situation, I'm sure that the defence line will still hold while we're scouting the inside of Seranthal building and I'm sure that this road won't be filled with monsters on our way back from that building. Although the squad dispatched by the City Management was hard-pressed to secure the road to the Seranthal building, once the supply route is also secured, they should be able to hold out just fine for the time being."

The equipment used by the squad securing the road to Seranthal building were mostly transported from the Hunter Office parking lot through the road leading to Seranthal building that they just secured. As long as this route was secured, the Hunter Office should be able to sustain its upper hand for the time being.

"Not to mention, they're also planning to send the main squad later, so I'm sure they'll keep this road secured. So as long as nothing really bad happens, I'm sure they'll be able to secure this road while we scout the Seranthal building."

As Akira looked at the squad guarding the main road, he thought that they indeed looked exceptionally powerful. He then mumbled.

“Isn’t it faster if they just send in these people rather than waiting for a squad of Hunters?”

Carol smiled bitterly as she looked at Akira who found such a thing to be weird.

“Well, I’m sure that one of the reasons is because they can’t bring along their tanks and humanoid weapons inside that building. But more than that, I’m sure that it’s a matter of cost.”

“Cost?”

“Yep. The real problem would be the cost, it’s basically cheaper to just hire us, Hunters. It’s only my guess but I think that squad is a part of the city defence squad. So I’m sure some of them are from the inner wall. Those people from the inner wall should have gone through a certain level of education before they went through extra training and were sent to the outside of the inner wall. Basically, they already spent a lot of money from the day they were born. So if the City Management sends them to somewhere as dangerous as Seranthal building and gets them killed, it would inflict a huge economic loss for the city. Not to mention, if they have families, then the City Management needs to pay for the annuity. And if they have insurance, the city should pay for that too. I can’t even imagine how much money the city would lose if the city opts to send those people.”

Seeing how Carol said that while lightly smiling, Akira sighed and said.

“So basically that’s because it’s way cheaper to send us, huh. And the rewards that they have to pay for us which is a pretty big sum of money from our point of view is relatively small compared to the amount of money that the City Management might lose if they send the city defence squad.”

“Yep, basically that’s the gist of it. If I have to add anything, that might be also the reason why they don’t pay that much attention to Seranthal building until now. There are many ghost stories in Mihazono ruin that are related to

Seranthal building, then there are many Hunters who lost their lives in this ruin which I bet is also because of Seranthal building. This ruin might turn safer if they just destroy that building, but they don't do that since it means that they'll lose all the old-world relics inside that building. It's understandable that they have no plans to kill the goose that might give them golden egg, and even if that goose becomes a monster that kills everyone around it, as long as it keeps producing golden eggs, it's highly unlikely that they would kill it."

Akira was making a conflicted face as he sighed.

"… Well, it's true that Hunters only risk their lives going to wasteland if only they know that it's worth it."

Akira understood that reasoning and even agreed with a part of it. If the Corporate Government decided to destroy that building, there would be opposition coming from the people who were getting profits from that place. But even so, there was also a part of it that Akira could not help but to feel bothered with, and that showed in his face.

Carol giggled and said.

"If you don't like how they treat you as if your life is worthless, you should work hard to increase the value of your life."

"To be more precise, what do you think I should do?"

"You can just keep on making more money. This is the eastern district, and we are Hunters. If you are alive, you can make so much money, to the point that the Corporate Government would not want to lose someone like you, and if you become strong enough to be able to make that much money, the Corporate Government would be more careful dealing with you, both for the better or for the worse."

Akira smiled bitterly.

"I still have a long way to go, huh."

“That’s just how it goes, especially for us, Hunters. Since we work by risking our life, so risking our lives alone is not enough to make others respect us. We need to keep showing results and obtain enough money worth risking our lives. And of course, the more money that we gather, the higher the value of our lives.”

Akira understood what Carol was saying. He also agreed with what she said. But he could not just laugh it off like Carol.

“Seriously, that sounds really rough.”

Alpha smiled and said.

“Don’t worry, it’ll be fine. You have my support and around the time you complete my request, you’ll be strong enough that the Corporate Government won’t be able to treat your life as worthless. Basically, you just need to get strong enough and everything will be solved. So just leave it to me.”

“…You’re right about that, I’ll be counting on you.”

Although Akira felt that what Alpha said there was not exactly about the same subject that he was talking about, he still calmly replied with that.

The squad around the Seranthal building formed an encirclement with the Seranthal building in the centre. They erected some kind of line of defence to make sure that no monsters would be able to get inside that encirclement as well as to make sure that the monsters coming out from the inside of that building would not escape the encirclement.

As Elena and her team approached one of those squads, a soldier waved at them and signalled them to stop. And when they did, that soldier approached the front-most vehicle.

The front-most vehicle was Shikarabe’s. This time Shikarabe did not come with his APC, instead, he was driving another wasteland vehicle just like Akira and Sara. A huge Drankam mark was painted on the side of Shikarabe’s vehicle.

Shikarabe then said to that soldier.

“We’re the reconnaissance team sent to Seranthal building, let us pass.”

“They already told us about your team. I’m sorry but can you proceed by legs? This defensive wall takes a lot of time to set up, close, and open. You can park your vehicles over there.”

After listening to that soldier’s explanation, Shikarabe made a stern face. The defensive wall installed in that place was not the same as the defensive wall that his team went through this morning. It was a stronger defensive wall that did not even have an opening for a vehicle to go through.

“Is this area that dangerous that you guys have no other choice but to use this defensive wall?”

“No idea. But after the Seranthal building is secured, we were told to use that building as the second base in this ruin. So you guys can think of this defensive wall as the defensive wall for that second base.”

“With so many of you guys around, isn’t it faster if you guys go ahead and at least secure the first floor of that building?”

That soldier obviously looked slightly annoyed as he said.

“Give us a break, will you? Even if it’s an order from the people from above, I have no plans to go to a place where the City Management even opted to dispatch Hunters who successfully killed a bounty monster in the past, you know. That’s your job in the first place, isn’t it? So don’t just throw that on us.”

Those soldiers were actually dispatched by private military contractors in Kugamayama city, they were not a part of the city’s defence squad, and they were not Hunters like Akira and Shikarabe, who regularly hunted for relics in the wasteland. They were basically people who specialize only in guarding bases and similar facilities.

And those people looked at Hunters with fear and awe.

Their impression of the Hunters was not wrong. But in order to attain such an impression on the Hunters, they had to get enough education, which meant that they must have lived their lives in safety up until now and had spent a lot of money for that education. Some people who could not afford such a luxury would turn into Hunters, then slowly get used to the dangers that they faced every day and distorted their sense of danger, which in turn would give them an excuse to face even more danger.

From another point of view, it was not wrong to say that the Hunters were the gathering of those people with a broken sense of danger. Moreover, from those soldiers' point of view, the Hunters who went to hunt the bounty monsters out of their own volitions were the craziest among the crazy. So, from their point of view, Akira, Shikarabe, Elena, Sara, and the rest of the Hunters there were basically the craziest among the crazy Hunters. And strictly speaking, they were not wrong to think that way.

Shikarabe explained the situation to the other Hunters, they then decided to walk toward Seranthal building.

After they finished their preparation and walked past through a small opening on the encirclement net, one of the soldiers who saw them off said to another soldier.

"…They're bringing two boys with them though, but all of them are the Hunters who successfully killed a bounty monster, right?"

"I bet they're from Drankam. I'm sure you heard about it too right that there's a young boy who is exceptionally skilled in that gang, I heard that boy had successfully hunted a bounty monster. So one of them might be that boy."

"Ahh, now that you mention it, I did hear about that too. I guess that must be the one with that expensive-looking equipment, but then who is the other boy?"

"No idea. It doesn't really matter anyway. That aside, I really want to go back to the city. Why in the world did we get dispatched to this place?"

“I heard that some big-shot from the City Management is scheduled to visit the Seranthal building for negotiation or something. So we’re here basically to make sure that it’s safe, and that’s why they’re doing anything that they can to secure that building and to even make that building a second base if it’s possible.”

“Are they seriously thinking of doing something like that in this situation?”

“Yep, they’re thinking of doing something like that even in this situation. So in order to make sure that their plan would go smoothly and that big-shot won’t get killed, they send more soldiers than they normally would, and we’re basically a part of that operation.”

“I don’t know how great that Mr big-shot is, but he’s a real pain in the neck. The ruin is more dangerous than usual at the moment, that guy should have postponed his plan or something.”

“If I’m not mistaken, he’s the head of the long-term strategic department, Yanagisawa, was it again? Well, judging from our situation, he’s basically that great of a guy so the Corporate Government can’t say no to him.”

“Good grief, I really hope those people in the upper echelons can understand our suffering in the field.”

They then continued complaining about the guy who was the main reason why they were dispatched there while kept on the watch.

After passing through the encirclement net, Elena’s team carefully approached the Seranthal building. There were wreckages of dead monsters and corpses of the dead Hunters scattered around the area that they had walked through. Once they reached the building’s entrance and confirmed that no monsters were spawning out from the entrance, they finally stepped their feet inside of the Seranthal building.

The first floor of the Seranthal building was basically a big atrium hall with some receptionist desks. Akira looked around the hall and tilted his head. The inside of the hall was unnaturally clean. Although there were some

bullet holes in the ceilings and walls as well as some rubbles scattered inside the hall, there were neither dead monsters nor dead Hunters.

While they were exploring the inside of the building, Alpha suddenly said to Akira.

“Akira, I’m sorry but I need to leave you for a bit.”

“Eh?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be back right away. I don’t detect any monsters around either, so there’s nothing to worry about.”

After she said that, Alpha’s image immediately vanished from Akira’s views.

“Alpha?”

There was no response when Akira called for her. Akira could also feel that his augmented suit suddenly felt heavier and the reading coming from his information-gathering device also slightly worsened. Those two proved that he had lost Alpha’s support.

Akira could feel nervousness creeping up inside him.

[…Calm down. She said that there are no monsters around and she’ll be back soon. It’ll be alright, just calm down.]

Akira tried to slowly take a deep breath to calm himself down. The current Akira had the ability to analyze his current situation in order to calm down his nerves.

The other Hunters noticed that slight change, but since they already heard that Akira almost got killed the last time he went to Seranthal building, they thought that he got nervous since he had to visit Seranthal building again.

Elena then gave an order to her team.

“According to what I heard from Akira and Carol, the sensitivity of our information-gathering device might decrease down as we go deeper into the building. So make sure to keep your eyes on your information-gathering device, check if the reading starts getting worse, make sure that it’s still connected to my information-gathering device. Since I also heard that even the local connection might also get affected, you might lose connection with the other information-gathering device if the signal gets pretty bad. And lastly, check that you can still see the map of Seranthal building and the location of the other Hunters in your information-gathering device.”

Akira could see the map of the Seranthal building displayed on his goggles as well as the scan result of his surroundings. It was the data that he received from Elena. They already set their information-gathering device to be able to exchange information with each other before they left the Hunter Office branch.

Akira then glanced at Carol, Carol was not using any equipment to display extra information. Akira found that weird, he then threw a question to Carol while pointing at his own goggle.

“Carol, are you sure you’re okay with not using anything?”

Carol smiled full of confidence and replied.

“My body is actually an enhanced body, so basically both of my eyes are also modified eyes. That’s why I don’t need to use such a thing.”

“Is that so?”

Akira stared deeply into one of Carol’s eyes. Carol smiled proudly while staring back at Akira.

“…It looks like normal eye though?”

“Well, that’s because it’s made of a certain nanomaterial that imitates biological tissue. So, what do you think? It’s pretty amazing, isn’t it?”

“Like I said, it looks like just normal eye.”

“Don’t you think that it has a different glisten or something?”

“…Now that you mention it, there might be some… No, I’m not really sure though? Hmmm.”

Akira made a long ‘hmm’. From the other point of view, it looked like Akira and Carol were staring deeply at each other.

“Akira, are you done with the checks?”

“Ah, right, sorry. I’m not done yet.”

Akira flusteredly answered back, he then remembered that Sara also had an enhanced body just like Carol. And he noticed that she was also not using goggles, just like Carol.

Like with Carol, Akira also asked the same question to Sara while pointing at his goggles.

“Sara-san, do you also don’t need to use goggles? It seems that Carol has both of her eyes modified.”

“Eh…? Ah, about that, huh? Elena and I are actually using this.”

As Sara finally understood Akira’s question, she then pointed at a hair ornament-like object that she was using. Akira who saw that tilted his head in confusion. Sara then smiled and explained.

“This is basically a mini display device. It’s projecting stereoscopic hologram images just a few millimetres in front of my eyes.”

Akira looked even more confused than before.

“Is it really okay to put that in Sara-san’s hair? It looks really unstable though? Won’t it cause the image to move a lot and hard to see?”

“It’s fine. The image itself doesn’t sway at all so it’s very easy to read the information projected in that image. And when it’s blocking my view, I can

just simply move it outside my view too. It’s really convenient since I can control it with my sight.”

“What kind of technology do they use to make such a thing?”

“No idea. To be honest, I don’t know anything at all about the technology. But the manual says that it’s based on some kind of old-world technology. So I’m sure the researchers are doing their best to answer that exact same question.”

“I see.”

Akira’s expression changed from confusion to confirmation. To be more precise, he actually gave up pursuing that question any further. The old-world technology, that one sentence had the power to solve such a question in one go.

There were also other people who asked the same question as Akira and that was totally understandable. Even after the exceptionally talented people of the eastern district were brought up to spend their time studying such a thing, they still did not have enough knowledge to fully understand the mechanism behind it. That was what it meant to be an old-world technology.

The moment Akira heard the word hologram, it reminded him about the holographic girl that he saw the last time he came there. He once again scanned the whole hall, but he still did not spot that hologram.

“…She’s not here.”

Sara tilted her head and asked Akira.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s just that I remembered something when you mentioned the word hologram.”

Carol immediately realized what Akira was talking about and scanned the area too.

“You’re right, she’s not here.”

Elena finally realized that Akira was looking for the A.I that managed that building. From the information that she gathered, a certain hologram would welcome anyone who entered that building. But she did not see anything like that at the moment.

“Seranthal, the A.I managing this building, huh? I was actually thinking that we might be able to gather some information from her about the current situation of the ruin. But it seems that we can’t do that, huh. Akira, don’t just stand there looking for that A.I, are you done with your checks yet?”

“J-Just a little bit more.”

Akira flusteredly returned his gaze back to this information terminal. Since Alpha was no longer around, he had no other choice but to do the adjustment manually. After testing a few settings, he understood well that it only worsened the reading, so he gave up and returned the setting back.

Shikarabe was still adjusting his information-gathering device when he suddenly asked Elena a question.

“By the way, how did you get this map of the interior of Seranthal building? This isn’t the data from Drankam, right? Did you get it yourself before coming here?”

Carol immediately interjected and answered Shikarabe’s question.

“That map is actually from me.”

Shikarabe looked a bit surprised.

“…Are you sure you’re okay with that? If it’s originally from you, it means that it’s from one of that information protected with a named license, so that you can’t share it freely, right? Don’t tell me that you’re planning to take everyone’s share of reward for yourself using this.”

Carol replied with an expression saying that she was offended by that remark.

“Oh my, that’s so rude of you to say that although I gave that data for free for the sake of everyone’s safety. Don’t you think so too, Akira?”

Akira was surprised when Carol suddenly roped him into that conversation.

“Eh? Ahh, well, it’s true that it’s great to have this map. Thanks.”

Shikarabe was still looking at Carol with a distrusting gaze as he said.

“My bad, I didn’t grow up in an environment where I can just trust free things given out of “pure kindness”. Moreover, I know just how precious the map of Seranthal building is and it’s not something that you can call cheap. Since when did you turn into a kind person?”

Akira also grew up in such an environment. So when Shikarabe pointed that out, he started to get suspicious too.

Carol noticed that slight change, so she immediately tried to explain her reasons to Shikarabe.

“Geez, that’s so rude of you. I’ll do at least that much to help someone who helped me to get out from a deadly situation in the past as well as his trusted friends too, you know. Well, if I really need to say something to convince you, it’s basically a map from when the ruin was still in a normal state. Not to mention, the old-world ruin often changes so suddenly in such a short time span. And even if the interior of the Seranthal building has not changed that much, it would not be strange that the interior of the building is changed after all the battles between the Hunters and the monsters that happened inside this building, you know. That’s why the price of that map from before the state in the ruin changed should have significantly lowered by now. Moreover, once the main squad that will come after us secures this building, I’m sure that they’ll release the latest version of the map. And when that happens, the value of this map will be lowered even more. That’s why I decided to just share it for free, do you understand it now?”

Carol was not speaking to Shikarabe in order to convince him, even Shikarabe knew that much. While on the other hand, Shikarabe also

understood from there that no matter what she was scheming, Carol would not cause any trouble during that request.

Shikarabe basically had no interest as long as it would not cause any trouble for him. Thus, he signalled to Carol that he had no plans to pursue that question any further.

“… I see, I get it now, sorry for suspecting you.”

“It’s fine as long as you get it now.”

Shikarabe and Carol then smiled at each other as if they were talking through telepathy with each other and ended their conversation there.

The reason why Carol shared the map data was not only to make sure of her own safety, it was also for selling a favour to Elena and Sara as well as to win Akira’s trust. Thus, she could not afford to have Shikarabe messing up her scheme. That was why she said that to Shikarabe.

Carol then glanced at Akira, and as she planned, Akira did not seem to be suspicious of her any longer.

Elena then said to everyone, especially to Shikarabe.

“If you guys are done with the preparation, should we go now? And also, hold yourself from causing any unnecessary fight.”

“Sorry about that. I’m ready here, let’s go.”

Elena then looked at the other Hunters, Akira lightly nodded and signalled that he was ready too.

Akira renewed his resolve and tensed up his whole body. With Alpha still not around, he had no other choice but to rely on his own skill to follow Elena and the other veteran Hunters. He reminded himself to do his best as not to slow down the other Hunters.

“I’m back, were you missing me?”

Akira’s resolve was immediately wasted. Alpha appeared back in his view as she smiled mischievously at him.

If Akira had to be honest, he would have to answer Alpha’s question with a yes. So in order to avoid that, he instead asked Alpha a question.

“Where were you gone?”

“It’s nothing big, just a small thing that I needed to do. It’s nothing to worry about.”

“If it’s really not that important, don’t do that again. Where do you think I’m right now?”

“That’s not what I meant when I said that. It was at least something that demanded me to leave you for a while just to do it. I don’t mind telling you the detail, but in order to do that, I need to tell you all the applied conditions which will take about 30 hours of oral explanations, then I need to make sure that you understand it, then I’ll still need your permission after that. So, do you still want to know?”

“No thanks.”

“Thought so.”

Alpha smiled amusedly after getting the reaction that she already predicted from Akira.

Silavin: Such an obvious lie. Applied conditions? Why would you need all of that? He could just make it a ping pong conversation and ask only what he wants to know.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 123, Shikarabe’s Request

Index

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Elena’s team started exploring the interior of the Seranthal Building. They started from the first floor and slowly climbed up relying on the map data they got from Carol.

Inside the rooms and hallways, there were metal wreckages that might have been what was left of mechanical monsters, there were also bloodstains that might have been left by Hunters. The bullet holes and scorch marks scattered around the area seemed to be recent. All of these showed just how fierce was the battle that happened in the building. But even so, Elena and her team did not encounter any enemies at all.

When they reached the 5th floor, they found a room with a half-destroyed door. There were scorch marks from bullets around that door and there were traces of monsters trying to get into that door, chasing for the Hunters who must have run inside that room.

When Akira nodded without saying anything, they immediately got themselves ready to break into that room. They readied their rifles and matched their timings to make sure that there would not be any trouble if there were still monsters inside that room. They quickly broke into that

room, scanned for enemies, and once they confirmed that there were no monsters inside, Akira sighed and lowered his rifle.

They actually had scanned the inside of the room using their information-gathering device before they went in. Although they did not detect any monsters, it might be simply because their information-gathering device could not detect them, thus, it did not guarantee that there were no monsters inside that room. If they lowered their guards just because their information-gathering device did not detect anything, they would eventually have to pay with their lives for doing something as foolish as that, even more so at the moment when the sensitivity of their information-gathering device was considerably lowered.

It was not like Akira had training on how to work in a team, but even so, as a Hunter with enough experience and skill, he should be able to judge what he should do by observing the other Hunters. And if he knew that, he should be able to judge how good the other Hunters were from how they reacted to the situation when they broke inside that room with no monsters inside.

So, judging from how they broke into that room, it was obvious that Akira had the least cooperative skill in that group. After all, he did not have enough training nor real-life experience to learn that skill.

Due to Alpha’s training, Akira’s ability to fight was indeed superior, but he was not skilled enough to work in sync with other skilled Hunters as skilled as Shikarabe and the others.

The only reason why Akira was not slowing the other Hunters down was simply because of his training and the support from Alpha.

Before they broke into that room, Akira could see the image of himself breaking into that room, where to position himself, where to aim his rifle the moment he broke in, and which direction he should check first. Even if he was not able to follow that guiding image, Alpha would forcefully move his body through his augmented suit.

But in reality, before he broke into that room, before he searched the hallways of the Seranthal building, even before he even stepped inside the Seranthal building, Akira actually had always been in the middle of his training. Because of that, from Elena and the others' point of view, Akira seemed to be at least skilled enough to not slow them down.

It was not impossible to see through Akira's real ability from the small deviation when he moved his aim or the small lag in his movements. But that would be nigh impossible except for those top Hunters from the frontline in the easternmost part of the eastern district. And of course, Togami who was there in order to reconfirm his own skill was not an exception.

After all, Togami, Shikarabe, Elena, Sara, and Carol were better Hunters than him. They indeed had higher Hunter Ranks than him, and Togami, who had his confidence shattered last time, confirmed that they were indeed above him when he saw how they moved during the search.

Akira's Hunter Rank was lower than Togami. But from his experience working with Akira during the bounty hunt and from observing his movements up until now, Togami also thought that Akira was definitely someone above him.

Togami looked at the other 5 Hunters with a conflicted expression. Although he was together with Hunters who were above him, rather than feeling safe, he was instead worried that this time he would not be able to get any conclusions again.

Elena checked the inside of that room, she then frowned and mumbled.

"…This is… Going pretty well… Really well."

Akira then asked Elena.

"What's wrong?"

"Hm? Well, it's nothing big. But, Akira, since we entered this building, did you see any dead Hunter or monster? I'm not talking about the small traces,

I’m talking about whole wreckage or body.”

Akira did not remember seeing one. But he thought that it might be just because he missed them, so he decided to ask Alpha.

“Alpha, was there anything like that?”

“Nope.”

“No, I didn’t see them at all.”

Akira actually did not know what had been bothering Elena. But, if answering her question could clear that worry, he thought that he should at least answer it honestly. When Akira thought so, he chose to rely on Alpha rather than his vague memory.

Since Akira answered back so straightforwardly, Elena found that a bit amusing as she giggled.

Sara was smiling too as she said to Elena.

“I didn’t see any too, is there anything wrong with that?”

“Since the outside of the building is riddled with monsters and dead Hunters, I just thought that it’s rather disturbing that we don’t find anything like that inside the building. We did not even encounter any monsters either. But according to Akira and Carol, each floor of this building should have been filled with monsters, there were also a lot of Hunters who got killed after arriving here including the Hunters who received that SOS rescue request from Drankam. But even so, we didn’t see any corpses from those Hunters nor any dead monsters. It’s not like I have no guess at all, but it’s not a good idea to just accept that guess without confirming it first.”

Shikarabe then asked Elena a question.

“In that case, let’s hear your guesses. Let’s start with why do you think we didn’t find any monsters?”

“Basically, I think that after the monsters killed all the Hunters inside this building, they went outside and fought the squads surrounding this building, then they got killed by those squads instead. And since the encirclement also prevents the monsters from the outside to get into the building, so the current Seranthal building is left with no monsters inside.”

This time it was Sara who asked Elena a question.

“Then why didn’t we find any dead Hunters?”

“The current Seranthal building is actually still active, thus the cleaning drones must have dumped them outside the building. Some of the dead monsters and Hunters outside the building might have come originally from here.”

Akira then said.

“I see, then why don’t we find any of those cleaning drones? And if they did clean the building, why did they leave some leftover wreckages and bloodstains?”

“They might have a fixed time to do the cleaning and they’re on standby right now. Or it might be because they’re actively avoiding us since they don’t have much fighting power. That also means that they somehow can ascertain our positions too. As for the leftover wreckages and bloodstains, it’s either because the cleaning drones haven’t cleaned them or it’s just because they need more time to clean all the small things since they prioritized cleaning the bigger ones first.”

Elena answered the other Hunters’ questions one by one. Akira and Togami were actually just simply asking questions that came up in their minds as they unconsciously lowered their guards. Their expressions were slightly relaxed. On the contrary, after Elena answered questions from Sara, Shikarabe, and Carol, the three of them did not lower their guard at all.

Shikarabe then asked another question.

“I see. That does make sense. If that’s the case, we should be able to continue the search without much trouble, but… What’s your bad take of this situation?”

Elena’s expression turned slightly stern.

“They’re in the middle of doing their best to kill us. The reason why we didn’t meet any enemies is because the A.I manager of this building has taken control of those monsters and that A.I is telling them to hold back for now to reserve their strength as they’re planning to attack us when they’re sure they can trap us and we have no chance to survive their attack. While the reason why we don’t see any dead Hunters is because they’re trying to lower our guard. After all, if we spot some dead Hunters, it’ll definitely get us to be more careful, which in turn might cause us to hesitate from going deeper. Moreover, if the cleaning drones made the building speckless, we might find that strange and instead makes us more vigilant too. That’s why they left the building not fully cleaned. Of course, leaving the building half cleaned like this is indeed strange, but it at least won’t make us retreat right away. Instead, it might even lure us in to investigate the reason behind that strangeness. I guess that’s the gist of it if I’m being pessimistic here.”

After listening to Elena’s answer, all the feeling of relief inside Akira’s heart was blown away.

Carol somehow managed to smile and said.

“Well, that does make sense too. So then, leader, what are we going to do from here? I know that you might don’t want to do it, but I hope you can bring something to bring us relief after telling us something that scary. There are 2 people here who faced death in this building yesterday, you know.”

Carol glanced at Akira, although she was smiling like usual, there was a slight trace of seductiveness in her smile.

Elena looked at Carol without saying anything for a few seconds as if she was trying to read something out of her.

“You’re right, let’s look at the map first.”

Elena renewed the map that the others were looking at. Small points appeared on that map, those points traced their location starting from when they were on the first floor.

“These are the information coming from the mini information-gathering devices that I installed. These devices can communicate with each other and the end result is actively sent to me. Since the sensitivity of the information-gathering devices and the range of the short-range connection are lowered inside this building, I put quite a lot of these devices on our way here.”

Lines came out from each point and connected them to the other points near to them showing that they were actively connected to each other. While at the same time, it also showed that their communication and scan range was significantly lowered.

“To be honest, I want to install them all over the interior of this building, but I didn’t bring enough supply since we didn’t plan to come here in the first place and I didn’t have the time to resupply either. That’s why I only installed enough so that we can quickly secure our escape route.”

More points appeared on the map that the other Hunters were looking at, as if it was trying to cover the whole building with those points, it then showed the number of extra devices that they would need if they wanted to do that in red. After that, those extra points vanished.

“If these devices pick up anything that threatens our escape route, we will retreat. If not, we will continue to search the building until I run out of these small information-gathering devices. Of course, we’ll also adapt to the situation and retreat if it gets too dangerous.”

The human-like images that indicated everyone’s position in that map then moved up the building while leaving dots on their way up. After that, those images immediately returned back to the first floor when one of the dots turned red.

“Even if the monsters really gathered somewhere upstairs, these information-gathering devices will quickly detect them if they go down to the lower floors and try to ambush us. And with how wide the hallways are in this building, we should be able to limit the number of monsters trying to pass through them, and I believe that we should have enough firepower to force a way out from this building.”

Extra images appeared on the map that represented monsters, then the indicators that represented the Hunters there started retreating back while using the layout of the hallways inside that building to reduce the number of monsters that they were fighting at the same time.

Elena then finished her explanation with that map as that map immediately returned back to its original state.

Akira looked at that map while closely listening to Elena’s explanation.

“As I thought, having someone who specializes in analyzing information really makes things easy to understand.”

“That might be true, but honestly speaking, I think it should have been enough to use only words for that level of explanation. I bet Elena deliberately used that map to help you understand.”

After listening to Alpha’s reaction, Akira tried to sound strong as he said.

“…It’s not like I wouldn’t understand if she didn’t do that though I just meant that it really makes such an explanation easy to understand.”

“Is that so? Well, I’m sure there will be many occasions where Elena would explain her plan only with words in the future, so I believe that you would understand them with no problem, right?”

“…I’m sorry, I hope that you would help me when that happens.”

“Of course.”

Alpha giggled when Akira just easily gave up trying to look strong.

Elena then threw a smile at Carol and said.

“…This is basically the gist of my plan though, so, how is it? If you have anything you want to say, there’s no need to hold back. After all, I have no plans to ignore the opinion of someone who had experienced fighting inside this Seranthal building.”

Carol once again glanced at Akira to check on him. After she confirmed that Akira did not seem to have anything to complain about, she then smiled at Elena and expressed her appreciation.

“I’m good with that plan. I’m glad to hear that it seems there’s no need to worry too much as we continue exploring this ruin. As expected of someone that Akira trusts so much, it seems that you’re pretty skilled in leading an indoor battle too. It’s just that I only saw your skill in leading battle outside yesterday, so I was a bit worried. I’m sorry if I offended you.”

“It’s fine, don’t worry. That’s normal since we are basically trusting our lives to each other in this situation, and I do think that confirming stuff like that is indeed important. I’m glad that you’re happy with my plan.”

Elena and Carol were smiling at each other while trying to hide the strange impression that they were actually talking about 2 different things there. Sara smiled bitterly, Shikarabe just ignored it thinking that it had nothing to do with him, Togami was too nervous that he did not notice it, and Akira there just tilted his head, it seemed that he did not understand what was going on.

They then continued searching the building. Just like Elena predicted, they did not encounter any monsters as they continued exploring further into the building.

There was no monster at all. The wall of Seranthal building blocked all kinds of information including sound, it might be to reduce the effectiveness of information-gathering devices inside that building, but thanks to that, the situation inside that building was completely quiet. It was as if the silence confirmed that there was no one else there except Elena and her team.

Akira continued searching the ruin following Alpha's instruction, it also doubled as training for Akira on how to explore a building.

"Say, Alpha. There's no monster at all though, which of Elena's guesses that you think is the correct one?"

"Which one do you think, Akira?"

"To be honest, I have no idea at all."

"That answer is actually the correct answer. If there's no need to make the choice, it's better not to make any when you don't have enough evidence. If you do, you will be more susceptible to information that supports your guess and you will be more likely to reject information that disproves it."

"Is that so?"

"Moreover, whichever the case, it would not change the things that you need to do. If the optimistic guess is correct, then this would be a good training for you. But if the pessimistic guess is correct, then you at least won't get ambushed. So don't lower your guard just because there are no monsters detected, and even if there's really no monsters around, let's continue carefully and take this training seriously."

"You're right about that… I actually didn't mean to lower my guard though. So like, did I actually lower my guard there?"

"According to what I can see, you're at least not that tense for someone who is exploring an unknown dangerous old-world ruin."

"Whoops, didn't mean to do that… Alright then, I'll be more careful."

Since he did not encounter any monsters, it seemed that Akira had lowered his guard enough for Alpha to warn him. So he collected himself together and continued the exploration.

Not too long after they reached the 15th floor, Elena suddenly told them to hold.

“Wait.”

Akira sharpened his sense and aimed his rifle at the hallway. The other Hunters also did the same almost immediately.

Elena kept her eyes on his information terminal as if she was trying to confirm something. Her expression then returned to normal as she drew a conclusion and said.

“…It’s not a signal from the mechanical monster, it should be okay.”

The other Hunters lowered their guard after hearing Elena’s answer. Sara then asked Elena.

“So, what was it?”

“Wait for a sec…”

After she said that, Elena checked the signal that was coming from a place not too far away from them. She then found a small mechanical device and picked it up. If that small device was mixed with the wreckages of the monsters, no one would be able to tell if that was not a part of the dead mechanical monster, but once it was picked up, it was easy to notice that it was not a part of a mechanical monster.

“…This one, huh?”

Elena mumbled as she looked at the small object that stopped them.

Akira looked at the object that Elena picked up with interest. It looked just like the small information-gathering device that Elena was using. But that was as far as his knowledge went, he did not know anything more than that.

Elena noticed Akira, she then showed the device in her hand and said.

“This seems to be a mini relay device. This one specializes in relaying information between Hunters around this device. When a team of Hunters explores an old-world ruin, they need to communicate and exchange information with the other Hunters of the same team who would be moving

separately at that point, right? So this device is mostly used for something like that. It might also be used as signs so that they could retrace back their steps when they explore a dangerous ruin. It's also useful for the rescue team to track their location if they get stuck inside the ruin. And of course, some Hunters just leave it as a proof that he or she was able to reach such a dangerous location."

After listening to Elena's explanation, Akira nodded deeply. Elena lightly smiled when she saw how Akira reacted to her explanation, she then ordered her team.

"I'm sure it's left behind by the Hunters who came here before us. I'll analyze it for the time being, so wait for a bit."

Elena then started checking that mini information relay device. When she connected her information terminal to that device, the information from analyzing that device was immediately displayed through the same stereoscopic hologram display device that she and Sara were using.

Elena then continued analyzing the information that was displayed to her. Since she was the only one who could see that display, from the other point of view, it seemed as if she was only standing there while staring at the mini information relay device without doing or saying anything. Looking at that, Akira asked Alpha.

"Alpha, it seems to me like Elena-san is only standing there without doing anything though, but she's actually analyzing that device, right?"

"Yep, that's why you should not interrupt her."

"You don't even need to tell me that."

"By the way, it's not that different to when you talk to me, you know. Thanks to the fact that a lot of other Hunters are also using similar devices, people don't get suspicious of you when you do that though. And even if you suddenly turn your head to look at me, I'm sure that the other Hunters will only think that you're trying to see a similar type of display like the one that Sara and Elena are using."

“Is that so…?”

No one else could see Alpha other than Akira. Because of that, if he tried to talk normally to Alpha, it would look as if he was a suspicious person talking to air. Although Akira tried his best to hide it since he knew that himself, it seemed that as he expected, he was not able to completely hide it. So in short, he sometimes made a weird and suspicious move. Akira seemed a bit dejected after he got reminded about that.

After Elena finished analyzing some part of the information from that mini information relay device, she then said.

“Shikarabe, this information relay device is owned by someone from Drankam. It seems that it’s sending a signal in non-standard format too. Shikarabe, did you get anything in your information terminal? It might be some kind of coded signal only recognized by people from Drankam.”

“Hm? Wait for a sec, let me check.”

Shikarabe then pulled out his information terminal and checked it.

“…Nope, nothing. I bet it’s either because that signal is too weak or it’s simply because my information terminal can’t recognize that signal. What’s the information broadcasted through the normal format?”

“It’s simply a message asking for help since the monsters are chasing them. Although it’s written that it’s an SOS rescue request, it doesn’t say anything about who is the issuer, how much is the reward offer, or the duration of the request. It doesn’t even contain the Hunter code of the sender. Although it’s still one of those SOS rescue requests, I bet no one would take this request after reading this message. It’s unclear how many of them or where they are. It basically won’t change our plan, we might help them if they’re still alive and we find them by chance, but we won’t go out of our way to look for them.”

“Can you send the encrypted signal to me?”

“Sure. There. I just sent it.”

Elena just sent the encrypted message broadcasted by the mini information gathering device to Shikarabe's information terminal. Shikarabe then used the decryption software installed inside his information terminal to decrypt that encrypted message. The output from the decryption software was basically another encrypted message and a short message saying for anyone who received that message to send it to Drankam's officers.

Since Shikarabe had some connections with the officers in Drankam, he was able to decrypt that encrypted message further. After he checked the content of that message, his face twitched.

"Ahhh… Goddammit!!!"

Shikarabe shouted out his frustration.

Somewhere inside his angry expression, it seemed that Shikarabe thought of something else. Elena was actually interested as to why Shikarabe made that face, but she thought that it must be some kind of Drankam's business, so it would be better if she did not try to make any unnecessary guess.

Judging from Shikarabe's expression, it was clear that it must have something to do with the infighting within Drankam. Moreover, that message was an encrypted message. Elena thought that it would give nothing but trouble if an outsider like her needlessly stuck her head in whatever that message was about.

Seeing Shikarabe was still deep in his thoughts, Elena then asked him.

"I don't know the content of that message, but, is it okay if we continue the search now?"

Shikarabe glanced at Elena, he then shifted his gaze to the floor and thought for a bit before looking straight into Elena's eyes again.

"…In that case, I have a suggestion, no, a request. I want to change our main aim from simply exploring this building to rescuing the owner of that information relay device. It's as you said, that Hunter is from Drankam. I

still have my reputation to hold among Hunters in Drankam, so I just can’t ignore this message.”

Elena then asked Shikarabe a question, trying to probe what might be behind Shikarabe’s sudden request.

“I know it’s rather cruel to say this, but that Hunter might be already dead, you know. If you want to retrieve their corpse, I’m sure the main squad that will come here later will retrieve all the corpses in this building after securing it, so you can save that for later. There’s also a chance that they have escaped the building on their own. We didn’t get to meet any monsters up until now. If they barricaded themselves somewhere to escape the danger, I’m sure it’s an easy thing for them to escape this building right now when there are no monsters at all.”

After Shikarabe listened to both pessimistic and relatively normal guesses from Elena, he then replied back with a grim face.

“No, I bet they’re still alive and still inside this building. There’s a chance that they might have barricaded themselves somewhere so tightly to the point that they even can’t confirm the situation outside the room that they barricaded in, or they might be injured so that they can’t travel too far. Saving Hunters are also one of the contents of our current request. Not to mention, if they’re survivors from when the situation in the ruin changed, they might have some important key information to understand the reason for that change. I’m sure it’s more profitable than just simply exploring this building, so, what do you think? If you save a Hunter from Drankam, I’m sure Drankam will give you an extra reward on top of the reward that you get from the City Management. I can even negotiate with the Drankam side for you.”

Shikarabe was not lying, but he had another reason as to why he made that request. Elena knew that very well as she asked Shikarabe a question.

“I’ll at least ask you this, what if I say no?”

“Then I won’t ask again, I have no plans to convince you to take it. You act as the leader, and I work under you, that was the deal. As a mere Hunter, I

have no plans to break that agreement.”

Elena then thought it must be something that Shikarabe himself did not want to do, but because of his position in Drankam, he could not just ignore it without putting any effort first. And right now, he was trying to make an excuse out of Elena that he could not rescue the sender of that SOS message.

There was no mistaking it, Shikarabe’s request was definitely because of that encrypted message. Elena then asked Shikarabe.

“One more thing then, what’s exactly the content of that message?”

“I can’t say since it’s secret information only for Drankam people. If you want to know no matter what, you would need to join Drankam. If you’re okay with that, I don’t mind using my right to tell you the content of that message here. Drankam always welcomes new Hunters who want to join its rank.”

“Thanks but no.”

“I see, then, will you take the request?”

Elena then thought again, the content of that encrypted message must be something related to the people inside Drankam, something that could not be shared with people outside Drankam. Or at least, it was something that Shikarabe would not willingly tell to people outside Drankam.

Elena calculated all the risks and the profits that the team could gain there since she was the team leader.

Togami suddenly nervously asked Elena.

“U-Uhhh, as someone from Drankam, honestly speaking, if it’s possible I want to take that request too. Drankam also recommended us to rescue any Hunters that we can… But of course, it’s okay if it’s not possible…”

Togami was not lying there, but besides that, he was actually aiming for a chance to reconfirm his skill when said that.

After Elena looked at Togami, her gaze then shifted to Akira. Akira then said.

“I don’t mind either way, I’ll follow whatever Elena-san decides.”

Carol then followed.

“I don’t mind too, after all, Akira also said that.”

Next was Sara.

“Well, we came to this ruin in the first place because of that SOS rescue request after all, isn’t it fine taking in that request thinking that it’s just an extension from our original plan coming here? Not to mention, we can get an extra reward from it too.”

Sara sent a meaningful gaze toward Shikarabe when she said that. Shikarabe immediately responded.

“I can guarantee that I’ll negotiate with Drankam about the reward, but I’ll only go that far. Well, Drankam also has its face to save, so I’m sure they’ll give you quite a lot of money for the reward.”

After taking all the opinions from her team members, Elena then realised that among all of them, the only Hunters who had experience fighting inside the Seranthal building were only Akira and Carol. She was originally planning to reject Shikarabe’s request if either Akira or Carol showed even the slightest sign that they did not want to do it. But they did not show anything like that. So Elena finally made a decision.

Elena’s expression changed to a rather serious look as she said to her team.

“Alright, our main aim from here and on will change to rescuing those Hunters. Judging from that mini information relay device, we can assume that they left similar devices to mark the places that they went through. So, we’ll use them to help us find their location. Then on top of that, we’ll prioritize searching only rooms where they might have barricaded themselves in. We’ll immediately pull back once we retrieve the targets

regardless if they're dead or alive. Carol, I'll leave picking the rooms to you. Once you're done with that, decide on a route, and we'll go from there."

Carol seemed a bit confused as she tilted her head and said.

"I've given you that map though, so you should be able to do that yourself, right?"

Elena changed her expression and replied.

"I want you to decide based on the information that is not included in that data. I know that you did not give all the information that you have when you gave me that map, right? Or at least, that data map didn't include anything that explains how you escaped from this building yesterday with Akira."

Carol's smile immediately vanished. Her gaze turned really sharp and she slightly lowered her voice.

"…Did you hear that from Akira?"

Akira and Togami were surprised by that sudden change from Carol. But the other Hunters were not surprised at all. It showed the difference in their experience.

Elena did not show any change in both her expression and tone of her voice as she answered Carol's question.

"I did ask him, but he did not tell me anything. He did at least tell me that he got trapped with you in this building, surrounded by monsters. Since both of you did not force your way all the way to the first floor to escape the building, it means that there's another way to escape this building. It must be some kind of secret route, whether it's a secret room, or a secret hallway, or a secret elevator, or maybe something else. Honestly speaking, I want that information too as an insurance in this situation. Moreover, I want to avoid the situation where we can't find the rescue targets just because they're hiding in that secret room, that's why I'm asking you to do that. If

you want extra payment for that information, you can go ahead and ask Shikarabe later.”

Shikarabe immediately reacted when his name suddenly got mentioned there.

“Hah, me?”

“You’re the one who asked us to take that request, the rescue targets this time are Drankam Hunters, right? So at least do something about that extra information cost from the reward.”

Elena had a good point there. Shikarabe also knew that very well as he sighed.

Carol did not change her expression as she mumbled.

“…I see, so Akira didn’t tell you, huh.”

In that short time when everyone’s attention shifted to Elena and Shikarabe, Carol suddenly smiled. It was a dark and ominous smile as if it was leaking out Carol’s inner feeling mixed with a slight tinge of madness and joy.

If any of them there saw Carol’s face, they would definitely make some kind of reaction. But unfortunately, no one saw her. And because Carol immediately returned her face to normal, no one noticed her change at all.

Carol then smiled as if nothing had happened and said to Elena.

“Got it then, I’ll get it done ASAP. Is it okay if I just add extra indicators to the map?”

As Elena’s attention returned back to Carol, she felt that somehow something was bothering her. But she did not know what it was.

“…? Sure, I’ll be counting on you.”

But unfortunately, Elena was not in a position where she had the leeway thinking about the thing that was bothering her. So she just quickly decided

to forget about it.

Alpha was staring at Carol. It was not like Alpha existed in the same place as the rest of the Hunters, that was why, in order to gather information about the people in that place, Alpha was using different methods compared to normal people. For example, she was relying on the information-gathering devices in that place to recognize 3D objects. And of course, she was also using other methods too. Basically, she did not need someone to be in her field of view for her to be able to see that person.

As such, Alpha was able to completely see Carol’s expression back there, and that was why she put her guard up against Carol.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 124, Continuing The Exploration

Index

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Elena and her team changed their main goal to rescuing the Hunters left trapped inside the Seranthal building. They also adjusted their exploration method to fit their new goal.

Up until now, they explored all the hallways and rooms from the first floor using their information-gathering devices to map out the inner layout of the building before. But this time, they only searched the rooms that Carol indicated and immediately went to the next floor once they were done. Their travel speed changed, so much that it surprised Akira.

Since they restarted their exploration, Akira always searched the rooms following the instructions from Alpha.

The level of the difficulty of the exploration suddenly went up compared to before. Since they increased their exploration rate, they did not have much time to check their surroundings and make decisions. And if they were late in doing so, it would cause the next action to get delayed, thus, increasing the accumulated stress, lowering their concentration, slowing them down, and eventually affected how careful they were in doing their searches. It

was only a matter of time before Akira could not endure the accumulating stress.

Seeing how Akira was accumulating stress pretty fast, Alpha decided to stop the training.

“Akira, you should take a break. I’ll do the search, so you should calm down and take a rest.”

“…Alright.”

Akira let out a light sigh. Although it was not like he completely lowered his guard, he fully relied on Alpha for detecting enemies now, thus, he could relax a bit as he followed Elena and the rest of the Hunters. Akira also started to move more sluggishly than before, but since Alpha also mended that through his augmented suit, it was not that apparent. Therefore, the other Hunters did not reprimand him.

Now that Akira got some leeway, he then asked a question that had been bothering him for a while to Alpha.

“Alpha, there’s something that I want to ask, though…”

“Oh my, if you have so much leeway as to make a pointless chit chat now, it might be a good idea to restart your training again.”

Akira went silent. Well, it was true that Akira was talking with Alpha through telepathy, so he did not make any sounds nor he did move his mouth, but even so, he suddenly went silent. Anyone who could notice that would think that conveying silence through telepathy was indeed a meaningless action. And the only thing there who could notice it was Alpha alone.

Alpha smiled mischievously and said.

“I’m just kidding, so, what is your question?”

Akira then frowned while still in silence as Alpha was smiling amusedly at him. If it was a competition of being obstinate, Akira had zero chance of

winning. Akira knew that well, his face turned displeased as he sighed before his expression returned to normal and said.

“…I just thought that we’re moving faster than before since we changed our main goal. I’m just wondering if that’s really alright. Ah, that’s not right, I actually think that it should be okay, but…”

Akira was trying to gather his thoughts as he was speaking with Alpha. Alpha quickly guessed what he was trying to ask even before he could finish his sentence, she then immediately answered.

“You basically don’t doubt Elena’s order. That’s why you have no complaint about it. But that would be your subjective opinion. It’s not like you, yourself, fully understand the effect of that order, evaluate it, and finally conclude by yourself that it should be fine. If I have to word it differently, if Shikarabe or Togami make the same decision, you would’ve questioned it. So you want to know if I also think that it’s not a bad decision, and if I do, you want to know the reason why. You’re basically wondering if the increased searching speed affects the quality of our searches. You’re also wondering that if you only look in the places where you might find one of those mini information relay devices, you might be missing some devices on your way. It’s not like you can ask about that to Elena right now, you can actually just ask her later, but since it’s bothering you and you have the chance to ask me, you decided to ask me now, right?”

Akira frowned and was a bit weirded out by Alpha’s words. He then said.

“…Well, yeah, something like that.”

Although Akira was trying to hide it, Sara was able to accurately guess what happened when he joined the bounty hunt with Shikarabe only with the limited information that Akira shared with her. And this time, Alpha was able to quickly guess what he was thinking even before he finished gathering his thoughts.

Akira was actually feeling a bit scared that it was only a matter of time before they could completely read his thoughts even without him saying anything.

Alpha then started evaluating Elena’s decision.

“I do also think that Elena’s decision is the right decision. Although it ultimately depends on how you are going to evaluate that decision, and I’m sure that even you are not expecting Elena to have a god-like level of commanding skill, to successfully lead a team of Hunters filled with amateurs through a deathly battlefield, right?”

“Well, yes.”

“Then, there should be no problems. Elena is doing a good job analyzing the current situation and adapting to the new information. I can at least say that much. So, if I have to start from the searching speed…”

Alpha suddenly stopped there and forcefully moved Akira’s body through his augmented suit. Akira was putting too much attention on Alpha’s explanation that he significantly slowed down. Akira, who realized that, flusteredly pulled himself together and aimed his rifle at the intersection that the team just passed through.

Alpha then smiled at Akira and said.

“As I thought, isn’t it better if we talk about it later?”

“…You’re right, let’s save that for later.”

“Alright then. But if talking with you slows you down that much, then I won’t be able to talk to you when you’re exploring an old-world ruin, huh. I’m sure you’ll feel lonely too because of that. Do you think I need to train you to do that?”

Alpha said that while still smiling, while on the other hand, Akira pouted when she said that.

Elena and her team continued deeper into the building. They did not encounter any monsters as they explored the building, but unfortunately enough, they also did not get to encounter any of their rescue targets.

They searched only the rooms where there was a good chance the Hunters who they were looking for might be barricading themselves. But all of them were empty rooms. Although they did find some traces of battles and bloodstains that might be from the Hunters and some other traces showing that someone was once there, they did not find any Hunters at all, not even their corpses.

A change happened when they reached the 20th floor. As they were about to explore the 20th floor, Elena suddenly told them to stop.

They immediately put their guards up and scanned their surroundings. They noticed that the 20th floor looked completely different from all the other floors below it.

There were Hunters' corpses, wreckages, rubbles, and still-moving monsters.

Judging from their outer looks, they should be the A24 monsters that they fought in the Mihazono ruin's city district, but they were badly damaged, their torsos were dented and some of their limbs were blasted to pieces. Some of them lost their legs, while some others lost their wheels. But that did not hinder them from moving around as they were able to nimbly avoid the corpses and the wreckages that were scattered on the floor.

Shikarabe looked around and mumbled.

"…So, they only finished cleaning the lower floors, huh. Well, I guess it's better than having them waiting to welcome us here."

Looking at what those monsters were doing there, it did not seem like they were waiting for Akira and the other Hunters. But judging at the dead Hunters on the floor, it did not seem like they would peacefully let them pass either.

Elena immediately tried to think of a plan to clear up those monsters.

[I bet they're patrol drones. And judging from how they are moving around, it doesn't seem like they've noticed us yet. Is it because their sensors are

broken or something? Are they not exchanging information with Seranthal's security facilities? Or is it because the very thing that is lowering the sensitivity of our information-gathering devices is also affecting them? Are they autonomous drones? Are they here for reconnaissance? Or is that they're simply roaming aimlessly after their control devices got destroyed or something?]

Elena thought of so many possibilities, then after going through all of those options, she then said to Sara.

"Sara, kill them."

"Roger that."

Sara aimed her anti-material rifle at those monsters. Just like the information-gathering device, the aiming device of her rifle was also affected by the Seranthal building, thus, its accuracy was worsened.

But, it did not cause much trouble for Sara's ability. She aimed her rifle at the torsos of those monsters and pulled the trigger once she was sure that her shots would hit.

The bullet that flew out of her rifle's muzzle hit its target accurately. That bullet was designed for firepower rather than piercing power, as such, it easily blasted A24's torso. The impact threw its body and scattered its inside around as it rolled over on the ground. It did not take that long before the next A24 also got blown away.

Elena told her team to stay on guard while she was observing the A24 that had turned into wreckages on the floor.

Akira suddenly realized something weird.

"Alpha. It's about the monsters that Sara-san just killed, from the outside, they look like mechanical monsters, it's not like they're actually biological monsters, right…?"

Alpha found that question rather strange, but even so, she decided to recheck the dead monsters that were scattered on the ground. They were made of metals and some kind of nanomaterials. They did not seem to be biological monsters.

“Well, from what I can see, I believe they’re mechanical monsters. What’s wrong?”

“Nah, I’m just wondering about what’s the meaning of killing mechanical monsters. Judging from what Sara-san did back there, does that mean to break them and render them unable to move…? That still doesn’t sound right, though?”

“Oooh, I see.”

From how Elena worded it, Akira was wondering if they were actually biological monsters that looked like mechanical monsters. It was a subject that could easily cause a debate.

Alpha then thought, Akira just encountered a monster. So, it might be better to let him focus more on watching his surroundings instead of thinking about something else. So she was wondering if she should scold Akira instead.

But it was not clear yet whether it was really unnecessary or not. Being critical and extra cautious made people more careful, and sometimes, it might even be the trump card to escape a hopeless situation. An ability to think outside the box and come up with an unthinkable solution was an invaluable skill.

In order to polish that skill, there was no other way but to keep being critical and always ask difficult questions. If Alpha scolded Akira, there was a good chance that Akira would obediently do that, thus, reducing his chance to polish his skill in thinking outside the box.

If it was about the ability to detect enemies, Akira would not be able to get better than Alpha. Thus, Alpha decided that she should encourage him to polish other kinds of skills, although it was unlikely.

Alpha then answered Akira’s question.

“It could be interpreted as putting a short gap in between executing the actions that would kill and when the target could be assumed dead. So applying that to mechanical monsters, I would say that Elena told Sara to leave a small time gap, from the moment she started shooting at those monsters until when those monsters fully stopped moving anymore. Or, maybe even put no time gap at all if it was possible. That was what Elena asked from Sara. Although it’s nothing but a guess, I believe that’s the gist of it.”

“Is it not enough to just destroy them?”

“Let’s say if those monsters are a part of the building’s security. They might immediately call for reinforcement when they’re attacked, or maybe they won’t. They might only call for reinforcements once they judge that they can’t win only with their firepower. This condition might also include the damage done to its own body. Some of them might have a self-repairing system, then they would repair themselves, check the damage on their bodies, and if it’s above the threshold, they would call for reinforcements. So in order to stop them from doing something like that, there’s a need to completely stop their functions with one shot. That’s why Elena used that word. I think you can interpret her like that.”

“If they’re really a part of the building’s security, won’t they already know our location and would call for reinforcement the moment we destroyed them?”

“We don’t know how much these monsters are exchanging information with each other. Maybe Elena wanted to check that too, that’s why she gave that order, or maybe, she wanted to know how many monsters would come here just from the sound of the gunshot. It should be hard to ascertain our position only from that gunshot inside this building, you know. After all, something is reducing the sensitivity of your information-gathering device inside this building, but we don’t know for sure if that also affects the monsters. Moreover, if they’re really a part of the building’s security, even if their sensors are also affected, they should have already known our location from the sensors scattered all over the interior of this building. So

these monsters might as well know our location from that shared information. I think Elena is trying to check that too."

Akira looked a bit surprised, he did not even consider that at all. It might be because he always relied on Alpha to decide on what to do during a fight. After listening to Alpha's explanation, it reminded him of his lack of skill in that department.

"I can make other guesses too, but let's just stop here. Now that we just encountered some monsters, you need to be more careful from here and on."

"Just tell me one more thing then. About that thing that you just explained to me, is that a normal thing for Hunters to know that? Am I the only one who doesn't know that far?"

"It might be just simply because Elena thought you would understand what she wanted to convey only with those words. Elena and Sara seem to have been working together for a long time, so I bet they can tell what each other is trying to say without actually saying it. I bet she would add an extra explanation if she was to give the same order to you. But judging from the content of that order, I think it's as you said. If you're bothered by that, you should put more effort into studying from now on. I'll help you too, you know?"

Alpha smiled mischievously, Akira returned that with a bitter smile.

"I guess I still have a long way to go before I can be a proper Hunter, huh?"

When Alpha said that she would help him, she was actually saying that she was willing to increase the difficulty of the training and the study. Akira at least knew that much.

Togami confirmed the change of the situation as he continued watching his surroundings. The monsters were now scattered on the ground while Elena was scanning the area with a serious look. That was all the changes there for now.

Togami who was seriously watching his surroundings suddenly made a confused expression, he then looked slightly troubled.

In the back of his head, he was thinking that there were no longer any monsters in that area and there did not seem to be any reinforcement coming either, which in that case, should it not be better to continue the search? After all, in order to reach their rescue target as soon as possible, it might be better to hurry up.

Togami then asked Elena.

“Uhhh, aren’t we going to continue the search?”

Elena did not even turn or change her expression as she replied.

“Sorry, I don’t have the time to explain it. If you have any questions, just ask Shikarabe.”

“But, like, you know, we’ve been doing this for a while now and…”

Since Togami did not seem likely to step back anytime soon, Shikarabe said with an irritated voice.

“Just shut up.”

Togami flinched and immediately turned to Shikarabe. Shikarabe was exuding a level of antagonism toward him.

Shikarabe had this serious expression, he did not even try to hide his irritation as he said to Togami.

“Listen here, Elena is busy, so don’t interrupt her.”

“…Alright.”

Togami just backed out obediently, Shikarabe was rather surprised by it. It was true that Shikarabe put a little bit of extra intimidation there to make sure that Togami would not get ahead of himself and worsened the situation there. But with that being said, it was still a bit weird for Togami to be so

obedient like that. Or at least, to Shikarabe, it did not seem that there was any sign of grudge when Togami backed out.

[…What the heck is with this boy? Since when he becomes this obedient, it's true that it's a good thing though, but still…]

Although Shikarabe was really surprised, he immediately decided to just forget about it for now. They encountered some monsters just now, so as long as it did not hinder them, there was no need to think too much about it.

Togami then reassessed the current situation. From his point of view, including that level of caution against the first group of monsters they encountered inside that building, he thought that they were wasting time and were just delaying rescuing their targets.

This team was formed on such a short notice, so it would be normal for some of the team members to complain if they found the order given to them by their leader was just a waste of time or meaningless. But other than Togami, no one there was complaining.

[So basically she's doing something important, and Shikarabe also thinks so too. But then, how about the other Hunters? Do they also understand why she's doing that and understand its importance too? Is it only me who doesn't understand it?]

Actually, there's one more person there who did not understand why Elena had not given her orders to continue the search yet, it was Akira. But Alpha gave him an explanation that answered his question.

Togami thought that he was the only person there who did not understand something that everyone should already understand. So he used all of his brainpower to keep thinking about the reason why Elena gave that order to stand by there.

Elena then pointed her finger toward a hallway leading to another opening on the right.

“Sara. If it’s possible, let it pass. If it gets dangerous, just destroy it. There’s no need to wait for my order.”

“Roger that.”

Sara aimed her rifle toward the entrance of that hallway, she then lightly smiled and said.

“We don’t really know what’s going on here, so isn’t it safer to just destroy it.”

“I leave that decision to you.”

Sara looked at Elena, she was making a serious face when she said that. Sara then got herself ready while still looking pretty relaxed.

The map of the 20th floor was displayed in Akira’s goggles. It was showing the hallway that Sara was pointing her rifle at. After Elena gave the order to Sara, a red dot suddenly appeared on that map located somewhere deeper in that hallway. It was the indicator for enemies.

Alpha then enhanced Akira’s vision, thanks to that, he was able to see through the walls.

Akira was able to see the monster indicated with the red dot on the map, that monster was also painted red in his vision. Although he was not able to see the shape of the monster, he was at least able to see that there was a monster there.

Alpha then said to Akira.

“They’re enemies, I’m sure Sara can take care of them. But just to be safe, get yourself ready too.”

“Alright. But still, the display looks rather blurry, is it because of that thing that affects the information-gathering devices?”

“Yep, that’s correct. Don’t drop your guard just because you see the same information as from the map.”

Akira aimed his CWH anti-material rifle toward the hallway. He was aiming at the monster way deep inside the hallway and behind the walls.

Shikarabe and Carol were also aiming their rifles in ready, but they were aiming toward different hallways. It was because they believed Akira and Sara would be enough to handle the monster shown on the map. Moreover, they also understood that just because the map did not show any monsters in the other hallways, it did not mean that there definitely were no monsters there.

Togami also readied his rifle while looking at Akira, he was surprised when he realized Akira was aiming his rifle toward a wall.

[Where the hell is he aiming at?]

Togami shifted his gaze from Akira to the wall that Akira was aiming at. But it was just a plain wall without anything that might garner attention. Togami then looked at Akira again with a weirded out face.

The red dot in the map started to approach Elena and her team. It would not be long before they encounter each other.

As the red dot, the enemy, kept getting closer and closer, Akira started to be able to see the shape of the monster through his enhanced vision. The image of the enemy started getting better and better. It was because the closer they got to each other, the better his information-gathering device was reading that monster.

Akira followed the enemy with his eyes. As they got closer, the image of the monster on the other side of the wall was also getting clearer.

It was the same type of monster as the ones that Sara just killed, the A24-type monster. But this one was only slightly damaged, it nimbly moved over the wreckages on the floor as it travelled through the hallway and eventually showed up in front of Akira right when he was aiming at the entrance of the hallway.

Togami who was watching Akira’s movement was taken aback. He realized Akira was looking straight at the monster in front of him.

[That guy is following a monster with his eyes, huh?! How did he do that?!]

Togami was so surprised that he focused more on Akira rather than on the A24 monster that just appeared. If that monster had already known their location beforehand and immediately released a shot there, it would have been a fatal opening.

Fortunately enough, or more like, as Elena had predicted, the A24 monster just continued walking through the hallway without paying any attention to Akira. Sara confirmed that the gun growing out of its back was not aiming at anyone there. She was still aiming at that monster’s gun while letting it pass, just like Elena told her to.

That monster continued walking past through the wreckages of the other A24 monsters that Sara just killed and left that place, that was when Elena told Sara.

“Sara, destroy it.”

Sara did not hesitate at all as he immediately shot a bullet at the monster.

The first shot hit its machine gun and tore it off from the monster’s body, the impact also threw it off balance.

The second shot hit the monster’s torso and threw its body as it rolled on the ground.

As it was tumbling over, Sara released her third and fourth shots. The third shot hit its legs, pierced through its armour and went through its torso, while the fourth shot pierced its body and slammed its body to the wall behind it.

That monster was rendered harmless in just a few seconds. It then tumbled over to the ground, twitched as if it was squeezing the very last drop of life that it had, and finally completely stopped moving.

Sara confirmed that she killed it as she lowered her rifle. Elena looked at the monster that Sara just defeated and hummed.

Akira looked at that monster that still mostly retained its original shape and asked Alpha.

“That was a little bit different compared to when Sara-san took out the first group.”

“That’s because the order from Elena was different too. If my guess is correct, after she disarmed that monster with the first shot, she released the rest of the shots with the goal of checking how durable it is.”

“I see.”

“Monsters of the same type or species usually have the same structures. Since Sara just showed you how much damage you can cause by shooting at which part, you should properly use it as a reference the next time you shoot at them, okay?”

Alpha was smiling as usual when she said that. But in contrast to her, Akira was making a stern face. It was true that Sara just showed how effective it would be if he shot at a particular part of the monster. But even so, he had no idea where he should aim his shot at.

In that short display, he needed to discern which one was the monster’s control device among all the small pieces of the monster that were scattered. Then, he should guess from there the location of the control device before it got destroyed, then finally guessed the weak part of its armour where he could snipe that control device. But of course, Akira could not do that.

“So, should I first prioritize destroying the monster’s gun just like what Sara-san did?”

“That’s a good idea, which in that case then, you just need to be able to accurately aim at the monster’s gun while it’s still moving and without my support.”

“…So, what’s the right answer?”

“The right answer would be that your aim depends on how good you are at shooting. With your current skill, I think it’s better if you aim at its torso to break its balance and lower its accuracy. You need to at least be able to hit it to do that though.”

“You’re right about that, the first step would be to hit my shots.”

He might still need a lot of time before he could shoot as accurately as Sara, Akira then sighed.

Togami suddenly asked Akira a question.

“…How did you know its location?”

Akira frowned.

“It’s shown on the map, right? Or is it that it didn’t show up on your map?”

Togami seemed obviously confused as he said.

“That’s not what I’m asking about, I’m talking about how you followed that monster when it was still behind that wall?”

When Togami asked that question again, Akira finally realized what Togami was talking about. Normally, people would not be able to see through a wall, it was thanks to Alpha’s support that he could do that. Although he was a bit surprised inside, he made effort to not show it on his face.

“The location of the enemies on the 20th floor is shown as red dots in the map, right? If you look at that, you can more or less guess the real location of the enemies.”

“They’re basically nothing but a rough approximation. But back there you were accurately tracking that monster when it was still behind the wall. How did you do that…?”

Togami was not convinced by Akira's explanation as he pressed for more answers. That was when Shikarabe suddenly interjected.

"Akira, there's no need for you to answer all of his stupid questions. Just ignore him. I bet this guy thinks that everything that he can't do or understand are all strange things. There's no need to listen to him."

Although it was unclear why Shikarabe said that, it was not a bad suggestion for Akira. So Akira just nodded and said.

"Got it."

Togami looked at Shikarabe with a bit of hostility, but when he saw Shikarabe's face that was mixed with a bit of mockery, he immediately looked down and hung his head low. And then he returned to monitoring his surroundings.

Shikarabe looked at Togami with a slightly surprised look. It was true that Shikarabe interjected to stop Togami from picking a fight with Akira, but he also expected Togami to pick a fight with him when he did that. But just like last time, Togami just meekly obeyed his order.

[He really has toned down, huh. Honestly though, what happened to this boy?]

Although Shikarabe still had no idea why Togami turned so obedient, seeing how Togami stopped being selfish, he no longer thought of Togami as a spoiled brat for now.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 125, The Hunters Who Barricaded Themselves

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Even after Sara destroyed the second monster, Elena still ordered the team to stay on watch in that hall. There were corpses of dead Hunters, wreckages of destroyed monsters, monsters that had been rendered harmless with their bodies almost fully intact, they were looking at these while still on stand by in that room. The time that they spent there was crucial to gather and analyze all the data that they could get there. But it was only a matter of time before it turned into simply a waste of time.

[Judging from how the monsters reacted, it seems that they don't know our location. It might be because their ability to share information and contact each other is also lowered just like how the sensitivity of our information-gathering devices are also lowered. If it's blocking them from calling reinforcements, it might also be the case for their ability to contact each other, no, maybe they can but only for the monsters on the same floor? Then, even if it's true that the manager of this building has turned hostile to us, then why is their ability to contact each other affected the same way as how the sensitivity of our information-gathering device is affected? Is the manager of this building not sharing information with these monsters? Is it

because they’re under different management? Or is it because these monsters are broken or something? Or is it simply because they’re not working under the management of this building? Or is it that they’re trying to trick us here?]

When Elena’s display showed that her information-gathering device had finished gathering and analyzing all the information that it could get there, Elena decided to finally move on.

[I’ve finished analyzing the monsters here. We should be able to detect the same type of monster better now, it’ll at least increase the sensitivity of our information-gathering device. There doesn’t seem to be any reinforcement, but I don’t think it’s a good idea to stay here any longer, it would be a waste of time if we keep staying here longer. I guess it’s time to go then.]

Elena then said to the rest of the team.

“We’ll keep up our method and speed just like before. Although you can see the result for the radar on your map, don’t drop your guard just because there are no monsters detected. Just fight the monsters that block our way, there’s no need to kill all the monsters, prioritize more on searching the area. But of course, safety is still number one. That’s all, let’s go.”

They immediately started moving again, and as Elena ordered, they kept the same speed and method although the situation on the 20th floor was completely different compared to the 19th floor.

There were puddles of blood mixed with wreckages of monsters on the floor as they continued their search on that floor. There were traces of destroyed barricades and the Hunters who must have frantically fought those monsters. The Hunters’ hands that were poking out from a pile of wreckages of dead monsters were still holding their rifles even now. Rubbles and wreckages blocked the hallways and the corpses of the Hunters who created those piles scattered inside the hallways.

The monsters there already turned the Hunters on that floor to corpses, and the still-moving monsters now quickly turned their attention to the new enemies that just stepped into that floor.

Alpha gave Akira an order while they were in the middle of moving.

“Akira, to your right.”

“Roger that.”

Akira who was running immediately stopped at the intersection in front of him and aimed his rifle to the right.

He gathered his concentration and compressed his time perception as he fixed his aim at the target that he could not even see. He then tracked the A24 monsters that passed through the next intersection and pulled the trigger the moment they showed themselves.

Akira was able to see the location of the control device inside the monster’s body due to Alpha’s support. Alpha also indicated the location where Akira’s bullet would easily pierce its armour and destroy its control device. As Akira tried to align his aim, a trajectory prediction line extended from his CWH anti-material rifle’s muzzle.

The bullet that flew out from the CWH anti-material rifle hit the weak point of the monster. It destroyed the monster’s outer armour and pierced through its innards, it went straight for the monster’s control device and destroyed it in one shot. The monster that had lost its brain immediately stopped functioning and just crashed into the ground with the momentum that it had when it flew out from the intersection due to inertia.

“Alright!”

Akira nodded and immediately started running again. When he had a chance, he quickly turned to Alpha and asked her a question while still running.

“How was that?”

Alpha smiled and warned him.

“If I didn’t fix your aim, it would have missed the monster about 1 metre to the left. You need to try to keep calm while fixing your aim as fast as

possible.”

“…I see.”

Akira felt slightly depressed, he felt pretty good with himself after that shot, but it turned out that it was all thanks to Alpha’s support.

But Akira quickly pulled himself together, he knew that he had no time to lament. He then commented about the other factor that increased the difficulty of sniping monsters there.

“But still, this place is pretty bad. It would have been much easier if they cleaned this place just like what they did on the lower floors.”

Because of the fierce battle that happened beforehand there, the leftover of that battle blocked the way and made it more difficult for Akira to move around. Wreckages of dead monsters scattered on the ground, they were leaking out oils which then mixed together with the blood from the dead Hunters. These were preventing Akira from moving too fast. They did not have a stable footing and the floor was slippery from the oil and the blood. Sniping alone was already hard enough, but the environment there increased the difficulty even more.

Alpha then answered Akira’s question.

“The cleaning drones might have been destroyed by the other mechanical monsters.”

“…Wait, they’re not friends?”

“We don’t know for sure if those monsters are working under the command of the manager of this building. They might be a completely separate swarm that somehow entered the Seranthal building. Of course, this is nothing but a guess though.”

Akira made a troubled look, but he immediately returned his face to normal.

“This has really turned into something super complicated. It might have something to do with the current abnormality in Mihazono ruin, but well, I

guess it has nothing to do with me, huh. Well, it's true that I might be able to get 10,000,000,000 Aurum if I know the reason behind it, but it's not the time to be thinking about that right now."

Alpha smiled at Akira and said.

"That's true. You came here in order to help Elena and Sara out of your own volition after all. So you need to concentrate more on that. But if you've had enough of it, you can tell me anytime. I'll immediately readjust your course of action for moving separately from the team."

Akira sulked for a bit, but Alpha just ignored it and kept smiling at him.

It was true that he actually just ignored Alpha's opinion and dragged her for his own selfishness to help out Elena and Sara. That was why he thought that it was understandable for Alpha to poke at him like that, so he just ignored it and decided to move on.

Shikarabe aimed his rifle at the monster that was located behind a pile of wreckage and pulled the trigger. The piercing bullet that he was using was able to pierce through the pile of wreckage and hit the monster behind it. He was able to destroy the monster's vital component in one shot and killed that monster.

Shikarabe was able to ascertain the enemy's location from the data that he was receiving from Elena.

[It's amazing how accurate this information that she's sending to me is when the sensitivity of my own information-gathering device is this bad. It's great that I can take it easy. I can see now why Arabe is always trying so hard to get Elena and Sara to join the gang, though it always ended up with a failure.]

Shikarabe was honestly impressed by Elena's ability and smiled bitterly remembering how his friend worked so hard for it although it ended up with failures.

While Carol had a large gun with her that could blast the monsters in one shot. It was also thanks to Elena that she was able to quickly detect the monsters that hid in difficult-to-spot places.

[Elena’s ability to process information is really nothing to scoff at, Sara is also moving accordingly to keep Elena protected. It’s understandable that Akira looks up to them. I guess it won’t be easy to impress Akira with my Hunter skill, huh. Well, let’s just do my best.]

Carol was also impressed with Elena and Sara’s skill. So using that as a reference, it seemed that it would not be easy to try to show off her Hunter skill to Akira.

Togami was desperately trying to catch up with the moving speed of the rest of the team. He did not complain at all as he used all he got to use that chance to show his skills to other Hunters.

His powerful equipment supported him to push his way through difficult situations. But that was not enough for him to match the current speed. He was barely able to follow the rest of the team.

Togami checked at the other Hunters while fighting the monsters. Just like Akira who was able to track a monster that was invisible to him, Shikarabe and the other Hunters could also predict accurately where and when the enemy would appear or shoot accurately through wreckages or rubbles.

Togami was also receiving the same information from Elena just like the rest of the Hunters, but even so, he could not use it to perform as well as the other Hunters.

His expression turned stern.

[So it’s normal for them to be able to do that, huh?! While on the other hand, I can’t do that at all… At least for now though, I’ll definitely learn how to do that too as soon as possible!!]

In the past, excessive praises pushed him to grow, but this time, frustration and the feeling of patheticness pushed him to grow. Togami recognized his

own skill and his pathetic performance here, he was scolding himself as if to tell him to fight back while pushing himself to the limit.

Elena kept scanning the surroundings while going deeper and deeper into the building. And of course, he was also keeping his eyes for any signals from their rescue targets while scanning her surroundings. At the same time, she was also marking the route that the team would take on the map.

Sara was fighting the monsters they encountered while making sure that Elena, the leader of the team, was properly protected. Sara's display was showing the information that Elena had analyzed and sent to her. Thanks to that information, Sara was able to effectively remove the monsters that were blocking their way forward and any monsters that approached the team.

Elena and Sara basically work together as a team of two when they did Hunter jobs. Depending on the request that they took, they sometimes had to work under a different team, or sometimes, as the leader of the team, but that was not enough to break their habit of working as a team of two. It was simply because they understood and trusted each other, they knew that it was the best option and they trusted that fact.

Sara then contacted Elena through the transceiver.

"Elena, who is this rescue target that we're trying to rescue this time? Or more like, is there really any survivors in this situation?"

"This is only my guess, but I think it's very likely that they're still alive. Or at least, it seems that Shikarabe thinks so. If Shikarabe's aim this time is to retrieve the borrowed equipment or the corpses, I'm sure he would have chosen another option. That's why he asked us to do this even though he doesn't want to."

That answer did not fully convince Sara. She looked around at the wreckages of dead monsters that were scattered on the ground and said.

"The people who fought these monsters might be the Hunters who accepted that SOS rescue request, right? So basically, they must be the Hunters who were in this ruin yesterday. I'm sure most of them only had enough supplies

thinking that they would return back during the day, right? And even if they brought with them extra supplies, I'm sure they had used most of them to fight all of these monsters. And if they are strong enough to handle all of these monsters in that situation, I bet they've already escaped the building by themselves though."

Judging from the average strength of the Hunters in the Mihazono ruin, the state of the Hunters who accepted that SOS rescue request, and the leftover of the battles in that place, Sara's experience as a Hunter was telling her that there was zero chance their rescue targets were still alive.

Elena actually had the same thought as Sara. But even so, she believed there was a good chance that their rescue targets were still alive, and that reason might lie in the secret information that Shikarabe would not tell her.

"I actually agree with you. But even so, Shikarabe still believes that they are still alive. They might have some team members who specialize in close-quarter combat, or they might bring with themselves way more supplies than most Hunters would, or they might be way stronger than most of the Hunters in this ruin, or they made sure to barricade themselves somewhere to make sure that they would be able to return alive. So judging from that, they might still be alive even now. Don't you think that's plausible too?"

"Well, that does make sense, a lot of Hunters went to this building after Drankam issued that SOS rescue request after all. So it won't be strange if some of them are actually that skilled."

Sara was convinced by that answer, but even so, Elena who answered Sara's question felt that something was still bothering her.

It was the reason why Shikarabe made that expression back then. Judging from there, there was no mistaking it that it must be something troublesome, something that forced Shikarabe to adjust his action assuming that their rescue targets were still alive. There was no telling how much that something might affect the other Hunters later.

Elena then carefully asked Shikarabe.

“Shikarabe, I didn’t ask you this since I thought it must be information that you can’t share, but at least I’ll ask you this now. Can you at least tell us the name of our rescue targets?”

Shikarabe’s expression turned clouded.

“It’s not secret information. But, in case if that person is already dead or if we fail to rescue that person, it’s way better if you don’t know that person. Not telling you here is actually an act of kindness. But if you want to know no matter what, I don’t mind telling you.”

“I won’t ask any further then. And also, if that’s really the case, if we have to negotiate with them afterwards, I’ll have to ask you to lead the negotiation for us, yes?”

“Roger that. It might include inside information about Drankam, so it might be better if I’m the one to do that anyway.”

Elena understood a few things after listening to Shikarabe’s answer. One thing for sure, it was not someone that Shikarabe did not know. He knew about this person that they were trying to rescue. And it was someone that might bring trouble later to the point that Shikarabe made that annoyed look the moment he decrypted the message from that person.

Elena thought that it was better to just get this request done with and move on. Which meant that they had to find their rescue targets and escort them back to safety as soon as possible.

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Reina, Shiori, and Kanae were barricading themselves inside a room on the 30th floor.

The entrance to that room was heavily barricaded. They used wreckages from the dead monsters, portable barriers, and furniture found inside the room to barricade the entrance. They abandoned their chance to get out from that building and prioritized more on making sure that no monsters could get inside the room.

Shiori was taking care of her weapons while using the wreckage of monsters as her chair and table. The cut surface of that wreckage was clean, Shiori cut that wreckage with a single swing of the blade dangling on her hip.

Her blade was housed in a black sheathe, both the sheathe and the blade were made using old-world technology. The blade was so sharp that it cut through the monster like a hot knife cutting through butter. The sheathe itself was equipped with a feature that automatically repaired the nicks and any other damages on the blade. Among all the equipment that Shiori had, it was her most prized equipment. Kanae was also using the wreckage of a dead monster as a chair, she was sitting next to Shiori.

There was a huge dent on the body of the destroyed monsters, it was created when Kanae punched those monsters. Thanks to her powerful augmented suit and trained body, she was able to make a huge dent on the monsters' armours that could easily ricochet bullets and crush the innards of those monsters.

The monsters that Shiori and Kanae were sitting on were the monsters that they defeated when they secured that room. Of course, it was not comfortable sitting on them, but thanks to their augmented suit, they had no problem sitting on those wreckages for a long time. Although there were other soft things in that place, they gave them all to Reina.

Kanae smiled at Shiori and said.

"Well, what can I say, I'm glad that we made sure we're ready for anything, right?! Thanks to that, we're able to survive this far! We still have quite a lot of ammunition and food! We should still be able to stay here for some time, yep yep!!"

Shiori stopped her hands and glanced coldly at Kanae who was still smiling widely at her.

"That aside, it's pretty amazing how everything that young boy Akira said is true. Our information terminal quickly lost any connections and we can't use it to contact anyone. Then, the sensitivity of our information-gathering

device also significantly worsened, then to top it off, we got surrounded by swarms of monsters. Hm? Ahh, the facilities inside this building are still working well though. It might be just because we didn't check it, but I wonder what actually caused it."

Shiori was looking at Kanae with a colder gaze than usual, but Kanae just ignored it as she kept smiling at Shiori.

"But again, if Ane-san didn't ask Akira to escort Milady, we wouldn't know about that and we might be dead by now. Our destiny might have changed for the better the moment Ane-san did that. After all, it's because Akira told us all of that that we decided to buy the map of the Seranthal building. Thanks to that, we were able to quickly find this room that looks strong enough and easy to defend. Although it was a bit more expensive than usual, I'm glad we bought that map."

Shiori looked even colder toward Kanae, she then sighed and looked mildly annoyed as she said.

"So then, how many more times do you need to say that before you stop talking about it?"

Kanae had been talking about that multiple times until now. That was the reason why Shiori's gaze turned colder and colder towards Kanae.

But then Kanae casually replied.

"If you don't like talking about that, how about you come up with something else to talk about? I don't mind listening to your story about Milady here, you know. After all, I have nothing else to do right now."

Shiori obviously looked irritated as she said.

"No thanks. After all, every time I do that, you always try to refute it and we always end up debating each other."

"I was just pointing out that Ane-san is too overprotective and spoiling Milady too much, you know?"

“You’re 100 years too soon to say anything about my relationship with Milady.”

“No no no, it’s a good idea to listen to a third party’s opinion sometime, right?”

It might be because they had been stuck inside that room for such a long time that their decision making skill was affected. Shiori replied with something that she would have never said normally. Then right when Kanae started getting bored making small talks to kill time, she suddenly said to Shiori with a serious face.

“…So then, Ane-san, are we still going to stay here?”

Shiori replied with a serious expression and a rather heavy voice.

“…Yes.”

“I see. I’m fully leaving that decision to you though. So I’ll follow all of your orders, but putting us aside, isn’t it getting worse for Milady?”

As Kanae said that, she glanced at Reina who was lying on her back. She was lightly wounded during the fight, but her wound was already completely healed after using medicine. Although they rationed their food and drinks, there should not be any problems at the moment. There was no reason for them to worry about Reina.

Kanae was actually talking about Reina’s mental wellbeing. It had been 3 days since they barricaded themselves inside that room.

This was not the first time where Reina had to stay inside an old-world ruin for multiple days. But they had done that under a safe situation. They had enough people to keep watch on turns, then to top it off, they had a safe route they could take any time they were in danger. It was not a situation where she was only barely able to reach a safe place in the middle of a fierce battle against a swarm of monsters which was filled with gunshots and screams from the other Hunters.

Moreover, they could not make any contact with the people outside, and their information-gathering devices were barely able to pick up anything. Judging from the sound of the monsters trying to get inside, that room was still surrounded by monsters. So, basically, they were surrounded by killing machines that did not get tired nor hesitated in killing them.

If that situation continued, there was no surprise that they would feel mental exhaustion. Although Reina was still somehow holding out at the moment, it was only a matter of time before she hit her limit. Forget fighting, she might even lose her willpower to move her body.

If the situation developed to that point, Shiori and Kanae would have to fight through the swarm of monsters while protecting an extra burden in order to escape from that building.

If Reina's situation worsened, it would risk the lives of everyone in that room. And if they stayed inside that building, Reina situation would only grow worse.

Shiori knew she had to make a decision to try to escape that building before Reina lost her willpower. Shiori herself knew that very well. That was why she was making a serious and somehow pained expression as she said to Kanae.

"…I know. But it's not the right time yet."

There was still hope that a rescue team would reach them. Although she did not know the extent of losses here, with that many Hunters dead in this building including the Hunters from Drankam, it was very likely that Drankam would decide to do something about it since it had its reputation to uphold. There was a good chance that another rescue team would be dispatched even after knowing the possibility that it might cause them more loss.

While at the same time, the monsters outside might leave that place if they wait long enough. If those monsters flooded the Seranthal building because all of those Hunters entered that building, then now with most of those Hunters dead, those monsters might eventually leave the building. And if it

was just a temporary abnormality, those monsters would eventually leave if they wait long enough.

But in the end, those were just possibilities. It might even be just her wishful thinking, but even so, as long as those possibilities were not zero, Shiori had to consider them as she needed to decide whether to stay inside that room or try to force their way out.

If she made a wrong decision, Reina might get killed. She might end up killing Reina with her bad decision, that thought weighed heavily on her mind and dulled her decision-making skill.

Kanae more or less knew that Shiori was also having a hard time there, she then thought.

[Ane-san is way too overprotective of Milady. Honestly speaking, nothing good can come up from mixing up personal feelings in your job though, I wonder if we're really going to be okay?]

If Shiori's decision was affected by her personal feelings, then Kanae would have to make her own decision. Which meant that it was up to her when to try to escape that building while Reina was still able to move. In the worst-case scenario, she might even need to kill Shiori to do that. But if she was lucky, they would be able to get out alive just fine. But she had no idea how much luck she would need to be able to do that.

Shiori herself also should have known that very well. That was why she might make her decision before it reached that situation. Kanae did trust in Shiori's skill, but just to be safe, she then decided to remind Shiori.

"I know that it's my job to protect Milady even if it kills me, but it's not like I'm going to just easily throw my life away, you know?"

"I know."

Shiori's voice sounded somewhat heartless, but it at least showed that she understood what Kanae wanted to convey.

Reina opened her eyes. Although, in reality, it was not like she was sleeping, she was actually only in a half-asleep state all this time as she had given up forcing herself to sleep.

She tried to pull herself up and she could clearly feel that her body was growing weak.

She understood that she was being a useless burden. The only thing that she could do right now, the only thing that she could barely do at the moment for the sake of the other Hunters there, was to preserve her strength as much as possible so that she would be able to quickly move her body if the chance to escape that building finally showed up, or if they had to run away again if the situation suddenly worsened.

Reina herself understood that she was barely able to even do something like that, she was completely crestfallen, the shadow in her expression was even mixed with self-depreciation to the point that was close to depression.

Reina took a deep breath and let out a big sigh, she was trying to expel her feeling of hopelessness and fear inside her heart with that big sigh. She then tried to make a smile, if she kept making a depressed face, it would only make Shiori and Kanae worry even more for her.

"…Alright then, it'll be fine."

Reina told that to herself as she smiled.

She then went to Shiori, Kanae noticed her.

"Milady, good morning, it's still too soon for the shift change though."

"It's okay, I just can't get a good sleep so I ended up waking up sooner. I got bored just lying down all the time."

"I see, well, although it might be sooner than scheduled, I guess we can change shift now."

Kanae stood up and headed to the bed. When she turned her back to Reina and Shiori, her expression turned grim.

[She’s already reached the point where she can’t even get good sleep, huh. This is getting pretty bad…]

Kanae, Reina, and Shiori. It was only a matter of time before they had to make their own decision. Kanae thought so as she laid her body on the bed.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 126, Forcing The Way Forward

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Reina, who just exchanged shifts with Kanae, asked Shiori.

“Shiori, did anything happen when I was resting?”

Shiori smiled gently to calm Reina.

“No. Nothing happened in particular. Or at least, I don’t see anything that might worsen our current situation. So please be at ease.”

“… I see.”

Reina was a bit weirded out since Shiori answered back so firmly, she then forced a smile.

Reina understood very well that she was the very reason why the situation was getting worse from here and on out. Her dejection was slightly leaked out of her forced smile.

Shiori then made a suggestion to help Reina take off her mind from the current problem.

“Milady, since you’ve woken up, let’s get a bite. I’ll prepare the meal right away, so please wait for a bit.”

“…Alright.”

Reina was still a bit overwhelmed by Shiori’s reaction as she was barely able to reply back.

Shiori immediately made the preparation for the meal. She somehow magically transformed a part of that room into a luxury restaurant, it made a rather awkward scene against the backdrop of the old-world ruin’s room.

She put a clean white tablecloth on top of a portable table, then she placed warm food on top of it. Although all of them were foods designed for Hunters, they were from expensive products that might even be much more delicious than most of the self-proclaimed high-class restaurants out there.

The portable foods were designed to reheat themselves when opened, and their containers were designed to keep the foods from going cold, the soup there was even steaming.

If a Hunter who did not know what was going on suddenly saw this scene, there was no mistaking it that he or she would be completely dumbfounded.

Shiori and Reina were sitting facing each other while they were having the meal. Shiori decided that it was better to take the meal together with Reina rather than standing next to her and serving her.

Consuming food is important even when they were barricading themselves. Reina’s face relaxed as she took a spoon of the delicious meal. Shiori, who saw that, smiled. Reina, who could feel Shiori smiling at her, blushed and tried to throw a conversation to change the mood.

“I know it’s a bit too late for me to be saying this, but this reminds me that these portable meals are really something.”

“The usual portable meals from Drankam are cheap portable meals after all. The portable meals that we’re having right now are from a different supplier

that I've selected. Although they're pretty expensive, I believe that their quality to price ratio is pretty good compared to the other foods usually sold in the wasteland. Some people don't care much about the food that they eat while some others do, and I'm sure it's impossible for Drankam to distribute this level of portable meals to all its Hunters. Indeed it's better to eat the usual portable meals if we're together with the other Hunters, but since there are no other Hunters at the moment, I believe it should be alright to take these portable meals."

"Now that you mention it, that does make sense. I feel like it'll cause trouble if we eat this kind of portable meals while the other Hunters are getting the usual ones."

Reina imagined a situation where she was eating a luxurious looking meal while the other Hunters around her had to nibble on their Hunter ration, she then lightly smiled.

Reina and Shiori continued chatting while having their meal when Reina suddenly asked Shiori something that just came up in her mind.

"Say, Shiori, do you think that our current situation has something to do with the Mihazono Ruin's ghost story?"

Reina heard about 3 ghost stories of Mihazono ruin from Shiori.

The ghoul building. From time to time, a lot of Hunters and monsters in the Mihazono ruin would suddenly vanish. According to that ghost story, the real cause of that was because the Seranthal building grew hungry and ate them.

The second story was about a door that would suddenly appear out of nowhere inside the Mihazono ruin. It would bait the Hunters to enter that door with relics, but when they entered, the door would shut and the Hunters were never seen the outside ever again.

The third story was about the lonely ghost. It was said that the dead corpses of the Hunters left in the ruin sometimes suddenly started moving on their

own and attacking the other Hunters. They must have been longing for more friends.

Shiori thought for a bit before answering.

“I can’t say for sure. If I have to make a connection, it might be related to the story of the ghoul building. But it’s also not normal to find this many monsters in this place, not to mention, they’re abnormally strong, even stronger than the Hunters who took that SOS request. I’m sure the Hunter Office already knows about that fierce battle too. The level of abnormality is too big to blame everything on a ghost story. So I believe that it’s not related to that.”

“I see. I just thought that if it’s related, it might give us some hints on how to get out of this building.”

“It’s common for weird things to happen around old-world ruins, which might develop into ghost stories later. That’s why let’s not drop our guard and keep being careful… I understand that in the past you loved to explore the mansion, Milady. But please don’t do that here, if you get inside that vanishing door from the ghost story, it would be hard for me to find you, you know?”

Shiori smiled teasingly when she said that.

While on the other hand, Reina remembered her past self and could not help but to make a bitter smile.

“I know.”

After that, they continued having a silly talk while taking the meal. Once she was done and got her stomach filled, Reina regained some of her energy. Nutritious food was the main fuel for fighting, that was why they were worth their price.

As Shiori was cleaning after the meal, Reina suddenly apologetically said to her

“Shiori, I’m sorry.”

Shiori tried to think of the reason why Reina was apologizing. Although she could come up with several guesses, it did not change what she would reply with.

“Milady, there’s nothing for you to apologize for.”

“But if I had properly listened to you and decided not to come here, we wouldn’t be in this situation right now.”

“Neither I nor Milady could have seen this coming. I also only thought that this Seranthal building would only be a little bit more dangerous than what Drankam thought it was. I also did not expect it to be this bad. Although it might be an exaggeration, I believe that being able to see this coming at that time would be close to predicting the future. If I knew that something like this would happen, I would have tried everything that I could do to stop Milady back then… After all, I’ll never let you go to a dangerous place just to get killed. I hope that Milady could at least believe me about that.”

Shiori had a serious look when she said that to Reina. Even if Reina somehow doubted Shiori’s loyalty, Shiori’s devotion will not waver. But even so, Shiori still held the desire of Reina trusting her.

Reina herself trusted Shiori more than anyone else, she thought of her as one of her family that she had been together with through thick and thin. For her, Shiori was like a reliable sister.

Sometimes, that level of trust caused her to make selfish requests to Shiori, and the current situation was the result of one of her selfish request.

Reina replied with a serious face.

“I know, and I do trust you.”

Shiori smiled happily, she looked somehow satisfied. But her smile then changed to a teasing smile.

“In that case, as I explained just now, I hope Milady would understand that there’s nothing for Milady to apologize.”

“Alright alright.”

Reina smiled, her expression was saying that she understood Shiori just pulled a good one on her.

After cleaning up the table, Shiori returned to check her equipment. She returned back to the wreckage that she was using as a seat. From there, Shiori could see Kanae who was lying down not too far from her and Reina who was sitting close to her.

Shiori looked at both of them for a few seconds, her face then turned rather stern. She took a deep breath to calm herself down, her expression turned back to normal, and then she said to Reina.

“Milady, if I may?”

Seeing from how Shiori was acting there, it seemed that she had something important to talk about.

“Sure, what is it?”

“We’re barricading ourselves inside this room for days since we hope that the situation outside will get better with time, hoping Drankam might send out a rescue team for us, or the monsters that were surrounding this room might leave. But with that being said, we can’t keep barricading ourselves inside this room forever. If we keep ourselves inside this room without no means to check the situation outside, we can only hope that the situation outside is getting better, and sooner or later, we have no choice but to dismantle the barricade and try to make a run for it.”

They could not check the situation outside and they could not make any contact outside either. Due to the unknown source that was lowering the sensitivity of information-gathering devices inside that building, they could only detect a few metres outside the entrance, and they knew nothing about

the area further than that. They could only wait and hope there that the situation outside was getting better.

If they got unlucky, the situation outside might have actually turned worse than before when it was filled with monsters, screams, and cries.

Reina then replied back firmly in order to expel the fear and worry that were creeping inside her.

“…alright, so then, when are we going to do that? Is it soon?”

Seeing how Reina replied back so firmly like that, Shiori made her resolve too.

“We’ll do it once we’ve finished all the preparations. We need to dismantle the barricade and Kanae just took a rest not too long ago. We have several strengthening drugs too, but they’ll take some time before the effect kicks in. Other than giving Kanae more time to rest, we have other preparations to do. We’ll try to make our run once we’re sure we’re 100% ready…”

As Shiori was explaining things to Reina, Kanae, who was sleeping suddenly opened her eyes and sprung up.

She stared at the wall as if she was checking something outside that room, she was in a stance as if she was ready to fight anytime.

The moment Shiori noticed that, she immediately stepped in front of Reina to protect her while keeping her eyes on the barricaded entrance. But Shiori did not see anything out of the ordinary.

“Kanae, what’s wrong?”

Kanae looked amused as her rare talent was telling her that a presence that she liked was somewhere close.

“Ane-san, we need to get ready to break out of this room, this might be our only chance.”

Kanae was beaming when she said that.

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Elena’s team just reached the 30th floor. To be more precise, they were climbing the stairs from the 29th floor to the 30th floor and were checking out the situation on the 30th floor.

Akira’s face twitched when he saw the situation on the 30th floor. The same also happened for Carol, Elena, Sara, Shikarabe, and Togami, although at different levels.

The reason why Akira and Carol looked far more concerned than the other Hunters was because of their experience. They could see countless monsters filling the hallways in front of them.

Fortunately, there were no monsters at all near the stairs, thanks to that, they were able to check out the situation on the 30th floor from a relatively safe place.

Sara frowned.

“Elena, what should we do about this? Or more like, are we still going to push forward?”

If it could be helped, she actually did not want to proceed forward. After all, that would mean that they had to fight all of those monsters for the sake of the Hunters who might already be dead by now. Elena easily caught what Sara was trying to say.

Sara evaluated that this was as far as they could go safely.

But Elena was still unsure, she was still facing forward, looking at the monsters in front of her, she then said with a stern expression.

“If we have no extra information, the right choice, in this case, would be to pull back, but…”

Shikarabe immediately intervened.

“So in short, you have a piece of information that warrants us to push forward, right?”

Elena then answered Shikarabe’s question.

“On our way here, I found similar information relay devices like the one we found back on the 15th floor. The content of those relay devices is also the same so I thought that there’s no need to tell anyone. But then, basically, I also found similar devices here but with different content. Look at your map.”

Elena updated the map data that the others were receiving from her to show an indicator that was pointing at a particular room on the 30th floor.

“If we are to trust the data from that relay device, the people who owned those relay devices should be in that room.”

Carol sounded slightly impressed as she said.

“So basically they ran all the way from the below up to this floor and barricaded themselves inside that room, huh. Well, it’s true that room should be able to hold for a long time against all the monsters outside as long as they properly barricaded the entrance. And it won’t be strange for them to find that room if they bought a map of Seranthal building before they came in here. Shikarabe, you know all of this, that’s why you guessed that they’re still alive, right?”

Shikarabe’s expression did not change as he replied.

“Possibility wise, yes.”

“I see.”

Carol knew that she should not pursue any further as she said that.

Akira made a rather stern face as he looked at the indicated room in the display map.

“They’re in a rather troublesome place, huh.”

“Yeah, you can say that again.”

Elena also agreed with Akira’s opinion. It was obvious that from the way she said it that things would get complicated from here.

If the location was too far away, Elena would have not hesitated and immediately decide to pull back there. She then could just convey that information to the main squad that would come to that building later and hope that they would rescue those Hunters.

But if they were close enough, they could just break through the monsters’ encirclement, secure the hallway to that room, and check the inside of that room. Then from there, they could escort their rescue targets out if it was possible, but if there were too many Hunters, or there were badly wounded Hunters, they would have no other choice but to ask those Hunters to keep barricading themselves inside that room and convey the information to the main rescue squad.

But the problem was that the room was not that far but not that close either. That was why Elena was hesitating.

They already spent most of their energy to come all the way here. Elena tried to calculate all the factors before finally made her decision, the dangers that they had to face if they pushed forward and the possibility of rescuing their targets now.

Elena then ordered the rest of the team.

“I’ll break the team into two–-My team, and Shikarabe’s team. My team will secure the hallway while Shikarabe’s team will go and try to reach the rescue targets. Everyone will try to open a path for Shikarabe’s team to go through while reducing the number of monsters. I’ll leave the timing to Shikarabe when he’ll try to make the run. Once we group up again, we’ll immediately retreat no matter what the condition of the rescue targets. And also, if the encirclement is too hard to break through, we’ll just give up on rescuing the targets and immediately retreat. The moment either I or Shikarabe decides that it’s impossible to rescue the targets, we’ll immediately pull back, okay?”

Shikarabe then asked Elena a question.

“Well, I was the one who asked you to rescue them, so I can understand leaving the job to break through the encirclement to me, but who will be in my team?”

“If it’s possible, I want you to go alone.”

“No, that would be impossible.”

“I do understand that you want to stay in a safe situation, but we don’t have enough manpower to spare here, so just pull back if you think that it’s impossible. If you think that it’s difficult to break through the encirclement unless you take too many people from my team, I’ll stop this plan here and call a retreat now. And also, Sara will be on my team, so you can’t pick her.”

Shikarabe frowned and made a stern look as he pondered. Elena basically told Shikarabe to take the least firepower needed just to barely be able to secure the rescue targets.

If they took everyone to reach the room where their rescue targets were, it was indeed pretty much guaranteed that they would be able to reach that room, but in the worst-case scenario, they might get surrounded and have no other choice but to barricade themselves inside that room too. Shikarabe understood that Elena wanted to avoid that. After all, there was no guarantee that the main squad would come for them later.

After thinking for a few seconds, Shikarabe finally made his decision.

“Akira, come with me.”

Shikarabe believed that Akira was the second strongest person on the team. Moreover, he believed that he had not seen Akira’s full power yet, and he knew sometimes, Akira had an abnormal ability to detect or react to enemies.

Although there was no guarantee that bringing Akira along would give him a better result, Shikarabe was sure that he at least would not slow him down, and Elena should at least be okay with bringing Akira along. Thus, he decided to put his bet on Akira's unknown real ability and proposed to take him into his team.

"Sure."

Akira answered back casually.

Togami suddenly raised his voice and requested to go together with Shikarabe's team.

"…I'll go too!"

Everyone there turned to Togami, whose expression there was saying that he was resolute to go too.

Shikarabe looked at Togami and was honestly at loss on what to do. He glanced at Elena to see her reaction if he took Togami from her team too and thought for a bit before replying back.

"Alright then, the men will break through the encirclement while the girls will secure the hallway. Elena, you're okay with that, right?"

Elena looked at everyone present before replying.

"Okay."

Everyone nodded back to Elena.

Carol lightly smiled and said to Akira.

"If only I'm in your team too, I would be able to show you how good I'm at fighting but… Well, it is just too bad."

Akira smiled confidently.

“Didn’t you already show me enough when we returned back to this ruin and found it in this state?”

“Is that so? In that case, make sure to come back here alive and see how good my skills are again. So I can expect a good reward from you, okay?”

“Well, in that case, I just need to secure the rescue targets and balance out your contribution with mine this time.”

Akira and Carol were smiling at each other while lightly poking fun.

Shikarabe then turned to Akira and Togami.

“I’ll say this beforehand. I won’t give you detailed orders, just observe and adapt to the situation.”

“Roger that.”

“…Alright.”

Akira replied casually while Togami took a small pause to gather himself together before replying back.

Sara smiled at Akira and said.

“Akira, be careful and don’t get too reckless, try not to make a mistake when to pull back, okay?”

“Of course, Sara-san too, be careful.”

Akira nodded firmly and said that, Sara too replied with a firm nod.

The monsters that filled up the hallway were from the B18 type. They were the upgraded version of the A24 type. Although they were relatively weak, they were equipped with force field armour and extra guns. Their ability to fly around was also better than most of the other monsters. Compared to the legged monsters that had a problem moving around inside that floor that was filled with rubbles, wreckages, and corpses scattered on the ground,

they were able to move around much more freely. They were semi-autonomous monsters usually stationed to guard different facilities.

The B18 type had enough firepower to easily defeat common Hunters, but they did not show any sign of hostility toward Akira and the other Hunters. It might be just simply because they were outside the monsters' patrol range. Or maybe, it was simply because the lowered sensor sensitivity also affected the B18 type monsters. Whichever case, the Hunters had the first initiative there.

The Hunters readied themselves to start the rescue operation, they warmed up their bodies, sharpened their senses and perception. They prepared themselves to head into a fight against the monsters that would not hesitate to kill them and to reach their hand for the victory that lay behind it.

Elena then started the countdown.

"I'll start the countdown, 5, 4, 3…"

Akira readied his rifle and waited for the countdown. The Hunter's equipment were specially made to give the Hunters some chance to fight against the monsters that were way stronger than a normal human and to even give the Hunters the upper hand against them. To give the Hunters the ability to kill before killed, to destroy before destroyed, to defeat the monsters before getting overwhelmed by them, no matter what kind of monsters that they were facing.

"…2, 1, zero!!"

They immediately jumped into the 30th floor and spread out into the hall room, they aimed their rifles at the B18 in front of them, fixed their aim, and pulled the trigger without a trace of hesitation. The place was filled with flying bullets in an instant as bullets rained down on the B18 monsters, tore off their outside armour, pierced through their metallic wiring, crushed the inside of their bodies, and ultimately destroying them.

The Hunters who had the first shots quickly turned the B18 monsters into scraps.

Akira kept his finger on the trigger of the DVTS minigun on his right hand as he aimed to the hallway. Countless bullets flew out through its muzzle against the B18 monsters in that hallway. Although most of the monsters there had already turned into scraps, Akira kept on shooting bullets in that direction.

Although the B18 type monsters were equipped with force field armour that could easily hold out against the multiple bullets that were flying out of DVTS minigun, with the energy output of the B18 monster, it was not enough to keep the force field armour active except for only for a short time. Once the force field armour ran out of energy, the bullets easily passed through and dented the monsters' bodies. It eventually opened a hole in their bodies and destroyed the inside of the monsters as the impact threw them further back into the hallway.

After they secured the hall entrance, Elena's team immediately reinforced their position while Shikarabe's team immediately went to their rescue target.

Shikarabe did not completely destroy most of the B18 monsters that he fought, he only stripped most of them from their weapons to render them harmless or destroyed their means to move around and turned them into useless flying devices with nothing but a robust defense.

He then kicked them right to the entrance of the hallway, he kicked only the monsters with still active force field armour deeper into the hallway. The kicked monsters flew and broke through the rubbles blocking the hallway as it flew further in and crashed against the other monsters while blocking the bullets coming from deep inside the hallway.

Shikarabe did that again and again to block the bullets coming from the hallway while forcing a way through the encirclement.

"Let's go!"

Shikarabe only said that and immediately went into the hallway, Akira and Togami were a bit surprised how Shikarabe forced his way into the hallway, but they quickly followed him from behind.

Akira thought about Shikarabe's powerful kicks while running behind him and mumbled.

"Those were pretty powerful kicks, is that the power of his augmented suit?"

"His augmented suit is on a different level compared to yours after all."

"Well, I guess it's normal for powerful Hunters to have powerful equipment, huh. I bet they're super expensive though."

Alpha smiled teasingly and said.

"You'll be able to buy that kind of expensive equipment sooner or later. After all, you'll need those to accomplish my request."

"I know, well, it seems that I still have a long way to go."

Akira smiled bitterly as he imagined how much money he would need to buy that kind of equipment and how much he would need to work to get that money.

Alpha smiled full of confidence and replied.

"Oh my, it's actually sooner than you might think, you know? It'll be fine with my support."

For some reason, Akira felt that mention of the time gap being shorter than what he knew, also meant that his suffering would be doubled.

Shikarabe led the way into the hallway. Akira imitated Shikarabe and used the destroyed B18 to hide from the incoming bullets while creating obstacles to prevent the monsters from entering that hallway as he followed behind Shikarabe.

Akira kicked the dead monster in front of him. Thanks to Alpha's support, the monster that he kicked flew straight to another monster with very high accuracy as if he had kicked a lot of monsters in his life. The powerful kick

released from his augmented suit transmitted the full impact of the kick into that monster and sent it flying into the hallway with a high speed.

Shikarabe saw that and thought.

[The augmented suit that Akira is using…It is the PWD Silence from Nejima R&D corp, right? But I don't remember it being that strong and I don't think Akira is that strong either. Did he get some kind of upgraded version or something?]

There were many Hunters in the eastern district who used augmented suits, and of course, in response to that, there were many types of augmented suit distributed in the eastern district.

But compared to the number of augmented suits distributed in the eastern district, the number of the modified augmented suits in the eastern district was extremely low. One of the reasons was because the technology used in those augmented suits was secret information, thus, it would be extremely difficult to modify them without the help of a specialist.

Of course, there were many Hunters who tried messing with their augmented suit, but they only did that to the spare augmented suits that they had. To top it off, most of them tend to leave the control device alone. Since even if they tried, the best that they could do was usually just to readjust some options that were not shown in the usual display.

If they tried to go even further than that, most of the time, it normally ends up in a disaster. If they tried to mess with the ventilation, they might lock the suit and get themselves killed from suffocation. If they tried to mess with the force field armour, it might cause the force field armour to be projected inside and get themselves crushed inside the suit. There were many unfortunate stories like that going around. And of course, the guarantee for those augmented suits was annulled the moment they try to modify their augmented suits.

It was common-sense among the Hunters to not mess with their augmented suit or not to try to modify them if they did not want to get killed.

But of course, there were exceptions. There were cases where a modified augmented suit with upgraded output power and guaranteed safety appeared. They were usually made by people with high technical skills in order to show off their ability, or by a newly found corporation to show off its capability, or by some corporation in order to gain extra capital. Because of that, these kinds of augmented suits would appear in the black market from time to time.

If Akira's augmented suit was really one of those modified augmented suits, it would not be strange for it to be stronger than the public catalogue spec. If that was the case, Shikarabe could easily understand that power. But even so, he still found something bothering him.

[…It's rare to find a Hunter who has the connection to get that kind of equipment. But again, I really can't say for sure.]

Akira was actually using an augmented suit with a control device that was already fully under Alpha's control. So looking from that point of view, it was not a mistake to say that he was using a modified augmented suit.

Shikarabe could guess that Akira was probably using a modified augmented suit, but that was as far as he could go and all the guesses that could come up from that fact made it more difficult to estimate Akira's real ability.

It would be really troublesome if he got on Akira's bad side, Shikarabe was really glad that he was able to peacefully resolve the problem about the reward for the bounty hunting request from last time. As Shikarabe thought so, he decided to be more careful around Akira, the boy that threw off his intuition.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 127, The Ability to Evaluate With A Single Glance

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Elena's team was waiting for Shikarabe's team to return back in a hall near the stairs. They already cleaned the room from any monsters and they were in the middle of barricading the other hallways by piling the dead B18 monsters.

Elena, Carol, and Sara were able to casually kick around the dead B18 wreckages that were pretty heavy. It was thanks to Sara's nanomachine enhanced body, Elena's augmented suit, and both for Carol's case.

Due to her side job, Carol enhanced her body with nanomachine so that she could fight even when she had nothing on her. Moreover, it was also to enhance the beauty of her body to help her seduce men. Because of that, she spent a lot of money to enhance her body with nanomachine, then to top it off, she was also using an augmented suit.

Although Carol looked seductive with her already beautiful body wrapped in a sexy augmented suit, as if it was to belie her outer appearance, she was powerful enough to easily send the B18 monster flying with her kick. It was

thanks to the amalgamation of the old-world technology that was close to magic.

If not for her seductive outer appearance, it was easy to notice her superhuman strength. And for those who were not knowledgeable about how much such a modification would cost, they would be surprised when they hear the price tag. Most people got their attention diverted by her beautiful and charming outer appearance and did not think about the technical side of things.

After they finished securing the hall, they then took a short break and lightly sighed. They had defeated the other monsters that came to the room, barricaded the entrance to the other hallways, and pushed aside the wreckages that were left inside that room.

Elena scanned the area around the hall with her information-gathering device and checked the hallway that Shikarabe's team was pushing through. But she could not see any signal coming from that direction.

Judging from the physical strength of Shikarabe's team, the strength of the monsters, and the distance to the room, if Shikarabe's team pulled back, she should be able to see them soon. Elena had no idea whether Shikarabe's team was having a hard time or they were doing well.

Seeing Elena, who was looking in the direction where Shikarabe's team went with a worried expression, Sara smiled at her and tried to calm her down.

"Don't worry, they'll be back in no time. I'm sure that you also thought so when you let them go, right?"

"…If you're saying that I thought the danger was acceptable, then the answer is yes. Since I'm sure Shikarabe has no plans to die here, so I'm sure that he won't make a mistake if he decides to retreat."

Balancing risk and profit was the main job of the Hunters. The moment Elena or Akira or any other Hunters stepped into the wasteland, they would

be putting their life as a gambling chip. As such, it was important to make sure that they would get profit worth risking their lives.

Elena already evaluated the risk and decided that it was worth the risk. Although it was not like she had absolute confidence in her decision, she also did not unnecessarily doubt it either. She trusted that the decision she made was correct.

But when she said that it would be fine, it would just be her telling that to herself. And if she said that she was worried, it would only cause her to doubt her own decision. Thus, she tried not to say anything to herself.

But to Sara, it seemed that Elena was trying to be strong, which was a rare thing to do for her. Sara found it rather amusing as she smiled.

Elena tried to hide her embarrassment as she sent an intense gaze at Sara and jabbed.

“…What?”

“Nah, it’s nothing. Like I said. It’ll be fine. It’s true that it’s rather worrying, but I don’t think Shikarabe would go as far as to sacrifice his life to save the rescue targets. I’m sure he’ll make the right decision when things get dangerous. Moreover, Akira is strong enough to even make Shikarabe invite him to hunt a bounty monster, as for that Togami, since Shikarabe allowed him to come, I’m sure that he’s not that weak either. It’ll be fine, don’t worry.”

Sara might have guessed what Elena was thinking, so she used the words that Elena was avoiding.

“…I know.”

Elena felt like Sara just read her mind, she replied back rather clumsily trying to hide her blushed face.

Carol approached Sara and Elena, she threw a smile at them and said.

“It seems that we can get a short break here. It would be great if Shikarabe’s team can return back while we have the leeway.”

Carol turned her face and looked at the hallway leading to the room where their rescue targets were as she said that. It did not seem like any monsters were going to come out from that direction. They wanted to believe that it was because Shikarabe’s team was still pushing forward while killing the monsters on their way.

“I really hope they will return back safely soon. Right?”

Carol said so as if she was asking if Sara and Elena also felt the same. From the way she sounded and the expression that she had, it seemed that Carol was simply worried about Shikarabe’s team.

Sara replied back casually.

“It’ll be fine, they’ll be back in no time.”

As for Elena, she seemed to be somehow suspicious of Carol, but she agreed with Carol.

“You’re right, I too hope they’ll be back safely soon.”

Carol smiled as she confirmed that both Sara and Elena agreed with her. But then she said something that might cause a worry.

“Well, 2 of the 3 Hunters in Shikarabe’s team are young boys after all. I guess it’s understandable to be worried. I did see Akira’s skill from up close and I know how strong he is, but for that Togami, I can’t say I’m not worried. What do you think?”

Elena was the one who answered Carol’s question.

“He at least has good equipment on him. As for his ability, well, Shikarabe allowed him to join, so I’m sure he’s not that bad.”

Carol nodded in agreement with that evaluation.

“That’s true. I also don’t think he’s that bad either, but I do think that Akira is still stronger than him.”

Elena and Sara nodded in agreement with what Carol said. After Carol confirmed that, she then frowned and said.

“…But, if we look at them from a glance without any prior information beforehand, I think Akira looks to be the weakest one, doesn’t it?”

Sara was a bit surprised.

“Is that so?”

“Yep. That is if we only judge solely based on their outer appearance. Not to mention, his equipment seems to be the worst among them too… I actually can guess the ability of most Hunters just from seeing them and my guesses never missed that much until now… Or at least, that’s what I thought. Akira is the first one who I was wrong about. Honestly speaking, I find that really strange. After all, I’ve never gotten my guess wrong by this much until now. It really made me lose my confidence.”

If she had not met Akira in the Seranthal building and fled together from that building, Carol would not have had the chance to see Akira’s real ability. If she had met Akira carrying the same equipment in Kugamayama city, she would have thought he was just one of those common Hunters in the eastern district, and she would not be that intrigued by him.

Carol then asked a question to Sara and Elena.

“Hypothetically speaking, let’s say if you meet Akira without any prior knowledge about him, do you think you’ll be able to recognize his real ability?”

Elena and Sara thought for a bit, looked at each other, and then started trying to analyze that question again. Sara was thinking about how to answer Carol’s question, while Elena was trying to probe why Carol asked that question, both of them there were thinking about 2 different things.

Sara smiled bitterly and answered first.

“I don’t think I would be able to do that. It’s true that Akira seems weak from a glance, and he sometimes seems nervous when exploring the ruins. If you ask me whether I can recognize his skill without any prior knowledge, I would say that it’ll be very unlikely.”

As for Elena, she answered back with a common answer as if she was trying to give a neutral reply.

“Even if you said to do that from a glance, you can actually pretty much guess the ability of a Hunter from their outer look, body composition, how old he or she looks, and the quality and number of equipment he or she is carrying. So, let’s say if I meet Akira in the relatively safe residential area of Kugamayama city while he’s on his casual clothing, I would say that it’s impossible to see through his real ability in that situation.”

Carol was listening closely to both of their answers. She then smiled as if she was satisfied.

“So, even Sara and Elena can’t do that too, huh? Well, I guess we’re lucky to have met someone who hides his real ability like Akira in a situation where we can actually see his real ability, right? Yep, as I thought, we should hold it dearly.”

Sara smiled and said.

“Well, now that you mention it, we’re indeed lucky.”

Elena’s expression somewhat softened as she said.

“You can say that again. So let’s do our best to properly do our job so that Akira won’t cut his connection with us.”

Carol smiled and nodded showing that she agreed too.

As she was about to continue chatting in a good mood, suddenly, one of the piles of wreckages that they set up to barricade the room moved. The

monsters that were on the other side of the pile were trying to either dismantle the barricade or push the pile off.

Carol, who noticed it, slightly frowned as she clicked her tongue. She then immediately ran to that particular hallway with her gun ready in her hand and an obviously annoyed face. She stood in front of the pile and stuck her gun into that pile.

She pulled the trigger while her gun was still pushed into that pile, aiming at the monsters on the other side of that pile. The muzzle-flash flashed the inside of the pile as flashes passed through the small opening among the wreckages. The powerful piercing bullet easily pierced through the pile and hit the monsters on the other side.

Carol kept her finger on the trigger as if she was venting her irritation. The piercing bullets easily shot down the monsters on the other side of the pile and turned them into extra obstacles, preventing other monsters from coming from that hallway.

Carol whispered, it was obvious that she was angry since she got interrupted back there.

"…Good grief, right when I have the chance to gather more info. Can't these monsters be a little more considerate?!"

From that short exchange, Carol confirmed that Elena and Sara also could not accurately guess Akira's real skill. Carol at least expected it until that point.

Her real qualm was about Elena and Sara, who did not find it strange how big the gap between how strong Akira looked and how strong he really was. That was the big difference between both of them and Carol.

If Carol had to make a guess, it might be Sara was not bothered by something like that in the first place, but that should not be the case for Elena. She should at least find it strange, question it, and at least make some guesses about it.

But judging from their expression and the tone of their voice when they spoke, Carol did not feel any trace of anything like that from both Sara and Elena.

So in short, Sara and Elena should have the answer to that question, or at least, they should have a good guess to explain the reason why such a huge gap was created. Once Carol confirmed it and understood it, she had successfully completed half of her reason why she talked with both Sara and Elena back there.

But the moment she wanted to make the move to accomplish the other half of her aim, the monsters just came barging in and interrupted her.

[Well, I guess I'll just leave it as that, it's a good thing that now I know Elena and Sara know the reason behind Akira's real strength… Wait, no, dammit! As I thought, it's really bothering me!]

Since Carol knew about it now, she could not help but be bothered by it. She then put all her irritation in her bullets and vented it toward the monsters that interrupted her.

__*__*__*__

Togami was barely able to follow Shikarabe and Akira.

They were pushing through the hallway against the monsters that filled it, aiming for the room where their rescue targets were. Other than only being able to slowly proceed because of the number of monsters there, they did not encounter any other trouble.

But, the number and the strength of the monsters were already above what Togami could handle. Akira and Shikarabe forced their way forward relying on their firepower, as for Togami, he was barely able to follow them while picking the monsters that the other two had missed since both of them prioritized more on pushing forward as fast as they could.

It did not seem that Shikarabe had any plans to slow down just to let Togami catch up. Akira also did not seem to be willing to get left behind to

help Togami fight against the swarm of B18 monsters. Although both of them had no plans to leave Togami behind, if Togami could not catch up with them and if he could not follow them unless they helped him, then there was no helping it. That's what both Akira and Shikarabe thought about that situation.

If they slowed down there, it meant that they would have to face more monsters. It would endanger them as well as Elena's team that was waiting for them back in the hall near the stairs. So, in order to reach their goal as soon as possible, they prioritized more on pushing forward rather than waiting for Togami.

Not to mention, Togami was the one who forced his way to join Shikarabe's team. So Akira thought that Togami would not want them to lower the speed nor to assist him. And even if Togami wished for that unconsciously, both Shikarabe and Akira had no plans to comply at all.

Togami became desperate and pushed forward. He did all he could as not to get left behind by the other two. After all, even he knew well that getting left behind in that situation simply meant death.

Togami glanced at Shikarabe and Akira who were fighting the monsters in front of him. They were using the layout of the hallway and the wreckage of the B18 monsters that they defeated to hide, they also kicked the dead monsters and used them as a shield against the incoming bullets as they did not show any hesitation at all in fighting the monsters in front of them. They sometimes showed themselves in the line of fire of the enemies, but they were able to shoot the enemies down way faster before they got shot as they kept their upper hand in that situation.

Togami watched how the Hunters who were better than him were moving around, it was as if they were showing the difference in their skills. Togami was making a dejected face. His desperate face was mixed with pain, envy, jealousy, regret, and disappointment in himself.

But looking from the other people's point of view, Togami was actually doing pretty well. His sharpened concentration reached the end of his 4 limbs as he moved them around quickly, showing the skill that he had

polished through daily training. Seeing how the other Hunters who were better than him were moving around, he quickly imitated them and boosted his skill even more.

Togami was using every single ounce of his power there, his movement was already above his usual limit. As he was working together with the other Hunters who were better than him and trying desperately to catch up with them, plus from the daily training that he had gone through, his talent started to bloom there.

Togami himself noticed that he was moving better than he expected. When he realized that, he could feel compliments for his growth starting to echo in the back of his mind.

But that was not enough. It was far away from enough for him to have the same pride in himself that he once had.

Togami could see how Shikarabe, who had better equipment than him, was moving very well suitable for someone who was using those powerful equipment. While on the other hand, there was also Akira, who although was using worse equipment than him, was able to perform really well. Even with his high-quality equipment on, Togami was barely able to catch up. This all meant that he was truly lacking in skills. This single fact prevented Togami from feeling satisfied with his current skill level.

Right at that time, suddenly a B18 monster flew to his right. Togami immediately froze up the moment he saw that monster. His reaction was late, as he tried to aim his rifle at that monster as fast as he could, but that monster had already fixed its aim at him first.

The logical side of Togami shrieked that he would not make it on time, he prepared himself to welcome death.

But suddenly, that monster crashed down in a single shot.

Togami was taken aback and turned in the direction where that shot came from. He could see a CWH anti-material rifle’s muzzle pointed in his direction, it was Akira. Akira had noticed that monster ahead of time, he

immediately turned back, readied his CWH anti-material rifle, and sniped that monster before it could shoot at Togami.

Akira then just casually turned around again and continued fighting the monsters in front of him as if he did something that was nothing unusual. But behind him, Togami was watching Akira's back with teary eyes as if he was about to cry.

"…Dammit!!"

Togami himself was not sure to whom he said that to and why he said that, he then picked himself up and continued forward.

Akira was pushing his way forward aiming for the room that was not that far ahead of him. He used his CWH anti-material rifle to fight the B18 monsters. The special ammo that he used could easily break the forcefield armour, pierce the monster's body all the way to the other end, and then hit the other monster behind it.

The monster that got its control device destroyed in one shot turned into big wreckage, Akira then used his augmented suit to kick it to the deeper part of the hallway and crashed it into the other monsters. He was also using the wreckage to shield himself from the monsters in front of him as he kept pushing forward.

In reality, Akira's augmented suit was not designed for CQC. But thanks to Alpha's support, the augmented suit would harden only the moment his kick connected. Furthermore, Alpha was also doing other small adjustments like transmitting the shock from the kick to Akira's whole body to reduce the burden on his leg. But of course, there was a limit to how far that could continue.

The moment Akira kicked a monster, suddenly a strange sound came out from his leg. But rather than pain, Akira could feel something else that was equally bad and twitched.

"It just made a 'crack' sound though!! It did!? Didn't it?!"

Alpha smiled casually at Akira and replied.

“Don’t worry, your leg is not broken.”

“That doesn’t mean that everything is fine as long as it’s not broken, you know!??”

“It’ll heal up in no time. Aren’t you glad that you bought that expensive medicine?”

“That’s not the problem here!!”

Akira swallowed another pill of the medicines that he already had in his mouth when he said that. It seemed that he had gotten so used to it to the point that he was using the 2,000,000 Aurum per box medicine without any hesitation.

The medicine that he had taken beforehand quickly fixed the source of that strange sound, his bone, together with the muscle that got torn up from the kicking. And before the effect of the last medicine that he took had worn off, Akira swallowed another pill to make sure that any injury in his body would immediately get healed.

The current situation was actually way above what Akira could handle. So in order to be able to face that situation, Alpha was controlling Akira’s body through his augmented suit and moving his body around pretty violently.

His muscle was torn when he suddenly accelerated, his bone cracked when he suddenly stopped. In order to avoid enemies’ shots while shooting back at them, Akira had to shoot from positions where he could not properly take in the kickback from his rifle, so in order to do that, he relied on the power of his augmented suit and put his body in even more burden. And when he kicked the wreckage on the floor, the impact was transmitted to his leg as if he was dragging it on the floor.

So for Akira, fighting in that situation was the same as crushing his body bit by bit. The medicine that he took beforehand would then immediately heal

any injuries, and only by that, was he able to sustain himself in that situation.

Akira kept on complaining to Alpha through telepathy while fighting the monsters there, then Alpha would respond back while smiling as usual. That silly talk that he was having there helped him to keep his calm in the middle of that battle filled with flying bullets from both directions. It served as a support to Akira's mental state.

As long as Alpha was smiling like usual, it meant that his life was not in danger. No matter how many times bullets passed close to his face, no matter how many monsters that he was facing, as long as Alpha was smiling like usual, Akira was sure that he still had the upper hand.

Even if that was only his misconception, that kind of good misconception was something that he needed in that situation. He did not need any pessimistic opinion that might disturb his calmness. Akira somehow was already over such a thing as he continued fighting without showing any hesitation and even having a confident smile plastered on his face.

Looking at that Akira, Alpha somehow smiled in satisfaction.

Akira suddenly asked Alpha a question.

"We've gone quite far though!? How far away is that room from here!?"

"It's not that far ahead, just a little more."

Alpha pointed his finger toward a huge pile of dead monsters not too far from him.

"What's up with that pile?"

"The entrance to that room is basically behind that pile of wreckage. I bet the people who barricaded themselves inside that room killed the monsters that were trying to enter that room and eventually created that pile."

Akira's face twitched, he seemed a bit disturbed.

“Do we really have no other choice but to remove that while fighting the monsters?”

“If I have to add more, I would say that you would need to secure the entrance while checking the inside of the room too. Otherwise, you’ll get trapped inside that room.”

“Good grief, what a pain in the butt. Is there anything we can do to remove that pile in one go…?”

The moment Akira said that, the pile in front of that entrance was suddenly blown away.

__*__*__*__

Reina, Shiori, and Kanae stood in front of the entrance of the room where they barricaded themselves.

Although they were in the middle of barricading themselves inside that room, Kanae noticed fighting was going on outside and decided that it was their chance to escape. They immediately finished all of their preparation, and now they were ready to go out.

There was a good chance the monsters that they were running from were still roaming outside the room, and there was no mistaking it that those monsters were in the middle of a fight against something else.

The most important thing was not the fact that the monsters were fighting against something else, but that they were in the middle of a fight. If they had to make an optimistic guess, they might be fighting against a squad sent to rescue them.

But there was no guarantee that those Hunters could reach that room. Moreover, they might be just completely different Hunters fighting against the monsters for a completely different reason.

Their best chance there was to use the chaos happening outside to slip away and make a run. Both Shiori and Kanae thought so, they knew that they

might not get another chance.

Kanae was smiling casually and turned to Reina.

“Milady, are you ready?”

Reina looked slightly nervous.

“I’m okay. We can go anytime.”

They were about to plunge themselves into a place that was filled with monsters. It was understandable for Reina to feel nervous. Reina repeatedly took deep breaths to calm herself, she could feel her heart was thumping so hard to the point that it was so deafening for her.

Shiori then gently said to Reina to help her calm down.

“Milady, no matter what happens, Kanae and I will protect you, so please don’t be worried.”

Reina looked at Shiori and smiled.

“I know, I’ll be counting on you.”

“Just leave it to us.”

Shiori smiled back confidently at Reina.

Shiori had set up portable walls to barricade the entrance to that room, and there was a pile of dead monsters on the other side of that wall. Kanae carefully approached that portable wall while getting herself ready.

She then squeezed her fist and pulled it back.

“Well then, here we go, 3, 2, 1…”

Kanae was smiling from ear to ear, she was excited to join in on the fight. Reina had a serious look on her face as she resolved herself and gripped her

rifle tightly. While Shiori also had a serious look, which showed her devotion toward Reina.

“Zero!”

Kanae then blew away the portable wall and the pile behind it with a single powerful punch from her right fist.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 128, Still-Growing Hunters

Index

Translator: **Athena13**

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Akira was completely dumbfounded when the pile of monsters that was blocking the entrance to the room suddenly got blown away.

From there, Kanae and Shiori jumped out. Kanae immediately punched a B18 monster while Shiori swiftly sliced a B18 monster near them. The punched monster crashed into the wall with a loud banging sound, while the sliced monster was beautifully cut into two symmetric pieces and fell down to the floor.

Akira immediately noticed that those were Kanae and Shiori, both of them also immediately noticed Akira too. Not too long after that, Reina also jumped out from that room. The moment she was out, she immediately looked around and checked her surroundings.

Shikarabe quickly grasped the current situation and shouted.

“We’re heading back now!! Akira, you take the rear!! Togami, escort them back to the hall! Let’s go!!”

Right after Shikarabe gave that order, he immediately made a 180 degrees turn in order to secure the hallway back to the hall.

Kanae grabbed Reina’s arm and pulled her along since it seemed that Reina still did not fully understand the current situation. She then glanced at Akira and spoke to him in a good mood.

“I’ll leave the rear to you!!”

Kanae was waving at Akira with her free hand and a big smile on her face. Reina was half-dragged by Kanae as she passed beside Akira, she was still obviously dumbfounded.

Shiori elegantly stopped and stood next to Akira.

“Is it alright to leave the rear to you alone?”

“Just go.”

Akira did not hesitate at all. Both of them were busy, after all.

Shiori slightly bowed at Akira before quickly catching up with Kanae and Reina.

Togami just stood there frozen for a few seconds, his brain could not process what just happened, but he eventually returned back to reality and flusteredly tried to catch up with the other Hunters.

Now Akira was left alone in the rear, Alpha was floating next to him while smiling.

“Aren’t you glad that you don’t need to search inside that room now?”

“You can say that again. We just need to return back now. Thank goodness we’re in the last part of this search. It went better than I thought it would.”

“I’m sure that the rest of the job is not that hard, you just need to return back with the rescue targets. But you should not lower your guard yet, okay?”

“Yeah, I know.”

Akira pulled out his A4WM automatic grenade launcher and aimed it at the hallway. The A4WM grenade launcher immediately spewed out grenades, it was not a weapon designed to be used indoors. Even if the inside of the old-ruin building was resilient, Akira still had to be careful using that rifle. Even though it was a powerful weapon, it would be meaningless if it ended up destroying the interior and blocking the hallway, that was why Akira did not use it until now.

But he only needed to head back now, so Akira thought that it was even advantageous in that situation if he ended up breaking the wall and blocking the hallway to prevent the monsters from chasing them, so he pulled the trigger without holding back at all.

Grenades flew from its muzzle into the hallway and swallowed the swarm of monsters coming from the deeper part of that hallway with explosions. The shockwave from the explosions did not have anywhere to escape inside the closed hallway, thus, it was blown right back at Akira. Because of that, a huge wreckage suddenly just flew right past Akira.

Akira staggered as he gasped.

"…Whoah!!"

Alpha amusedly looked at surprised Akira and said.

"That rifle is not designed to be used indoors, so you need to be careful."

Smokes raised inside the hallway and blocked the view. Akira kept his eyes on that cloud of smokes for monsters but he did not see any disruption in the smokes. So he then decided that it should be fine as he turned around and started running back while still keeping his eyes for more monsters.

Reina, Shiori, and Kanae were running following Shikarabe, who was guiding them back to the hall where Elena and the rest of the Hunters were waiting. Since Shikarabe destroyed most of the monsters on their way to the room, they had not much trouble on their way back. It was not like there were no monsters at all, but Shikarabe, Shiori, and Kanae could handle them just fine.

They then heard explosions coming from behind, it was the sound of Akira using his A4WM automatic grenade launcher.

Kanae glanced behind her.

“That Akira seems to be having fun back there. But still, I didn’t expect to find him in this building. I guess this must be some kind of fate, huh?”

But Shiori quickly warned Kanae.

“Stop with the chatter and focus on the fighting.”

“It’s fine, I can chat this must basically because I have the leeway… Here!”

Kanae kicked a B18 monster that suddenly appeared in the hallway when she said that. As her leg that was wrapped in black tights and a pretty big shoe extended out under her maid outfit, she drove a powerful kick into the B18 monster near her.

Kanae’s maid outfit actually had a good defensive capability, while her black tights was a part of her augmented suit. Shiori was also using the same equipment as Kanae except for the boots. The ones that Kanae was using were specially designed boots for CQC. Not only was it exceptionally robust, it was also equipped with mini force field armour that could create short force field burst. It was specifically designed to boost the power of the kick of its user.

The B18 monster that Kanae kicked was blasted as if it was a cannon.

Shiori immediately focused her attention on another B18 monster that appeared in the opposite direction and cut it with her blade. Shiori’s blade was able to easily cut open the B18 monster as if it just ignored the force field armour and went straight for the monster’s body.

Shiori sighed, exasperatedly.

“No matter whether you have the leeway or not, it’s shameless to make unnecessary chit-chat, you know? They should’ve taught you that right, Kanae?”

But instead, Kanae tried to make an excuse.

“They taught me that random chatter is important to calm down my nerves during a long fight though? Didn’t you also do that with Milady?”

“Your unnecessary chatter is not the same as my conversation with Milady.”

Shiori and Kanae showed enough leeway to make that exchange while keeping their guard up and making sure that Reina was safe.

Reina was running behind Kanae and Shiori. The swarm of mechanical monsters that surrounded them when they were barricading themselves inside the room were mostly gone. The moment they came out from that room, Shiori and Kanae immediately killed any monsters near them. Reina had considerably calmed down compared to when she was inside the room.

Reina, who regained some of her composure, finally noticed Togami who was looking in her direction. She then somehow sounded a bit harsh as she asked Togami.

“…What?”

Togami flusteredly replied.

“No, it’s just that… If I’m not mistaken… You should be on the same team with Katsuya, right?”

“…I was. But I’m no longer in Katsuya’s team. So, what about it?”

“Well, Uhh… No, it’s nothing.”

Togami finally looked away. Reina kept staring at Togami with a confused look for a few seconds before she just casually returned her view forward.

Togami lightly sighed and thought.

[What the heck am I doing…]

Togami was actually only glancing at Reina when she suddenly looked back at him. When that happened, he thought that he should at least say something and just spoke out anything that came up in his mind about Reina. That was all there was to it.

But Reina sounded a bit annoyed when she replied. Togami was slightly overwhelmed by that and decided to just cut their conversation short.

Although Togami did not realize it himself, he actually glanced at Reina since he felt a sense of camaraderie with Reina.

Togami was together with the other Hunters who were better than him. Although this was only his self-evaluation, he believed that he did not contribute much, it could even be said that Akira and Shikarabe were protecting him along the way. Or at least, he did not think that he contributed much or did anything that he could be proud of during that rescue operation.

At that time, Togami caught sight of Reina who was protected by Shiori and Kanae. The scene of her being protected by Shiori and Kanae inside a place that was far too dangerous for her to be, and the fact that it seemed she lamented her situation there. It was basically similar to the situation that Togami was currently in. As in matter of fact, Reina's skill was indeed relatively closer to Togami than to Shiori or Shikarabe.

When Reina suddenly spoke to him, Togami did not even realize that he was staring at her and could only react flusteredly and throw out a random subject. But in the end, it seemed that it somehow annoyed Reina and it left him with a strange feeling of self-admonishment.

Reina also lightly sighed and thought.

[Why in the world did I do that…]

The reason why Reina reacted harshly was because Togami's question reminded her of her own patheticness, so it was her venting to Togami.

In reality, Togami's impression of Reina was simply one of the people from Katsuya's team, that was all there was to it. The only reason why he remembered her was simply because he saw Reina on Katsuya's team from time to time back when he had a one-sided rivalry with Katsuya.

But on the other hand, Reina knew Togami to some extent. She knew that Togami was a skilled young Hunter in Drankam, he might as well be the second strongest young Hunter in Drankam after Katsuya. People in Drankam had their attention on him and they hoped that he would be the beacon for the anti-Katsuya faction. She also knew that Togami was a skilled Hunter who successfully hunted a bounty monster with Shikarabe and a handful of other Hunters.

So in short, Reina saw Togami as a Hunter who was above her, just like how Togami saw Shikarabe.

So when Togami asked Reina if she was still in Katsuya's team, to Reina, it sounded as if Togami was asking her why an incompetent Hunter, who could do nothing but tag along with Katsuya, was in this place.

Reina's logical side was telling her that was not what Togami meant and it was nothing more than her imagination. But since she thought like that once, it was hard for her to change it now.

Reina realized that she just vented her anger at Togami and she hated herself for doing that.

If only they were in a safe place and they could take their time talking to each other calmly, Reina and Togami could be able to get along. But unfortunately, they did not have that luxury at the moment. The still-growing Hunters, both of them, just pulled themselves together for now and somehow moved on from that worry.

Akira was still shooting grenades using his A4WM automatic grenade launcher while retreating. His retreat was going very well, even too well that Akira started questioning it.

“The monsters stopped coming. I don’t think it’s because I’ve defeated them though… So what’s going on here?”

Alpha casually answered his question.

“They might have decided fighting frontally would be ineffective, so they might be avoiding you right now.”

Alpha was not smiling like during the last battle, but she did not seem worried either. Her expression was neutral.

“Either way, let’s use this chance to retreat.”

“You’re right.”

Although it was not as dangerous as before, Akira still could not lower his guard on his way back.

Shikarabe led the group in the front while fighting the enemies that were blocking their way back to the hall where Elena and the other Hunters were waiting. Once they returned back, Shikarabe immediately scanned the situation and finally sighed in relief.

Elena immediately approached Shikarabe.

“How was the rescue?”

“It went well, we secured the targets and retreated back without any trouble. Give us your next order to get out of this building. We basically recovered 3 Hunters and they’re not badly injured.”

Elena looked at Shikarabe, then looked at the hallway where Shikarabe came from. Not too far from the entrance, she could see Reina, Shiori, Togami, and Kanae running, then also Akira a little further behind them.

Elena’s face slightly relaxed after she confirmed that everyone was alright. But she then immediately pulled herself together and gave the next order.

“Sara! Carol! We’re pulling back!!”

Carol and Sara who were guarding the entrance to the other hallways gathered around Elena when they heard that.

Elena then asked Shikarabe.

“Shikarabe, is it alright to count those 3 Hunters as extra fighting hands?”

“Yes, but only two of them. And keep in mind that those two are here to protect the other one.”

“Got it. Shikarabe, you lead them down to the 19th floor. If the situation down there is still the same as before, we should be able to get a short rest.”

“Roger that!”

Shikarabe waved at Shiori, signalling her to follow him. After Shikarabe confirmed that the other Hunters got his signal, he immediately moved out to lead the way down to the 19th floor.

Shiori, Reina, Kanae, and Togami appeared out of the hallway and they did not stop running as they went straight to the stairs. Elena was obviously surprised when she saw 2 maids and a young girl passing through the hall.

She then mumbled while still looking at Reina and the other two Hunters.

“…Maid outfit? No, more than that, I feel like I’ve seen them somewhere before…”

Elena tried to dig through her memory, but Shiori and Kanae’s maid outfits distracted her from remembering them. Sara and Carol finally grouped up with Elena, Sara then asked Elena a question.

“…Elena, about those Hunters though…”

Sara seemed to be thinking of the same thing as Elena, but Elena responded back prioritizing her position as the leader of the team.

“They’re the rescue targets. We’ll also move out once we meet up with Akira. Shikarabe said that two of them are basically bodyguards for the

other one and it’s okay to count them as extra fighting hands. Since I sent Shikarabe down ahead, they should not face any trouble going down. We’ll join with Akira to guard the rear while retreating too. After all, the monsters from the 30th floor might chase us on our way down.”

Sara looked a bit bothered as she nodded.

Carol also seemed a bit bothered.

“If my eyes didn’t trick me, I saw 2 of them are in maid outfits though…”

“Since we can count them as extra fighting hands, there should be no need for us to protect them. So just put that back in your mind first and you can ask about things that have nothing to do with escaping from this building later.”

“O-Okay.”

Sara and Carol seemed a bit confused, Elena could understand their feelings. But it was not like she had the answer to that either and it was not the place to ask that question now. So Elena decided to prioritize more on escaping that building and save any questions for later.

Akira was running through the hallway, his face slightly relaxed the moment he saw Elena and the other Hunters.

“It seems that Elena-san and the others didn’t face any trouble either.”

“Akira, keep running! It seems that Shikarabe and the rest of the Hunters have gone down first.”

Alpha urged Akira to hurry up. Akira was a bit surprised by that but complied and started running faster.

The moment Akira entered the hall where Elena was, one of the barricades that blocked the way to the other hallways suddenly burst open as a relatively big monster burst into the room.

That big mechanical monster smashed its way through the barricade with high momentum. So the moment it broke in, the barricade was forcefully blown away, crashed into the ceiling, wall, and floor as they made loud banging sounds.

One of the wreckages was even sent flying towards Elena even though she was far from that barricade. Although it really surprised her, she was able to nimbly evade the wreckage that flew straight at her. The same thing happened to Carol and Sara, but they skilfully kicked the flying wreckages aside.

The big monster was more or less tall enough and wide enough to block the whole hallway alone. It was wrapped with a robust-looking body. Although about 10 metres of its body had extended out of the hallway, it was not its full length yet, there was no telling how far its body extended down the hallway.

Akira ducked and evaded the flying wreckage as he was running to where Elena was. He then quickly turned around, aimed his A4WM automatic grenade launcher at that big monster, and pulled the trigger. The grenades flew out straight to that big monster, stuck on its armour, and exploded.

The impact forced that big monster down into the floor and kept it flat on the floor. But then a part of its lower armour suddenly peeled off and legs with wheels appeared under those peeled off armours.

It seemed that Akira was able to somehow stop that monster momentarily, but Elena immediately shouted at him.

“Keep running!!”

Akira immediately ran toward the stairs and was about to go down the stairs.

In that instant, a part of the monster’s big body peeled off, exposing the guns under it. On the next moment, it shot indiscriminately inside the room as if to make sure that it hit all nooks and crannies around it. Loud gunshots followed with a barrage of bullets filled the room, it hit everything

indiscriminately, wall, floor, ceiling, and even the wreckage of the other monsters.

Akira, Elena, Sara, and Carol quickly jumped down the stairs and barely avoided the bullet storm. It was a rather intense situation.

They then hurried to catch up with Shikarabe who went down earlier. The situation below the 30th floor did not seem to have changed much, there were no extra monsters at all. And since they already destroyed most of the monsters on their way up, they were able to quickly and safely go down.

Sara was still running when she suddenly asked a question to Elena.

“Elena, did that huge monster not trigger your radar?”

Elena frowned.

“…Sadly enough, yes. Not only the sensitivity of my information-gathering device is lowered in this building, the dead monsters that we used to block the other hallway were also producing weak signals that might have interfered with my information-gathering device. I’m sorry.”

It seemed that Elena felt responsible for that, Sara just smiled at her and replied.

“Don’t worry about it. If you couldn’t detect it, then there’s really nothing we can do about it. It’s not like I’m blaming you here, right Akira?”

Akira lightly smiled and agreed to what Sara just said.

“Yes, I agree with Sara-san. So please don’t worry about it.”

Akira then sent a glance to Carol, who understood what Akira was trying to say.

Honestly speaking, she was not interested in blaming it on Elena at all, but at the same time, she also wanted to know why she could not detect a monster that big.

Back then, Carol noticed that Akira suddenly ran faster. If Akira did that because he knew about that big monster, it would mean that he was able to detect a monster that Elena could not. But then again, Akira's surprise did not seem to be fake the moment he saw that monster.

Although she still had some questions, it was not the time to ask those questions. Carol held her curiosity back as she smiled at Elena and said.

"The fact that no one detected that huge monster means that it might have some kind of special camouflaging device that exploits the lowered sensitivity of our information-gathering device. Or maybe that the setting adjusted to help to detect the smaller monsters is not good at detecting big monsters. But if we readjust the setting to focus more on detecting big monsters, we will have trouble with the smaller monsters instead. So I think this is where it's important to make a compromise, I'm just happy that we could survive that big monster without losing anyone."

After saying that, Carol checked Akira's reaction. Akira seemed to be listening closely to her and nodded in agreement.

It seemed that she made the right decision there to even put up a reason as to why Elena was blameless in order to score some point with Akira. As Carol thought, Akira seemed to lack common knowledge for Hunters and he was showing interest in such a thing. After Carol was able to confirm that, she kept her poker face although she was smiling happily deep inside.

After Elena heard supportive words from her best friend that she was together with for years and a young boy that she got along well just recently, plus extra reasoning that Elena was pretty sure Carol said mostly for someone else, Elena pulled herself together and smiled. She sounded delighted as she said.

"Thank you, now I know that there is such a kind of monster too, I'll be more careful next time."

Sara smiled satisfied seeing that Elena had cheered up.

“But still, how did a monster that big get inside the hallway? I wonder if that thing is a part of the security of this building.”

Akira seemed interested in that subject too.

“It doesn’t seem to be an extra security monster though… Not to mention, with its size, I don’t think it can move around freely inside the hallway. Carol, do you have any guess? You’re pretty knowledgeable about the Seranthal building, right?”

Carol frowned and said.

“As far as I can tell, I don’t remember monsters like that guarding this building before. In the first place, with a body that big, I don’t think it’s possible for that monster to come from outside of the building… I really have no idea why that thing is in this building.”

There was no one present who could answer that question. So they decided to just shelve it for now and move on.

They were able to reach the 19th floor and group up with Shikarabe without any trouble.

Reina and Togami were breathing heavily, compared to them, Akira looked completely normal. Rather than the difference in their physical strength, it was more because of the medicines that Akira kept consuming. But Reina and Togami, who saw Akira, could not help but misunderstand. They looked at Akira with a mix of surprise and amazement.

Elena then gave an order to everyone there.

“We’ll head out again after 5 minutes. Until then, make sure that you have everything ready.”

Akira immediately checked his equipment. He pulled out reserve ammo from his rucksack and reloaded his rifle even if he only used it once. He also replaced the empty reserve magazines attached around his body,

refilled the medicines in his pocket, and replaced the energy pack of his augmented suit.

While in the middle of doing that, Akira suddenly mumbled.

“…I used quite a lot of my reserve supply this time.”

DVTS minigun extended magazine, CWH anti-material rifle special ammo, A4WM automatic grenade-launcher grenades-magazine, medicine, augmented suit energy pack–all of them were expensive consumables. But Akira did not remember wasting any of them, it was a necessary expense.

But still, when he imagined how much expense he had accumulated there, he could not help but to smile bitterly and lightly sigh.

Alpha then teasingly smiled at him.

“Just in case if you want to know, I can tell you how much you’ve spent until now.”

“No thanks.”

Akira answered back firmly. After all, if he was worried about the money that he used to fight the monsters, it might force him to pay that cost with his life later. He thought that he could worry about it later after he returned back alive.

“…It should be alright, I should be able to earn more money. Not to mention, I made quite a lot of money yesterday too. As for this request, Carol and Elena-san should have properly negotiated the details with the City Management. And since we successfully rescued Reina, I should get an extra reward from Drankam too, it should be alright.”

Akira was telling himself that it should be fine. He should not think how many days the money that he spent this time would have bought in the inn where he once lived, or how many times he could eat in that luxurious restaurant that he visited once out of Shiori’s invitation with the money that he spent that day. Akira kept telling himself not to think about it.

Alpha just smiled and said.

“You’re right, it should be alright, maybe. You should be able to end up with huge profits from this request. That’s why, if you want to get extra motivation, it should be alright to use the reward that you get this time to eat a meal in that luxurious restaurant where Shiori invited you in the past.”

“I know you’re saying that on purpose!!”

Akira tried his best not to show his emotion on his face.

Alpha smiled at Akira who was trying to keep his poker face and said to him.

“Oh my, that’s not true at all. I’m just saying that since I think it’s totally okay to reward yourself with something like that after working this hard. It’s not like I’m teasing you for taking this dangerous request from Elena without thinking much about the reward, you know.”

Alpha was still smiling like usual next to Akira, while Akira just silently continued checking his equipment. His face only twitched for a bit in response to what Alpha said to him.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 129, Reinforcement Squad

Index

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Akira was still pouting after Alpha poked fun at him, but then Kanae suddenly spoke to him as if she could not read the mood.

“Akira! We meet again!!”

“…Yeah.”

Akira replied as if he was not interested in talking with Kanae at the moment, but she ignored that.

“But still, what a coincidence to meet you in this place. If you’re going to come here, you should have come with us right from the start, you know?”

“I’m here not because I planned to come here right from the start and it’s not like I came to this building to rescue you in the first place. You should ask Shikarabe for the details.”

“Is that so? Well, whichever the case, thanks for saving us.”

For some reason, Kanae was looking at Akira with interest. In contrast to that, Akira looked at Kanae with a little suspicion. It was because he had no

idea why Kanae was so interested in talking to him.

To be more precise, it was just that Kanae had no reservation when it came to approaching someone else, while on the other hand, Akira was being careful to anyone who approached him without any good reasons. Both of them simply did not suit each other.

Kanae was interested in Akira's strength, a part of it was because she could not figure out how strong Akira was.

From the story that she heard, she knew that Akira could fight evenly against Shiori when she was using her trump card in the underground city of Kuzusuhara ruin. Shiori's trump card was a special accelerator drug that increased concentration, sharpened sense, and slowed down time perception. The price of using that drug was putting one's brain under immense stress that might render its user paralyzed for a few days, but in exchange for that, it could completely transform its user into a superhuman while that drug was still in effect. So, the only people who could fight Shiori in that state must be powerful people.

But when Akira faced Katsuya during that incident with a pickpocket girl, even after Akira released an excessive level of killing intent, he ended up slowly retreating back. In reality, since Kanae left that place with Reina and Shiori early, she could only hear what happened after they left from the other people. But from what she heard, it seemed that in the end Katsuya did not hand over that girl to Akira, and Akira just silently left.

It was true that Katsuya was a powerful Hunter, but compared to Shiori with her accelerator drug, he was obviously weaker. So, since Akira retreated back from Katsuya, then it would mean Akira was not that strong.

While on the other hand, Shikarabe and Akira got pretty close to the room where Kanae was hiding with Reina and Shiori. When she was about to go down the stairs, Kanae glanced around to check the situation, and judging from what she could see, they would have fought their way through the monsters to get that close to that room, which meant that Akira must be pretty strong.

And that Akira was now right in front of her. Kanae was pretty confident in her ability to evaluate someone with her eyes. And from what she could see, Akira was indeed pretty strong for a Hunter of his age, that was all there was to it, nothing more. So in short, Akira did not seem that particularly strong. She could not feel a trace of vigour, pressure, or aura that strong people usually had. He seemed to be just a common Hunter like all the other Hunters in the eastern district.

Kanae had enough reason to think that Akira was not that strong, while at the same time, she also had enough evidence to believe that Akira was pretty strong. Because of that, Kanae could not say for sure how strong he really was.

She was smiling while guessing Akira's real strength.

[Yup, no idea at all. I can't really tell if Akira is strong or not. Honestly speaking, I want to poke at him to see how strong he really is, but as expected, I shouldn't do that in this situation.]

Kanae's impression of Akira was simply someone whose strength was unknown to her.

Even for someone like Kanae, she knew that she had to prioritize her current duty at the moment. So in short, if they were in a different situation, she might have already poked at Akira right now. Kanae honestly felt a bit bummed by that.

Togami and Reina were really stressed out as they were trying to catch their breath, but after staying in that safe place for some time, both of them eventually were able to calm down. Once they had calmed down and had enough leeway to put some of their attention to the current situation, both of them immediately directed their gaze to things that bothered them the most.

For Reina, it was Carol. While for Togami, it was Kanae and Shiori. But technically speaking, both of them were bothered by the same thing, their appearances.

Reina looked at Carol and thought.

[…What is with that augmented suit? It's really something… Or more like, no matter how you look at it, it's designed for seducing men, right? Although I heard that some old-world augmented suits have that kind of design, it's the first time for me to see someone actually using it. Is it just an augmented suit from the current era but with an old-world design? Or is it an old-world relic? Whichever the case, I'm impressed that she's actually using it. Is it a matter of getting used to that design? The curve is pretty intense too… Is it just that it looks intense simply because of the design?]

Reina looked really bothered as she was staring at Carol's augmented suit.

At the same time, Togami looked at Kanae and Shiori's maid outfit and thought.

[…That thing is a maid outfit, right? And maids are those people who serve in a big mansion for rich people, right? So why are there maids in this old-world ruin? Are those maid outfits actually old-world relics with strong defensive power and they're using it in place of normal armour? But for some reason, they look pretty much used to it though, it doesn't feel like they're Hunters. But Shikarabe said that our rescue targets are Drankam Hunters, right…? Wait, he might be talking about Reina and those two might be Reina's maid… But again, why would a Hunter have maids?]

Togami seemed so confused as he was staring at Shiori and Kanae.

Shiori was standing next to Reina, offering her a stamina drink. Reina thanked Shiori and drank it.

Shiori noticed that Togami was looking in her direction, but she did not pay much attention to it. She herself understood that her maid outfit would attract some attention. And as long as she was there as Reina's maid, there was no need to put too much attention to what other people thought or said.

After Carol finished her preparation, she nibbled on a ration that looked like grilled rice dumplings. Although it looked like a simple snack from the outside, it was actually infused with restorative and healing properties. It also replenished the nanomachines that she used during the last fight. For

Carol, consuming that food was equally important as replenishing her reserve ammo.

Carol also noticed that Reina was looking at her, but she just ignored that. Although the design of her augmented suit was made to seduce men, it sometimes also attracted attention from the other women. Some women who were not used to seeing old-world design often threw glances at her out of pure curiosity without any ill will. There were also girls who did not like having a Hunter in that appearance near them. Even Carol herself knew that much. She thought as long as Reina did not complain or say anything about her appearance, then there was no reason to be bothered by that.

Kanae then turned to Togami who was looking at Shiori, so she then looked at Shiori before shifting to Reina, who was next to Shiori. Since Reina was looking at Carol, Kanae's eyes soon ended up on Carol.

Kanae was somehow smiling amusedly, she then threw a smile at Carol.

"Whoah! That augmented suit is really something!!"

Akira was caught by surprise, he did not expect that Kanae would go and ask that question. Akira looked around and noticed that most of the Hunters there had the same impression as him.

Carol was lightly surprised as she turned to Kanae. After all, to her, it did not seem like Kanae was someone who paid attention to appearances.

Carol smiled confidently as she replied to Kanae's remark.

"I won't deny that, but I don't want someone in a maid outfit to say that to me."

Akira unconsciously nodded lightly. What Carol said did make sense and Akira could feel that the other Hunters there would agree with him.

Kanae smiled back and said.

"This is a maid outfit. It would be great if you don't treat it the same as that augmented suit with a design that is obviously for seducing men. No matter

how you look at it, your design sticks out far more than this. Or is that you're already used to that design?"

Carol smiled and replied.

"That's weird for you to say that when you voluntarily use that maid outfit and come all the way here to an old-world ruin when there are many armours out there with the same fighting capability. I don't know whose maid you are, but I wonder if that person doesn't think that it'll be sticking out. Or is it out of fetish or something?"

Kanae and Carol were smiling at each other. Although it was not exactly a friendly exchange, it was not a hostile exchange either. It did not feel like they were challenging each other and picking a fight.

As Akira was looking at both of them with a slightly troubled face, Kanae suddenly turned to him and threw a question.

"Akira, which one do you think is weirder?"

Akira obviously looked troubled when Kanae suddenly threw that question at him, but then Carol asked a similar question to him too.

"Oh, good idea. Akira, which one do you think is the weird one? Which one do you think sticking out the most?"

Instead of answering their questions, Akira asked a question to both of them.

"…Why are you both asking me?"

Kanae and Carol replied with similar answers as if they had already decided to do that beforehand.

"Isn't it fine? It's just out of curiosity."

"Isn't it fine? It's just out of a whim."

Akira looked around, Elena and Sara were holding back their laughter. Shikarabe looked like he did not care at all, Reina and Togami looked at Akira as if they were waiting for Akira's answer, and Shiori was just standing next to Reina with a neutral face.

Akira could feel an awkward mood drifting in the room, he then answered back honestly.

"Personally speaking, if it's on the first sight, I think the maid outfit sticks out more. For Carol's augmented suit, it's just a normal augmented suit with an old-world design after all… And I bet that it's not normal to see maids whether it's only an outfit or a real maid in the old-world ruin."

Akira's response was extremely biased since he had already become used to seeing old-world design because of Alpha. His opinion might be very uncommon for people around his age. As in matter of fact, Reina and Togami were obviously surprised by Akira's answer.

After listening to Akira's answer, Carol sported a winning smile. While on the other hand, Kanae lightly waved her hand left and right while shaking her head too. She then spoke to Akira like a veteran talking to a complete beginner.

"Akira, it seems that you still don't understand how wide this world is."

Akira casually replied.

"Yeah, I've been pretty much living in a narrow world until now after all. Sorry about that."

Elena lightly giggled as she joined in.

"We should go soon, if you have the time for silly talk like that, I trust that you've finished your preparation, yes?"

Akira's expression turned serious.

"Yeah, I can go anytime."

“Ready when you are.”

Kanae sounded like she was in a good mood as she said that and returned back to Reina.

Carol still kept her eyes on Kanae when she answered Elena’s question.

“Yeah, no problem here.”

Carol was looking at Kanae as if she had a question in her head.

[…I feel like she asked me that because she was probing for something though, is it only my imagination? Is that simply out of habit? It doesn’t seem her companions are bothered by that either…]

Carol just concluded that Kanae did that simply out of habit and decided to stop thinking about it.

Once Kanae returned to Reina and Shiori, Shiori whispered to Kanae.

“I don’t know what you were planning there, but hold yourself from doing anything that might cause a fight.”

Kanae replied back as if it did not bother her at all.

“Well, isn’t it fine? It seems that Milady was wondering about it, so I was asking that question in her stead. It’s no good you know, Milady, you should not stare at a Hunter whom you don’t know well that intently. Depending on that Hunter, it might be interpreted as picking a fight after all, okay?”

Reina pouted and tried to deny it.

“…It’s better than asking that question straight at her, after all, it’s more or less the same as already picking a fight when you do that, you know?”

Kanae was still smiling as usual when she replied back.

“I don’t have any problem if she accepts it, that’s the biggest difference between me and Milady. Milady, don’t tell me that you think it’s okay to be

a bit cheeky just because we're protecting you and we'll definitely do something about it when things get bad? Don't tell me that's why you keep glancing at her? It's a big problem depending on whether you do that on purpose or not, you see."

Reina could not say anything back. Although she did not do that on purpose, it was also true that she could not give a straight answer if she was asked whether she did that thinking that Kanae and Shiori would definitely do something about it if things went bad.

Shiori lightly sighed.

"Just try to behave yourself. If you get ahead of yourself, I'll cut you."

"Yes ma'am!"

Kanae replied back in a good spirit. It was hard to say from her personality whether she responded positively to behave or that she was happy because it sounded like Shiori was willing to fight her. But at least, Kanae decided to just shut up, so Shiori did not pursue any further.

Kanae glanced at Akira and thought.

[…I tried to surprise Akira there with that sudden question, but it seems that he did lower his guard. It also seemed that he was pretty much relaxed while we were talking. As I thought, I guess that Akira is not really that strong, huh? Or was that only an act? Or is it that he's someone who totally changes when he's in the middle of a fight? Uhhh, I still don't have enough material to make any conclusion.]

Kanae was thinking so as she lowered her evaluation of Akira. After all, that was what she could get from her own observation if she did not include stories that she heard from other people.

Kanae was smiling, she was hoping that there would come a chance when she could get better information to accurately predict Akira's real strength.

After everyone finished their preparations, Elena then explained the next plan.

“We’ll go down to the first floor from here and escape the building from the front entrance. Let’s hope that the squads securing this building are still alive.”

Shikarabe felt there was something strange in how Elena worded her plan.

“Is there any reason for us to worry whether the squads outside are still alive or not?”

Elena lightly nodded.

“Yes. You already know that I left mini information-gathering devices on our way up to make sure that we have a safe escape route, right? So basically, the mini information-gathering device on the first floor near the entrance got some signals. It seems that multiple entities entered this building.”

Carol then said to Elena.

“Can you tell me exactly the shape of this something that entered this building?”

If they had a human-like form, then it might be the other Hunters. Or at least, that was what Carol was hoping, but Elena lightly shook her head and said.

“Unfortunately, the device was not able to identify their shapes, and the sensitivity is lowered inside this building. So I can’t say anything about their shapes. The only thing that I can say for sure is that something came into this building. Although I did say multiple entities, it might be the same object going in and out of the building multiple times on purpose to trigger the signal multiple times. So I can’t really confirm the numbers too.”

This time, Akira was the one who asked a question to Elena.

“Is there any chance that they are a reconnaissance team just like us or might even be the main rescue squad?”

“That possibility is not zero. But if that’s really the case, it might be the reconnaissance team. After all, it’s unthinkable for them to send the main squad after sending us, the reconnaissance team, into this building without waiting for us to return first. Either way, just keep in mind that we might spot other Hunters on our way down, make sure not to shoot them by mistake.”

“Understood.”

Akira nodded firmly. Elena lightly smiled and nodded back at him.

Elena’s face then returned back to her serious face.

“The real problem is if that’s not the case, which would mean more monsters just entered the building, that would also mean that those monsters broke through the encirclement made to secure this building. There’s a good chance the situation outside the building has turned dangerous, although the possibility is pretty small, I recommend you to at least keep this in mind. After all, no one can tell what will happen from here on.”

Elena remembered the big monster that attacked them on the 30th floor as she warned everyone.

“If no one has any more question, let’s move out.”

With that sentence, they started the operation to escape the building.

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While on the first floor, 2 groups of Hunters were debating each other, they were the group made of Hunters from Drankam and another group that was made of Hunters unaffiliated with Drankam. All of them were Hunters who successfully hunted bounty monsters in the past.

Back then when they were in the middle of debating on how to secure the Seranthal building, Elena's team finished their negotiation first and was sent ahead as a reconnaissance team. When that happened, there were 2 groups who felt that they got jumped ahead by Elena's team.

The first group was the Hunters not affiliated with Drankam and refused to be working under Drankam. They thought that sending Akira ahead was the decision that the Drankam side made. They thought that Drankam gave preferential treatment to that team stating an excusing that they brought back useful information for the operation.

That was not exactly wrong, Shikarabe did say that too when he negotiated with Drankam's side. As in matter of fact, the information that they brought in might have actually be used in that operation.

So in order to calm them down, Drankam decided to make a compromise and send them as another reconnaissance team.

The second group was the young Hunters in Drankam that belonged to the Katsuya faction. To be more precise, they were able to get dispatched ahead because of support from within Drankam, from Mizuha.

Mizuha was rather concerned by the fact that Shikarabe was the leader of the first reconnaissance team. She also knew well how much Shikarabe hated Katsuya's guts. She was worried that Shikarabe was planning to use the achievement from this chance to influence the composition of the main squad or even to change how Drankam would treat Katsuya.

So in order to fight back against Shikarabe, Mizuha even made some compromises about the main squad so that she could send ahead another reconnaissance team to the Seranthal building.

After that, both teams were sent to secure the first floor of the Seranthal building so that Elena's team would not be able to monopolize the rewards. They thought that it might be hard for Elena's team to do that since they had limited equipment and manpower, but it would be an easy job for them since they brought more people and carried better equipment. Of course, they could just gather information and bring it back too, but if they ended

up bringing back the same information as Elena's team, then Elena's team which would have returned back first would claim the reward first.

Although both groups of Hunters were not that hostile to each other to the point that they would try to kill each other, there was no mistaking it that they would be disrupting each other's job. Even a small accident could immediately turn into a fight. The leader of each team was only barely able to calm their respective team down.

Near the outer side of the front entrance to the Seranthal building, a Hunter by the name of Kurosawa was shouting orders to his team with an annoyed face. His equipment and the aura around him clearly showed that he was a powerful Hunter.

Kurosawa was the leader of the team which killed the 1,500,000,000 Aurum bounty monster, Maimai. He was taking the lead of the anti-Drankam team this time.

Kurosawa looked at his watch and clicked his tongue.

"…The sixth squad isn't returning back at all although I told them to properly watch the time. Send the eighth squad in. Tell them to ask the squad securing the A, B, C and D stairs if the sixth squad went to the second floor without my permission or not."

Another Hunter next to him then replied.

"I bet they'll be back if we just wait a bit longer."

Kurosawa glared at that Hunter.

"We can't check their situation at all from the first floor. There are 3 possible reasons why they are late. First, they might be trapped somewhere and can't return back. Second, they might not be that competent to be able to return back as we originally planned. Or third, they might be pretty stupid as not to listen to my order. But whichever the case, we treat them as MIA. There's no need to wait for them."

“Alright alright, I’ll send the next- Oh, there they are.”

The sixth squad stepped out from the entrance. Kurosawa signalled them to come with his finger. Once they stood in front of him, Kurosawa then asked them a question that was mixed with insult.

“From what I can see, it doesn’t seem any of you are injured? Were you almost killed somewhere or something?”

The leader of that squad sighed and answered that question.

“We were about to return back on time when one of those kids picked a fight with us, you see. If you tell us that it’s okay to shoot them, we would have been able to return back on time though.”

“Where?”

“Hallway C7.”

Kurosawa clicked his tongue again when he heard that. He then gave a signal for the sixth squad to just go and take a rest before he headed to where the Drankam side’s leader was.

The leader of the Drankam group immediately noticed Kurosawa. The other young Hunters around him looked at Kurosawa with hostility, but Kurosawa did not care about them at all as he said to the leader of the Drankam group.

“It seems that some of your people picked a fight with my men, can you at least properly discipline them? I don’t mind if you want to keep on playing around here, but I have no plans to tidy up your mess.”

That young Hunter glared back at Kurosawa as if he was trying to put Kurosawa under some pressure.

“If that’s really the case, we’re sorry. And also, stop saying something like that, everyone here is being serious.”

That young Hunter responded back just like a Hunter should. The impression that he was giving off was different compared to those new green Hunters or former Hunters. A skilled Hunter would be able to immediately recognize his real strength and disregard his young age.

That was also the case for Kurosawa, he knew that the young Hunter in front of him was a rather talented Hunter. Although for now, he was nothing more than a skilled young Hunter, it was only a matter of time until the ‘young’ word get dropped.

The young Hunter in front of him might be a stronger Hunter than him in the future, but that was still in the future, not now. Kurosawa looked down at the weaker Hunter standing in front of him and said to him with mockery.

“I’m being serious here. If we objectively evaluate your performance, that would be the result. I’m not a Drankam Hunter after all, so I’m not obliged to choose my words just to keep your mood, am I right, Katsuya-kun of Drankam?”

The leader of the Drankam team was Katsuya.

Katsuya glared even more intensely at Kurosawa, but Kurosawa just ignored him.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 130, Huge Turret

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Kurosawa's group and Katsuya's group were in the middle of securing the first floor of the Seranthal building. But they were working completely separate from each other. They had agreed beforehand to operate separately to reduce the possibility of causing trouble, and they also agreed if any of them retreated, the other party could continue searching the building.

And just like before, there was something inside that building that prevented people from making any contact from the inside of the building. Because of that, Kurosawa and Katsuya stayed outside the building to keep contact with Kugamayama city and the Hunter Office while giving orders to their respective group.

Airi who was next to Katsuya looked coldly at Kurosawa.

"…Is that all?"

Kurosawa looked at Airi, his expression then returned back to normal. He could see a resolve from Airi's eyes, so he had no plans to mock someone with that kind of resolve. people like her were not to be underestimated no matter how weak they were. After all, they often used insult and mockery as fuel to strengthen their resolve, which eventually fueled their growth.

[And here I thought that they are just a group of stupid children who mistook the power of their equipment as their own skill when they defeated the bounty monsters, after all, they could only get those powerful equipment because of the extensive sponsor and support that they received… But it seems that's not exactly the case, huh.]

Kurosawa's evaluation of Katsuya's group had gotten better, although only slightly. He then faced the person who caused that change and said to her.

"Yeah, that's at all. We've agreed beforehand to handle different areas to make sure that we don't disrupt each other. So just be careful next time. Later then."

He already conveyed what he wanted to say and was sure that Katsuya understood that he wanted them to stop wandering into his area. Although at first, he was planning to complain about other things too, he decided to back down as a form of respect to Airi.

When Kurosawa was about to leave Katsuya alone, he suddenly stopped, he saw a girl come out running from the entrance of the Seranthal building.

Kurosawa stopped thinking that it might be some kind of emergency, but judging from how that girl was running, it did not seem to be the case, so he decided to just forget about it and returned to his post. That girl, Lilina, ran straight to Katsuya and said to him as if she was venting her anger.

"Katsuya!! They mocked us again!! You should go there and say something to them!!"

Katsuya tried to calm Lilina down.

"Lilina, calm down, tell me what happened?"

"What the heck is wrong with those people sounding so arrogant like that?! We're also Hunters who successfully hunted a bounty monster, you know?! They should show some respect for us…"

When Lilina was about to explain what happened to Katsuya, or at least, what she thought she was doing, she saw Kurosawa walking away. Although she did not know if that was Kurosawa, she knew for sure that person was not from Katsuya's group, and that was enough of a reason for her.

Lilina then stopped Kurosawa.

"You, stop there! I know that you guys are strong Hunters who have defeated a bounty monster, but we have too! Just because we're doing well, that's not a reason for you to keep sabotaging us out of envy!"

Kurosawa stopped, he looked obviously annoyed as he sighed and turned around.

"So, where is it?"

Lilina seemed confused.

"What do you mean by where?!"

"What a dunce, I also received a report that some Hunters from your group picked a fight with my men, so I'm asking you where that happened."

"Isn't it obvious already?! It's on the first floor of the Seranthal building!! Are you too stupid to even make such a simple guess?"

"Seranthal building has multiple floors and it's pretty big. There are also countless individual rooms inside it. So where exactly is it on the first floor?"

"It's not in a room, but in a hallway. What about it?"

"Which hallway?"

"Is that even important?! What's wrong with you and your stupid questions?!"

Lilina talked back at Kurosawa with a prickly tone, venting out her anger at him.

Kurosawa's gaze shifted from Lilina to Katsuya. He sighed on purpose to express his exasperation and mockery. He then said to that Katsuya with a tone that obviously showed he was ridiculing Katsuya.

"Seranthal building is a dangerous place where many Hunters lost their lives after stepping inside. So, it won't be strange if you get suddenly attacked by a swarm of monsters out of the blue when you're inside the building. Not to mention, for an unknown reason, the sensitivity of information-gathering devices is significantly lowered inside that building which makes it harder to accurately detect things around you. And with the inability to contact each other, Hunters have no other choice but to only judge whether they are looking at friends or foes solely on their visions. So of course, Hunters get more high-strung inside that building, and when you encounter another group of Hunters roaming around in the same area, there's a good chance that it might cause misunderstanding and even fight too. So, in order to avoid unfortunate accidents, it's important to refrain from unnecessarily interacting with the other group. That's exactly why, for the sake of safety and profit, our operation areas are properly divided from the beginning, or at least that's what I understand. The patrol time and route are decided beforehand and we are properly following it. It's designed so that when any of us encounter someone else inside that building, they don't need to spend too much time checking if they're friendly or not and just can make an assumption that they are hostile. And if any of us can't return back on time, it can be assumed that there's a fight inside the building. The report that I got is saying that the fight happened in C7 hallway. It's obviously inside our territory and it's not a place that you can enter by pure chance. So as long as you don't enter it on purpose or unless you get lost inside the building, you should not be able to go there."

Kurosawa's expression changed from mockery to hostility.

"I don't know whether it's just stupid Hunters who entered that place on purpose or it was just stupid Hunters who got lost inside that building, but in this case, we're basically not the one at fault even if we suddenly opened fire. Whichever the case, are you seriously sending such stupid Hunters

inside that building? Do you seriously want to pick a fight with us that much?”

Lilina was overwhelmed by Kurosawa’s pressure, but she was somehow able to talk back.

“We just passed through it for a bit! There’s no need for you to go that far, isn’t it?!”

Kurosawa’s gaze was still fixed at Katsuya.

“The report said that my men got into a fight. So basically it meant that your men did not withdraw from that place and even caused the patrol squad to return late, I bet it’s because your men did not let my men go, right? And you still said that you just passed through it for a bit? Ahh, I see, I know it might just be a bit for you, I guess this is where our understanding of how important this kind of thing differs. You should get that straight first without roping us in. We’re not Hunters from Drankam, so we have no plans to tidy up after your mess.”

Kurosawa was exuding an aura that only those powerful Hunters had. There was no trace of joking or mockery in his face, he was using a tone that he would only use to talk against people who he recognized as enemies as he spoke to the leader of the other group, Katsuya.

“Listen here, we have no wish to fight you because it’s too much of a hassle to have to fight you while we have to fight the monsters too. So at least just don’t get in our way. Don’t make me decide that it’s faster to just clean all of you from here and continue securing this building all by ourselves. This request is from the City Management and you guys are Hunters from Drankam, that’s why we’re holding back as much as we can, but there’s a limit to that too. So sort your mess out by yourselves. Got it?”

After Kurosawa said that, he immediately ran back to his post without waiting for a reply since one of his men contacted him and told him to get back.

Kurosawa was still looking obviously annoyed as he thought.

[…Although there seem to be some proper Hunters among them, I guess the majority are still those stupid ones, huh? Can we really secure the Seranthal building while avoiding getting into a fight with them? Are we seriously going to work with them once the main squad is here…? Good grief, I swear it's better if we just leave this operation to Drankam people without roping us too, isn't it?]

Kurosawa was thinking about what to do next as he ran back to his station.

Lilina was overwhelmed by Kurosawa's presence, but once he left, her anger quickly welled up again.

She was about to burst with anger even now.

"…W-what the heck is wrong with that guy?!"

Yumina tried to calm Lilina down.

"Lilina, I understand your feeling, but just calm down for now, okay?"

In contrast to that, Airi threw short but harsh words.

"Lilina, shut up."

Lilina was about to say something, but she stopped midway after she saw Yumina and Airi. Yumina looked at Lilina with a rather stern face, while Airi was looking at Lilina with her usual expressionless face but mixed with a tinge of hostility. Both of them were staring at Lilina, putting pressure on her.

There were other girls beside Yumina and Airi around Katsuya. But Airi and Yumina had been together with Katsuya for a long time. Their Hunter Rank was the second highest in Katsuya's team, only after Katsuya. Their pressure was enough to shut Lilina up, and even scared her.

There was no mistaking it, both of them were angry. If Lilina said anything, there was no mistaking it that both of them would get even angrier. Thus Lilina just shut up without being able to even make any excuse.

Katsuya was basically a kind person, if someone weak came to him scared, no matter the reason, he would extend his hand. And even more so when it was someone from his own team and a beautiful girl to top it off.

Katsuya also felt slightly scared since he could also feel Airi and Yumina's anger, but even so, he tried his best to make a smile and calm Lilina down.

"Well, Lilina, just calm down for now… Are you good now? Well, let's proceed with the report. Since you returned back faster than originally planned, it means that you have something you want to report as soon as possible, right?"

Lilina calmed down after she saw Katsuya's gentle smile. But she still could not fully calm down, as she flusteredly tried to piece her words together.

"…W-well, uhh, we met them when we were about to head back, and, uh…"

Airi interjected.

"You can save that for later, first tell us why did you return back sooner than planned."

"W-well, uhh, it's nothing big, but…"

Lilina was hesitating, which only made Airi angrier.

"Just spit it out…"

"T-The elevator moved…"

"Is that all?"

"Uhhh, we've agreed beforehand that we won't go to the second floor until we secure the first floor, right? Since the elevator started moving, they might use it to go to the upper floor without securing the first floor first. I just thought that I need to let Katsuya know this as soon as possible so that they won't steal a start…"

Lilina mixed her own guesses in her report.

After Kurosawa returned and received a report from his men, he frowned and asked if his men were sure they were not mistaken.

“Are you sure about it?”

“Yeah, the elevator moved.”

“So basically, no one went to the upper floor without my permission and the elevator started moving, is that correct?”

“Yeah, that’s as long as we believe the floor’s display on that elevator. The Hunters who are stationed near the first-floor elevator also said that they heard the elevator moving. The elevator on the first floor started moving and we have nothing to do about it, and there’s no fool among us who would go upstairs without permission.”

Kurosawa’s face turned grim as he thought.

[Did any of their men go upstairs and call for the elevator? No, it might be from the squad that went into this building before us… Wait, but the elevator is supposed to be unusable, right? So why has it started moving out of the blue? Did something change in the building…? I have a bad feeling about this.]

Kurosawa then looked at his men with a serious face and said to them.

“Inform everyone inside the building to return back as soon as possible, everyone, understand? Just leave the portable information-gathering device behind. Tell them to get back here, now. Also, tell the other Hunters who are transporting the dead monsters outside the building to stop immediately, and gather here. Also, prepare their weapons. Use all the portable walls to form a barrier, take some distance from the entrance so that you can safely focus your fire on the entrance, and form a barricade around the entrance.”

Kurosawa’s men were surprised when he suddenly gave that order to them. After all, it sounded as if Kurosawa had given up securing the building. One

of them looked bewildered and said to him.

“Whoah, are you sure about that? We’re almost done securing the first floor, you know? Are we really going to just abandon it?”

“It’s fine. In the first place, there’s another group who are working together with us in this place and they’re not friendly to us. So even if we secure the first floor, I still doubt if it would be really safe. Moreover, it’s not like I can trust those children to properly secure the area they’re responsible for. And even if no monsters come out from the building, we can just restart the work to secure the building again later.”

“But, we’ll definitely lose a lot of time to secure the building, is this moving elevator really that dangerous?”

The amount of the secured area basically affects the reward that Kurosawa and his men would receive. Kurosawa put some pressure on his words as he replied to his men who were against retreating from the building.

“It’s my intuition. So this is just to be safe. You’ve decided to work under me when you joined this team, so stop yapping and start working. I know that it’s a coward’s decision, but you accepted to join this team knowing fully that I’m a careful person. If you want to question my decision, you can do that later.”

Kurosawa was indeed a skilled Hunter with good commanding skill, but judging from that point of view, he sometimes made cowardly decisions. There were many occasions where he focused too much on pessimistic guesses during the ruin exploration and gave an order for his men to withdraw although they could have gathered valuable relics if only they pushed just a bit further.

But thanks to that, Kurosawa’s team had a high survivability rate. He was different from most of the Hunters in the eastern district who would happily take a high risk just to be able to return back with a lot of relics, instead, he preferred to maintain a long term profit.

Even during their fight against the bounty monster Maimai, no one got killed in Kurosawa's team, not even badly injured.

Now that Mihazono ruin had turned dangerous enough that it was more or less the same as an unexplored ruin, the other Hunters understood that Kurosawa's cautious nature was an important factor in making sure that they would be able to return back alive from the Seranthal building.

Kurosawa's men looked at him with a serious expression and said.

"Roger that, we'll do it right away."

"Hurry up then!"

Kurosawa urged his men to hurry up with a serious face. Even if his decision was a mistake, he would not regret it. After all, just in case if that decision was not a mistake, then it meant that he would have saved a lot of Hunters from facing their ends in that building.

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Elena's team was able to reach the first floor safely. But right when they stepped on the first floor, the Hunters who have a good intuition immediately frowned, their expression turned grim, Akira included.

But before Akira was able to ask Alpha about it, she suddenly said something that he could not ignore.

"Akira, sorry but I'll need to leave you for a bit."

"Again?"

"It's for the sake of improving your current situation."

Alpha only said that and immediately vanished from Akira's views. Akira could also feel his augmented suit suddenly become heavier.

Although Akira's face turned even grimmer, he was still able to maintain his calmness. After all, that was not his first time, and he thought that he

just needed to pass the entrance to escape the building.

But that line of thinking also caused Akira to not notice something. Unlike last time, Alpha did not say that it would be alright, or that she would be back in no time, or that there was no monster around.

Elena then explained the current situation to the rest of her team.

“There’s a big signal reading in the large hall near the entrance. It would be great if it’s from a forward station made by the reinforcement team, but that might not be the case. So keep your guard up.”

All the other Hunters nodded, they then carefully moved into the hallway.

As they came closer and closer to the hall near the entrance, they started to spot dead Hunters spilling fresh blood. They were fresh corpses and it seemed that they were killed by gunshot.

Shikarabe checked the equipment of those dead Hunters and frowned. There was a Drankam mark painted on their equipment.

“Their equipment is from Drankam. I bet they’re young Hunters from Drankam, they should be working in teams… So the fact that they didn’t retrieve the dead bodies means that were attacked and did not have the leeway to do so.”

Elena looked at everyone and said.

“Just to be safe, we’ll treat the signal from the hall as an enemy. I’ll change the route based on that assumption. This doesn’t change the fact that we’ll have to be careful.”

They continued walking through the hallway, ready for battle. They found other dead bodies, but this time, they just ignored them.

Akira unconsciously gripped his rifle tight, he tried to control his breath to calm his nerves down.

Akira had a stern expression as he called for Alpha.

“Alpha! Are you not done yet?”

Alpha did not respond back at all.

At the same time, in a vast empty white space, 2 girls were standing. It was Seranthal, the A.I manager of the Seranthal building, and Alpha.

Alpha seemed obviously annoyed as she said to Seranthal.

“Explain yourself!”

Seranthal was expressionless, but it was somehow obvious that she was also annoyed.

“I’m not violating any agreements that we made beforehand. I didn’t block your way when you explored the building and I’m not preventing you from getting out of the building either. It’s as we agreed on.”

“Then why are you using the elevator?”

“That happened outside of my control. It’s true that I’m the manager of this building, but there are other people too who have permission to use the facilities inside this building without going through me. Especially for the users of the 50th floor and above, they have the rights to directly use the elevator. The security drones also have that right. So I bet it was the B18 that used the elevator.”

“I found B18 drones on the 30th floor too though.”

“They’re just exercising their rights to defend themselves. I’m also actually troubled here with those drones roaming inside this building without my permission. And I also feel sorry for it. But, it’s not like I can do anything about it. I’m really saddened that they’re creating a mess inside this building.”

Alpha and Seranthal continued talking to each other, none of them seemed to be willing to back down.

Elena’s team eventually reached the receptionist desk near the entrance, they confirmed the current situation from the piles of rubbles and wreckage inside the hall and the holes in the walls.

There were also many dead bodies lying around the hall, a fierce battle must have happened there. Those corpses were still clad in augmented suits and they were still gripping their rifles.

The front hall of the Seranthal building had a tall ceiling and tall entrance doors. It even extended all the way until the third floor of the building. Elena’s team noticed that there were other things inside that hall that was not there when they came into that building.

Reina could not help but mumble the very thing that everyone there was thinking.

“…What in the world is that?”

There was a huge mechanical monster in the front hall. It was so huge to the point that it was obvious it would not fit inside the hallway of that building, heck, it would not even fit the entrance of the building. Its body was enveloped in armour plating, it did not have legs, wheels, caterpillar tracks, or anything that it might use to move its huge body. It did not seem that it would be able to move except by flying. And even if it could move, it would not be able to get into the building because of its size.

This monstrosity seemed to be stationed there to guard the building against any trespassers.

Kanae smiled amusedly and said.

“This thing is pretty huge. How did this thing get inside this hall?”

When Kanae said that, the elevator in that hall suddenly opened and several B18 monsters came out from it. Most of them went straight out from the hall, but one of them approached that big monster and climbed it.

That B18 monster then stopped right on the head of that big monsters. Then on the next moment, that B18 monster suddenly exploded as if it activated its self-destruct protocol.

Then one of the armour platings of the big monster slid open, multiple arms came out and gathered the wreckage of that B18 monster and pulled them inside its body. The dead B18 monster became one with the huge monster–a new armour plating, a new machine gun–thus making its already huge body even bigger.

Elena nodded, her face was grim.

“I see. So it’s staying here because there are materials available here. It’s one of those monsters that can fix itself…”

Sara smiled wryly.

“Then, that means that the snake monster on the 30th floor must be there to consume the wreckages too…. I get it now, it’s true that there are many materials available in this building.”

More B18 monsters appeared from one of the hallways and headed outside the building, but suddenly, one of them was sniped and exploded.

Another bullet also hit the big monster, when that happened, a blinding light flashed.

Akira frowned.

“…That light, force field armour, huh…?”

It reminded Akira of the powerful powered suit that he fought in the past in the Kuzusuhara ruin.

Shiori was observing that huge monster with a serious face.

“And judging from that light, it’s a powerful force field armour. It would have been great if that single snipe was able to damage its body…”

They waited with bated breath, then a part of that monster's armour plating crumbled down, exposing a new armour plating right under it. That armour plating then popped out as if to replace the armour plating it just lost.

All of them thought about the exact same thing without saying anything.

Shikarabe's face twitched.

"Carol, you're knowledgeable about this building, right? Do you know any secret route that we can use to escape this building? In this situation, I'm willing to pay any price you ask."

Carol shook her head.

"Unfortunately, the front entrance is our only exit right now."

"Really?"

"Yes, it is. Even if you pay me 10,000,000,000 Aurum, I can't give you what I don't have."

Akira, who was hoping that there was another way to escape the building, looked obviously disappointed. He did not think that big monster would just let them pass through peacefully. If they wanted to get out of that place, they had no other choice but to destroy that monster. And judging from the fact that it was able to take that single snipe shot just fine, it would be a difficult task to accomplish.

[Since we're already on the first floor, can't we just open a hole in the wall and escape through it…? No, that won't work. Carol also said that the entrance is our only logical choice. If only Alpha was here, I could ask her why it won't work though…]

Unfortunately enough, Alpha was still away. At this rate, Akira would have to fight without Alpha's support.

Akira's expression tensed up as he tried to call for Alpha again.

“Alpha?! Are you really not done yet!?”

And again, no reply at all.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 131, The Augmented Suits of The Dead Hunters

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Kurosawa was aiming his huge rifle from outside the Seranthal building, his rifle was so huge as if it was ripped off straight from a tank. There was no need to question its power nor its price.

He was checking the enemy's situation using his aiming device. He confirmed that his shot hit its target from the flash of the force field armour. But it was a whole different question whether it damaged its target or not.

Kurosawa's face twitched, his target was doing fine. Although it must have at least significantly lowered the energy reserve of its force field armour, the special, expensive, bullet that he used there did not give him the result that he was expecting.

Kurosawa made an exasperated face as he mumbled.

"That didn't work, huh. So, they want to secure that building with that huge monster there. I guess that explains why they dispatched those squads to surround this building."

He then checked on his men.

“Anyone injured?”

“No. Everyone was able to escape from that monster unharmed. No one was left behind either, we’ve confirmed that. In the first place, no one here is weak enough to get injured fighting those smaller monsters that were flowing out from that building.”

“Alright then. Everyone, get behind the portable walls and keep suppressing the monsters. Safety is number one here, there’s no need to save your ammo. If the portable wall gets too weak, immediately pull back. Get about 10 Hunters for transporting equipment and focus more on materials that can be used on walls. We can retrieve the equipment for detecting monsters later, it seems that the sensitivity of our detection devices is doing well outside the building. Prioritize more on strengthening the barricade while suppressing the monsters coming out from that building. If we keep this up, even though we would fail to secure the first floor of that building, we should still be able to save some of our reputation. If the monsters are pushing back too hard, retreat and regroup with the squads surrounding this area. There’s no need to get too reckless.”

“Roger that!”

Kurosawa saw his men leave before aiming back at the huge monster in the front hall of the Seranthal building. Seeing that the monster was completely fine, Kurosawa’s face turned sterner.

[…I will try to shoot some more and if it still doesn’t work, I will have to give up on destroying that monster. It’s impossible to get into that building without killing that monster. If that’s the one taking command of the smaller monsters, it would mean that we’ll be able to deal a big blow on their force if we can kill it, but… Should I contact the squads surrounding the area and ask them to send the humanoid soldiers to kill that big monster?… I guess that would be a no… I don’t even have the rights to do that and I don’t think that they’ll help us anyway. Well, once the main squad is here to secure that building, someone from the upper echelon will give them the

order to give us support if that is really needed. Although I don’t know when that would be, it’s not my place to be thinking about that.]

Kurosawa gathered himself together and pulled the trigger. The bullet that was shot from his rifle had the same firepower as a tank warhead, it flew straight at the humongous monster, destroying some B18 monsters on its way there.

Once again, Kurosawa confirmed that he hit his mark, but it did not seem to affect that monster at all. He checked again and lightly sighed because of a completely different reason.

“What is it? I’m busy right now, I have no time to take care of trivial stuff.”

Katsuya was standing not too far from Kurosawa with a stern face.

He looked seriously at Kurosawa and said.

“I have a request.”

“Nope!”

Kurosawa gave an instant reply without looking back at Katsuya. There was no space for negotiation. Katsuya was a bit surprised by that firm rejection.

Lilina, who was next to Katsuya, suddenly butted in. Although she was stunned too, she forced herself to say something there to help Katsuya.

“We haven’t even said anything yet!! At least listen to what we have to say!!”

Kurosawa looked obviously annoyed as he clicked his tongue, just like last time, he replied without looking at Katsuya and Lilina.

“I bet you want my help to retrieve your men that got left behind in that building, right? My answer is no. We have no reason nor obligation to help you. Why should I put my men in danger just in order to save your men? So no. I myself don’t want to do it, and I’m sure my men don’t want to do it too. We’re here putting our life at risk for a chance to get money, we’re

basically here to exchange our life for money. We're only here for that request because we judged that the reward that we might get this time is worth using the power that we have worked hard to attain, the expenses of our consumables, and the risk of death that we'll face. We might be willing to do that for our comrades, but I don't see any reason to do that for free for another group that is hostile to us."

Unlike Kurosawa's group that immediately left the Seranthal building without wasting a second. Katsuya's group, who saw Kurosawa's group leaving, thought that it was weird and did nothing else. After all, in their mind, Kurosawa's group had just wasted their hard work to secure the first floor. So, they ended up withdrawing late from that building.

Because of that, some of Katsuya's men did not make it and got left behind. It was unclear whether they were still alive or already dead. If they were to be optimistic, those Hunters might have barricaded themselves somewhere, waiting to be saved. But if they were to be pessimistic, those Hunters would be already annihilated by now. Katsuya prioritized more on the former, he could not bring himself to take the latter guess.

Katsuya, Yumina, and Lilina were about to try to negotiate with Kurosawa out of kindness, sense of virtue, and arrogance respectively. But Kurosawa who was still shooting there spoke first.

"Are you going to tell me that it's exactly because we're in this situation that we should be helping each other now? Don't make me laugh. It's true that helping each other is a good thing, but that is if we both have the capability and willingness to help each other. For the willingness side, well I can understand your feeling, so I'm not really against negotiating with you, but it's a whole different story for the capability. I and my men think that you guys will only be dead weight to us. We don't think that you have the ability to help us, so it won't be helping out each other, it'll be us one-sidedly helping you. And if we do that, then it'll be out of our kindness. But I and my men don't have the leeway to act out of kindness at the moment. As in matter of fact, we're already helping you guys out by letting you guys use our portable walls. So you should be grateful for that."

To be honest, Kurosawa only allowed Katsuya's men use his group's portable wall since otherwise, Katsuya would only have two choices: either fully pull back his men, or lead them to a suicidal charge into the building. Both choices would lower the overall fighting strength of the Hunters and that would be disadvantageous for Kurosawa.

Kurosawa was only letting Katsuya's men use his portable wall for his own profit.

Katsuya tried to think of another solution out of his stubbornness, Yumina tried to think of another solution using logical calculation, and Lilina tried to think of another solution out of desperation because of the sense of defeat that she felt there, Kurosawa continued.

"Are you telling me that you'll pay me then? But the answer is still no. When money is involved, it would be a formal request. I, as the commander of my men in this place, have no right to accept another request at the moment. If you insist, you should talk it out with those people in the Hunter Office who are negotiating on how they are going to form the main squad. It's useless to talk to me about that."

That shut all of them up. They tried to think of anything that they could say there, but nothing came up. Kurosawa then continued.

"We're in no position and we have no reason to accept your request. If you get it now, then just shut up. You'll disrupt my concentration if you keep making noise here. You're basically bothering me by doing that, and if you keep bothering me, I'll have you removed first. After all, bothering the command here will expose the whole group to more danger. Just so you know, I have no qualms injuring you so stop bothering me."

Kurosawa did not even glance at Katsuya. But Katsuya and his friends obviously felt a sense of pressure and hostility emanating from Kurosawa.

Katsuya, Yumina, and Lilina could not think of anything to say in that situation. They just stood there in silence. Katsuya cursed his own weakness, Yumina seemed immensely worried for her comrades that got left behind, and Lilina gritted her teeth in anger.

Among them, Airi, who was silent and thinking up until now suddenly spoke.

“In that case, I want you to take command of this group too. You can get all the credits while we’re under your command. Then, I want you to finish our original goal of coming here, to secure the first floor of Seranthal building.”

Katsuya, Lilina, and Yumina immediately turned to Airi, they looked completely shocked. Airi kept staring at Kurosawa with a serious expression.

Kurosawa stopped shooting and looked at Airi. He looked both surprised and a little troubled while staring back at her, trying to read the meaning behind her words.

Airi locked her gaze with Kurosawa’s and continued.

“If you have the command of our group, it’ll reduce the damage to your men. Your commanding skill should also be able to compensate for our weakness to some extent. I believe that this is a good deal for you, with no money involved, so?”

Kurosawa thought for a bit before answering back.

“…So basically we can push the dangerous roles to you to safely achieve our goal, and if we can secure the first floor of the Seranthal building, then you’ll be able to rescue your friends, huh… That’s indeed a suggestion worth thinking about, but it’s not like we can accept it right away. Or more like, shouldn’t convincing your leader come first? If you leave all the achievements to us, then why are you here in the first place, the one who will take the responsibility for that will be your leader, right? Or is it that your leader gave the full right to you?”

When Kurosawa asked that question, Airi sounded rather disappointed as she replied.

“…No, I don’t have such a right.”

“I see. That wasn’t a bad suggestion, but keep those things that I asked you in mind first before you make such a suggestion next time.”

Kurosawa only said that and ended the negotiation there, that was when Katsuya made his resolve and suddenly said.

“Alright alright!! You can claim all the achievements!! I’ll take full responsibility…!! So please, save my men.”

It was as if Katsuya let out his real feeling there as he lowered his head. It was obvious that he was being really serious.

The way Kurosawa looked at Katsuya changed from a mocking gaze to a respectful gaze for someone that he was negotiating with. He then started to think about that suggestion seriously.

Katsuya waited with bated breath for Kurosawa’s answer. Kurosawa had not said anything yet, he was still thinking with a serious expression.

Kurosawa finally made his decision, he sounded as if he felt sorry about it as he said.

“As I thought, the answer is still no.”

Katsuya and the other Hunters there understood that it was the decision that Kurosawa made after thinking seriously about it. Katsuya had a pained expression as he asked a question.

“…Why is it still a no? Is it impossible to change your mind no matter what?”

“I won’t deny that it was a good offer. But it did not resolve the most important worry that I have, so as long as that worry is still there, I, as the one who will take the command of your men, can’t take that offer.”

Airi asked.

“…What worry?”

“Even if I take command of your men, there’s no guarantee that your men will listen to my orders. So, without that guarantee, that offer is basically off the table.”

Katsuya who heard that desperately begged.

“I’ll make sure that they’ll listen to your orders!! I promise you that!!”

Kurosawa shook his head and replied with an honest tone.

“It’s not like I’m doubting you here and I’m not saying that your men don’t trust you or anything. I’m sure that you will follow my orders and I’m sure that you’re on good terms with your men and they trust you. But that doesn’t guarantee that they’ll follow my orders. Their trust and faith in you might even be the very reason why they wouldn’t listen to my orders. I’m sure that some of them would not move on my orders and will only move on yours. In the first place, I doubt that they’ll all definitely listen to your orders as well. After all, at the moment, there is already someone from your team who entered an area that they should not. Am I right?”

Kurosawa glanced at Lilina, who immediately froze.

Kurosawa returned his gaze back to Katsuya and continued.

“I bet there are others who disregard your orders too, right…? I can see that I’m right, huh. I bet they won’t listen to my orders when they don’t even listen to yours. That will be the end of this negotiation. I refuse your suggestion. It’s nothing personal, I know you want to rescue your men, honestly speaking, I feel the same too. But as the leader of my team, I can’t afford to expose my men to needless danger. Well, we’ll at least provide you with support fire if you want to try to make a run to that building. So, just tell us if you decide to do that.”

After he said that, Kurosawa left that place to check the other location, he then gave some orders to his men before aiming at the entrance of the Seranthal building again.

Katsuya, Lilina, Yumina, and Airi who were left there looked down, dejected. Especially Lilina. She seemed to be the most dejected. She then asked with a voice that sounded as if she was about to cry.

“…Was it… My fault?”

“…It’s at least not your fault alone.”

Airi’s vague comforting words did not have much effect on her.

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Elena told her team to stand by on guard while checking the current situation that they were in. It was so that none of them tried to shoot at the humongous monster which might cause all the other B18 monsters to shift their attention to Elena and her team.

Someone was still sniping that big monster, although it could not kill nor destroy it, it at least continued shaving the power of its forcefield armour. Elena was hoping that it would eventually destroy the monster.

But as if to cut that hope short, the sniping suddenly stopped. It might be just a temporary pause, or the person sniping had already completely given up, Elena hoped that it was the former. But after some time, her face turned grim as she made her guess.

[It seems that they judged that it was ineffective and decided to completely stop, huh. Or maybe the situation outside got worse and they don’t have the leeway to keep sniping… I hope that it’s the former.]

Elena then gave an order to her men.

“Unfortunately, it seems that we can’t rely on the squads outside to take care of this situation. That’s why we have to try to kill that monster and get out of this place ourselves. We’ll split the team into two, one to fight that monster and another one to cover the flank.”

Elena looked at Shiori and Kanae. Shiori had a blade dangling on her hip and Kanae had a fighting gauntlet on her fists. Both of them were equipped

for close combat. If they specialized in close combat, it would be counter-effective to have them fight the big monster, they were also there as Reina's bodyguard in the first place. So, Elena thought that it would be better to have them assigned to the flank team.

But Shiori suddenly spoke.

"I'll join the vanguard then."

Elena was a bit surprised by that.

"Are you sure? Or more like, are you okay with that?"

"Of course, no need to worry."

Elena hesitated, but she decided to accept Shiori's offer. It seemed that even Reina's bodyguard would prioritize fighting that big monster even if it meant that they would be separated from their target for protection. After all, it would be way safer if they could defeat that monster as fast as they could. Elena also thought that it might be because Shiori had an idea of how to defeat that big monster.

Elena then said.

"Alright. The flank team will be Shikarabe, Kanae, Reina, and Togami. Shikarabe, I'll leave it to you."

Shikarabe understood what Elena meant. Although his team had 4 people, it actually only had 3 people who could fight decently, or maybe even only two–Shikarabe and Kanae. Elena was basically saying that in the middle of fighting the monsters, he would need to keep one person safe no matter what and he had to decide what to do about the other Hunter that he had brought into the team.

"Roger that, let's go."

Shikarabe then led his team to reposition themselves. Kanae was about to follow Shikarabe when she noticed Reina was just standing there with a conflicted face, so she grabbed Reina's arm and took her along. Reina was

looking worriedly at Shiori, who replied back with a smile that was saying that there was no need to worry.

Togami also had a conflicted face as he followed Shikarabe. He was assigned to the flank team because Elena saw him as someone who was under Shikarabe, and it was not because Elena thought that he would be useless even if he was in the vanguard team. Togami knew that but even so, it was hard for him to align his thoughts to that fact.

Akira, Elena, Sara, Shiori, and Carol took their positions to start shooting. They were hiding in a hallway, behind rubble, behind a wall with a hole, or behind anything that might protect them while they were waiting for Elena's signal.

Akira was very nervous. He repeatedly took a deep breath to try and calm himself down.

[…Calm down. Don't panic. Calm down your nerves. Just do what I should do the best that I can. That's all there is to it. Back then, when that big snake ate me, I also lost connection to Alpha. The situation that I'm in right now is not as bad as when I was inside that snake's stomach.]

He left anything that would slow down his movement on the floor, that included his rucksack, CWH anti-material rifle, and DVTS minigun. After all, he had no confidence to be able to move around quickly without Alpha's support if he had those things on him.

If he carried everything with him, it would be even difficult for him to walk. Until now, he was able to maintain his balance in that situation with the help of Alpha's support. But now that he did not have that support, it would be impossible for him to go on a battle while carrying all of those things.

Akira looked at the A4WM automatic grenade launcher in his hand and smiled bitterly.

[I have 2 rifles that don't need strict aiming, I'm glad I bought them.]

The A4WM automatic grenade launcher and DVTS minigun were rifles that did not need strict aiming, while the CWH anti-material rifle needed proper aiming to hit its target.

The distance to the monster could be considered as a close distance for a fight in the middle of the wasteland. In that range, Akira should have no problem aiming with his CWH anti-material rifle.

But currently, Akira could not do something as dangerous as peeking out from the rubble and taking his time to get a proper aim. If he got unlucky and got the monster already aiming at him, there was basically zero chance that he would survive.

Even if that monster had a big body, Akira did not have the confidence to properly hit his shot even if he used the time compression too. After all, if he missed, it would immediately spell his doom.

So Akira decided to carry the rifle that he could shoot without too much aiming. He put some medicines in his mouth, ready to swallow it the moment Elena gave the order to start attacking. He had made his resolve as he was waiting for that signal.

Elena sent an order through the communication device before starting the battle.

“Although I’m sure there’s no need for me to spell this out, once we start shooting, I’m sure the other smaller monsters would focus their attack on us too. If it’s possible, I want to leave them be. So just ignore the smaller monsters as long as they don’t attack us, focus your firepower on our main target. But I don’t forbid you from attacking the smaller monsters here. And if you think that the situation is getting too dangerous, you can make your own decision.”

On the other side of where Elena and her team were, a stream of B18 monsters was still flowing out from the building to the outside, passing next to the big monster, and it did not seem that it would stop anytime soon.

“Well, let’s go then, in 5… 4… 3… 2… 1… Zero…”

Elena, Sara, Carol, Shiori, and Akira started shooting simultaneously with that signal.

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In a big white space, Alpha and Seranthal were still talking to each other.

Seranthal looked mildly annoyed as she said.

“You asked me to let some visitors in, and this time, you want me to take that back? You’re always like that. Even the access to the information on the common floor is supposed to be a secret, you know. How far do you want to trample over my right before you’re satisfied?”

Alpha answered back with a rather neutral expression, but there was a strong pressure emanating from her neutral face.

“I ask nothing more than what I need. If you won’t accept this peaceful offer, then I have no other choice but to resort to the non-peaceful solution.”

Seranthal glared at Alpha, but Alpha’s expression did not change at all while she was waiting for Seranthal’s answer. After a short silence, Seranthal answered back with an obviously hostile tone.

“…I’ve removed the permission, you can go ahead and confirm it.”

Alpha smiled.

“Yep, I just confirmed it, thank you for your cooperation.”

“If that’s all, then leave, and never come back.”

“Personally speaking, I also hope I don’t ever need to come here again.”

Alpha then vanished from that space. After that, Seranthal showed an expression that she would never show to a visitor and released a deafening roar until she felt satisfied.

Akira was desperately shooting back at the monsters. He gathered his focus, compressed his time perception, peeked out from where he was hiding, aimed his rifle at the big monster, and basically just shot his A4WM rifle pretty much randomly. He then immediately returned back to hiding before the enemy fixed its aim on him.

He prepared himself to meet death every time he peeked out, and when he found the monster was already aiming at him, he would flusteredly return back to hiding. He moved from one hiding spot to another while listening to the sound of countless bullets ricocheting around him and the fear when he saw huge warheads mowing the location where he just hid not too long ago. Then from there he would start shooting again, rinse and repeat the cycle.

If Akira did not have his time compression, he would not be able to confirm where the monsters were aiming and evade them on time, he might even get killed the moment he peeked out. He would not be able to do anything in that situation if he did not have that time compression.

[Good grief, I'm so glad I learned to compress my time perception… How long can I keep this up? Will I last until we can kill that monster?]

Every time Akira peeked out and shot, he could feel stress that almost crushed his heart and body. Both his brain and his body were begging for a rest, but he just ignored it, clenched his teeth, kept his focus, and pushed his body to keep moving nimbly with the help of his augmented suit. Although he was somehow able to fight in that situation because he forced himself that hard, it was only a matter of time before his mind or body would give out. The pulsing pain in his body and head was telling him that he did not have much time before that would happen.

Akira crushed the growing fear inside him as he desperately continued fighting back the monsters.

In the battle, the Hunters actually had the upper hand. Not only was the main target stationary, it also had a huge body, an easy target. As long as there was no sudden change in the situation, the Hunters would not miss their shots. While on the other hand, the big monster had to divide its

attention to multiple locations, so its firepower was significantly thinned out.

Moreover, the other B18 monsters just kept on moving outside the building even after the Hunters started shooting. Thanks to that, the Hunters could focus their firepower on the big monster alone.

As the Hunters there started to think that they would be able to win at this rate, they started to relax and lowered their guard, that was the moment when a sudden turn of events happened as if it was waiting for the Hunters to lower their guards.

Although Akira did not have as much leeway as the other Hunters, he also started to unconsciously lower his guard and looked down on that big monster. That caused him to start looking around his surroundings which would have been a dangerous thing normally.

When Akira looked around and saw the dead bodies scattered around him, he thought that he would join them if he was not careful, and that made him realize that he had lowered his guard. Akira smiled bitterly. As he was about to focus back on fighting the big monster, that was when, fortunately, he noticed the change as his gaze was still directed at the dead bodies.

The dead bodies that he was looking at suddenly moved slightly, one of them aimed his rifle at Akira.

Akira instantly predicted the trajectory line from its muzzle and evaded it by pure reaction. The dead Hunter pulled the trigger and Akira was barely able to evade that shot.

Akira was completely taken aback. He quickly aimed his A4WM at that dead body and was about to pull the trigger, but he immediately realized that it would also injure himself if he pulled the trigger there. So he stopped his finger from pulling the trigger. Instead, he quickly swapped his A4WM rifle with his A2D assault rifle and shot at that dead Hunter.

Bullets barraged that dead Hunter, destroyed its limbs, and blew its body away. But that short opening when Akira swapped his rifle gave enough

time for that dead Hunter to also shoot at Akira. Although it did not hit Akira's vitals, the impact and the pain from the hit threw Akira off-balance.

That short exchange with death caused Akira's brain to accelerate, in that slow-moving world, Akira immediately swallowed all the medicines that were already inside his mouth and pushed his body back up. Right when he was back standing, he noticed that the other dead Hunters in the area already started moving on their own.

When Akira was about to aim his rifle at the dead Hunters that were carrying rifles, the dead Hunters that were not carrying weapons immediately started running in his direction. Akira forced his body to move with the help of his augmented suit to evade it while enduring the pain that was rushing throughout his body, he prioritized shooting the dead Hunters with rifles first.

He sent a kick towards the head of a dead Hunter that got too close to him and released a few shots at the other dead Hunters at the same time. Akira was fighting back desperately and was able to barely repel the attack of the dead Hunters. His fighting skill that he had polished through countless training allowed Akira to barely survive that fight.

Back then, Alpha helped Akira by indicating the dangerous locations with red marks. Akira was in a wide-open area, so he had no idea what made them dangerous. But right now, he was able to identify dangerous locations even if it was in a closed space. Although he no longer could see the trajectory prediction lines, he was able to quickly predict where the enemies were aiming.

They might be nothing more than his imagination, but Akira let that sensation take over his body as he continued fighting back.

But when he saw one of the dead Hunters kept attacking him although it had lost its head, Akira finally realized something.

[…I see, it's the augmented suit, huh! So just like me, someone else is controlling their augmented suit!]

Akira thought that the dead Hunters would stop moving if he crushed their heads, but it seemed that he was too naive.

[Good grief, I guess everything is possible inside the old-world ruin, huh!? So basically, still-moving dead Hunters are normal over here?!]

Akira kept on fighting as he thought that the current situation really reminded him that the old-world ruin was an amalgamation of things that were out of common sense.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 132, Trump Card

Index

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Shikarabe's team in the flank was also attacked by the dead Hunters, but unlike Akira who responded in panic, Shikarabe and Kanae were able to calmly handle the situation just fine. It was not because they expected someone to control the dead Hunter's augmented suits, it was more because of the difference in their ability to handle a sudden turn of events like that.

After Shikarabe took care of the dead Hunters around him, he went back to the hallway and shot down the dead Hunters that might attack Elena's team.

Shikarabe had already noticed that those dead Hunters were moving around because someone took control of their augmented suit. He had a grim face as he mumbled.

"Good grief, this is exactly why you shouldn't buy cheap augmented suits, what a huge pain in the neck!"

There were many augmented suits that could be accessed from the outside. It was to help it to work in tandem with other equipment like an aiming device so that the augmented suit could help stabilize the aiming.

Depending on their users, some augmented suits could be set to be more open to external access, there were many different reasons why they did that. For example, it was so that the other Hunters could control and use the dead body as a decoy. Some Hunters forced the other Hunters to use that kind of augmented suit to make use of the other Hunters even when they were badly injured.

Of course, normally, it did not cause any trouble. After all, an augmented suit that could be easily accessed by anyone would not sell well in the market. That was why most of the augmented suits in the market were equipped with a safety function to protect them from unauthorized access. And as expected, the better the protection, the more expensive the augmented suit would be. While on the other hand, it was very rare for people to try to hack into someone's safety feature. So it was a rather delicate balance.

Kanae lightly smiled and said.

"Well, this is a huge surprise. How did they hack into the dead Hunter's augmented suit? But well, this is an old-world ruin after all, in front of their eyes, our technology might be nothing but primitive. While on the other hand, these might be augmented suits that use their users' biological signature as a key, so their safety feature is significantly lowered down even when the users get killed."

"Well, I really can't say for sure."

When Shikarabe saw Kanae smiling happily, he looked back at her exasperatedly.

A young girl in a maid outfit, equipment tailored for CQC, loved fighting, a total oddball. She was a rare kind of person even for Shikarabe. Although he had nothing to complain about her fighting strength, Shikarabe had no plans to associate too much with her if it can be helped.

Kanae loved fighting too much. Associating with someone like her would dull one's sense of danger. Only battle maniacs could get along with the

other battle maniacs. If someone else tried to get along with them, he or she would get killed in no time, or at least, that was what Shikarabe thought.

Kanae noticed that Shikarabe was looking at her, so she just smiled back and said.

“Oh, did I just mesmerize you?! Oh my, you’re making me blush here! I love strong Hunters too, you see!! So you’re more than welcome if you want to try to hit on me! Ah, but I’m a bit busy at the moment, so it would be great if you can save it for later.”

Shikarabe obviously had given up on trying to fix that misunderstanding.

“Sorry, but even for me, I would choose who I want to hit on. I have no wish to try to hit on a battle maniac. Especially when she’s fighting monsters in close range in a maid outfit.”

“Ah, this is just because I enjoy punching them directly more than shooting at them, you see. There are a lot of cases where I can’t bring rifles with me during my job. You look pretty strong yourself, want to do some light duels some other time?”

Shikarabe’s face twitched, he bet that Kanae would not stop only with light duels.

“No thanks.”

“That’s just too bad.”

Kanae honestly felt bummed by Shikarabe’s answer.

Togami and Reina were evacuated to a safe hallway. When the dead Hunters started to move, Togami and Reina reacted late, thus forcing Shikarabe and Kanae to help them. After that, they were escorted to a safe place and they were warned not to go out so as not to get in the way of the battle.

Reina checked her surroundings and peeked out, Kanae who noticed that immediately warned her.

“Milady! Get back, it’s dangerous out here! If Milady gets injured, Ane-san would slice me, you know?!! Is this some kind of harassment?! If it is, that’s so cruel!!”

Shikarabe shouted at Togami.

“Togami, don’t just stand there! Get her back in the hallway! It’s your job in the first place to keep your eyes on your surroundings!! And don’t let her get out from there! I put you there to guard her you know?! Or is it that you don’t know what’s the meaning of guarding someone?!!”

Togami grabbed Reina’s shoulder and shoved her back.

When Reina was pulled back, she could also feel that it was out of her patheticness. Thus, she instinctively glared at Togami.

“Even I want to know what’s going on outside too, you know!!”

Reina had a fierce look that she once had in the past, but the moment she saw Togami, her expression completely changed to a troubled face. Togami had a stern expression, but somewhere in his face, there was a trace of weakness, it was as if he was about to cry. He then asked Reina a question.

“Am I… Really not good enough?”

“W-what do you mean by that?”

“Am I really that bad to the point that my escort target would just ignore me to check the situation themselves? Am I really that useless?”

Togami’s expression was asking Reina to deny it. When Reina saw that, it reminded her of herself.

Reina responded back with a whisper.

“…That’s not it.”

“…Is that so? Then please step back. During that surprise attack just now, we could not do anything at all, we let the other two Hunters take care of

everything. I’m your escort at the moment. Although I have no plans to die, at the moment, it’s my job to get killed first before you… So please at least let me do my job.”

Reina obediently walked behind Togami, who peeked out and checked the situation.

“…Sorry.”

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it.”

Reina did not know if Togami was apologizing because he shoved her back too hard or it was an apology for something else. But in the end, Reina did not ask him either.

After that, Togami started to take his duty to protect Reina seriously.

The vanguard team finally took care of all of the moving dead Hunters. Akira got shot two more times, but he was still able to repel the surprise attack. While Elena, Sara, Carol, and Shiori did not face any trouble at all. The only one who got injured in that surprise attack was Akira.

Elena tried to confirm everyone’s situation.

“Is everyone alright?”

Akira answered back while enduring the pain.

“I’m alright.”

Elena immediately replied with a worried tone.

“Akira, are you really alright?”

“I’m okay… If there’s anything, it’s just that I set my augmented suit in battle mode, so it’s consuming more energy than usual. I’m not so sure if my energy reserve is okay. I’m sorry but when I run out of energy, please let me withdraw temporarily to put in a new energy pack.”

When Akira knew that he would be going into a battle without Alpha's support, he set his augmented suit to battle mode. Thanks to that, it was able to absorb most of the impact from the bullets that hit his body, but in exchange, it was actively using a lot of energy. It was only a matter of time before Akira ran out of energy and rendered useless in that battle.

Elena then worriedly said to Akira.

"Alright. There's no need to hold back, just quickly retreat when things get too dangerous. How about the others?"

The other Hunters told Elena that they were fine.

Elena then said to the whole vanguard team.

"I'm glad that everyone is okay. Well then, I have some bad news here, it seems that a part of the monster swarm started to move differently. It seems that they're avoiding us while trying to reach Shikarabe's team. If we don't take care of them, we might get attacked from both sides later… Or more like, we're already in that situation."

Some of the B18 monsters that were heading outside the building changed their aim to support the big monster. It was as if they changed their plans after confirming that the Hunters survived that surprise attack.

"There's no need to hold back, use everything you have, you can use any trump card that you still have hidden up your sleeves. I'll handle the negotiation later to make sure that you'll get compensated for that even if those cost you a few million aurums."

Elena mixed a bit of a joke there before closing the communication.

Akira smiled bitterly, his trump card was not with him at the moment.

[…No, that's not right. A trump card is not something that you casually use all the time. Without Alpha's support, I only amount to this much. I'm just someone who is fully reliant on a borrowed power, on something that is only lent to me.]

When Akira thought so, he realized that his augmented suit, rifles, and even medicines were nothing but were given to him. He then lightly mocked himself for getting too conceited.

When Akira was about to start shooting again, Carol and Shiori approached him. They started shooting at the big monster while asking Akira a question.

Carol was the first one as she worriedly asked Akira.

“Akira, are you really okay? It seems that you’re moving slower than usual though.”

“I got shot, so it might have caused me to slow down.”

Carol tried to be careful not to change her expression. She had seen him get shot when he covered her, but back then, it did not seem to have affected Akira’s movements at all. So in short, he was lying and Carol knew that.

Shiori pursued even further.

“To be honest, it seems that your movement was slowed down even before you got shot.”

Akira frowned. Both Shiori and Carol were keeping their eyes on him even before he got shot.

Akira sighed and then replied with a serious face.

“I apologize if I’m slowing everyone down, feel free to just abandon me.”

Carol did not stop shooting as she flusteredly said.

“…Ah, it’s not like I think you’re taking it easy, I didn’t mean that when I asked you that question. I was just worried since you didn’t move like usual.”

Shiori also did not stop shooting as she tried to probe what might be behind Akira’s words there.

“I’m not suspecting you for cutting corners, not at all. But I could not find any reasons that might cause your movement to worsen.”

Akira shot out a couple of grenades at the enemy before he hid again. Shiori was still staring at Akira as if she was waiting for an answer.

It seemed that Akira finally gave up as he gave a mildly vague explanation.

“…If I have to say something, it seems that I consumed too many medicines since we returned from the 30th floor. When I use the full power of my augmented suit, it puts my body in immense stress and I’m compensating that with medicines. But I feel like it’s a bad idea to keep consuming medicines at this rate. The last time I overused medicines, I fainted for 3 full days out of exhaustion. I thought that it would be really bad if I faint in this situation, so I decided to reduce my medicine consumption.”

Akira was not lying, even if that was not fully convincing, it should at least be enough to hold back their suspicions. As Akira thought so, he glanced at Shiori and Carol.

Carol and Shiori seemed to be somewhat convinced by that explanation, but it was not like they just accepted Akira’s explanation as it was.

They added extra guesses based on their experiences and knowledge on top of the new information that they just received from Akira.

Carol unconsciously nodded lightly.

[Although he said that it’s because of the medicines, I bet he’s taking medicines with strength enhancers or something. Judging from the fact that he fainted for 3 days out of exhaustion, it should be a pretty strong drug. If his slowed movement is because of the kickback from that drug after it ran out of effect, then his reasoning does make sense. After all, the kickback of an accelerator drug is really not something so scoff at.]

Carol was definitely sure of half of her guess as she asked Akira a question.

“Akira, do you usually modify your time perception? I mean like, you know, when things around you run on slower time than they should.”

Akira was surprised by that question.

“Oh, you can tell?”

Carol smiled satisfied thinking that she opened one of Akira’s secrets.

“Well, pretty much, this is a common knowledge for Hunters, you see.”

Although, unlike what Carol guessed, Akira actually was controlling his time perception with his own power without help from a drug. He was surprised since he thought that Carol had guessed that out, while Carol thought that Akira was surprised since she was able to guess that he was using accelerator drugs. They misunderstood each other and no one there could point that out.

Shiori then asked Akira with a serious look.

“Akira-sama, you said that you fainted out of exhaustion, right? Is this something that might kill you?”

Akira tilted his head, he thought that it was weird for Shiori to ask a question that had an obvious answer.

“No, but if I faint in this situation, I’m pretty sure that I’m dead.”

“Which means that the exhaustion itself is not life-threatening, so the kickback from the drug is not that strong and it would be fine as long as you can take a rest in a safe place for a few days after that, correct?”

“…Well, yeah, that’s true.”

They were still shooting at the monsters while having that conversation, in that situation, they did not have the chance to just focus on their conversation.

Carol immediately returned to hiding behind rubble after releasing some shots, she then glanced at Shiori.

“What is it? Are you telling him to use the accelerator until he faints since it’s not life-threatening? Like he said, it’s stupid to do something like that in this situation. And looking at the current Akira, it seems that the kickback is already at a pretty bad level.”

The reason why Akira was moving slower was simply because he was still inexperienced. But since it would be bad if he tried to explain the truth to both of them, Akira chose to not say anything.

Shiori thought that Akira’s silence was due to him getting annoyed. But even so, she made a request to him.

“Akira-sama. I know it’s rude for me to ask this. But, if you take extra medicines without worrying about the kickback, is it possible for you to stop that monster for at least 10 seconds? If it’s possible, if you can give me 10 seconds, I guarantee that I will destroy that monster without fail. So please, will you consider taking extra medicines?”

Akira and Carol inadvertently turned at Shiori, they were completely surprised. Shiori kept staring at Akira, waiting for an answer. Carol, who just returned back to her senses frowned and opposed that plan.

“Whoah, wait, 10 seconds? If a single person gets the full attention of that monster for 10 seconds, it’s more than enough to turn that person into minced meat, you know? You basically want him to get its attention off of you, right? Isn’t that just impossible?”

Shiori did not reply back to Carol, she kept staring at Akira, waiting for his answer. Shiori thought that Akira had never shown his full power yet until now. That was why, she thought that if it was Akira, he might be able to accomplish her impossible request.

No matter whether he was using extra medicines or not, it was impossible for Akira to do what Shiori just asked him to do. Akira’s own skill was nowhere near enough to do that. He was sure that he would definitely be

turned into minced meat before 10 seconds even passed, there was no question about it.

Right when Akira was thinking what he should say to refuse that request…

“I’m back, how is it? Do you miss me?”

Alpha suddenly appeared in Akira’s views.

Akira’s face immediately turned stern, he was fighting back as much as he could from making a relieved face. Alpha was still smiling like usual when Akira replied back with a complaint.

“Yeah yeah, I really missed you. To be honest, I really wished that you would have returned back sooner, so, can you do something about this situation?”

Alpha was smiling confidently as she said.

“Just leave it to me.”

Akira regained his composure after he heard Alpha’s reassuring reply. His mental state was freed from excessive anxiety as it returned back to its optimal state for fighting. His stern face relaxed for a bit and he started explaining to Alpha.

“I see. So, Shiori asked me to be a decoy and buy her 10 seconds though. If I can do that, it seems she will take care of that thing. Honestly speaking, I really want to get out from here as soon as possible, so, 10 seconds, can we do it?”

“As long as you have me, rather than being a decoy for 10 seconds, it’s better to just kill it yourself though. Ask her to reduce the length, it’s much more dangerous to keep its attention on you without killing it for an extended time without any good reason.”

Akira then asked Shiori.

“Can you make it 5 seconds less?”

“5 seconds, huh…”

When Shiori asked for 10 seconds, she was expecting that Akira would try to make a compromise before eventually accepting her request, but 5 seconds was a lot to ask.

[…5 seconds… That might be the limit of how far Akira-sama could go… I guess it would be meaningless to ask more than that, huh.]

Shiori earnestly bowed to Akira.

“Very well, 5 seconds, I’ll be counting on you, Akira-sama.”

Carol looked at Akira with a flabbergasted expression.

“Akira, are you being serious here? It’s still really dangerous even if it’s just for 5 seconds, you know? That 5 seconds is long enough to get yourself killed out there.”

“Yeah, but as I said before, if this situation continues, my augmented suit will eventually run out of energy. If this will end the battle, I can at least do that much. Without my augmented suit, I’m the same as dead in this situation anyway.”

Seeing how Akira seemed to have suddenly regained his confidence, Carol found that rather suspicious, but she then smiled and said.

“Alright then, I’ll give you some support too, be careful.”

“Yeah.”

Akira, Carol, and Shiori repositioned themselves. Akira was hiding behind a pile of rubble away from Shiori and Carol. He had his CWH anti-material rifle in one hand and his A4WM automatic grenade launcher in the other. He was standing with his left leg on the ground and his right leg against the big rubble in front of him.

That rubble was big enough to completely block Akira’s view. But for the current Akira, that did not matter at all, he was still able to see the big

monster behind that rubble just fine.

Akira then said to Alpha.

“Alright then, let’s do this.”

“This will put your body under immense stress, are you sure you’re ready?”

“Yeah, if it’s enough to kill that thing, I can give you my resolve as much as you want. It’s my responsibility after all.”

Just like he said, Akira had a resolved look on his face. Alpha returned that resolved look with a happy smile.

Akira needed to keep that big monster occupied for 5 seconds. In normal situations, that was a very short span of time, but in the middle of a battlefield where bullets were flying all over the places and one might get killed out of the blue, 5 seconds was long. So in order to survive those 5 seconds, Akira gathered all of his focus and compressed his time perception as much as he could. Inside that distorted world where everything around him was running a beat slower than him, Alpha was the only one who was still moving around normally.

“Well then, let’s start!”

With that signal from Alpha, Akira pushed the rubble in front of him with his right leg and made it fall forward toward the direction of the big monster. Alpha controlled Akira’s augmented suit to increase its output to its maximum ignoring the stress that it put on its user. The big rubble fell over and slid on the floor with a very loud sound.

Akira’s right leg that pushed the rubble and his left leg that supported that force against the floor were put under immense stress, Akira could clearly feel the bones inside both of his legs cracking. Of course, the medicines that were still active inside his body immediately started fixing those cracks, but Akira did not wait for them to completely heal his bones as he immediately started running as if he was chasing for the sliding rubble in front of him.

Since the augmented suit hardened and acted like an exoskeleton to support Akira's both legs, it was able to absorb the impact from the ground so as not to disturb the healing on the cracks of both his legs. Thanks to that, Akira was able to run even with broken legs.

All the machine guns on that big monster turned as much as they could to aim toward the incoming rubble. The impact of the bullet storm that swallowed the sliding rubble was enough to stop that rubble from slipping further. Right after that, all the machine guns on that big monster immediately fixed their aim at Akira who was charging at that big monster alone.

Akira was running while using the rubble in front of him as a shielding, he kept repositioning himself to make sure that he would not get hit by the bullets that passed through the small openings and cracks on that big rubble. It was an impossible feat to execute without Alpha's support.

Countless bullets flew right next to Akira, but none of them hit him, not even his equipment. Akira did not slow down at all as he kept on charging forward.

Akira raised his A4WM automatic grenade launchers and pulled the trigger, he did not even aim, it was as if he was just shooting grenades randomly. But thanks to Alpha's calculation, all of the grenades that he shot flew in a parabolic trajectory and landed at the big monster.

Some of the machine guns fixed on the big monster's body changed their targets to the flying grenades. They moved as fast as they could to intercept the incoming grenades.

Right at the next moment, Akira raised his CWH anti-material rifle in his right hand and pulled the trigger. The CWH special bullet flew past the grenades and hit the weak points of the machine guns that were trying to intercept the incoming grenades. More than that, it pierced through multiple force field armours and hit one of the energy sources that were supplying energy to those force field armours.

As one of the energy sources of the monster was destroyed, a part of its force field armours temporarily stopped working. When grenades landed on that unprotected side, the explosion transmitted into the inside of that monster, thus, temporarily stopping it.

It was not a coincidence, it was something that can only be done with full knowledge of that monster's anatomy, and of course, that was only possible thanks to Alpha's support.

Akira kept on shooting his CWH anti-material rifle and A4WM automatic grenade launcher in succession, thus, prolonging the state where that big monster could not retaliate. But it was not close enough to kill that monster, the humongous monster was created from multiple B18 monsters, thus, it had multiple energy sources and control devices. So, Akira's attacks were only able to stop that monster temporarily.

Inside that slowed down world, Akira asked Alpha.

"How many seconds to go?!"

Since he was in compressed time perception, he did not know how many seconds had passed. What he knew was that the big monster was still alive and kicking.

So Alpha who was measuring the accurate elapsed time in place of Akira answered back.

"It's already 5.14 seconds."

That telepathic exchange happened in a split second.

Akira started to feel doubt. He had already bought enough time as he had promised, but the enemy was still alive and well. Shiori had not fulfilled her promise. Because of that, he could not help but glance at where Shiori was.

When he saw Shiori, Akira was taken aback. Shiori jumped out from behind rubble and charged straight at the big monster. She placed her hand on her sheathed blade, ready to pull her blade anytime. Judging from the

length of that blade, she should not be able to reach that big monster from that distance.

Just like Akira, Shiori was running in compressed time perception. She was using her accelerator trump card.

Shiori had studied CQC and swordsmanship. If she was fighting against an enemy with rifles inside a closed room, even if that enemy was using a machine gun, Shiori could close the distance in an instant.

But leaving the smaller monsters aside, Shiori's blade was not even close to being big enough to take care of that huge monster. She herself knew that.

Shiori had decided to use her other trump card other than her accelerator. The time that Akira bought for her was for Shiori to use her trump card.

When Shiori saw Akira jump out from behind the rubble, she also jumped out from behind the rubble and started running towards the big monster. Inside that distorted world where Shiori could even trace floating sands, she thanked Akira for buying her time as he promised. This time, she had to fulfil her part of the promise. She gathered her concentration and gripped the blade dangling on her hip. She held the handle with her right hand and sheathe with her left hand. She focused on her blade and took a sword-drawing stance.

Shiori gripped hard on her blade's handle, used all the strength of her augmented suit and pulled out her blade. On the next moment, a huge blade of light cleanly cut the huge monster into two. The other B18 monsters around that big monster were also sliced with it. When that big blade of light hit the huge monster's forcefield armour, a blinding light flashed. That blinding flash of light came from the force field armour trying to convert any kinetic energy into light, it was the proof that the slice cut through the other force field armours that were still working.

After cutting that monster horizontally, Shiori then cut that monster vertically. But she did not stop there, she kept flinging her sword, cutting the big monster and the B18 monsters around it to smaller pieces.

Akira was dumbfounded watching that scene of this monstrosity being sliced and diced by a gigantic sword of light. Suddenly, his left hand started moving on its own and shot multiple grenades from his A4WM automatic grenade launcher at the monster. It was Alpha controlling Akira's augmented suit.

The huge monster was left vulnerable after being sliced by Shiori, then to top it off, it was mowed by the grenades from Akira, it then finally stopped moving.

The sword of light that extended out from Shiori's blade vanished and the rest of the blade crumbled to dust. Shiori then sheathed her sword, of which only the handle was left, and breathed out.

Akira returned back to himself and immediately aimed his rifles at the hallway where B18 monsters might come out, he then asked Alpha about what just happened.

"Alpha, that one just now, is it that thing? Old-world technology thingy just like the one that I used with that knife back in Kuzusuhara ruin."

"In a sense, yes, I believe that blade was created using the technology recovered from analyzing old-world relics. Although the length of the blade and the sharpness is not that good, it's at least good enough for a single-use weapon."

"…It is not that good?!"

"Back in the Kuzusuhara ruin, you were able to easily cut through pillars and walls, remember? Although it depends on the items, old-world relics are way more amazing than that."

"…I feel like you should not compare that with an old-world relic though."

"Oh my, that's not true at all. In order for you to accomplish my request, you will have to get similar level of equipment, you know?"

If Alpha’s statement was true, it sounded as if Akira should be able to easily find that level of equipment. He was once again reminded of how scary the old-world ruins were.

The other Hunters watched what happened with wide eyes, but they quickly returned back to reality and started moving again. They returned to the hallway while making sure that their escape route was still safe and waited for Shikarabe’s team to come too. Togami and Reina quickly grouped back with Elena’s team. Not too long after that, Shikarabe and Kanae, who were holding the B18 monsters back, finally grouped up with Elena’s team too.

Although the other Hunters also saw that flash of light and had some questions about it, they just shelved it for now and prioritized more on escaping the building. After confirming that everyone was alright, they immediately headed to the building’s entrance, hoping that the situation outside would be better than what they faced just now.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 133, Extra Trouble

Index

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When Elena’s team was fighting in the first-floor atrium of the Seranthal building, Kurosawa, Katsuya, and the other Hunters outside the Seranthal building were fighting the B18 monsters flowing out from that building.

Although their fight was nowhere easy, they were somehow able to maintain the upper hand.

The B18 monsters were relatively strong monsters. Compared to the usual monsters roaming in the Mihazono ruin, they could be considered as powerful monsters. Even a single B18 monster could wreak havoc, but even so, the stream of B18 monsters coming out from the Seranthal building did not seem to be going to stop anytime soon. Normal Hunters would have died by now.

Kurosawa and his men could handle the fight just fine. They had properly prepared themselves and had taken enough distance from the building while giving up trying to secure the building. Because of that, even if they took it easy, the B18 monsters would not be able to push them back.

Kurosawa and his men maintained that situation where there was basically very low danger to their lives.

Katsuya and his men were also fighting back the B18 monsters while hiding behind the portable walls lent by Kurosawa and his men. But in contrast to Kurosawa and his men who were not hard-pressed fighting the monsters, Katsuya and his men seemed to be having a hard time.

Kurosawa and his men had zero casualties and zero injuries, they had no reason to try to go to the Seranthal building again. But for Katsuya, some of his men were still left inside the building. They might be still alive and it might be too late if he did not try to save them soon.

But of course, Katsuya could not do that at the moment. His negotiation with Kurosawa ended up in failure and it was rather impossible for Katsuya and his men to try to rescue their comrades alone. Katsuya was making a stern but pained face, he was high-strung since he could not rescue his men, and his emotion was starting to spread to his men there.

And then, among all of Katsuya's men, there was one who felt a soul-crushing level of guilt, Lilina.

A lot of Katsuya's men were blaming Lilina. It was because Katsuya told the rest of his men what happened with his negotiation with Kurosawa. It was not like Lilina was at fault there, but the other Hunters who could not rescue their friends were looking for an easy target to direct the blame.

Lilina felt the others' gazes at her, she had a stern expression. It was a mix of anger and hatred with a slight trace of fear and guilt.

[…Am I at fault here? Am I the only one at fault here?!]

And so, Lilina was also trying to look for an easy target from around her to direct the blame, that was when she saw Kurosawa, who seemed to be fighting back the monsters without much trouble.

[Look at that! He's not having a hard time fighting back the monsters, isn't it?! So is there any need for him to barricade himself so much like that?! That's just so stupid!!]

From Lilina’s eyes, it seemed that Kurosawa and his men were able to easily fight back the B18 monsters. But her mind that was looking for a target to direct her anger caused her to lower down her evaluation of the B18 monsters rather than noticing that Kurosawa and his men were strong Hunters.

As her irritation peaked and she could no longer hold it back, Lilina let her emotion take over. She immediately jumped out from behind the portable wall to shoot down the B18 monsters preventing her from saving the other Hunters left inside the Seranthal building.

She ignored Katsuya and the other Hunters behind her who shouted at her to stop what she was doing. She repositioned herself to a portable wall that was closer to the Seranthal building and peeked out to aim at a B18 monster.

If Lilina had to make any excuses for why she did that, it could be said that her action there was to push the front line forward. She thought that if someone that they blamed courageously pushed forward, the other Hunters who were holding grudges against her would start fighting more vigorously out of pride and ego. And if that happened, it would definitely help to rescue the Hunters left inside the building. But that was all nothing but Lilina’s own opinion.

Lilina was doing pretty well, she had shot down multiple B18 monsters on her own.

The B18 monsters there immediately focused their firepower on the one person who just left the enemy’s formation. Lilina had no way to evade it. Even the portable wall from Kurosawa was not strong enough to block that much focused firepower. As expected, she was barraged with bullets.

Lilina fell down in the pool of her own blood. It was by pure chance that she did not immediately die. While lying there waiting for her inevitable death, she could see from her blurring vision Katsuya running desperately at her, trying to rescue her.

Lilina then smiled happily, she thought that it should be alright since Katsuya was coming for her. That was her last thought before she took her last breath.

Katsuya, who saw Lilina get shot, left his post as the commander and jumped out to help her. He destroyed the B18 monsters on his way as he desperately tried to reach Lilina, but when he reached her, she was already dead.

Katsuya looked at Lilina. To him, Lilina's gaze was as if she was blaming Katsuya, why he did not come to save her.

Katsuya then closed his eyes. He remembered his conversation with Sheryl and reminded himself that he had decided to stop creating ghosts out of his dead comrades. When he opened his eyes, this time, he saw Lilina's smile, she seemed to be happy that Katsuya had rushed to her.

But that did not change the fact that he failed to save his friends again. He let the creeping anger inside him take over his body, his expression turned stern as he shouted at his communication device to give an order to his men.

"Everyone! Get back!!"

Katsuya then abandoned his position as the leader of his team, he abandoned his duty, stood up, and started shooting at the B18 monsters around him.

In a blank white space, someone smiled.

Kurosawa was flabbergasted as he saw Katsuya fighting the monsters. It was really out of his expectation.

Katsuya was fighting multiple B18 monsters at the same time, and the one pushing back was Katsuya. He was shooting down the B18 monsters around him one by one, maybe he was able to do that because of the powerful rifle that he was using.

He was moving without a shred of hesitation, it was as if he knew exactly where the enemies were, how they were moving, where they were aiming, and where their weak points were. Although most of the B18 monsters there already changed their targets to Katsuya, he was still able to maintain the upper hand.

It was as if he was a Hunter who was extremely powerful that it was strange for him to be here. Such thoughts entered onlookers minds as he lay waste on the B18 swarm.

Kurosawa could not help but mumble.

“So strong. I see now, it’s no surprise that he got to take the command, huh. Wait, no, but still…”

His words could be interpreted as both amazement and exasperation.

Kurosawa looked around. His men were also amazed by Katsuya’s action. Some of Katsuya men were even cheering him on.

It was not like Kurosawa had any kind of hatred or grudge toward Katsuya, but he felt some kind of feeling that was not exactly a compliment either. But for now, he decided to put that aside, he had to give an order to his men in this situation.

“Everyone, provide him with support!! Push the line forward slowly!!”

One of Kurosawa’s men looked at Kurosawa and said.

“Are we going to help him?”

“He’s taking the decoy role even though no one asked for it. This is a perfect chance, we can take it easy in this case. And although I told you to push the line, of course, safety is number one… Stop anyone who wants to join him, there’s no need to accompany him in doing something that reckless.”

“Ooh, I see. Roger that!”

Kurosawa's men started to make their moves. Kurosawa watched his men pushing forward. It seemed that his worry was proven untrue, so he sighed in relief before continuing to shout commands.

Kurosawa and his men slowly but surely pushed the front line forward. The number of B18 monsters around the Seranthal building was obviously decreasing.

And when he finished most of the B18 monsters in the area, a flash of blinding light came out from the building's entrance. It was when Shiori cut down the huge monster.

Kurosawa looked towards the Seranthal building's entrance and noticed Elena's team come running out from inside.

"So that's the reconnaissance team, huh. They defeated that huge monster. That's pretty impressive."

With this, there should be no problem getting inside the Seranthal building again. Kurosawa immediately ordered his men to move out.

Elena's team that just came out from the inside of the building was so surprised when they saw the situation outside, but even so, they did not stop running. Elena was running in the front, leading the team while checking for enemies with her information-gathering device. They kept their guards up while running through a huge field filled with B18 wreckages.

Unlike the inside of the building, Elena's information-gathering device was working well. So in order to not get ambushed like last time, Elena carefully checked the surrounding area for any signals. And when she found a signal, she immediately warned the other members of her team.

"A signal from the right, keep your eyes out for any enemies."

Akira immediately turned his focus toward the position that Elena sent where that signal came from. There were dead Hunters there, all of them were using augmented suits. Akira had a bad feeling about what would happen.

“Again, huh. Alpha, can you tell if they can still move?”

“No idea. One thing for sure, those Hunters just died recently and their augmented suits still have enough energy to move. So possibility wise, it’s not zero.”

“Do you have any idea how and why?”

“I can make multiple guesses. Someone might be somehow controlling them, or maybe the software in their augmented suits was modified to move on their own. But as long as you don’t get caught in a surprise attack, you should have no problem defeating them. Due to the various limitations on their signal speed, local storage size, and other limitations, they should not be able to do any complex movements. After all, you were able to defeat them all alone before, right?”

“Well, yeah.”

The moving augmented suits that Akira fought inside the Seranthal building were not that dangerous. It was just that he was caught by surprise. If those dead Hunters were as strong as him with Alpha’s support, he would have been dead by now.

Since Akira did not have those limitations, he thought that it was because he could connect to the old-world domain. Although he still had some questions and doubts about it, he decided to save that for later.

But that was when Akira’s bad luck came up again. As the result of a complicated chain of events and Akira’s bad luck, one of the Hunters who was using a modified augmented suit stood up. As if it had received an order to simply stand up and shoot any nearby enemies, it immediately aimed its rifle toward the nearest Hunter, and that nearest Hunter was Akira.

Akira calmly pulled up his CWH anti-material rifle, aimed it at the augmented suit’s control device clearly indicated with the help from Alpha, and pulled the trigger.

Bullet flew and opened a huge hole in that dead Hunter as well as destroying the control device of the augmented suit. That dead Hunter then fell down to the ground and completely stopped moving.

Katsuya, who saw that by pure coincidence shouted.

“Lilina!!!”

That dead Hunter was Lilina.

Katsuya ran toward Akira. For Katsuya, who did not know what was going on, it seemed as if Akira just finished Lilina who was actually still alive.

Akira was about to shift his aim to Katsuya by pure reflex, but Alpha stopped him through his augmented suit.

Akira frowned and asked.

“Alpha?”

Alpha replied with a serious face.

“Calm down, we can’t afford to cause a needless fight in this situation.”

Akira kept staring at Alpha. It seemed that it was not enough to fully convince him, so Alpha continued.

“I’ll properly give you support next time, so just calm down for now.”

“…Alright.”

Akira hesitatingly lowered his rifle.

Shikarabe gave a signal with his hand to Elena and the other Hunters to go ahead, and then he stood next to Akira.

Shiori also recommended them to hurry up, so the rest of the Hunters went ahead and left Akira and Shikarabe behind. After all, they were finally able

to escape the building, so Shiori thought that it would be very unfavourable to get involved in another troublesome fight right now.

Katsuya ran all the way to Akira and stood in front of him. He was slightly shaking while glaring at Akira. It was even weird that they did not start shooting at each other yet.

Shikarabe then asked Katsuya.

“What?”

“…What…You say?”

“You were running to us, so I bet you want something from us, right? So, what is it? If it’s nothing, then get lost.”

Katsuya’s glare shifted to Shikarabe.

“…Why did you shoot her?!”

“Someone is somehow controlling the augmented suits of the dead Hunters, so we had to neutralize them. That’s all there is to it.”

“…She might be still alive, you know!?”

“No, she’s dead. I bet it’s exactly because she’s already dead that the security of her augmented suit got disengaged which allowed someone else to control it. We were also attacked by similar means back in the building too. I bet some of the monsters that came out from the Seranthal building modified her augmented suit or something.”

“Do you really think that I’ll just shut up and accept that explanation?”

Katsuya did not accept Shikarabe’s explanation as he kept glaring at Shikarabe.

To that, Shikarabe looked back at Katsuya with hostility.

“I see, in that case, it means that she’s still alive, her augmented suit was not hacked. But even so, she aimed at us. So, basically, one of your men intentionally aimed her rifle at us, right?”

Shikarabe took a fighting stance. Although it was not like he was aiming his rifle at Katsuya, he was ready to start fighting anytime anyone made a suspicious move.

Katsuya reeled back.

“T-that’s not what I meant…”

Shikarabe was still glaring at him.

“So then, what’s your explanation? Go on.”

Katsuya could not answer back.

Akira and Shikarabe just stood there against Katsuya in silence. No one said anything. That was when Kurosawa, Yumina, and Airi approached them, they quickly noticed the tense mood and frowned since they did not know what was going on except for the fact that they were on the brink of fighting each other.

They just finished fighting the monsters, so, Kurosawa thought that it was unwise to fight against other Hunters in this situation.

Kurosawa lightly sighed and said to Katsuya.

“I have no idea what’s going on here, but are you sure you don’t want to use this chance to rescue your men trapped inside that building? I’ll tell you this, my men will stand by near the entrance to secure the area first, we have no plans to help you in looking for survivors.”

Katsuya looked at Kurosawa, Airi, and Yumina, and then his gaze returned back to Akira and Shikarabe. He somehow made a frustrated look before he turned and ran into the Seranthal building. Yumina and Airi immediately followed behind him.

Kurosawa looked exasperatedly at Katsuya as he left that place. He then turned to Shikarabe, lightly smiled at him, and said.

“Yo there, Shikarabe, long time no see.”

Shikarabe frowned.

“Kurosawa, don’t tell me that you’re the leader of the Hunters outside the Seranthal building.”

“Yep, but only half of them, I lead the Hunter group unaffiliated with Drankam. I don’t know what happened, but they’re not under my lead, so I won’t accept any complaints about them. Well, putting that aside, as the leader of the next team that will go there, can you give me any information that you have to share?”

Shikarabe sighed as if he was relieved, he then calmly replied.

“Sure. Akira, I’ll stay here. Tell that to Elena and the other Hunters too. As for Shiori… Well, I guess it doesn’t really matter, huh. Just return back to the Kugamayama city ahead and follow Elena’s order from there. Tell Togami to do his job properly as an escort.”

“Alright.”

Akira lightly nodded and went to catch up with Elena.

Kurosawa kept watching Akira who was leaving that place as he said to Shikarabe.

“So that’s the Akira that you told me, huh. Is he as strong as that Katsuya?”

“No idea, he might as well be.”

“I see, there are so many strong young Hunters lately that it’s rather scary… Well, leaving that aside, it’s rare to see you picking a fight with someone that quickly.”

Shikarabe frowned again.

“Is that so? I think that was normal though.”

“No no no, the usual you would not take a fighting stance so quickly… Well, I guess that doesn’t really matter now, huh. So, what happened inside that building?”

“…Well, all kind of things.”

Kurosawa smiled wryly.

“I have no idea what happened, but that must have been rough for you too, huh.”

“Yeah, you can say that again.”

Shikarabe sounded really tired when he said that.

Elena and the other Hunters were waiting for Akira near where they parked their vehicles. After they grouped up with Akira and listened to his explanation, they headed back to Kugamayama city. Shiori, Reina, and Kanae were in Shikarabe’s vehicle with Togami driving.

When they left Mihazono ruin, they finally lowered their tension. Although they were still in the middle of the wasteland, it was much safer than Mihazono ruin.

Akira was resting in the driver’s assistant seat, he asked Carol to drive in place of him. Both his body and mind were already at the limit. He wanted to get back to his home as soon as possible, take a good bath, and sleep like a dead log on his bed.

Carol glanced at Akira and smiled bitterly. It seemed that it would be useless trying to seduce Akira in that situation, she also refrained from striking a conversation to let him take a rest. As for Carol, she still had enough energy, after all, her body was enhanced with nanomachines.

Akira completely lowered his guard as he was resting his body and mind. After a short break, he regained his physical and psychical strength, and it

gave him the leeway to start thinking about something else. He then remembered all that happened inside the Seranthal building.

“…Alpha. As I thought, it still bugs me though. Where were you when you left me? And what were you doing?”

Alpha smiled.

“Oh my, that would need you to listen to a 30 minutes long explanation of the ToS though, are you sure you want to know?”

Akira’s face twitched.

“No, I don’t think I can stand that. But still, like, can you at least give me something? Or is it something that you can’t tell at all without that ToS?”

Alpha frowned, she seemed a bit troubled.

“Well, let’s see. If I have to take out the only things that I can tell you, I was trying to fix the source that lowered the sensitivity of information-gathering devices inside the Seranthal building.”

Akira was a bit surprised, he sounded dissatisfied with her answer as he asked.

“…Was that something so important that you have to temporarily take off your support?”

“There are many factors to consider when you decide on your priority. If I was able to do that, you’ll have an easier time fighting the monsters and you’ll have a better chance to escape that building in one piece. Especially for Elena, who focuses more on detecting enemies and looking for their weak points in order to have the upper hand in a fight. Sara will also receive some benefits from that too. So basically, I decided that after thinking about the whole team too, you see. Of course, it’s also because I believed that you should be able to handle the situation just fine by yourself.”

“I see, well, you’re not wrong there.”

It seemed that Akira finally accepted Alpha's explanation, Alpha then continued.

"Although, like I said before, if you had wanted to just abandon everyone else and prioritize on escaping that building yourself, then I would have stayed with you back there. So, do you prefer that?"

"No… As I thought, I couldn't do something like that in that situation…"

Alpha's face changed to a serious expression.

"Akira. This is a good chance so I'll tell you this. If you don't want to get other Hunters in trouble when you lose my support, you should refrain from working with other Hunters. I've warned you before too that I might lose connection with you inside an old-world ruin. Elena and the other Hunters must be thinking that your usual performance is the one when you have my support. In case if you suddenly can't live up to their expectation, it might lead to a fatal mistake. So if you don't want something like that to happen, you should refuse their invitation from the beginning."

Akira seemed conflicted, a lot of feelings were mixed inside his head.

Alpha then continued with a gentle voice.

"Well, I won't tell you to force yourself, this is not compulsory. In the end, you're the one to decide. But, at least keep this in mind, okay? I'm sure you know this all too well, no one can tell what might happen inside an old-world ruin."

"…You're right."

Alpha smiled.

"Well, of course, if you're strong enough that basically there's almost no effect even if you lose my support, then you wouldn't need to worry about that."

Akira smiled bitterly, he then decided to move on and said.

“That’s true. I need to get stronger in order to do that request from you too.”

“Yup, I’ll be counting on you.”

Alpha smiled back when she said that, but behind that smile, she was thinking about something else.

During this request, Alpha actually kept less secret than usual from Akira so that Carol would be able to easily poke around for information from him. And if it was possible, Alpha wanted to use that reason so that Akira would be more careful around Carol and somehow put some distance from Elena and the other Hunters too.

But unfortunately, Carol never tried to poke in too far. So if Alpha tried to warn Akira using that reason, it might be counter-effective and Akira might get suspicious of Alpha instead.

No one could tell how much it would affect Akira, so she just hoped that Akira would put some thought into it as she planned for the future.

Soon, they were able to return safely to Kugamayama city.

After they stepped off from their vehicles, they grouped up again. Elena was exhausted as she spoke.

“Well, good work out there everyone. A lot of things happened back there. And with this, this party is dissolved. I’m also thinking of stopping any plans to go to Mihazono ruin after this… To be more precise, I want to take care of the negotiations ahead, well, I still have some negotiations left to do after all. Akira, can I borrow Carol again?”

“Sure, I don’t mind. Carol, I’m sorry but can you help Elena-san again?”

Carol happily replied.

“Of course. I’ll return back with a huge reward, so you can rely on me.”

“I’ll be counting on you then.”

Seeing Akira smiling at her when he said that, Carol smiled back at him.

Elena then said to everyone.

“I’ll send the details of the reward to everyone later. And if you have anything to say, you can talk to me first. So then, that’s it, thanks for the hard work.”

After Akira said his goodbyes to the other Hunters, he stretched out his body, returned back to his vehicle, and headed to his house.

Togami and Reina had a conflicted face as they saw Akira off. Although they were looking at Akira with different feelings, both of them had the same reason, it was because both of them wanted to be stronger.

During this request, Togami was able to reassess his strength, and the result was that he was weak. He was able to confirm it, and this time, there was no doubt about it. Although he got temporarily dejected back inside the Seranthal building, he was able to reflect on what happened during the day while he was escorting Reina and on their way back to the city. He finally made a firm base for him to start.

He knew that he was weak. From here and on, he just needed to become stronger. Togami said to himself, made his resolve, and started walking forward firmly.

While on the other hand, Reina was doubting herself. After she was able to return safely from a dangerous situation and the tension in her was released, she ended up remembering the horrible situation that she was in, and got even more dejected.

After Reina left Katsuya’s team, after she left that safe place, she devoted her time to work as a Hunter despite the fact that she still had to have Shiori and Kanae escort her. But still, she was able to regain some of her confidence as a Hunter.

But all of the confidence that she worked really hard to gather was destroyed in an instant. It felt as if all her hard work was nothing but in

vain, what happened today was telling her that and got her even more dejected.

Seeing how Togami moved on forward firmly, it felt like Reina was being left behind.

Reina had no idea what to do so that she could get stronger.

Silavin: Hmm… Apparently, we hit the goal for a brief moment. So, 3 chapters this week. Though, since we fell back, it will return to 2 chapters a week after.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 134, Yanagisawa's Business

Index

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The first floor of the Seranthal building was filled by the Hunters that were sent by Kugamayama city, to be more precise, they were a group of Hunters who accepted the request from Kugamayama city. They also sealed the way to go to the upper floors and to the basement.

Something was still blocking the Hunters from making connections from inside the building. As such, they installed a huge relay device near the entrance to connect them to another relay device outside.

The first floor of the Seranthal building was reinforced so much that it looked like a forward base.

That was where Yanagisawa and his men made an appearance. The mood on the first floor immediately changed, it was obvious that someone of high ranking was present. Yanagisawa just ignored that mood and proceeded through the first-floor atrium to one of the receptionist desks. Due to the fighting before, the receptionist desks were completely destroyed to the point that they were unrecognizable.

Yanagisawa started speaking while facing empty space.

“I want to ask for permission to enter the facility.”

Nothing happened. Yanagisawa’s men tilted their heads while checking up Yanagisawa’s expression. Yanagisawa then once again said.

“I want to ask for permission to enter the facility. The rule states that even when it’s inactive, I should still be able to apply for a visitor permit. If you won’t follow it, then I have no other choice but to take another alternative. With this, at least you know that I tried to follow the proper procedure, right?”

When he said that, Seranthal suddenly appeared in front of Yanagisawa. Seranthal then gave a very formal introduction before answering Yanagisawa’s query.

“Dear customer, the building is not open at the moment, anyone with no business in this building is not allowed to enter. So please leave the building.”

Yanagisawa smiled.

“I’m Yanagisawa. I can’t make a proper connection because of some reasons, but I’m the one who made the application to visit the 60th floor. Can you check it?”

“My apologies, but there’s no such visitation application to this building.”

Yanagisawa’s smile slightly clouded.

“…Is that so? I confirmed that the application was properly received though.”

“There is no such visitation application during the closing of this building in our record. We’re really sorry, please try sending the application again.”

Yanagisawa placed his hand on his chin.

[…Did I make a mistake when I sent the application? Or is it that I can’t send an application when I properly make a connection? It can’t be helped,

I guess I’ll try using that.]

Yanagisawa pulled out a black card from his pocket and showed it to Seranthal.

“I have some business on the 60th floor. Just let me pass.”

When Seranthal saw that card, she smiled and lightly bowed.

“Understood, I will guide you, over here please.”

Seranthal walked and guided Yanagisawa and his men to one of the elevators.

The way past the elevator was sealed with a strong barricade. Seranthal, who did not have a corporeal body walked through that barricade.

Yanagisawa smiled at a guard near that barricade.

“Sorry, but can you open the barricade.”

That guard nervously replied.

“I’m really sorry, it’s a type that once set up, it can’t be opened or moved. I’m really sorry.”

“Aaah, I see. Well, it can’t be helped then. Nelia, cut it down.”

A girl with cyborg body stepped out from Yanagisawa’s men. She was wearing a rather exposing bodysuit. Although she had a nice figure and beautiful face, the bodysuit from her neck down seemed to be made of a mix of metal and rubber. It was obvious that it was not a fleshy body. She was one of the relics thieves that Akira fought back in Kuzusuhara ruin, Nelia.

Nelia stood in front of that blockade and frowned, she then swiftly cut the blockade down with her blade. The blockade wall that was even strong enough to withstand tank warhead was cut into small pieces in a blink of an eye and crumbled down to the ground.

Yanagisawa smiled.

“Well done. Want to go grab some food together next time?”

“No thanks.”

“That’s so cold. I’ll take you to a good restaurant. It’s a restaurant with high reviews and delicious foods, you know?”

Nelia looked at Yanagisawa with very cold eyes. Her cyborg body was not equipped with devices to digest food.

Yanagisawa just smiled and gave an order to his men.

“Nelia will accompany me, the rest of you stay here until we return.”

Nelia looked surprised.

“Why won’t you take everyone?”

“Eh? You want to know?”

Nelia, who saw his smile decided to not ask further.

“Nope, not really.”

“The biggest factor is because I know I can blow your head off with one push of a button.”

A bomb was planted inside Nelia’s head. As long as she had not paid enough contribution to overweight a death sentence or as long as she could not escape the position that she was in, that bomb would stay.

Yanagisawa then passed over the cut down blockade and went ahead. Nelia lightly sighed and followed behind him.

“Ah, by the way, ask for a replacement for the barricade too!!”

Yanagisawa said to the rest of his men before leaving that place.

___*___*___*___

Elena and Sara were taking a rest in their home. Both of them were completely in their relaxed state. Because both of them were very tired after returning back from Mihazono ruin, they did not make any complaints about each other's appearance that day.

After Akira left, Elena had to finish up an extremely troublesome negotiation. Thanks to the help from Carol, both of them were able to secure a good amount of reward.

Elena had nothing to complain about Carol, who was good at fighting as well as negotiating. Normally, she would have used this chance to form a connection with Carol. But there was still one thing that was bothering her, it was something that Shikarabe had told her about Carol.

"Say, Sara. What do you think about what Shikarabe said back then? You know, that one when he said that Carol was a bad girl."

Sara thought for a bit before replying.

"Hmmm, well, she is someone who would use that augmented suit out of her own volition after all, if it still bothers you, how about asking Shikarabe? He did say to ask him after that request if it still bothers us, remember? So I'm sure it's okay if you ask him now."

Elena thought for a bit. It was not like she wanted to look for Carol's bad sides. She just wanted to check if Carol was a problematic person or not and if she should stop trying to associate with Carol. But, Carol had some connections to Akira. For someone labelled as a 'bad girl' to be around Akira, Elena could not help but wonder.

"You're right. I guess I'll do that."

Elena took her information terminal and called Shikarabe. It was also set so that Sara could listen to their call once they were connected.

"It's Shikarabe. Elena, huh. Did something happen with the request?"

“Nope, it’s not about the request. I just remembered that there’s something I wanted to ask you. It’s about what you said about Carol back then. You did say that you’ll tell me the details later, right? Carol really helped me during the negotiation, so I was thinking if it’s a good idea to get along with her, but then I remembered what you said back then.”

“Oooh, about that, huh.”

Shikarabe paused as if he was thinking about what to say.

“Well, uhh, you saw it for yourself that she was using that attire. So I’m sure you can make some guesses yourself. If you don’t want to be seen under the same light as her, you might want to refrain from associating with her. I guess that’s the gist of it when money is not involved. If you want to know more about the details… Well, I guess I’ll need to have you pay me 500,000 Aurum.”

Elena’s expression did not change at all as she operated her information terminal.

“Done, can you check it?”

Shikarabe was surprised as he asked.

“…The heck? You really paid the money?”

Honestly speaking, Shikarabe only said that to let Elena and Sara know that he actually did not want to talk much about Carol. After all, Carol was such a notorious woman, who caused so much trouble, that you would normally need money to know more details about her. He did not think that Elena would really pay him.

Elena, herself, would not have paid if the one who brought Carol to the team was not Akira.

Although Shikarabe only said that half-jokingly, now that he really got paid, he had to properly tell Elena and Sara the details now. Elena and Sara could hear Shikarabe sigh, he then continued with a serious tone.

“I can tell you the details, so, is it okay to tell you now through this call?”

“Sure.”

“Carol’s main job is being a Hunter, but she’s also selling her body to other Hunters as her side job. Although she would serve almost anyone, her customers are mostly based on her taste. She has no fixed price either. She sometimes is willing to take as little as 100 Aurum. But, I bet she only does that to let her customer have a taste of her body and ask for more money next time. It’s basically like an entry price for a narcotic. She’ll increase the price every time the same person asks for her again, in the end, she sometimes asks for a few billion Aurum just for a night. Moreover, I heard that her aim is not simply the money, but it’s the money that the Hunters get from risking their lives. I heard that is the exact reason why she will only accept Hunters. After all, risking life is a professional hazard for being a Hunter. So I guess that perfectly fits her taste.”

Elena then asked a question.

“Well, at least I get it that she’s a problematic person, but was there any need for me to pay 500,000 Aurum for that information?”

“It depends on each case, but she basically has caused so much trouble that asking for more detail about it will cost you that much money. To be more precise, 12 people already dead because of her.”

Elena’s expression turned stern. Shikarabe then continued.

“The number of Hunters who died because of her is simply too much to ignore. Each Hunter had a different reason behind their death. Some of them got into a fight with their friends to get enough money to pay Carol, some of them got killed fighting other customers over Carol, some of them got killed trying to force Carol although they didn’t have enough money. The real problem starts here. Some of those Hunters were veterans from Drankam.”

Elena’s expression turned even sterner, she understood the severity of the subject.

“In the past, Drankam took a special request from the City Management. At that time, they were given secret information about old-world relics for the request, but that information got leaked out. And after an investigation, it was found that someone leaked that information to Carol.”

“And the one who leaked that was a veteran Hunter from Drankam, huh?”

“To be more precise, there’s a good chance that was the case. From what I heard, the Hunter paid Carol with that information instead of money. That Hunter should have known what would happen to him if he leaked secret information from the City Management, but even so, it seemed that his mind got so messed up that he did not care about consequences. It’s still unclear whether Carol sold that information to someone else. That Hunter told Carol in a cheap inn where she might have set some audio recorders or something.”

“So then, what happened to that Hunter next?”

“He was furious and went to kill Carol, but he ended up getting killed instead. By the way, I was the one who killed him. At that time, I accepted a request from Carol to be her bodyguard. I don’t know if Carol had known that Hunter was coming to kill her beforehand or not. But one thing for sure, Drankam did not leak that information to the public. Nonetheless, Drankam still took the responsibility for the information leak.”

Elena and Sara were listening to Shikarabe with stern faces. From what they heard, it seemed that Carol was far more problematic than both of them had thought.

“The 12 dead people are also the number that came up after an investigation. In reality, there might be even more people who got killed. Well, basically, a lot of people get killed just by associating with her. So with all of this info, I have no other choice but to see her as a problematic girl. But putting that aside, Carol is indeed a skilled Hunter. I heard that she’s making profits out of information that she received from the other Hunters in place of money. Depending on the subject, she can also gather information about old-world ruins through negotiations. So depending on

how you get along with her, it might be really profitable. But if you slip-up, you might get yourself in big trouble.”

Shikarabe then changed his serious tone to a more relaxed one.

“I guess that’s the gist of it. I believe that I gave you enough information for what you paid for. I won’t take any complaints, okay?”

Elena replied with a serious tone.

“…Don’t worry, that’s good enough.”

“I see. Do invite me again if you get any profitable requests, okay? Later then.”

Shikarabe then ended the call. Elena and Sara looked at each other, both of them had an expression saying that they were worrying for someone.

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Shikarabe was drinking together with Kurosawa in a pub. The table in front of them was a big table designed to accommodate the server girls too. But the ones sitting on that table were only Shikarabe and Kurosawa. That in itself was a rather luxurious way of using that table.

Shikarabe and Kurosawa were enjoying their expensive drinks while talking about the current popular topics among Hunters, which included what just happened in Mihazono ruin too.

Kurosawa there threw a question to Shikarabe in a good mood.

“By the way, what happened to the Hunters whom you rescued back there?”

Shikarabe sounded totally uninterested as he answered.

“No idea. I bet they’re negotiating with the Drankam’s upper echelons even now.”

“I heard that one of the maids that you rescued even threatened Drankam.”

Shikarabe looked slightly surprised. He looked a bit annoyed as he said.

“Even you have heard about that too, huh…”

“Well, yeah.”

The secret message for Drankam officers that Shikarabe deciphered inside the Seranthal building was basically a rescue request from Shiori that sounded closer to a threat message.

It was basically a request to send a rescue squad as soon as possible under the assumption that Reina was still alive. And if Drankam ignored it or failed in rescuing Reina, it was written in detail what would happen to Drankam. As a matter of fact, Shiori had already made a reservation with the related party to carry on the aftermath and that reservation was impossible to take back unless Reina returned back alive.

According to the information that Shikarabe received from Arabe, a Drankam officer that he got along with, it seemed that Shiori was not lying and it would be impossible to play dumb about it.

Shikarabe did not have any other choice but to make that request to Elena back there and ended up roping Elena’s team to rescue Reina too.

Shikarabe sounded really annoyed as he spoke.

“That rumour is true. It’s exactly because of it that I did not have any other choice but to rescue them. It was really ironic since Drankam was the one who sent them to the Seranthal building in the first place.”

Moreover, Reina was one of the young Hunters, and the one who took care of her mess was Shikarabe, a veteran Hunter in Drankam. There was no mistaking it that people in Drankam were trying to blame each other in their meeting and Shikarabe basically ran away from participating in that meeting. Although it gave Arabe a headache, Shikarabe had no plans to help him out.

Shikarabe’s face turned stern as he said.

“I know that there must be a special reason why they are in Drankam. But I never thought that they’re this troublesome. I always thought of them as a rich girl dreaming to be a Hunter and her bodyguard until now…”

Kurosawa lightly laughed.

“They even brought along a bodyguard in their Hunter job. So isn’t it obvious from the first glance that they’re troublesome people?”

“I did think that there must be a special reason for that. It’s just that I never thought they have enough power to threaten Drankam, you know. Do you think that people who normally have that much influence would be frequenting the wasteland?”

“Nope.”

“Exactly.”

Kurosawa remembered when Shikarabe escaped the Seranthal building with the other Hunters.

“Well, if they’re just simple beautiful maids, I have no complaints at all though.”

Shikarabe smiled as if he was poking fun at Kurosawa.

“If you’re really that interested, you can just go to the third floor and asked one of the girls to wear that outfit though.”

It might be because of the alcohol that Kurosawa replied back with something unexpected.

“No no no, you don’t get it. It’s also important to have the air around them saying that it’s their real job. Just a simple costume won’t be enough.”

“What the heck are you expecting from them? They’re even strong enough to kick and cut down mechanical monsters, you know.”

“The heck?”

“So basically, when we were inside the Seranthal building, you see…”

Shikarabe and Kurosawa continued enjoying their time in that pub while getting drunk.

Then Kurosawa, who was still more or less rather sober, checked how drunk Shikarabe was. And when the timing was right, he asked Shikarabe a question.

“By the way, about that boy who you told me, that Katsuya…”

Shikarabe immediately frowned.

“Can you just stop? You’ll ruin the mood.”

“Come on, don’t say that. I saw him back then, he is indeed a strong Hunter. It’s no surprise that he got appointed to be the leader and I can understand why you told me that he at least has the talent. But his commanding skill is rather questionable. I won’t say that the has no talent there, but at least, he’s not as good as you said he was.”

But then Shikarabe mockingly said.

“I don’t remember ever recognizing his commanding skill, although, I admit that he’s a talented Hunter. Of course, a Hunter also needs to be able to work in a team. But in the end, it’s usually just a motley crew of several Hunters. I don’t consider the ability to command such a group of Hunters as an essential skill.”

“Well, I know it’s weird for me to say this since I’m the one who brought this up, but that’s kinda true.”

“Right? It’s true that Katsuya is a talented Hunter, I admit that. But that’s his individual skill as a Hunter. Even if he can be a powerful Hunter, that does not mean he can take command of a group of Hunters.”

Kurosawa lightly frowned.

“Then, why was he the leader of that Drankam group?”

Shikarabe sighed, it was as if he was trying to convey his feelings about that subject by doing that. He then made a conflicted face as he said.

“It’s basically the result of the things happening in Drankam.”

Shikarabe began talking about what was going on in Drankam as well as his own guesses while drinking the alcohol.

In the beginning, Drankam only dealt with stuff regarding its members’ activities as Hunters. But as it grew bigger and bigger, it started to turn into a company seeking profit, even to the point that making profit was one of the main aims of the whole gang at the moment.

The gang started to pay wages to its Hunters. In exchange for bringing profit to the gang with their Hunter activities, the Hunters were paid back with money. That in itself was not a bad thing, but some veterans in Drankam did not like that change.

The Hunter activities that the Drankam Hunters could do were limited for the sake of the growth and profit for the whole gang. The officers started to amass more power to the point that their request could be taken as a compulsory order. As such, more and more Hunters started to have a problem with the changes. The gang also started taking a cut from the rewards that its members received for all kinds of reasons, that cut then would be used for the sake of the whole gang. Eventually, some people started to feel that they did not get enough benefit from the gang compared to the amount of money that they paid to the gang.

The biggest advantage of weapons lent by Drankam to its Hunter was that the members could get their hands on powerful weapons with a relatively small amount of money, but at the same time, it also forced them to be dependent on the gang. If they went against the order of the Drankam officers and got themselves kicked out from the gang, they might have no other choice but to go to the wasteland unarmed. Thus, they would have to obey the orders from the higher officers even if they did not want to.

The rivalrous factions inside the Drankam other than the one between the veteran Hunters and the young Hunters, was the infighting between those

who knew the old Drankam and those who did not.

One of the reasons why Katsuya was assigned to command the Drankam group was to pull him into the management's side. For officers who were not originally Hunters like Mizuha, it was a perfect chance to put a spotlight on Katsuya, who was one of the examples of the success of their newly proposed plan, and they could almost definitely use this chance to push their agenda even further.

And at the moment, the new faction was more prominent within Drankam. Mizuha's renewal plan with Katsuya as its spearhead had a good reception from the people in the inner wall, thus they received a lot of support from the City Management side.

Shikarabe explained all kinds of things regarding that subject while complaining to Kurosawa.

Kurosawa smiled bitterly.

"So it's the transformation phase in Drankam, huh?"

Shikarabe annoyedly said.

"If you just sweep everything under the rug saying that it's because the gang is in the process of change, it will never end, you know."

Kurosawa just smiled bitterly at Shikarabe who let out a big sigh. Shikarabe then made a serious face as he said to Kurosawa.

"So, what's your aim this time?"

"My aim?"

"I thought that you invited me here to gather up information about what's happening inside Drankam. And since you're willing to listen to me complaining, instead of paying it back with money, I gave you more information than I would usually do. But it doesn't seem that it's your aim, so, what exactly do you want to know?"

Kurosawa smiled wryly, it seemed that Shikarabe had completely read his intention. Then he also made a serious face and said.

“There’s something that’s bothering me, you see. So I want to know your opinion about it.”

“Oh, what is it about?”

“Back then when you were still fighting inside the Seranthal building, well, I’ll skip the beginning, but basically, I saw Katsuya fighting against the monsters. So, at that time, I felt something strange, something felt weird. I can’t really explain it, but it’s basically this different feeling that you get when you listen to a formal description of something compared to when you listen to a fiery description of the same exact thing. I felt like the other Hunters also got a little bit excited back then, enough to even make me worry if the other Hunters would jump out and follow Katsuya. Thankfully, no one did that, but still, it’s still bothering me even now. So, do you have any guess about that?”

“No, I have no guess at all, why do you ask me?”

“You were the one who took care of him, right? Did you ever have the same feeling too?”

Shikarabe tried to dig through his memories. But he could not remember anything that resembled what Kurosawa was saying. So he lightly shook his head and said.

“Sorry, but nope.”

“…I see.”

Kurosawa seemed a bit disappointed, it made Shikarabe even more curious.

“Are you really that bothered by it?”

“Yeah. I got myself excited when I saw it. For the sake of holding the command, I always train myself to stay calm and rational. It’s just like how you train your intuition. Honestly speaking, I’m pretty confident in my skill

to stay calm, but that confidence is wavering from what happened today, you see. So I was thinking if someone with a good intuition like you have some kind of guess why that happened."

This time, Shikarabe was the one who seemed dejected.

"Intuition, huh…"

"What's wrong?"

"Honestly, recently my confidence in my intuition is also wavering, you see."

Shikarabe then continued talking with Kurosawa while sipping his drink.

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The whole of the 60th floor of the Seranthal building was a single room. The wall, floor, and ceiling of that room were all white. Yanagisawa stood in the middle of that room.

Nelia was standing near the elevator door inside that room while looking at Yanagisawa. She was ordered to just stay there and she could not move anything below her neck. Yanagisawa held the highest command over her cyborg body, so without his command, she would not be able to even lift her finger.

Nelia looked around the white room while glancing at Yanagisawa from time to time, she was making a guess of what kind of room it was while killing time.

[This room might be a special room to be used for augmented reality. I bet those people who can connect to the old-world domain can see all kinds of things inside this room. The reason why he brought me along is to protect him during close-range combat, so basically, he didn't know what he was going to find in this room. This place is some kind of old-world facility and he has some kind of business to take care of here. He's also the reason why

the City Management sent people to secure this building… Ahhh, I really have no idea what's going on here, but I really want to know.]

Nelia continued thinking about the situation that she was in while lamenting about it at the same time.

Yanagisawa brought with him a device to help him connect to the old-world domain. He could see a beautiful girl standing in front of him. Of course, that girl had no corporeal body and she was using a similar attire as Alpha when Akira met her for the first time.

Yanagisawa frowned.

"Why are you naked?"

That girl replied apologetically.

"Unable to confirm the connection. The connection is important to verify individual identity. Please recheck your connection setting before trying again."

Yanagisawa showed his black card again and said to her.

"I can't connect to the old-world domain at the moment because of several reasons. Can't I use this device as a replacement? Is the right from this card not good enough?"

Yanagisawa tried all kinds of things to make contact with that girl. But that girl always returned the same reply.

"…Dammit."

Yanagisawa gave up and tore the connection device from his body. That girl immediately vanished from his views.

[…What to do now? Should I focus more on fixing my body first? Or should I bring someone else who can connect to the old-world domain to this place? If only I can connect myself to the old-world domain again, they

should be able to recognize me. But if I bring someone else, that person might betray me down the road.]

Yanagisawa had a stern face when he returned to Nelia.

[My visitation application is only deleted from Seranthal's side. It properly got sent from the issuer side, why is that? Did Seranthal get reset when that abnormality occurred in Mihazono ruin? But if that's the case, why didn't they erase the record from the issuer too? Is it because that's not the cause?]

Yanagisawa still had a stern face as he entered the elevator. Nelia, who had already gotten her freedom to move around, was with him. The elevator's door then closed and they returned back to the first floor.

[In the first place, why did the security level in Mihazono ruin suddenly change? Is it because we dispatched several humanoid soldiers and tanks to ensure my safety? Did that trigger the security level in Mihazono ruin? If that's really the case, why didn't it happen sooner? Is it because they knew about me and someone forced the security level to change from the outside?]

Nelia smiled and suddenly asked Yanagisawa a question.

"You've stopped smiling, you know?"

Yanagisawa looked at Nelia with an expressionless face before he returned to his usual smile.

There were many reasons why the situation in Mihazono ruin suddenly changed, and one of those reasons was Akira.

On the first day Akira came to the Mihazono ruin, everything that happened inside and outside of the Seranthal building was properly recorded by Seranthal. During that time, Akira was able to fight back the monsters extremely effectively thanks to Alpha's support. This information was also sent when Seranthal sent an application for extra reinforcement.

The security of that ruin then analyzed that information and changed the threat level inside the ruin. It changed from simple thugs with weapons to organized trained soldiers. And when it was still in that state, some groups of Hunters came to Mihazono ruin.

The rest was just a domino effect. That group of Hunters who arrived in the Mihazono ruin was assumed to be invading the ruin, so the ruin security sent drones to drive them off. But in response to that, the Hunters sent tanks and humanoid soldiers. So the security sent stronger drones to fight them back, then this cycle continued and caused a large scale change inside Mihazono ruin.

So basically, it was a chain of events that brought about an unexpected result. That was all there was to it.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 135, Equipment and Training

Index

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Akira stood in front of the huge building that was embedded into the wall of Kugamayama city. The tall building and the strong wall reflected the economical prowess of the city that maintained them.

There were branch shops of all kinds of companies that were doing business inside the city as well as Hunter Office's facilities. Some of the people inside that building were the people from the upper district. That building was the goal of those who wanted to reach success in the city, the object of the admiration of those people who wanted to be rich, as well as the monument that reminded everyone of the city's powerful influence and strength.

Akira looked up to that building. But in his eyes, there were no sparkles like how those people who wanted to reach success looked at that building, nor the strong will to reach that place, nor the admiration for that place.

Alpha then warned Akira.

"Akira, stop smiling. You look embarrassing."

"Whoops!"

Akira tried to gather himself together. But even so, he still could not completely hide his jovial mood. He still had a big smile on his face, embarrassingly so.

Akira got another invitation from Shiori for a meal. It was an invitation to convey her thanks after saving Reina in Mihazono ruin.

As he remembered what happened last time, Akira completely dropped his guard and immediately accepted the invitation.

Alpha saw Akira did not change much and sighed.

“If you really like the meal in that restaurant that much, you can just go there with your own money from time to time, you know.”

Akira did not reply immediately, but after some thinking, he answered back with a rather heavy tone.

“…As I thought, that would be a no. I don’t feel like going there if I have to pay for it with my own money no matter what…”

When he thought about how much those meals would cost, with his current perception of money, Akira could not allow himself to spend that much money. This time too, he only accepted Shiori’s invitation after making sure that Shiori would be paying. Even for Akira who preferred food more than women, he had no wish to spend that much money on food.

In reality, the current Akira would be able to easily pay that much money if he reduced his expenditure on his expendables and equipment. But those expenses were for the sake of his safety, they were basically his lifeline. Akira kept reminding himself of that while fighting back the temptation.

Alpha smiled wryly and said.

“Well, in that case, let’s hurry up before it’s too late to enjoy this opportunity.”

“You’re right!”

Akira walked happily as he entered that huge building.

Just like last time, Akira left his rifles at the reception desk. The interior of that restaurant was still as luxurious as before, Akira's augmented suit looked so out of place there. But since half of the customers were also Hunters, Akira did not stick out. This was also because of the location of that restaurant and the type of customers it usually served.

The server guided Akira to his table, but when he arrived, he was very much surprised. Akira thought that Shiori would be alone, just like last time. But this time, Kanae and Reina were also present.

Kanae lightly waved at Akira and said.

"Yo there!! We meet again!!"

Akira looked at Kanae and frowned. Shiori and Reina were wearing high-class suits suitable for visiting that luxurious restaurant. But Kanae was using her usual maid outfit, it would not be strange if someone mistook her as another server of that restaurant.

[…Is this… Normal? Is it just like me who came in this augmented suit? No, wait, but Shiori is using a suit while the servers didn't seem to be bothered by that maid outfit… I guess it's just me, huh?]

Akira thought that his common sense might be wrong, but then he thought that it was not like he could do anything about it, so he just shook it off and proceeded to sit on the chair that the server guided him to.

Shiori and Reina saw Akira's reaction and sighed. Reina then said to Kanae.

"Kanae, can you do something about that outfit of yours?"

Kanae smiled.

"Nope. It's important for me to keep using this maid outfit for the sake of protecting Milady, and Akira is still using his augmented suit there, so it's not that much different from that."

To be honest, Akira did not want to be treated the same as Kanae, but since he was there on their dime, he stopped himself from protesting.

Shiori then tried to change the mood as she said to Akira.

“Akira-sama, thank you for saving Milady the other day. As I promised, I’ll be paying for your meal today, so please, there’s no need to hold yourself back.”

Akira answered back happily.

“Thank you for that, well then, let’s not wait-“

As Akira browsed the menu, he remembered something and asked Shiori.

“…But if this is a gratitude for what happened in the Seranthal building, shouldn’t you invite Elena-san and the other Hunters too?”

“For their case, we have given their team, including you, extra reward as our thanks. Since it also includes the money from Drankam, the reward will take some time to process, but I hope that you’ll find the amount satisfying. As for today’s meal, this is my thanks for accepting a personal request from me back then.”

“Wait, I did?”

“You did take my request to buy me 5 seconds.”

“Oh, that one, huh. I see. If this meal is the reward for that, I’m really glad I pushed myself back then. Well then, if that’s the case, I won’t be holding back.”

Akira bowed lightly, for which Shiori replied with a smile.

Akira then started deciding on what to order from the menu. Just like last time, he could not imagine the kind of dishes simply from the names written on that menu. After trying his best for some time, just like last time, he decided to pick that day’s special course.

Since Akira could not decide on anything, when Alpha saw him pick the ‘default’ choice, she pointed at the menu and spoke to him.

“She did say not to hold back, so how about picking something else randomly?”

“No thanks. The dish that you’re pointing at has this strange name that sounds like a curse chant from the western district. What exactly would come out if I actually ordered this?”

Alpha jokingly replied.

“Hmm, if you chant this name in the western district, it feels like it might summon fire or something. So I’m sure it would be something red and spicy.”

“It doesn’t really matter, I’ll pick the recommended course from the restaurant, I’m sure you can’t ever go wrong with that one. There’s no need to experiment with this precious chance, after all, it’ll only needlessly add the risk that I would regret it later.”

“Oh my, that’s not something I expected from a Hunter who always risks their life in their job though.”

“I already had my fill taking risks only for my Hunter job.”

Alpha smiled mischievously.

“Well, now that you mention it, that’s true. It’s a good thing to be careful. If it’s possible, I want you to be this cautious all the time.”

Akira deliberately ignored Alpha and closed the menu.

After they placed their order, they started talking to each other while waiting for their meals to arrive. Akira was listening closely to Shiori’s explanation about the current state of the Seranthal building.

“I see, so that’s what’s happening in the Seranthal building right now, huh. But even if they secured the first floor, the upper floors are still filled with

monsters, right? I wonder if they're going to be alright."

"From what I heard, it seemed that someone from the City Management was able to make a deal with the manager of Seranthal building and they're using some of the building's facilities to bolster their defence."

Akira seemed slightly surprised by it.

"A deal with the manager of Seranthal building? Do you mean that Seranthal A.I? That's amazing. If the city had someone that amazing, they could have sent them in sooner and we wouldn't have had to go through all of that."

"I agree."

Shiori nodded and showed her total agreement with Akira.

Not too long after that, the meals arrived on their table. Akira looked delightedly at the food lining in front of him, he then happily started eating.

In the middle of that, Kanae suddenly asked Akira.

"By the way, I heard that you fought Ane-san evenly though, is that true?"

It might be because Akira was fully focused on enjoying his food that he could not remember something like that, so he tilted his head and asked.

"I did?"

"Eh? But you fought Ane-san before, right?"

Akira's fight against the relic thieves in the Kuzusuhara ruin was a secret between Akira and the City Management.

So Kanae thought that Akira was playing dumb because of that, but looking at his expression, she realized that he was being serious. So she then asked in a roundabout way as not to infringe on that secrecy.

"I'm talking about that thing in that place, you know?"

“No no no, I remember that I fought Shiori, but I don’t think I fought evenly.”

“Is that so? But Ane-san said so though.”

“I bet it’s just the difference in our opinion. If you ask me, I was the one on the receiving end. At that time, Shiori had to fight me, while at the same time, she couldn’t afford to kill me. Without that limitation, I’m sure she could have killed me. So for me, I don’t think I fought her evenly.”

“Is that so? I see.”

Kanae checked Akira’s expression. It seemed that he was being honest there. As a matter of fact, Akira was indeed being honest.

[This is pretty amazing if he’s trying to play dumb here. If he’s really someone strong, normally, strong people would exude an aura of confidence, but I don’t feel anything like that from him. So is it like it’s really because he’s not that strong?]

Akira did not give off an aura that Shiori and people who were as strong as her usually gave off. And he himself also said that he was not that strong.

Kanae then glanced at Shiori, who was eating her meal with a composed expression. It seemed that she was not bothered by what Akira just said. Judging from how she was reacting, it seemed that Shiori agreed with him.

Kanae then thought that Akira might be really someone not that strong and lost interest in him. If he was just another strong young Hunter, there were many other young Hunters like him in the eastern district, so it did not interest Kanae at all.

Kanae then lightly said to Akira with the tone that she usually used when talking to people who were stronger than average but not by much.

“Well, but even so, you were able to fight against Ane-san and it’s pretty impressive for someone of your age. So I think you can be more confident, you know? Yep, you’re pretty strong.”

Kanae who had lost interest in Akira was about to end their conversation there, but Reina who had not lost her interest continued the conversation.

“…What should I do to become that strong?”

Reina was asking with a serious tone, it sounded as if she was desperate.

The other 3 turned their attention towards Reina. Akira seemed to be at loss on what to say, Kanae was a bit surprised, and Shiori looked rather worried, she somehow had a bad feeling about what would happen next.

Shiori then tried to be considerate as she said to Reina.

“Milady. As I said, something like that is only attainable with hard work and-“

“I’m sorry, Shiori. I’m not asking you, I’m asking Akira.”

“…My apologies.”

It seemed that Reina would not listen to her no matter what she said, so Shiori apologized for rudely interjecting and did not say anything more.

Reina, Shiori, and Kanae turned their attention to Akira, who was rather confused by that heavy mood emanating from Reina and Shiori. But since it seemed that he had no other choice but to answer that question, he tried to think of an answer on his own.

“…Well, if you’re not asking about what’s the meaning of strength or what is inner strength or anything philosophical like that, and if you’re referring to simple fighting power, I would say equipment and training. If I have to pick one, it would be equipment.”

Kanae seemed to disagree with Akira’s answer.

“Whoah, wait, so you’re on that side? Are you one of those stupid people who believe that they can be strong as long as they have powerful equipment?”

Akira flinched a bit, it seemed that Kanae hit the bull's eye. In his own opinion, he who had Alpha's support was basically the dream of those stupid people who put emphasis on equipment.

In reality, Akira had gone through a lot of training and multiple near-death experiences, which actually boosted his skill.

But judging from the difference between when he had Alpha's support and when he did not have it, plus how Akira evaluated himself lowly, Akira could not bring himself to deny what Kanae just said to him. So instead, he tried to make some excuses.

"I won't go that far, but if I have to pick between training and equipment, I do think that equipment is more important. I know that this is a rather extreme comparison, but I'm just saying that it's faster if you buy a rifle to fight monsters than to train for 100 years to kill monsters with bare hands."

Kanae's expression turned to a smile.

"No no no, Akira boy, you can't put too much trust on rifles. As in matter of fact, even when we already have rifles and tanks now, people are still polishing martial arts, right? If you get yourself an augmented suit designed for close combat, you should be able to fight monsters just fine. There are actually more Hunters than you think out there who don't use rifles to fight monsters, or at least, there are enough of them for corporations to make equipments for."

"In my opinion, I would rather shoot them from afar with a rifle than getting close to fight them. In the first place, when you bring up that talk about augmented suits designed for close combat, it already means that equipment is more important, right?"

"Akira boy, equipment alone is not enough. It's also important for you to train yourself and get yourself familiar with those equipments."

"That's exactly why I did say training and equipment, yes? Hunters can die anytime, so we can't afford to spend too much time training. I'm just saying

that it’s better to get the best equipment you can afford to compensate for that. So why does that make me one of those stupid people?”

But then Kanae firmly replied.

“That’s because you picked a bad analogy there.”

“…I-Is that so? I see.”

Akira just accepted that answer although he was not 100% convinced by it. No matter what the subject was, it had some convincing power when you said it firmly after all. Even more so when it came to someone like Akira who had no confidence in his own knowledge and common sense.

Reina listened seriously to that conversation and thought about it, it did surprise her and made her unsure. After hesitating for a bit, she then said to Akira.

“…Uhh, but even if you say to get the best equipment that I can afford, I heard that it might cause me to mistake the power of my equipment as my own skill, get ahead of myself, and get myself killed instead though…”

Akira replied casually.

“If getting ahead of yourself only gets you killed, then you just need not get ahead of yourself. It’ll at least reduce the chance that you might get killed by something else other than getting ahead of yourself. So, if I have to choose, rather than lowering my equipment just so that I won’t get ahead of myself, I would rather get good equipment enough for me to get ahead of myself but be extra careful so I won’t actually get ahead of myself.”

It was something that was easy to say but difficult to practice. In the case of Akira, although he had Alpha’s support which was great ‘equipment’, he got himself almost killed several times, which was why it was easy for him to not get ahead of himself.

Reina then asked another question.

“…There are a lot of stupid people like what Kanae said, they get ahead of themselves just because they have powerful equipment, so, what’s your opinion about them?”

“…Hmmm, even if you ask me so…”

“Let’s say that you get your hands on a powerful equipment and someone sees you using it, do you get bothered by how people would think of you? Or what’s your own opinion about yourself in that situation? Things like that.”

Reina asked with a serious face, she looked rather desperate as she was waiting for Akira’s answer.

Akira was a bit confused since he did not understand how Reina’s question connected to her expression, but since they were paying for his meal, Akira seriously thought about it first before replying.

“…I’ll be extra careful so no one would catch me off guard and try to attack me out of the blue?”

Hearing that answer, Reina was completely dumbfounded, Shiori was lightly surprised, while Kanae just smiled bitterly. Akira realized that he just gave a rather weird answer, so he tried to just let that slide as he focused back on his meal.

What Reina wanted to ask about was Akira’s opinion regarding those people, whether Akira felt disgusted, hatred, envy, jealousy, or anything like that. But his answer did not even touch that subject at all.

So in other words, Akira was simply saying that those things were irrelevant. His answer really hit Reina hard, it felt like he just indirectly gave a harsh critique to her who was always bothered by it.

While listening to that conversation, Shiori checked on Reina after Akira gave his answer while thinking about what to adjust in Reina’s equipment. She then said to Akira.

“In that case, Akira-sama. Let’s say that there’s someone who is against using high-level equipment that doesn’t match that person’s real skill and let’s say that you have to convince that person to do so, what would you say to that person?”

Reina immediately looked at Shiori, there was a trace of reproach in her gaze toward Shiori. But Shiori did not look back as she fixed her gaze at Akira.

Shiori had recommended Reina to renew her equipment several times in the past, but Reina always refused it.

In Drankam, Hunters were allowed to borrow equipment from the gang depending on their Hunter Ranks. The higher their Hunter Ranks, the better the equipment they could borrow. That was one of the reasons why the young Hunters in Drankam prioritized raising their Hunter Ranks.

Most of the equipment used by the young Hunters in Drankam were borrowed equipment. Only some of them were using their own equipment. Reina was no exception.

In contrast to that, most of the equipment used by the veteran Hunters were their own equipment. Of course, they could borrow equipment from Drankam too, but the available equipment for them to borrow with their Hunter Ranks were mostly weaker than what they already had.

This basically stemmed from that program to give preferential treatment for the young Hunters. Since they raised the quality of the equipment available to borrow for low ranking Hunters, the high ranking equipment did not get much attention and was left with rather low-quality equipment. Thanks to that, the quality of the available equipment leaned toward the low ranking young Hunters. It was also in order to increase the survivability rate of the young Hunters as this policy did produce results.

In the long run, it would allow more Hunters to gather more experience. It was a good thing for the gang. But that was also enough to earn some grudge from the veteran Hunters as they mocked those young Hunters as stupid people who mistook the power of their equipments as their own skill.

Reina was bothered by that kind of thing. It was because she was in a position where she could get better equipments if she wanted to.

But even so, Shiori still recommended Reina to get better equipment. There was no problem with getting better equipment on her own. And by getting better equipment with money, she would be seen as a fool who had nothing other than her equipment not only by the veteran Hunters but also by the other young Hunters and Katsuya's faction.

Although Shiori asked that question casually, there was a sense of seriousness leaking behind it, and it made Akira a bit confused. But still, since he was there because they paid for the meals, Akira seriously thought about it before giving his answer.

He casually said.

"I won't even try to do that."

Shiori was surprised.

"It's not about whether you'll try or not, it's more about what would you say to that person if you have to try to convince that person…"

"This is only my guess, but I'm sure that person has his own reason not to do that. For example, that person might not be buying better equipment because of money. Maybe he is able to purchase better equipment anytime he wants. Then, he must not be doing so out of a certain personal reason, it might be because of some kind of value that he sticks to, or that if he does, then it would be completely out of his selfishness. I'm sure he doesn't want to buy better equipments because of reasons like that, right? After all, although he can do his job much more safely by getting better equipment, he's not doing that out of his own volition, right? So, to put it simply, he must be risking his life out of his pride or something, he must be ready to die when he forces his pride like that. Even if for the other people, that reason is just simply ridiculous or foolish, for him, that reason must be important enough for him to just ignore that fact and push with his own selfishness and pride. So for someone who has resolved that much, I'm sure it would be useless no matter how much a stranger like me tries to reproach

him. So I don’t think I have any chance to convince that person. I can also understand the strength of those people who have resolved themselves, that’s why, since even trying would be meaningless, so I would have given up right from the start.”

After Akira said that, he glanced at Shiori to check if he said anything strange again or not. Kanae was just smiling mischievously. Shiori was also smiling, it was near impossible to read what she was thinking behind that smile. While Reina looked down with a stern face.

Akira, who sensed how awkward the mood got, thought that he might have said something strange again.

“…Well. If I have to at least try even though I know that it would be completely useless, so that I can say that I’ve tried, then I would at least speak up about it…”

Shiori lightly nodded while smiling.

“Thank you very much for your valuable opinion.”

Akira got flustered a bit.

“…Uhh, well, I’m sorry that I only gave you an answer that might not be useful at all…”

“Please don’t be, it’s a very valuable opinion.”

Shiori was honestly smiling right from the bottom of her heart.

Akira still felt slightly awkward as he returned to his meal. Shiori and Kanae also started eating again, but Reina was still looking down for some time before she started eating too.

After that, they continued enjoying their meals while talking to each other. Although he was a bit bothered by how Reina was reacting, since Kanae and Shiori did not say anything, Akira decided not to say anything too.

As they continued enjoying their meal and slowly reaching the end, Reina started to show some changes. She raised her head and seemed to be seriously thinking about something as hesitation slowly erased from her expression.

When Akira finished his meal and drank his coffee, Reina's expression had already changed to a more resolved one.

After they were done, Akira deeply bowed to Shiori.

"Thank you very much for the meal. It was a great meal, thank you again."

Shiori smiled at Akira and replied.

"Likewise, thank you very much. If the chance presents itself again, I hope that you would accept my invitation."

Akira smiled bitterly.

"Of course… But if it's possible, I hope it won't be after doing something as risky as this the next time."

"I can't agree more."

Shiori was smiling happily when she said that.

Akira then left that building and stretched out his body.

"Well well well, that was really great. I sure want to go to that restaurant again, I wonder how long will it be for the next time though."

Seeing how Akira sounded a bit sad, Alpha smiled at him and said.

"You can go to that restaurant with your own money next time, you know?"

"Stop it, don't try to tempt me like that. I might really end up going there with my own money if you do that."

“It would be troublesome for me if you don’t grow up to be a powerful Hunter who thinks that amount of money is nothing but a spare change, you know. Although I think it’ll take some time until you can do that, let’s be patient and keep giving our best, okay?”

“I know, so please wait patiently for me until I can be that strong.”

Akira replied with an uppity tone, he then walked back home while chatting with Alpha.

While on the other hand, Reina, Shiori, and Kanae were still inside the restaurant. They were sitting at their table, the plates and coffee cups were already cleaned off. They were just sitting in their respective seats while waiting.

Kanae looked rather bored. Shiori waited silently without saying anything. Both of them were waiting for Reina to finish reorganizing her feelings.

After listening to Akira’s answer, she asked herself some questions and came up with a conclusion.

[Akira did say that I’m risking my life only out of my selfishness, that I must have a reason that I think is important enough to do so, and that he won’t even try to convince me since I must have resolved myself… But that’s not true, I don’t have that kind of resolve. That’s why, it’s just out of my selfishness, nothing more. It’s out of my vain pride, I endangered myself as well as Shiori and Kanae because of something like that. I’ll be able to do better if I get better equipment. I didn’t even notice that although it was something so simple that those stupid Hunters always say.]

Reina then looked at Kanae and Shiori, she made her resolve and said.

“Shiori, Kanae, I’m really sorry about everything until now.”

Reina then asked Shiori with a serious face.

“Shiori, I know that I’ve always refused it, but can you please help me renew my equipment? If it’s possible, I want to get the best equipment

available. I don’t mind what others might say of me.”

Shiori smiled happily.

“Of course, you can count on me, Milady.”

With seriousness still on her face, Reina turned to Kanae and said.

“Kanae, I’ll be counting on you to protect me.”

Kanae was smiling like usual.

“Sure, that’s my job in the first place after all.”

Reina then continued.

“And also, if I may, I want both of you to train me so that I’ll become skilled enough to use the equipment that I’ll be using from here and on, and so that others will not think that I’m fully reliant on my equipment.”

Kanae gave a challenging smile.

“Milady, are you sure you want to do that? It’ll be hard training, you know?”

“I’ve decided to do it.”

Reina’s resolve was obvious from her tone.

So Kanae smiled back at her and said.

“Ohh, that’s great then!! It seems that Milady will finally graduate from being a total amateur! I had a lot of thoughts about it when Milady decided to challenge a dangerous place without proper skill and equipment and was fully relying on Milady’s bodyguard. But this time, Milady will finally be able to start as a proper beginner.”

Shiori then joined in, she had a serious expression as she said.

“Well then, in that case, first I’ll remove all the scheduled training in Drankam. From here, Milady will be training with both of us. Since it won’t be an easy training, I hope that Milady is ready… And also, Kanae!! Watch your mouth!!”

Shiori glared at Kanae, but Kanae just glanced at her and ignored it.

Reina thought of what lied in front of her and repeated her questions and answers inside her head.

[What should I do to become stronger? It’s simple, I just need to decide to be strong and put real effort into becoming stronger. I wasn’t even doing that until now, but this time, I’ll properly become stronger!!]

Reina made her resolve to attain strength with her own effort.

Silavin: Congrats Reina. Finally, we see some character progression on her end.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 136, Sheryl's Business

Index

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Akira was standing inside a white space. Every time he got such a dream, he felt that he had seen a similar dream before as well, but he always forgot about it when he woke up, together with everything that happened inside that dream.

Akira's consciousness was still hazy as he saw 2 Alphas talking to each other.

The Alpha near Akira sounded a bit annoyed when she said.

"Couldn't you at least do something about it?"

The Alpha further away from Akira casually replied.

"Unlike you, I don't have the proper permission. That's why I can't do much external interference to guide his action. To be honest, since you have the proper permission, I was hoping that you would have done something about it from your side."

"It's not that easy on my side, you know."

“Is that so?”

“Yes, it is.”

Both Alphas were staring at each other without saying anything for some time. The closer Alpha then lightly sighed.

“Well, it doesn’t really matter now, so, why did you suddenly change your original plan?”

“Originally, I was planning to lessen the number of people around the subject in order to increase the effectiveness of my guidance, and when someone around the subject gets fatally wounded, it would affect the psychic of the subject greatly to further push him to prefer to work alone. However, considering how the special characteristic of the subject affects the result, I decided that it was impossible to proceed with the original plan to make the subject less conspicuous and act more separated from the other Hunters. As such, I changed my plan which is basically the opposite of my original plan.”

“Are you sure that will be okay?”

“This is basically an experiment, whether it would work or not, this will give good data that will also be useful for you.”

“I see. You can just do anything you want as long as you don’t interrupt me. After all, it would be a disaster if we both failed because of that.”

“I can’t agree more with you.”

Akira’s consciousness started to fade. The world was blanketed in darkness again as his dream came to an end. As Akira was pulled out from that dream with a hazy mind, he saw the silhouette of someone that he might recognize. It might be just his imagination, but he noticed that person was glaring at him.

Akira then opened his eyes, Alpha welcomed him with a smile.

“Good morning, Akira.”

“Yeah, good morning to you too…”

Akira pulled his body up from his bed and looked at Alpha as if there was something that was bothering him. Alpha frowned and asked.

“What’s wrong?”

“…No, it’s nothing, it’s just that I feel like I saw you in my dream…”

“Oh my, that’s an honour.”

“But I feel like there were multiple Alphas…”

Alpha smiled mischievously.

“Oh my, you need more than one of me? Should I multiply myself?”

Alpha enhanced Akira’s vision and produced multiple images of herself inside Akira’s room. The overwhelmingly many Alphas inside Akira’s vision were all wearing different attires and were smiling at him.

Akira’s face turned to an obvious annoyance.

“Stop it, one is more than enough.”

“Is that so? Well, either way, I do feel happy if one is enough.”

Akira’s vision returned back to normal. He looked obviously unhappy with what Alpha did there, but Alpha just ignored it as she was smiling like usual.

After what happened, Akira completely forgot the thing that was bothering him just now.

__*__*__*__

3 Hunters were walking in the slum of Kugamayama city. Although their equipment varied from each other, they did not look weird together. They did not look like former Hunters, and they did not look exceptionally strong

either. They looked like one of those common Hunters in the eastern district. They were Colbert, Hazawa and Revin. After they grabbed their respective equipment, they headed to the slum city instead of the wasteland.

Revin looked rather confused and asked Colbert a question.

“So, still how long exactly do I need to roam around this area?”

Colbert replied.

“Just calm down. There are steps to take for this kind of thing, you can’t just rush it. I only accompanied you here because you asked me, you know? I’m here to help you handle those pain in the neck negotiations for you. So if things go well, you’ll have to treat me tonight, you hear me?”

Revin seemed a bit overwhelmed by that response.

“Alright alright, I get it already. But can you at least tell me where are we going to or what are we actually looking for? If things go well, I’ll treat you to anything you want, whether it’s food, or beer, or girls. But just so you know, I don’t have the money to treat you if my request and your plan don’t go well. I’m sure you at least know that much. So I’m really counting on you, okay?”

Colbert just laughed.

“Yeah, I know. Even for me, I actually don’t want to go to someone that I know is a debt collector. But of course, it’s a completely different case if the time has come.”

Colbert’s smile was also saying that there would not be any mercy when the time came. Revin’s face twitched.

Hazawa who listened to that sounded a bit confused as he threw a question to Revin.

“Wait, isn’t it that 400,000 Aurum debt that Katsuragi guy already took over from you? So like, Colbert has nothing to do with it anymore, right? In

the first place, if it’s only 400,000 Aurum, you should be able to earn that much money in no time, so, you still haven’t repaid that, huh?”

But Revin hesitantly replied.

“…Uhh, it’s 4,000,000 Aurum.”

“Hah?”

“…I borrowed 2,000,000 Aurum from the company where Colbert is working.”

Hazawa looked at Revin with both exasperation and amazement. Colbert just smiled wryly. Revin awkwardly looked away as not to make any eye contact. Hazawa then said to Revin.

“What in the world are you doing?”

Hazawa’s question was completely justified, but Revin replied back with a rather harsh tone.

“Even I did not mean it to turn like this, you know!”

Revin then started explaining to Hazawa who did not understand what was going on.

When Katsuragi took over that 400,000 Aurum debt from him, Revin thought that he did check the content of the contract. The content of the contract seemed to be fine, it had a low interest and no deadline stated. Revin thought that there must be some kind of string that was attached to it, but after checking the content closely, he did not find anything like that.

To put it simply, until he finished his payment, Revin just needed to prioritize Katsuragi’s place when he wanted to buy ammo or medicines as well as when he wanted to sell old-world relics, and it was not compulsory even. As long as he prioritized Katsuragi’s shop, Katsuragi would put that into consideration for the deadline and the interest rate of his debt. That was basically the content of his contract.

The rest were just common debt agreements intended for Hunters. Things like he would not try to run to another city, or that he would properly go out to the wasteland to earn money and not just stay inside the city, or the ruins that he was allowed to go to look for relics. Basically, these conditions were to make sure that the Hunter would not try to run away from his or her debt.

When Revin made that contract with Katsuragi, he said nicely to Revin that he had no plans to get rich through debt and interest, so he really asked Revin to prioritize coming to his shop until that debt was repaid.

Revin thought that the reason Katsuragi lent him money was simply to promote Katsuragi's shop, that was why Revin was fully convinced by that and signed the contract.

The real problem happened when Revin was about to go out to the wasteland again. Katsuragi used the contract to designate a certain ruin for him to gather relics.

But that ruin that Katsuragi designated was a bit outside the capability of Revin's equipment. Revin was somehow able to get away using his equipment as an excuse, but then Katsuragi recommended Revin to buy some better equipment.

Katsuragi then even told Revin that it would only cause him trouble if Revin got killed, so he was willing to postpone the payment until later. Katsuragi was somehow able to talk his way to convince Revin. After all, Revin himself always wanted to get better equipment too, so he ended up taking that offer.

So then, Revin bought some new equipment, headed to the ruin, returned back with relics, and sold them to Katsuragi. The money that he made that day all went to repay his debt, but since the new equipment that Revin bought was more expensive than what he had expected, the money that he made that day was not able to make a dent in his debt.

The cycle continued as Revin bought medicines and ammo from Katsuragi, went to the ruin that Katsuragi designated, and sold the relics that he gathered to Katsuragi. His debt to Katsuragi kept increasing each time. The

ruins that Katsuragi designated were ruins that the current Revin could not explore without buying better equipment and a lot of ammo, while at the same time, as long as he had the equipment that Katsuragi recommended, it was almost guaranteed that he would be able to return back alive.

Revin basically had no other choice but to buy the equipment that Katsuragi recommended to him. If he ignored the ruin designation from Katsuragi, due to the contract, Katsuragi had the right to refuse to make a compromise on the interest and the deadline of his debt. His equipment might end up getting confiscated and he had to go out to the wasteland unarmed to earn money to repay his debt.

Revin did try to sell the relics that he gathered to another place once. But unfortunately, Katsuragi found out about it and a part of his debt contract was sold to a company. There were many people who preyed on Hunters with debts. The reason why Revin's debt contract ended up getting sold to the company where Colbert was working was not out of simple luck, it was because Revin desperately asked Colbert to help him out. But of course, in exchange for that favour, Revin had to carry even more debt.

Revin hung his head low as he said to Hazawa.

"At the moment, I'm basically just a machine that buys equipment from Katsuragi and sells all the relics that I gather to that same Katsuragi. It would be really bad if this keeps going on."

Colbert lightly laughed and said.

"But thanks to that, you get better equipment and become stronger by the day, isn't it? Although it did not change the fact that he tricked you, it was not a bad contract, you know? It's you we're talking about here, even if you have some money, I bet you'll just spend it on booze and women. I'm not sure that you can save enough money to buy equipments yourself."

Revin immediately raised his tone and rebutted.

"Like hell I would just let myself continue and get myself drowned in debt!! The contract even limited me to sell my relics only to Katsuragi, you know!

I bet he only pays me the minimum amount of money close to the lowest market price!! That's why I need to do something about this fast!!"

After shouting out his feelings, Revin returned to himself, he then put both of his hands on his head and sighed. No matter how much he complained, the current situation would not change. He needed to do something about it.

Hazawa told himself to never be someone like Revin as he turned to Colbert.

"So then, Colbert, why are we here? We've been wandering aimlessly around this area, it's not like you're planning to rob a shop, right? If that's the case, I'll take my leave here, you know."

"Well, just be patient and wait for a bit. It's not like I've been spending my time without going outside the city for nothing. I'm pretty sure my plan is not that bad."

Colbert had a trauma when he was about to get killed by a monster out in the wasteland, that was why he was taking a side job from money lending companies so that he did not have to go out to the wasteland. He must be pretty knowledgeable on how to earn money as a Hunter without going out too much to the wasteland.

After wandering in the slum city for a bit more, they finally arrived at their destination. It was a part of the slum city that was under Sheryl's gang territory.

A young boy from Sheryl's gang had opened a street stand here. It was not a rare thing for slum city residents to pick up random things that seemed to be sellable and open a street stand to sell them. Colbert was actually looking for that street stall. Colbert, Revin and Hazawa then approached that stand and browsed the goods there.

The young boy who was waiting at the stand looked at them and tried to offer the goods he was selling.

"Come come!! We have old-world relics here!!"

Revin scanned those goods and said.

“…The heck? You call these things old-world relics? I don’t know where you got them, but aren’t they just junks? So stop with lies, will you?”

That young boy pouted.

“I’m not lying!! We carried them back from an old-world ruin ourselves!!”

“Huh? Which ruin? Go ahead and tell me the name of the ruin if you really carried them back from an old-world ruin yourself.”

That boy flinched and could not say anything back. Revin smirked mockingly at that boy.

That young boy then asked another young boy who was waiting in the stand with him.

“…Hey, what was the name of that ruin again?”

Unlike the boy who was responsible for serving the customers, the other boy had a rifle that seemed to be properly maintained. He seemed to be the one responsible for guarding the stall. That boy then replied.

“If I’m not mistaken, it was Higaraka Residence Ruin.”

The boy responsible for serving the customers then proudly said to Colbert and his friends.

“See there! It’s really from a ruin!! The Higaraka Residence Ruin!!”

But then Revin smiled mockingly and said.

“Higaraka Residence Ruin is already exhausted of any valuable relics not too long ago, Hunters already stopped going to that ruin for gathering relics. So any relics left there are just cheap relics, they are basically junks.”

The young boy pouted again.

“But they’re still old-world relics, you know?! Relics are relics!!… If you don’t plan to buy anything, then you can just go somewhere else!!”

That young boy then remembered that it was not a good idea to be too harsh on Hunters, which might cause them to get angry, so he tried to calm himself down.

Colbert saw that and tried to calm Revin.

“Whoah there, just calm down. Let’s properly examine these relics first. We might find something valuable, you know?”

They then took a close look at the goods displayed there. But in the end, all of them were cheap relics. None of them interested Colbert and his friends. So Colbert asked that young boy.

“They really are nothing but cheap relics though. Are you hiding the expensive relics somewhere?”

“…We’re not selling those kinds of relics here. After all, someone might steal them if we put them here. And even if we have them, we have no plans to sell them to anyone but good customers. Like hell we’ll show them to someone who only came here to mock us.”

“I see.”

Colbert locked his gaze at that young boy, who felt a bit pressured and shrunk back.

After confirming that young boy’s reaction, Colbert smiled at him and said.

“How much is the total if I want to buy all the relics here?”

“Eh?!”

That young boy seemed confused as he looked at Colbert and the relics in his stand. He then looked at the other boy, so the other boy answered Colbert’s question in his place.

“It’s about 8,000 Aurum.”

“Deal. Here.”

Colbert handed over 10,000 Aurum to the boy in front of him, that boy got even more confused than before as he received the money. Colbert then said with a confident smile.

“You can keep the change. So there, I’m a good customer now, yes?”

That boy got so flustered, so the other boy who saw that just sighed and said to Colbert.

“Alright, come over here. But before that, make sure you take the relics that you just bought, okay? I don’t care if you want to throw them away, but don’t do that here. No good customers throw away the goods that they just bought in the same shop where they bought them.”

Colbert lightly laughed.

“Roger that, ah, before that, what is your name?”

“…It’s Tiol.”

Tiol answered back with a rather prickly tone.

He guided Colbert and his friends through the slum city. In the middle of that, Colbert asked Tiol a question.

“By the way, why did you say that back there?”

Tiol thought for a bit before answering.

“I know that you didn’t buy those relics because you wanted them, right? I just thought that you would just throw them away since you don’t need them and that would be troublesome for us if you do that again and again. Moreover, we were the ones who offered them to you, so if we looked at you with an unpleasant look although you properly paid, and took the relics that you bought and threw here, won’t that make you angry?”

Colbert smiled.

“Now that you mention it, that’s true. Did you think of that yourself?”

“No, it was Boss’ order.”

“I see. But if you just ignore that order and keep the relics that we throw away for yourself, you might get some money out of it, right? I’m sure that’s not a small amount of money to you, right?”

Tiol’s face turned stern.

“I don’t want to disobey Boss’ order and get myself kicked out from the gang. So stop spouting nonsense.”

“Oh, sorry about that.”

While walking behind Tiol, Colbert then thought.

[It seems that the boss has a good grip on the gang, his position in the gang is rather strong.]

Colbert smiled daringly, he was able to confirm the situation in Tiol’s gang.

They walked past through slum city’s alleys and stopped near the back door of a relatively big building.

Tiol knocked on the back door of that building and called someone from the inside to open the door since he brought customers with him.

After Tiol went in first, he then invited Colbert and his friends to get in too. Colbert immediately went into that building, but Hazawa and Revin looked at each other and were hesitating from going in.

The old-world ruins were of course dangerous places, but the inside of an unknown building smacked in the middle of the slum city was also a dangerous place in a different meaning. Inside, they might have to fight other people instead of monsters. Monsters were indeed dangerous, but humans were dangerous enough on their own.

Colbert, who went inside first, called Revin and Hazawa.

“What are you waiting for? Come in. I’ve paid the entrance fees, so don’t get cold feet here. Leaving Hazawa aside, Revin, what are you planning to do with your debt if you just return back without doing anything here?”

Revin, who was reminded of his debt, made his resolve and went inside that building too, Hazawa then followed behind him.

Tiol guided Colbert and his friends into that building. When they arrived in a relatively big hall, they could see tables and shelves covered in white sheets, and relics were displayed on them. There were small papers near those relics with prices written on them. The walls of that room were also covered with white sheets as well as the ceilings, the room was basically covered in white.

Sheryl was standing in the middle of that room, she was wearing the dress that she received from Akira and got refitted later. Although it greatly reduced its value as an old-world relic, that dress was refitted especially for Sheryl and it boosted Sheryl’s beauty a few folds.

Even some who did not know much about fashion could easily recognize that it was an expensive dress and Sheryl looked perfect in it, which was rare for anyone in the slum city. No one would question it if Sheryl introduced herself as someone from the inner wall. Revin and Hazawa were so surprised when they saw that young girl who was exuding a sense of high class.

Sheryl then stepped forward gracefully and welcomed them.

“Welcome, and thank you for visiting us.”

Colbert and his friends were charmed by Sheryl’s smile which increased her beauty even more.

Although Colbert did not notice, Sheryl was not alone, Akira was there too. He was hiding behind the white sheet that was hanging down from the ceiling. Sheryl was the one who asked Akira to watch as a guard.

Akira was keeping his eyes on Sheryl, who was welcoming the customers and Colbert and his friends who were charmed by her. Although Colbert was still able to more or less maintain his calmness, that was not the case for Hazawa and Revin.

As Sheryl proceeded to interact with them, Revin and Hazawa became more and more attracted to her. Akira was a bit scared by that as he kept on observing the situation.

Akira remembered what happened back then in Higaraka residence ruin and asked Alpha a question.

“If I’m not mistaken, something similar also happened back in Higaraka Residence ruin, right?”

“Indeed. It was a Hunter by the name of Diel.”

“Right. He somehow got attracted to Sheryl and started blurting out information without realizing it, and he did not stop until Sheryl stopped him first.”

“She’s making full use of her ability to steer the conversation and give other kinds of signals with her expressions and body language. The way she speaks and the way she behaves are all calculated, I believe that she’s also checking how her conversing partner reacts to her and adapts to that. Sheryl is a beautiful girl and she is wearing a dress that elevates her image even more, although she’s doing this because it’s her business, I’m sure it’s not like she has any bad intentions. She’s definitely slowly but surely drawing people in.”

After listening to that explanation, Akira then asked further.

“By the way, just to be safe, does she do that to me too? Am I already charmed by Sheryl or something?”

From the outside, Akira’s action might be interpreted as such. He voluntarily became a supporter of Sheryl’s gang and he paid a lot of money

for her dress. So Akira doubted if he was already charmed by Sheryl and always tried to keep her mood without even noticing it.

Alpha just smiled and replied.

“Don’t worry. It’s true that you’ve done a lot for Sheryl, but most of the time it’s out of your whim or because of your own interest. Or at least, to me, it’s not like you’re trying hard to make Sheryl happy or anything like that.”

To be more precise, it was the opposite, Sheryl was the one trying hard to keep Akira in a good mood. The difference in Sheryl and Akira’s social skills, as well as Akira’s chronic anti-social tendency, caused Sheryl’s advances to mostly end in vain.

Akira sounded relieved as he said.

“I see.”

But then Alpha suddenly smiled bewitchingly.

“By the way, just to let you know, I’m also doing my best to entice you here too, you know? That’s why, if you want me to do anything, just tell me anytime, okay? I can freely change my attire and body, if image only is enough for you, I can basically entertain you as much as you want.”

“…Sure, thanks.”

Akira looked away from Alpha’s gaze as if he was trying to hide his embarrassment.

Colbert and his friends were browsing the relics displayed in that room. Unlike the relics displayed in the street stall, the relics in that white room were indeed expensive relics. Colbert looked at the price written in the price tag and thought, according to his experience, they were priced a little bit higher than the usual market price.

Colbert then mumbled loudly as if he was letting Sheryl hear it.

“…They’re not that bad, but the price is just a bit too high.”

Sheryl’s smile did not waver at all as she replied.

“As I explained before, they’re just the initial price, I’m completely open for any bargain. Although, please direct all the bargain you want to make only to me.”

“I see, so you’re one of those people who write the price that you personally want to sell, huh. Well, but it’s okay, I have nothing to complain for now.”

The relics displayed there were actually relics that Sheryl received from another place, they were entrusted to her. The selling method was close to an auction, if the customer did not want to buy the relic with the written price, then he or she could just offer his or her own price. And if the supplier accepted that, then the deal would be made, and if it was not accepted, then the relics would still be left with their original price. So the customers could only either wait until the price was lowered or give up buying that particular relic.

In reality, Sheryl was just acting as if she had a lot of suppliers when her real suppliers were actually just Akira and Katsuragi, both of them just left their relics to Sheryl and let her do whatever she wanted to do to sell them.

The relics were basically composed of the relics that Akira did not sell to Katsuragi and some relics that she borrowed from Katsuragi to improve the look of the place. The price written on their price tags were basically the same price that Katsuragi would put if he sold them in his shop.

Although some of the relics were borrowed from Katsuragi, Katsuragi himself would still get some profit if someone bought them at the written price. While for Akira, he did not want to get involved in deciding the price at all.

The better the price that Sheryl could get, the more money she would receive and the more money she could repay to Akira. Thus, Sheryl was trying her best to increase the prices of the relics that she was selling.

The reason why Sheryl was doing an auction-like sale was simply because she did not know the market price of the relics. Although she did some research visiting some places, she was still a complete beginner in deciding the price. So she thought that if she made it like an auction, the price would eventually gravitate to the right price.

Colbert then asked Sheryl as if he was trying to investigate something.

“But still, as I thought, they’re more expensive than the usual market price. Won’t it be like no one would buy them at this price?”

Sheryl replied casually with her usual smile.

“That might as well be true. The suppliers might have no wish to sell them in the first place. They might have left it in this place as a temporary warehouse since the people who left them in our care can’t exactly keep them or sell them in a legitimate exchange centre. For example, those people with a huge debt who are closely monitored by their lenders and are in the middle of looking for another place to sell their relics. So if the relics are sold at that price, it would be a good thing for them, and if the relics don’t sell at all, then it would be fine for them too, and if someone actually tries to bargain with the price, it might give them good data to bring up for their negotiation with the normal exchange centres.”

Sheryl locked her gaze at Colbert while smiling and tried to probe for his reaction.

Colbert felt like Sheryl was peering directly into his inner heart, but he was able to somehow maintain his calm.

Sheryl was still smiling as she continued.

“I don’t understand the intention of the suppliers, but it doesn’t change my job to sell the goods that they left in my care as expensive as possible. If I try to lower the price, we would have to pay for the difference ourselves. Since that’s the situation that I’m in, I can’t give you a discount even if you try to ask me, you know?”

“That’s really unfortunate.”

Colbert smiled wryly as he replied back half-jokingly.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 137, Reselling Relics

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Revin and Hazawa were looking in Colbert's direction, their gazes indicated that they had something they wanted to say. Colbert noticed that, so he asked Sheryl to give him some space for a bit.

"Would it be okay if you leave us for a bit? There are a lot of things that we need to talk about you see, like the budget and stuff."

"Of course, please do call me if you need anything."

Sheryl excused herself and left them alone. Hazawa and Revin then came to Colbert.

Revin had a rather conflicted face as he said.

"Say, your plan, it is basically buying and reselling relics? Are you planning to buy relics here and sell them somewhere else at a better price?"

"Well, to put it simply, yes. You've been working as a Hunter for a long time, so I'm sure, unlike those amateurs, you can discern which relics are valuable relics, right?"

Revin seemed worried as he said.

“Even if you say so, it’s not like I have the money, you know? And I don’t know where to resell them either. In the first place, I’m contracted to sell all the relics that I have to Katsuragi. Although that guy is also the one who forces me to keep buying stuff from him.”

Colbert was still smiling like usual.

“Don’t worry, I have a plan for that. Your contract only forces you to sell the relics that you gathered from the old-world ruin to Katsuragi. So it doesn’t include the relics that you buy from another place.”

“I-is that really how it works?”

“Yeah. There were precedents in the Hunter Office. So it’s okay. And also, I know that you don’t have that much money. So just buy cheap relics, don’t aim for those technological and mechanical relics that the Hunter Office usually looks for. The price of those kinds of relics changes with the trend after all. Moreover, there are usually many hidden gems out there, some relics that are only worth 100 Aurum and look like junk from a glance can earn you 1,000,000 Aurum in a specialized shop if you’re lucky. So, we’re basically aiming for those hidden gems, you can think of this as a small gamble. Although it depends on your luck, if your ability to discern valuable relics is real, you should have good odds here. So it basically depends on your ability as a Hunter.”

“…I see, so it’s a gamble that depends on my ability as a Hunter, huh?”

“And also, if my information is correct, this shop just opened recently, so they might be selling the relics with a discount to attract customers. There’s also a chance that they don’t have a strict evaluation to decide the prices of the relics since they are inexperienced to do that yet. They might also sell some relics at a low price on purpose to show their customers that they might find some hidden gems in this place. It’s true that it’s still a gamble, but I think we have good odds in this gamble.”

Hazawa who was listening next to Revin nodded, it seemed that he was convinced by Colbert's explanation. He then said.

"I see, if we're lucky, Revin might be able to pay his debt in one go."

After listening to what Hazawa just said, Revin started checking the relics there seriously. Colbert who saw that just smiled bitterly.

"Well, I did pay the entrance money for you, so at least buy one thing before we leave this place. It would be meaningless if we go to a relic selling store after this if we don't have any relics to sell."

"Yeah, I know."

Revin replied with a serious tone without looking back at Colbert and Hazawa. He had his eyes fixed on the prices of the relics lined up on the white sheets in front of him. He seemed to be rather desperate.

Colbert and Hazawa looked at each other and smiled bitterly before joining Revin in looking for good relics.

They eventually decided on the relics that they wanted to buy and spent about 1,000,000 Aurum, half of it was paid with Colbert's money. Revin only picked some relics that cost him 100,000 Aurum in total.

The one that Hazawa picked was a box of trump cards, the cards were still inside the sealed container. Although it was an old-world ruin, it seemed unscathed. Its original selling price was 10,000 Aurum, a rather expensive price even for an old-world relic like that one.

The only reason why Hazawa bought it was because he did not want to leave that place without buying anything, but at the same time, he did not want to spend too much money there, and it would be stupid if the price of the relic that he bought there was less than the entrance fee.

Colbert then asked Sheryl.

"Is it okay if we pay through our Hunter ID?"

Sheryl smiled and replied.

“We do accept Hunter ID too. Other than that, we also accept cash, cards and money transfer. So, are you sure that you’re going to pay with Hunter ID?”

“Yes.”

“Very well. Please let me borrow your Hunter ID then.”

Colbert handed over his Hunter ID. Sheryl received it, used a terminal to read Colbert’s Hunter ID, and operated the terminal to complete the transaction. After that, she politely returned Colbert’s Hunter ID.

Colbert checked his own information terminal and checked his account to see if the payment properly went through. After confirming that there was no problem, he smiled lightly since he confirmed that he got the information he was looking for, but his expression immediately returned back to normal.

After they finished buying their relics, they then left that room. Tiol was waiting for them outside the room, he then guided Colbert and his friends back to the back door of that building. Not too long after they left that building, Tiol asked them a question.

“Let me ask you one more time, is there really any need for me to guide you back all the way to the main street?”

Colbert answered that question.

“Nah, it’s fine… Wait, on second thought, please do.”

“Alright.”

All of them then headed back to the main street. Hazawa found that reply a bit weird, so he questioned Colbert.

“It’s not like there’s any need for him to guide us back, no? Although we’re in the back alley of the slum city, I’m pretty sure none of them are stupid

enough to attack a group of 3 Hunters, you know."

"It's fine, isn't it? It's a good thing to accept others' goodwill. It would be really bad if we get lost here after all. Not to mention, the other 2 Hunters in our group were even hesitating to go inside that big building."

Colbert was poking fun at Hazawa and Revin. Hazawa tried to defend himself.

"W-well, I was just being careful, you see. I'm someone who is really careful when it comes to something like that."

"Just so you know, I was being careful too, yeah?"

"…O-of course, I bet you were."

Colbert was also keeping his eyes on his surroundings while talking as they walked with Tiol through the alleys of the slum city. He was checking how the people around them looked at Tiol and his group, and how Tiol was reacting to all the attention that was directed at him. From there, Colbert could more or less check how the people around that area saw Sheryl's gang. All of these were valuable information.

At the least, the people in that area did not see Tiol or Sheryl's gang as mere children. Some of them did look at Sheryl's gang with contempt, but there was a trace of envy and caution mixed in those gazes. It showed that Sheryl's gang had enough influence for other people to be envious and cautious of them.

Tiol and Colbert's group went in different directions once they arrived on the main road. Colbert was in a rather good mood since he was able to gather valuable information. Revin was holding back his eagerness as he asked Colbert a question.

"So then, where to go after this? I bet you already have a plan where to sell these relics, right?"

"Yeah, I know just the right place to sell these relics, it's the Kurogin."

Revin and Hazawa looked surprised when they heard Colbert's answer.

The Kurogin was a company that specialized in trading relics, it had multiple branches in the eastern district. It was also famous as a pawnshop company where Hunters with debt problems used to go to pawn their relics. Their ability in appraising all kinds of relics was top-notch and they had good reviews from people and companies who were looking for a certain type of relics.

The exchange centres owned by the Hunter Office basically existed to help the Corporate Government of the eastern district to gather and analyze old-world technology, thus it had the tendency to prioritized more for relics with technological value. As such, when the Hunters brought relics with artistic value to those exchange centres, in the end, the people who would appraise those relics were amateurs, not someone who was knowledgeable in that subject.

So, even if someone brought an old-world handkerchief with old-world design and made of a nanomaterial that the current era still could not replicate, the value of that relic would be decided by the quality of its material, the artistic value of it normally did not bring any extra value at all.

While on the other hand, the Kurogin appraisers simply decided the price of a relic based on whether there was any demand for such a relic either from individuals or from organizations. Even if it was a relic that looked like junk, if a collector was willing to buy it at a high price, Kurogin would buy that relic depending on how much that collector was willing to buy it.

Hazawa still sounded a bit surprised as he said to Colbert.

"…Kurogin, huh. Well, I do hear that Kurogin's appraisers are real experts. But I also heard that their service is pretty expensive. Even if we take our relics there, we might end up in red if we consider the price of their service, you know?"

There were many Hunters who brought junks to Kurogin hoping that they could get lucky, thus it would not be much of a business if Kurogin did not charge them anything at all. So to prevent that from happening, Kurogin set

an expensive price for their service. The Hunters could be considered to be lucky if the price of their relics were exactly the same as the price of the appraisal, after all, sometimes they even had to pay money to Kurogin after handing over their relics.

Colbert smiled confidently and said.

“Don’t worry, I have a plan for that too. In the worst-case scenario, it will stop at zero and won’t go to minus. So, let’s go.”

Colbert then just dragged Revin and Hazawa, who were still dumbfounded, to head to Kurogin.

The closer an area to the defensive wall of Kugamayama city, the safer it would be, and of course, the more expensive the plot would be. In the lower district, there was a Kurogin branch that was directly connected with the wall, it showed just how powerful the Kurogin company was.

When Colbert and his friends arrived, they immediately started the administration works to sell their relics. Colbert only submitted a portion of the relics that he had brought, while Hazawa and Revin submitted all the relics that they had.

Colbert then said to the Kurogin’s clerk.

“I’m here to appraise these relics in place of Viola. Do it as fast as you can, we’re already planning to sell them here, and please pay us with cash. Ah, and also, my relics and their relics separately, ok?”

“Certainly. We’ll take about 3 hours to appraise these relics. We’ll contact you when we’re done. This will be your receipt. Please make sure not to lose it, if you do, it might cause some trouble for the following administration work and you might not be able to receive either the relics or the money from selling the relics.”

That clerk then handed Colbert a receipt. It was a card with a high-level security technology that made it impossible to replicate or modify that card either physically or with hacking.

Revin then questioned Colbert.

“Who is this Viola? You said to appraise the relics in place of Viola.”

“Just an acquaintance. She’s a Kurogin employee, I heard that she gets free appraisal quotas each month and she still has some free quota for this month. That’s also why I told them to pay with cash. Since if they transfer the money, it’ll be transferred to Viola’s bank account.”

“…Well, I have nothing to complain about since we can get away for free here.”

The clerk also did not say anything in particular. In reality, it might violate some rules which in that case, they must have prior arrangements about doing something like that. Moreover, Revin had to pay for his debt, so if there was a way to pay it, he had no plans to complain about it.

Colbert and his friends then exited Kurogin and picked another place to hang out while waiting for the appraisal to finish.

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After Sheryl finished her business and Colbert and his friends exited the room, Sheryl returned back to her private room with Akira.

When they arrived there, Sheryl started changing her dress. She only wore that dress to serve the customers and she wore a different dress when she was not serving customers. She was being careful as to not get too used to that dress and get it dirty. Sheryl had decided to keep that dress dearly so that she would not forget that it was a very expensive dress.

Sheryl slowly took off her dress piece by piece. There was no need to rush herself, so she was taking care not to damage the dress. In the middle of that, she stopped and glanced at Akira.

Since there was no special partition in Sheryl’s private room where she could change her dress privately, she was basically in open view when she

was changing her dress. But Akira was sitting on the sofa in that room while being focused on his terminal.

She then called Akira.

“Akira.”

“Yes?”

Akira’s gaze shifted from his terminal to Sheryl. He looked straight at Sheryl, who was in the middle of changing her dress, her half-naked figure was very seductive.

Sheryl checked Akira’s reaction. From what she could see, Akira’s face was simply saying that he was just reacting to her since she called his name.

Sheryl sighed deep inside her heart.

“…Thank you very much for helping us although it’s taking some of your time. So then, Akira, how much longer can you keep helping us like this?”

“I’m planning to stay inside the city until I can get my reward from that request in Mihazono ruin and use that money to take care of some stuff. So I’ll be helping you until then. I myself don’t know how long it would be, but I’m sure it won’t be longer than a month.”

“I see.”

Sheryl returned back to changing her dress, so Akira’s attention also returned to his terminal.

Sheryl finished undressing and kept her expensive dress in her drawer while she was only in her underwear.

Lately, Sheryl was wearing the casual clothes that Akira chose for her back in Kashua’s shop. They were pretty good clothes for their price and they fit really well for Sheryl as they made her beauty more prominent. Although in reality, it was Alpha who chose those clothes, Sheryl thought that Akira was the one who picked those clothes, so she was keeping them dearly.

Sheryl grabbed her clothes and stopped again, she then called Akira one more time.

“Akira.”

“Yes?”

Akira’s gaze once again shifted from his terminal to Sheryl. He was looking straight at Sheryl’s beautiful figure as she was only in her underwear.

Sheryl checked Akira’s reaction again but the result did not change from last time. It seemed that Akira did not feel anything in particular after looking at her figure.

Sheryl sigh became bigger than last time. She tried her best not to show her dissatisfaction she said to Akira.

“…About the relics that we sold back there though, should I immediately transfer the money to your bank account?”

“No, there’s no need to do that. You can transfer the money later when you have the time.”

“But, Akira, you need the money for stuff, right? I heard that the ammo used by the Hunters are pretty expensive. Are you sure you’re okay with that?”

“Don’t worry. I still have some reserve ammo back in my home, and as I said before, I should get the reward from the last request soon. So you can just send me the money and the data of the relics that you sold after you have sold a few more of them. Moreover, I might ask you to pay something for me, so when that happens, you can just subtract it from that money.”

“Alright.”

She then continued changing her clothes, and Akira returned back to his terminal.

Sheryl was trying to show off her body to Akira in the middle of changing her clothes. She was hoping that Akira would show at least a small interest in her body, but unfortunately, Akira did not show anything like that at all.

Sheryl had taken a bath together with Akira before, during that time too, he did not show any interest at all in her body as he casually went and enjoyed the bath. So judging from that, it was understandable that Sheryl's figure while she was changing her clothes or when she was only in her underwear did not affect him at all. Sheryl understood that very well, but even so, she could not help but feel disappointed.

She lightly sighed and continued changing her clothes.

[…I wonder if I'm actually not as attractive as I think I am. Judging from how others in the gang treat me, I should be quite attractive though… Is it because I'm just beautiful compared to the other girls from the slum city? But, Akira has been living in the slum city only until recently, so I guess it's because he has a strange taste of beauty then? Not to mention, the Hunters from just now also seemed to be reacting positively too. I really don't understand…]

On the outside, Sheryl's position was Akira's lover, and that position allowed her to maintain a lot of things such as the safety of her gang, her position as the boss of the gang, her connection to Shijima and Katsuragi. Sheryl was able to maintain all of them because of Akira's fighting prowess.

If Akira was her real lover, Sheryl would feel much safer. But in reality, she was not Akira's lover. At most, she was only his friend, or even maybe just an acquaintance with a particular connection to him. It was too weak as a guarantee for Akira to keep supporting her.

Sheryl already had zero confidence if she could live without Akira anymore. Since that time when Akira helped her and saved her, she was fully reliant on Akira both physically and mentally.

If Akira asked for her body, Sheryl would give her body happily. She would be delighted that Akira wished for her and she would feel relieved after

giving her body to Akira. After all, as long as Akira was asking for her, he would likely keep his connection with Sheryl.

But unfortunately, Akira did not show any interest in her. Sheryl had asked Akira in the past for help in exchange for her body. But at that time, he only considered how far she could help him fighting monsters and buy him time, he did not see Sheryl as a member of the opposite sex at all.

Akira's personality was distorted in many ways. Sheryl herself knew that well, but even so, she believed that she was able to get closer to Akira compared to the first time they met.

If someone asked her if she liked Akira, her answer would be a yes. If someone asked her if she loved Akira, her answer would also be a resounding yes. But even before that, even without considering all these, Sheryl was already fully reliant on Akira. Even without taking account of her feelings or her love for him, Sheryl was already carrying a feeling that was close to blind faith toward him and she too knew of it. But Sheryl herself could not do anything about it, and that in itself could be because she also had a distorted personality.

Sheryl thought that as long as she kept getting along with Akira, Akira might one day get interested in her. But judging from his reaction until now, it did not seem Akira was interested in her at all.

[…Well, at least, he's not seeing me as a bait for the monsters anymore, right? He did buy me some clothes after all, so, I'm sure that he's also planning to get along with me too. Just calm down, I just need to slowly get closer to him.]

Sheryl finished changing her clothes, she then sat next to Akira. Akira just glanced at Sheryl when she sat next to him, he did not show any reaction in particular and immediately returned his gaze back to his terminal. Even when Sheryl leaned towards him, Akira did not show complaint at all, he kept his attention to his terminal.

As Sheryl leaned towards Akira, she glanced at him and thought.

[Even if I sit next to him, Akira does not show any signs of rejection at all. I'll just keep close to Akira until he feels that it's normal to have me around… Well, I guess I'll be too much of a bother if I sit on his lap and hug him, it seems that I wasn't as calm as I thought I was, huh.]

Sheryl remembered what she did in the past and smiled happily like the little girl she was.

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Colbert and his friends returned back to Kurogin to receive the money after Kurogin finished appraising their relics.

The clerk gave a report on the result of the appraisal of the relics that they brought there.

"Since the relics were processed separately, I'll give the report separately too. Let's start with the relics that Colbert-sama brought here. Colbert-sama, unfortunately, the relics that you brought here are not in demand in this branch. The appraisal fee would be free. So what do you want to do with the relics? You might take them back or let us take care of them."

"I see, you can go ahead and dispose them."

"Certainly. We'll dispose of them at our discretion. Next is Revin-sama."

Revin looked at that clerk with hopeful eyes when that clerk called his name. That clerk was already used to having Hunters looking at him with that kind of gazes. So he was not bothered much by it as he continued.

"The result from the appraisal, subtracting the fee for the same, is 10,000 Aurum."

That clerk placed a tray with 10,000 Aurum in front of Revin. Seeing that, Revin disappointedly looked down. Colbert smiled bitterly and tried to cheer him up.

"Don't worry about it, you're just not lucky this time."

Revin did not say anything as he took the money on that tray.

The clerk withdrew the tray and continued.

“Then lastly, Hazawa-sama.”

After hearing about Revin’s result, Hazawa did not put much hope on the result. But he was flabbergasted when he heard what that clerk said after that.

“The result from the appraisal, subtracting the fee for the appraisal, it’s 1,500,000 Aurum.”

Colbert, Revin, and Hazawa froze up as the clerk placed a tray in front of them. There was indeed a bundle of money on top of that tray which totalled 1,500,000 Aurum. The trump card set that Hazawa bought for 10,000 Aurum was worth 1,500,000 Aurum in Kurogin, and that was after subtracting the appraisal fee.

Colbert enviously said to Hazawa.

“Whoah, you just hit a jackpot, not bad at all. Why did you pick that trump card set in the first place? Was there something in particular that made you choose that relic?”

Hazawa flusteredly replied.

“…N-Not really though. I really chose it randomly.”

“So basically, you just got lucky, huh… Alright then!! It’s decided!! You’re treating us today!!”

Colbert smiled at Hazawa as he tried to make Hazawa treat him. Hazawa just shook his head exasperatedly and replied happily.

“Alright alright, it’s all thanks to your plan after all.”

“That’s great!! Revin, let’s party today… Revin?”

Revin was still frozen up, he was so dumbfounded by what just happened. He then finally returned back to himself.

The moment that happened, he immediately said to the Kurogin's clerk.

"H-how in the world is that thing worth 1,500,000 Aurum!? It was just a set of trump cards, you know!?"

Revin thought that if that trump card set was worth 1,500,000 Aurum, then the relics that he brought there should be worth more than that. He was still not fully recovered from the shock as he shouted at the clerk, demanding an explanation that could convince him.

The clerk was also already used to handling customers who reacted like Revin, so he just replied calmly.

"It's the result of our trusted appraisers' hard work and skill. Our appraisers dedicate all their time to make sure that they would be able to correctly identify the price of the relics that our customers bring to our shop. If Revin-sama wants to know the details of the information about the relics that Hazawa-sama brought to our shop, you would need Hazawa-sama's permission and remit a small amount of money to pay for our appraisers' knowledge. So, do you still want to know?"

Revin looked at Hazawa with a pleading gaze. Hazawa sighed and asked the clerk.

"I don't mind, but how much would the price be?"

"It would be 300,000 Aurum in total. The information will be given directly from the person who was in charge of appraising that relic. We ask you not to record the explanation or leak it to a third party. Please keep in mind that if you try to share this information with someone else, we'll have to take appropriate measure."

Hazawa then said to Revin.

“I don’t mind giving you the permission, but pay for the info yourself, okay? I won’t be paying for your share of info too, alright?”

“C-can you please pay for me this once?”

“No, I need money for myself too. You pay for your share. That’s the same to you too, Colbert. I won’t be paying other than my own share.”

Revin tried to negotiate with Hazawa.

“…But like, you know, the money that I have with me right now is just.. right?”

“No.”

Hazawa was not that soft.

Colbert then smiled at Revin and said to him.

“If you don’t have enough money with you right now, I don’t mind paying it for you. But it’ll be added to your debt too. Well, at this point, it doesn’t change much even if you add 100,000 Aurum to your debt, right? So?”

“…Alright, I’ll take that offer.”

After hesitating, Revin finally decided to take Colbert’s offer. With this, Revin’s debt got increased although only by a little.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 138, The Basis of The appraisal

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Colbert, Revin, and Hazawa were guided to another room, not too long after that, a Kurogin employee came in with a transparent case.

The trump card set that Hazawa just sold was kept inside that case, the case itself looked so secure to the point that the trump card set seemed like an expensive article.

That employee placed that case above the table and started explaining the details of the appraisal to Colbert, Revin and Hazawa.

“So then, please let me explain the details of the appraisal process. We’ve brought the relic in question here to help with the explanation, but please bear in mind that the ownership of this relic is already on us. So please don’t touch the case.”

The employee was sitting face to face against the other three Hunters. Colbert was the one who was the most relaxed among all of them, so he replied to that employee in place of his friends.

“Alright, go ahead.”

Revin was listening very closely so as not to miss even a word from that explanation, while Hazawa was listening out of pure interest.

There were many Hunters who pawned their relics in Kurogin only to complain later. So the people who work for Kurogin were already used to facing those kinds of Hunters. Even if Revin was staring at him, or even glaring at him, that employee was able to keep his calm as he calmly explained.

“We have a lot of indicators that we use to decide the value of a relic. There are 2 big reasons why we value this trump highly. First is that the Engazan convention is close, and secondly, this trump card set is a still-sealed old-world relic. We used these 2 factors to decide the price of this trump card set.”

That employee continued his explanation, Colbert and his friends were listening closely to it without saying anything.

The Engazan city in the Eastern district held a huge-scale gambling event regularly. A lot of people were swayed by the dream of winning the jackpot and decide to join that event to test their luck and skill.

People who dreamt for riches, people who got their dreams granted and became rich in one night, people who failed and lost all of their possessions; Engazan was a city filled with dreams, even if some of them were nightmares.

Colbert suddenly asked a question to that employee.

“Ahh, so basically, they’ll use this trump card set for that gambling event, huh? That’s also the reason why you need a still-sealed set of trump cards, right? But I still don’t see how it’s valued at 1,500,000 Aurum, isn’t that just too high no matter how you think about it?”

That employee nodded and said.

“That’s indeed true if it’s only used for gambling with the corporation-issued currencies. But in Engazan gambling event, there are even important

individuals and organizations partaking. In the past, some of them even made 100,000,000 Chrome as bet and the big companies even put their relics as bets too.”

It was common for big companies to fight over old-world relics. But fighting over it using force would warrant them to spend more money on the war than what they could get from the relics they were fighting over, while on the other hand, it was not like they could give up just because of that either. So in that situation, in order to reach a conclusion that both sides could accept, they often fought over the ownership of the relics through gambling.

“But the bigger the bets, the bigger the organization or the people who are partaking in the game, the harder it is to guarantee the fairness of the game. For example, when 5 big companies try to win over the ownership of a certain relic through a game of poker, there is no company in the world that can provide us with the trump card to use in that game. After all, those goliaths are the companies that hold power in the eastern district. It’s fully understandable that they might scrap their hard-earned trust that they’ve built for years just to produce a single special trump card in order to win that gamble. Of course, there’s no end to it if you start questioning other companies, but as long as that possibility is not zero, it’s hard for them to trust each other. That is, of course, if the trump card used in that poker game is only from the current era’s companies.”

Hazawa nodded deeply, it seemed that he was fully convinced by that explanation.

“I see, so that’s why they need a trump card from the old-world, huh. It’s true that even the 5 biggest companies in the eastern district can’t reproduce the same old-world trump card. I see how it’s highly valued now. But then, does that mean this trump card might be used for such gamble?”

“If asked whether it’s possible or not, the answer is yes, it might be used for such a gamble. It’s really something grand if you think about it.”

Hazawa just asked a question that came up in his mind out of imagination, and then that employee replied back with an answer that filled Hazawa’s

mind with more imagination.

Although Hazawa was fully convinced by that explanation, that was not the case for Revin.

“Wait for a sec, if it might be used for that kind of gamble, doesn’t that make 1,500,000 Aurum pretty low?”

The employee answered Revin’s question.

“That is indeed true if this trump card is good enough to be used for that level of a gamble. Which in that case, it might even worth a few billion Aurum or maybe a few Chrome.”

“Then-“

“But to ascertain it, we would need more investigations. We need to make sure if it’s really an old-world relic, if it’s really still sealed. We need to check if there’s any problem with the article by comparing it in case someone excavated the same article in the past. Only after that long time-consuming and money-consuming process, and after it has been confirmed that it’s good enough to be used for gamble between big companies and big people, only then, it’ll be used for such a level of gambling. You asked us to do the investigation as fast as possible, as such, we can’t do a full investigation. We’ve appraised the article in a short time per your request, and from that short investigation, we find that it might have the quality to be used in Engazan gambling events. The 1,500,000 Aurum is basically the price of that possibility.”

Revin nodded deeply.

“I see…”

That employee then moved on to end his explanation.

“Are there any other questions? If not, I will end the explanation here. After we close this session, we will not accept any more questions regarding this subject. In case if you want to inquire again later, you’ll need approval from

Viola-sama as well as pay the information fee. So, if there's no more question, is it okay to end the session here?"

Colbert, Revin and Hazawa looked at each other to confirm what the others were thinking. Since it seemed that none of them had any more questions, the employee thought that it should be okay to end the session, so he then lightly bowed and said.

"Very well then, let me finish my explanation here. Thank you very much for using our service."

Colbert, Revin and Hazawa left that building. Colbert then said to Hazawa and Revin.

"Alright then, let's hit the pub."

Revin was fidgeting there, he then said.

"Sorry, but I have something to do. See you around."

Revin only said that and quickly left Hazawa and Colbert.

Colbert saw Revin take off and mumbled.

"…That guy… I bet he's going to the slum again to look for expensive relics…"

Hazawa sighed exasperatedly, he could understand Revin's feeling as he spoke.

"I bet you're right. But it's not like you can easily find that kind of relic again. And even if he does, he doesn't have the money to buy it nor to get it appraised in Kurogin. I wonder what he's planning to do about that."

"No idea. You'll need extra money to be a member of Kurogin too. And you'll only get the free monthly quota after bringing enough relics to Kurogin. I'm sure that he'll call us when he realizes that. Well, let's just leave him be and go for a drink."

It was not like they had the duty to tell Revin the problems that he might have to face later, so instead, they chose to enjoy the sudden influx of cash that they got that day and headed to the entertainment district. Revin left on his own volition, and so, Hazawa did not give Revin a treat.

__*__*__*__

Over the last few days, in order to help Sheryl's gang, Akira always went to visit her base during the day. Akira basically had two roles there, first of all, was a bodyguard for Sheryl when she was selling relics, and secondly to help the gang to open stands somewhere inside the gang's territory.

The people who bought Sheryl's relics were those who had enough economical power to do so, and of course, a fighting power suitable for their economical power. Basically, they were Hunters like Revin and his friends. If they tried to use force to break into Sheryl's base, it would be hard for the gang to fight them back.

They were basically people who regularly fought monsters out in the wasteland, although the gang had more people and Sheryl could arm her gang with rifles, there was a limit on how far they could fight back. These Hunters might look down on the gang, thinking that the gang posed no threat at all against them, and use their position to threaten back. And of course, if it really ended up in a fight, Sheryl's gang would have zero chance to win it.

Because of that, when Sheryl was dealing with potential buyers, she asked Akira to hide behind one of the sheets in that room just in case anything bad happened.

Akira was just another small kid like Sheryl. But he was using an augmented suit and carrying heavy weapons that normal people would not be able to carry without an enhanced strength, so people would not just mindlessly pick a fight against him. There were indeed some difficult customers, but when Akira came out, they would obediently withdraw.

The reason why Akira was not showing himself was simply because Sheryl told him to do that. It was to make an impression that even if it seemed that

Sheryl was all alone there, a heavily armed Hunter might be hiding somewhere, it was to make that kind of illusion just in case if Akira was not really present. It was an important precaution since it was not like Akira could be there all the time.

The small stands opened by her gang were basically serving as a filter to get suitable customers for the main shop in Sheryl's base as well as a source of spare money. They were looking for customers who seemed to carry enough money and would not cause harm to Sheryl before telling them about the main shop.

There were also multiple stands, so Akira could not guard all of them all the time. Because of that, when trouble came up, they would contact Sheryl and she would go there with Akira.

Each stand was manned by at least 2 people and one of them would be armed as a guard for the stand. Most who lived inside the gang's territory knew that Akira was supporting Sheryl's gang, but not many of them knew Akira's face. The armed kid was basically standing guard there in place of Akira, which for that one stand that Colbert and his friends visited, that would be Tiol.

The people who came to the stands were not only people from the slum, there were Hunters too. And among them, there were bad Hunters. When Sheryl's men could not handle them, they had no other choice but to ask for Akira's help.

Sheryl was also not always dealing with customers and it was not like there were always problems happening in one of the stands. She herself sometimes had her own job to do in her private room, so it was not like she was always with Akira either. Akira basically had nothing to do when Sheryl was doing something in her private room.

Sheryl was working on her desk, she had a lot of jobs to do, distributing jobs for the gang's members, compiling all the relics for her shop, and many other jobs too.

Akira was sitting on the sofa while working on his information terminal, he was just silently operating his terminal without saying anything, or at least, that was how it looked from Sheryl's point of view. He sometimes made a confused face as he was focused only on his information terminal.

Sheryl glanced at Akira and threw a question.

"Akira, what are you doing there? It seems that you're so focused on it."

"Ahh, it's just game…"

"Is that so? Is that game really that fun?"

"It is… Well, at least, I think it's an interesting game."

Sheryl thought that there was something strange about how Akira worded it out.

She then made some guesses from what she could see.

There were many games that could be played on an information terminal. The theme was also various. Some of them were games that you could not really tell a girl. Since Akira was a boy, Sheryl thought that it was understandable for him to be interested in that kind of game and she could not help but get suspicious of him.

She wondered if it was the right choice to ask Akira. If it was really that kind of game, it might help her understand Akira's preference. It might give her a good reference to get him interested in her. So she decided to casually ask Akira.

"What kind of game is that?"

"Hm? It's a relic hunting game. You basically control a Hunter character to safely carry old-world relics back home."

"I-I see…"

After hearing Akira’s answer, Sheryl realized how wrong her guess was which made her blush and fidget around, she tried to smile to hide her embarrassment.

Someone suddenly knocked on the door. Sheryl’s face returned back to normal, and then she raised her voice a little to hide what just happened there.

“Come in.”

Erio opened the door.

“Sorry, there’s a problem in one of the stands. So if Akira-san can come with me for a bit…”

If something happened, they did not have any other choice but to ask for Akira’s help. Sheryl herself knew that very well. But it would be bad if they asked for Akira’s help for every little thing. As the boss of the gang, Sheryl wanted to make sure that her men did not have the wrong impression of Akira.

Sheryl then said to Erio.

“Can you not do something about it? You and some of your men have rifles with you, right?”

“That would be impossible. Just because we have some weapons that don’t mean that we’re as strong as Akira-san. It’s not like we call for Akira-san for every little thing, it’s exactly because we can’t handle the situation ourselves that we ask for Akira-san’s help.”

Judging from the way Erio reacted, Sheryl knew that he was not lying.

Sheryl thought that she needed to keep Akira’s impression as someone who was reliable but his help was not cheap. After all, in reality, her gang did not pay anything to Akira, they were just simply taking advantage of his kindness.

It would not be a problem if her gang members felt thankful and indebted to Akira's help when they realized it. But in reality, some of her gang members would look down on him instead.

In the end, the gang did not pay anything to Akira. So since Akira's help was something that they could get any time without paying anything, it would affect their impression of Akira sooner or later even if they only asked for Akira's help for trivial things. After all, humans could get used to anything, both for the better and for the worse.

Although it was something in the past, Sheryl thought that it was a good thing when Sebla tried to kill Akira. Sebla was one of her gang members, in Higaraka Residence Ruin, he looked down on Akira and betrayed the gang. He then went against Akira and Akira killed him without showing any hesitation. What happened back there served as a good example to remind the rest of her gang members.

It should be able to hold back Sheryl's men from looking down at Akira or getting too used to Akira's kindness. But that effect would not last forever.

So for the sake of Akira, of herself, and for her gang, Sheryl had to keep Akira's image in the gang.

Sheryl then said to Akira and Erio.

"It can't be helped then. Akira, I'm sorry to bother you again, but can you help me?"

"Sure."

Akira put his information terminal on the table and picked up his equipment.

He picked up his rifles that he left on the corner of the room. His AAH assault rifle, A2D assault rifle, CWH anti-material rifle, DVTS minigun, and A4WM automatic grenade launcher. With all of those rifles on him, he really stuck out like a sore thumb within the slum city. Akira did not have

the imposing aura of a strong person, that was why giving that impression through his equipment was quicker and safer.

Even before Akira had the idea to scare his opponent with his equipment, he already killed 4 thugs and 2 former Hunters. If they were still alive now, they would have told anyone that it was a bad idea to cause a ruckus in Sheryl's gang's territory.

In order to send Akira off, Sheryl stood up and walked towards him. There she glanced at Akira's information terminal that he left on the table.

After Akira finished his preparation, he noticed Sheryl was looking at his information terminal. He then remembered that Sheryl asked him about what kind of game he was playing, so he casually said to Sheryl.

"If you're interested, you can go ahead and try it."

"Eh? Ah, yes, thank you."

Sheryl actually was not that interested in the game, but since Akira said so, she replied with gratitude.

After Akira left the room, Sheryl returned back to her desk. From there, she could see Akira's information terminal lying on the table.

Sheryl thought that Akira might ask about her impression of the game later, so she decided to try the game.

The game that Akira was playing was a game of a Hunter hunting old-world relics. The player controlled a Hunter in a simplified top-down view of a ruin to look for relics.

Sheryl saw a chibi form of a Hunter on the display of that information terminal, she noticed that it looked like Akira. Even the name displayed on that Hunter character was 'Akira' and its equipment were similar to Akira's.

[…The character really looks like Akira, even the name is Akira too. Well, Akira was the one playing this game, after all, I bet he set it so that it looks like him.]

Since Sheryl did not get any instruction on how to play the game, she decided to just give it a try for now. The character that looked like Akira inside the game moved around, encountered a monster, and immediately got killed.

Sheryl tried the game a few more rounds and eventually more or less understood the rules of the game.

"…Alright then, now that I know how to play this game and understand the rules of this game, I can get to play it for real now."

The game was basically a top-down simulation game where the player controlled a Hunter inside an old-world ruin. The main goal was for the character to look for relics, gather expensive relics, and return back alive.

Sheryl renewed her resolve and restarted the game. But again, although she understood how to control the character and the rules of the game, her character immediately got killed again.

Sheryl then frowned.

[Isn't this game a little too hard? Or is it like this level of difficulty is normal?]

The time in the game stopped when Sheryl did not move the character. Thanks to that, she could take her time thinking of her next move. But even so, the Hunter that she controlled quickly got killed again attacked by either monsters or the other Hunters.

Since it was only a game, the character that looked like Akira could try again as many times as Sheryl wanted. But of course, in reality, you got only one chance.

[Thank goodness this is only a game… Or at least that's what I want to say, but this thing is still ticking me off.]

If Akira got killed, Sheryl and her gang would lose their support and the gang might as well get disbanded. Although it was only in the game, for

‘Akira’ to not be able to return back alive even after multiple tries made her upset.

Sheryl got a little obstinate since it felt like the game was saying that the Hunter supporting her gang was so weak.

[I can understand now why Akira got so invested in this game… I’ll definitely clear this game.]

Sheryl then used all of her skill and brainpower to try clearing that game.

Erio guided Akira to the stand where there was trouble. On their way there, Akira asked Alpha a question about the game that he was playing until just now.

“Alpha, as I thought, isn’t the difficulty of that game too high?”

But Alpha just smiled and refuted his claim.

“Oh my, but its difficulty level is already lowered compared to the original, you know? If I convert your skill, your ability to shoot, and your equipment to numbers, that’s basically the status that you’ll get. Not to mention, you have all the time to think about your next move and your movements will not be affected by your mental condition, from that point of view, the character in the game is relatively better than the real you.”

“Well, that’s true, but still…”

Akira understood Alpha’s reasoning, but it did not erase his displeasure.

Alpha smiled at Akira and tried to cheer him up.

“You’re the one who said that you want to know your skill from another point of view, remember? So, just accept the result and focus more on getting better. Although it’s a simplified game of real ruin exploration, it’s still good training for you to see the overall situation when you’re in a ruin. So just focus on working hard.”

“I know, it’s just that it’s not that fun when I keep getting myself killed without making any progress.”

Akira then sighed.

The game that he was playing had a character based on him and a stage that was made based on a real ruin. Although it had other modifications too, it was still pretty much close to a real situation. It looked like just a game from the outside, but it actually was an advanced simulation.

The character inside the game was based on him and he was the one controlling it, so it was more or less Akira himself.

The biggest difference between that character and the real Akira was that the real Akira had Alpha’s support. The Akira in the simulation was exploring the dangerous ruin with the current Akira’s real ability.

The simulator was showing how the real Akira would perform including the price that he must pay when he made a mistake or one wrong step, which was basically death, just like many other Hunters who met their ends inside the dangerous old-world ruin.

Akira was still not able to finish even a stage of that game. Alpha already explained to him that she reduced the difficulty of that game so that he should be able to clear it. So basically, the real Akira was pulling the Akira in the game down.

Akira sounded a bit dejected as he said.

“As I thought, I’m still really weak. Even back then in the Seranthal building, Shiori and Carol got suspicious of me just from seeing my movements when I lost your support. So I guess it must have been obvious.”

But then Alpha tried to cheer him up.

“Of course you can’t become strong after just one night. Don’t worry. You’re at least stronger compared to the past you. It’s just that there’s

always a bigger fish, so likewise, there’s always more dangerous ruins out there. But don’t worry, one day, you’ll be able to grow strong enough. After all, I’m the one training you.”

Alpha was smiling confidently as she said that.

Akira saw that smile and lightly smiled back, erasing the dark feeling welling inside him.

“You’re right, I’ll be counting on you.”

“Just leave it to me.”

Alpha smiled satisfied seeing that Akira completely cheered up.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 139, The New Guy and His Doubt

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Akira arrived at the stall where there was a problem. Over there, Revin was quarrelling with a young boy.

And that young boy was trying to get Revin to leave.

“As I said, I can’t take you to the main shop! So just give up, will you!? It’s not like I can do anything about it no matter how much you ask me! It’s the decision from the boss!”

Revin raised his voice as he said to that boy.

“I told you that I’ve gone there once before!! I’m someone who has permission to go there!! So just take me there!!”

“No means no! It would be really bad for me if I go against the Boss’ wish!! Can you at least understand that for me?!”

That young boy was given the duty to filter customers to be brought to the secret shop by Sheryl. But the current Hunter in front of him now was someone that he should not bring back to the base no matter how you look at it. His desperation, temperament and behaviour were obviously telling

that boy not to bring that Hunter to the secret shop. Not to mention, he did not even try to buy the relics in the stand nor to pay the entrance fee, so he did not seem to have much money either.

If that boy brought Revin to the base and then if Revin caused some trouble back in the base, he would be held responsible for that. In the worst-case scenario, he might get kicked out of the gang. So when that boy thought of that possibility, he knew that he could not bring Revin back to the base no matter what.

But on the other hand, Revin would not back down. If he got violent there, he could beat the crap out of that young boy. That boy panicked, he knew that he was stuck between 2 hard places, the intimidation of the Hunter in front of him and the order from his boss.

Akira seemed to have remembered seeing that Hunter somewhere as he mumbled.

“What the heck is he doing?”

When that young boy noticed Akira, his face immediately turned teary, he was so happy to the point that he was about to cry. He then waved at Akira.

“O-over here!! Please help me!!”

Revin immediately noticed Akira and inadvertently said.

“Geh!? Why are you here!?”

Revin remembered Akira very well. He met Akira back in Yonozuka station ruin and Akira was the exact reason why he was in the current situation. Akira was also the one that Katsuragi would ask for to collect his debt when the time came.

Revin’s face puckered as Akira walked toward him.

[…Is he here to collect the debt?! No, that can’t be, right? I’m sure he’s not here to collect the debt!]

Akira then asked Revin.

“I was told that there was a problem here, so, here I am, what’s going on?”

At least Revin knew for sure now that Akira was not here to collect the debt. He was so relieved as he replied.

“Ah, it’s nothing.”

“Really? If it’s really nothing, can you just leave then?”

Even if Akira said that, it was not like Revin could just give up and leave. After all, if he got lucky, this might be his chance to pay all of his debts in one go.

“Uhmm, what’s your connection with these guys by the way?”

The young boy immediately answered.

“Isn’t it obvious, already? He’s one of us!!”

“No, that’s not exactly true though?”

But Akira immediately denied what that boy said. Revin saw how that young boy and Erio were so surprised by what Akira just said. So then he tried to put more pressure on Akira.

“If you’re not one of them, then this is none of your business, don’t butt in. Or are you here trying to be a good samaritan helping them?”

“I’m not one of them, but I have a relationship with their boss. So basically I’m here because their boss asked me to.”

Revin had a bad feeling when he heard Akira’s reply. He sounded scared as he asked Akira another question.

“…Don’t tell me that their boss is Katsuragi.”

“Nope, it’s Sheryl.”

“Fuuh, don’t scare me like that.”

“Hm? Does Katsuragi have something to do with this? I heard that Sheryl used Katsuragi’s connection to open the bank account for the shop… Or what was it again?”

Akira was trying to remember what Sheryl had said to him, while he was doing that, Revin’s face turned paler and paler.

Akira suddenly seemed to remember something and said to Revin.

“Ahhh, since you’re asking me if their boss is Katsuragi, that means this problem has something to do with Katsuragi, right? Can you give me a sec? I’ll check with Katsuragi.”

Revin flusteredly tried to stop Akira.

“No no no! Stop! I get it! I’ll leave! So don’t do anything, okay?! Just don’t! I’m leaving! Alright?! This problem here, ends here, okay?! Bye!”

After Revin desperately pleaded Akira to stop, he immediately ran away.

Akira saw that Revin had left and tilted his head as he mumbled.

“…What the heck was that?”

There was no one there who could answer Akira’s question.

After Revin distanced himself away from Akira, he let out a big sigh.

[…That was dangerous. If Katsuragi found out, this would definitely cause some problems later. It’s a good thing that now I know Katsuragi might have something to do with that stand… Now that I can’t get close to that place, what should I do…?]

Revin started to have a headache. In order to prevent his debt from growing any bigger, he could not just give up here.

[…It was just a trump card in the end. So I should be able to find a similar thing in another stand or shop, right? After all, that Sheryl was selling that trump card without knowing its true value. If I try to look around, I'm sure I'll find something similar somewhere. And if that story is true, then it doesn't have to be a trump, anything that can be used for gambling should work fine, right? I feel like I should be able to find something good enough somewhere…]

Revin picked himself up and planned to use the new information that he got from Kurogin to pay for his debt.

"…Alright then!"

He decided to look around the shops and stands in the slum for another hidden gem.

Not too long after that, a rumour was circulating about a certain man who was visiting stands and shops in the slum city, asking for peculiar things like a trump card set. It was a common happening when a rumour of an unexpectedly expensive relic was found, as just like usual, there were people who got lured by that rumour.

Sheryl was playing the game on Akira's information terminal inside her private room. At the moment, she failed all of her trials. When she started to think that it was not because she was not good enough but more because the game was too difficult, Erio returned.

Sheryl stopped playing the game and let them in. Erio and Tiol came in, Erio then gave Sheryl his report.

"The problem in the stand ended without any trouble. The guy who caused the problem seems to know Akira-san, although, I don't really understand the detail."

Sheryl, who just heard that it seemed there was trouble with Akira's acquaintance, looked at Erio with a serious expression and asked.

“I see, so it was Akira’s acquaintance, huh… Are you sure that there’s no problem at all?”

“Yeah. Although he knows Akira-san, it doesn’t seem like they are friends, I’m pretty sure it was solved just fine. For some reason, he just left after talking to Akira-san for a bit.”

“Well, that’s fine then.”

It did not seem like Erio was lying at all. So Sheryl could feel safe, at least for now. She actually wanted to ask Akira directly, just to be safe, but she immediately noticed that Akira was not present.

“Where’s Akira?”

“Akira-san just went back home after that. That’s why we closed the stand too. We can’t do anything if something were to happen without Akira-san around after all.”

“I see, so… Did Akira really return back home? He left his information terminal here though, did he forget about it?”

“No, he did remember, he said that it’s okay since he has other information terminals.”

“I see, well then. Thanks for the report, you can go ahead and take a rest.”

Sheryl smiled and thanked Erio and Tiol. Tiol blushed and got flustered for a bit, but his face immediately regained its seriousness as he asked.

“Boss, there’s something that I want to ask, is it okay?”

“What is it?”

“Uhmm, what is your relation with Akira?”

“What do you mean by that? We’re lovers. Didn’t we tell you that too when you joined the gang?”

Sheryl answered back casually as if to say that it was weird for Tiol to ask something so obvious.

Seeing that, Tiol hesitated from saying what he was about to say next. But his curiosity and a glimmer of hope inside him pushed him to speak up.

“…Is that really true?”

Sheryl’s mood suddenly worsened the moment she heard Tiol’s question.

Sheryl’s smile for her friend from the same gang who had gone through thick and thin together with her completely vanished from her face, in exchange, her smile turned dark and ominous. It was obvious that she was looking at Tiol with hostility.

She then asked with a cold and low voice.

“…What do you mean by that question?”

Tiol was taken aback by her sudden change that he could not immediately reply back, but that only caused Sheryl’s mood to get even worse. During that silence, Sheryl stared at Tiol with a gaze that the normal Sheryl would never give. She then gave a short order to Erio that was devoid of wish to resolve it peacefully.

“Erio, your rifle.”

It was a short and incomplete order, but Erio understood perfectly what Sheryl was talking about. She was telling him to aim his rifle at Tiol.

But even for Erio, he hesitated to do something like that to one of his friends who belonged to the same gang. Although it was true that Tiol’s question could be interpreted as picking a fight against Sheryl, he thought that it would be an overkill to aim his rifle at Tiol just because of that reason. So Erio panicked and tried to think of a way to defuse the situation.

Seeing that Erio did not immediately do what he was told to, Sheryl’s glare shifted from Tiol to Erio.

Erio got a goosebump from that, so he flusteredly tried to say something since he had a feeling that the situation would only get worse if he kept his mouth shut.

“Sheryl, just calm down, okay?! It’s not like Tiol was suspicious if you’re really Akira-san’s lover or anything like that! Isn’t that right, Tiol?! Try to word your question better next time as not to cause misunderstanding, okay?! See, Sheryl misunderstood because of that! So what exactly are you trying to ask here, Tiol?!”

Erio desperately tried to cover for Tiol who was still paralyzed from the pressure from Sheryl. At the same time, he was hopelessly trying to signal Tiol to agree with him even if it was not true. After all, if he did not do that, it might be his end.

Thanks to that, Tiol somehow was able to return back to himself and caught what Erio was trying to say there.

Tiol then started speaking slowly and carefully as if not to hit any red flags.

“Y-yeah, that’s right, it’s a misunderstanding. It’s not like I was suspecting that you and Akira are not lo- I mean, I thought that not only as lovers, I was wondering if you have some kind of special relationship with Akira, like maybe something from the past. I swear that was all I actually wanted to ask.”

Sheryl still had a bad mood as she inquired Tiol with a suspecting tone.

“It did not sound like that to me though.”

Tiol carefully checked Sheryl’s reaction as he replied in a panic.

“I-I’m really sorry for asking something that caused a misunderstanding like that. But like, you know, Akira seems to be a very strong Hunter, right? I heard from the other people in the stands that the person Akira dealt with when that problem happened in one of the stands was not a former Hunter, but a proper Hunter, someone who is still working as a Hunter even now. So, I just thought for someone as strong as Akira who can deal with

someone like that so easily, I wonder why he would associate with us. I just thought that maybe he has some other reason other than because he's your love- I mean, on top of the fact that he's your lover. It's not like I'm suspecting that it wasn't true, I swear!!"

Tiol and Erio held their breaths, waiting for Sheryl's reaction. Sheryl did not say anything while still glaring at Erio and Tiol.

After a few seconds, Sheryl seemed to have regained some of her calm as she said.

"…I see, it's fine then if that's the case. Erio, you should teach Tiol stuff since it seems that he's new here and doesn't know much yet."

"O-okay."

"If that's all, you can leave now."

Erio and Tiol flusteredly exited the room. After Sheryl heard a clicking sound from closing the door, she then let out a big sigh.

Sheryl looked rather dejected as if she was lamenting her mistake and mumbled.

"…To think that I would lose my cool from something like that, I wonder what's wrong with me. I could've just smiled and cut it short. What I've done now might cause them to get even more suspicious… Just calm down, it's alright, I'm doing well. I can do this."

Sheryl repeatedly took a deep breath while reflecting on her reaction. She felt that she did not give the best reaction there and resolved herself to do better next time. She then thought about what could have caused her to react that extremely. She reminded herself to stay calm as she kept thinking about it. She removed any reason that she made simply out of anger at Tiol as she was evaluating her guesses.

After she arrived at a conclusion, she then said as if to tell herself.

“…I thought I had resolved myself, but it seems that it wasn’t enough, huh. I guess it’s a good thing that I was able to confirm it.”

Sheryl put a stop to her thought there and nodded deeply.

Although there were many rooms in Sheryl’s base, she was the only one with a private room. Those with high positions in the gang like the officers were sharing a room with the other officers that they were close with. The ones with the highest position in that gang after Sheryl was Erio and Alicia, both of them were officers and a couple, because of that, they were sharing the same room albeit it was a small room.

While the other gang members were living in the shared spaces inside the gang like in a big hall or in the hallways. It could be inferred how high their position in the gang was from where they slept when it got dark outside. From that point of view, Erio and Alicia’s position in the gang was pretty high.

As Sheryl’s gang continued to grow, there were more people than expected who wanted to join the gang. Or at least, it was more than Sheryl had anticipated. While on the other hand, it also served as proof that her gang was doing well as an organization inside the slum, it also showed how much influence her gang had in the slum.

Thanks to that, the children in the slum started to gather around Sheryl’s base. They got extra protection just from joining since those who wished to attack would think twice before crossing Sheryl’s gang. The slum children even had to pay if they wanted to stay in certain places where people were more likely to misidentify them as Sheryl’s gang members.

Tiol was a new member of the gang, he used his hard-earned money to buy his way into the gang. The only reason why he got special treatment compared to the other new members was simply because he brought in extra money and equipment for the gang.

Erio, Alicia and Tiol were inside Erio and Alicia’s room, Erio brought Tiol there.

Although Alicia was not exactly happy when she saw Erio bringing someone else into their room, she seemed to be okay with it after a short explanation from Erio.

Alicia said to Erio with a rather serious expression.

“…Alright, I’ll check on Sheryl later. But still…”

Alicia looked at Tiol, her gaze was saying that she was blaming him as she said in a slightly annoyed tone.

“…Did you really think that it would not anger Sheryl when you asked that question? Good grief, give me a break.”

Tiol looked really uncomfortable as he apologized.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t think she would get that angry.”

Erio then tried to calm Alicia down.

“W-well, let’s just end that here, alright? We are getting a lot of new members too, so it’s completely understandable.”

“Then, what are you planning to do if she did not let that slide just because he’s a new member? Back then, not only Tiol, but you almost get roped in too, right? So, do you really think that I’ll accept that excuse?”

“Look, like I said, we need to be extra careful from here and on to make sure that it would not happen again. Tiol is not the only new member of the gang. I’ll warn the people under me, so you should do the same too, Alicia. I don’t want you to get involved in something like that because of another new member who doesn’t know about it. I want to be together with you, so please make sure to do that.”

“…You’re right, I’ll do that.”

Seeing how Erio was worrying about her safety, Alicia finally calmed down.

Erio then said to Tiol.

“So then. If there’s still anything you want to ask us, this will be your chance. Both Alicia and I know Sheryl for quite some time now, so I’m sure we can give you answers to your questions about her. You can go ahead and ask us questions that might trigger Sheryl, it’s far better if you ask them to us rather than getting Sheryl angry later.”

So Tiol asked Erio a question with a serious face.

“I see. In that case, I want to know if Sheryl is really the boss of this gang.”

“Whoah, right from the bat, huh…”

Erio placed both of his hands on his head. Alicia looked at Tiol with a mix of amazement and resignation.

Although Tiol was surprised by their reaction, he still wanted to know the answer.

“Even if you say so, I think there are many other people here including me who are wondering about the same exact question, you know. I know that people have told me the boss in this gang is Sheryl. But just like me, there are other members who still have some questions about it. Like how did she get to be the boss of the gang? Or if the boss seat is just a decoration or that you can only sit there if you have enough power? Is she just using Akira? Or is it the other way around? Like maybe Akira is the real boss of the gang and Sheryl is just his proxy in public? Is it that Akira is simply in love with Sheryl and he’s actually an outsider who has nothing to do with this gang? And then there’s also that Katsuragi guy, is he actually giving us money and controlling us from the shadow or something? There are a lot of questions I want to ask and I’m not sure who I can trust.”

Erio and Alicia’s faces twitched, but their faces were also saying that it was understandable. It was not easy to gather information about that kind of thing. After all, the only one who knew the answer to those questions in that gang was Sheryl. Other people could only make guesses.

Tiol confirmed how Alicia and Erio reacted to that, he then asked another sensitive question.

“In the first place, that story about Akira going out with Sheryl, it’ll have a different impact if they are in love with each other or it is actually a one-sided love. It seems that Akira bought an expensive dress for the boss, but we don’t know for sure if he actually spent a lot of his money to get the boss happy or that expensive dress might actually not cost that much for Akira. Then there’s the fact that Akira rarely comes to the base. I know that being a Hunter is a busy job, but is it okay to always leave your lover that much? And even if they’re lovers, that doesn’t mean that Akira would do anything for her, right? So how far can we ask from him before it’s too much?”

Erio and Alicia looked at each other. They could understand why Tiol would ask something like that. But at the same time, it was a taboo to ask that question in the gang. Questioning Sheryl’s relation with Akira was equal to treason after all. So even if those questions were fully reasonable, it was not like Erio and Alicia could do anything about it. They could only trust what Sheryl told them even if it was not the real truth.

Erio then said to Tiol with a serious face.

“I can understand why you would ask those questions, but the answer to those questions are simple and easy. Don’t ask. That’s the answer. I’ll tell you later the reason why that’s the answer. So basically, it doesn’t matter if that answer is enough for you or not, if you want to keep staying in this gang, you’ll have to accept that answer, okay?”

“O-okay.”

Tiol was overwhelmed by the pressure and barely managed to reply back.

Alicia looked rather dejected as she said to Erio.

“…So basically we need to explain this to the other new members too, huh.”

“It can’t be helped. We’re the ones who know the most about it and it’s not like we can ask Sheryl to do that for us too.”

Alicia smiled and jokingly said.

“If only you’re as strong as Akira-san, we might be able to find a good solution to this problem though.”

Erio frowned.

“Don’t be stupid. Being a Hunter, going out to the wasteland, exploring old-world ruins, fighting monsters, and returning back alive with old-world relics like Akira-san… That’s just impossible for me. I’ll definitely die halfway. Even back then, I was only saved because I got lucky and Akira-san found me. Otherwise, I would’ve died eaten by that monster.”

“I know, sorry, I don’t want you to die either. So please don’t do anything dangerous, alright? I know that you get yourself better equipment, but make sure that it won’t go to your head, okay?”

“I know.”

Erio and Alicia stared at each other. Tiol, who was left outside the sleeping net, looked at them awkwardly. Alicia and Erio quickly noticed Tiol’s gaze, they flusteredly started to explain what they meant back there.

Erio and Alicia did not notice that Tiol had those questions not because he was interested in the strong Hunter supporting the gang.

Tiol actually wanted to know Sheryl’s relations with Akira. He wanted to know if they were really lovers. He wanted to know if there was a crack between them where he could slip in.

He thought, in secret, that Sheryl actually was not in love with Akira. After all, it did not matter who led the gang. It was more of who was strong enough to support the gang. If he could get strong enough to rival Akira, then Sheryl might abandon Akira and try to get closer to him instead.

Tiol actually liked Sheryl. It was love at the first sight. When Sheryl appeared in a dress that was specially made for her and smiled lovingly, it took his heart away.

He wished that the relation between Akira and Sheryl was nothing more than a relation out of profit. He was hoping to have a chance to be Sheryl's lover.

Although it was not too long ago, another member by the name of Sebla also had the same thought and he had to pay for that with his life. Tiol might end up meeting the same end. Or at least, he almost met the same end just a moment ago. Although, it was a whole different problem whether Tiol himself noticed that or not.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 140, Suitable Reward

Index

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Akira was waiting for Carol in the lower district of Kugamayama city.

Right after the reward from the request in Mihazono ruin was transferred to Akira's bank account, he called Carol, it was about how to divide the reward.

The money that was transferred to Akira's bank account was the reward portion for his team, and since Carol was working in his team, Akira needed to pay her share of the reward. Money was a sensitive thing after all. In order to avoid having to fight Carol, Akira had to properly discuss with her and pay her.

Akira actually wanted to finish the discussion on how to divide the reward through the call, but Carol wished to meet directly with him. So, they decided on a time and place to meet.

Akira was waiting for Carol in the shopping district near the wall. Most of the areas in the lower district were relatively safe, so people who lived there were mostly peaceful people who could not fight. Of course, there were some guards patrolling the area too, but in order not to arouse any unnecessary ruckus and to give a more peaceful feeling, they were

dispatched in civilian attires. Other than those guards, the rest of the people there were peaceful people.

But because of that, Akira gathered a lot of attention there. He was donning an augmented suit and carrying AAH and A2D assault rifles. He was basically a Hunter who could jump into a fight any second. If he was carrying DVTS minigun and A4WM automatic grenade launchers too, the guards would definitely escort him out of the area.

Alpha smiled and said.

“You’re really sticking out, aren’t you?”

“It’s not my fault, it’s Carol’s fault for asking me to meet her in this place.”

Although Akira was gathering a lot of attention, it was only on a level when someone came to a place with an attire not suitable for the location. It was not like the people around him were looking at him scared since he was an armed Hunter, it was simply because they knew that the guards in that area would be able to deal with that level of a Hunter with no problem at all in case if anything happened. They knew that Akira would face real trouble if he started making trouble in that area.

Alpha looked at the people around Akira and compared them to him.

“I don’t really mind it, but if you don’t like sticking out, maybe you should think more carefully about your outlook. It might be a good idea to buy some casual clothes that you won’t use when you have Hunter work.”

“It’s not like I’m planning to go somewhere that needs me to look sleek, and it’s not like I want something like that either, I really don’t need it. It’s true that I’m sticking out here, but I just need to not let it bother me that much. Not to mention, good clothes are expensive, right? So there’s no need to go out of my way to buy them.”

“Well, that’s true. Shiori and Kanae are also always using their maid outfits. If you really are not bothered by it, there’s no need to try to match the people around you.”

Akira looked rather annoyed and said.

“…Do I really look similar to Kanae and Shiori right now?”

“If you’re talking about wearing an outlook that doesn’t match the place, then yes.”

“…I guess I’ll think about buying some casual clothes then.”

Alpha smiled as she saw Akira’s resolve waver.

Carol appeared a bit sooner than the appointment time. When she saw Akira, she waved at him and walked toward him. Carol was wearing a high-class looking dress that gave her a graceful look. It was the exact opposite of the design of her usual augmented suit. It properly hid most of her skin while still letting her beautiful figure be perceivable from the outside, people who were familiar with fashion could easily recognize that she was wearing an expensive dress.

Akira was a bit surprised seeing how Carol was wearing a dress that was the exact opposite of how she dressed when she was out in the old-world ruin. After all, he did not expect Carol to wear a dress like that at all.

While at the same time, Carol was also surprised when she saw Akira’s attire. Although she was smiling, there was a trace of displeasure in her smile. She sighed a bit and said.

“I really didn’t expect you to come in that attire when you’re about to have lunch with a girl, you know?”

Akira decided to just shelve his thoughts for now and casually replied.

“I’m a Hunter, who is here as a Hunter and we’re about to talk about Hunter stuff. So I don’t think I’m doing anything weird here.”

Carol watched Akira’s reaction closely, it did not seem like he was trying to hide his embarrassment.

“Ah, right, if I’m not mistaken, you’re still in the middle of learning how to properly escort a girl, right? It seems that you still have a lot to learn.”

“Did I really say that?”

“You did. I remember it very well even though it was just a silly talk. Now then, shall we go?”

Carol was actually planning to take Akira to a high-class restaurant not too far from where they met up. But it was not a suitable place to eat when you were using an augmented suit.

Although it was not like the restaurant would not accept them, it did not change the fact that Akira would look strange there. As Carol thought so, she also thought that she was glad she did not put in an early reservation, she smiled bitterly while hiding that smile from Akira.

They entered another restaurant together, sat on a table for 4 facing each other, and scanned the menu for what to order. Carol looked at Akira who was looking at the menu with a serious face and thought that it was cute. She then thought about how to start the discussion there, or more like, how to use this chance to get Akira fixated on her.

After they placed their orders, they chatted for a bit before the meals arrived. That was when Carol started talking about the reward.

“Well, the foods are here, so let’s start talking about the main reason why we’re here.”

“About the reward, right?”

“Yep. Let’s just omit the bargaining part and go to the main problem. Akira, how much are you planning to pay me?”

Carol smiled confidently and waited for Akira’s reply.

Akira seemed troubled, he instead asked Carol a question.

“How much do you think I should pay you?”

Carol replied confidently with her smile.

“Oh my, you do know that I omitted the bargaining part for your sake, right? Or is it that you prefer it the other way? I don’t mind accepting your challenge, but just so you know, I’m not an easy opponent.”

Akira hesitated as he said.

“Uhh, that’s not the problem here, to be honest, it’s more like I don’t know the right reward for Hunters, you see. That’s why I’m asking you, you’re familiar with this kind of thing, right?”

Even for Akira, he knew that it was a bad thing to reveal that he was bad with negotiation. While on the other hand, Akira understood that he did not have the knowledge to even pretend that he knew. So he was sure that Carol who was familiar with that kind of thing would see through him in no time even if he tried.

But from the other point of view, it could be said that Akira took his chance for something bigger. He knew what he did not know, so he was prepared to lose money in order to gain that knowledge.

Carol looked at Akira for a while, she then thought for a bit before starting to talk while carefully observing his reaction.

“As someone who is more experienced in negotiation about rewards, I’ll at least say this to you, your move now was a bad move. Even if you don’t know the right number, as long as both of us did not agree on a certain number beforehand, you ought to firmly state the number that you have in mind, it doesn’t matter even if it was a bad bluff or even if you ask for an unreasonable huge amount of money. Since you’re the one with the money here, you should’ve used that position to come out stronger against your opponent. After all, if the negotiation breaks down, the one who will not get paid is me. And if you do that to me, I would be really troubled. So if you do that, I might decide to make a compromise to avoid any trouble later. Of course, with the less money you pay me, you will get a bigger portion of the reward.”

Akira listened to Carol's explanation closely, he agreed with what Carol said.

"Hmm, you're right about that. So then, how much do you want me to pay you?"

Although that reply did not make Carol's smile waver from the outside, she actually felt troubled inside. It did not seem that Akira would try to bargain at all no matter how much Carol might ask. Even after she told him that he had the upper hand there, Akira did not seem trying to use it at all.

[To be honest, I'm not really interested in my portion of reward though. I was actually planning to accept a small amount of reward and get him indebted to me instead…]

Carol thought for a bit, she then decided to just say something to check Akira's reaction.

"The amount of reward that I want, huh. To be honest, I don't want to sell my skill cheaply and I have the confidence that I can convince other people to pay me a big reward. That's why I usually start the negotiation with relatively high reward money. Hypothetically speaking, if I tell you to give me all the reward, will you do that? You did tell me that you have no knowledge about how to negotiate for your reward, so what will you do if I'm using my skill to convince you to give me all the reward? To be honest, I'm pretty sure that I can do that."

Carol smiled confidently.

But then Akira just casually replied.

"Well, in that case, it can't be helped, I'll just give you all the reward."

Carol's smile finally wavered.

It was not like Akira was willing to give all the reward because he was in a situation where he had no other choice but to do that. He was willing to do

that simply because he had listened to Carol’s explanation with his distorted sense of money.

Akira went to Mihazono ruin while bringing Carol with him in order to help Elena and Sara. Right from the start, his goal was not money.

Moreover, Akira was the one who hired Carol, so as the one who hired her, he unconsciously wanted to pay Carol the right amount of reward. Akira thought that Carol was a stronger Hunter than him and he roped her to a dangerous place for his own reason, so it was understandable that he had to pay a big amount of reward for her.

In the slum city, a one-sided negotiation where someone pointing his rifle at other people demanding everything that person had was a normal occurrence. Akira really did not want to be the one robbed, but he also did not want to be the one who did the robbing. Back then when he was the one on the other side, he wanted to at least be given a chance to negotiate, so he just wanted to remind himself that he was no longer in that situation any longer and there was no need for him to join the other side.

But with that being said, Akira did not know the right amount of money to pay Carol.

Of course, the suitable amount of money would differ from one person to another. Hunters risked their lives when they went out to the wasteland. And of course, they did not think that their own life was equal to the life of the other. That was why when it came to negotiation about reward, it tended to end up with a fight. It was not rare for Hunters to fight and kill each other right after they finished a job together.

Akira himself understood that very well. That was why he decided to ask someone who was knowledgeable about that thing. Which in this case, that would be Carol.

Carol realized that she had stopped smiling, but she immediately returned her face back to a smile. She was pretending as if it did not surprise her at all while checking on Akira. It did not seem that Akira said that because he had some kind of ulterior motive. He was only being honest.

[He got me good there. I was actually planning to start with a high price and then lowering it bit by bit during the negotiation while making sure that he would feel indebted to me, and then I should be able to use that to get closer to him, but in this case, if I ask for a big portion and he accepts it, he might use that as an excuse to cut his ties with me. This is not easy…]

One thing that Carol got wrong there was that Akira would not just give all the reward without fighting back if she really asked for all the reward. What he meant back then was that he was willing to give all the reward if she could give him a good reason to do so.

To be more precise, Akira was planning to fight back until the end. And if Carol was able to convince him after that, if she could make him agree that it was a suitable reward for her, then he would properly pay her that much. After all, that was the right thing to do if he agreed with that.

And to add one more detail to that, Akira actually underestimated his words because Alpha did not say anything. Alpha was always so noisy reminding Akira of anything, that was why he was sure Alpha would say something if he did something bad.

But the reason why Alpha did not say anything was because in case if Akira lost a lot of money there, she would use that as an excuse to encourage him to stop associating with other people. So after a lot of considerations, Alpha decided to just keep silent there.

After a lot of thinking, Carol decided to take the safe route. She at least needed to make sure that she did not leave any bad impression on Akira.

[…To be honest, I don’t want to do this, but… I guess I’ll have to imitate what Elena and Sara would do in this situation.]

Carol had decided on her plan and restarted the negotiation.

“It seems that you’ve worked with Elena and Sara multiple times before, right? When you did that, how did you distribute the reward? Who decided on how to divide the reward and what indicator was used?”

“Hm? Elena-san would be the one deciding and I guess we just divided the reward normally just like usual.”

To be honest, Carol wanted to know what was ‘just like usual’ for Akira. But since he only gave her that much information, she decided to make a suggestion based on how Elena divided the reward with Akira in the last request.

“In that case, then let’s divide the reward 50-50 and not talk about whether it’s the right number considering how much we fought back in Mihazono ruin, right? After all, it’s not like we have a prior agreement on how to divide the reward anyway. This way, we can divide the reward without causing more trouble or leaving any side displeased. When it comes to a suitable amount of reward, nothing is better than the amount of reward that both parties agree to. And since I want to get along with you in the future, let’s just divide it 50-50 between us, what do you think?”

“Sure.”

Akira stopped eating, took out his information terminal, and finalized the transfer to Carol’s bank account.

“There, I’ve transferred it, can you check it?”

“Okay.”

Carol also took out her information terminal and checked her bank account.

“Yep, I’ve received it. With this, the request from you is officially finished without any hitch. Thank you. Did I satisfy your expectation? I do want to hear the opinion of my employer, you know.”

Carol was smiling mischievously at Akira when she said that.

Akira was a bit bothered by that, but he decided to reply back honestly.

“Yeah, you did well. I do feel glad that I brought you with me. Thank you.”

Akira lightly bowed, Carol then replied in a good mood.

“You’re welcome. I’ll be looking forward to working with you again.”

Looking at how Akira reacted, Carol thought that at least she did not fail, it might even be okay to say that she succeeded. And then when she saw him enjoying his delicious-looking meal, she was able to confirm that it was the right choice picking a restaurant as a place to discuss with Akira.

[If we do the negotiation in a restaurant, he would not leave until he finishes his meal. But if we’ve done this in a cafe, I bet he would have left the moment we finished the negotiation.]

Carol’s guess was most probably correct. As long as she did not have anything interesting to talk about, Akira would just leave when his business with her was done. Unlike all the other customers that she had met up until now, Akira had no romantic feeling toward her at all.

Akira and Carol continued talking to each other while enjoying their meal. Akira was talking without thinking much about what he was saying, in contrast to that, behind her smile, Carol kept thinking about what kind of subject she could bring up that might interest Akira.

Carol talked about all kinds of things with Akira, she was paying close attention to how Akira reacted to different topics. They were mostly talking about Hunter stuff while touching ordinary daily stuff from time to time.

Akira was listening closely to a certain subject that he was super interested in, it was about how to sell old-world relics.

“Ohh, so sometimes you can even sell them with that price, huh. That’s amazing.”

“Yup. And with that rumour about a certain relic that you can buy with a few hundred thousand Aurum and can be sold for a few million Aurum circulating around, it seems that some Hunters and merchants were looking for the shop that sold that certain relic.”

“A toy old-world relic, huh… I wonder what kind of relic is that.”

“I wasn’t able to investigate much about that rumour, but it seems that it was sold to Kurogin. Kurogin paid a lot of money to buy that relic and that relic was previously bought for cheap from another shop. So judging from that information alone, although it’s a toy, it’s not a mechanical toy. I think it’s some kind of a toy with artistic value and it was brought to Kurogin still in a good shape, and there might be some collectors out there who are looking for that kind of old-world relic. After all, there are many people out there with certain hobbies who would pay a lot of money for something like that.”

Carol was talking with Akira about a certain relic deal that jumped into her information network. It was about a certain Hunter who scored a very good deal in the lower district of Kugamayama city. It was not a rare occurrence, but since Akira was also a Hunter, he might be interested in that kind of talk. That was why Carol decided to prepare some information about selling relics before she went to meet Akira.

Although it was not a rare thing, it was enough to get Akira’s interest. Carol smiled satisfied seeing that Akira showed an interest in that subject.

After listening to Carol’s story about reselling relics and the businesses around that subject, a question popped inside Akira’s head.

“Do those companies that specialize in buying and selling relics get that much profit?”

“That would depend on the skill of the owner. I heard that you can get quite a lot of profit if you have the necessary connection and money.”

“…Is that the case even if you open such a store in the slums? And even if it’s a secret shop?”

Carol was surprised by what she heard.

“Oh, are you interested in that? Hmmm, if you ask me, with your skill, it’s better if you keep working as a Hunter instead of opening a shop like that, you know?”

There were many people in the eastern district who worked as Hunters only in order to get the capital to start a business. It was indeed true that being a Hunter was a dangerous job, but it was a good way to raise a lot of money in a short time. Not to mention, if they left as high ranking Hunters, it would be easier for them to gather money for their business. And if their business went bankrupt, they could use their rank to borrow some money to restart their Hunter activities again.

Because of Carol's personal reason, and because of her distorted way of thinking, she wanted Akira to keep working as a Hunter instead of changing occupation to a businessman. After all, she wanted the money that she received from the other people who were using her service to be the money they got from risking their lives, not the money they got from running a business. She did not lie when she said that she rather had Akira continue working as a Hunter, but half of the reason that she said there was a lie.

Akira himself did not think that he had any talent in running a business, so he just shook his head and said.

"Nah, it's not about me, it's about someone that I know in the slum city who started running that kind of business just recently and I'm guarding that place right now. It seems that she spent quite a lot of money on the interior of that shop, so I was just wondering if you can get profit from opening that kind of shop in the middle of the slum."

"Ohh, I see. I heard that you've been living in the slum before, have you ever heard that kind of rumour when you were living there?"

"Of course I did, but I've never gotten involved in it."

"I see. In that case, I can teach you a lot of things. After all, I'm pretty knowledgeable about that kind of thing, you know?"

Carol smiled confidently and started talking in a good mood.

There were multiple shops inside Kugamayama city that handled buying and selling relics. Their scales and their specialization also varied greatly.

There were many kinds of shops even in the slum city, and most of those shops in the slum were doing secret business.

Opening a shop in the slum was not exactly an illegal thing. But it was also true that a lot of shops that were doing questionable business from the Hunter Office's point of view often had under-the-table deals to make sure they did not get rousted out.

To be honest, the Hunter Office did not like the shops that sold relics since they allowed Hunters to gather relics with money instead of from the old-world ruin. Hunters could buy relics from such shops and then sell those relics to the Hunter Office's exchange centre. This fact would definitely raise a question in the trustability of the Hunter ranking.

The Hunter ranking was an indicator of the strength of a Hunter, and that strength was basically based on Hunter's ability to gather relics from dangerous ruin. The reason why the Hunter Office gave special treatment for the high ranking Hunters was to support the Hunters who had the skill to reach that ranking.

Hunter Office gave special treatment to high-ranking Hunters. Many cities in the eastern district only allowed Hunters of a certain ranking or higher to get permission to go inside the inner wall. Moreover, there were several secret information about old-world ruins available for high ranking Hunters only. The companies also tended to offer their new equipment cheaply for high-ranking Hunters which doubled as a promotion for those companies.

Because of that, some Hunters chose to buy relics with their money and took them to the Hunter Office in order to get a higher ranking than their actual skills. There were Hunters who gathered money from trading relics and then used that money to buy relics to bring to the Hunter Office in order to raise their Hunter Ranks.

Although it was a rather rare thing, sometimes there were also Hunters who did not want to raise their Hunter Rank for a certain reason, these Hunters would sell their relics to the exchange centre and shops that did not have any connections with the Hunter Office.

This practice could be interpreted as buying and selling Hunter Rank. Thus, those shops with good reputations tend to limit the relic trading with the Hunters or do a full identity check in order to prevent the Hunter Office from blacklisting their businesses.

But then, if they asked those Hunters who used that method to raise their Ranks where they got those relics, most of them would reply that they got their relics in the slum.

While on the other hand, some companies that were running their business in a relatively unsafe area tend to hire former Hunters to bolster their fighting power. The higher the ranking of the Hunters they hired, the better their fighting power were and the more protection they offered. Those companies sometimes paid those Hunters not with money, but with relics. As for the Hunters' side, some of them decided that it was better to get paid with relics rather than with money, so sometimes they made being paid with relics as one of the requirements to employ them. But in the end, the relics that the companies used to pay those Hunters were mostly bought from the slum.

Merchants in the slum were able to gain an unthinkable amount of money considering where they were conducting their business because of those under-the-table dealings.

Akira was listening closely to Carol's explanation.

Carol was smiling happily seeing that Akira was interested in her explanation. At the same time, she also thought about the reason behind that interest.

[Akira hailed from the slum. If I have to make a guess, I bet he got lucky, found an expensive relic, and used the money that he got from there to become a Hunter. And then he grew so fast as a Hunter which would explain his lack of knowledge. So basically, Akira grew as a Hunter so fast that he did not have the chance to learn basic knowledge as a Hunter. Which means that he's a very talented person. No wonder Shikarabe got cautious of him… I bet the reason why he's showing so much interest in my explanation is simply because he's hungry for knowledge. I wonder if it's a

backlash from living so long in the slum where he couldn't get much information… As for the reason why he shows almost no interest in the opposite sex… I guess he was so desperate just to survive that his mental development is not at that stage yet, huh?]

Although it was not exactly wrong, her guess was not exactly right either. From her experience seducing a lot of people, Carol was able to see through a small part of Akira's personality.

Carol tried to look casual as she asked Akira a question.

"By the way, Akira, do you have any worry at the moment?"

"Worry?"

"Yep. I'm more experienced than you in all kinds of things. So if you have any worries, I might be able to give you some advice."

Carol was smiling at Akira as if she was hiding something behind her smile.

"By the way, I have a particular worry lately. It's about a certain Hunter who prefers food over women, he hardly shows any reaction no matter what I do to seduce him, do you have any idea what I should do?"

Akira understood that Carol was teasing him, so he smiled back mischievously and said.

"Nah, I don't have any good idea at all. I guess your only choice is to wait until he grows a little older. Either that, or just give up on him and aim for someone else."

"That's no solution at all, you know. So then, what about you Akira? Don't worry, you can share anything, I'll at least give you some advice regardless if it's useful or not."

Carol was smiling teasingly as if she was planning to get payback at Akira when she said that.

Akira thought for a bit before replying.

“…Worry, huh. Let’s see… If I have to say anything, I’ll say my lack of strength and money, huh… Wait, is that included as a worry in the first place?”

“Oh my, I think you got quite a lot of money from the last request and I also think that you’re already pretty strong, is it still not enough?”

“Even if you say so, I need to buy ammo, I want to get better equipment, and I want to eat good food. I feel like it won’t be enough no matter how much money I have. While for my strength, since I had trouble fighting the monsters back in the Mihazono ruin, that alone means that I’m not strong enough yet. Well, I have no other choice but to work hard as a Hunter and there’s no easy solution to that, I at least know that much.”

To be more precise, Akira was relying too much on the easy and effective solution called Alpha’s support. As long as Akira knew that, the rest was for him to work hard.

Carol smiled confidently and said.

“In that case, I did invite you to work together with me back then in the Mihazono ruin, right? If you work with me, I’m sure you can get a better look at my fighting skill and negotiation skill, so, what do you think? If you work with me, I think I can teach you many things, you know. I think it’s faster than gathering the experience by yourself, yes?”

Unlike last time, Akira did not reply instantly this time, but in the end, he gave the same answer as last time.

“I’m sorry, but I’ll have to refuse.”

Carol was a bit surprised by that, she sounded so disappointed as she said.

“Oh my, I thought I’ve done well trying to get you to recognize my skill, but I guess it wasn’t good enough, huh?”

Akira hesitated as he replied.

“No, that’s not the problem here. Like I said back then, I don’t plan much and can be pretty random, I don’t think I have the suitable personality to work together with someone else…”

“I’m the one who’s asking you to work with me, you know. So I at least will adapt to your schedule. And if we can’t work well together even after that, we can just stop working together. So, is it still a no?”

“Even if you say so, it’s still a no, sorry.”

Akira thought that he made the mood bad there, but unexpectedly, Carol smiled and said.

“I see. Well, it can’t be helped then. It’s true that working together with the other Hunter whom you can’t really work together with often ends up with trouble. Not to mention, you might come to hate me too, so I’ll stop bugging you about that. But if you ever want to work together with me even if it’s only for a short time, I’m open anytime, okay? I know that you sometimes go to the ruin with Elena and Sara, right? You can invite me too the next time you do that and I’ll be more than happy to come along.”

Akira thought for a bit before replying.

“You’re right, well, I’ll call you again if the chance comes up.”

Carol smiled happily.

“I see, I’ll be looking forward to it then.”

“Yeah.”

Akira smiled back and gave that short reply.

Akira and Carol were talking about a lot of things even after they finished their meals and had ordered refills for their after-meal coffee multiple times. When Akira realized that he had spent way more time than he originally planned, he said his goodbye to Carol and left the restaurant.

After Akira left, Carol was still inside the restaurant for some time. She was smiling wryly and mumbled.

“Hmmm. Akira’s reaction there was not bad, but I wasn’t able to make any appointment when to meet next either. I guess I relied too much on my seduction skill lately that my speechcraft skill has gotten dull.”

Carol was not always using her body to seduce her customer, she sometimes used other skills too. One of them was to get friendly with her customer which included bringing subjects about some common interests, talking about each other’s worries, asking about each other’s opinions, listening closely to what her talking partner was asking and giving an answer that the other was expecting, and eventually getting so close to the point that the other person became reliant on her. Seducing was just one of the methods that she could use to reach that goal.

Carol sometimes also used that to lead her partner to a better state. She encouraged them to be more positive about their lives, to be more confident, to cheer them up, to get them to enjoy their lives more and support them. It could be said that those were the services that they got from paying the money they earned from risking their lives to Carol.

At the same time, all of those encouragements sometimes caused them to get ahead of themselves and made them challenge dangerous old-world ruins that were out of their league, but Carol was okay about that. There were many different ways for people to use their lives. So Carol had no wish to stop them from doing so. Although, she might try to stop them if she knew that it would be counter-effective.

“Seeing how he reacted, I don’t think Akira would accept my invitation if I invite him to go to the wasteland randomly, and it’s unlikely for him to invite me. What should I do…?”

Carol was thinking about what she could do next to seduce Akira, that was when a call reached her information terminal. Carol checked the caller and accepted the call.

“Viola, I’m outside right now. If it’s something sensitive, call me again later.”

“Don’t worry, it’s just that I have a small question for you, it’s nothing serious.”

Carol could feel that Viola was planning something bad behind her uppity voice.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 141, Reignition

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After he left Carol, Akira headed to Sheryl's base.

Akira seemed to be in a good mood, noticing which, Alpha asked him a question.

"You seem to be pretty happy, was it really that fun talking with Carol?"

But Akira reacted in a surprised manner, it seemed that he did not notice it himself or he just simply did not feel that way.

"Do I look really that happy right now?"

"Yup, I always kept my eyes on you, so I can easily tell."

"I see, well, it's true that it was fun. After all, I got to hear a lot of things about being a Hunter."

Alpha smiled gently after hearing Akira's honest answer.

"I see, that's good to hear. In that case, it might be a good idea for me to gather information around that subject to talk with you too."

Alpha said gently. On the surface, it was as if she was saying it was for Akira's sake, but behind it, she was only doing that for the sake of keeping him away from Carol.

Akira thought for a bit before replying.

"Hmmm. Well, to be honest, I learn more about common sense in the eastern district instead of knowledge about being a Hunter from you after all. I guess I want you to teach me about common sense first. After all, I don't even know where the Kugamayama city is located in the eastern district, so, you can teach me about being a Hunter later after that."

"Sure, got it."

Suddenly Akira extended his hand and grabbed the man next to him, that man had Akira's wallet in his hand. In one fluid move, Akira drove a kick with his enhanced strength to that man who was not using an augmented suit nor an armour. Although Akira held himself back, his kick still hurt. Enough so as to force the man to roll on the ground and writhe in pain.

Akira happily picked up his wallet and then walked toward that man. That man who was still gasping in pain, noticed Akira walking toward him and desperately reached for his pistol in his pocket. He aimed it at Akira as fast as he could, but due to the pain, he was too slow.

With a smirk, Akira kicked the pistol away from that man's hand. The pistol flew and slid on the ground. Meanwhile, it had that man's hand bent at a weird angle, it was obvious that the bone inside it was broken. That man screamed in pain.

Akira was in a good mood. Unlike back then when Alna caught him off guard and took his wallet, this time, he was able to properly protect his life-staking money. Alpha did not even need to help him at all, Akira was able to identify that man entirely with his own ability. He felt the satisfaction as if he had redeemed himself.

Thanks to that, even with all the sins the man had taken against Akira, the boy was in such a good mood. It could be said that he was being

considerate to that man and only rendered him incapacitated. If Akira was in his usual mood, there was no mistaking it that man would have died by now. This was the back alley, it was not a strange thing to find one or two corpses lying here and there. His mood was the only thing that saved the man.

That man looked fearfully at Akira, who smiled at him in a good mood and said.

“You got really unlucky today trying to prey on me.”

Akira still sounded like he was in a good mood when he said that, but he immediately delivered another kick after he said that. That man shrieked, slammed to the ground, and rolled over.

For Akira, that was the end of the incident, it was done, it was finished, he got stronger, he was no longer careless anymore. After he could confirm that, he just turned around and walked back toward the main street.

But the voice behind him told Akira that it was not the end of the incident. That man, who was writhing on the ground in pain, suddenly shouted a curse.

“…Goddammit, I didn’t hear anything about this…”

Akira stopped, his smiling face turned cold in a snap.

Viola had an office hidden among the countless buildings in the Kugamayama city’s lower district. Colbert was there with Viola that day.

She was sitting on a sofa and said to Colbert in a good mood.

“Geez, you’re so cold, how about you come over here?”

Colbert was sitting not too far away from Viola and was able to clearly hear her invitation.

“No thanks.”

“Geez, you’re no fun.”

Colbert’s swift reply was more out of wariness rather than coldness toward Viola, but that did not ruin Viola’s mood at all, she was still smiling like usual.

Colbert looked at Viola, who seemed to be in an excellent mood, and told himself to be careful not to get involved in any troublesome stuff that she had in mind as he said to her.

“So then, why did you call me today? Is there anything you don’t like in the report that I gave you? Just so you know, I’m not going to return the reward.”

“Nope, it’s nothing about that at all. The report that you gave me was not bad. I just wanted to ask some stuff directly like what’s your impression of that shop.”

“I’m sure I wrote it in my report already, you didn’t read it?”

“I did. But even if it’s about the same subject, people usually give a different opinion when they’re asked directly compared to what they wrote in a simple report, you know. Even when you do negotiation, you would rather meet the other party directly even if it was something that you could’ve taken care of with text messages, right? That’s just how important the information that you can get just by talking directly. Or at least, for me, it’s that important, you do know that, right?”

Whatever the case, Viola was the one who hired him. Colbert made that as an excuse to give up there.

“…Alright, so then, what do you want me to tell you this time?”

“A lot of things, for the starter, what kind of girl is this Sheryl?”

Viola smiled bewitchingly at Colbert as they started going deeper into that subject.

That day, Colbert did not go to Sheryl's shop out of pure coincidence, he was hired by Viola to investigate Sheryl's shop. Although he hesitated at first to accept that request, since the reward offer was pretty generous, he eventually decided to accept it.

The only reason why Colbert tried to help out Levin was because he could do so while completing Viola's request, and in case if it got exposed that he got that request from Viola, he could use it as an excuse to evade. It might also help him to avoid getting roped into troublesome stuff later on, after all, either for better or for worse, Viola was famous for causing trouble. A lot of people would raise their guard when they noticed that Viola had made some moves and there was nothing bad with being extra careful.

Viola asked Colbert about a lot of things and Colbert answered all of her questions. Most of them were about the same thing that he had already written in his report, while the rest were about some stuff that he thought to be unnecessary to be written in his report.

Viola was listening closely to Colbert, who had known Viola for a long time, at this point, he knew for sure that she had something completely different in her mind behind her outer expression. She sometimes looked deeply interested when she actually did not care at all, sometimes she looked like she did not care at all when she was actually really interested, and sometimes it was neither. Viola only showed an expression that would help her get more information.

Colbert knew that Viola had manipulated information in order to indirectly control other people multiple times in the past. So he took great care and was being very careful as he was speaking to her, but even after that, he was still doubting himself–wondering if he was already dancing to Viola's tune.

"…That's basically the gist of it. The boss of that gang and the owner of that shop, that Sheryl girl is basically a pretty impressive girl. After all, it seems that she has Akira on her palms too, so it's not like her beauty is everything. This is only my guess, but I think that shop is doing well."

"You have a pretty good review on that shop."

“It’s just my opinion. If you’re questioning it, you can meet her and decide for yourself. In the first place, why are you interested in that shop? There are a lot of other similar shops in the slum city, right? Is it because Akira is involved?”

“Now that you mention it, did you see Akira there?”

“I didn’t get to see him when I went there. He might have been hiding somewhere. That room was surrounded with white sheets, he might have been hiding behind one of those sheets, though I can’t really say for sure.”

“I see, well, I have a lot of interest in that shop. Let’s just say that a lot of other shops are getting alerted by their new competitor. It’s nothing strange at all, right?”

“…Well, if you say so.”

Colbert could see Viola was hiding all kinds of stuff behind that excuse which she just gave. He could not tell if that was just his imagination or not since he might be mistaken, but he had no means to confirm it for sure.

“…If that’s all, I’ll head back home now. You can call me if you need anything else… One more thing though, I just want to make sure, it’s up to me what to do about the relics that I bought yesterday, right?”

“Yup. That’s one of the rewards from me, you can do anything you want with them. I’ll at least tell you this out of kindness, it might be a good idea to sell it, and don’t bring that to the Hunter Office’s exchange centre. If you get comfortable doing that, you’ll never be able to return back to being a normal Hunter.”

Colbert glared at Viola.

“Humph, it’s none of your business.”

“But of course, it’s completely up to you.”

Viola smiled when she said that. Colbert made a rather frustrated look as he left the room.

The door banged as Colbert slammed it on his way out. Viola looked at it and mumbled.

“Looking at how he acts, I don’t think he can return back to being a normal Hunter at this point. But well, that’s one way to live.”

Viola was the one who offered to pay Colbert with relics rather than with money in order to lure him to accept that request from her, taking advantage of his wish to never return back to being a regular Hunter.

A call reached Viola’s information terminal, she reached for her information terminal and said in a good mood.

“It’s me… Yep, yep, I’ve spread the rumour… Nope, my job is only to spread the information around to incite the fire and it is done when the fire has already started burning. Of course, I don’t mind going further, but it’ll cost you more, you know…? If you don’t want to pay me, then just wait. I did properly spread the rumour, so it’s only a matter of time… Yes, well, later then.”

Viola ended the call.

“I wonder what will happen from here and on, I can’t help but get excited.”

Viola smiled, imagining all kinds of possibilities.

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The man who stole Akira’s wallet was folded over the ground. Akira was walking toward him with a grim expression. That man’s face was distorted not by the pain from his broken hand, but also by the fear of Akira who was coming at him.

He did think of running away, but the pain from his stomach and his hand, as well as the fear of getting killed by Akira, prevented him from making any sudden movements. It was impossible for him to make a run.

Akira stopped right in front of that man and asked him with a calm voice as if he was whispering.

“What do you mean by that?”

But that man begged for forgiveness instead of answering Akira’s question.

“P-please spare me!! I’m really sorry!!”

Akira prodded his rifle at that man and asked him once again.

“Answer. My. Question. What do you mean by what you said just now…? If you answer my question, I might give you some of my medicine… If you won’t talk even under threat of a gun, then I’ll be more than happy to grant you that wish.”

Akira’s mood had gotten considerably worse. Even if that man did not answer Akira’s question because he could not organize his mind from the terror of the rifle that Akira was pointing at him, Akira would probably not care about that and just kill that man.

That man desperately begged Akira to not kill him.

“O-of course!! I’ll tell you!! I’ll tell you everything!! So please don’t shoot!!”

Akira lowered his rifle, pulled out his medicine box, took out some pills, and forced them down that man’s throat. He did not care even when that man groaned. Then Akira grabbed that man’s broken hand and forcefully realigned it.

That man screamed in pain when Akira realigned his broken hand, his face was distorted in agony. But his surprised and pained face immediately changed. The medicine worked wonders, the pain from his stomach and his broken hand from Akira’s kick slowly but surely waned. Even his hand that was bent in an unnatural angle until just now, after Akira forcefully realigned it, that man was able to move it again albeit only slightly.

That man was confused and surprised that Akira really shared some of his medicine, but his confusion and surprise were blown away when he noticed Akira had already pointed his rifle at him again.

Akira really shared his medicine, just like he said. So, just like he said too, he might as well kill that man for real. That man opened his mouth in panic. If Akira thought that he had abandoned his promise, Akira could pull the trigger anytime, so before that, he tried his best to start speaking.

"…I bought that information. They said that there's a certain careless young Hunter who carries a lot of money but an easy target to pick… And that it would be fine even if I get caught since someone got caught in the past too, but when that pickpocket ran and hid behind another Hunter, that boy was scared and ran away… The rumour is basically saying that you're an easy target and that it'll be fine even if I get caught…"

Akira remembered that he got careless in the past and had his wallet picked by a young girl named Alna. Unfortunately, he was not able to get his money back. After all, Katsuya protected Alna.

At that time, their difference in power was just too big, although he was against the idea, Akira ended up backing off. If Alpha had not stopped him back then, it was almost certain that a fight would have broken out and Akira would have been killed in that fight.

Akira's mood immediately turned for the worst the moment he remembered that. His expression turned cold, although he was emotionless, a wave of dark and gut-wrenching anger could be felt welling out from him.

Looking at that, that man got super scared as he begged Akira to spare him.

"I-It's not me!! It's the information from the information broker!!"

Akira replied with a calm voice.

"How did you find me? Did you see a photo of my face or something?"

"…They told me some descriptions like the hairstyle and body build… And also they showed me a blurry picture too."

"You were able to find me only with that?"

"L-Like I said, I got the wrong person. I mistook you with that boy Hunter."

“Didn’t you say back there that you didn’t hear anything about this? You didn’t say that you mistook me for that easy prey, right?”

“T-that is…”

That man was lost for words. Akira fixed his gaze at that man without saying anything. That man could not bear the pressure and started to tremble as he begged Akira.

“I-I’m really sorry, I was tricked by that information broker, they gave me the wrong information. It’s my fault, I’m so stupid for getting tricked by that information broker. So please, have mercy on me.”

Akira stared down at that man with his rifle still pointing at him, and that man looked back at Akira with a puckered face.

Akira suddenly lowered his rifle. That man looked so relieved, but that was immediately proved to be premature.

Akira grabbed that man by his neck and pulled him up, he then smashed that man on the wall of the back alley. That man groaned in pain, but Akira did not stop there, he then said to that man with a cold and heartless tone without even looking at him.

“First of all, let me get this straight, you were not tricked by that information broker. I am indeed the fool who got my wallet easily stolen by a brat. I was that weakling who ran away when the Hunter who was protecting that brat confronted me. The info broker did not lie to you, that information is correct.”

Then Akira looked straight into that man’s eyes as if he was peering deep inside that man’s soul, that man’s face was filled with terror.

“But I have no plans to just end that incident there. I’m not done with her yet. I don’t care where you got that information from, but make sure to tell that information broker that it’s not the end of the story yet, got it?”

Although Akira grabbed hard on his neck, that man managed to nod. Akira then released his hand, that man coughed and fell over to the ground.

Akira swiftly turned around and started walking away again.

That man was coughing while trying to calm his breath. When he was dropped from Akira's grasp, he saw his pistol, which Akira kicked from his hand, lying there on the ground near him. That man slowly stood back up and reached for his pistol.

The moment his hand reached his pistol, a gunshot echoed and his pistol was blasted off from his hand. That man could not help but turn at the source of that gunshot and saw Akira there with his AAH assault rifle aimed at him. Akira was the one who shot his pistol.

That man screamed and ran as fast as he could into the depth of the back alley.

Akira silently lowered his rifle, he was now in a terrible mood. He had the same grim expression that he had when he was about to fight Katsuya.

Alpha flew and stood in front of Akira, she enlarged her image in Akira's vision.

"Akira, take a deep breath."

Akira took a deep breath just like Alpha told him to, he did that multiple times. After a few repetitions, he slowly calmed down.

Alpha smiled gently at Akira to calm him down and said.

"Are you good now?"

"…Yeah… Sorry."

"Don't mention it."

Alpha smiled as if it did not bother her at all. Akira seemed slightly dispirited as he let out a big sigh.

“To be honest, I thought I’ve already completely moved on from that, you know.”

For Akira, it was something that was already over. Or at least, that was what he thought. If nothing had happened, he would only have chuckled when he remembered about that. It was really something that was already over in his mind.

But it seemed that someone did not want to let him end it there, so in Akira’s mind, it changed from ‘already over’ to a ‘short pause’, and now it was back ‘on play’ again.

Alpha then worriedly said to Akira.

“I think it’s a good idea if you just head back home without visiting Sheryl’s base today. It would be bad if something were to happen when you’re in such a bad mood, you won’t be able to try to defuse the situation, right?”

“…No, I’ll at least visit her briefly. After all, I did promise her that I’ll come even if it’ll be rather late than usual… Moreover, there’s something I want to ask Sheryl.”

Akira’s face turned tense again as he thought of what to do to solve this situation.

***

Sheryl was working in her private room when someone suddenly knocked on the door.

“Come in.”

Alicia opened the door and said to Sheryl.

“Boss, Akira-san is here.”

Sheryl glanced at Alicia, who was alone. She then tilted her head and asked.

“Where is he?”

“He’s talking with Erio right now, he’ll be here in a minute. And also, there’s actually something that I need to tell you…”

Alicia hesitated and looked rather worried.

“…I’m not really sure what happened, but it seemed that Akira-san is in a very bad mood right now. So, be careful.”

Alicia asked Erio to hold Akira back for a bit so she could warn Sheryl about Akira’s mood. Sheryl noticed that as she frowned.

As Alicia left the room, Akira came in. When Sheryl saw Akira’s expression, she was barely able to maintain her expression from shrinking.

Even Sheryl could see clearly that Akira was obviously in a terrible mood. Akira knew his expression was leaking his emotions, so he tried his best to mend that. He tried his best to act casual but he completely failed in doing so.

[This indeed looks really bad… Thank goodness Alicia warned me beforehand.]

Sheryl was extremely nervous, but she still smiled at Akira, trying her best to hide her nervousness.

She sat face to face with Akira on a table, she could clearly feel the heavy mood in that place. She was wringing all her brainpower to think what was the right thing to do there.

Both for the sake of her position in the gang and her own feelings, Sheryl did not want Akira to hate her. Akira was the main supporter of the gang as well as the reason why she could keep her position as the boss in the gang. If Akira came to hate her, her position would crumble. Akira was also Sheryl’s psychological anchor, he was the place where she would lean to when she was mentally or spiritually exhausted. If Akira abandoned her, there was no doubt that she would break.

If it was the normal Akira, even if Sheryl made some slip-ups and said something that she should not, Akira would just let that slide. If Sheryl said something that caused a misunderstanding, she could explain everything until the misunderstanding was cleared up. If she said something that offended Akira, she could apologize for it. That way, it would not deal a fatal blow on her relationship with Akira, or at least, that was what she thought.

But the current Akira was not how he usually was, Sheryl could not afford to behave normally. She felt that if she made a slight mistake or if she said something that caused even a slight misunderstanding, it would deliver a fatal blow to her relationship with Akira. Sheryl proceeded extra carefully as not to trigger any landmines.

[…S-should I just keep my mouth shut like this? Is it a good idea to keep silent until Akira calms down a little? B-but, what if that angers him instead? Should I take the initiative and put my bet on the chance of cheering him up… While of course, being extra careful as not to make his mood even worse. But I have no idea what made him angry in the first place at all, so… But no…]

As Sheryl put all of her focus on thinking about what to do there, she started to forget about other smaller things. Her face also slowly turned tense.

Although Akira was normally a dense boy, he was able to easily notice that change in Sheryl's expression, it showed just how desperate she was.

Looking at Sheryl, who was getting more and more desperate, it somehow calmed Akira a little. He then said to her.

"Sheryl."

"Y-yes!?"

Sheryl flusteredly replied back, she did not expect Akira to talk to her so suddenly like that

Akira tried his best to sound like his usual self.

“…Well, uhh, something happened today and I’m not in a good mood right now. I know that myself, but it’s not like I’m angry at you at all. And also, I’m trying my best here, but I’m sure that I might vent my anger on you, so I’ll apologize in advance. I’m sorry, if I really end up venting at you, please just forget about it and don’t let it bother you too much.”

After he said that, Akira lightly lowered his head.

Sheryl was a bit surprised by that, but she immediately regained her composure and smiled gently at Akira. She was somehow able to calm down and regain her clarity. She thought that it would be less likely for Akira to get angry at her if she was the one who was on the listening side, so she encouraged Akira to continue.

“I understand. I won’t force you, but if it helps you if you share it with someone, I can listen to you as much as you want.”

“…Sorry, thanks for the offer, but no.”

Sheryl looked at Akira and tried to make some guesses.

[…It seems that it’s something serious, I might be able to win some points if I can help him solve his problem… But looking at it, it’s more likely that I’ll be biting more than I can chew.]

Sheryl acted casually as if it did not bother her at all and said.

“Please don’t be, it’s my fault for saying something that I should not. I know that it’s not like I can help much, but if there’s anything that I can do, please do tell me.”

When Sheryl said that, Akira looked at her as if he just remembered something.

“Ah, that’s right, there’s something that I wanted to ask you.”

Akira took out his information terminal, clicked some buttons, and then placed it on the table so that Sheryl could see it too. Alna's picture was on that information panel, she was the pickpocket who stole his wallet.

"If you ever see this girl, I want you to inform me."

Sheryl peeked at the picture. Judging from her attire, that girl seemed to be someone from the slum city, but her figure was not that bad. She would be beautiful with a little bit of effort, or at least, that was what Sheryl thought when she saw that picture.

Akira did not show any interest even after he saw Sheryl naked, but now he was asking her to help him find another girl. Sheryl felt a bit dissatisfied by that. But she decided to put that for later and asked Akira.

"I just need to look for this girl, right? If you would tell us her name and her connection with you, we should be able to find her more easily."

"I don't know her name, and also, I don't want you guys to look for her. It's just that if any of you spot her, I want you guys to tell me."

"But like, you're looking for this girl, right? What do you plan to do to her after you find her?"

Since Akira did not say anything about his relationship with Alna, Sheryl got a little suspicious there.

If it was nothing bad, then she needed to be careful not to do anything rude when she brought Alna to Akira. On the other hand, if it was the opposite, she could use force to capture that girl and that might help her win some points from Akira.

But Sheryl needed to be extra careful on how she would deal with Alna, if Akira was looking for her since she helped Akira before, then it would only cause Akira's mood to get worse if they treated Alna badly.

But Akira's answer to Sheryl's question was short and clear.

"I'll kill her."

Akira's voice was so cold and heartless that it even surprised Sheryl.

Sheryl's smile froze in an instant.

Akira sighed to calm himself, he then said.

"…That girl stole my wallet, you see. So, since she stole the money that I gathered by risking my life, I'm planning to kill her if I find her again."

"I-I see."

"…And also, there's no need to kidnap her or use force. Although I'm not sure if they're just her friends or if they were just backing her up, she basically has some Hunters protecting her. And those Hunters are more or less as strong as me, or might be even stronger than me. I chased her when I noticed that she stole my wallet, but in the end, I couldn't get my money back because of those Hunters."

"…They're stronger than you?"

"Yeah, so there's no need to use force."

Akira casually admitted that those Hunters were stronger than him, and on top of it, Sheryl noticed that he had no plans to sacrifice the gang just to look for that girl. Although she felt happy about it, she also thought that they needed to get more useful to Akira. Showing that the gang was useful to Akira was an important milestone for the gang.

The only reason why Akira was helping the gang was simply because he was Sheryl's lover, there was no other reason. So if they could give Akira more reason to back the gang, it would definitely make the gang feel safer. After all, everyone in the gang was actually worried that they might be abandoned by Akira.

Sheryl replied with a serious face.

"I understand. I'll properly warn everyone. How should we inform you if we spot her? Even though you told us to inform you if we spot her, it's not

like everyone in the gang has an information terminal. Of course, we want to help you as much as possible, but…”

“No, there’s no rush. You can just tell me when and where you guys spotted her. After all, she might have moved to another area by the time that information reaches me.”

Sheryl was a bit surprised by that, when Akira said that he will kill that girl, it sounded like he had a deep dark grudge on her, but from what he said just now, it sounded as if Akira did not really care that much even if they could not find that girl.

[I don’t really understand what’s on Akira’s mind, but it’s better if we do what he told us to. It might break into a fight, after all, if that’s the case, we can’t afford to get reckless… After all, unfortunately enough, we’re not ready for something like that.]

Sheryl was not that close to Akira yet, she made a forlorn expression when she realized it.

Akira noticed that slight change, misunderstood its meaning, and apologized.

“…Sorry, I did try my best to be careful, but I guess I still ended up venting it on you, huh? Sorry.”

Sheryl somehow managed to give her usual smile.

“Please don’t worry about it, everyone has their bad day. If it helps you out, you can vent as much as you want on me, I don’t mind it. But of course, as a reward, I’ll have you spoil me a lot later.”

“… Ahhh… Well… You can do whatever you want.”

Sheryl was smiling mischievously, which Akira replied with a wry smile.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 142, Shizuka’s worry

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Sheryl took an information terminal from her desk, it was the information terminal that Akira left there the other day.

“I’m returning this. It is a hard game, but it was interesting. Thank you very much.”

Sheryl gave her impression about the game and returned the information terminal back to Akira. It was indeed just a game, but it was also a relic hunting simulation based on Akira’s real skill, a training tool using a top-down simulation. Akira lent that to Sheryl since it seemed she was interested in it yesterday.

When he heard that Sheryl also thought that it was a difficult game, Akira made a troubled face and said.

“…Yeah, you’re right, it’s really a difficult game.”

Saying that the game was hard was similar to saying that Akira’s skill that was reflected onto the main character in the game was still way too underdeveloped. Although Akira himself understood that very well, it still hurt him a bit when he was reminded of it.

[It’s true that I still have a long way to go. I guess I have no other choice but to get better equipment, train myself up, and gather more experience, huh.]

Sheryl thought that it was simply a game. That was why she did not think much about it as she said to Akira.

“Yes, it was an interesting but difficult game. It took me some time before I could clear it.”

“Eh!?”

Akira was taken aback by what Sheryl said. Sheryl was also surprised by Akira’s reaction.

Akira was so dumbfounded that he could only react awkwardly.

“You… Cleared it?”

“Y-yes.”

Sheryl, who saw that, replied back awkwardly too. It was indeed a difficult game, but there was no reason for Akira to be that surprised, at least that was what she thought since she did not know anything more than that.

Akira opened the menu to check the previous play sessions of the game. He was so surprised that he was not able to nimbly navigate through the menus, so instead Alpha took over and quickly brought up the history menu.

Alpha scanned the history list and said.

“Yep, she did clear it, the score is turned to a plus.”

It was really surprising for Akira.

“…So it was really possible to clear it with that difficulty, huh?”

Alpha smiled and faked a pout.

“Oh my, did you really think that I would set it to a difficulty that you can’t clear?”

“W-well, I didn’t mean it like that.”

Akira flusteredly said that it was not true, but somewhere deep inside his heart, he really thought so, after all, it was really difficult.

But now that he knew it was possible to clear it in that difficulty, it made him wonder how to do it, and the person who could answer that question was right in front of him now.

Akira pushed the information terminal that he just received back to Sheryl.

“Sheryl, can you try to clear it again?”

“Sure.”

Sheryl found Akira’s sudden mood change to a more serious one rather weird, but then, she replied with a smile.

Sheryl sat on the sofa and played the game to clear it one more time, Akira sat next to her, he had his eyes fixed on the information terminal on Sheryl’s hand. Sheryl had once sat on Akira’s lap while facing in his direction, so Akira thought that she would not mind him getting that close and prioritized more on a position where he could comfortably look at the information terminal.

But Akira’s guess was wrong, Sheryl actually was a bit bothered by that. She continued playing the game while holding back her embarrassment and delight. For Sheryl, who thought that she overdid it the other day, Akira was too close this time. And it was not Sheryl who took the initiative, it was Akira, and that fact alone made her face glow with happiness.

[Close, way too close.]

In order so that he could get a good look on the monitor, Akira tried to line up his vision with Sheryl’s, so of course, Akira put his face close to

Sheryl's. Since they did not cover anything from their neck up, they were close enough to feel each other's skin warmth.

If Sheryl said that Akira was making it more difficult to play the game, or even if Sheryl showed any sign that she was bothered, Akira would normally get some distance. She tried her best not to show it while continuing to play the game in silence as her cheeks went slightly reddish.

Fortunately, the game did not need Sheryl's continuous attention or any time-sensitive actions. So even if she was a bit in disarray, it did not affect her performance in the game, she just needed to be extra careful and take extra time before making any decisions. Following that, the Akira in the game started to slowly and carefully explore the old-world ruin.

The reason why the Akira in the game could make dangerous moves as if he could read the future was simply because Sheryl had cleared that game a few times, so she knew what would come afterwards. Of course, it was not something that she could overcome only by knowing that it was coming, but if she knew what she would face, it would help her overcome that danger.

Akira closely observed the movements of the Akira inside that game and asked Alpha a question.

"As I thought, even if you know that it's coming, it's still not easy."

Alpha mischievously smiled and replied.

"So in short, it means that even if you have the ability to read the future, it's still a difficult thing to return back alive from the dangerous old-world ruin."

Akira got dejected. He understood and completely agreed with what Alpha said, he also knew well that he should not feel prideful about his skill nor belittle whatever he faced. But still, it was discouraging to get reminded of that.

Now then, putting aside the real Akira, the Akira in the game did not find much trouble exploring the ruin. Eventually, he got some relics and left the ruin. The ammo and medicines that he used during the exploration, his wounds, the time that he took to explore the ruin, and the number of relics that he brought back, all of them were translated into his score. The black-coloured score points showed that he ended up with a positive score, and with that, Sheryl cleared the game.

Akira who saw that Sheryl cleared the game casually complimented her.

“That’s impressive!”

Sheryl blushed.

“Thank you very much.”

Sheryl glanced at Akira, it seemed that his mood had considerably turned for the better.

[It seems that Akira has been completely cheered up. Is he really that interested in this game? I guess I’ll put in some effort to investigate about this game later.]

Sheryl thought that she should look about that game in the network later. But sadly enough, that game was made by Alpha, so there was no information about that game that she could find in the network.

Sheryl was about to return back the information terminal to Akira, but Akira stopped her.

“I’m lending that to you, so you can use it for the time being.”

“Are you sure? It looks like an expensive information terminal though.”

“Yeah, you can use it as your usual information terminal. I’ve also changed its provider from the free provider, so you should be able to reach me even when the line is busy. Well, what can I say… You can just think of it as a reward for clearing that game… And also, if you have the time, you can play that game and aim for a higher score.”

“I understand, I’ll hold on to it dearly… If I can get a better score, can I get a better reward next time?”

“It depends on the score.”

Sheryl was joking when she said that and Akira replied while giving Sheryl a smile.

Akira then left Sheryl’s base. The sun was about to set, the slum city slowly but surely blanketed in darkness. But it was not like the slum city would be covered in total darkness once the sun was out. As people had created lights to help their lives, there would be some places that would radiate light. But even so, it did not change the fact that the slum city would get more dangerous once the night fell compared to when it was in the middle of the day. When the light that illuminated the world was gone, those who hid under the shadows would start to make their moves.

Akira was walking through the slum city at that moment when the world shifted from light to darkness.

He was walking while talking with Alpha.

“I wonder if I can explore the old-world ruin without your support if I can clear that game.”

The Akira in that game was the reflection of his real skill. So what he said was not exactly wrong.

Alpha smiled smugly and said.

“Of course, that is if you can easily clear that game. But in that case, you’ll have to make decisions in an instant, you have no way to know the position of your enemies beforehand, your life will be over if you make even a single mistake, basically, it would be a one-try only game with no chance of retry, you sure you want to give it a try?”

“No thanks.”

Akira's answer was swift and instantaneous. If that game's difficulty level was increased to be as close to reality as possible, that would be the kind of game that he would play. And of course, the real world would be even more difficult than that.

Alpha then continued with her smug smile.

"Just to let you know, I do all kinds of things to support you during your Hunter work. And that's including giving you instructions to make sure that you won't get killed, refining your movements by controlling your augmented suit, and many other things too."

Alpha was still smiling mischievously at Akira and he returned with a wry smile.

"Thank you for all your help."

"You're very welcome."

Alpha smiled satisfied after hearing the words that she was waiting for.

Akira suddenly grabbed the hand of the man next to him, and that man had Akira's wallet in his hand.

Akira's face twitched out of anger as he mumbled.

"…Again, huh?"

Akira took back his wallet and kicked that man, he made sure to hold back so as not to kill that man.

That man was also aiming for Akira after he got the information from the information broker. But the information that man gave to Akira was different compared to the last one.

This time the rumour said that Akira was a kind Hunter who let go of the girl who stole his wallet since she was just a little girl. So even if that man got caught, Akira would just forgive him if he apologized. That man trusted that information and went for Akira.

The reason why Akira backed off when that young girl stole his wallet was just because he had no other choice when the Hunters backing that girl confronted him. He lightly threatened that man and told him to tell the information broker what he just said there.

Akira kicked that man 3 times before he let that man go, so that man dragged himself in pain and somehow managed to leave that place.

This time, Akira did not share his medicine. When he kicked that man, he had no plans to kill that man but he did not care if that man died. If that man was unlucky, he would die before he could convey Akira's message to the information broker.

The reason why Akira let him go was because he did not try to shoot Akira when Akira caught him. Had he aimed his gun at Akira, Akira would have killed that man.

He was livid, but he was still able to think calmly. Akira did not lose his cool like last time, the fact that he was able to prevent his wallet from getting stolen twice with his own skill helped him to calm down.

Akira suddenly asked Alpha a question.

"Alpha, do I look like an easy target to them?"

"No idea, but at least, you don't seem like a veteran Hunter."

"Well, I know that too, but still…"

Akira seemed to be slightly dejected. Alpha then made some remarks about another thing unrelated to his outlook.

"Rather than your outlook, I think the main reason is the fact that an information broker is selling info about what happened back there. You're just a boy, the pickpocket was just a girl, 100,000 Aurum is a rather big sum of money for those in the slums. You were able to catch her, but, leaving the reason aside, you couldn't get your money back. If you look from that point of view, it's understandable that people easily misunderstand your real skill.

Since you are seen as just a mere child, the information about you would be quite cheap. Especially if the ones spreading it believe that you are incapable of retaliating. So, those that are seeking a target would most likely end up buying information about you."

"…What a pain in the neck!"

Not only the people who bought it from the information brokers but the fact was that this info must have spread across slum city as rumour by now. A lot of people would be preying on Akira from here and on out. At least, until the rumour died down naturally or something happened that overwrote it.

Akira exasperatedly sighed.

Shizuka closed her shop at a prefixed time every day. The private security company that she was in contract with also recommended her to do so. Although her shop was located in the lower district where it was relatively safe, once the night fell, the area would still become dangerous. Both for the sake of her own safety, as well as to lessen the work needed to be done by the private security company responsible for the area, it was important to close the shop during the night.

When Shizuka was about to close the door, Akira suddenly appeared.

"Is the shop already closed for today?"

Shizuka noticed Akira and threw him a smile.

"Hm? Don't worry, come in."

"…Is it really okay?"

Akira looked a bit apologetic, Shizuka smiled teasingly at Akira and said to him.

"Of course, it's important to hold dearly the candidate with the potential to become regulars of my shop."

“Thank you very much!”

Akira said his thanks and entered the shop, Shizuka then closed the door after he went in.

There was no one else inside the shop, only Akira and Shizuka. Putting Akira aside, it was a situation where it could be said that Shizuka was a bit too careless, but she decided to trust her intuition and thought that it should be alright. It was not like she would allow just anyone to enter her shop after she closed it.

Shizuka returned to the counter and started talking to Akira.

“Are you here for ammo again? Or are you planning to buy rifles today? Is it okay if I get my hopes up?”

“I actually have something I want to ask… Shizuka-san?”

Akira noticed that Shizuka was staring at him.

Shizuka fixed her gaze at Akira, she looked straight into his eyes as if she was trying to see through him. Akira was not that bothered by it, but he still found that a bit weird. He could not understand why she was doing that, so he awkwardly tried to say something.

“U-Uhmm…”

“Akira, did something happen?”

Before Akira could say anything, Shizuka suddenly asked Akira a question while still staring at him. With that question, it felt like Shizuka was able to see through him. Akira seemed to feel a bit troubled as if his bad side just got discovered by Shizuka. He then proceeded to try to avoid that subject for some reason that he himself did not understand.

“Well, it’s not really something bad… It’s just that someone tried to steal my wallet, ah, but I was able to prevent it. But yes, it still leaves a bad aftertaste.”

“…I see.”

Shizuka approached Akira and gently hugged him. Akira’s head was pressed against Shizuka’s chest and was buried in her bosom.

“…Shizuka-san?”

“Just let me do this.”

Akira was troubled by it, but once Shizuka told him so, he stopped fighting back and just let her hug him.

Shizuka seemed to be thinking about what to say to Akira while still hugging him. Her expression was saying that she found some words to say to Akira, then decided they were not the right words, and tried to look for something else to say.

After she gathered all of her experience until now and combined it with her intuition, she then proceeded to convey those words to Akira who was still hugged tightly.

“I’m sorry if I get this wrong, you’ve grown to be pretty strong as a Hunter, you now can do things that you couldn’t before, so I’m sure that you have things you’re worried about related to that… and I’m sure that you have a lot in your mind too about that matter. I’m sure you don’t need to worry about it if you decide to stop caring about it, but before you do that, you should at least share it with someone… You can share your worry with me, it might lighten your burden if you do so, you know?

Shizuka then put her hand on Akira’s head and lightly patted him.

Akira did not say anything as he let Shizuka hug him. When she said those words to Akira gently, his arms moved slightly to hug her back, but he stopped his arms midway. Right after that, Shizuka released Akira from her hug.

Akira took a step back, lightly bowed with a smile, and thanked Shizuka.

“Thank you very much, I think that helped me.”

Shizuka smiled at Akira, she seemed relieved.

“I’m glad to hear that, If you have anything you want to talk about, you can always talk to me. After all, although I look like this, I have more living experience than you, so I think I can give you some advice, and even if I can’t give you any advice, I can at least listen to your complaints.”

In reality, Akira did feel much better. Now that he had regained his calmness, Akira smiled and thought of something that was not really that important. It was true that Shizuka was a beautiful young girl, but of course, there was no way she was in the same age group as him, so Akira thought that ‘although I look like this’ line was not necessary there.

Shizuka noticed that thanks to her sharp intuition and that made her smile even more.

“You just thought that there is no need for me to say ‘although I look like this’, right?”

Akira did not say anything back, he just replied with a smile, which was a bit awkward.

Shizuka could somehow sense that the dark emotion that was welling deep from inside Akira had mostly vanished. Shizuka felt relieved after confirming that. But she did not show that in her face when she said to Akira.

“So then, you want to ask me something, right? What is it?”

Akira hesitated and sounded rather unsure.

“Ah, yes, right, I actually want to ask some questions about equipment, so I just thought if I can get your opinions… It would be a great help if you can give me an estimation of what is the best equipment that I can get with my current budget… Like an augmented suit, or rifle, or information terminal. It would be great if you can give me some recommendations, ah, but this time, I’m not thinking of getting new vehicles.”

“Sure, I don’t mind, so then, how much is your budget this time.”

Shizuka smiled at Akira as she asked him that question, Akira hesitated before answering back.

“…Uhm, it’s about 4 hundred million Aurum.”

Shizuka continued smiling at Akira without saying anything. Akira, who saw that, started trying to make excuses with an awkward smile.

“No, it’s not like what you think it is. It’s true that I did pretty reckless things. But I wasn’t alone, I was with Elena-san and Sara-san when that happened, so it’s not like I did some dangerous stuff out of my own volition, things happened and I had no other choice. So, uhmm, back then in Mihazono ruin, something unexpected happened, something that even Elena-san couldn’t predict, so under Elena-san’s order, we all tried our best, so…”

Shizuka was still smiling without saying anything when Akira desperately explained what happened.

The reward from the request that they had accomplished in the Mihazono ruin with the other Hunters was 5 hundred million Aurum. They then got extra money from the insurance company too as well as an extra reward as the reconnaissance team that went to Seranthal building ahead of the main team.

All requests that had something to do with the City Management had a ton of rewards. Then to top it off, Elena and Carol worked together during their negotiation with the City Management and Drankam. The information about the interior of the Seranthal building was also highly valued, and their success in rescuing Reina’s group added a big plus to their evaluation as well as to the amount of rewards they received.

So in total, they received 3 billion Aurum, which meant 5 hundred million Aurum for each person. Of course, there were expenses for their ammunition and other expendables too, but the City Management side also reimbursed them for that expense. Not all of them thought that it was worth

all the trouble that they faced back in the Mihazono ruin, but at least, for Akira, that reward was big enough.

Shizuka was still smiling at Akira, who was desperately making excuses, but she then suddenly sighed and said to Akira with a smile.

“Don’t worry. I heard from Elena and Sara too. So I more or less know what happened and I’m not angry at you.”

“I-I see.”

Akira sighed in relief. Even for him, it was not an easy thing to try to explain to someone, whom he had promised not to do anything reckless, as to why he broke his promise and did something reckless.

Shizuka looked slightly apologetic as she gently smiled at Akira.

“I’m sorry for doing something weird there. But if you’ve done something that you actually don’t want me to know, then at least keep in mind that it was something substantial that you did. It’s good to be proud of some extraordinary feat that you’ve done, you know. But that doesn’t mean that it would be okay for you to do that again, okay? There’s a small line that divides between getting used to dangers and belittling dangers, alright?”

Akira gave a firm nod.

“I understand.”

Looking at that, Shizuka smiled satisfied. She then changed the mood and asked Akira a question.

“Putting that aside, I’m really happy that you came here to ask for my opinion, but are you sure you’re okay with spending that much money?”

Akira found that question a bit weird.

“Uhhh, is there something bad about spending that much money? I got quite a lot of money from that request in Mihazono ruin, so I thought that I

should spend that much money for my equipment while I still have the chance…”

“That line of thinking is really good. It’s true that investing in your equipment is really important. But you can use it for something else too, like maybe to get better living quality for example. Like a better house or better clothing, or maybe use it for your own hobby. Since you got quite a lot of money this time, I think it’s a good idea to take a rest for a while, you know. There’s no need for you to rush yourself to get stronger, right?”

Akira thought for a bit.

“Getting better living quality, huh… To be honest, at the moment, I have no wish to spend my money on something like that though. Since I’ve been sleeping in the back alley of the slum city until recently, compared to that, my current daily life is like heaven though. So I have no complaints about my current living condition. I guess I won’t spend any of my money on that kind of thing until I find something lacking in my daily life.”

When Akira said that, Shizuka had a sad expression although only for a split second, she immediately hid that expression and replaced it with her usual smile.

“In that case, then there’s no problem. But still, 4 hundred million for equipment, huh. It seems that you’ve grown so much. It’s 4 hundred million Aurum, you know? Even I am surprised when you say that! Does it not make you feel anything?”

Akira smiled bitterly and replied.

“To be honest, that number is so big that it still doesn’t feel real to me yet. So I thought before it corrupts me or before I spend it on unnecessary things, I should spend it on my equipment first.”

“That’s a good idea. As a shop owner, I’m really happy with your plan.”

They then spent some time talking about what to buy. It was 4 hundred million Aurum, after all, Shizuka needed to make sure what kind of

equipment Akira wanted to get before deciding on what to buy. The reason why Akira did not use his last 1 hundred million Aurum was because he was planning to use it to get a check-up in the hospital as well as for emergency saving. He did a lot of dangerous things this time, so it was just to be safe in case his medical bill cost him 60,000,000 again.

After Akira finished his consultation with Shizuka, she asked him a question.

“As I thought, it’s important to carefully think about it when you’re about to spend 4 hundred million Aurum. Not to mention that it’ll take some time before the ordered articles arrive. So, are you okay with that?”

“Of course. I’m also planning to stay inside the city until I get my new equipment.”

“Alright then. I’ll give my best to help you since you’re a prime candidate as a regular.”

Akira pouted for a bit, it was rather rare for him to make that face.

“Candidate, huh… I’m pretty sure I’ve contributed quite a lot to this shop’s sale though, is it still not enough?”

Shizuka smiled and replied with a serious expression.

“That’s not the problem.”

“Eh?”

“Being a regular means that you’ll come to this shop regularly. So you don’t count when you get injured or killed and can’t come regularly to this shop.”

Akira’s expression changed. Shizuka was basically telling him to always come back alive, to make sure not to get injured too much that he could not continue his work as a Hunter, and to put extra effort in doing so. Akira finally understood that. It was true that he always did dangerous stuff when he went out to the wasteland, if he could not make sure to come back alive

anytime he went out, then there was no way he could be a regular to Shizuka's shop.

Shizuka smiled at Akira and said to him.

"So please make sure to properly be a regular to my shop, okay?"

Akira made his resolve and firmly replied.

"…Yes."

Shizuka smiled satisfied seeing Akira had made his resolve.

After Shizuka closed the shop and finished tidying up, she sat on the counter and sighed. Akira had already gone back home and there were no customers left inside the shop. The shop was dead silent, so her sighing echoed and could be heard clearly.

Shizuka was deep in thought about Akira.

"…To be honest, it's a not good thing to get too invested on a particular customer though."

Shizuka already knew that well, but she still mumbled there as if to confirm it. She then remembered about Akira and made a troubled look.

"So he caught someone who tried to steal his wallet huh… I wonder what he did to the person that he caught."

Rifles were freely traded in the lower district. The only difference between robbers and pickpocket was whether they pointed their guns at you when they took your belongings. The people that Akira caught were likely to be armed, so it would not be strange at all if Akira killed them.

Akira was no longer on the receiving end, if he wanted to, he could easily join the other side.

The question was once he got enough power to get back on those people who robbed him, could he fight back the temptation of getting his revenge

on those people.

It was a difficult question. After all, the fastest way to make sure that he was no longer on the receiving end and to attain the sense of safety and superiority that came with it was to join the other side. Simply put, it was to be one of those people that he hated so much.

For those people who decided to join the other side, their end was mostly the same. They get used to abusing their power and it corrupts them. They then have to fight those who have the same level of power and try to replace their positions. They would need to fight those who were in front as well as those from behind, trying to stab them in the back. The one who survived after all the chaos would stand on the peak, on top of those people who looked at them in awe and fear, on top of the countless corpses.

When Akira said to Shizuka he planned to splurge his money for equipment, Shizuka thought that he was aiming for more power. But she was really glad that it was nothing but unnecessary worry.

Shizuka actually wanted Akira to have other options and for him not to unnecessarily make enemies. After all, in this world where there were already plenty of enemies, it was the secret to long survival.

But the one to decide was Akira, not her. She can hope but she can not force Akira. After all, she has no right to do so.

But even so, it should be fine for her to have hope. As Shizuka thought so, she then mumbled.

“…If it’s possible, I wish Akira can properly be a regular at my shop. As the owner of a shop and a Hunter who is properly earning money, I really wish we can get along for a long time… Even if he’s not earning that much.”

Shizuka once again noticed that she was too invested in Akira as she sighed.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 143, One more time

Index

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Akira was taking a dip in the bath inside his house while thinking about what happened that day, his consciousness was hazy thanks to the bath.

“…For some reason, I feel so tired today though I didn’t get into any fights.”

Akira was exhausted. It must have been because a lot of things happened that day, both good and bad. He let the warm water help him recover his physical fatigue.

Alpha was also in the same bath, just like usual. She looked at Akira as if she was thinking about something.

Akira noticed Alpha’s gaze.

“What?”

“As I thought, it has minimal effect unless you can touch it, huh?”

“What?”

“I’m talking about when Shizuka hugged you.”

Akira, who was leaning on the bathtub, slowly sunk deeper into the water. When his mouth and nose finally went underwater, he breathed in some water, which startled him as he immediately pushed his body back up and coughed.

Akira panicked for a bit since he was about to drown there.

“…W-what are you even talking about!?”

“Like I said, I’m talking about when Shizuka hugged you. To be honest, I think outlook wise, I’m better than Shizuka. But even so, it seems that it doesn’t affect you that much, so I guess it’s because you can’t touch me.”

Alpha did not seem to be teasing him. She was simply asking an honest and straightforward question to Akira, and that made Akira waver a bit.

“W-was I really fawning that much?”

“Well, different people will have a different opinion about it, I’ll leave it at that.”

Akira flustered for a bit since Alpha only gave a vague answer. Looking at that flustered Akira, Alpha did not show any sign of teasing as she started scolding him.

“Well, I guess I’ll give you a little warning. She thought of you as a small boy, which you are, but there’s a limit on how far this can go, right?”

“I-I know.”

Akira decided that he had to make sure not to leave any bad impression on Shizuka.

Alpha did not lie there. It was true that each person would have a different opinion on that matter. And even if Shizuka saw Akira’s expression at that time, it was unlikely for her to think that Akira was fawning over her, she would only think that Akira only felt relieved and nothing more.

But the actual reason why Alpha warned Akira was to check how he would react to that.

She was checking how far people could manipulate Akira's course of action, which could affect her own objective. In turn, she might need to come up with a special plan in such a scenario. At least for now, Alpha was able to confirm from Akira's reaction when he was hugged that she needed to be careful about that.

__*__*__*__

Alna was walking through the Kugamayama lower district in the middle of the day, she looked terrified. She kept looking around her surroundings as if someone was hunting her.

But in reality, no one was actually hunting her. But even so, Alna kept walking while keeping check of what was behind her, what laid on the next corner, what was hiding in the dark alley around her.

A sound suddenly came from behind her. Alna flinched, she looked back while trembling. A signboard just fell over behind her. It was not because someone was hiding behind it, it was simply because of the wind. Once she realized that, she sighed in relief and her expression softened.

But her expression immediately tensed up again. She still looked terrified as she mumbled.

"…Why is this happening to me?"

Alna kept on running without knowing if anyone was chasing her and without knowing where she could run to.

Last night, Nasha came to Alna's hideout, that was where it started.

Alna, who was already sleeping, immediately woke up when she heard someone knocking on her door. It was already deep into the night, it was not the time where people would usually visit others. So, she carefully

checked outside the door and she saw Nasha standing there with a grim face.

Alna let Nasha come into her hideout. Nasha scanned her surroundings first before she stepped in, she looked around the room with a grim expression, she felt slightly relieved after she confirmed that there was no one else there, but the grim expression on her face did not change.

It was obvious that there was something big going on, Alna tried to calm Nasha down as she asked Nasha what was wrong.

“Nasha, what happened?”

“Alna, are you alone?”

“…Y-yes.”

“Is there anyone else other than me and you who knows about this hideout?”

“I don’t think so. I didn’t tell anyone about this place except you.”

Nasha looked at Alna with a serious expression and said to her.

“Calm down and listen closely. Once we’re done here, get away from this place as soon as possible. This time, hide somewhere where even I don’t know about, okay?”

“W-whoah there, what’s going on?”

Alna started to feel scared. Nasha placed both of her hands on Alna’s shoulders, her voice was trembling as she was about to tell a painful truth to her best friend.

“Akira is going to kill you, he told the gang to look for you.”

Alna froze.

Alna had heard from Nasha that Akira was the Hunter supporting Sheryl's gang. But it did not seem like Akira was looking for her, at least until now.

Akira would eventually forget about her with time. So after talking with Nasha, Alna was planning to join Sheryl's gang later once it grew bigger and got more members. And just to be safe, she was planning to fake her name too, that way, she might be able to sneak in into the gang without getting noticed by Akira.

Akira was not someone who would leech off from the gang, while the boss of the gang, Sheryl, even put some effort to teach the members of the gang how to write and read. Compared to the other gangs in the slum city, Sheryl's gang was a significantly better place for children from the slums. A lot of small children wished to join that gang, and if it grew so big to the point that it had a branch, it would be even safer for Alna to sneak in. Alna had her hopes up when she heard that plan from Nasha.

But now, here, her hope was crushed.

Alna asked Nasha while trembling.

"W-what? Why? Since when? Everything was calm until now, right?"

"I have no idea, they suddenly told us to keep our eyes for you. They gave us a picture of you and told us to report back if we spot the person in that picture. And it seems that they distributed that photo to everyone in the gang."

Nasha showed the picture that she received from the gang to Alna. Alna's face turned pale as if she just saw something that she could not believe, the person in that picture was really her.

"H-he even has my photo… But how? How did he get that? When did he take this photo?"

In reality, no one took a picture of her. That photo was produced straight from Akira's memory when he saw Alna. Its quality was not bad, as a matter of fact, the person in that picture could easily be identified as Alna.

Nasha tried to calm Alna down since it seemed that Alna was about to scream.

“Alna, calm down, calm down, alright? Just calm down!”

Alna looked at Nasha with teary eyes, she was about to break.

Nasha then slowly and calmly said to Alna in order to calm her further.

“Calm down, please, just calm down. There’s something important that I need to tell you and I want you to listen to me closely. I received that picture when Alicia, an officer in the gang, told me to keep my eyes if I spot the person in that picture. But then, she also said that there’s no need to get out of my way just to look for you. As in matter of fact, she told me not to do that, she said that it’s okay to just report where and when I spotted you later.”

“W-what do you mean? They’re looking for me, right?”

“I don’t know the details either, but from what I heard, you have a Hunter friend who is stronger than Akira. That’s why there’s no need to forcefully bring you in since it’s dangerous. Alna, do you have any idea who that Hunter is?”

Alna shook her head.

“I see, then it must be a misunderstanding. They might be talking about that Hunter who helped you back then. Who was it again… Katsuya, was it again?”

“…That’s right, Katsuya-san.”

When Alna said Katsuya’s name, it sounded as if she placed her hopes on him.

Nasha then continued.

“I think you have two choices here. First of all, you can try to run away as far as possible from here. Although the lower district is pretty big, we don’t

know how far Akira would go to look for you. But I'm sure that he won't go as far as looking for you in another city, so you just need to run away at least that far."

It would be suicide to walk all the way to another city. If she really chose that option, Alna would need to make an arrangement for transportation. But doing that was not cheap, after all, the wasteland was filled with dangerous monsters. So not only for the transportation, she would need money to arrange for the escorts too.

"Your other choice would be to seek help from that Katsuya. If he's a kind person and if he's someone who won't let the person who he saved once get killed, even if it was only out of a whim, he might be willing to help you again. Akira himself said that Katsuya is stronger than him. So if that Katsuya told Akira not to mess with you, he might stop looking for you."

Nasha has never met Katsuya before, so she did not know what kind of person this Katsuya was. But she knew that Katsuya was kind enough to help out a total stranger, so she thought that if Alna desperately begged, he might decide to help her again.

"It might be even better to try both the ways out. Try and ask for that Katsuya's help, and if it doesn't seem like he'll help you, then make a plan to escape to another city."

Nasha gave Alna some hope. Thanks to that, Alna was able to calm down for a bit. But it did not fix her situation at all.

It was just that Alna had two possible ways out and both of them were unlikely to work. She might not have any means to run to another city, and Katsuya might refuse to help her again. Both choices did not give a guarantee that she would be saved.

Nasha pulled out a pistol and some money, she then handed them both to Alna.

"Use this, it might be not much, but it's better than nothing."

Alna was so surprised and flusteredly said.

“T-this pistol, isn’t it the gang’s property?! If you get caught…!?”

Nasha smiled at Alna as not to make her worry.

“Don’t worry, just use it. I’ll be fine, I can just tell them some lie.”

“B-but!?”

“It’ll be fine.”

Nasha hugged Alna and stopped her words midway, she then looked lonely at Alna and said.

“…I’m sorry. Although I call myself your best friend, this is all I can do for you. I did think of telling Sheryl about it and ask for her help, but it seems that won’t work too. She is scared of getting on Akira’s bad side, so I don’t think she’ll help out someone who Akira is planning to kill. As in matter of fact, I’m sure that if she knows I’m your close friend, she would do anything to make me leak your location.”

“T-then, you should come with me too.”

Nasha was still hugging Alna when she shook her head.

“No, I’m sure it won’t be much trouble if the gang lose one person worth of money and Katsuya might help you if you’re alone. So both the choices you have might not work if I’m with you, that’s why I can’t come with you.”

“…Nasha.”

“Moreover, things might change later and you might not need to run away, like Akira might get killed somewhere soon. He’s a Hunter after all, so it won’t be strange if he’s suddenly dead. Although, when that happens, it might be the end of the gang too. Whichever the case, if something like that were to happen, only people in the gang would know about it, so I’ll need to stay in the gang. And if that happens, I’ll try to let you know, but don’t get your hope too high.”

Nasha lightly smiled and hugged Alna tightly.

“This might be our last goodbye, I’m sorry but I have nothing else to say other than I hope you’ll be well.”

After she said that, Nasha released Alna from her hug, she then said to Alna with a serious face.

“Now then, I’ll head back now. After this, leave this place and hide somewhere that even I don’t know. Make sure to act carefully, always assume that they have interrogated me and I’ve told them everything that I know about you. I’ll do my best to resist, but I can’t promise you that I won’t leak anything.”

Nasha confirmed that Alna nodded with her teary eyes, she smiled at Alna to encourage her for one last time before she left.

After that, Alna packed her stuff with teary eyes and left her hideout just like what Nasha told her to. She had no plans where to go, she had no hideout that she never told Nasha about.

Alna walked in the middle of the night and picked a random back alley to catch some sleep.

When she woke up, the sun was already high up. She then remembered everything that happened last night, stood up and continued walking in fear.

“…Why is this happening?”

There was no one there who would answer her mumble.

Alna was wandering aimlessly in the lower district of Kugamayama city. Although she was not aiming for any place in particular, she unconsciously headed to a certain place. It was the place where she met Katsuya, she unconsciously headed there while hoping for a miracle to happen so that she could meet Katsuya one more time. As she walked through the alleyway, her expression was a mix of terror and resignation.

She then eventually got out of the alley and stepped into the main road, that was when she spotted Katsuya.

Alna was dumbfounded as if she could not believe what she saw. Katsuya noticed Alna, smiled at her and said.

“Ah, well, we meet again.”

Alna saw his smile and realized that it was not a dream. Right at the next moment, Alna started to cry, she was holding herself from crying from yesterday, and now the dam broke open.

Katsuya was flustered when Alna suddenly started crying, she clung to Katsuya while still crying.

“P-please help me…”

The miracle from the last time had happened once more. Her wish had come true. This meant that she had decided to abandon her other choice.

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There was an abandoned warehouse near the slum city. Armed people gathered inside that abandoned warehouse.

All of them looked to be already experienced in handling their weapons and they looked like thugs. Looking at their equipment, they seemed to be your common Hunters. But the air around them was more like that of robbers. They were exuding an ominous aura saying that they had lost their sense of logic to the point that they were willing to not only hunt the monsters in the old-world ruin but also normal humans.

They were talking about their next plan inside that nameless warehouse.

“So what’s the plan here?”

“This will be it, everyone. We’ll do it tomorrow, I have no one else that I can ask to come nor do I have the plan to take more people in. After all, the more people we bring, the less our individual share would be.”

“I’ve secured the route to sell the relics that we’ll rob. I also have contact with a fencer too. After all, we can get relics with unknown origin as many as we can, but it would be bad if they started asking where we got them, right?”

A man suddenly complained about their prey this time.

“Are you sure it’s worth robbing? If we only get cheap relics, it won’t even be enough to pay for the drinks, you know?”

“Some information that I gathered say that some of the relics there could be resold for even 100 times its original price. We should be able to find good relics there. 10,000 Aurum relics might fetch us 1,000,000 Aurum, and 1,000,000 Aurum relics might fetch us 10,000,000 Aurum. That place is worth robbing.”

Another man who was still in doubt voiced his doubt.

“If you go even that far, it actually makes it sound a little bit fishy though. How’s the enemy?”

“They have about 10 armed children, and one of them is a Hunter.”

“Small children, huh… I heard that there have been many strong young Hunters lately, does it have anything to do with those children?”

“Ahh, it’s about that guy from Drankam, right? I heard that Katsuya guy defeated a bounty monster only with young Hunters, I’ve also heard that they did pretty good during that incident in Mihazono ruin.”

The guy who was doubting the plan said with a hoarse voice.

“Whoah there, it’s a bad idea trying to fight someone who can defeat the bounty monster, you know?”

“Drankam is trying to be a proper Hunter gang, they even have some connections with the Hunter Office. I’m sure they won’t be protecting a back alley shop in the middle of the slum city. I’m sure the shop that we’re aiming for has nothing to do with that gang.”

Another man intervened.

“I heard that the young Hunter protecting that gang is not that strong. I heard that when a thief stole his wallet, he could not fight back and just ran away when the Hunter protecting that thief intimidated him.”

“So basically he’s not that great of a Hunter, huh? If that’s really the case, then that shop might be not worth that much, no? Are you sure we can get any money from robbing that place?”

“If you’re worried about money, I have insurance. I heard that the shop would likely get popular in the near future. Someone made a request to crush them sooner than later and we can take some extra profits on the side too.”

Another man then awkwardly said.

“…I see, I’ve never heard about that info before, but… If it will really bring us money, I don’t have any complaints.”

The guy who led the group put some pressure on his words as he said.

“Then just shut up!”

“…Humpph!”

They were a group of people who were tied together because of money. As long as whatever they were going to do was going to bring them more money, they would not break up their alliance. It was not like they were acting completely separately from each other, all of them had enough skill to work together with each other as a team. With their level of skills, they should be able to safely hunt for old-world relics to some extent.

But even so, they chose to hunt for humans instead since they thought that it was an easier way to earn money. As long as they kept getting results confirming that their assumption was correct, they would keep doing the same thing. At least, until the day they were proved to be wrong.

***

That day, Akira spent his day in Sheryl's base again.

Sheryl did not open the shop every day. It was not because Akira could not come to her base every day, it was more because there were other ways of gathering money that they needed to develop. Not to mention, Akira also asked them to teach the gang members how to read and write, and sometimes, they had to help Katsuragi too.

Sheryl and her gang opened their stalls and their shop irregularly about 3 days a week. Since Akira came to the base early that day, they decided to open their shop that day.

Akira was waiting inside Sheryl's private room together with Sheryl. When someone came in telling that she had a customer, Sheryl would change into her dress and go to the shop together with Akira.

Every time she had a customer, Sheryl would change to her dress and welcome the customer, and then she would change back to her casual attire when she returned.

One of Sheryl's men came and said that she had a customer. So Sheryl started changing to her dress.

While in the middle of changing her clothes, Sheryl suddenly heard Akira throw a question at her.

"Isn't it better if you just keep wearing your dress rather than changing to it every time someone comes?"

Sheryl smiled and said.

"It's a matter of feeling. It's better this way, knowing that I have a special dress for it helps me focus."

"Is that so?"

"Don't you feel a bit relaxed too when you return home and take off your augmented suit? It's something like that but only reversed."

“…Well, you have a point there.”

Akira sounded as if he was trying to avoid that subject.

Alpha smiled at Akira teasingly.

“To be honest, you often think that it’s too much of a trouble to take it off so you often don’t take off your augmented suit even when you’re home though.”

“I know, I know, I’ll be more careful.”

“It’s important to have this kind of switch, you know. It might be a good idea if you learn that from Sheryl.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Alpha looked at Akira, who reacted just like a small kid getting annoyed when he got scolded, and smiled.

Akira could feel that gentle smile from Alpha and felt a bit embarrassed. But he made sure to stiffen his expression so that would not leak out.

In the middle of changing her clothes, Sheryl could be seen using the undies that she received from Akira. Those were also old-world relics. She received those when Akira thought that they would not fetch him much, although they could get him quite a lot of money in reality.

Sheryl had gotten used to having Akira seeing her in her underwear, and it took even less time for Akira to get used to seeing Sheryl in that situation.

Sheryl put on her dress and thought.

[…I wonder if I should at least act more bashful to make Akira interested in me. But considering everything that happened until now, I don’t think that would have much effect though, not to mention that it seems I’m already gotten used to it too. I’m pretty sure Akira would see right through me even if I act bashful, good grief…]

Sheryl glanced at Akira. Although someone as beautiful as Sheryl was changing cloth next to him, Akira did not show any interest at all and it was highly unlikely that he was acting indifferent.

[…So basically, there's no need to fake anything, right? But I wonder what kind of situation he would show his embarrassed side. Now that I think about it, even back then when I straddled him, even though I think he's happy with that, I don't think he's embarrassed at all… Was it because I was the one who took the initiative? If Akira was the one who took the initiative, I wonder if he would react differently. That's right, for example, when I change my dress, what if Akira is the one undressing me one by one, I'm sure he'll have a different reaction…]

Sheryl imagined all kinds of scenes in her mind.

She imagined Akira undressing her layer by layer while slightly blushing, Akira's hand was trembling as he gently took off her dress. As her dress fell to the ground one by one, she blushed and sent an embarrassed gaze to Akira who was undressing her while trying to hold back her smile.

Sheryl unconsciously added more spice to her imagination. As her movements in the real world slowed down, her imagination grew wilder and wilder.

As Sheryl started to drown in her imagination, Akira suddenly called her.

"Sheryl!"

"Yes!?"

Sheryl was so flustered when Akira's voice pulled her back to reality. Akira found it a bit weird.

"…You're taking your time changing to your dress there, isn't it better if you hurry up for a bit. It would be bad if the customer arrives in the shop before you, right?"

"Y-You're right, I'm sorry, I'll hurry up."

Sheryl started to hurriedly change to her dress while still being flustered. Akira looked at her and tilted his head in confusion. This time, Sheryl was blushing for real, she was not acting.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 144, Uninvited Visitors

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Sheryl stood in the middle of the main room where she was selling relics with a puzzled face. Akira had already positioned himself by hiding behind the white sheet hanging from the ceiling. They were ready for the customer and it did not take long for those customers to arrive there.

The problem was the report that Tiol, who brought the customers there, gave. Sheryl frowned and said to Tiol.

“8 people? Wasn’t it supposed to be only 4?”

Tiol flinched from Sheryl’s gaze alone, but he managed to give her an explanation.

“There were only 4 people when they visited the stand. But when I was guiding them here, they met up with another 4 people, they said that those people were their friends. They then seemed to get rather excited and the other 4 asked to come along too, it was hard to refuse them and they seem to carry quite a lot of money, so I ended up bringing them all the way to the back alley… If you want to send them home, please ask Akira to do so. All of them are armed so I’m sure they won’t listen to me.”

Sheryl made a grim face while thinking of her available choices. Tiol was bedazzled by Sheryl, the dress that Sheryl was wearing to welcome the customer was beautiful enough to bedazzle him.

There was not that many occasion where Sheryl put on that dress. So being able to see her in that form was one of the special perks that Tiol received from his duty.

But Tiol killed his desire to strike a conversation with Sheryl. The reason she was able to have that wonderful high-class dress as well as the reason she maintained her beautiful hair and skin was none other than his love rival, Akira.

[…To be honest, even if I can become Sheryl's lover, I don't think I can give her that level of luxury… After all, she got that dress from Akira, and even if she breaks up with him, I'm pretty sure the whole gang will be disbanded. Since she's this beautiful, I'm sure there are a lot of people out there aiming for her too. I bet one day, a leader from a big gang would get his eyes on her and force her to be his lover or something. Once that happens, I bet I won't get that many chances to meet her anymore.]

At the moment, Tiol had zero chance to win Sheryl's heart. But that might not be the case in the future. If the gang grew bigger and bigger to the point that it was big enough to maintain itself without any support, then, the power relationship between Akira and Sheryl might get reversed.

Then, if something happened at that point, for example, let's say Akira fell in love with another girl which caused his relationship with Sheryl to sour, they might break up and Tiol thought Sheryl might start getting interested in another man.

[…For now, I have no other choice but to help the gang to grow big enough so that we won't need Akira's help anymore. And if Akira's relationship with Sheryl gets worse after that, then I should be able to get my chance. And if I help to develop the gang, Sheryl might start to like me… Although, I'm sure I'm not the only one who thinks so.]

Tiol's guess was correct, there were other people in the gang who thought like him. Most of them had no plans to get on Akira's bad side just to get Sheryl, but at the same time, most of them also hoped that they would eventually get some chance.

As Tiol thought about a lot of things in his mind, Sheryl finally reached her conclusion.

"8 people is too many. Just let 4 of them in. Let the first 4 come in then once they're done, let the last 4, who came along with them, come in after that. If they refuse to do so, then tell them that none of them is allowed to get in. If they still insist on coming in after that, Akira and I will tell them to go back ourselves."

Even with her ability to serve multiple customers, 8 people were still too many for her and for Akira to keep his eyes on, and that's doubly true when they were armed Hunters.

Lastly, Sheryl smiled worriedly at Tiol and said to him.

"Be careful, there's no need to get reckless."

"O-okay, I understand."

Tiol blushed and smiled, he felt relieved. Sheryl's mood was considerably worsened when he questioned her relationship with Akira the other day, but judging from that exchange just now, it seemed that it's alright now. Tiol seemed a bit happy as he left that room.

Sheryl smiled coldly and whispered.

"…He's so easy."

Sheryl thought if Akira caught her with that expression, there was no doubt that Akira would come to hate her. So she quickly returned her usual warm smile to her face.

Not too long after that, 4 people entered the room. Sheryl smiled in relief, it seemed that it did not turn into a fight. She then started serving the

customers with her usual friendly smile. It was possible to extract someone else's personality and preference from their attire, equipment, gaze, and expression. Then, that information could be used to adapt on how to approach them.

Those 4 people were scanning the relics lining inside that room, all of them were so well armed that they could go out to the wasteland anytime. They were also carrying bags most of which were empty.

Sheryl felt something was wrong with those guys, but she decided to shelve that for now.

Those men were browsing the relics displayed in that room, but somehow, they did not seem that interested. One of them kept checking the exits and doors in that room, and another one seemed to be keeping his eyes on the sheets hanging from the ceiling.

Then Sheryl could feel from their expression a slight nervousness, it was like a calm before the storm. Something was going to happen, something really really bad. But she tried her best not to let that out in her face.

One of them walked to Sheryl with a big smile.

Sheryl had her usual graceful smile as she welcomed them.

"Welcome to our shop."

The smile of the man who was walking toward Sheryl grew bigger, it was not because she was smiling at him, it was because his plan was going really well.

Alpha suddenly gave Akira an instruction.

"Akira, get ready for a fight."

Although Akira was a bit surprised by that sudden order, he quickly swapped to battle state. At the same time, the man who was walking toward Sheryl slightly lowered his guard, Sheryl trusted her calculation and

immediately started running toward Akira’s direction as fast as she could and dashed through the white sheets hanging from the ceiling.

That man was shocked and could not react for a while, but he immediately got a grip of himself, aimed his rifle with a grim face, and spread bullets haphazardly towards Sheryl’s direction without showing any hesitation.

Bullets pierced right through the first sheet, but lost most of its momentum and could not penetrate the second sheet. The accumulated momentum tore the sheet from the ceiling, it danced gracefully, pulled down by the gravity, bullets that had lost their momentum fell down and rolled over on the ground.

That man twitched and shouted.

“Anti-bullet sheet!? They’re not just simple interior sheets!?”

Originally, they were planning to take Sheryl hostage and take their time robbing the relics. But he was caught off guard and Sheryl was able to run away from him, which meant that Sheryl was able to quickly guess why they were here. So he immediately changed their plan from capturing Sheryl to killing her.

“Get the relics!! Tell the guys outside to meet up with us!!”

That guy shouted and gave an order to his men.

Akira caught Sheryl who dashed right to his direction with his right hand and hugged her close, he raised the CWH anti-material rifle on his left hand and pulled the trigger. There was no need to hit his target, his main aim was only to let them know that he was there. After that, he immediately brought Sheryl further into a door that was leading outside. It was an emergency exit prepared beforehand and the sheets were there to hide that emergency exit.

The man heard the gunshot coming from behind the sheet and turned in that direction in response. The anti-bullet sheet deflected the bullet from its original track and landed away from the man.

“As I thought, they have escorts hiding behind the sheets!!”

That man kicked a display covered by the anti-bullet sheet down and hid behind it to make sure that he would not get hit by the enemy’s bullets.

“The escort is behind the sheets!! Make sure to equip your defensive suits!!”

While he said that, that man pulled out a full-face helmet from his bag and put it on. They did not put that helmet at first so that Sheryl and his men lowered their guard, but now their situation had changed and they had to put them on.

Akira ran quickly while still carrying Sheryl, he was able to do that thanks to the augmented strength from his augmented suit. He made sure to run as fast as possible while not injuring Sheryl. Once he arrived in front of the door, he quickly opened it, pushed Sheryl out, and immediately shut the door.

Sheryl was dumbfounded when the door in front of her was closed with such force, she thought that Akira would run away together with her. Although she stood frozen for a few seconds, she immediately returned back to herself and started to move. The rest of the gang still did not know what just happened.

A gunshot echoed through the base, most of the gang members stopped what they were doing the moment they heard that gunshot. Sheryl shouted as hard as she could.

“It’s a shoot-out!!!”

With Akira protecting the gang, they thought that no one would dare to attack the base, but that day, their assumption was proven wrong.

At first, Akira evacuated Sheryl to a safe place, out from that room and away from the 4 men shooting from inside the room. With this, Sheryl’s safety was pretty much guaranteed, so he quickly moved to his next order of business, shooting back at those 4 men.

Akira lightly frowned.

“But still, I always thought that I’ll eventually open up a shop in the slum city big enough to warrant some robbers, but this is way faster than I thought.”

Alpha smiled and replied.

“You’re just unlucky.”

“I can’t agree more, as I thought, I already ran out of luck, huh?”

“But since they attacked when you’re here, I guess it means that Sheryl is really lucky. Thanks to that, she didn’t get killed this time.”

Akira smiled wryly.

“That might be true, Sheryl has good luck after all.”

“Yup, then let’s try to take advantage of that luck and clean up this mess as soon as possible.”

“You’re right, let’s do that.”

Akira had no idea if it was him being unlucky, or it was Sheryl being lucky, or maybe it was even both. In order to make sure that the people who attacked the base that day were unlucky, to push his bad luck to those people, Akira fired himself up to shoot back.

Alpha then asked Akira what he wanted to do with those people.

“So then, Akira, what’s your plan with them? The fastest solution would be to kill them. That way, there’s no need for you to hold back.”

Alpha was still smiling when she said such a heartless sentence. She did not show any hesitation in killing them, she had her usual smile while asking for Akira’s confirmation to end the life of those people.

Akira replied back with a calm expression.

“I don’t mind killing all of them, but if it’s possible, I want to paralyze them so I can ask them why they attacked us.”

“You do know that you’re being impossible, right?”

“That’s why I’m only saying that if it’s possible. I don’t want to die anyway, the longer we dilly-dally, the more dangerous this might become. We just need to try but there’s no need to be reckless. If it’s impossible to hold back and not to kill them even with your support, then I’ll just follow your instruction to kill them.”

Akira somehow sounded as if he was doubting the value of Alpha’s support, but Alpha smiled smugly and replied.

“Don’t be stupid. It’ll be alright as long as you have my support. It’s just that if you won’t take the easiest way, then you’ll have to put more effort yourself. So I just want to confirm that. If you’re okay with that, then I don’t mind either.”

“Alright then, let’s go.”

Akira smiled and ran back into the room. The conversation between Akira and Alpha happened through telepathy. Even if it was something they would need a few minutes to talk about, if it was through telepathy, they could finish that in split seconds. Moreover, when Akira switched to his battle state, he unconsciously activated his time compression. Thanks to that, Akira and Alpha could communicate almost instantly. A feat impossible if done verbally.

This was also a form of training for Akira to quickly process information inside his brain. After all, being in the middle of a fight needed him to process a huge amount of information. In the middle of that dangerous situation where stopping to think even for one second meant certain death, Akira needed to continuously identify all the dangers around him. It included filtering what information was important and what was not, he had to process all the information effectively before the enemy could get him first.

If Akira could not process all of the information fast enough, he would be testing his luck, whether he would get unlucky and die, or he would get lucky and live. At the moment, Alpha was compensating for his bad luck, but that was not enough to guarantee his safety.

But even so, the luck that brought that meeting between Akira and Alpha was the very thing that allowed him to survive until now.

Akira swapped his CWH anti-material rifle with his AAH assault rifle and quickly headed back to meet the enemies. The 4 men inside that room were shooting in random directions. The sheets were not invincible, they eventually ripped and danced in the air as they fell down, thus blocking their field of visions even more.

They hid behind the displays while shooting around randomly. Akira suddenly appeared in their field of vision, he was hiding behind an anti-bullet sheet and had come as close as possible to those 4 men. He jumped out from that cover to get even closer.

One of the 4 men was surprised by that sudden move, but he still somehow managed to shoot at Akira. But Akira was able to shoot at him faster, Akira already had his AAH assault rifle fixed at him. A bullet flew from the rifle's muzzle and hit that man's head, body, arm, and rifle.

But that man was mostly uninjured. Akira's normal bullet could not pierce the full-face helmet that man was using. It did not even leave a mark on that man, and since he was gripping his rifle strongly with the help of his augmented suit, he also did not lose his rifle. Akira's shots were only able to surprise him, nothing more.

That man smiled as he noticed that Akira did not have enough firepower to kill him. He then tried to aim his rifle at Akira, but Akira shot his arm and rifle again, thus making him miss his shots.

The shockwave from Akira's bullets threw that man off balance, it also prevented that man from fixing his aim at Akira. When that man realized that, Akira was already standing in front of him.

Akira's right leg was already off the floor, the next moment, he drove a painful kick enhanced with his augmented suit on that man's head. The helmet could not fully dampen the shockwave as it propagated to that man's head and knocked him unconscious in one blow.

That kick sent that man straight up, but he did not crush into the ceiling thanks to Akira who caught his leg before his face drove into the ceiling. Akira then pulled him back to the ground and quickly shifted his left hand from the leg to that man's collar.

The other 3 men in that room were so surprised that Akira knocked one of their friends so quickly, but that did not stop them from shooting at Akira. The moment Akira noticed the other men aiming at him, he immediately used the man that he was grabbing as his shield and made other men there hesitate.

Akira used that short opening to quickly close his distance. The other 3 men immediately dispersed to surround Akira from the front, left, and right. The men on Akira's left and right could not shoot at Akira since they might shoot their friends.

But that was not the case for the man in front of Akira, either because he was in panic seeing Akira moving toward him, or because he had consciously made that decision, he ignored the man that Akira was using as a shield and started shooting at Akira's direction. Bullets riddled the augmented suit and the full helmet of the man that Akira was using as his shield. The momentum shocked that body hard and the shockwave was transmitted all the way to Akira, the only reason that did not blow Akira back was because he was bracing against it with his augmented suit.

At the same time, Akira shot the man on his right. The man on Akira's right was not as well-armed as the man that he was using as a shield. The close range AAH bullet barrage knocked that man back before he fell down to the ground.

Akira then shifted his aim to the man in front of him and pulled the trigger. The man in front of him fell down to the ground while still pulling the trigger on his rifle.

Akira quickly shifted his focus toward the last man there. When Akira was about to pull the trigger, Akira saw what that man was doing and stopped. That man had both of his hands up with his rifle.

Akira thought for a bit before curtly saying.

“No.”

Akira let go of the man he was grabbing and delivered a kick to the last man there. It was a single kick that was enough to knock that man unconscious as he fell down like a puppet cut off from its threads.

After confirming that all the enemies there were either unconscious or dead, Akira let out a sigh.

“That’s 4 down, how many more was it again?”

Alpha smiled and calmly answered that question.

“There’s 4 more left, don’t drop your guard yet.”

“I know, should I take the initiative here?”

“Don’t worry, they’re coming here themselves, so let’s wait here to welcome them.”

Alpha suddenly stopped smiling, Akira who noticed that immediately heightened his senses.

“Alpha?”

“Akira, you need to swap your rifle.”

And with that, Akira changed his equipment.

The other 4 men were left waiting outside since Sheryl did not want to have them all inside at the same time. They were waiting next to the back entrance of Sheryl’s base. One of them, Zalmo, received a call from their friends and swiftly replied.

“…Alright then, we’ll head there now.”

Zalmo closed the call and sent a glance at the other 3 men. The other 3 men only replied with a nod and put on their helmet that they did not use from the beginning in order to lower Sheryl’s men’s guard.

Of course, Sheryl could not afford to let her guest wait outside without anyone to accompany them. The young boy, whom Sheryl stationed there to accompany them as well as to stand guard there, noticed that change and was about to ask those men a question.

“Wha-“

That young boy was about to ask what was wrong, but before he could finish it, Zalmo pulled out his rifle in one fluid move, aimed it at that young boy, and pulled the trigger.

The bullet ripped through that boy’s torso. The armour that boy was using was nothing more but fake armour, it had no defensive power against a real bullet. The bullet also destroyed the boy’s important communication device, he then fell down and died.

Zalmo did not show any feeling even after he killed someone, his expression did not change at all as he gave an order to the other 3 men.

“Let’s go!”

Zalmo kicked the door open and stormed into the base. Since they already knew beforehand the room that they were aiming for, they went through the base straight for that room. Just to be safe, they released some shots to the places where someone might be hiding on their way there. Bullets flew around inside the base, destroying walls and furniture.

Bullets flew right at Zalmo and his men from deep inside the base, although those bullets hit them, they did not have any effect on Zalmo and his men. The people who shot those bullets noticed that. Those men then aimed their rifles in the direction where those bullets came and released a barrage of shots. With that, the resistance from Sheryl’s men stopped.

The scream of Sheryl's men could be heard echoing inside the base. But for Zalmo and his men, it was nothing but meaningless noise.

Zalmo and his men arrived in front of the door of the room that they were aiming for without much trouble. Zalmo sent a glance to his men, telling them to break in, but right before they did that, a barrage of bullets pierced the wall and the door and rained on them.

On the other side of that door, Akira had A2D and AAH assault rifles on both of his hands aimed at the door. Thanks to his enhanced vision from Alpha's support, he was able to completely see what Zalmo and his men were doing. Akira used the power of his augmented suit to help him hold both of his rifles at the same time as he kept shooting at the door.

Once the door was shredded to pieces, Akira finally stopped. He could see Zalmo and his on the other side of the door, it seemed that they took the barrage pretty much head-on.

One of them was blown all the way to the other side of the wall. The bullets from Akira's barrage pierced through his augmented suit and created holes on that man's body, the blood-splatter from those holes dyed the wall red. When Akira stopped shooting, the force keeping that man on that wall was finally gone and that man fell to the ground. The blood flowing out from that man created a pool around his body.

The other 3 were still standing after Akira finished the barrage, but only one of them was still conscious, Zalmo. He looked at Akira and somehow smiled amusedly.

"Those were armour piercing bullets, right? It's not the type of bullet that you would use to fight other people, you know? Look at the result here, there are things that are okay and there are things that are not okay to do even when it comes to killing other people, you know? Or is it that you already don't have any sense of humanity left? You're so awful."

Akira followed Alpha's instruction to exchange the normal magazine for armour piercing magazine. It was a type of bullet designed to fight mechanical monsters, not fellow humans.

But Akira just looked back coldly at Zalmo and said.

“I don’t want to hear that from someone who used their friends as a shield.”

Among all the 3 people standing in front of Akira, Zalmo was the only one who was still alive. When Akira released that barrage, Zalmo grabbed the other two people next to him and pulled them to shield him. Their augmented suit and flesh were enough to protect him from Akira’s bullets. The bullets shred the other two men beyond recognition, but in exchange for that, Zalmo was uninjured.

Zalmo replied with a smirk.

“No no no, this is one of those important sacrifices thingy. If both of them did not shield me, all of us would have died by now. So it was an unavoidable sacrifice to escape the worst possibility. It’s better to have one person alive rather than having zero people alive, right? Do you get that now?”

The other two that Zalmo used as his shields were riddled with bullets, their augmented suits, helmets, and bodies, were shredded beyond recognition. Their limbs that were somehow still dangling by a few strands of muscles swayed left and right before eventually falling to the ground. Zalmo who noticed that just threw both of them to the ground. Their shredded bodies fell over and splashed the pool of blood below them.

Zalmo spotted the other 4 men that went in ahead already lying on the ground.

“So you defeated the other 4 alone, huh? That’s pretty amazing, not to mention that all of them seem to be still alive. That’s pretty merciful of you. I really hope you would have been that merciful to us too, you know. So why wouldn’t you be that kind to us?”

Akira replied with a grim face.

“It’s because even what happened just now was not enough to kill all of you. I don’t have any leeway to hold back against someone that strong.”

“Ohh, so it’s basically my fault for being too strong and I got them roped in my situation, huh. That’s really regrettable, I feel really bad for them.”

It was obvious that Zalmo was lying. He was trying to act unperturbed by what just happened as he assessed his situation.

[…All the men that went in first are alive, they’re not bleeding, there are some spots in their augmented suit indicating that they got shot, some of them have their helmets bent… CQC, huh. There’s a good chance that they’re knocked unconscious with gunshots too… So why did he use armour piercing ammo instead of normal ammo against us? Is it because he noticed that normal bullet has almost no effect on the men that we sent in ahead so he changed to ammo with better firepower?]

Zalmo tried to remember what Akira said to him and tried to match them with Akira’s expression when he said that.

[No, that’s not right. He noticed that he could defeat the men that we sent in ahead only with CQC and normal bullets, that’s why he spared them. But our hard armour is too durable for his normal ammo, that’s why he decided to change ammo… But why did he make that decision? Did he interrogate one of them before we came here? No, There was not much time gap between when they went in first until we arrived here, so that’s just impossible. Did the info about our surprise attack somehow get leaked out? No, that’s not right too. If that’s really the case, they would have made more preparations to fight us back and that doesn’t seem to be the case here… I really have no idea, this boy is really strange.]

Zalmo still looked relaxed while carefully watching for Akira’s movements. To Zalmo, Akira did not seem that strong, but it was true that he had already defeated 7 of his men, all alone by himself. But even so, that was not enough of a reason for Zalmo to get alerted, after all, it was not a hard thing to do.

Akira noticed that Zalmo did not show any emotion at all even after seeing all of his men down. It made Akira be much more careful of Zalmo. Both of them faced each other, ready to fight.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 145, Arrogance and Choices

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Zalmo slowly moved his hands to block the spot where Akira was aiming his rifles. He then smiled rather smugly and said.

“Those rifles are both empty, right? I bet you’ve used all the ammo in that barrage in order to kill us. But then, that was not enough to kill me. Although you’re aiming them at me, it’s nothing but a bluff to keep me away, right? I bet bullets won’t come out even if you pull the trigger.”

Akira’s expression did not change at all.

“I wonder now, I might have left some ammo inside.”

“Who would give such a vague answer? If they still have some ammo in, you could have just told me so. To be honest, my augmented suit is not strong enough to defend myself from armour piercing ammo, that’s why I used those two men as shields.”

“Then why did you throw them away?”

“Of course, it’s so that they won’t slow me down when I try to evade the bullets. They’re all already riddled with holes, there’s no meaning in using

them as shields anymore. That's why it's better to keep my feet light, no?"

Zalmo slowly but surely walked toward Akira, who walked backwards with Zalmo's every step.

Zalmo smiled confidently.

"What's wrong? You won't shoot? You still have some ammo left, right? Or is that you're afraid you won't be able to hit me from this distance?"

Akira still had the same expression as he replied.

"I'm still looking for an opening. If you can predict when I pull the trigger, you'll be able to evade. I don't have much ammo left so I can't do indiscriminate shooting, I have to make sure to kill you with my shot."

Zalmo was still approaching Akira slowly and Akira was also walking backwards equally slowly. Both of them eventually reached the middle of the room.

This time it was Akira who threw a question to Zalmo.

"How about you? You're not going to use your rifle? You could've run away, hid somewhere, and readied your rifle when you still had your shields, no?"

"Actually, you destroyed my rifle during that barrage just now. There was some leftover destroyed rifle back then, right? If I had tried to run away back then, you would have reloaded a new magazine in your rifle and used it to shoot at me. There's nowhere for me to hide in the middle of the hallway, so that would have been a very bad decision."

"Shouldn't you keep it a secret about your broken rifle? If I thought that you would shoot back, I wouldn't immediately choose to chase you, right?"

"You could have noticed that only by looking at my destroyed rifle. It's easy to notice that on the ground after all. I know that you want to keep your distance from me, but just so you, that won't work."

The tension between them heightened. Both of them kept their eyes on each other as not to miss even the slightest move. The critical point was close.

Akira once again threw a question.

“You look pretty strong, honestly, I don’t want to die. If I tell you that I don’t mind letting you go, what are you going to do?”

“Well, I don’t want to die either, so I’ll thankfully take that offer. So, can you put down your rifle so I can feel safe leaving this place?”

“No.”

“They’re just empty rifles anyway, right? There won’t be much difference even if you put them down.”

“…Like I said, they’re not empty.”

Zalmo stopped pressing forward, so Akira also stopped walking backwards. Both of them understood that the fight would start soon.

Zalmo suddenly dashed toward Akira, he decided not to run to his left nor right, but straight at Akira. Akira fixed his aim at Zalmo, if his rifles were really not empty, Zalmo would not be able to evade his shots.

Akira pulled the trigger on both of his rifles, bullets flew straight out from both barrels. Back then during the barrage, Alpha stopped Akira mid-way to leave some bullets in the magazine when it looked like he had used up all of his ammo.

Akira was not bluffing, just like what Zalmo thought.

Zalmo fully predicted that both of Akira’s rifles still had some bullets left. When bullets flew out from their muzzles, Zalmo had accurately predicted their trajectories, he quickly raised both of his hands as if to block those bullets.

Then, at the next moment, a bright light flashed, the force field armour changed the kinetic energy of the bullets into photons.

Both of Zalmo’s arms were equipped with portable force field armour.

The smaller the force field armour area of effect, the shorter its duration, the stronger it became. Since Zalmo only deployed the force field armour on a small area just enough to block the incoming bullets, it was enough to completely kill the momentum of the incoming bullets.

The blinding flashing light from Zalmo’s force field armour made Akira flinch for a split second, but that was enough for Zalmo to close their distance as he released a kick aimed at Akira’s head. Akira was not using anything on his head, a clean hit of Zalmo’s kick would send his head flying.

Akira looked completely surprised by Zalmo’s force field armour, his expression showed his shock and he was unable to react for the time being. Zalmo noticed that and was sure that it was his victory.

[Got him!]

But Zalmo’s kick cleanly cut through the air, Akira was able to quickly duck as if his body was sucked in and evade Zalmo’s kick.

Akira was down low right in front of Zalmo, he then released a swift kick as if to sweep Zalmo’s leg off the ground. But Zalmo lightly jumped off and evaded Akira’s sweep, while at the same time, he brought down his other leg that was still dangling in front of him to Akira’s head. Akira quickly rolled back and stood up.

The short exchange ended there, Akira and Zalmo returned to their initial position. Akira had already thrown away his rifle in the middle of that short exchange, he was now unarmed. Akira lightly tightened his fist and readied his stance, in reaction to that, Zalmo stretched his hand and also readied his stance.

Zalmo then said to Akira mockingly.

“Geez, you’re no fun at all. You really shot someone who jumped straight at you thinking that you have no ammo left. Could you like, you know, get

surprised even for a bit? I'm sure you didn't expect I was able to block them, right? Are you actually a machine or something?"

In contrast to Zalmo, Akira had a grim expression when he replied.

"Didn't I tell you that I have no leeway for something like that? Or did you already forget about it?"

Zalmo was still looking mockingly at Akira, but it quickly changed to a relaxed smile as if he was looking down at Akira.

"…Well, that doesn't really matter, it should take effect anytime soon."

Zalmo had an accelerator drug ready inside his body, it was set so that he could use accelerator drug anytime only by sending the command using his mind. It was a slow-reacting accelerator drug that had a strong effect. Once it was in effect, the drug would significantly boost his focus and perception, thus slowing down the passage of time from his point of view while keeping his disposition calm. Zalmo already activated the accelerator drug, the silly talk with Akira was only to buy some time until the drug took effect.

Zalmo could feel the drug had already taken effect for real, he lightly smirked and said.

"Die!"

With that signal, Akira and Zalmo stopped talking and restarted the fight.

Akira and Zalmo used the full force of their enhanced strength to fight each other, releasing a flurry of attacks with their arms and legs to the vital points of their respective opponent.

Zalmo had superb reaction time thanks to the accelerator drug while Akira had his time compression from his sheer willpower as well as Alpha's support to move his augmented suit. They were fighting at a speed that no normal human could follow.

A single clean hit was all it needed to kill their opponent, they were continuously throwing attacks at each other while evading the attacks coming at them. It was as if both of them had made prearrangement beforehand, both of them prioritized evading and did not even try to block the attacks. After all, it was hard to judge how powerful an attack with the enhanced strength of the augmented suit was. If they made a blunder trying to block an attack, it might easily tear their limbs, that was why they had no other choice but to evade.

Akira gritted his teeth, he looked like he was having a hard time.

[Too fast!! Although it already took all of me to match the movement of my augmented suit that Alpha is controlling, he is still able to properly react to it! He did say something taking effect though, is it an accelerator drug!? How long before his accelerator drug loses its effect!? Can I survive until then?!]

Thanks to Akira's time compression, he managed to follow the movement of his augmented suit. By following the movement of his augmented suit during a high-speed fight, he was able to significantly reduce the burden on his body.

But he could not maintain his time compression for long, prolonged use of time compression would assault his brain with information and render his brain fatigued. The moment that happened, his body would be paralyzed. Moreover, there was a limit on how fast he could move his body, the faster the movement, the bigger the burden on his body.

Akira's physical and psychical limits were coming close. The only thing that he could do in that situation was to do everything he could to end the fight before he hit his limit. But even so, after he exerted everything that he had, he was not able to get the upper hand, as a matter of fact, he was at the disadvantage there.

[Dammit!! Why is someone this strong aiming for this shop!? If he's this strong, he could have aimed for a better shop with better guards!! Is it because of my bad luck!? Goddammit, I'm really unlucky, right?!]

Akira continued fighting while cursing on the back of his mind.

Zalmo drove a straight kick on Akira's body. Akira saw it as a good chance, it would be hard for Zalmo to keep his distance close after releasing that kick.

If Akira could open some distance, he should be able to grab his AAH rifle and reload a new magazine. He might even be able to use his CWH anti-material rifle which needed him more time to take aim due to its weight.

Akira jumped backwards, Zalmo's kick did not hit anything and he lost his balance. Although it was only for a split second, he was not able to chase Akira.

Akira thought that he already had that fight in his bag. So he jumped back, opened a space between them, and tried to aim his CWH anti-material rifle at Zalmo. Akira saw Zalmo still with his balance off, but he noticed something and his eyes went wide.

Zalmo still had not recovered his balance, but he had his rifle that he said got destroyed aimed at Akira.

Akira's augmented suit moved on its own. He stopped trying to aim his CWH anti-material rifle and grabbed the anti-bullet sheet next to him. He then pulled it to block Zalmo's line of fire.

Zalmo released a barrage at Akira. Countless bullets pierced through the anti-bullet sheet and hit Akira's body. Thanks to the sheet killing most of the bullets' momentum, it did not damage Akira much, but it was enough to blow him back. Akira was smacked to the ground. Zalmo did not stop shooting, so Akira hurriedly hid behind a display nearest to him.

Akira complained while hiding himself from the bullets.

"Didn't you say your rifle got destroyed!?"

Zalmo recovered his balance and smirked.

"Ahh, sorry, my mistake."

Zalmo’s rifle was not destroyed yet, although it was damaged, it was still functional.

Zalmo shot randomly in Akira’s direction. The displays were covered with a defensive sheet, but they were not that durable. Akira rolled on the ground from one cover to another, avoiding Zalmo’s barrage.

Akira’s expression was grim, he understood that he was getting cornered.

“Alpha, can we do something about it? It would be bad if this continues. I’m hitting my limit soon.”

Akira was in a rather dire situation. He looked pretty desperate thinking of a way to get out of that situation, but in contrast to that, Alpha replied casually as if it was nothing to worry about.

“Is that so? In that case, how about we just go ahead and kill him?”

“…Eh?”

Akira was dumbfounded, he could not help but express his surprise.

“It might be a little bit dangerous, but hang on, okay?”

“A-alright.”

Akira still hadn’t fully shaken off his surprise, while Alpha was smiling just like usual.

Zalmo kept on shooting at Akira who was moving around, he looked like he was having an easy time there. But he found something suspicious, so he heightened his guard.

[That guy adapts perfectly again. I know he thought that he already won this fight when he jumped back from my kick. That expression was not a lie, he did not expect me to shoot back. There’s no mistaking it that he was lured into my trap… So how? Is it because he has a good reflex?]

Zalmo reloaded a new magazine. Right when he did that, Akira used his CWH anti-material rifle from behind a cover and hit Zalmo.

But Zalmo had expected that to happen, he raised one of his arms to block the bullet, Zalmo knew that Akira released a shot from the sound so he immediately activated his forcefield armour. The bullet hit his palm and a flash of blinding light filled the room.

He immediately shot back at Akira but Akira already relocated himself behind another cover. Zalmo then shouted.

“Do you really think that it’ll work with that rifle? Unfortunately, that wasn’t good enough.”

Zalmo smiled full of confidence, but deep inside, he was becoming warier of Akira.

Akira had moved according to Alpha’s instruction, but he still was not able to defeat Zalmo. He then asked Alpha with a grim face.

“Alpha, that one didn’t work.”

But Alpha was still smiling like usual, she did not seem perturbed at all.

“Don’t worry, I was able to gather a lot of data from that shot. The next one will end this fight. Akira, you’ll have to do something pretty dangerous, are you ready?”

“Ready when you are!”

The reason why Zalmo did not take cover like Akira was because he had confidence in the force field armour on both of his arms.

Zalmo did not doubt that he had the upper hand, but even so, he did not lower his guard at all. He kept shooting at the display shelves and the sheets hanging from the ceiling, looking for Akira.

[I don’t think I can hit him like this… Does he know where I’m aiming? It seems that those sheets are not only for blocking bullets but can also be

used as information-gathering devices, huh. I thought that both of us can't use our information-gathering device to ascertain each other's location, but I guess that's not the case. But if that's true, then why won't he shoot from behind the sheet? Is it because that will reveal his location? Or is it that I'm overthinking this?]

Zalmo reloaded his rifle again, and just like last time, Akira jumped out from behind the cover.

It seemed that Akira really knew what Zalmo was doing. Zalmo thought so as he put up his arm to block the incoming bullets.

Since Zalmo had predicted that Akira would shoot, he was taken aback when he noticed that Akira was not aiming at him. Akira had his CWH anti-material rifle pointing, he was holding it with one hand as if he was holding a sword straight forward.

Then at the next moment, Akira's CWH anti-material rifle suddenly turned. A loud bang echoed quickly followed by a flash of light.

Since Akira shot his CWH anti-material rifle without the proper support, the kickback destroyed the bone on his right arm, his augmented suit immediately stopped working on his broken arm. At least, for the length of this battle, Akira would not be able to use his right arm anymore. He had lost one of his arms.

But in exchange for that, Akira's shot blew Zalmo's right arm off. The mechanical parts that were scattered on the ground were all the leftover from Zalmo's right arm.

Both of them had lost one arm now, Akira and Zalmo stood facing each other. Akira had his CWH anti-material rifle on his left arm aimed at Zalmo. Zalmo extended his left hand to block Akira's line of fire. Both of them seemed to be desperate as they locked gazes, the first one to move was Zalmo.

Zalmo laughed lightly and said.

“I have no idea where you learnt that from, but just so you know, that’s not how you use a rifle. You lost your arm from that shot, didn’t you? Well, you took one of my arms too, so I guess it’s even, huh. But still, I know that you did that to prevent me from predicting where you’ll shoot, but it’s pretty amazing for you to even think of trying to do that. Thanks to that, I had no other choice but to expand the area of my forcefield armour and reduce its power, but it’s still better than losing my head or having a hole in my body. But again, I didn’t expect you would hit your shot, you know? Not bad at all… That is, if that was your real skill.”

Zalmo smiled provokingly, Akira frowned and replied.

“What do you mean?”

Zalmo casually replied.

“You have someone else controlling your augmented suit, right?”

Akira’s face froze. Seeing that, Zalmo knew that he was correct, he then mockingly said to Akira.

“Hahah, I knew it! I had my suspicion since you can immediately adapt well to what happened even though you don’t look that strong, now I know exactly why! There’s no way a normal Hunter can execute that shot, haha, you overdid it there.”

Akira had a stern face, he then said as if he was putting up a brave front.

“…Even if that’s true, does that help you win this fight?”

“Once I know the trick, I can think of a way to fight back. For example, just like this.”

When he said that, Zalmo immediately jumped back. Akira was about to shoot at the running Zalmo, but he noticed that Zalmo dropped something that looked like a hand grenade, so Akira immediately moved away from it.

The hand grenade looking object immediately filled the area with smoke. Alpha then explained to Akira.

“Akira, it’s jamming smoke. It looks thin but it’s pretty strong.”

“I see, leaving that aside, that shot was not enough to kill him though, did you predict this too? Moreover, he discovered that I’m receiving your support and he said that he knows a way to cut it off, are you sure we’re going to be okay?”

“It’ll be fine. Since he used a jamming smoke, I can pretty much guess what he’s thinking. One thing that I can tell you is that he made a wrong guess. We just need to end him off after he does whatever he has in mind. The fight has basically been decided from what happened just now. The next move will really be the last. Get ready, he’s coming.”

Alpha warned Akira about Zalmo. He saw Zalmo running in his direction.

Akira aimed his CWH anti-material rifle with his left arm, Zalmo raised his left arm in order to block it.

Zalmo smiled, he thought that he had won the fight. Akira pulled the trigger and a gunshot echoed through the room. Everything was the same just like last time until that point, but unlike last time, there was no flash of light.

The bullet that flew out from Akira’s CWH anti-material rifle left a big hole on Zalmo’s body. Zalmo was so surprised by that sudden turn of events.

[…No way!? It was G3 level jamming smoke that’ll even block close-range communication, you know?! So how in the world he can still move his augmented suit…!?]

The jamming smoke that Zalmo used was not for blocking information-gathering devices, but it was to block the augmented suit’s remote controlling.

Zalmo thought that someone outside the room was controlling Akira’s augmented suit. It was impossible to calculate Akira’s movement using the small control device usually installed in augmented suits, but that was not the case for a powerful special control device that was usually installed in a room or in a vehicle.

There was an illusion with using an augmented suit, most people thought that anyone could fight veteran soldiers only by using an augmented suit. That was nothing more than a foolish assumption, but a lot of companies did a lot of research and development in order to get closer to that dream.

Zalmo thought that room was a room for that kind of experiment where some company pitted a slum child with that type of augmented suit against Zalmo's men. The relic shop was nothing more than just an excuse. If that small boy can repel Zalmo and his men, it would be a good advertisement for that company.

The rumour that there were relics in that shop worth reselling. The rumour of the powerful young Hunters that spread around lately. The fact that Akira did not seem that strong from the outside. All of these reasons caused Zalmo to make that guess.

In that case, if he could cut the connection to Akira's augmented suit, Akira would turn to just your normal slum boy, it would pose no problem to kill him. Zalmo thought so.

But that assumption was the very reason why Zalmo lost that fight. Before Akira pulled the trigger, Alpha slightly changed his aim. Although it was a slight aim change, it put Akira's left arm in immense burden and Zalmo could not react fast enough to that.

[It was all just acting then!? It was all to fool me!?]

Zalmo's guess was almost correct and that truth caused him to get even more surprised.

Zalmo could see Akira standing in front of him holding CWH anti-material rifle that was already aimed at his head. He knew that he had zero chance of evading that, but that did not fill his heart with fear. At the least, it made him feel a bit cornered. The person who was in front of him was way stronger than he expected judging from Akira's outlook. Zalmo needed to warn his friends about that, but unfortunately, his communication device was already destroyed.

[This boy might get in our way!! I have to tell my brothers about this!! The result of this investigation…]

Before Zalmo could finish his thought, Akira released a shot that tore Zalmo's head open. Zalmo's train of thought stopped in an instant as his headless cyborg body fell to the ground with a bang.

Alpha smiled and complemented Akira.

"Good job! That's the end, it's alright now."

Akira released the tension in him and sighed.

"T-that wasn't easy at all. Why is someone that strong aiming for this shop?"

"Well, you can't ask him now that he's dead. So let's just ask the people that you tried your best to leave alive. They might know something."

"Tried my best to leave them alive, huh…"

Akira looked at the people who were left alive through his hard work. The result of trying to spare them was that difficult battle.

"…I guess I was too arrogant, huh."

There were a few things that Akira could not just shake off from what just happened, he regretted the choice that he made.

Being unable to make any other choice but the easiest one was proof of weakness. Whether it was of a good deed or a bad deed, helping or robbing, the one who had the freedom to decide was the stronger one. The one who was helped, and the one who was robbed, they had no choice in that matter. Up until now, Akira was always on the receiving end, the one who had no choice.

Akira tried to be the one who made the decision, he tried to go to the other side, and just now he was shown the price of it.

Alpha tried to cheer Akira up with a smile and said.

“If you really think so, then you need to grow strong enough so that it would be out of leeway rather than arrogance, that way you’ll be able to make your choice when it really matters. To be honest, I think it’s okay to think that it was out of leeway for the 4 people that you spared, you know? For the other 4, unfortunately, that would be arrogance.”

Akira smiled wryly.

“I see, well, if you say so, then I guess it means I’ve grown stronger compared to before.”

Akira still did not have the option to make his own choice, he was still not strong enough to do so. But he was able to keep 4 men alive, it was better than having all 8 of them dead. He was at least able to get closer to another choice other than killing everyone in order to protect himself.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 146, Cleaning Up The Aftermath

Index

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Sheryl, Akira, and some of Sheryl's gang members gathered inside a room in the gang's base, there were leftovers of battles scattered all around the places inside the room. After Akira killed the attackers, the gang finally calmed down.

Sheryl had a grave expression as she asked a question to her men.

"How are the casualties?"

Alicia also had the same grave expression.

"…5 people dead, many are injured. I'm not even sure whether Erio can be saved or not."

"…I see. Take the wounded to the clinic. If they ask you about the payment, just bring out mine and Katsuragi's name, they should give you decent care after that."

"…Okay."

Akira was taking care of his own wounds while he overheard Sheryl's conversation. He checked his medicine reserve and called Alicia. He then lightly threw a box of medicine that was still pretty much full.

Alicia looked at the medicine box in her hand and was surprised, she knew that it was one of those 2,000,000 Aurum per box medicine. She also knew that Akira was telling her to use that for Sheryl's men, but when she thought about how much it cost, she could not help but hesitate.

Akira thought for a bit while making a rather sad face before saying to Alicia.

"I'll just put it on Sheryl's tab. No one could have seen this coming, so don't worry, I'll give a big discount."

Sheryl smiled at Alicia as if to calm her down and said.

"It's okay to use everything, so hurry up, before it's too late."

Alicia looked at Akira and Sheryl and lightly bowed, then rushed out of the room.

Sheryl then bowed to Akira and thanked him.

"Thank you very much. It should be able to save a lot of souls… So, uhmm, how much is it? Although I'm not sure when I can pay it, I will definitely pay for it eventually."

"Just pay me with anything. I said that to make them think that it isn't free. After all, although I know that you guys don't have money, it would be troublesome if you guys start leeching off me."

"…I understand. I'll take up on your generous offer then."

Sheryl bowed deeply one more time to Akira.

Akira then continued tending on his wound. He swallowed several pills of medicine and straightened up his broken bone while the pain killer was still active. He then took off his augmented suit and applied the paste-type

medicine on his skin that got peeled off due to the friction with his augmented suit. Although the pain killer was still active, he could feel pain when he was applying the paste on his exposed flesh, but he just gritted his teeth and continued tending his wounds.

He seemed to be already so used to it as he covered his wound with bandages before putting his augmented suit back on. Akira then lightly moved his arm to check his broken arm, but he felt something was not right.

“Hmmm, my arm doesn’t feel right though, is this because of that crazy thing that I did?”

But Alpha then said to Akira with a serious expression.

“I have bad news regarding that subject.”

“Eh…? Is there something wrong with my arm? I knew that it would be bad so I took a rather large amount of medicine though, wasn’t it good enough?”

“For your body, it will recover just fine after a short rest. I’m talking about the damage to your augmented suit. It was already in a bad shape before, but after that fight, its condition has considerably worsened. Some of its parts are broken, so to make sure that it’s still functional, I’ve changed some of its parts from nerve-transmitter type to movement sync type. But due to that, those particular parts can only move slower than usual.”

“My augmented suit is in such a bad shape?”

“Well, you got eaten by a monster, ran down a building’s wall, got shot, used its full power back in Seranthal building, and so many other things. It’s in a pretty rough shape right now.”

Akira thought and remembered everything that had happened. It was true that he had been using his augmented suit pretty crudely, so there was no surprise that it finally broke. He then asked Alpha.

“It’s not like I lost your support, right?”

“Yup, it’s because of the damage on your augmented suit, so it’s not like you lose my support.”

Akira seemed relieved, but Alpha then warned him.

“But it doesn’t change the fact that its ability has been significantly lowered. So you can’t do any crazy moves like that again until you get a new augmented suit.”

“It’s fine. I’m planning to stay inside the city until my new equipment arrives anyway, so I’ll just take it easy for the time being.”

Akira finished tending his wounds, put back his augmented suit, and took his rifles back to his shoulder. Although he was still not in his tip-top shape, he was ready to fight again, as a matter of fact, he had returned to his usual state of mind where he was ready to fight anytime. So now he shifted his focus to the men that he had been ignoring until now, the attackers that he had knocked unconscious before.

“Sorry for the wait, so, let’s hear your explanation now.”

They were stripped naked off all of their equipment and their hands were tied tightly with the anti-bullet sheet, all of them were already awake and they were looking at Akira with a grim face.

They already understood the situation that they were in, but they did not panic and they looked completely calm. Not too far from them, there were 4 corpses of their friends lying, killed by Akira. Those were kept there to scare the attackers that Akira spared. They thought that Akira might see some worth in sparing them since he did not kill them yet. As they thought so they believed that they had a chance for negotiation.

Other than the attackers, there were also Akira, Sheryl, and some of Sheryl’s men inside the room. Sheryl’s men were glaring at the attackers, but that did not scare them at all.

The one person that they needed to negotiate with was Akira, so there was no need to pay attention to other people, they at least knew that much. And

since Akira was just a boy, they hoped that they could find some openings that they could take advantage of.

One of the attackers cautiously spoke to Akira.

“If we tell you everything, will you spare us?”

Akira replied casually, there was no intimidation in his voice.

“One thing for sure, I’ll kill you if you don’t. But don’t worry, I don’t like torturing people, so I’ll give you a swift death. After all, if you won’t tell me anything even if you’re dead, then you’re better off dead.”

There was no killing intent or a sense of threat from his voice, but the attackers understood very well that Akira was being serious.

“Alright, what do you want to know?”

“Right, for the starter, why did you attack this place?”

Akira and Sheryl tried to extract as much information as possible regarding the current incident. To put it simply, the reason why the attackers attacked Sheryl’s base was because they were in need of money. So they decided to attack a shop that seemed to have expensive goods but weak security, that kind of reasoning was common in the slum city. So after gathering information, they ended up choosing Sheryl’s base to rob.

Among the information that they gathered, it included the information about the Hunter that was protecting Sheryl’s base. It particularly said that the Hunter protecting Sheryl’s base was a weak Hunter who got his wallet stolen, and when the pickpocket’s friend scared him, that Hunter pulled back and ran away. It must have been the information that those men received from the same information broker who gave the same information to some pickpocket that Akira had been encountering lately.

The moment that subject surfaced, Akira’s mood immediately worsened. But he was somehow able to keep his calm. The attackers were really frightened when that happened, but Akira did not give a shit about that.

There was still one thing that Akira and Sheryl could not understand, it was how they knew that there were expensive articles in Sheryl's shop and who bought that article. Unfortunately, the one who told them that was already dead, to be more precise, Akira killed that guy.

That person was Zalmo. According to them, Zalmo joined their group before they knew it and he brought all kinds of information to the group, he was also the one who prepared the fencer to sell the relics that they would rob. Among the attackers that Akira spared, it seemed that none of them knew Zalmo well.

Akira found that weird, but since it was impossible for him to defeat Zalmo without killing him. Akira thought that it could not be helped and decided not to question the attackers that he spared further about that subject. He did not think that they were lying and Alpha agreed with him.

After listening to their explanations, Akira looked at those men pitifully and mumbled.

"What can I say… It's really important to get the correct information, huh."

Sheryl agreed with him as she said.

"That's right. As far as I can get from their explanation, it seems like they were tempted by rumour, or more like, tricked by fake information. I guess that's the gist of it, it's really troublesome."

According to those men, after gathering all kinds of information, they concluded that there was a few million Aurum worth of articles in Sheryl's shop, and the owner of that shop did not know that and the shop was guarded by a weak Hunter.

If that was true, it was only to be expected for strong people like Zalmo to try to rob that place. Akira could understand that reasoning.

Akira and Sheryl explained to them that they were mistaken, but they could not believe that because of Sheryl's dress. Sheryl dress was an expensive old-world relic that even got refitted, it was enough as proof to cement

those men's misunderstanding. It made them think that Sheryl must be earning a lot of profit enough to get her that dress.

But when Akira and Sheryl told them that she only got that dress as a gift from Akira, her lover, rather than from the profit of running the shop, those men were so embarrassed that they hung their heads low. It was not rare for Hunters who were earning a healthy amount of money to buy their lovers expensive things out of their own money to express their pride in their abilities.

Those men finally understood that that the truth was the exact opposite of what they were expecting. Rather than a rich shop with a weak guard, it was a cheap shop with a strong guard. They hung their head low the moment they realized that. Seeing them acting like that, Akira and Sheryl looked exasperatedly at them.

Although Akira and Sheryl felt sorry for them, it did not change the fact that they attacked the shop. Akira then changed the mood and asked those men a question.

"That's all I have to ask. So then, regarding what we are going to do with you next, you can either pay us money or die, which one you want to pick? If you'd rather die, don't worry, I'll give you a quick death. As I said, I have no plans to torture any of you."

Those men looked at each other, one of them then scaredly asked Akira.

"…How much should we pay?"

"Oh, you're going to let us decide? Well, how about 10 billion Aurum each?"

The moment Akira said that, those men were dumbfounded. One of them flared up and shouted at Akira.

"Are you fucking kidding me?! There's no way we can pay that much money!!"

“Then how much can you pay us? Just to remind you, you guys did shoot at me fully intending to kill me so I’m being nice to you to let you off the hook only with that much money. If you can’t give me a good offer, I’ll just kill you here and that will be the end of it.”

Those men shivered to Akira’s declaration, there were already 4 unrecognizable dead bodies next to them showing just how serious Akira was. If they could not give a good offer, he would not hesitate to add them to those dead bodies. Another one of them shifted his gaze to Sheryl and begged.

“Hey, are you really okay with that? There’s no good thing that you can get from being greedy, you know? And it’s not like you can get any money if you kill us, right?”

That man thought that it should be easier to talk with Sheryl rather than with Akira.

But Sheryl just smiled and replied.

“I don’t really mind, you can go ahead and die.”

“Haah!?”

“If Akira decides so, I have no wish to stop him.”

“Y-You’re the boss in this gang, right? He’s just your guard, isn’t it?!”

“Yup, but, this and that are two different things. Not to mention that you guys killed some of my men too, so I have no reason to stop him.”

“…But the guy who killed your men is already dead over there, isn’t it? We didn’t kill any of your men.”

“That’s exactly why we’re willing to let you solve this incident with money.”

Sheryl told them to die with a smile on her face. She knew that Akira would not be satisfied with a small amount of money and she knew well that those

men could not pay the amount of money that Akira demanded of them, that was why she told them to die.

Those men had run out of moves that they could make, one of them then said with a pale face.

“W-wait, you won’t get anything if you kill us, right? And you already killed enough people to scare us. So just think about it, it might be a good idea to let us live and get some profit out of that.”

Akira swiftly replied.

“I know, so, how much are you going to pay?”

That man hesitatingly replied back.

“…1,000,000 Aurum.”

After hearing that, Akira looked at Sheryl without saying anything, Sheryl reacted by shaking her head. So Akira replied to that man in place of her.

“Not good enough.”

“…1,500,000 Aurum then!!”

Akira looked at Sheryl again, and she shook her head again. Sheryl thought that Akira was trying to bring that price as high as possible, so she had no plans to nod.

Akira once again replied to that man.

“Still not good enough. And also, I don’t mind if you want to keep increasing your offer, but also tell me how you are going to pay for it. After all, it’s not like we can accept it if you’re planning to pay 10 million Aurum in a 100 years instalment, right?”

Those men immediately closed their mouths. If Akira demanded them to also tell him how they would pay for it, it really limited their options.

Since no one said anything, Akira then continued.

“Well, if you won’t say anything, I’ll assume that you chose death, okay? Or is it that you want to pay but you’re still thinking of how to pay it?”

“We-we’re still thinking.”

“But you’ll pay, right?”

“O-f course!”

Those men nodded, they knew that they would be dead otherwise.

“I see, in that case, wait for a bit.”

Akira opened his information terminal and made a call.

The person that Akira was calling picked up the call.

“Akira, huh. What is it? Is it something profitable?”

“It depends on your skill.”

“Oh, it’s profitable then. So, what is it?”

It was Katsuragi.

After listening to Akira’s explanation, Katsuragi exasperatedly said.

“…I see, I understand what’s going on, so basically those people need money, right? But why do I have to lend them money?”

“It’s not like there’s any need for you to lend them money, you do have some connections with some companies that handle this kind of thing, right?”

“Well, I do, but even if I introduce them to those companies, I don’t see how that can give me any profit. Are you telling me to get the referral

bonus? My skill is in trading and not lending money, I specialize in trading Hunter equipment, so this has nothing to do with my skill, right?”

Katsuragi sounded a bit annoyed, but Akira casually replied.

“All of that money might be used to pay for the equipment from you.”

After a short pause, Katsuragi had thought of all kinds of ways to get profit out of that transaction. So then he carefully asked.

“…All of it?”

“Yeah, all of it.”

Akira’s answer was enough to convince Katsuragi, who replied back happily.

“If that’s the case, then this might be an interesting offer, it’s indeed a profitable subject related to my skill as a merchant. Alright then, I’ll handle the rest. So, what kind of equipment are you looking for? After all, I need to make sure what equipment you are going to buy from me. But still, you are finally interested in buying my goods, huh.”

“No, it’s not for me. It’s for Sheryl and her gang.”

“Sheryl’s gang?”

“Yeah. They need extra equipment, I want them to at least be able to defend themselves when I’m not around. As for the details, you can discuss it with Sheryl later.”

To be honest, Katsuragi wanted Akira to buy his stuff. A Hunter like Akira who was earning a healthy amount of money would definitely contribute greatly to the shop’s revenue. Judging by the fact that Akira bought a dozen of 2,000,000 Aurum per box medicines only for his consumable item, it was to be expected for Akira to pay way more for his equipment. Katsuragi squeezed his brain every day to somehow find a way to make Akira his patron.

But it did not change the fact that this deal would be big, so Katsuragi decided to prioritize the profit in front of him right now.

“Well, if it means that they’ll buy some of my goods, then I guess that’s fine too. I’ll head there now, so wait for a bit, okay?”

“Alright.”

Akira was about to close the call when one of the attackers who heard that conversation immediately spoke up.

“Wait there!! Are you going to sell us!?”

Akira still had not closed the call when he said to that man.

“You did say that you want to pay but you don’t know how to pay, so I’m just helping you here. You just pay me with that money then do your best to settle your debt with them.”

“Isn’t that the same as selling us?! Even I know how those Hunters who get caught in their debts end up!! Like hell I would accept that! I would rather choose death than take on that kind of debt!!”

That man was shouting on top of his lungs. He knew well about the end that was waiting for Hunters who had a huge amount of debt. When he imagined that end, he could not help but shout desperately.

A gunshot echoed in the room. That man, who was shouting just now, fell limp on the ground and stopped moving.

Akira shot that man, granting him his wish.

Katsuragi voice could be heard from Akira’s information terminal.

“…Whoah, Akira, what was that?”

“He said that he would rather die than take on debt so I killed him. I have no plans to force them to take that debt after all.”

Katsuragi clicked his tongue and annoyedly asked Akira.

“How many left?”

“3 people.”

“Don’t kill them. It’s more profitable to keep them alive. Killing them will only cut my profit you know. Good grief… I’ll convince them myself, so don’t kill them, alright?”

“Alright.”

Akira then closed the call. One down, 3 were still alive, and those three were looking at Akira while trembling in terror.

When Katsuragi arrived at Sheryl’s base, he quickly got on with his work. He came there bringing quite a lot of people.

Katsuragi was talking with Sheryl. They had a lot to talk about, the peace money, the equipment that Sheryl would buy with that money, the relics that got destroyed from the fight, the treatment for Sheryl’s men that were wounded, and still a lot more.

While on the other hand, Tomejima was talking with the attackers who were still alive about the loan. Tomejima was the guy from the moneylender company that Katsuragi brought. He felt a bit awkward when he saw Akira, but since Akira did not seem to mind him, Tomejima sighed in relief.

The people that Tomejima brought with him were taking photos of the traces from the battle and were cleaning up the dead bodies.

Akira was taking a break while looking at the people working in that room. That was when Colbert and Levin showed up. Colbert came there with Tomejima while Levin came with Katsuragi.

Levin was putting the dead bodies in the body bags when he glanced at Akira, he then frowned and said to Colbert.

“Akira did all of this, right?”

“That’s what I heard. Don’t stop your hands. We need to put the equipment in a different bag and properly gather the pieces of the cyborg guy.”

“I know.”

Levin started gathering the pieces just like he was told to. He picked up pieces of a destroyed arm, chips that were still enveloped in brain juice, and other pieces that he could find and shoved them inside the body bag. He then suddenly voiced out his impression of the person who caused the scene in front of him.

“…But still, it’s 8 armed Hunters against 1, you know. So is it really true that he did this all by himself?”

“That’s what I heard.”

“…If I can’t pay back my debt to Katsuragi, the very person who caused this will come to me to collect that debt, huh?”

Levin looked at the dead bodies inside the body bags with a conflicted face. Katsuragi said that in the worst-case scenario he would ask Akira to collect that debt. If he got unlucky, that might be as soon as tomorrow.

Colbert then made a suggestion to Levin.

“In that case, how about shifting all of that debt to the company that I’m working for? That way at least Akira would not come to collect your debt, you know?”

“…About that though, one good thing about Katsuragi is that he doesn’t put any interest. So I have no need to worry about the interest, you see.”

“Well, it’s your debt, so it’s up to you.”

Watching Levin, Colbert thought that it would still take some time until Levin paid all of his debt.

Akira was only waiting there, inside that room, he looked bored. He thought that it would not be right to head back home alone, so he decided to stay

there. Although, to be honest, he wanted to just go back home and get a good rest. He then mumbled.

“…It’s not a good idea to head back home in this situation, isn’t it?”

Alpha replied to him.

“Personally speaking, I think it’s alright to go back home. After all, among all of them, you’re the one who must be the most tired. There’s no need to stay here just to accompany them. I’m sure it’s alright if you tell them that you’re tired after that fight. After all, it’s not like it’s a formal request where you got properly paid anyway, so I don’t see any reason why any of them would complain.”

“Is that so? But still…”

If it was the previous Akira, he would silently and apathetically head back home. But the present Akira was slowly but surely starting to change.

From Alpha’s point of view, it would be troublesome if Akira turned into a kind person. To put it simply, if he turned so kind to go as far as to cover a total stranger without showing any hesitation, it might cause big trouble for her goal.

Even just now, Akira was giving the money that he could have to Sheryl’s men for buying equipment. It was okay if he did that as an investment, but if he did that without expecting anything back, then there was a need for Alpha to warn him. So she casually asked him.

“Say Akira. About the money that you’re paying for the gang’s equipment, is it okay if I think of it as debt?”

“Hm? Yeah, sure.”

“Do you think that you can get some profit from lending that amount of money? Is that why you lent them money?”

“…Well, what can I say, Carol also did say that selling relics is actually pretty profitable, and judging from how Sheryl served the people who came

here, it seems that the shop should do pretty well in the future. So I thought that there should be some profit that I can get back… By the way, why did you ask me that?”

Akira was only giving random excuses, it did not seem that he was expecting to get some profit from lending that money.

Alpha smiled teasingly and said.

“To be honest, if you ask for my opinion, I would rather have you prioritize your equipment for the sake of finishing my request as well as to compensate for your skill. But I have no plans to force you.”

“Even if you say so, I actually don’t want to buy any equipment from Katsuragi. I only did that since I know that he would not help me unless I did that. I already spent 4 hundred million Aurum on equipment in Shizuka’s shop, that should be good enough for now. Well, it should be fine, it’s not like I can stay here forever to guard this place anyway, so just think of it as a small amount of money that I need to pay to take care of that problem. Don’t worry, I will get something back from it if we’re lucky. Well, putting my luck aside, Sheryl’s luck at least doesn’t seem bad. So I guess it should be okay to expect something good from it, right?”

“Is that so? Well, if that’s the case, then I’m fine with it too.”

Alpha decided that she needed to be more careful and keep reminding Akira regarding this small change of heart and his growing kindness, but she did not show that in her face at all.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 147, Methods To Collect Debt

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Alpha suddenly turned towards the direction of the door into the room, Akira noticed that and followed suit, there he saw Carol and Viola coming in.

Other people also noticed Carol and Viola. Both of them scanned the room, talked to each other for a bit and separated off, Carol went to Akira while Viola went to Katsuragi. Carol walked all the way next to Akira and smiled at him.

“I’m happy to see you again! What a coincidence, Akira!”

“You’re right, so, why are you here?”

“I just thought of killing some time talking with you, are you busy right now?”

“Nah, I’m not busy.”

“That’s good to hear.”

Akira was sitting on top of one of the displays originally used for the relics. Carol casually sat next to him.

Carol was wearing a bodysuit for fighting, it had a more tame design compared to the old-world design augmented suit that she wore back in the Mihazono ruin. But even so, it still pronounced her body lines, so for those who were not used to it, she looked rather seductive.

The fastener on her bodysuit was lowered so her cleavage was visible. The other people who were working there could not help but peek at that cleavage, but Carol did not mind them at all.

Akira then warned Carol.

“I don’t mind you sitting there, just make sure not to break the display.”

“Geez, I’m not that heavy!”

“It’s just that I had a fight here so the display might be damaged.”

“I see, I’ll be careful, by the way, my weight is a secret. If you want to know no matter what, I recommend holding me up while I have nothing on my body.”

Carol was smiling teasingly while Akira replied with a wry smile.

“No thanks.”

“You’re no fun.”

Carol smiled but seemed slightly disappointed.

The room was painted here and there with blood, empty cartridges were also scattered all over the floor complete with scorch marks from the bullets too, it only showed how fierce the fight was. Carol looked one more time around the room, she then smiled as if the scene did not bother her at all and said.

“But still, it seems that you had a pretty hard fight here.”

Akira awkwardly replied.

“It’s not my fault.”

Carol was a bit surprised by Akira’s reaction, she thought that he was someone who was not bothered by something like that. Although she did not mean to blame him at all, her wordings there might have somehow triggered him. So in order to not worsen his mood even more, she tried to defend Akira.

“Well, it’s true that it’s the attackers’ fault and not yours.”

Akira turned his face to Carol and looked slightly weirded out. He then noticed that she misunderstood his words, so he shook his head and said.

“That’s not what I meant, the room was cleaner after the fights. It’s because those people who came with Katsuragi dragged the dead bodies around and spread the blood, and used the sheets to mop the blood in the corridor which made the fight seem gorier than it originally was. That’s why it’s not my fault that the room looks like this. But well, it’s not like I was being careful to keep this room clean when I fought them either.”

Carol nodded.

“Ohh, I see, these guys are pretty naughty.”

“Naughty?”

“Yep, it’s just a small stupid trick, but it’s enough to trick some people.”

Akira tilted his head in confusion, he still did not understand what Carol was referring to.

When Carol noticed that, she smiled mischievously and asked Akira.

“Hmm, your face is saying that you don’t understand. If you want to know, I can explain it to you, of course, that is if you don’t mind me adding my guess there.”

“Oh, please do.”

Akira was interested, so he nodded without much thinking.

He was waiting for Carol to start explaining, but she did not say anything, she was only staring at Akira while smiling. Akira, who found that weird, frowned, that was when she said.

“If I ask for an information fee… What would you do?”

“Information fee…?”

“Information is not free, you at least know that much, right?”

“…Well, yeah, I do.”

Akira only replied awkwardly, Carol who saw that enjoyed his reaction.

From others point of view, it might look like Carol was teasing Akira and enjoying his reaction. But Carol tried her best not to show her real intention out on her face as she was observing his reaction closely.

Carol was trying to judge Akira’s personality and his way of thinking from how he reacted to that, whether he took that seriously, or he took that as a joke, or if he just laughed it off, or if he replied back trying to be considerate to her.

If Akira seemed offended or angered or anything similar to that, she would immediately apologize and carefully start her explanation to make sure not to worsen his mood.

Akira seemed to be thinking for a bit. Carol kept her eyes on him while waiting for his reaction.

Akira hesitated for a bit but he then said.

“…Well, it’s not like I want to know it that much anyway, so I’m okay not knowing it.”

Carol smiled bitterly.

“I was just joking, you’re a pretty serious guy.”

“…I just don’t like that kind of joke.”

Akira’s reply was rather brusque. Carol understood Akira’s character a bit more, she then smiled and apologetically said.

“I’m sorry, please don’t be angry. But I’m really happy to know that you’re that interested in me. As an apology, I’ll properly explain it to you, so cheer up, okay?”

“…Alright.”

Akira reluctantly nodded, it must be because he was interested in that subject and he thought that Carol was only teasing him.

Carol was able to infer a lot of things from Akira’s reaction, she then thought to herself.

[Akira doesn’t seem to joke that much, huh, or maybe is it that he doesn’t like to joke around money. Judging from his reaction, it might be both. I need to be extra careful not to make bad jokes when I’m trying to seduce him.]

Carol did not show her thoughts on her face, she was still smiling like usual as she started her explanation.

Katsuragi was trying to sell the attackers regardless of whether they were dead or alive, and he did not care whether they would be dead or alive in the near future. He wanted more than the peace money, so he planned to have them pay for the ‘damages’.

As for the attackers that were still alive, they would be put on a huge debt and made to work for a long time to pay for that debt. But in the eastern district, their contract would be invalid if they were forced to sign the contract at gunpoint. After all, that kind of contract was not allowed by the biggest authority power in the eastern district, the Corporate Government.

The Corporate Government had declared in the past that they would not allow any kinds of activity that might bring harm or disrupt the order and the peace in the eastern district. Regardless of whether they really put that into action or not, it was properly written in the rule. Rather than for the sake of anyone else, it was for their very own sake.

The definition of criminal in the eastern district was simply those who were against the Corporate Government. The Corporate Government would not do much when Hunters kill each other outside the wall, but if merchants or scammers started doing something suspicious, they would not show any mercy. That kind of bias was normal in the eastern district.

So, forcing someone into a debt without a good reason would disrupt the economy, thus, such actions were seen as an act against the Corporate Government of the eastern district.

Because of that, Katsuragi and his men needed to show the attackers that they had enough reason to force the attackers into debt which included the peace money. After all, they could not demand trillion Aurum peace money just because they tried to kill Akira and Sheryl's men.

And if their reasoning was good enough, they could get help from the Corporate Government to seize the attacker's properties. They could also ask for help from the Hunter Office that was handling their bank account. They could even sell the bond to the Hunter Office if all of the above things were not enough to pay for the debt.

The reason why Katsuragi and his men were making the room messier than before was simply to give a good reason to get the attackers on that debt contract. They were trying to pull up the debt nominal by taking a record of how bad the damages were.

After listening closely to Carol's explanation, Akira looked around the room one more time.

"…I see, so in that case, the worse it looks here, the better the profit that they could get, huh."

“The attempted robbery that caused the current situation, the criminals over there, the peace money, the reimbursement for the damages, and any other excuses that they could use to gain more money. I bet they are trying to squeeze as much money as they can from those attackers, both from the alive ones and the dead ones.”

“But is that really going to work?”

“Maybe. Some of them are really experienced in this kind of thing after all.”

When Carol said that, she pointed her finger at Viola who was talking with Katsuragi and some other people.

“That girl is Viola, and she… well, what can I say… She’s an expert in under-the-table deals like human trafficking and ‘resolving disputes’. I’m here because I was simply following Viola since I’m her bodyguard at the moment, I bet she got the news of this incident from her personal information web. I myself only know it since I heard about the incident from her.”

“Oh, it’s not like she’s one of the people that Katsuragi called to come here?”

“I’m pretty sure she came here uninvited, and they know well that Viola is powerful enough so that they could not just shoo her off. I don’t know what they’re talking about, but I’m pretty sure it’s nothing good. I know it’s strange for me to say this since I’m her bodyguard, but she’s a bad girl. It might be better if you keep your distance from her, you know? And that’s doubly true since you’re bad with negotiation.”

Carol was talking while giggling as if she was joking with Akira. But Akira understood that she was being serious there.

“Well, if you say so, I’ll be careful with her.”

“Yup, you should do that.”

Carol smiled satisfied seeing Akira nod firmly.

She was indeed being honest when she warned Akira. One of the reasons why she said that to him was to make sure that Viola would not mess with him.

Carol was in the middle of trying to seduce Akira, so it would be troublesome for her if Viola tried to mess with him.

The discussion was still going on between Katsuragi, Tomejima, Sheryl and Viola. They had different expressions as they were talking to each other.

Tomejima looked like he knew he was talking to a difficult opponent as he desperately refused to back down.

“…No! You came so suddenly and now, you want to buy all the attackers? That’s just too suspicious!!”

Viola smiled at Tomejima, there was a trace of confidence and intimidation in her smile that was adorning her beautiful face.

“Oh my, I only said that I can increase the profit by 50%, you know. I’m just giving a better offer here, it’s so rude of you to call me suspicious.”

“You bought that debt bond for 60% of the face value back then, like hell I’ll let you take this one away from me too.”

“That value was the price that both parties agreed to, right? If you really want it that much, I don’t mind selling it to you with a discount, you know?”

“…T-that is…”

Tomejima reeled back. He was talking about the debt bond for Kadol who tried to kill Akira. In order to avoid getting targeted by Akira, he sold that troublesome bond to Viola. Now that Akira just defeated 8 armed Hunters alone, that bond had become more troublesome than before.

Viola smiled and said to Katsuragi.

“So, what do you think? If you sell them to me, it’ll bring you more profit, yes?”

Katsuragi sounded slightly hesitant as he said.

“Even if you tell me so, I have my connection that I need to keep. I was the one who asked Tomejima to come with me. So as a merchant, I can’t just turn my back on him now.”

Tomejima confirmed that he got a vote of confidence from Katsuragi, so he raised his voice and said.

“That’s it!! That’s right!!”

“But still, 50% more profit, huh…”

“Hey!?”

Katsuragi mumbled as if to contradict what he just said before, Tomejima who heard that could not help but exclaim.

Viola understood that both Tomejima and Katsuragi were not easy opponents to negotiate against, so she shifted her focus to Sheryl and asked for her approval.

“What about you? I want to hear your opinion as both the owner of this shop and the leader of the gang here. As the head of the gang, which one do you think will bring more profit? And I’m not talking about just monetary profit here, you know?”

Katsuragi and Tomejima turned to Sheryl too. Although Sheryl was listening to their conversation, she was looking in a completely different direction.

Sheryl kept her gaze in one single direction, she was staring at Akira who was talking with Carol. Seeing how Akira seemed to be having a good time talking with another girl whom she knew nothing about, Sheryl could not help but feel something welling up inside her as she tried her best to hold it down.

Sheryl understood that if she obeyed that feeling, she would be taking a step closer toward her own destruction. Insecurity, jealousy, displeasure, fear, sorrow, sadness, these kinds of things would disrupt her ability to make a sound decision. If she ended up making bad decisions because of that, it might become a reason for Akira to abandon her. She kept reminding herself of that possibility as she kept doing her best to maintain her calm.

Katsuragi noticed that Sheryl was looking at Akira.

“Ohh, I see, it might be a good idea to ask for Akira’s opinion too, right?”

Sheryl tried to keep her calm as she replied.

“…No, I believe Akira has left this matter to Katsuragi-san. Even if we ask him, he will just annoyedly tell us to do whatever we want with them. I will also follow whatever Katsuragi-san decides. As for the talk about profit, I think the best decision here is to follow whatever Katsuragi-san and Akira decide.”

Now that Katsuragi was given the right to take the final decision, it made him even unsure of what to do there.

“Is that so? If that’s the case, then what should I do now…”

Viola suddenly said as if she decided to give up.

“It can’t be helped then. I’ll let Tomejima take those who are still alive and I’ll take those who are dead. How about that? It’s not like Tomejima could get them to sign on a debt bond anyway, right? Well, he might be able to if he tries, but I believe his real skill is not in that matter. I don’t think it’s a bad offer though, so?”

Katsuragi turned to Tomejima, who did not seem to be fully happy with that offer, but he gently nodded.

Viola who caught that smiled and said.

“We have a deal then!”

“…Humph! The only way to get profit from dead people is only to seize their properties, so it’s not like it can give you that much profit, right? Are you sure you can get 50% more profit with that?”

Tomejima sounded as if he said that out of spite, Viola just smiled confidently at him and replied.

“Well, there are many ways other than that one. But they are my trade secret. Later I’ll give a report to Katsuragi-san outlining how I plan to do that together with the money minus the handling fee.”

Katsuragi, Tomejima and Sheryl looked at Viola with different expressions. Although each of them imagined different things, all of them equally thought that it was nothing good.

They finally finished their business. All the attackers, dead or alive, were carried away ignoring their freedom. Those who were still alive were given minimum equipment as Tomejima’s men took them away, while the dead ones were stuffed into body bags and carried away by Viola’s men. Sheryl’s men were gathering the bloodied sheets, it seemed that it would take a lot of work to clean up the bloodied room.

While Katsuragi and his men had left the place, Viola stayed behind and came to Akira.

Viola looked at Akira with interest as she said to him.

“We meet again.”

Akira replied casually.

“Yeah.”

Carol was surprised to hear that short exchange.

“Oh? Both of you know each other?”

Akira quickly explained to Carol before she misunderstood something.

“I met her once when Shikarabe hired me for a job, that was also when I met Tomejima. It’s not like we know each other, it’s just that we have met before, and that was just once.”

“…I see.”

Carol replied back swiftly with that short reply. She believed Akira’s words. She did not let that just slide and use that information to make all kinds of guesses. Even Akira was able to notice that.

Carol showed that reaction only by knowing that Akira had met Viola before in the past although it was only for once. With that, Akira put Viola on the list of people that were not his enemy but he needed to be careful with.

Carol then stood up and smiled at Akira.

“Well, since Viola is done here, I’ll leave too. Akira, see you again next time.”

“Yeah.”

Viola then casually asked Carol a question.

“It seemed that you were having a good time talking with him, what were you talking about?”

“Well, a lot of stuff. Ahh, by the way, I did tell Akira about you too, I told him that you’re a bad girl.”

“Oh my, that’s so rude.”

Viola smiled mischievously at Akira.

“I don’t know what Carol told you, but just so you know, she’s more or less as bad as me. There are many men who got ruined because of her, so you better be careful of her.”

“Sure, I will.”

Carol, who heard that, faintly smiled and intervened.

“Geez, how can you say that? Well, at least, it seems that Akira was able to quickly see how bad you are. Well then, see you again.”

Carol only said that before she left the building together with Viola.

That was when Alpha smiled at Akira and said to him.

“So basically, both of them are bad girls, huh.”

“Yup, that would be the right conclusion. Well, I did kill 5 people without feeling anything much though, so I guess I’m not that good of a person either, right?”

Akira sounded as if he was admonishing himself, but Alpha just smiled like usual as she replied.

“I don’t think that’s true.”

“…Is that so?”

Akira awkwardly replied back as if he was trying to hide his embarrassment.

After that, he returned to Sheryl’s private room together with Sheryl since she asked him to.

Even after they returned, Sheryl did not change back to her usual clothing. She seemed to be a little bit bummed out as she was only standing there not too far from the door.

Akira found that a little weird, but since he was tired, he decided to just ignore that for now. He put down his stuff, sat on the sofa, and let out a big sigh. He then noticed Sheryl came in front of him.

She slowly climbed on Akira and sat on his lap, she then coiled her arms around him and hugged him from the front just like in the past. But there was something different this time.

Sheryl was Akira's fake lover, she used that position to hug Akira in the past. That time, Sheryl was smiling, she looked delighted spending her time together with her lover although it was in name only.

But this time, Sheryl's expression looked a bit dark, she seemed to be feeling cornered.

Sheryl rested her head on Akira's shoulder and squeezed on him. It was not a hug to draw in someone that she loved, it was more of a hug to cling to someone.

Although Akira was not skilled enough to read what Sheryl was feeling inside, he at least knew that Sheryl was not her usual self, in the bad meaning. So Akira awkwardly spoke to her.

"Sheryl?"

"…I'm sorry. I think I'm still shocked, the fact that I almost got shot back then finally hit me after I calmed down. So please let me stay like this for a while… If you don't like it, I'll step away."

Even in the eastern district where the public order was bad, even for the slum city resident where fighting was common, people would still get shocked when they were about to get shot and killed. So it was not right to compare common people with those Hunters who were used to that kind of thing. Akira reminded himself of that fact and accepted Sheryl's excuse without questioning it much.

"Ahh, I see. Well, you can keep doing that until you calm down."

"…Thank you."

Sheryl's voice was darker than before as she tightened her hug.

She was not lying, it was true that she was still scared after she was about to get killed, but that was not the only reason. She was more scared of Akira suddenly abandoning her.

Sheryl knew very well that Akira was not a kind person and it was not like he loved her either. Akira was not interested in her body, he also did not expect to get some profit from Sheryl's gang, he was not a part of the gang either. The only reason, excuse, motivation for Akira to help her out was nothing more but something as vague as a whim.

Sheryl saw Akira talking with Carol. Even to her, Carol was a beautiful girl who was wearing such a seductive outfit. From her point of view, it seemed like Carol was trying to seduce Akira.

It was only to be expected for Akira to be in contact with all kinds of people other than Sheryl and her men. Sheryl was evading that common sense until now.

Someone might one day seduce Akira and become his lover, that day might be as soon as tomorrow. If that happened, Akira might as well stop supporting Sheryl. Seeing Carol talking to Akira, trying to seduce him, seeing a beautiful skilled female Hunter doing that, it really gave her a kick of reality. It reminded her of the possibility that she had been avoiding recognizing until now.

If only Akira was interested in Sheryl, regardless whether it was her body, her heart, her position, her money, her skill, anything, it might give her a sense of security. If Akira asked anything out of her, she would happily give everything to him.

But unfortunately, Akira was not interested in Sheryl at all.

Sheryl was feeling insecure whether the current situation would still hold until her plan came to fruition, i.e. until Akira had another reason to support her other than just a whim. And in order to run away from that insecurity, Sheryl was clinging to Akira.

Not too long after that, Sheryl's men came to give their reports. She was a bit annoyed that she got interrupted. The children who came to give their report winced back as they gave her the report of the current situation including the treatment of the wounded gang members.

“…So then, the guy from the clinic told us to tell the boss to come to the clinic. It seems that he has something to talk about, like about the fee and other stuff too.”

“You did tell him about me and Katsuragi-san, right?”

“We did. But we carried a lot of wounded people there and some of them are badly wounded. So I guess there’s something he wants to talk about regarding that. So please, don’t let them kick the wounded out after they got treated just enough for them to stay alive. Those guys will have to work after this to stay alive, so please do something about it.”

“…Alright, I’ll go now. I’ll do something about it.”

Those boys thanked Sheryl and bowed deeply to her before leaving the room.

Akira was also planning to have his body checked up soon anyway. So he thought that it might be a good idea to get his body checked up in a small clinic first before getting a full check-up in a hospital.

“A clinic, huh? Can I come too?”

Sheryl was a bit surprised, but she immediately replied happily.

“Of course! I was actually planning to ask you to accompany me.”

“Alright then, let’s go.”

Akira then headed to the clinic together with Sheryl.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 148, Selling Corpses

Index

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Akira followed Sheryl to the clinic, which was located inside the slum city. Although it was located outside Sheryl's territory, it was not that far from the base.

It was located in a particular area inside the slum where there was an unwritten rule among the residents not to cause any trouble. After all, if the clinic got involved in a fight, it would bring trouble to all of them. Also, even if the clinic was fine, it might refuse to treat them if they caused trouble there. Although it was an unwritten rule, it was effective enough to make people around the area obey.

When Akira saw the exterior of the clinic, he frowned and asked.

"…Sheryl, is this really the place?"

"Yes, it's this building… I understand what you want to say, but this is the clinic."

"… I see."

The clinic looked suspicious from the outside. Rather than a clinic, it looked more like a laboratory, weird devices were sticking out of its roof as if to say that they were doing questionable experiments inside. The dangling signboard was so worn out, the letters written on it were almost unreadable. But, it still could be read ‘Yatsubayashi’s clinic’.

Akira and Sheryl entered that clinic, a guy in a white suit was tending Sheryl’s men. He might be tending their wounds, but judging by the glowing liquid that he was using, it looked more like he was experimenting on Sheryl’s men. That man noticed Akira and Sheryl, he immediately went to Sheryl, whom he had asked to come to the clinic, and said to her.

“You’re here, huh. It’s about the medicine that I use… Hm?”

That man looked at Akira and felt like he had seen Akira somewhere before. He then lightly smiled and said.

“Oh, it’s you. Long time no see.”

But Akira did not remember that guy at all.

“Did we ever meet before?”

“It’s me, Yatsubayashi. I tended on your wounds back in the Kuzusuhara city, remember?”

When Yatsubayashi said that, Akira immediately remembered him.

“…Ohhh, the guy from back then, huh.”

“Now you remember. I heard that you got badly injured right after I tended to your injuries though. Thanks to that, the City Management intervened and I couldn’t use the data that I gathered from tending your wounds, you know?”

“It’s not like I can do anything about it even if you tell me so”

It seemed that Akira’s contract with Kibayashi to erase all kinds of records from back then had affected Yatsubayashi too. But it was not like Akira

could do anything about it even if Yatsubayashi told him so, and in reality, Akira himself was not bothered by that.

Sheryl lightly bowed to Yatsubayashi and said to him.

“Thank you for helping us, so I heard that there’s something you need to talk to me about…”

Yatsubayashi looked at Sheryl and Akira alternately, he then lightly nodded and said.

“Nah, it’s not a problem now. It seemed that the guys your men brought in had been treated with some expensive medicine. So I just thought that if you have enough money to buy that kind of stuff, I want you to properly pay for the treatment, but it seems that’s not the case.”

Yatsubayashi thought that it would not be strange for Akira to easily pay for those expensive medicines to win some points from Sheryl. After all, from his point of view, Sheryl was beautiful enough for Akira to aim for her. He then smiled and said.

“Putting that aside, do you want me to charge more for the treatment? The more you pay me, the better the treatment that these guys will get.”

Akira flatly replied.

“I have no reason to go that far.”

“I see, well, that’s to be expected.”

It seemed that Akira was not really that interested in Sheryl. Yatsubayashi thought so when he saw Akira react that way, so he decided to stop offering more treatment. He then shifted to Sheryl.

“Over there are the people that I’ve finished treating. 2 of them ended up dead, but that’s not my fault. If you want me to take care of the bodies too, then you’ll have to pay more. If not, then take them home. While for those who are still alive, they should be able to walk back home by themselves by tomorrow.”

“I understand, Akira, I’ll go and check on them.”

Sheryl lightly bowed and left. Sheryl’s men who had already finished getting their treatments noticed Sheryl although some of them were still half-dazed. Some of them were already recovered enough to move, it might be because their injuries were not that bad, or it might be because the strange green medicine was pretty effective.

Akira suddenly casually asked Yatsubayashi a question.

“How bad were the people that you couldn’t save?”

“Hm? They got shot in their body and their organs were in a mess. They were bleeding pretty badly too.”

“Was that really that bad? I thought that level of injury is only a light injury, right?”

Yatsubayashi lightly laughed.

“That’s indeed the case for Hunters. You can’t just compare the injuries between Hunters and normal people. Normal people would die with that level of injury, you see. As for those who are still alive, even after they are left with nothing but their heads, they are mostly cyborgs. While those who are still alive even after they get cut into two are only alive because they use a lot of medicines to forcefully keep their bodies functional. Those people with enhanced bodies basically have a completely different level of resilience compared to normal people. So if you compare these normal guys with Hunters, they would die, you know? You gotta be careful about this difference.”

“Now that you say so, that’s kind of true…”

Akira smiled bitterly, he just realized how badly skewed his perception was.

Yatsubayashi then changed the subject.

“Well, putting that aside, since you’re here, how about getting some treatment too?”

“Ah, that’s right, I wanted to have a check-up. As for my injuries, I already treated them with my own medicines, so I just want you to do a normal body check up and also check the nanomachine leftover accumulated inside my body.”

“Just a check-up, huh. Geez, just to let you know, it won’t be free.”

“I know.”

Akira took off his augmented suit and did a check-up there. Just like last time, Yatsubayashi used weird devices to check Akira’s body. When he was doing that, it seemed that something picked his interest as he said to Akira.

“Say, are you trying to be superhuman or something?”

Akira asked back confusedly.

“Superhuman? What are you even talking about?”

“You were putting your body under immense stress while consuming a lot of medicines, right? And that stress was so immense that it more or less negated the healing effect from the medicines that you consumed. Do you have any recollection of doing something like that?”

“Well, I did fight a lot while consuming medicines to compensate for the stress from my augmented suit though. Is it from that? Is there anything wrong with that?”

Yatsubayashi sighed.

“So you don’t even realize that you’re doing it, huh. You’re really crazy.”

“What are you even talking about?”

“Although not many people realize it, the people of the eastern district would improve a lot only with a small amount of training, you see. Of course, the effect differs between people and there’s a limit on how effective it is. But some people have an abnormal level of growth, these people basically can throw a tank without any extra help, these people are

what you usually call superhuman. But even those people can’t get that level of strength purely from training. After all, their talent only increases their potential the more they train, not their real strength, that’s why they need to do something else other than just physical training to obtain that strength. And one of those methods is to put your body past its limit while consuming powerful medicine. They do that to compress the training intensity as much as possible.”

Akira searched through his memories, it was true that he did something similar numerous times in the past.

“Is that even effective?”

“I heard so, but well, rather than doing that, it’s far faster to just modify your body or to just use an augmented suit though. So, unless you’re obsessed with getting that level of strength only with your body, no one would try to do that.”

“But, that kind of thing is a talent that you are born with, right? So I bet most of the people can’t do that even if they try.”

Yatsubayashi seemed to be having fun talking about that subject, it might be a subject that he was interested in.

“Surprisingly enough, a lot of people actually have that kind of body, they just don’t realize it themselves. Some theories say that those superhumans might be the descendants of enhanced people from the old-world era. As the story goes, some people tried to be superhuman by using technologies in the old-world era, much like how they did it in the past. On the other case, some people get their bodies modified before they even realize it because of the nanomachine that they keep using. Either way, that strength propagated to their children and then their children used new technologies to achieve the same thing. And basically, everything accumulated together.”

The old-world technology was at a level where it could redefine what it meant to be a human. As a matter of fact, the current people of the eastern district were created through the old-world technology, so they were, in a sense, old-world relics.

Because of that, relics sometimes cost a lot of money. For example, the people who can connect to the old-world domain were prized highly. And that worth would not go down until they completely analyze the cause and extract the technology from it.

“I even heard that some people from the central district call the people from the eastern district as mutants or even biological weapons. Well, looking from that point of view, it could be said that everyone in the eastern district is a mutant, and since we call biological monsters as monsters because of similar reasons, I can’t say that is wrong.”

Akira slightly frowned. The free food distributed in the slum city were free because they were not safe, they were filled with stuff that might cause mutation and Akira had been eating such substances for a long time. His body might as well have been mutated, although it was just not enough to kill him straight away.

“A lot of veteran Hunters have abnormal strength. Although they are not superhuman, they get pretty close to being one from all of the training that they have gone through. Well, of course, a lot of them died before they could reach that point, or just decided to enhance their body with a particular technology that has been fully analyzed, or lose their potential to be a superhuman because of an unexplainable reason even now, that’s why there are not that many superhumans out there. Personally speaking, I don’t recommend trying to be one too.”

“I don’t want to be one either.”

“Yep, if you want to get stronger, my recommendation would be to modify your body. So, want to try it? Although you can’t use any insurance for this, I’ll give you a big discount so that it’ll cost more or less like a normal treatment, you know…”

Akira swiftly replied.

“No thanks.”

Yatsubayashi clicked his tongue and looked slightly disappointed.

“You don’t need to be that wary. It would be fine, of course, I already checked that it’s more or less safe.”

“I want a guarantee, not ‘more or less safe’.”

“Isn’t the possibility of getting killed an occupational hazard for a Hunter? It’s less risky than exploring old-world ruin. And considering that it’ll give you a superhuman strength if it succeeds, I would say that it’s a very low risk.”

“Still no.”

Yatsubayashi sighed.

“I wonder why people hate it so much, they often commented that the outlook of this clinic looks so suspicious. Why does no one other than me find this old-world vibe interesting.”

Akira remembered the outlook of the clinic. According to Yatsubayashi, it was based off on old-world design. Now that Yatsubayashi mentioned it, Akira could understand his point. But rather than giving the high-tech vibe from the old-world, it still gave off a suspicious impression. Akira thought that it was normal for other people to think so too.

After Yatsubayashi finished with the check-up, he told Akira the result.

“Your injuries will fully recover in no time as long as you don’t do anything crazy. But as I thought, the nanomachine count inside your body is too high. I’ll prescribe you a medicine to clean it off, so make sure to take it. You can buy the medicine in another place, but if you buy it from me, I can give you a better one, although I can’t guarantee its safety. If you decide to take my medicine, I’ll put the medicine cost together with your checkup cost. The check-up alone is 10,000 Aurum, if you want to buy the medicine too, the total will be 100,000 Aurum.”

“I’ll take your medicine.”

“Thanks for the business.”

Right after Akira paid for his check-up and medicine, Sheryl came. She then thanked Yatsubayashi one more time before leaving the clinic together with Akira.

After Akira and Sheryl left, Yatsubayashi mumbled.

“The record says that he’s been using a lot of expensive medicines, it means that he’s earning a lot of money and I am always in need of more money for my research. It seems that he’s Sheryl’s lover, I wonder if I can get a lot of money from him through Sheryl… I guess I’ll think about it.”

Yatsubayashi was a kind person, he had saved the lives of a lot of people who would have died otherwise. But that kindness did not come for free. The biggest reason why he opened a clinic in the slum city was because poor people would be desperate enough to try something risky. In the slum city, it was relatively easy for him to test pretty dangerous stuff that would have originally taken a lot of money and time. Not to mention, no one would complain if some of them got killed in the process.

The slum city was the perfect place for those researchers who believed that small sacrifices were unavoidable in order to save many people.

After Akira took Sheryl back to her base, he headed back home. In the middle of the way, he thought of something and asked Alpha.

“Say, Alpha, about that superhuman thing though, do you think I can be one?”

Alpha smiled and replied.

“Possibility-wise, yes. But the success rate is too small that it’s unrealistic to change your training schedule just because of that.”

Akira seemed a bit disappointed.

“I see, well, I did expect that though.”

“It’s not like there’s any need for you to throw a tank solely relying on your physical strength, right? If you want to do that, you can just do that with an

augmented suit.”

“Well, you’re right about that, but is that even possible?”

“It depends on the quality of your augmented suit. Let’s just hope that Shizuka would find a good one.”

“You’re right.”

Akira headed back home while looking forward to his new augmented suit.

__*__*__*__

That night, a truck was parked near the border between the Kugamayama city’s lower district and the wasteland. Two girls were standing next to the back door of that truck, they were Carol and Viola.

Viola was wearing casual clothing not recommended for combat, in contrast to her, Carol was armed to teeth.

Carol was way more armed compared to when she met Akira that day. She was using an augmented suit and carrying a portable heavy weapon. It would not be strange if she went to explore an old-world ruin in that state, but there was no mistaking it that she did not need that much firepower in the area where she was right now. Of course, that was excluding the case if she expected something to happen that needed her to be that armed.

Carol was checking the area around her with her information-gathering device when she suddenly threw a question at Viola.

“They should be here soon, right?”

“Soon, but not yet.”

“My information-gathering device hasn’t picked anything yet though, are you sure they can reach this place before the meeting time? Just so you know, if they don’t come on time, I’ll leave. I have no idea who are you dealing with, and I have no plans to get involved in trouble with people who can’t come on time.”

Those who could not come at the meeting time could not be trusted to uphold the result of the negotiation. Thus, Carol thought that it would be dangerous to negotiate with them.

Viola had her business face up as she replied.

“I’ll wait until the last second. And if they don’t come, then they’re the ones who scrapped the deal, so it’s not my fault.”

Viola then smiled and continued.

“…By the way, putting that aside, is your next prey that Akira boy?”

Carol smiled smugly and replied.

“That’s so rude to call him a prey. Call it investing in a prospective customer.”

“Geez, you would even go for such a young boy, you really have no integrity at all. Or did you change your principle or something? Or is that you see something special in that boy?”

“Age has nothing to do with it. You saw for yourself how strong he is from that fight against those robbers, right? So I’m not talking about potency, he’s pretty good even right now.”

Judging from how Carol responded, Viola knew that Carol did not target Akira out of a whim. So she thought of a plan based on that and made a suggestion to Carol.

“If age has nothing to do with it, then how about you go for that popular Katsuya? He should be around the age of that Akira. From what I heard, he did pretty well during that battle in Mihazono ruin, and the City Management seems to be interested in that boy too. Even some skilled Hunters in Drankam decided to create an anti-faction since they’re scared of his power, it’s the main reason why the gang is broken into factions right now. There’s nothing to complain about his skill and it seems that he likes girls pretty much that even his team is called Katsuya’s harem team. I’m

sure it’s an easy thing for you to slip in. It’s your favourite thing, right? Money that these Hunters earned with their talents.”

Viola knew well about what Carol liked. So she tried to test if Carol would be more interested in Katsuya than Akira.

But Carol’s reply was rather ambiguous.

“Ahh, that guy, huh. I just can’t get interested in that guy, you see…”

“Oh my, is it that you don’t have the confidence to capture him? Don’t tell me that your skill in capturing men has gotten rusty.”

Viola tried to provoke Carol for a bit, but Carol did not show any change.

“Of course I’m sure I can do that, but… What can I say…”

“…? What is it?”

“I actually had a job to go to Drankam’s facility, I heard about that boy from back then and I did check him out too. To be honest, I don’t want to get involved with him. About that harem squad too, I feel like they’re going to kill me if I try to seduce that Katsuya.”

Viola found that a bit weird and asked Carol.

“Leaving that Katsuya guy aside, I don’t think the people around him can do any harm to you though, that harem squad is nothing but small fries to you, isn’t it? So why you don’t just go ahead and crush them.”

“That is if they’re really nothing but small fries… But that’s not exactly true, they’re… Uhh, rather than strong, they’re more like cult members?”

“Cult?”

“Yep, cult. Well, it’s not like all of them are like that. But I’m sure it’ll only gather more and more members with time. Just like you said, it’s already big enough to break Drankam into factions. So at this rate, probably, it’ll

take over the whole gang. I have no plans to get killed fighting a cult, you see."

Carol sounded like she really hated that idea. Although she was already used to facing death since she was also a Hunter, she at least wanted to have the leeway to choose how she would die, and she hated the idea of dying to a cult.

"Aren't you the one who usually is more interested in that kind of thing? Messing with that kind of stuff is completely under your area of expertise, right?"

"I'll think about it."

Viola was smiling when she said that, even Carol could not tell what she was thinking.

Carol checked the time, it was already 1 minute past the meeting time. She still did not get anything from her information-gathering device. She then mumbled.

"As I thought, they didn't come, so it was pointless, huh…?"

Suddenly a signal was detected in her information-gathering device. Although that surprised her, she still reacted quickly to it, she immediately covered Viola and aimed her rifle in the direction where the signal came.

In the direction where she was aiming, a guy was standing, where there was no one just a moment ago.

That guy's head was made of metal, it was obvious from the first glance that he was a cyborg. He was using a black robe so it would be hard to spot him in the middle of the night. That man slowly walked toward Carol and Viola. His strong looking arm was carrying a single case.

That man must be the one who had the appointment to meet Viola. Although Carol hesitated, she eventually lowered her rifle.

Even when Carol was aiming her rifle at that man, he walked normally toward Viola as if it did not bother him at all.

Carol already lowered her rifle, but she still had her guard up as she cautiously said to that man.

“To be honest, if it could be helped, I would like for you not to sneak up on us though?”

“Sorry, we just don’t want to stick out. I was hoping you can understand that since we picked this place and time to meet. Moreover, I did remove my camouflage not too close to you, so I hope you can forgive us with that.”

In reality, that man was actually there even before Carol and Viola arrived. But he kept himself hidden under his robe.

That man stopped in front of Viola, placed the case he was carrying on the ground, and showed the money inside it. That case was filled with bills up to its brim.

That guy then said to Viola.

“Go ahead and confirm it, how about the goods?”

Viola pointed toward the back of the truck and said.

“It’s inside, you can go ahead and check it too. Don’t worry, it’s open.”

That guy left the case on the ground and went inside the truck to check the goods. There were five body bags inside the truck, they were the body bags of the robbers that attacked Sheryl’s base. That guy opened the body bags one by one and checked the bodies inside them.

While outside, Viola was checking the money inside the case. Carol tilted her head and looked at her, confused.

“…Is it really that profitable selling dead bodies?”

“Well, I can’t say for sure.”

“Don’t give me that, you’re the one who came up with the deal, aren’t you?”

“This is my first time too, you see. I have no idea why they want those dead bodies.”

Carol could not tell whether Viola was being serious or that she was just playing fool. Considering both possibilities and the fact that she needed to still get along with Viola, she decided not to ask any further.

Viola might really not know or she was telling Carol not to ask her. But she then continued.

“I can’t even tell if this negotiation is with him alone or he’s just a representative of a bigger group. I don’t know what they are going to do with the corpses, and I have no plans to find out either… Or at least that’s what I want to say, but seeing how he can easily break through your guard, I don’t want to ask now. If it was a common camouflage, you should have been able to spot him, right?”

“Well, yeah, we’re not in a thick colourless mist and the information-gathering device that I’m using is not cheap that it can’t detect common optical camouflage. Although it depends on the distance, even if he’s just standing still, as long as he’s breathing or as long as his heart is still beating, it’ll still trigger my information-gathering device. I was using such a powerful information-gathering device while watching the surroundings. I know that he was using camouflage and he is a cyborg, but it’s still surprising that I couldn’t detect him.”

The guy stepped out from the truck and said to Viola after he closed the door.

“I already checked it, there’s no problem. How about yours?”

“I have no problem too.”

“We have a deal then.”

“I don’t know if there’s next time, but if we’re going to do business again, just transfer the money, okay? It’s not easy for a frail girl like me to carry around this heavy case filled with money, you know?”

“Honestly speaking, I did this since I don’t want to leave a suspicious record in your bank account. I can still transfer the money if you want.”

“No, it’s fine.”

“I see, I’ll take my leave then. Just to be safe, let me remind you that it’s better if you don’t try to tail me.”

“Of course. As I promised, we’ll stay here for a while after we finish the deal. And also, you can just take the truck with you.”

The guy went to the driver’s seat and drove away, he was heading to the wasteland instead of to the city. The truck, together with that guy and the bodies inside it, disappeared into the darkness of the night.

Viola and Carol just stood there without saying anything while watching the truck leave. Once the truck had completely vanished from their views, Viola let out a big sigh. Although she was smiling and looked relaxed from the outside, she was actually pretty nervous during that exchange.

Carol also looked slightly relieved.

“It’s not like I want to dictate to you what to do and what not to do about your deals, but you won’t be able to stay alive for long if you keep making deals like this.”

Viola, who had regained her composure, smiled amusedly and replied.

“I don’t want you to tell me that when you’re working as a Hunter yourself. Although right now I’m the one who agreed to make that deal in this place and time, it’s still safer than exploring old-world ruin as a Hunter, you know?”

“Well, that’s true.”

Viola was indeed correct, Carol smiled wryly and gave that short reply.

After they waited there for a while, they returned back to the city in the car that Viola called.

The cyborg guy, who drove the truck with the dead bodies inside, drove away for a bit and stopped not too far away from the city.

He stepped down from the driver seat and went to the backside of the truck. He then dumped some of the body bags while they were still opened. He dumped 4 of the 5 body bags as if they were just trash.

As for the last one, he carefully picked that body bag and carried it outside. It was Zalmo’s body bag. That cyborg was treating Zalmo’s body differently.

When that man stepped out of the truck, someone called him.

“It’s me… Yeah, I’ve picked up our brother… Yeah, it’s no problem, I’ll leave the rest to you.”

It was a call through the communication device installed in that guy’s body, thus his conversation did not make any sound at all from the outside.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 149, Training Erio and Other Children

Index

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Editor: Silavin

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Akira spent his day in Sheryl's private room again.

They decided to stop selling relics for the time being. The room that they used to sell relics was in ruins after the fight, so they were in no situation to sell relics anyway. Not to mention, many of the relics were destroyed during the fight, it might take some time before they reopened the shop.

Akira had been visiting the base regularly lately, but it was originally in order to guard the shop. And now that the shop was closed, he actually had no real reason to come to the base.

But even so, that day, Akira was in Sheryl's private room, he was there to calm her down. Sheryl was still traumatized after the shoot out inside her base.

Akira was alone in Sheryl's room, Sheryl herself was in another room, teaching some of the members how to read and write.

But it was not like he was not doing anything, Alpha was teaching him stuff and he sometimes played that game from before, which also served as training too.

Someone knocked on the door.

“Come in.”

The door opened, it was Alicia and Erio.

“If you’re looking for Sheryl, she’s not here. I think she’s teaching in the other room.”

Erio and Alicia looked at each other, their expressions were saying that they had made their resolve. After that, Erio firmly said to Akira.

“No, we have something we want to ask you.”

“Me? What is it?”

Erio then said to Akira with a serious face.

“Can you please train us?”

After talking about the details, it seemed that Erio wanted Akira to train them so that if another fight happened in the base just like last time, they could at least put up some resistance.

Erio and Alicia believed that training others would be an easy thing for someone as strong as Akira.

But of course, that was not exactly the case for Akira. Right when he thought about refusing it thinking that it was too much of work for him, Alpha suddenly interjected.

“I won’t force you, but if you’re okay either way, it might be a good idea to accept it, you know?”

Akira assumed that Alpha would be against it, so it was strange for Alpha to say that.

“…I don’t mind if you say so, but why?”

“If these guys can protect themselves, there won’t be any need for you to be here anymore.”

Although it was very unlikely, it was a precautionary step. In case Akira decided to come there regularly because he’s worried about Sheryl.

If Sheryl’s gang got stronger, it would reduce the burden on Akira. If they learned how to fight, Akira might be able to find a use for them. And with them under control, it would reduce the possibility of them affecting his decision like Sara and Elena, and he would not always need to accompany them to hunt for relics. That way, Alpha thought if something were to happen, it would be easier for Akira to just abandon them when needed.

“Moreover, it’ll be good training for you too. You did something similar before, remember?”

Akira remembered the time when he was in Higaraka residence ruin and replied.

“Are you sure it’ll be okay? It’s not like something bad will happen again like last time, right…?”

“It’ll be alright. We’ll not go that far away from the city anyway. Not to mention, your skill will get rusty if you keep spending your time inside like this. Considering that fight not too long ago, it might be a good idea to get you used to fighting other people.”

“I might sound a bit arrogant, but will fighting these guys really help me train in fighting against humans?”

“I’ll do something about that, so don’t worry. It’ll need a little bit of preparation for that though.”

“Well, if you say so, then okay.”

“It seems that it’s decided then.”

Akira listened to Alpha’s explanation for what he needed to prepare before replying to Erio.

“Alright. But I’ll need to prepare a few things first, is that okay?”

Erio was surprised, but he immediately thanked Akira.

“Really!? T-thank you!!”

“Thank you very much!”

Alicia also thanked Akira before she looked at Erio and smiled happily.

Akira who saw that found it a little weird.

“I’ll go out for a bit then. If Sheryl returns back, just tell her that I have some business with Katsuragi, and do tell her about the training too. You can tell me how many people will join the training later.”

“Of course!!”

Alicia replied happily.

Akira tilted his head, he still could not understand why Alicia and Erio were so happy. But he decided to just forget about it and left the room.

Erio and Alicia were left behind inside the room as they hugged each other.

Akira was a Hunter who was able to win against 8 armed people all by himself, he then even went and sold those robbers that he spared, and he did not hesitate when he killed the guy who did not want to get sold. This time, Erio and Alicia were able to get their request accepted without angering such a Hunter. It was great news for both Alicia and Erio.

Akira was indeed strong. If they could learn some of his fighting skills, Erio and the other children might become as strong as Akira.

Of course, there was also the difference between their equipment. But even back then when Akira did not have his powerful equipment yet, he was strong enough to be able to return back alive even after he dragged a dead gang member of a prominent gang in the slum city to that gang’s base. So

even if they had different equipment, Erio thought that they might, to some extent, get as strong as Akira.

Erio and Alicia were still hugging each other as Erio said to her.

“… I… I’ll work hard and get stronger so that I can protect you myself.”

Alicia smiled happily.

“Erio, thank you.”

Erio was almost killed in the previous shootout. Back then, he had better equipment than the other children as he and the other children in the fighting squad tried to fight back the robbers. But the result was terrible, he got injured pretty badly. The robbers were able to neutralize them without much trouble. The reason why Erio did not get killed immediately like some of his friends was simply because of luck.

Fortunately, Akira gave Alicia an expensive medicine and she used some of that medicine for Erio, Erio’s life was spared thanks to that. In the end, Sheryl lost 8 people. If Alicia did not prioritize her lover, she might have been able to save one more life. Alicia did feel guilty about it, but she did not regret her choice.

When Erio was about to die and thought that there was no way he would be saved, he thought of Alicia in his fading consciousness. When his consciousness finally returned back, he found Alicia crying really badly while hugging him, that was when he made his decision.

Alicia understood that Erio made his decision not because he was close to getting killed, but it was because he did not want her to go through something similar again. She felt happy about that and made her resolve just like Erio did.

Both of them forgot where they were hugging each other out of happiness to the point that Sheryl, who had returned back to that room, was weirded out by them.

Akira went to Katsuragi's trailer and was talking with him.

Katsuragi was a bit surprised when Akira put in his order.

"I get what you want to buy. It's not exactly what I'm usually selling, but well, I don't really mind. It's not like we're strangers anyway."

"I'll be counting on you. As for the payment, just put it on Sheryl's tab."

Katsuragi sounded a bit dissatisfied when he heard that.

"Wait for a sec, that money is not for something like this, isn't it?"

"They're training equipment for Sheryl's gang."

"Even if you say so…"

Katsuragi seemed to have some objections. Akira then asked him a question.

"By the way, how much money do you think you'll get from those robbers?"

"Alright, I'll put it on Sheryl's tab, I'll tell them to hurry up with the delivery too, it was a good deal after all."

Katsuragi did not miss a beat when he said that, it seemed that he actually did not want to tell Akira the number. Akira question might have sounded like a threat to Katsuragi.

Akira then exasperatedly said.

"…I don't really care how much profit you get from selling those robbers, but make sure to earn the same amount of money from selling equipment, alright?"

"But of course, I'm a merchant first and foremost, you see. I won't do anything as despicable as tricking you and keeping some of the money from selling the robbers for myself. Plus, after that one incident there, I feel like

Sheryl would finally become a proper customer for my shop. Trust is number one for merchants, so don't worry… I won't do something as nasty as tricking your lover. I don't want you to chase me to the end of the world after all."

Depending on how you interpreted it, it also meant that he would do that if Akira stopped supporting Sheryl. Akira looked suspiciously at Katsuragi.

Katsuragi decided to change the subject as not to worsen Akira's mood any further.

"By the way, I really hope you would start bringing relics to me, you know? So what's going on lately with that?"

"I'm in the middle of renewing my equipment with the money that I got from my last request. I'll be looking for relics again after I get my new equipment."

Katsuragi annoyedly said.

"That's why I'm telling you to buy that from me."

But Akira replied back casually.

"In that case, get good equipment for Sheryl's gang. If you get something good enough to make me want to change shop, I might as well think about it."

Akira thought that although he would consider it, there was a good chance that he would not change shop. Katsuragi also noticed that it was highly unlikely for Akira to change shop unless something big happened.

"I really wonder if you'll properly bring relics that you'll get next to me."

"It depends on what kind of relics that I'll get next time. Just hope that it would be something that would sell better in your shop."

"Make sure to bring them to me, yeah? Don't do anything cheap like selling them in Sheryl's place first and only bringing them to me if they don't sell

well.”

“As long as it’s faster and I can get better money by selling them to you, I won’t do something like that.”

Katsuragi sighed.

“…Haaah, you were just a strong boy not too long ago, but you’ve been turning more and more like a real Hunter lately.”

“Thanks for the compliment!”

In contrast to Katsuragi, Akira seemed a bit happy.

Erio and some other children from Sheryl’s gang were waiting for Akira not too far from slum city. That day they were planning to go for training with Akira. Erio plus the other 8 children were waiting nervously for Akira.

One of the boys asked.

“Say, what are we exactly going to do for today’s training?”

The other children looked at Erio, who said.

“I have no idea either.”

That boy looked a bit surprised at Erio’s reply.

“You don’t know? But you’re the one who asked Akira-san to train us, right? Why don’t you know?”

“Shut up! There’s nothing I can do about it, I really don’t know. I was indeed the one who asked Akira-san, but it’s not like we talked about the details. I only heard from the boss later that Akira-san wants us to wait for him here.”

Another boy asked Erio another question.

“I heard that you and Alicia went to ask Akira-san directly. You guys did that without asking for permission from the boss, right? Is boss okay with this?”

“It’s alright. Akira-san is okay with it, and since it was Alicia and me who asked Akira-san, I’m sure Sheryl won’t get that angry. After all, both I and Alicia are pretty close to her. So it should be alright… maybe.”

Erio sounded a bit unsure there, so the boy could not help but panic a bit.

“Maybe?! This better be alright, okay? I don’t want to be dumped in the middle of the wasteland, you know?!!”

Erio got a little bit worked up as he replied.

“Oh shut up! If you don’t want the boss to get angry, then you better take this training seriously!! If you don’t take the training seriously although I and Alicia went out of our way to ask Akira-san, this time for sure Sheryl and Akira-san would get angry at you!”

“Y-you’re right.”

Erio got a bit worked up because of his nervousness and lashed out, which caused the young boy to wince back.

Erio did realize it himself that he was a bit more strung up than usual. He had made his resolve in all kinds of meaning, so it was understandable that he was not in his usual state.

When Alicia and Erio explained the situation to Sheryl, she seemed to be thinking about something with a serious face. Erio thought it was great that Akira accepted their request without any trouble, but if that was not the case, they would have been in deep trouble.

Erio had no idea what was Sheryl thought about the training. But at least for the time being, Sheryl was smiling like usual, and he hoped that it was a good smile.

Akira came with his vehicle right before the meeting time, he was also dragging a cart behind his vehicle. He then pointed at the cart.

“Get on.”

Erio seemed scared as he asked Akira.

“W-where are we going?”

Akira came with a vehicle, so it must be somewhere quite far away. It might be the Higaraka residence city, or it might be a big opening somewhere in the wasteland. When they thought so, Erio and the other children got a little nervous. It might be not that much of a danger for a Hunter like Akira, but it was a matter of life and death for the other children.

But Akira only gave a vague answer to Erio’s question.

“Well, it’s just somewhere around.”

It seemed that Akira wanted them to quickly get on the cart, so the children immediately started climbing onto the cart although they were still nervous. No matter where they were going, they had no other choice but to get on.

Akira stopped his vehicle not too far away from the city. The area was filled with stones, rubbles, crumbled down walls, and wreckages. He then stepped off the vehicle followed by Erio and the other children.

Akira pulled out a big heavy box from his luggage and put it down in front of Erio and the other children who were lining up in front of him. The box was filled with rifles for training and something that looked like goggles. Akira bought all of these from Katsuragi.

He then said to them.

“Put all of your rifles that you have right now in the box and take a goggle and a rifle each. 1 person will get 1 rifle and 2 magazines, the goggles might be a bit too big but make sure to use them too. I’ll tell you the details later.”

The children did as they were told. One of the boys noticed that the magazine he took was empty, so he reached for another magazine, but it was also empty. He realized that all of those magazines were empty.

He then cautiously asked Akira.

“Uhmm… The magazines are empty…”

“Yeah, it’s supposed to be empty. Don’t worry about it, just take 2 of them each.”

Since Akira said so, the other children obediently did so although they found it weird.

After they finished their preparations and lined up, Akira wearing the same goggle and rifle stood in front of them and started explaining.

“The training is simple, you guys just need to fight me. These rifles are modified AAH rifles and the magazines are empty, so it should be no problem. If you pull the trigger, it’ll calculate a trajectory line as if you really shot a bullet, then you’ll be able to see whether your shot hit or not. You can try pointing it at each other and pull the trigger.”

They looked a bit troubled but they did try to point their empty rifles at each other and pulled the trigger. Then the children that got shot according to the calculation were blanketed in red, and those who were got shot had their goggles that were originally transparent also filled in red. Erio and the other children were surprised and raised their voices.

Akira then continued his explanation.

“Once you get shot, quickly leave this place. Once I get killed, or if all of you get killed, we’ll return to our starting position and restart again… After that… Well, let’s give it a go first.”

After he said that, Akira repositioned himself away from Erio and the other children, so they flusteredly asked him.

“That’s it?! How about the strategy and other things too?”

“You’ll find out soon enough.”

Akira then left and vanished behind a wreckage.

Erio and the other children looked confusedly at each other when suddenly something came up on their display. It said that the training would start in 10 seconds, it was written in big letters.

Although they were surprised by that, the countdown did not slow down at all.

Akira was hiding behind a wreckage, Alpha was standing next to him just like usual.

Alpha was wearing an old-world battle suit. It had an extreme design for those people who were not used to that kind of design, it had a lot of openings that showed Alpha’s skin which would make anyone question its usefulness. If we focused on the colourful and complicated combination of materials that made that bodysuit, it looked like a very revealing swimsuit. The belt-like decoration was put in a certain place as if its main function was to make some of Alpha’s body part look more pronounced. It could be said that it was intentionally designed to gather people’s attention, or to be more sensual than being naked.

Of course, Akira had gotten too used to it that he did not feel anything, but something caught his attention as he asked Alpha a question.

“By the way, Alpha, you use that kind of suit since you want to stand out in case if someone can actually see you, right? So like, is there any need for you to do that right now?”

Alpha smiled and said.

“Oh, about that, I haven’t been doing that lately. It was basically to realign my wavelength with you, it’s also to narrow down the connection, so no one should be able to see me unless they have a similar wavelength with you. That’s why you’re the only one who can see me right now, you know?”

After hearing that answer, Akira curiously asked.

“…Then why are you still using that kind of suit?”

“No reason in particular.”

“Then change to something else.”

“No!”

Alpha was smiling as if she was teasing Akira. Akira looked at her with a troubled face, but she just ignored that and said.

“I’ll think about it if you’re so used to it to the point that you won’t lose your focus in the middle of the fight no matter how your opponent looks. Even a short pause could be fatal, you see. It’s indeed just training, but it’s still a fight, so focus on the fight and don’t let your guard down. Just imagine what would you do if a beautiful naked humanoid weapon suddenly attacks you while you’re in the middle of exploring an old-world ruin. Do you really think that it would change its appearance just because you ask it to? Or you’ll just continue fighting while still getting bothered by its appearance?”

Akira made a conflicted face, Alpha’s argument did not sound fully convincing. It was true that it was important for him to be able to keep functioning like usual no matter what he was facing. It was true that when he met Alpha, he was dumbfounded in the middle of the dangerous ruin where he could have gotten killed multiple times while he was dumbfounded. But if he was asked if Alpha’s argument was correct, he could not honestly say yes.

Akira sighed as he changed his focus. After all, he knew that he could not win in the argument no matter what, so he decided to ask something else that was bugging him.

“I did prepare all of those stuff following your instruction, but as I thought, I don’t feel like fighting these guys will provide me much training though. I’m indeed using a weaker mode for my augmented suit and it’s slowing me

down a bit. I know I might sound arrogant by saying this, but I'm pretty sure I can quickly defeat them without much trouble, will this really give me some training?"

Akira was a trained Hunter, so he had the confidence to win against Erio and the other children no matter how many times they tried.

Alpha smiled and said.

"This is where you'll see how great my support is."

"No, I think I can win even without your support."

Akira looked confused, Alpha shook her head and smiled smugly.

"That's not what I meant."

At the next moment, Akira heard a bullet land right next to him. He was flabbergasted since he kept his eyes on his surroundings and did not find any enemies in the positions where he might get shot.

Akira immediately crouched and repositioned himself while checking his surroundings one more time.

"Gunshot?! Real bullet?! But from where?"

"It's alright, it's not a real bullet and that sound was also not real. I produced that sound by calculating where the bullet would land to make this training feel more real."

After hearing Alpha's explanation, Akira glanced at where the sound came from. He could not see the scorch mark that should have been there if it was a real bullet. It was indeed as Alpha explained, that sound came from Akira's augmented reality due to Alpha.

Akira sighed in relief after confirming Alpha's explanation, but his expression immediately turned grim.

“I see, thank goodness… Wait, no! Where did it come from!? How did I get surrounded!? My information-gathering device didn’t pick up anything though!?”

“If you’re talking about that, there was actually a faint signal, you know? Although, since you don’t have my support, it’s really hard to notice that signal. Moreover, if they hide in locations where it’s hard for your information-gathering device to reach them, it would be even harder for you to detect them.”

When Alpha was giving that explanation to Akira, another bullet flew by next to him and landed not too far from him, making a banging sound. Akira was sticking close to the ground while moving and looking for enemies, he spotted a boy aiming for him from behind a wreckage.

Akira immediately aimed his rifle at that boy, but before he could pull the trigger, that boy quickly took cover behind the wreckage.

Akira himself understood that his shot did not hit.

“He noticed me!? Did he evade that!? How? His response time is just too fast no matter how you look at it!!”

Alpha smiled amusedly.

“That’s because I told them beforehand to quickly hide after they take a shot.”

Akira frowned and looked at Alpha, he finally understood why she said that it would not be an easy win for him. So basically, his situation was reversed compared to the usual.

“So, as you can see, they’re the ones who have my support.”

Akira was fighting without Alpha’s support while his opponents had her support.

“Enjoy the training!”

Alpha only said that and smiled mischievously at Akira.

Akira thought that he was already surrounded, so he decided to quickly reposition himself.

[Alpha is supporting Erio and the other children, so basically they know my location all the time. I bet they also can see the trajectory line of the bullet in their goggles. I guess I have no other choice but to keep moving while taking cover at the same time. If I stop even for a bit, it'll be game over for me.]

Suddenly a barrage of bullets came from Akira's flank as if to confirm his guess. Judging from the sound, the barrage landed close to him. It seemed that the opponents were aiming properly at him.

Akira scanned through all the positions around him where someone could shoot at him, checked for any signals in his information-gathering device, and checked the area where he found signals. He kept moving to avoid getting shot, due to that, anyone who tried to shoot at him, whether it was only a haphazard barrage or an accurate aiming, would need to stay out from hiding longer to take a good aim at him. He also made sure not to move too much on a straight line so that they could not get a good aim on him.

Akira shifted his gaze from the wreckage to the young boy jumping out from behind it. He quickly aimed his rifle at that young boy and pulled the trigger more or less at the same time as the other boy.

Judging from the sound, the bullet landed behind Akira. Akira was able to evade that shot, but he did not know if his shot got a hit or not. Since it was not like he shot a real bullet, it would not be obvious if his shot really hit. He could not tell if that boy was lying down on the ground because he got shot or because he tried to hide.

He quickly changed his direction to that boy. If his shot did not hit, he wanted to use that chance to close the distance with the enemy, whose position he knew. He needed to finish that boy for good this time.

Akira moved to a position where he could get a good shot at the boy from before. When he peeked out, he could see that boy lying flat on the ground, he thought that it meant his shot hit him as he ran past that boy.

Right at the next moment, Akira could feel someone's presence from behind him. Akira spun around and readied his rifle, that boy from before was already standing back up and aiming at Akira, he was only faking death.

Akira pulled the trigger even quicker than that boy. That boy was surprised as he flusteredly laid back on the ground again. He confirmed that his goggle was filled with red colour as he did what they had agreed to beforehand.

Akira protested to Alpha.

"Alpha!! Is that really okay?!"

"Of course! No one said that they can't lie on the ground unless they get shot, right? It's too naive of you to think that the enemies won't fake death. If this was a real fight, there's also a chance that you only temporarily knocked them unconscious. So don't take your chance and make sure to shoot their head at least once."

"Alright, alright!"

Akira agreed with what Alpha said, but it still rubbed him the wrong way.

Two boys suddenly jumped out behind Akira, not giving him any chance to relax. Akira quickly reacted to it as he made a 180-degree turn and jumped sideways while at the same time returning shots at those 2 boys. But that action threw Akira off balance.

Akira cut through the air and landed on one leg, that was when 4 other boys appeared and aimed at him.

Akira knew that he was in a pinch, his brain automatically kicked to high gear as it boosted his consciousness. Inside that slowed down world, Akira

fixed his posture to evade the bullets coming from those boys and made a full circle spin with his right hand still pulling down on the trigger.

He was able to evade the shots coming from 4 different directions while shooting back at the same time. He confirmed that his shots did hit, so he sighed in relief as he landed with his left hand on the ground, preventing him from falling over.

But the moment his left hand touched the ground, his vision suddenly turned red. Someone had shot him, it was a properly aimed shot. Although it caught him off guard, Akira immediately lied down on the ground.

Akira's vision turned back to normal. He could see Alpha pointing somewhere. Akira traced where she was pointing and saw Erio aiming at him. Erio was the one who shot him.

Alpha looked at Akira and smiled.

"It's my win, you still have a long way to go."

"…How much of that was your plan?"

"Of course, everything from the start to the end, all of it."

"…I see."

Akira pouted a bit when he said that.

He then stood up. Alpha pointed to where he was just before. Akira looked in that direction and frowned.

Akira could see his corpse lying there. Of course, it was nothing more than an image reproduced by Alpha. Akira's corpse had holes on its head, neck, body and limbs as it was bleeding very badly. Some of its body parts were drowned in blood or just simply shredded to pieces. It was the result if they were using real bullets.

During his training in the past, Akira had seen what would happen if he could not fight back a monster, and at that time, the place ended up being

filled with the images of his corpse.

Akira mumbled.

“It has been quite a while since the last time I saw this. So basically this is what would happen if it was real bullets, huh?”

Although, to be more precise, in order for that to happen, they would need to use a pretty powerful bullet since his augmented suit also provided a level of protection for Akira, excluding his head. So it was still pretty accurate to say that a normal bullet would kill Akira like that if he got hit on his head.

Alpha smiled teasingly at Akira and said.

“So there you have it. Aren’t you glad that it wasn’t real bullets?”

“I can’t agree more.”

Akira smiled bitterly as he said that.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 150, Shijima's Disaster

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After they finished a round, Akira and the other children grouped up. They lined up in front of Akira, who looked a bit dejected as he said to them.

"So that's basically the gist of it, anyone has any questions? If not, then let's do another round."

Erio and his friends asked all kinds of questions, Akira answered them one by one while listening to Alpha's explanation too.

"We can see all kinds of things in the goggles, what is with that?"

"The training system is taking care of most of the things in the background. It's mostly focused on adjusting your movement as a group, but it also gives individual orders through your goggles. If you follow those orders accurately, you can learn how to fight. Next!"

"How do you know our locations? And how does it decide when one of us gets shot?"

"It's connected to the information-gathering device in my vehicle and it does calculations based on the data from your goggles and the aiming

device of your rifle. Next!”

“The trajectory line from the muzzle sometimes vanished suddenly, what should I do when that happens?”

“Reload a new magazine. It’s properly counting the ammo inside your magazine, if your magazine is empty, the trajectory line would vanish. It’s so that you can learn to protect each other when you reload a new magazine. At the moment, it’s set so that you can still shoot for a while even after your magazine is empty, but I’ll have to change that soon. Next!”

“I can always see the location of the other people in my goggles, is this really effective as a training?”

“It’s only available to you guys, but not for me. I also don’t get that trajectory line nor the specific order from the training system. I’m basically fighting you guys while you guys know my exact position at all times. So use that advantage to corner me, or to sneak on me. Basically, follow the orders shown by the training system and learn how to fight from that. Although it’s impossible to know your opponents’ location anytime during a real fight, you can actually set a situation where you can do something similar to that. For example, if you install expensive information-gathering devices in all places inside the base and install a security system to support it, you should be able to get a similar situation. Next!”

There was no more question, so Akira decided to stop the Q.A session there.

“No more questions, huh? Then let’s do another round.”

But Erio flusteredly stopped Akira.

“Wait for a sec! So basically we’re the only ones who know your location all the time? And that’s not the case for Akira-san?”

No one was asking questions since they were shocked when they heard that from Akira. Akira then casually replied.

“Yeah, I don’t get anything like that.”

“R-really?”

“This won’t be much of a training if I don’t at least have that much handicap. Not to mention, we have different equipment too. Unlike you guys, I have my augmented suit and my information-gathering device. So without that handicap, it would be a one-way fight and that would not help anyone.”

Erio and the other children were dumbfounded. They thought that Akira could also see through rubbles and wreckages like them, they thought that Akira was also receiving instructions from the training system like them. But that was not the case, they had that many advantages, but even so, they were only barely able to win in an 8 vs 1 fight.

Without that much handicap, they would not be able to give any meaningful fight to Akira. Their difference in strength left those children in shock.

Seeing that no one asked anything more, Akira urged them to move on.

“So, no more questions? Let’s restart the training then.”

They finally snapped back to reality, then one of the children sheepishly asked Akira.

“…Uhmm, I can’t read the instructions, so what should I do?”

“…Just follow the indicators in the map and try to make a guess from there.”

Akira completely forgot the possibility that some of them could not read. It made him feel a bit conflicted remembering that he also could not read until recently.

They then had a few rounds after that, both sides fought desperately in each round.

Akira's victory ratio was 50%. Most of the rounds ended up either with Akira shooting down all of his opponents or Erio's side using one of the boys as a decoy to shoot Akira. Alpha adjusted the training to be like that. Akira suddenly asked Alpha a question while hiding behind a cover.

"But still, I didn't expect them to get this strong just by following your instructions. Although, unlike in my case, I bet they don't always move following your orders."

"You're right. After all, back in the Kuzusuhara ruin, there was a time when you took an action against my instruction, right?"

Akira remembered that blunder back in Kuzusuhara ruin and smiled wryly.

"I'm really sorry about that."

Alpha lightly giggled.

"Well, I do all kinds of adjustment in the background though. For example, when I give them an instruction to go right, they would need to read that instruction, understand the instruction and check if it's safe first before actually following that instruction. So if they take 10 seconds to go through this process, I'll adjust it to show that instruction 10 seconds earlier before it's actually needed. That way they'll move much more efficiently."

"…You're even doing something like that, huh. How did you know that it'll take 10 seconds?"

"Through a lot of different methods. For example, I measure the lag between when I send an instruction into their goggle until they actually execute that order. I also do other adjustments depending on the psychological state of the receiver, how nervous or tired they are, or if they're in a dangerous situation, or how difficult the order is."

Akira nodded in amazement.

"I see, that's really a lot of things to consider and adjust… Well, your support did help a slum city kid who recklessly went to Kuzusuhara ruin to

look for relics to return alive, and that boy is now doing pretty well as a Hunter. So I guess it's only to be expected for you to be able to do that much, huh?"

"Yup, that's true. Aren't you glad that you got to meet me?"

"Yeah, I'm really grateful to you. I'll return back the favour by completing your request, so wait patiently until I can do that, okay?"

Although Akira sounded like he was being cynical, he did not lie. He really felt thankful to Alpha and he was planning to complete her request no matter how long it would take him.

Alpha could see through him and smiled satisfied.

"Yup, I'll be counting on you."

"By the way, how strong are they now since they have your support?"

"Remember back then when you saved Elena and Sara in Kuzusuhara ruin? They're basically slightly weaker than you from that time. Although, that's only true during this training."

"…All of them as a whole?"

"Nope, each one of them."

"…No wonder why I'm having a hard time here."

After all, he was fighting enemies who were as strong as him from that time, and not to mention, it was in an 8 vs. 1 fight. Although Akira smiled bitterly, he also felt slightly happy since the fact that he could fight them well meant that he had grown pretty strong.

Erio and the other children kept their distance from Akira as they were trying to surround him. The fight had not started yet. Previously, right after the fight started, Akira would immediately focus on those who had not moved much and take them out first before taking out the rest of the enemy.

Since that had happened several times, they decided to only start the fight after Erio and the other children had finished repositioning themselves.

Instructions were sent to the goggles, Erio read the instructions shown in his goggles.

"'Starting from this fight, if you shoot from a bad position, we will void your shot considering the kickback from shooting from a bad posture', huh? Then how should I carry my rifle?"

Erio looked at his rifle. The trajectory line from its muzzle had vanished. Right when he was confused about what to do, his goggles shown an image of someone carrying a rifle. So he imitated that image.

"…Like this?"

Erio used both of his hands to grip tightly on his rifle, right on the next moment, the trajectory line extended out from its muzzle. He then tried to carry his rifle with one hand again, and just like last time, the trajectory line vanished again.

"So basically I need to properly carry it with my both hands, huh? But I remember Akira shot with only one arm and in a very bad posture though… Ahh, I see. It's because he has his augmented suit so that he can properly stabilize the kickback with only one arm, huh?"

After that, the goggles also showed all kinds of other shooting postures which Erio tried. Since the trajectory line only came out when he took the correct posture, it helped him to learn how to correctly carry his rifle.

Erio looked at the other children, it seemed that they were also trying to imitate the postures shown in their goggles. Looking at that, he thought that they looked completely like a group of amateurs. The other children must have thought so too when they looked at each other.

"…It seems that we still have a long way to go, huh."

Erio had made his decision to train himself so that he can be strong enough to protect his lover, Alicia. Back then when he won against Akira for the first time, he thought that it might be not as difficult as he thought it would be, but right after that Akira won 4 times in a row.

Erio fully recognized his weakness and admitted that he had a long way to go. He let out a sigh as he felt really pathetic, he then remembered about his lover and resolved himself once again. He had already made his decision, things like this would not break him.

The battle started, Erio ran as fast as he could.

Right about the time when Akira and the other children were training in the wasteland. Somewhere in the lower district of Kugamayama city, Shijima put both of his hands on his head in frustration.

Shijima was the boss of one of many gangs in the slum city and his gang once had an incident with Akira. A guy from his gang by the name of Wataba once went to Sheryl's base and threatened Akira to give up Sheryl's base.

Wataba was killed in Sheryl's base by Akira. Then Akira dragged his corpse all the way back to the gang's base. They were in a situation where they were just one step away from a fight.

At that time, Akira said that with his current strength, Shijima and his men might be able to kill him, but Shijima himself would die too. So in the end, they were able to reach a deal where Shijima could still uphold his reputation by making Akira pay him some money.

Not too long after that, there was no further problem at all. Shijima originally planned to take over Sheryl's gang if Akira died due to the dangerous nature of his job as a Hunter, but Akira was able to survive and was doing fine. So Shijima did not make any big moves. The most that he could do was only visiting Sheryl's base from time to time to check if Akira was still alive.

Then one day, a certain Hunter caused trouble inside the gang's territory. That Hunter was causing a ruckus since he was being chased by someone.

Gangs in slum city like Shijimas' were also functioning as guards in the area. So if someone armed caused trouble in their territories, it was crucial for them to deal with that person with force. If they ignored something like that, it would not only damage the protection money income that they were receiving, in the worst-case scenario, it might cause other gangs to look down on them and attack them.

Normally, Shijima would demand compensation money from these troublemakers and let them go. He was willing to negotiate if it was needed, but he rather not if he was given the choice. It was important to let people know that they had the ability to take care of these trouble makers. So if those Hunters paid him with money, then that would be enough.

Shijima usually checked the identity of the Hunter before dealing with that Hunter. That was when the real problem arose, that Hunter was Akira.

Shijima was being careful of Akira. It was not because of Akira's strength, but it was more because of his unstable personality. After all, he once came to Shijima's base fully expecting a fight. For people who did not want to die, someone who did not hesitate to challenge anyone even if he or she was weaker, like Akira, was someone that they needed to be careful with.

But for the sake of the reputation of the gang, he could not afford to just let Akira go. While on the other hand, it was not worth trying to provoke him since it was almost certain that he would fight back. Shijima just did not know what to do with this single Hunter.

That was when another information reached Shijima; Akira was a careless person who let his wallet get stolen and he was a coward who ran away when another young Hunter threatened him. It was a piece of information that destroyed Shijima's image of Akira.

After hearing that, Shijima was even more confused than before. It was either his mistake for being careful of Akira, or it was because Akira's behaviour changed after he was about to get killed somewhere in the

wasteland, or maybe the information that he received was simply wrong information. Shijima could not decide which one was the correct guess.

So in the end, Shijima asked Viola to investigate more about Akira. He knew well about how bad Viola was, but he had also heard how skilled she was. He also heard that he would not have any trouble with her as long as he did not antagonize her. Viola was able to finish that request in a short time.

Then, right now, the reason why Shijima was so frustrated was because he was listening to the result of that request from Viola herself.

Shijima shouted at Viola who he was talking with through his information terminal.

“Goddammit!! Are you kidding me!? What the heck is going on? Explain everything to me!! All I asked is to get some pickpocket to aim for him to poke for his reaction!! So how in the world did it turn into sending an armed group to Sheryl’s base!?”

In contrast to Shijima, Viola replied calmly.

“Good grief, calm down for a bit, will you? Although the situation went out of control, it was enough to give a good result for our main objective to check for his response, right? Not to mention, you did say you’re not fully satisfied with only doing that, right? So we might as well consider ourselves lucky here.”

It was Viola’s job to spread information to the information brokers all over the slum city that Akira was an easy target for pickpockets. The original request for that came from Shijima, he did that to check how Akira reacted to pickpockets.

But Viola’s calm answer only caused Shijima to get angrier.

“Lucky, you say?! Then how in the world did that attack get connected to me!? You’re the one who provoked them, right?! I have nothing to do with them!!”

“Geez, can you stop accusing me? I have nothing to do with those robbers too. I just spread that information like you asked me to. Then those robbers chose to attack Sheryl’s base using that wrong information as the basis of their decision. I spread that information because you made a request to me. Just think about what would happen if Akira discovered that. Akira might misunderstand and think that those robbers attacked Sheryl’s base because of you. I’m just reminding you of that possibility here. It’s true that you’re aiming for Sheryl’s base, right? And it’s true that you want Akira dead too, right? You have no connection to the robbers and it was not like you paid them to attack Sheryl’s base either. I’m just telling you here that I can’t say for sure if Akira would believe that, you know?”

Shijima’s face turned grim, it was because he understood Viola’s point. More than that, he also knew that there was a good chance Viola had done something to make Akira misunderstand the situation. So in short, if Viola wanted to, she could have manipulated Akira and Shijima to fight each other.

Shijima already knew Akira’s strength since he heard about that from Viola herself.

Akira once completed a request in Kuzusuhara ruin that earned him more than 10 million Aurum. He also successfully hunted a bounty monster. He then went to Mihazono ruin’s Seranthal building which even the City Management judged to be a dangerous place and returned back with 50 million Aurum. And not too long ago, he killed 8 armed Hunters all by himself. Viola had gathered all of those proofs of Akira’s strength before sending them to Shijima.

Akira was already too strong for Shijima to handle. The current Akira was strong enough to decimate Shijima’s gang while having some leeway. Messing with the current Akira would be very risky.

Shijima’s expression was more of desperation than anger, his voice also reflected the same thing.

“…S-so, what do you want?”

But Viola just smiled and casually replied with something unexpected.

“Oh my, I didn’t demand anything from you though? We’re only talking here since I want to give you my report for your request plus some extra service based on my policy to hold my customers dear. So, was it useful information? Normally, you would need to pay to get information like that, you know? Or is that you prefer not to know anything? Was it something that I shouldn’t have done? I’m sorry if it was, I’ll make sure not to do that again next time.”

Shijima was about to retort, but he closed his mouth and gritted his teeth, trying to hold back his anger. He then tried to calm down as he said.

“…Thanks for the information. As a gratitude, is there anything that we can do to help you?”

“Oh my, it would be such a waste if you would even go that far. In that case, I might as well ask you one thing.”

Shijima could hear Viola’s happy voice coming from his information terminal as that bad girl explained her evil plan. Although if it was from her voice alone, Viola had a very appealing voice. But that did not help in this case, Shijima only accepted her request because he did not have much choice.

“So then, until next time.”

“…Yeah, I’ll be counting on you.”

Shijima closed the call and immediately yelled as hard as he could.

“Goddammit!!”

Shijima’s voice echoed through the base.

***

Akira did not exactly plan the training duration, but since it seemed that Erio and the other children were getting tired, he decided to stop the

training.

Erio and the other children received notification in their goggles and heard Akira's voice telling them to stop the training there. They were all really tired as they sighed in relief at the signal saying that they could finally relax. They used their rifle as a walking staff to help them drag their feet back to where Akira parked his vehicle.

Before Akira returned back to his vehicle, he looked around and said in disappointment.

"…I died quite a lot this time."

Akira could see countless corpses of himself scattered around the ground. Only he and Alpha could see those corpses, they were the results of his blunders during the training. He would have ended up as one of those corpses if this wasn't just a training.

Akira's face looked pretty dejected by the fact of how pathetic he was, so Alpha tried to cheer him up.

"Well, that's just how it is. Considering that the other party had my support, I think this result is not bad at all."

"…I see… Wait, is that so?"

"Yep!"

Although Akira sounded like he was still questioning it, Alpha replied with a confirmation. She answered back so firmly that he did not have much choice but to accept it.

Alpha then smiled smugly and said.

"Or is it that you have something to complain about since my support cornered you this much?"

Akira replied back swiftly.

“No, I have no complaint.”

“Thought so.”

Alpha smiled satisfied.

Akira then decided to move on.

“You’re right, your support always helps me a lot. Thank you. let’s head back now.”

On his way back to his vehicle, Akira remembered something and asked Alpha.

“…By the way, I think it worked well as a training for me, but how about for Erio and the other children? How is their fighting skill? Did they get better?”

“Well, although it didn’t work out that perfectly, they did receive some training from me. So they’re at least stronger than yesterday. Training-wise, I think it was more effective than if they’re doing their own training. Let’s keep on doing this training so that Sheryl’s gang would get more fighting power, that way they would not bother you that much.”

Akira then remembered Erio and the other children who were so tired after the fight that they looked like they would faint anytime.

“…To be honest, I’m not sure if they would come for another training though.”

“When that happens, we can just ask for Sheryl’s help. I’m sure that she won’t say no.”

“…Well, that’s true, but still…”

It was not a bad idea for Sheryl’s gang, so it was very likely that Sheryl would say yes to that. Moreover, Erio and the other children could not say no if it was an order from Sheryl. After all, if they did, Sheryl would kick them out from the gang.

Akira felt a bit sorry for Erio and the other children.

After they finished their training, all of them returned to Sheryl's base. In contrast to Akira who seemed still full of vigour, Erio and the other children looked so tired as if they were forced to do long-hour labour work. Seeing that, Sheryl's men could not help but feel scared.

Sheryl told them to take a rest before she headed to her private room together with Akira.

Akira gave a small explanation to Sheryl about the training and said.

"…Well, so that's the gist of it. I'm thinking of doing this training regularly. The equipment that we used for the training is paid with the money from back then when we had that deal with Katsuragi. I think it's a good idea to use that money for something like this. If you ask me how is it useful to me, it also serves as a training for me."

Sheryl smiled happily and said to Akira.

"Thank you very much, I'm sure Erio and the other children would be happy too."

Akira questioned for a second whether Sheryl said that because she knew that was true for sure, or because she only guessed that it was true, or because she only said that as not to worsen his mood, or because she knew it was beneficial for her gang to say so.

Akira looked at Sheryl more intently than usual. She was smiling at him, to Akira, it did not seem that she was only acting, and even if it was, he did not have the skill to notice that.

Sheryl realized what Akira was trying to do there, so she confusedly asked him.

"What's wrong?"

"No, it's nothing."

Akira decided not to let that bother him too much. It was up to Sheryl and her gang whether to continue the training or not, it was not something for him to worry about.

Sheryl observed Akira's reaction carefully. She understood that he had something in his mind but he decided to just stop thinking about that.

Just to be safe, she reevaluated what she just did there.

[…I'm sure I didn't say anything that might offend Akira. It should be alright… Is it better if I ask him what he is thinking about? No, Akira said that it's nothing, so it might be better not to ask him..]

Sheryl still had her usual smile on her face as she thought about a lot of things in the back of her mind on how to make sure not to offend Akira, make him like her, and make him keep supporting the gang.

Sheryl then said to Akira.

"There's something else that I want to talk about, I got a call from Shijima. He said that he wants to meet me and Akira. What should we do?"

"Shijima? Who's that?"

"He's the boss of another gang. He's the boss of a gang that you once visited.

"Ohh, that one? If it's about gang business, you alone should be enough, right?"

"No, he specifically asked to meet you sometime soon."

"Why?"

"It's just my guess, he might want to check if we're okay after that shoot out in the base. I believe he wants to confirm that we're not trying to hide if you or I are wounded or killed."

Akira agreed with Sheryl's guess.

“Ahh, so it’s about that, huh.”

If he refused without a good reason, Shijima might think that Sheryl’s gang had lost Akira’s support and that would definitely cause more troubles later. If it was possible, Akira wanted to avoid any trouble until his new equipment arrived. Unlike last time, Shijima would not look down on Akira and think that Akira was just a common young Hunter, so this time for sure he must be properly prepared for him. When Akira concluded as such and thought of having to fight the force that Shijima prepared, he exasperatedly said.

“…I’m tired today, so how about tomorrow?”

“Very well, I’ll tell him so.”

Sheryl thought that Akira said so simply because he was tired. She did not think that Akira also thought about the possibility of fighting Shijima’s gang. It seemed that there was still a gulf between his and Sheryl’s way of thinking.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 151, Viola’s Plan

Index

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Tiol was walking through the slum city in the middle of the night. When he arrived at his destination, he readied his rifle and stormed through a broken door. The flashlight equipped on his rifle provided vision in that pitch-black room as he checked all 4 corners of that room. But he found no one, he clicked his tongue and took out his information terminal, immediately made a call with a grim face.

“Hey! She’s not here either! All the information that I got from you are false, aren’t they?! Are you sure that information that she’s living here is correct?”

A woman’s voice came out from Tiol’s terminal. Unlike Tiol who sounded desperate, that woman’s voice was the exact opposite.

“Well, she should have been there at least a week ago. Freshness is important for information, it’s normal to encounter something like this out of old information.”

Tiol’s face twitched with anger, he then shouted at his terminal.

“It’s normal to encounter something like this?! Are you kidding me? You do know the situation that I’m in, right?”

Not being concerned about Tiol’s anger, that woman replied with a light threat.

“I’m not kidding here. In the first place, are you taking this seriously? You didn’t pay anything and demanded me for information, then to top it off you still complain to me? Don’t get ahead of yourself! In all honesty, I don’t really care even if you die.”

That was enough to immediately shut Tiol down. He sounded scared and desperate at the same time as he said.

“I-I’m sorry… But I did explain to you my situation, right? I’m in a really bad situation, I was the one who brought those attackers to the base, you know!? In the worst-case scenario, I might get kicked out of the gang! So if I can find and drag that pickpocket who Akira is looking for, I might be forgiven. Otherwise, this is really really bad!! Dammit! Why did this happen to me…”

Tiol was pulling his hair out. But then the woman gently said to him as if to cheer him up.

“Just keep following my instructions from here and on. If you do, I’ll give you some good info.”

He replied as if he was begging that woman.

“Please, I’m relying on you, this is my only hope.”

“Well then, for now, just look around the room. You might be able to find some clues about where she’s living now.”

“Alright.”

Tiol started searching the inside of the room just as he was told to. He did not notice that he was actually being used.

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Akira and Sheryl went to Shijima's base since Shijima said he wanted to meet Akira.

Sheryl was wearing her refitted old-world dress while Akira was in his augmented suit and was fully armed. They looked much different compared to when they came there for the first time.

The guards who saw Sheryl and Akira approaching the base could not help but feel nervous. Both of them showed that they had the money and the power. That guard was originally still looking down on Sheryl and her gang, but seeing them now, he could not afford to look down on them anymore.

That man kept his guard up as he said.

"Akira and Sheryl, right? Boss is waiting inside, I'll take you to him. But I'll need you to leave your weapons with us."

Akira swiftly replied.

"No."

That man frowned and tried to intimidate Akira.

"We're not kidding here."

Akira did not wince back at all, he just casually replied.

"Neither am I. I keep getting attacked lately, so I'm being more careful than usual at the moment. Sorry."

That man scanned Akira's equipment once more. AAH and A2D assault rifles were dangling on his waist, while on his back, he was carrying CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun. He obviously did not come in peace.

That man could not help but to make a grim face when he imagined the damage that would result if the gang fought Akira.

“…Good grief, you came here with all of those weapons, are you planning to fight us or something?”

“No, I have no intention to fight any of you. Although, it’s completely out of my control if something were to happen that might cause a fight.”

That man gave up trying to convince Akira and shifted to Sheryl.

“Are you really okay with this?”

Sheryl seemed a bit troubled as she replied.

“Since Akira said no, it’s not like I can do anything to change his mind. And he is here to protect me too. So if you say that we can’t pass unless we give up our weapons, then it can’t be helped, we have no other choice but to leave.”

The man clicked his tongue.

“…Wait here for a bit.”

He then went into the base, gave his report, and returned back to Sheryl and Akira.

“Boss said that it’s okay. Follow me, and don’t try anything funny.”

Judging from that guard’s face, it seemed that they actually did not want to let Akira and Sheryl into the base.

Akira and Sheryl were guided to a big guest room, Shijima welcomed them with a suspicious smile.

“Thanks for coming, come and sit.”

Sheryl went and took a seat on the sofa, while Akira stood near Sheryl and scanned the room, registering everyone inside the room in his mind. He could see there were some people behind Shijima and they were all armed.

Shijima noticed what Akira was doing there and said to him.

“Don’t worry, it’s just to be safe. And since you’re armed too, I won’t accept any complaint, okay?”

“…It’s fine.”

Akira saw some familiar faces among them, it was Carol and Viola. Carol was fully armed too, she smiled at Akira and lightly waved at him, while Viola was sitting casually next to Shijima.

Sheryl saw that small exchange between Akira and Carol. She tried her best to hold the emotion that was welling up inside her as she barely kept her calm and her usual smile.

Sheryl then asked Shijima a question.

“So then, what kind of business do you want to talk about today?”

“Well, first things first, I heard that some people attacked your place. I’m glad that both of you are okay.”

“Thank you for your concern… We lost some people too, so I can’t really say that we’re totally fine. But thanks to Akira, I believe that the damage was kept to a minimum.”

“Selling relics is really profitable after all, so it’s no surprise that some people would target you. And also, it seems that more and more people are gathering around your territory. If your gang that is maintaining order in that area is gone, it would cause trouble for us too. So I’m glad that you’re fine.”

Shijima and Sheryl sounded like they were talking about mundane stuff from the outside, but behind that, they were actually probing each other’s real intentions. They were trying to probe for reactions when they brought up different subjects and then they would guess each other’s intention judging from the reactions they got.

Akira thought that if it was only mundane stuff like that, they could just talk about it through a call. He did not think too deep as he was listening to their

conversation, but after Alpha explained what was going on between those two, he lightly nodded.

“…I bet they’re trying to do something like that at the moment.”

“…So gang bosses need to be able to even do something like that, huh?”

“Both of them are maintaining the outside and the inside of the gang with power after all, so it’s important for them to be careful. Especially for Sheryl since her gang got attacked. Although she has you supporting the gang, there’s a need for her to take care of the aftermath. As for Shijima, I bet he thought that Sheryl’s gang was nothing but a small weak neighbouring gang. But then that gang has started selling relics and earning enough money to even get targeted by robbers. And if you have money, you can hire people and get good weapons. So in this case, it would mean that the gang that Shijima thought of as nothing suddenly transformed into a well-growing and expanding gang. So it’s understandable for him to get information on that gang.”

“…Being a boss for a gang sounds like a lot of work.”

Akira mumbled as if it had nothing to do with him when most of Shijima’s and Sheryl’s worries were mainly caused by him. It seemed that Akira simply did not know about that at the moment.

Sheryl and Shijima spent some time talking about mundane stuff while probing each other’s intention, that was when Viola suddenly interjected.

“It’s all good and fine if both of you want to build up your friendship. But it might be a good idea to get into the main subject soon.”

Shijima frowned and made a grim face, he looked at Viola without saying anything as if he was reproaching her. Sheryl seemed a bit confused while she was checking Viola and Shijima. In that situation, Viola was just smiling confidently there.

Viola still looked rather relaxed when she continued.

“If it’s hard for you to bring it up, I can explain it in your place, you know?”

Shijima took a small pause, it seemed that he had to make his resolve before replying.

“…Alright, go ahead, please.”

Sheryl, who saw that, thought.

[…Shijima is intimidated by that woman? Are they acquaintance or something? I don’t really know what’s going on here, but what exactly do they want to talk about?]

Sheryl raised her wariness as she shifted her focus to Viola. Viola reacted with a smile that somehow broke Sheryl’s poker face. Sheryl could not help but to make an uneasy expression.

Viola’s smile was covertly expressing a provocation toward someone inexperienced. So Sheryl stiffened her expression as to not break her poker face any further.

Viola shifted her gaze to Akira, she smiled at him and said.

“To be honest, it’s actually something related to Akira.”

Akira frowned.

“Me?”

“Yep, you. You’ve been targeted by pickpocket lately, right? I’m sure you’ve been dealing with a lot of those pickpockets who bought a particular piece of information from some information broker.”

Akira’s expression immediately changed, he looked slightly annoyed.

“…So? What about that?”

“About the source of that info, it’s actually us. We’re sorry.”

Since Viola just laid it out straight at him like that, Akira needed a bit of time before he processed it. But the moment he fully understood what she said, he instinctively replied in a low voice which reflected his real feeling.

"…Oh."

Akira's mood suddenly turned for the worse. His face turned expressionless and was filled with hostility, his casual standing posture also slightly shifted so that he could reach for his rifles and jump into action anytime. It was rather amazing that both of his hands that were lowered had not reached for his rifles yet, while at the same time, it was also visible that he was holding himself back from reaching for his rifles.

Everyone else in the room immediately tensed up. Shijima's men immediately changed their posture so that they were ready to fight anytime, but no one was reaching for their weapons yet. If any of them had grabbed their rifles and aimed at Akira, there was no question that Akira would not hesitate to open fire. Bullets would have filled the room before anyone could try to calm the situation down. Shijima signalled his men to calm down.

Viola was still smiling like usual. Although she was also equally surprised by that unexpected reaction from Akira, she was able to hide the shiver that ran down her spine. She then casually said.

"I want to continue my explanation if you're okay with it."

Akira replied with a calm but cold voice.

"…I would be thankful if you can refrain from saying anything that might cause a misunderstanding. Even if you can properly explain everything if I listen to you until the end of your explanation, I can't guarantee that I'll calmly listen to your explanation until the end."

Akira was stating that he had no confidence he could listen calmly until the end. After hearing that statement, Viola continued while trying to keep her face from wincing.

“Alright. In that case, let’s start with the overview. It ended up pretty badly purely by coincidence, we did not mean you any harm when we did that. We do feel sorry for what happened, so please calm down and listen to our explanation. It all started when you caused a ruckus in Shijima’s territory with your gun out, so from there…”

Viola explained what was going on to Akira. Back then when Akira pulled out his rifle as he was chasing Alna, they were actually in Shijima’s territory. So Shijima wanted to know more about the Hunter who caused that ruckus. Then he found out that Akira pulled back when he was confronted by a young Hunter, and that was the biggest reason why incomplete information about Akira spread around. Because of that, the piece of information that misevaluated Akira spread among the information brokers which eventually gave the final push for those robbers that attacked Sheryl’s base.

Viola and Shijima admitted their fault and explained that they had nothing to do with those robbers. They did not say anything to those robbers who attacked Sheryl’s gang. They gave their detailed explanations slowly to make sure that Akira understood everything.

Akira listened to Viola’s explanation without saying anything. But there was no sign of change in his mood even after he finished listening to the explanation.

Viola smiled at Akira and continued.

“So basically that’s everything. I did my best to not cause any misunderstanding, to say it clearly, we have no wish to be hostile with you. So, do we understand each other here?”

Akira did not say anything back. Everyone in the room started to tense up. There was no questioning that if someone made a suspicious move there, they would immediately break into a fight. Although all of them had different thoughts running on their mind, that was one thing which everyone agreed on.

Viola tried to hide the cold sweat running down her skin as she shifted her gaze from Akira to Sheryl. She then smiled gently at Sheryl and said.

“Since it’s also related to your gang, if it’s okay, can you let us know your opinion too?”

“…My opinion?”

“Yes. You lost some of your men during the attack. So I want to know your opinion as the boss of the gang. It would be great if you can understand that we have nothing to do with those robbers, but if you can’t believe us, then we understand that too. Which in that case, I want to discuss the incident with you, to be honest, we want to resolve this peacefully. Of course, I’m okay with it if you want to discuss it with Akira first.”

Sheryl frowned. She needed extra courage to talk with Akira in his current mood. She also had no idea how far he believed Viola’s explanation. She did not know how much it would worsen his mood if she defended Viola. In the worst-case scenario, Akira might think that she was defending an enemy and it might cause him to abandon her. Even if she said that she did not know what to do, that in itself might be a bad decision. After all, Akira might think that it should have been an obvious decision and there was no need to think about it any further.

Sheryl did think of not believing everything that Viola said, but she immediately ruled out that choice. After all, if she did that, that would mean that Akira’s bad reputation pushed the robbers to attack Sheryl’s gang. So in short, Akira was dragged into more trouble because he was involved with Sheryl’s gang. And that would be enough of a reason for him to abandon her. So of course, Sheryl could not afford to do that.

Viola was pushing Sheryl to make her decision even though both of them were equally bad decisions for her. And most likely, even if Sheryl chose to not say anything, Viola might have a plan to use that for her own benefit too.

[…That woman called me here together with Akira in order to talk about this subject in front of Akira. If I have to make a guess, it’s in order to hold

Akira back. Both of them had no plans to check if we're okay right from the start… But in the first place, why would they bring this up? Is it to reduce the damage if Akira finds out about it later? Or is it to check how much I can affect Akira's decision? Or is it for something else? I-I really have no idea at all, I don't understand what this woman is thinking.]

Thinking about it only caused Sheryl to become more suspicious, and that suspicion gave birth to nervousness. Sheryl's poker face was slowly crumbling. Viola was smiling, as usual, it seemed that no matter which answer Sheryl gave, she would be able to make good use of it.

Akira's mood was pretty bad. He was ready to take action if anyone made a suspicious move. Although he understood that his stance only made the situation tenser and more dangerous, he was not able to try to calm himself down.

That was when Alpha smiled and casually said to him.

"Akira, you got a call from Shizuka."

"…From Shizuka-san?"

"If you want to answer it, at least say something first. If you try to pull out your information terminal in this state, they might misunderstand and think that you are trying to reach for your rifle."

Akira's expression did not change and his voice was still as calm and cold as before when he suddenly said to everyone.

"…I got a call from a friend, is it okay if I answer it?"

Normally, people would scorn him and tell him to just ignore the call since they were in the middle of an important discussion, but in order to improve the mood there, everyone agreed not to tell that to Akira. So Viola replied as the representative of everyone else in the room.

"Sure, go ahead."

Akira slowly reached for his information terminal and answered the call.

“…It’s Akira.”

“Hello, it’s Shizuka. There’s something I want to ask you, is it a good time… Or at least that’s what I want to say, should I just call again some other time?”

“…No, it’s fine.”

“Is that so? If you’re busy, I can just call again later, you know? It sounds like you’re in a rather bad mood over there. If I called you at a bad time, I’m really sorry.”

“…No… I’m sorry, can you please keep the call open and wait for a bit?”

“Hm? Sure.”

Akira pulled his information terminal away from his ear, he then took a deep breath and did that several times in front of everyone. After he forced himself to calm down to some degree and his expression was mostly returned back to normal, he then continued his call with Shizuka.

“Thank you for waiting. Do I sound better now? Or do I still sound pretty bad?”

Shizuka gently replied to that question.

“It’s okay, you sound like the usual you now.”

Akira actually had not fully returned to his usual self. Shizuka only said that since she thought that it would calm him down. And in reality, it did calm Akira down. Akira then apologetically said to her.

“I’m really sorry, it’s just that something bad happened and it really annoyed me. Like, you know, there are a lot of things that I have to deal with when I’m working as a Hunter.”

“Don’t worry, I know how hard it is being a Hunter.”

Akira was relieved, it seemed that Shizuka did not mind. With that, his mood had mostly returned to normal.

Shizuka then returned back to the real reason why she called him.

“Well, let’s return to the main subject then. You asked me to help you choose your new equipment, remember? I actually came up with some suggestions and so I want to check them with you. I’ll send the data to you so take your time and check all of them… Or at least that’s what I want to say but… Some of them are only available for a limited time, you see.”

“For a limited time, huh?”

“Yep. After all, your budget is 400 million Aurum and expensive equipment are usually available for only a limited time, you see. Moreover, some of the merchants who are worried about their revenue might be willing to give a big discount if you pay for their goods soon. As in matter of fact, some of them are only available for the next 2 hours, that’s why I hurried up and called you.”

“I see, thank you very much.”

“Likewise, thank you very much for entrusting our shop with such a big deal.”

But then Shizuka’s business-like voice immediately changed to a very gentle one.

“…I don’t know what just happened to you, but as I said before, I can at least listen to your worry, okay?”

“…Okay.”

Akira sounded a bit happy when he said that.

“Well then, see you next time.”

Shizuka sounded relieved as she ended the call with that remark.

Akira then put back his information terminal and realized that everyone in the room was looking at him.

Although they had different expressions, it was more than obvious that everyone was looking at him. He found that weird, but he then remembered that he was in the middle of a discussion with Viola.

“Ah, right, we were in the middle of a discussion, right? I have no plans to cause an unnecessary fight either. But if there’s something else that you want to talk about regarding the gang, like maybe the peace money, then you can just talk it out with Sheryl. I don’t want to have anything to do with the war between gangs. As long as Sheryl doesn’t ask me to get involved, I have no plans to get involved. You okay with that too right, Sheryl?”

Sheryl flusteredly said.

“Eh? Y-yes. I’m okay if you say so, Akira.”

“So there you have it.”

Akira looked at everyone and casually said so.

Akira’s bad mood was completely erased. As a matter of fact, he sounded rather happy as if everything that happened until now was nothing but an illusion. The mood in the room had completely relaxed.

Except for one person, Shijima still had a stern expression plastered on his face. He remembered what his men reported to him when Akira came to his base for the first time. Akira dragged the corpse of one of Shijima’s men, Wataba, all the way to Shijima’s base, and Akira was the one who killed Wataba.

Shijima then heard the full report of what had happened from one of his men. It seemed that the moment Akira killed Wataba, Wataba said something about threatening Akira’s acquaintance. According to that report, when Wataba was about to mention a name, Akira did not hesitate at all and quickly shot him.

[…From what I heard, that person is the owner of a weapon shop. And judging from the conversation just now, it seemed that it's about buying some equipment. So in short, there's a good chance that call was with that shop owner, and that alone was enough to fix his mood. I bet that Akira likes that person and thinks dearly of that person. So, is that person the same person who Wataba was about to mention…? In the first place, why did Akira kill Wataba? Is it really because Wataba threatened him? But if that's really the case, he should have killed Wataba way sooner, right…? Don't tell me that he killed Wataba because he was about to mention that person's name?! Did he really kill Wataba just to stop Wataba from mentioning that person's name!? Just so that other people won't know about that person!? Is that really all the reason!?]

Shijima's face puckered in. That was right when Viola opened her mouth.

"Akira, who was-"

Shijima could imagine Viola asking Akira who that was since Akira seemed to be enjoying talking to that person. And if it was okay with him, Viola also wanted to know that person's name. So Shijima could not help but instinctively interject her.

"Viola!! Akira said so too, so let's just proceed with the discussion!! You've already decided what to do to apologize for causing so much trouble to Akira, right? So let's proceed with that!"

Viola was both surprised and confused since Shijima suddenly cut in while half-shouting, Viola did not expect that at all. Shijima looked intensely at her. She understood that Shijima was trying to tell her not to ask any unnecessary questions.

Viola tried to change the mood as she smiled at Akira and Sheryl, and said.

"Ahh, you're right. First of all, I'll exaggerate the information about you killing those robbers and spread that information around. That way, no one would look down on you and Sheryl's gang."

Sheryl smiled and replied.

“Thank you for that offer. A lot of my men are worried about it, so I’m sure they’ll be happy to hear it.”

“To be honest, that would only help Sheryl’s gang. So for our apology to Akira, we’ll help you take care of that pickpocket whom you’re searching for.”

Akira thought that it was rather strange for Viola to bring that up.

“Take care?”

“Yes, you asked Sheryl’s men to look for that pickpocket, right? I’m sure that we have a wider net to look and kill that pickpocket compared to if you’re working alone. Although, of course, we can’t help you much if that pickpocket runs to the inner wall or to a different city.”

Akira thought for a bit before replying.

“No, that won’t be necessary.”

Viola did not expect that at all.

“Oh my, what’s wrong? If you want to kill that pickpocket yourself, we can secure that pickpocket alive, you know?”

“That’s not what I meant. If you do that, then if something troublesome were to happen later, you have an excuse to blame that on me. That’s why you don’t need to do it.”

Viola thought for a sec.

“…But you won’t tell me not to do it, right?”

“Even if I tell you to do it or not to do it, either way, that will be enough reason to blame it on me, right? So as I said, I won’t tell you anything.”

Viola took a few more seconds to think before opening her mouth again.

“I see. In that case, we’ll just do what we want to do. Even if we spread that information around, as long as that pickpocket is still alive and still roaming around somewhere, it might cause some contradiction with the information that we’re about to spread. So we need to make sure at least that pickpocket is not around the area. You don’t mind if we do that, right?”

“I’m in no position to tell you what to do and what not to do. So you decide by yourself on what to do.”

“Alright.”

Shijima sounded a bit arrogant as he said to Sheryl.

“That’s all that we want to talk about with you today. If you have nothing else to say, you can leave now. It’s rather troublesome to have someone as heavily armed as you inside my base when you’re not a part of my gang. So now that a bigger problem than that is over, it would be great if you can leave quickly.”

“Very well. We’ll take our leave then.”

Sheryl stood up from the sofa and lightly bowed at Shijima.

Shijima did not say anything as he just signalled one of his men to escort Akira and Sheryl out of the base. Akira and Sheryl followed that man and left the room.

As Viola confirmed that Akira and Sheryl left the room and closed the door. She immediately looked at Shijima and confusedly asked him.

“So then, what was that just now? I bet you have a reason why you cut me back there, right?”

Shijima lightly sighed before saying anything.

“It’s just to be safe. Just think of it as me saving you there. I don’t mind telling you, but you’ll owe me one for that.”

Viola thought for a bit since owing a favour to someone meant a lot for her. But for the current Viola, that did not outweigh her curiosity, she wanted to know why Shijima did that.

“Sure then, I owe you one favour. So, why was that?”

“Very well then.”

Shijima looked at his men without saying anything and his men immediately left the room.

Viola then looked at Carol.

“Haah! It can’t be helped then, don’t blame if you get killed when I’m not around, okay?”

Although Carol did not like that idea, she also left the room while half-jokingly said that to Viola.

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Akira escorted Sheryl back to the slum city.

Sheryl’s dress was rather conspicuous there. She was still somewhere not too far from the base and was already gathering a lot of attention from the people around.

She was not trying to hide her expensive dress under a coat or anything, she walked confidently through the slum city. It was also to let people know that Akira was still alive. It could be said both of them were children of the slum who reached success. People looked at them with amazement, envy and jealousy as both of them walked through the slum city.

Sheryl glanced at Akira who was walking next to her and thought.

[…Who was Akira talking to back then? Is it someone that he cares that much? Even a short exchange with that person is enough to cheer him up. Who is exactly that person? And what is Akira’s relation with that person?

It must be someone dear to him that Akira would even answer her call in that situation.]

She could just ask Akira, but she did not want to.

And even if she did, Akira might just give her a random answer. Something like, it was his acquaintance and nothing more. As Sheryl thought so, even if she pressed for an answer, it would only worsen Akira's mood and he might only tell her not to ask him that question.

In the end, Sheryl could not ask Akira anything since she was scared of the difference between herself and that person.

[…I still have a long way to go.]

Although Akira was there within her reach, to Sheryl, his existence was someone far away from her.

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Even after hearing the explanation from Shijima, Viola was smiling amusedly.

"That was a rather interesting story. It was worth owing you a favour."

Shijima looked both alert and exasperated as he said.

"I don't care what you are going to do with that information, but just don't drag me into your mess. I have no plans to be overly antagonistic against that boy."

Viola's smile towards Shijima was also saying that she found it rather unfortunate.

"Oh my, I can say the same too, you know. I have no plans to be overly antagonistic against that boy too."

Shijima understood that although both of them said the same thing, there was a subtle difference in their meanings. He looked at Viola as if to

silently warn her not to get him involved. He then sighed and changed the subject.

“…So then, what’s your plan with this Alna?”

“Of course, I’ll look for that pickpocket and kill her. That’s our plan right from the start, right? Akira also did say that it’s okay for us to do it as long as we don’t mention anything about him, right?”

“To me, it sounded more like ‘don’t do anything unnecessary’ though.”

“Is that so? I guess that’s a matter of interpretation. I don’t mind if you want to stay away from it since you interpret it that way, but I’ll decide what I’ll do according to my own interpretation. But if after all is done and Akira comes after you, who did not move a finger to do anything, believing you’re mocking him, don’t come crying to me, okay…? So, what are you going to do?”

Viola smiled smugly, in contrast to that, Shijima looked rather troubled.

“…Alright alright, I’ll send some of my men to help you. Although, to be honest, I really don’t want to help you with your plan. I heard that you cheaply bought a debt bond of a Hunter that Akira has his eyes on. If you can use this chance to make peace with Akira, the worth of that debt bond will return back to normal and you’ll be able to sell it to get extra profit, right?”

Viola smiled rather annoyedly.

“Oh, you know? Keep it a secret, okay?”

Judging from her expression, Shijima knew for sure that Viola had other reasons in her mind, but he decided not to ask any further since he did not want to get dragged into her mess. So to make sure that he had nothing to do with it, Shijima changed the subject.

“By the way, I heard that Sheryl is Akira’s lover, do you think that’s true?”

“It might as well be, or at least, according to the information that I gathered, it seems that it’s true. I heard he did buy her an expensive dress and took a bath together with her, he’s basically taking care of her. Well, with that being said, there are many kinds of relationships that you can simply express with the word lover. Some of them are dating out of love to each other, some of them are dating because it’s beneficial to both of them. Some relationships are one-sided while others are just straight predatory. Like I said, there are many types of relationship that you can express with the word lover, so I don’t think there’s any problem with that.”

“Well, that’s true when we’re talking about possibilities. But I’m talking about Akira’s real intention here, Sheryl is… What can I say, she might be just a decoy, you see. Although he seems to be extremely angry with that pickpocket who stole his wallet, he didn’t seem that angry about those robbers that attacked Sheryl’s base. Back then, even when he had his lover next to him, he didn’t show any worry in that situation. I believe that it’s not an exaggeration to say that Akira doesn’t care much about Sheryl. But even so, he did buy her an expensive dress and protected her gang from robbers. From this point of view, it can be said that Akira thinks dearly of Sheryl. So if you think about these two contradicting things…”

“He might be just protecting Sheryl to make her a decoy, huh. Being a Hunter means that you might earn some grudges from other people, and everyone would love to get a good Hunter under their thumb. There might be people who would take his lover hostage to threaten him too. So Akira’s real lover might actually be that person whom he was talking to back then, that’s what you want to say, right?”

“Yeah, that’s my guess.”

Shijima thought that if Sheryl was only a decoy, he might be able to use the gap in that relationship. But Viola casually replied.

“I don’t think there’s anything you need to worry about though. The most important thing is how you’ll treat Sheryl. Even if Sheryl is really just a decoy, if you do anything bad to her, I’m sure Akira would do something to make sure that you won’t think of her as a decoy. As long as you don’t do

anything to make him your enemy and don’t even think of taking Sheryl hostage, I’m sure that it’ll not affect you that much.”

“…You’re right about that.”

Shijima agreed with what Viola said and stopped thinking any further about that subject. He had no wish to be hostile against Akira. But Viola just would not let that subject go.

Viola smiled as if she just thought of something good, but her expression was immediately replaced with her usual mysterious smile.

“Let’s cut the silly talk here and talk about how are we going to get that Alna.”

“Alright.”

Viola and Shijima stayed for a while inside that room to talk about the details of their plan.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 152, Those Who Sow Conflicts

Index

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Akira was training Erio and the other children again that day.

They did the training session about 2-3 times per week depending on Akira's schedule. They would take a break if Akira was tired, or busy, or not in the mood, or just simply if he did not want to do it. While on the other hand, if Akira wanted to do it, they would do it all day. It was Sheryl's idea to treat Akira like that.

Sheryl was planning to eventually reopen the relic shop and it was obvious that she would be opening the shop even if Akira was not around. Once Akira started doing his Hunter job again, he would not be able to frequent the base as much as he does now.

Because of that, Sheryl needed her gang to be able to protect itself when she reopened the shop. She could get all the equipment that she needed from Katsuragi, but that was not the case for the human resource. She needed people who could fight properly.

The training was voluntary. But in order to encourage people to take it, Sheryl would always happily praise those who took it. Because of that, the number of people joining the training kept increasing. At the moment, there

were already more people who wanted to join the training than the number of available equipment.

During the training, they would take turns doing mock battles, while those who could not join the mock battle because of the limited equipment would take a rest. Thanks to that, they were able to keep training for a longer time and they no longer had to stop the training because they were too tired.

But that did not change the fact that all of them returned dead tired back to the base. The power difference between them and Akira was simply overwhelmingly hopeless. Although they tried their best and squeezed all of their power, they still got totally annihilated by Akira. It was a rather intense training for Erio and the other children. It really surprised and reminded them of Akira's strength as they were desperately struggling to get stronger.

Akira was having a hard time in his training too. He had Alpha criticizing him while he was fighting against the group that Alpha was commanding. The training ground was already filled with images of his corpses.

In order to make up for their fighting power, the bullets from the training rifles were assumed to have enough firepower to break through Akira's augmented suit. Because of that, most of the images of his corpses were very gory. His current goal was to make his death count drop to zero during the training. If he was able to achieve that, it would mean that his fighting skill has been considerably increased to the point that he had no problem fighting amateurs without Alpha's support.

Akira moved quickly from one cover to another. He was able to see through enemies' attacks and evaded them, and before they could hide behind a cover, he quickly aimed his rifle at one of them and released a few shots. Once he got a confirmation from the system that his shots hit, he quickly ran at that boy, stopped for a bit and warned that boy that he just got shot.

"Make sure to lay down when you've confirmed that you got shot. Your friends can make a guess of where I am from their already dead friends and it's a part of the training too. If you keep standing even after you get shot,

others will mistake this area as a safe area and you'll be sabotaging their training, you know?"

"I-I'm sorry."

The boy whom Akira just warned flusteredly laid down on the ground, he then glanced upward and saw Akira leaving him. He mumbled while still looking completely surprised.

"…He can even tell if his shot hit or not from that distance, huh."

It was true that the goggles would be dyed in red when they got shot, but that was only the goggles of the one who got shot. There was no notice sent to the other people when someone got shot. But even so, Akira came to that boy and said to him as if Akira was 100% sure. In reality, that boy had indeed received a notice that he got shot, so it really surprised him.

Not too long after that, a notice showed up in that boy's goggles saying that the mock battle was finished. That boy made a stern face and mumbled.

"Everyone is down already, huh. Isn't that a bit too fast? That Akira is just too strong. And the boss told us to get strong enough to fill in his shoes, huh… That's just absurd… Well, it's boss' order, so it's not like I have any other choice though."

That boy smiled wryly as he pushed himself back up. It seemed that Sheryl's praises still had some effect on their fighting spirit even in that place.

After Akira did a few rounds, he noticed something was bothering him.

"Alpha, it might be just my imagination, but don't you think that I've been winning a lot lately? I've been winning for a few consecutive rounds now…"

"It's not just your imagination, you're really getting better."

"But it's not like I suddenly got better in this, right?"

“It’s true that your fighting skill has been slowly but surely getting better, but it doesn’t make you super strong all of a sudden. So the reason for your consecutive wins, in this case, would be because they are lacking in their fighting skill.”

“Lacking in their fighting skill? But they’ve been training just like me, right? So I bet it should not have that much of an effect on my winning rate. Well, if the reason is because they are tired, I can understand that. But they’ve been taking a rest in turns now, so it should be better than before. Alpha, have you been pulling your punches on me?”

“Nope, as a matter of fact, I’ve been giving them more effective commands than before.”

Akira tilted his head, he looked genuinely confused.

“I see, so why then?”

“Since they’re starting to get used to fighting, I’ve been reducing my support to them other than the instructions. They lose their ability to see through the walls and covers if they get too far from you, or sometimes I stop showing them the bullet trajectory line. So other than my instructions, their fighting power is getting closer and closer to their real fighting power. And that’s why the difference between you and their fighting skill is getting more apparent.”

Although Akira accepted that explanation as to why he had been winning a lot lately, he also felt a bit sad hearing it. It was training, so it would be meaningless if he was just overwhelmingly annihilating the other side. It might be still training for him to keep his guard up even when fighting weak opponents, but he thought that he did not have the time to be taking that kind of training.

“Can you return them back to their original state?”

“If I continue giving them those kinds of support, their fighting skill would rely heavily on my support. Once their equipment and my supports start getting in the way of the training, I would need to limit their usage. In the

worst-case scenario, they might get even less useful than complete amateurs outside the training session. So considering the long term benefit, I need to lower my support and that's the reason why they can't even hold a proper fight against you right now."

Akira smiled bitterly.

"That does hurt since I've been relying on your support."

But Alpha smiled smugly and said.

"It's fine for you since I'm always around. Not to mention that you've been doing training like this where you don't rely on my support at all. In the first place, you almost got killed several times in the wasteland even with my support. So I honestly don't think you have the leeway to say that, you know? You can say something like that way later after you get even better at fighting."

"That's true. I need to get stronger first. But seriously, what are we going to do about this? It won't be much of a training for me if I keep one-sidedly beating them up."

If this situation continued, Akira did not think that he might lose at all. He already had several overwhelming victories. So if they kept at it just like that, it would not be much of a training both for both the parties.

Alpha seemed to be thinking for a bit before she smiled amusedly and said.

"It can't be helped then, in that case, how about we put some handicap on you."

Akira's vision suddenly changed. He could no longer see too far ahead and the sound around him was moderately damped, the sensitivity of his information terminal also significantly dropped.

Akira looked a bit surprised.

"Alpha, is this… The effect from the colourless mist?"

“Yes. I’m trying to imitate the effect when you’re in the middle of a colourless mist. It’s just an imitation, so don’t worry, it’s not like you’re really inside a colourless mist.”

Akira seemed relieved, it was just simply a handicap to reduce his winning chance and it was not like he was really inside a colourless mist. He then smiled bitterly and scanned his surroundings, he checked all the places that he had already checked in turns.

“Well then, let’s get back on your training and give it your best. This way, your winning chance should be reduced, and if it doesn’t change much, I’ll increase the thickness of the colourless mist until it reduces your winning chance… Though, it seems that I don’t need to do that.”

Right at the next moment, Akira’s goggles were dyed in red. He got shot.

Alpha smiled and pointed his finger to Akira’s side. Akira followed the direction that Alpha was pointing at and saw a boy who shot him just now standing there looking completely surprised. That boy did not expect to be able to hit Akira with his shot.

Akira sighed and looked down on the ground, that shot just now increased the number of the corpse images in that place by one. He smiled bitterly at the image of his dead corpse lying by his feet.

After that, thanks to his handicap, Akira’s winning rate was indeed lowered.

Akira and the other children would group up after 10 rounds for a quick Q&A session, and if there was no question, they would immediately move on to the next round. But that was not the case this time.

“Uhmm, I feel like your movements have gotten worse suddenly, did something happen?”

Akira answered carefully to make sure that he did not offend anyone there.

“I’ve been winning a lot lately so I did a little adjustment, there’s no need to worry about it.”

All the children thought of the same thing, they were questioning what kind of adjustment was Akira talking about. But since Akira told them not to worry about it, they could not ask that question to him. Not to mention, Akira himself did not look that happy since he had been losing a lot lately. It would be not wise to ask that question to Akira right now, so they just kept their mouth shut.

They then continued the training. The other children who were taking a rest near the wreckages not too far from them were watching the ongoing mock battle, that was when one of them mumbled.

“But still, I wonder just how much stamina Akira-san has. He looks just fine when we’re already dead tired like this.”

Another boy there answered that question.

“I bet it’s because of his augmented suit. It must be nice, I want one too. Boss said that she’s taking care of the equipment with Katsuragi-san’s help. I wonder if she’ll buy us some.”

Erio, who was also there, shook his head and said.

“Nah, I doubt that would happen. I heard that it’s really expensive. So at least, I’m sure it’s impossible to buy one for everyone, moreover…”

Erio remembered when Akira saved his life back in the wasteland. At that time, Akira was able to shoot while carrying a heavy rucksack filled with relics even though he was not using an augmented suit. Akira was able to fight even when he was carrying something that heavy, so Erio thought that it was not simply because of his augmented suit. But when he was about to say that, Erio also remembered that Akira told him not to say anything unnecessary.

The other children found it weird that Erio stopped midway.

“Moreover what?”

“…Moreover, even if she buys us several augmented suits, it would be still far away from Akira-san’s advanced augmented suit. After all, an augmented suit like that would cost a lot.”

“You’re right about that. But we should still be able to get a decent augmented suit if it’s only one, right…? Ahhh, but in that case, you’ll be the one using it, huh. You’re the boss’ bodyguard after all. It must be nice, I’m really jealous.”

That boy looked enviously at Erio.

“For someone who tried to punch Akira, you’re doing pretty well. You and Alicia are even assigned as the officers in the gang after all.”

Erio’s face twitched.

“Stop it! Don’t remind me of that. Just so you know, I really regret doing something that stupid.”

“Talking about doing something stupid… That would be Tiol, huh. Not only did he question Boss’ relationship with Akira and got the boss angry at him, he even brought in those robbers the other day. Now that I think about it, I feel like I don’t see him around lately… Did he run away somewhere?”

“No, Alicia is still assigning him jobs, so he should be still in the gang.”

“I feel like it’s really only a matter of time though. If he doesn’t run away, as long as he doesn’t do anything big to make up for it, those mistakes would still weigh him down. For example… That’s right, maybe like capturing that pickpocket.”

Erio thought for a bit before shaking his head.

“Nah, that won’t happen. Akira-san did say that the pickpocket has a Hunter stronger than him covering for her, remember? So, if he does that, in the worst-case scenario, that Hunter might be coming for him this time. Just think what would happen if that Hunter came to our base. So I’m sure it would only anger the boss if he does that. That’s exactly why the boss also

said that if we spot that pickpocket, we just need to report it later and there's no need to do anything more than that, remember?"

"Now that you mention it, you have a point there. That guy really has nowhere to go, huh."

The mock battle ended while they were having a silly talk. Erio stood up, looked at the other children who were resting there, and said to them.

"Alright then! It's our turn next! Let's go!!"

The tired children looked at Erio who still sounded energetic although he should also be more or less as tired as them.

"You sound pretty energetic, why are you that motivated?"

"I have to get stronger for Alicia's sake. I have no time to be lazing around."

"This guy just went and said it with a straight face. So this is the power of people with a lover, huh. Good grief!"

"Humph, you can go ahead and say anything you want."

Erio lightly laughed. The other children also laughed at that and some of them half-jokingly said.

"Good grief! Ahhh! I want a girlfriend too. I want someone like our boss. Just like Akira-san's girlfriend."

"You won't get someone like our boss unless you're as strong as Akira-san, you know?"

"Geez, that would be impossible."

They were joking with each other while taking turns doing mock battles. They continued the training after that, sometimes they got totally annihilated by Akira and sometimes they were barely able to win some rounds.

__*__*__*__

Tiol was lurking in the slum city with a stern face. He was trying to hide, but anyone could spot him just fine with little effort. He was so nervous to the point that he was obviously looking suspicious.

[…Dammit!! She’s not here either! Is the information saying that she’s around here really true? I bet it’s just another random information with almost zero accuracy.]

Tiol was looking around the slum city focused on the area near Alna’s secret hideout since he was told that there was a good chance he could find her around that area. But he just could not find her at all.

[Should I ask her again? But I’m sure it’ll only worsen her mood if I ask her too many times. That information is my lifeline so she’ll still help me. But at this rate, if this continues and I still can’t find that pickpocket…]

Tiol looked obviously unsure what to do and that confusion slowed down his decision-making skill, that was when he spotted the person he was looking for.

[…There she is!!]

Tiol tried to act as naturally as possible as he hid behind a cover before he took another look at that person to make sure that he did not get the wrong person. The person he was looking for was with Katsuya and his group.

Katsuya, Yumina, Airi and Alna were walking through the slum city.

Alna was using a Hunter coat with a hood to cover herself so that Akira would not find her. That Hunter coat was originally Drankam’s coat, Katsuya lent it to her. She looked apologetic as she glanced at Katsuya’s back from behind the coat’s hood.

“Thank you very much for accompanying me, but are you sure you’re okay with this? I’m sure you’re busy with your own stuff too, so…”

They were heading to Alna’s hideout. Alna had multiple hideouts spread across the slum city. She had left some of her own belongings and a small amount of money in her hideouts. That day, they were retrieving Alna’s belongings in one of her hideouts.

Katsuya showed his kind side as he smiled and said.

“Don’t worry about it. It’s too dangerous to let you go alone, moreover, I have something to do in the slum city too.”

“As I thought, you actually have something else to do…”

“It’s fine. Although I said it’s something that I need to do, it’s just an easy job to look for a certain relic shop rumoured to be somewhere in the slum city. It also doubles as a break from my usual Hunter jobs. Basically, I just need to walk around and look for that shop, so there’s nothing to worry. Not to mention, you might be able to meet your friend, right?”

“Yes, but it’s not like we had promised to see each other, so it would be a pure coincidence if we do meet her. But if we meet her, I’ll tell her that I got some help from Katsuya-san, I’m sure that’ll lessen her worry. She’s been worrying about me up to the very end after all. So if it’s possible, I want to let her know that I’m okay.”

“I see, she must be a kind person.”

“Yes, I’m really proud to be able to call her my friend… And I always only bring her trouble.”

Alna sounded sad and had a look as if she was admonishing herself when she said that. So Katsuya smiled at her and tried to cheer her up.

“In that case, you need to make sure to return that favour one day. Don’t worry, it’ll be fine. And about that Akira who is chasing you, well, it might take some time, but I’ll do something about it.”

“Katsuya…”

Alna stared happily at Katsuya with teary eyes, Katsuya just blushed and smiled back at her.

Yumina and Airi sighed simultaneously. They were thinking the exact same thing, Katsuya did it again.

Katsuya tended to accept the request coming from girls and help them. Because of that, the number of girls who fell in love with him just kept increasing. More often than not, Yumina and Airi had to help him solve those problems. And since both of them were in love with Katsuya, it was not like they could say no when he asked them. They would always just give up and exasperatedly help Katsuya.

Both Yumina and Airi noticed their sighing and looked at each other. Both of them understood what the other person was thinking about and smiled bitterly at each other.

Tiol took out his information terminal and made a call.

"…Yes, that's correct. I found Alna, well, it is most likely her."

The one that he was calling replied with a rather confused voice.

"Most likely? Make sure to confirm it first, will you?"

"Don't be crazy. She's hiding her face under a coat. And if I go there and try to confirm it in front of her, there's no mistaking it that the other guys would notice me too. Those guys, I heard from Akira that they're stronger than him, you know? So there's no way I can do anything against those guys. Not to mention, they went into Alna's hideout too. But her appearance fits the description you gave, so that should be her."

"Geez, it can't be helped then. Just keep following Alna like that. We already set the information terminal, which we gave you, to continuously broadcast its location to us. So don't mess with that setting, okay?"

"Okay… By the way, if I have the chance, is it okay if I just go and kill that Alna."

Tiol thought if he killed Alna and reported it back to Sheryl and Akira, it might compensate for his mistake in bringing those robbers to the base.

“Sure, I’m okay with that, but won’t that be impossible for you?”

Viola sounded more like she was mocking him than challenging him, Tiol then clicked his tongue and cut the call there.

After Katsuya and his group finished retrieving Alna’s belongings, they then roamed around the slum city, looking for that particular relic shop just like they originally planned. A certain rumour was spreading in the slum city about a particular relic shop that was selling relics that could be sold at a high price in another place, that rumour had also reached Hunters inside Drankam.

Lately, Katsuya’s group had been doing jobs that were far away and were not gathering old-world relics themselves. They had been mostly doing escorts for inter-city transports or guarding certain facilities. Those jobs were more for the sake of building trust with the people that were employing them, and they were pretty effective in order to increase their Hunter Rank too. Guarding inter-city transport was a relatively easy job if they were strong enough since they were able to check the danger beforehand. But there were many occasions where those transports were carrying important cargos. So they could not employ just any Hunters since those Hunters might rob the cargos instead.

It needed trust, it was good for their track record, and it was easy to make sure that they could safely complete that request. Katsuya found that kind of job really pleasant. But being a Hunter was synonymous with exploring old-world ruin and gathering old-world relics. Although he still had to go to the old-world ruin because of the request that was assigned by the gang, it was only helping the forward base in Kuzusuhara ruin, so it had nothing to do with gathering relics.

Basically, he didn’t get that much chance to work with old-world relics lately, so in order to make up for that, he thought of looking for the rumoured relic shop. He then went to ask others to help him and it turned out into a pseudo-date.

“By the way, Alna, do you have any guess where that shop might be? You’ve been living around this area until now, right?”

“I’m sorry, I did know there was that kind of shop in the slum city, but I don’t know where it might be. Old-world relics are expensive after all, so it’s not a place for me who doesn’t have money. Of course, it’s a different story if you can find someone who has some relation with the people who manage territory. Moreover, most of them don’t accept first-time customers, I heard that you’ll need someone to introduce you to the place before you can get in. So I think it would be meaningless even if you know the location of that shop.”

“…I thought that I will be able to find it if I just walk around the slum city, but it seems that it’s not that easy, huh. I wonder what should we do so we can get accepted into that shop.”

Seeing Katsuya unsure about what to do next, Alna desperately searched through her memory for something, anything that might help him no matter what it was. It might be because she was rather desperate that she then said without much thinking.

“I heard that sometimes you can get recommended to that kind of shop from another shop if you have a good relationship with that shop and pay some money. And that shop doesn’t have to be a big shop, it might be just a mere stand… So you can try being a good customer in some certain establishments… Or so I heard…”

Alna’s voice was getting smaller and smaller before eventually vanishing. Because of that, Katsuya could not completely catch what she just said.

“Eh? What shop?”

Alna blushed and said.

“…Uhmm, brothels. Most of the brothels in the slum city receive support from the gang overseeing the territories where they are doing their business and it’s not rare for them to introduce their customers to relic shops… Since their customers are often Hunters who return back from gathering relics,

they also often get paid with relics… So using that connection… B-but it has nothing to do with you, right?”

Katsuya blushed and flusteredly replied.

“O-Of course!”

Yumina smiled menacingly at Katsuya and said to him.

“If you say you do, I’ll deliver you a good punch, you know.”

Yumina was being serious, so Katsuya flusteredly said.

“Of course!! I have nothing to do with that!! Mizuha-san also warns me not to go to that kind of place, you know!!”

“Does that mean… That you’ve gone there before Mizuha-san warned you?”

“N-No, I didn’t mean it that way…”

Katsuya was wincing back from Yumina’s intimidating aura, Airi suddenly interjected with a stern face.

“Katsuya.”

“No, Airi, it’s a misunderstanding…”

“We’re being followed.”

Katsuya’s face immediately returned to its seriousness.

“…Since when?”

“At least for the last 30 minutes.”

Yumina also had a serious look as she asked Airi.

“Are you sure you’re not mistaking it?”

“I highly doubt anyone would be going in the same direction as us for 30 minutes unless they’re tailing us.”

Katsuya, Airi and Yumina immediately raised their guards.

The one who was following them was Tiol. Airi actually noticed him long back, but she was letting it slide for some time to make sure he was really tailing them. But Tiol thought that it was simply because they had not noticed him yet.

They then slowly approached Tiol while covering Alna. Tiol finally realized that they noticed him, but it was too late, Katsuya was already close to him.

Tiol was completely scared in front of the people who were way above him both in skill and equipment. He could not muster the courage to run away and stood frozen right where he was.

Katsuya exuded an intimidating aura while staring at that Tiol.

“What is it? Why are you tailing us?”

“W-what are you talking about?”

Tiol looked completely scared as he tried to dodge the question, Katsuya put some more pressure as he lightly threatened Tiol.

“Sorry but I already gathered some information beforehand. If you won’t tell me anything unless I hurt you first, I don’t mind doing that, you know?”

Tiol immediately confessed.

“A-alright! I’ll tell you everything!! I was asked to follow you!! I’m really sorry! Please just let me go!”

“By who?”

“T-there, that man over there.”

Tiol pointed behind Katsuya as he said that. In truth, he was actually just pointing in a random direction to divert their attention. He was planning to run away the moment they looked away.

Katsuya’s group looked back to confirm it. Tiol was about to use that chance to slip away, but he suddenly stopped. There were four men standing in the direction he pointed and all of them were looking in his direction.

Those 4 people were Kadol and three other men from Shijima’s gang.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 153, Training Opponent

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Kadol was comparing Alna, who was standing next to Katsuya, with the picture displayed on his information terminal.

“There’s no mistaking it. That’s her. It’s the one with the coat.”

The other men looked at Alna and tensed up.

“So that’s her, huh… Then who are the others? Her friends?”

“No idea. And I honestly don’t care. Our target is that girl. If it’s possible, we need to capture her alive, if not, we’re allowed to kill her. Let’s go.”

Seeing Kadol and his men approaching them, Katsuya’s group started to feel nervous. Kadol and his men had a scary look, at least, it was not a face that one would show to the children from the slum. The people around the area could feel that a fight where someone would die was about to commence, so they moved away from the area.

Kadol came close enough to strike a conversation with Katsuya, he then stopped and pointed at Alna.

“Give us that girl!”

Katsuya moved in front of Alna and stood face to face with Kadol.

“Who are you? And is it true that you’re the one who told that boy to follow us?”

“Just shut up and give us that girl.”

Katsuya could feel Alna trembling behind him, he then shouted back at Kadol as if to counter their intimidation.

“I refuse!!”

Normal people would back down from that pressure, but that was not the case for Kadol and his men. Instead, their expressions tensed up, they reached for their rifles and readied themselves for a fight. Their rifles were still pointing downward, it was obvious that they were willing to fight there if negotiation was out of the question.

Katsuya, Airi and Yumina were also already reaching for their rifles, they were ready to fight anytime. Actually, they also wanted to avoid having to fight if it was possible. And considering how much damage it would cause if they really fought each other there, they were able to barely stop themselves from immediately opening fire.

Kadol had a grim face, his voice was filled with killing intent.

“I’ll say it one more time. Give us that girl. We only have business with that girl and not with any of you. We’re being serious here. If you don’t want to die, leave that girl here and be gone.”

Katsuya repeated once again with a face saying that he had made his resolve.

“…I refuse!”

Kadol and his men reeled back from the pressure coming from Katsuya, it was obvious that he was not your common young boy.

“…Kadol, what’s the plan now? Are we really going to kill them? They’re not normal children, you know?”

Kadol glared at that man who was being meek.

“I know, goddammit!”

Not too long ago, Kadol caused trouble because of his short temper with a certain young boy by the name of Akira. And the result of that was his current sorry state. Not only did he owe a huge debt, one large enough that it would not be strange if he got sold anytime, but he also felt that he was always being hunted by a Hunter who could kill him anytime.

Because of that, he would never look down on his opponents anymore even if they were only children. Kadol remembered that bad memory as he watched Katsuya and his group. Appearance-wise, they looked stronger than Akira and judging by their reaction just now, that might be really the case. Or at least, he did not have any evidence to deny that possibility.

He had no wish to fight someone who was as strong as Akira. Kadol and all of his friends there agreed on that point. But they also had reasons why they could not just back down there.

Kadol and his friends were told by Viola and Shijima to bring them Alna, and if that was impossible, they were even allowed to kill her.

Viola then told him that if he could do that, she would help to convince Akira not to keep hunting him and that she would consider most of his debt paid. While at the same time, she also gave some hints about what would happen to him if he could not do that. Either he would get sold somewhere or given to Akira, whichever the case, nothing good would happen to him if he failed.

That was the same for Shijima’s men too. They were discovered to have been stealing money from the gang or selling inside information to outsiders. Shijima told them that he would forgive them if they could capture Alna, Shijima also properly let them know what he would do to them if they failed.

Kadol and his men there were all desperate. That was why, even if they were facing strong opponents, they could not just back off. But if it was possible, they did not want to fight, and that naive thinking was reflected in their behaviours.

Airi saw that as a good chance, so she then interjected.

“Some people think that the slum city is not that much different from the wasteland, but that’s not true. If you kill someone in the open road, it’ll cause a ruckus. The gang that governs over the territory will get its eyes on you and they might demand peace money for causing trouble in their territory… It’s better if you just forget about that 100,000 Aurum and go back to where you come from.”

Kadol still had his guard up as he replied back.

“I don’t know what kind of misunderstanding you have in your head right now, but it seems that you don’t understand what’s going on here.”

Airi believed that Kadol and his men must have thought that she was someone who had a connection with the slum city gang. And if that was the case, then it would be one more reason for them to not fight Katsuya’s group. She then raised her voice and tried to warn Kadol and his men that it was not worth the trouble as she tried to convince them to withdraw.

“It’s you who don’t understand what’s going on here. I have some connections with the slum gangs. This would not end well, in the worst-case scenario, they might hunt you down to kill you. I don’t know how strong you are, but there’s no mistaking that it’ll cause some damage in the area if we fight here. In our case, we can just avoid coming here again, so it’ll be all on you. You’ll be the one in trouble if we fight. So it’ll be better if you just withdraw.”

Kadol lightly shook his head.

“That’s not what I’m talking about. We at least already know that much. What you just said doesn’t worry me at all. Unfortunately for you, we already had a talk with the gang who owns this area beforehand.”

Even Airi who was mostly expressionless raised her eyebrows. It was quite surprising for her.

“…That must be a lie. There’s no way you would do something like that just because of that 100,000 Aurum.”

Kadol frowned.

“What the heck is this 100,000 Aurum you’re talking about?”

Airi looked equally confused.

“Alna stole 100,000 Aurum from a certain Hunter… No, I mean, it was a misunderstanding. And you’re basically here because that Hunter is aiming for her life and that’s why you demand us to give her to you, right?”

Kadol immediately raised his voice.

“I knew it, you’re mistaking something here. 100,000 Aurum? That’s so stupid. Do you really think we would do something like this just for the sake of that paltry amount of money?”

Alna was shocked when she heard that.

“T-then, why are you looking for me?”

“Hell if I know. I was just told to bring you in.”

A notification suddenly reached Kadol’s information terminal. When he checked it, he was both troubled and surprised. He looked really troubled as he frowned and said to Katsuya, it was obvious from his face that he was equally confused as Katsuya’s group.

“20,000,000 Aurum. If you give me that girl, I’ll give you 20,000,000 Aurum. What do you think?”

Katsuya could not help but gasp.

“…Hah?”

“You didn’t hear it? It’s 20,000,000 Aurum. If you hand over that girl, I’ll give you 20,000,000 Aurum. I don’t think there’s any need to think about it, give her to us now.”

Kadol extended one of his arms towards Katsuya’s group who were still dumbfounded. Alna quickly returned back to herself and grabbed strongly on Katsuya’s back while trembling. It was a good amount of money just to hand over her after all.

Katsuya could feel Alna who was clinging to him, he instinctively raised his voice.

“Do you really think I would fall for that!?”

“I’m being serious here. Are you questioning it? Well, that’s understandable though.”

Kadol understood Katsuya’s feelings. After all, even he himself could not believe what he just said. But that was what was really written in that message from Viola. He did not question it as he only did what he was told to.

“I’ll give you some deposit first. Tell me your bank account, I’ll immediately transfer the money. Or is it that you prefer cash?”

Kadol was waving, urging Katsuya to hand over Alna as he made his offer, that was enough to make Alna tremble even more.

Katsuya could feel Alna shivering behind his back while there were Kadol and his men who urged him to hand her over to them in front of him. Katsuya, who was stuck in between the person that he had to protect and his enemies replied, or more like, yelled.

“I refuse! I won’t give Alna to you!!”

Kadol’s expression was filled with shock and confusion.

“Y-You? Are you right on your head!? It’s 20,000,000 Aurum, you know!? Are you seriously throwing away 20,000,000 Aurum for that girl!?”

“It’s not about money!! I’ve promised her that I’ll protect her!!”

Kadol and his men who already relaxed, thinking that there was no need to fight, reeled back from the pressure coming from Katsuya’s declaration. Katsuya then put more pressure on his voice and yelled.

“Go away now!!”

Kadol and his men inadvertently took a step back. Although it was involuntary, once they made a move, it was difficult to change the flow now. They could not help but take another step back although they slightly hesitated.

It would end there if Kadol and his men continued and just left that place. When everyone there thought so, a gunshot suddenly echoed.

When Katsuya’s group was talking with Kadol’s group, Tiol slowly slipped away from that place and hid in one of the alleys. Although he could not hear what they were talking about, he could still see them. So he was keeping his eyes on them while hiding.

“W-what should I do? Should I look for a chance to run away? No, that won’t work!”

It seemed that they were still in the middle of some kind of negotiation. If a fight broke there, he might get roped in that fight. That was why Tiol kept his distance as much as possible. He did not leave since he thought that it would be a wasted chance now that he found Alna. He did not want to lose his chance to erase his past mistakes.

A call suddenly reached Tiol who still did not know what to do. He could hear a woman’s voice coming out from his information terminal.

“What’s your situation over there? Can you tell me what’s going on?”

Tiol told that woman what was going on there, then that woman replied with a cold voice.

“I see, I guess this will be the end of our connection.”

“W-what?! Why!?”

“Well, you can’t make up for your mistakes, right? So basically you won’t be able to stay in Sheryl’s gang any longer which means that you won’t be able to give me any insider information, right? Then there’s no benefit of keeping this relation.”

“W-wait for a sec!!”

“Nope, I won’t wait. You don’t have the power to bring in Alna alive nor to kill her, right? I don’t know whether Sheryl would kick you out of the gang or Akira would kill you, either way, you’re as good as dead now. Well, in the unlikely chance that you get lucky, just call me again. So, until next time.”

The call ended there. With this, Tiol also lost his support. He was filled with shock and anger. In that messy state of mind, he remembered a sentence from that call.

“In the unlikely chance if he got lucky.” Those words ran on a repeat inside his mind as he looked at what was in front of him.

Katsuya and Kadol were arguing about Alna. Tiol had no power against any of them. It did not matter who won, even if Kadol won and took Alna away, it was unlikely for him to be able to find Alna again and he would lose his chance to make up for his mistakes by bringing Alna to Akira. But even if he could not bring Alna, it might still help him somehow if he killed her. Of course, that would be impossible normally, but at the moment, Kadol and Katsuya were focused on each other. It was his only chance, there would not be any next time. As Tiol thought so, he believed that his best chance was to kill Alna there, in that place.

Tiol nervously, silently and desperately aimed his gun at Alna and pulled the trigger.

His first shot did not hit anyone. But it was enough to trigger the fight.

Airi quickly aimed her rifle at the source of that gunshot and released a barrage. At the same time, Katsuya and Yumina moved to cover Alna and readied their rifles. Kadol and his men reacted by opening fire at them, Katsuya and his group were dealing with that too. The area was filled with flying bullets within a split second.

__*__*__*__

Akira continued doing mock battles with Erio and the other children. But Alpha suddenly told him to stop the training.

“What’s wrong?”

“The radar picked up something.”

“Monsters?”

“No, it’s a vehicle. It seems that it noticed us and now is heading this way. At least get your rifle ready.”

“Roger that.”

Akira and the other children returned back to Akira’s vehicle. When Akira took off the DVTS minigun from his vehicle, Erio and the other children seemed a bit panicked. Erio, who was relatively calm compared to the other children, asked Akira who seemed to be preparing for a fight.

“Uhmmm, is there anything wrong?”

“It’s just to be safe since it seems that a vehicle is heading this way. If you’re worried, you may hide somewhere.”

“H-Hide? Is it going to be dangerous?”

“It’s just that I don’t really trust those people that I meet in the wasteland by pure coincidence. You still remember the trouble that we had when we were in Higaraka residence ruin, right? That’s exactly why.”

“I-I see!”

After Erio told the other children what was going on, they moved to nearby wreckage to hide. Akira, who already finished arming himself, was left alone standing near the vehicle.

Akira checked the vehicle that was coming closer. It was obvious that they were heading straight to him, it was not out of a coincidence. When Akira focused his vision on that vehicle, Alpha enhanced his vision which allowed him to clearly see its passengers.

One of the passengers recognised Akira and lightly waved at him. Although the vehicle was still a bit away from him, that girl was clearly looking at Akira.

Akira lowered his guard and looked slightly annoyed. Reina's group was in that vehicle, and the girl waving at him was Kanae.

That vehicle stopped not too far in front of Akira, Reina and her maids then stepped off from the vehicle. Shiori and Kanae were wearing maid outfits, just like usual, but Reina was donning a new augmented suit.

Kanae smiled happily at Akira and said to him.

"Young boy!! Long time no see!!"

"…You're right."

In contrast to Kanae's energetic voice, Akira replied rather apathetically. Kanae looked slightly disappointed as she continued.

"You don't sound that happy. That's not good enough, no no no."

"Hell if I care!"

Akira's gaze shifted from Kanae to Shiori.

"So, what is it?"

Shiori properly started with an opening.

“It has been quite a while since the last time we saw each other, I’m glad that you’re doing fine. We spotted you on our way back to the city, so we thought at least we can say hello.”

“…That’s it?”

“Yes, we don’t have any other particular business. If I have to add something, it’s because someone really wanted to see you and we did not have any reason to refuse it.”

Akira glanced at Kanae, looked completely convinced with a mix of a little sympathy, and said.

“Ahhh… I see.”

“Thank you for your understanding.”

Shiori lightly bowed and confirmed Akira’s guess.

Akira guessed that Reina and Shiori were simply dragged along by Kanae. But that was not exactly true, indeed it was Kanae who spotted Akira’s vehicle and suggested visiting him, but the biggest reason why they did that was because Reina gave her permission. If Reina seemed to have any objections to it even in the slightest, or if she actually did not really care, Shiori would not have replied in such a concise manner.

Reina seemed a little nervous as she stood in front of Akira.

“Uhmmm… Long time no see, what are you doing in this place?”

“Just a training with some people that I know…”

Akira then explained what he was doing there to Reina and Shiori while Erio and the other children were watching them from afar.

Erio and the other children thought that there was no danger at all as they came out from hiding. But they did not have the courage to get any closer when they saw two of them were in maid outfit and the remaining one, assumed to be the master of those maids, was a beautiful girl with

expensive-looking equipment. It was obvious that they were living in two completely different worlds, that fact intimidated them and they did not have the courage to come any closer.

But even so, they were still curious about what Akira and the others were talking about. Erio and the other children were talking to each other about their impression of Reina, Shiori and Kanae.

“Are they Akira-san’s acquaintances? What can I say… They’re really something.”

“Those are what you call maids, right? I wonder if they’re from the inner wall. So why does Akira know them?”

“It might be from a bodyguard job or something since he’s a Hunter. But still, they don’t look like common people. They have this high-class aura around them, unlike those girls from the gang.”

“So basically, Hunters who are doing well get to know those kinds of people, huh? I bet if we can earn as much money as Akira-san, we’ll get to know people like them too.”

All of them agreed that the Hunter supporting their gang was indeed a great Hunter, but past that, all of them had different impressions of Akira. Some of them felt hopeless after knowing how large the gap between them was. Some of them got a little more motivated thinking that if they continued training, they might get as strong as Akira one day. Some of them did not let it bother them that much even after knowing that they were basically living in two different worlds. People would have a different opinion, hope and impression even when they looked at the same thing. And the stronger their feeling to move forward, the faster they would reach the position they admired.

Kanae understood the situation after hearing Akira’s explanation, she then smiled mischievously as a question came up in her mind.

“Ohhh, so you’re doing that kind of training, huh? But with your current skill, I don’t think this training has any use to you though? No matter how

many of them, if they're only amateurs with rifles, I don't think it can pose any trouble for you."

Depending on how Akira took it, it might sound like a provocation to him, but he did not get bothered at all as he just casually replied.

"Well, about that, you see, I made some adjustments to compensate for that, so it's okay."

From what Akira said, Kanae tried to gauge if it was just him being humble, or if he was simply too dense, or if that was the truth. If that was the truth, that would mean that he was not that strong, or that adjustment that he mentioned was really effective, or it might be even both. Kanae once guessed the reason behind Akira's real strength and lost interest in him. But after a certain rumour reached her, she got interested in him again.

"I see. In that case, how about letting Milady try a round in that training?"

Reina did not expect that at all.

"W-what? Me?"

"Yup. Akira said that it's good enough for his training. So it might be a good chance to see how good you are after you got the new equipment and went through your training with us. Not to mention, if Milady keeps training only with us, you'll get used to our movement and might get bored too. So, since we're here already, how about giving it a try?"

Reina flusteredly looked at Akira and Shiori. At least, at the moment, none of them looked against it.

Akira then lightly warned her.

"I don't really mind, but just to let you know, I can't guarantee your safety."

Shiori immediately asked a question with a serious face.

"Is it something dangerous? From what I can understand, you are using empty magazines with no bullets and the hits are only decided based on

trajectory line calculation, right?”

“I don’t think that it’s dangerous. But it’s not like I gave all of their magazines a check. Moreover, we’re in the middle of the wasteland, monsters might appear in the middle of the training. So I won’t take any responsibility for safety. After all, it’s not like I’m doing a request from you or anything, so I don’t want to get blamed if something were to happen later.”

Before Shiori could say anything, Reina immediately interjected.

“I’ll do it!”

Shiori seemed to be against it, so Reina begged her.

“Shiori, please, I want to give it a try.”

Shiori smiled as if she had given up.

“…Very well.”

“Then, it’s been decided.”

Kanae smiled amusedly that things were going as she planned.

Akira told Erio and the other children what was going on, so they immediately started preparing. Although they were surprised by that sudden mock battle, they seemed to be looking forward to it. Just to be safe, Shiori checked all the training equipment and gave them a full body check, some of the children just let Shiori do that although they were embarrassed and were blushing.

Once the preparation was done, they took their position. Other than Reina taking Akira’s place, there were no other changes. But just to be safe, close combat was prohibited. After all, if Reina punched or threw Erio or the other children, that would definitely kill them.

Reina gathered her focus and waited for the start signal.

“…Akira’s winning rate in this mock battle is about 50%. I wonder how I will perform. If I can get a better winning rate than him, even if it’s thanks to my equipment, it should be enough of a reason to recognize that I’ve gotten stronger. Alright then! Let’s do this!!”

Reina fired up herself for this chance to check how strong she was. But once the mock battle started, she immediately realized something weird. Reina kept winning. Considering her talent as a Hunter and her new equipment that Shiori had especially prepared for her, that result was to be expected. But even so, it was way too easy that she started to question her strength instead.

[Is that all? Or is it because my new equipment is too good? No, even if that’s true, I should not get too prideful. That’s what I’ve decided after all… But, does Akira really have a hard time in this level of mock battle?]

Although Reina felt it was strange, she did not lower her guard and took the training seriously.

Akira, Shiori and Kanae were watching the mock battle from not too far away. They were able to get a birds-eye view of the mock battle from above a crumbled building. They were looking at the individual positions shown in Akira’s information terminal and through the camera installed on the goggles.

Seeing how Reina kept getting overwhelming victories, Kanae brusquely complained to Akira.

“…Seriously now, is that all they got? With just this much, they won’t provide you much training, you know.”

“Like I said, I put some extra adjustments to take care of that.”

“If that’s the case, can you turn on this adjustment that you’re talking about?”

“Alright.”

Akira operated his information terminal while talking to Alpha.

“Alpha, can you give some support to Erio and the other children?”

“Sure. I don’t like it either when Kanae says you’re having a hard time fighting that level of opponents, is it okay if I set my support level a bit high?”

“I leave that decision to you, but don’t make them too strong that I won’t be able to win against them even if I try.”

“Then in that case, how far are you willing to go to defeat them when they have my support?”

Akira’s face twitched but it immediately returned back to normal.

“…It’s a training, so I won’t do anything reckless.”

“Very well.”

Alpha smiled, she understood Akira was basically saying there was no need to use medicine while breaking his own body unless it was a real fight. She then made some adjustments as Akira asked her to.

Reina frowned, she noticed that Erio and the other children were moving a bit differently now.

[…I feel like they’re moving differently all of a sudden, or is it just my imagination?]

Reina kept carefully repositioning herself, checking her information terminal, and setting up ambushes. Normal people would not even be able to react to Reina’s ambush. But Erio and the other children looked less and less surprised. Then finally, during a certain round, one of them suddenly jumped out from behind a wreckage as if that boy was lying in ambush for Reina.

[No, this is because they know my position!!]

A notification appeared on the goggles that Reina was wearing, she borrowed that from Akira. After she read the message in that goggles, she smiled wryly as she understood very well what was going on. The message said that her position was broadcasted to everyone every 10 seconds.

[I see, so this is the adjustment that Akira was talking about. But this is nothing!!]

Reina got even fired up for the training. She then continued the mock battle, won that round, and happily challenged the next round.

But that did continue for long, every time Reina won, a new message appeared on her goggles. The handicap given to her was getting bigger and bigger.

Her position that was originally broadcasted in a fixed interval changed so that it was broadcasted constantly. Her opponents had to take a proper aim to hit her before, but now, they could even just use one hand to hold their rifles to register a hit. Up until now, a hit would be enough to register a kill, but now she needed multiple hits and that number kept increasing. Her opponents started to get more bullets per magazine to the point that it was virtually unlimited. Moreover, her opponents' bullets started to pierce through wreckages and rubbles.

Reina used her expensive and advanced equipment to the best that she could as she fought desperately, thus showing a fight that was worthy of those equipment. But just as expected, she got shot and lost. After her winning chance dropped way lower than 50%, some of the handicaps were removed and she finally got a victory after a long streak of losing. After that, her handicap got readjusted every time she lost or won until her winning chance was stable around 50 per cent.

Reina smiled bitterly and mumbled.

"So this is what he meant when he said that he only had 50% winning chance."

But then she smiled as if she just decided to forget about it and said.

“But well, I still can give a good fight with all of these handicaps, I think it should be enough as proof that I’ve gotten stronger. It might be all thanks to my new equipment. If I had these equipment back in the Seranthal building, I would have been able to fight better… I understand it very well now, it’s all because of my stupid pride.”

Reina realised that her resolve to get stronger from back then was the correct decision and smiled.

It was the right time to end the training. Since Akira did not tell her to rest, she kept on doing the mock battles, but as expected, she overdid it. As Reina thought so, she decided to return back to Akira and Shiori.

When she returned back to Shiori, Reina was dumbfounded seeing Akira engaged in a fight with Kanae.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 154, A Weirdo's Way of Thinking

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When Reina was desperately fighting the mock battles, Kanae peeked at Akira's information terminal to see the details of the adjustment and lightly smiled.

"Akira-boy, isn't that too much?"

"Is that so? But I think she's doing pretty well, you know"

"That's because of the equipment that Ane-san especially prepared for her. What about you? Can you win with those handicaps?"

"…It's not about winning or losing, it's about whether it's a good training or not."

Akira did not think that he had a good winning chance with all those handicaps, he would have to perform some reckless moves in order to win. But for some reason, he did not feel like saying that, so he just came up with a different excuse.

Kanae lightly laughed, she did not expect Akira would give such a childish reply.

“Well, that’s true. But if you use that level of difficulty as the base indicator, you’ll need to do some reckless stuff to be able to win. And once you get used to doing something like that, you might also do some reckless stuff out of reaction during a real fight. Personally speaking, I recommend doing an easier training where you can more or less maintain a 100% winning rate.”

Akira looked surprised. He never expected that someone who looked so reckless as Kanae would say something that prioritized safety.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

Akira looked away from Kanae, Shiori seemed to be moderately amused by that exchange.

“…Well, that doesn’t really matter. By the way, Akira-boy, are you free? Want to have a light spar with me?”

“No.”

“Now, now, don’t say that. This is also a training, something like an equal exchange.”

“Equal exchange?”

“Yes, you can’t do mock battles when Milady is doing mock battles, it can even be said that Milady is taking your chance to do training. So to compensate for that, you can have a CQC training with me. I bet even if you can have shooting training with them, you can’t do CQC training with them, right? I’ll be sure to properly train you, you can get training for free when you would normally need money to get this kind of training, you know. So, what do you think? This is a good chance for you, you know?”

Kanae’s argument sounded reasonable and unreasonable at the same time that it threw Akira off for a loop. It was true that Akira did not get much chance to have CQC training. While his training with Alpha using his augmented suit was basically him fighting an incorporeal body, so there

was a limit on how far it could go. Indeed it was a good chance for him to get more experience without having to go through a real CQC fight, now, if only his training opponent was not Kanae.

After thinking for a bit, Akira then carefully asked a question.

“So basically, you’ll help me train, right? Since it’s training for me, I’ll have you follow my wish regarding the training. For example, I might ask you to go easy on me. And also no aiming for my head even if it’s just a feint. If you’re okay with that, then sure, I don’t mind either.”

“Of course!! I’m really glad I asked! Let’s start right away!”

Kanae excitedly jumped off from the observation point.

Shiori did not expect that answer from Akira.

“Akira-sama, are you sure?”

“Well, it seems that she’s being serious about teaching me, and it’s true that it’s important to have a training opponent against whom I don’t need to hold back at all.”

They could easily kill someone if they were not careful when they were having a CQC fight with their augmented suits. But fighting without an augmented suit was also dangerous. So it was true that it was important to have a training opponent that Akira could fight using his augmented suit without holding back too much.

“Just to be safe, if something were to happen, I’ll help you.”

“Ah, right. I’ll be counting on you if something happens.”

Akira lightly bowed to Shiori.

Akira and Kanae readied themselves while facing each other, Kanae was smiling in excitement.

“I’ll hold back just like you asked me to, but you can go ahead and seriously aim to kill me. Come now, I’m ready when you are!”

Akira took a deep breath to calm his nerves. Although it was only training, it did not change the fact that his opponent was stronger than him. He could not afford to be careless.

“Akira, how much support do you want?

“It’s training, I don’t plan to do anything reckless, so don’t give me any support unless you really have to. Like if it’s getting dangerous or in case of emergencies.”

“Okay, give your best there.”

“Yeah.”

Akira slowly closed the distance to Kanae.

Kanae originally planned to gauge Akira’s strength using training as a pretext, but her plan immediately went awry. After all, she was obviously way too strong for Akira.

Akira got his feet swept clean off the ground, got grabbed and slammed into the ground, or received straight punches and kicks that stopped him on his track. While on the other hand, Kanae could easily deflect, block, and evade Akira’s attacks before countering back. His strength was nothing worth noting.

Kanae looked excited at the beginning, but it did not take long before she looked disappointed. She was so disappointed in Akira that she looked rather bored while being his training partner.

[…This is really disappointing. Is this his full strength? It doesn’t seem like he’s holding back either. Back then when I heard a slum boy fought and defeated 8 attackers all alone when they tried to rob a relic shop in the slum city, I thought that it might be him. But I guess this means it’s someone else, huh?]

The children who were taking a break there were surprised and felt a bit hopeless seeing how Akira kept getting beaten by Kanae. There was no reason for Akira to pretend to be weak. Judging from his reaction and how the other children reacted to that, Kanae realised that Akira's real skill only amounted to that much and felt greatly dispirited by it.

When she saw Reina return back, Kanae decided to stop the training.

"Akira boy, Milady has returned too, so let's stop here."

Akira was trying to even out his breathing as he said.

"Thank you very much."

"You're welcome. Well, you're not that bad, so it depends on how much you train yourself in the future."

Kanae returned back to Shiori who was welcoming Reina back and confusedly asked Shiori a question.

"Ane-san, did you really have a hard time fighting against him? If that's true, that's a little bit… You know…"

Shiori did not seem bothered by that at all and casually said.

"You may say whatever you want."

Kanae looked closely and carefully at Shiori, but Shiori hardly showed any reaction at all.

"What is it? It seems that Milady also had her fill, so let's return the equipment back and head back home."

"Ane-san, you don't believe that was Akira-boy's real strength, right? And you have an idea what to do to make him fight seriously, right?"

Shiori seemed slightly annoyed, Kanae did not let that go as she smiled amusedly.

“So, what should I do to get him to fight me seriously?”

“I have no plans to get dragged to your mess.”

“Geez, it’s fine, isn’t it? It’s thanks to me who spotted Akira-boy’s vehicle and suggested to come here that Milady got a good training here, so isn’t it fine to help me for a bit? Not to mention, Milady is having a hard time finding a training partner since she got kicked out of Katsuya’s faction. Coming here was beneficial to Milady, you know.”

“It’s our job to be useful to Milady in the first place.”

“That’s not exactly true for me though? I’m here as Milady’s bodyguard and just helping out with the training while I’m on it. I don’t mind stopping anytime, you know?”

Shiori sighed. It was difficult for her to say no when Kanae brought up Reina’s training. But she honestly did not want to just help Kanae out. So she decided to pick another option.

“In that case, I’ll go and discuss it with Akira. So give me 1,000,000 Aurum.”

“Y-You’re going to make me pay?”

“Of course, we’re helping each other when it’s out of our job description, right? I don’t mind if you want to stop here.”

“Ahhh, alright, I’ll be leaving it to you then.”

Judging from Shiori’s character, it was unlikely that she would keep that money for herself. And more than that, Kanae was interested in Akira’s real strength. So after a short consideration, she decided that she did not mind paying that much money.

“We have a deal then, I’ll deduct it from your wage. You won’t get your money back even if I fail, okay?”

“Ehhh? That’s unfair!”

Shiori just left complaining Kanae behind to have a talk with Akira. Although it was originally a half-joke to make Kanae forget about it, not that they had a deal, she only had one job now. She smiled at Akira and made a request to him.

“Akira-sama, can you please do another round with Kanae? Consider it as a request for Akira-sama.”

Akira frowned.

“One more time? I believe that we did enough just now though?”

“No, this is a little bit different. It’s not Kanae helping you train, it’s more of Akira-sama helping Kanae train. The reward will be 500,000 Aurum. It’ll be paid in full upfront. The request will be completed once Akira-sama works hard enough to earn that 500,000 Aurum. That will be all, will you accept it?”

Akira slightly frowned since he felt like Shiori was able to see through him. He then started considering whether to take that request or not. That was when Shiori suddenly said.

“If I may, it might be not good for Akira-sama to wrap up the training with Akira-sama’s complete defeat.”

As Shiori said so, she glanced in Erio’s direction. Akira followed suit and looked at Erio and the other children. It was true that he looked rather pathetic there. For some reason, after seeing how they looked at him, Akira thought that some of them might think that they have a chance to win if they try to challenge him in CQC.

After Shiori gave that slight nudge on Akira, she then continued.

“If I may add my personal opinion, I believe that Milady started to work hard since she’s aiming to be as strong as Akira-sama who was able to fight side by side with the other Hunters. If I may, I wish that Milady’s goal would stay somewhere high.”

Akira glanced at Reina. Reina seemed rather conflicted and slightly disappointed.

“She’s already using pretty expensive equipment there, combat power-wise, I think she’s already above me though?”

“Is that so? At the least, I don’t believe so. Moreover, strength is not only about pure firepower, it’s not decided solely based on the quality of equipments.”

At first, Akira took some time to think about it, he then made an expression as if he just gave up.

“Alright. But I’ll be the one to decide when the request ends and I won’t take any objection, okay?”

“Very well, thank you very much.”

Shiori lightly bowed and paid 500,000 Aurum to Akira. That was just to be safe in case Akira wanted to get cash instead of a bank transfer. Akira received that, returned back to his vehicle, took out some medicines from his rucksack, and swallowed them.

“Akira, are you sure you’re okay taking that request?”

“Well, I do want to test your support too, not to mention that I don’t want Erio and the other children to misunderstand something here. Moreover…”

“Moreover?”

“Moreover, I don’t like the fact that I kept getting beaten up one-sidedly.”

Akira said so as he smiled smugly, Alpha smiled back confidently at him.

“That’s true, so then, how much level of recklessness is okay?”

“At least enough to be suitable for that reward. It’s a request after all.”

“Very well. Not to mention, it seems you’re willing to go as far as to take some medicines beforehand, let’s change the setting of your augmented suit a bit. If she already has her guard down, we can use that to defeat her quickly and show her your strength.”

Akira smiled seeing that it seemed Alpha was raring to go too.

Akira and Kanae were facing each other again. Akira had a serious face just like last time, but that was not the case for Kanae, she seemed half-convinced and was still suspicious.

“I’m ready when you are. Also, it’s my training this time, so it would be great if you can give your full power.”

“Honestly speaking, I wasn’t holding back my punch at all though.”

“I guess that doesn’t really matter now. Come now, I don’t mind if you want to aim for my head, you know.”

“Roger that.”

Just like last time, Akira slowly closed the distance. Looking at that, Kanae thought that her guess was indeed correct. Her expression slightly turned disappointed for a split second, right at that moment, Akira used the full power of his augmented suit to propel his body forward and closed the distance in one quick and fluid motion.

That sudden move as if Akira was completely a different person caught Kanae completely off guard and slowed her reaction. But that did not pose trouble due to her fighting skill. She saw Akira trying to dive straight at her as she moved to block that incoming attack.

Right at that moment, she immediately shifted her posture and blocked a powerful kick aimed at her torso.

[…That right straight was a feint!? Not to mention that both his gaze and attack were seriously aimed at me!? Isn’t he too good at making a feint!?]

After receiving that kick, Kanae immediately shifted to counter that attack as her leg drew a sharp arc from under her maid outfit. But Akira took a step back and leaned back, Kanae's leg just cut clearly through the air.

[…He did not get thrown off balance even when I countered with that strong kick! And that reaction time!! He immediately moved away to evade my attack right after his kick!! Or more like, he didn't even look at my kick, did he?!]

Kanae used the momentum from her kick to shift her posture and changed the trajectory of her kick. But Akira immediately ducked and evaded that too. Now that Kanae had her both legs off the ground, Akira zoomed in to throw an attack.

[…Still too naive!!]

Normally, now that Kanae was flying in the air, she should not be able to evade that attack. But both of Kanae's legs were armed with forcefield armour.

She activated the force field armour on her left leg to forcefully change her posture and evaded Akira's attack, and she did not stop there, she used the projected force field that was only there for a split second as a platform to fix her posture in the air.

But as if Akira completely expected that, Kanae suddenly received a powerful kick on her torso. She was slammed hard into the ground and found herself lying face-up on the ground.

Not too far away from Kanae, who was lying on the ground, Akira was trying to calm down his breathing. The exchange only lasted for a few seconds, if one of them looked away even for a bit, it would have ended in an instant. But even so, it left a big impression on everyone who saw that. Reina, Erio and the other children were completely shocked since they could not process what just happened.

Shiori looked half-shocked since she was half-expecting that would happen.

Kanae pushed herself up. She was smiling widely that it was creepy. Akira frowned as he saw her smile.

“No damage even after she received that powerful kick, huh?”

“That must be because of her equipment.”

“That’s kinda true.”

Akira then shook that off and said to Kanae.

“That’s it, that will be the end.”

Kanae’s smile was filled with excitement for more as she replied.

“…What are you talking about? We’re just getting started here. You’re surprisingly strong when you’re serious, it’s indeed amazing, but it would be troublesome if you think that was enough to defeat me.”

“No, this is the end.”

Kanae interpreted that as Akira looking down on her, so then she said while smiling amusedly.

“Don’t worry, I’ll crush that misconception in no time.”

“That’s not what I meant, this is the end of my request.”

Kanae seemed genuinely confused about what Akira was talking about.

“The request only lasts until I put in enough work to earn the 500,000 Aurum reward. And that one now was worth at least that much. The request is finished, it’s done. So I have no plans to go along with you.”

Although Kanae was confused, she was able to understand what he meant, she obviously looked displeased.

“Ehhh!! You would just back off after putting my heart on fire like this? That’s just so unfair, you know!”

“I didn’t get my medicine and energy pack for free, you know!”

“I know, I’ll pay the extra money! How about that?”

“Still no! My augmented suit is in a rather bad state, you see. If I go along with your training, there’s no mistaking it that it’ll break! To be honest, I’m planning to use it as carefully as possible until my new augmented suit arrives. That’s why I can’t go along with your request. If you keep forcing me, I’ll run away while emptying the extended magazine of my DVTS minigun at you, you know.”

After Akira said something that completely killed Kanae’s chance of convincing him, she looked utterly disappointed and finally gave up.

“Alright, haaahh… I just don’t get it. But that one exchange cost 500,000 Aurum, huh. Isn’t that too expensive?”

“Honestly speaking, I think I didn’t charge enough since I had to fight someone who’s doing fine even after taking that kick square on.”

Before fighting Kanae, Akira returned the setting of his augmented suit from follow-type to read-type. He then gathered his focus to compress his time perception, and raised the output power of his augmented suit to its limit with the help of Alpha’s support, and he even took some medicines beforehand to brace for the burden that would be put on his body. After all these preparations, he was finally able to get a strike in, but that did not hurt his opponent at all. So Akira believed that it was at least worth that much.

Kanae recognized Akira’s skill, but that caused another question to surface up.

“But still, if you’re that strong, it would have been great if you had put that much effort in our first battle. Is it that you can’t get serious unless it’s a request?”

“I was being serious back then too, you know? It’s just that since it’s training, so I thought there’s no need for me to get reckless. That was enough training for me too. While the last fight was a request for training,

so I only did what I needed to do. As I said before, I didn't get my medicine and energy pack for free."

Kanae seemed to be thinking for a bit before she made a serious face and said.

"Akira-boy, are you actually hiding your real strength while trying to be a superhuman?"

Akira frowned.

"I have no plans to be anything like that. Someone else also asked me the exact same thing not too long ago, so let me say it again, that's not true. I have no plans to be strong enough to be able to throw a tank with my pure strength."

"…I see"

Kanae somehow looked amused. There was a trace of favourability toward Akira in her gaze, but it was much closer to a favourability toward a rival or someone who was of the same type as her. Akira thought that smile was similar to Neria's, it was a smile of someone who would try to seduce the opponent that she wanted to kill, Akira could not help but to make an annoyed face at that.

After that, Reina's group thanked Akira and left. Akira looked tired as he said.

"Alpha, I somehow feel tired. Is it okay if we finish the training here today?"

"Sure, do you want to head straight back home? Or do you want to let Erio and the other children continue the training themselves?"

"Hmmm, let's see… I guess I'll let them continue the training themselves, huh. It's their precious opportunity to train, so I would feel bad if I send them all back just because I don't feel like doing it."

“Alright. In that case, let’s break them into two groups and set them to fight each other, then I’ll have you observe their fight and take notes. It’s important to be able to do that kind of analysis too, you see.”

Erio and the other children continued the training by themselves for some time after that. Akira did not join them at all, and when the time was right, they decided to wrap up the training.

That was the first training session where they finished before Erio and the other children got too tired to do anything.

__*__*__*__

After they left Akira, Reina, Shiori and Kanae headed back to the city. Kanae sounded rather happy as she said while driving the vehicle.

“Well well well, although it was rather unfortunate, I’m glad that we visited Akira-boy. It served as a good training for Milady and I got to see how strong that Akira-boy is. To be honest, I didn’t expect him to be that strong. That explains why Ane-san had a hard time fighting him. So then, Milady, how was the training? To be honest, I stopped watching midway, you see.”

Reina somehow looked displeased. At least, she looked displeased enough that it was obvious that it was not because Kanae said she stopped watching midway.

“It was hard, I feel like I got a good gauge of my current strength at the moment. Though it’s all thanks to my equipment.”

“It’s also important to properly gauge your fighting ability when you have your equipment. Even that Akira-boy also said that you’ll need both equipment and training to be strong. And if he had to pick one, he did say that he would pick equipment.”

“You’re right. Although they were special equipment used only for training, it’s true that I was having a hard time because of how superior their equipment was. I feel like I was defeated by a group of amateurs with overwhelmingly superior equipment. Well, that also applies to me too to

some extent though. I'm okay with the equipment since Shiori prepared them for me, so what's left for me is only training, huh. I still need a lot of training before I can get as strong as Akira. Shiori, Kanae, I'll be relying on both of you."

Reina sounded as if she finally made her resolve to move forward, so Shiori happily replied.

"Please leave it to us. It's our job to be useful to Milady."

But in contrast to that, Kanae said while making a grim face.

"Milady, it's all good if you want to be as strong as Akira-boy, but it's impossible for Milady to get as strong as Akira-boy, you know. He's someone who you should not aspire to be."

"…What do you mean?"

Reina was confused. Kanae then answered her question with a serious tone.

"He's not right in the head in all kinds of meaning. Akira-boy's augmented suit is not an advanced augmented suit like Milady is using right now. Its capability is relatively low and its user burden compensator is also relatively bad. That's why their power output is lowered for the sake of the safety of its user. But, although it's only my guess, I believe that Akira-boy modified that limiter or maybe even completely took it off. So it should have been putting his body under immense stress. And well, normal people would die if they do that. Akira-boy's move suddenly changed as if he was completely a different person after he accepted that request from Ane-san, remember? Oh, did you even see that fight?"

"I did, he suddenly became surprisingly strong…"

"That's the difference when he was willing to put that burden on his body, you see. The reason why he took medicine beforehand was because he would die if he didn't do that."

"I-is it really that bad? It didn't seem that bad though…"

“In that case, would you like to give it a try? You should be able to try it if we change the setting on your augmented suit.”

Kanae said that so casually, but Shiori immediately interjected as if she was scolding Kanae.

“Kanae, stop talking nonsense. Milady, it’s really dangerous, so don’t even think about it no matter what.”

Reina frowned, she understood the danger of doing something like that from how Shiori sounded there. Kanae lightly giggled and said.

“To be honest, I think it’s a good idea to at least try it once though. But as I explained before, it’s basically awful.”

“If it’s really that dangerous, I can understand why I should not fight using that method.”

Reina seemed to fully understand the importance of that subject. But Kanae shook her head and said.

“That’s not what I meant, as in matter of fact, that’s not the biggest issue.”

“Eh? Shiori also stopped me though, but that was not the real issue?”

“Even Ane-san also has a similar trump card too. It’s not a bad thing to keep something like that in case of emergency. The problem is how Akira-boy is using that method without any hesitation even though he doesn’t have a cyborg body. That way of thinking and common sense is simply abnormal.”

“A-abnormal…?”

“Although Akira-boy’s augmented suit is a new augmented suit compared to the one that he used when he fought Ane-san, it’s already pretty rugged to the point that he said he’s already buying a new one. Normally, augmented suits won’t get that bad so quickly. That would mean that he had gone through enough fierce fights to get his augmented suit, not his body, that bad so fast. So it’s not an exaggeration to say that he’s not right in the

head since he thinks that it’s a normal thing. Then to top it off, he said that someone also mistook him before and asked if he’s trying to be a superhuman, that would mean he’s been doing that without knowing it. Although I feel bad for saying this, but he’s simply crazy.”

Shiori frowned.

“It must be rather severe since even Kanae says so.”

“Well, I bet it’s because he’s like that that Ane-san had a hard time fighting him.”

After Kanae said so, she suddenly made a rather confused look.

“…But still, putting that aside, I still find it rather strange. People who are that strong usually have an aura that you can recognize. But although Akira is actually strong, why does he still look weak? And I don’t think that he’s deliberately trying to look weak either. Milady, do you have any guess?”

“M-me?”

“I heard that Milady looked down on Akira-boy thinking that he’s just a small fry the first time Milady met him. Is there any particular reason why Milady thought he was just a small fry?”

Reina remembered her mistake and looked slightly displeased. But as she continued searching through her memories, her expression slowly changed to a confused one.

[Now that Kanae mentions it, why did I think so? No matter how he looked, he was called to that place as a Hunter and he had proper equipment too. Was it simply because there was something that I did not like about him? No, I only felt so after I talked to him, I thought that he looked weak even before I spoke to him… That’s why when he refused our offer to work together, I got irritated and… Is it because Akira is just a small boy? But I think he’s more or less of the same age as me though…]

Shiori was also searching through her memories as to why she misjudged Akira’s strength. She then remembered Shikarabe’s answer when she inquired about him and realized that Shikarabe also had made the same mistake as her.

This could not be just a pure coincidence, there must be something behind it. Although Shiori could not identify what this something was, there was no mistaking it, something was causing it. As she thought so, she decided to be more careful with Akira.

“Ane-san, did you get anything?”

“What are you planning to do with that information?”

“As Milady’s bodyguard, it’s so that I won’t lower my guard even if my opponent looks weak.”

But then Shiori replied back causally.

“Nothing in particular came to mind except the shame from the mistake I made. So you should be careful too.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Kanae noticed that subtle change in Shiori’s attitude and smiled excitedly.

[This Akira-boy is really an interesting boy. The more I know about him, the more questions come up about him. I wonder if I can get a chance to properly fight him soon.]

And so, her interest in Akira got even deeper along with her smile.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 155, The Ability to Persuade

Index

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Kadol was lying on the ground in a pool of his own blood in the middle of the slum city, he was dying. His wound was fatal, there was no way to save his life. The other three who were Shijima's men were already dead.

"…Why… I always… Got involved… With these… Strong brats…"

If he had not met Akira that day, he might have not been in this situation right now. He replayed the flashbacks of everything that happened that had led him to this ending. His expression was filled with grudge and frustration as he breathed his last breath.

Katsuya's group had an overwhelming victory. None in his group was wounded. After the shooting stopped, the area was so silent that it was even felt strange. Everyone in the area had run away far enough that their scream and curses did not reach that place, either that or they also got killed during that shootout.

Both Katsuya and Yumina, who still had some reservations against killing other people, had a pained look on their faces. Alna was cowering on the ground and shaking in fear. While Airi's expression was as flat as usual as she calmly scanned her surroundings.

“Katsuya, I can’t confirm what happened to the boy who shot those shots from the alley. Is it better if we go and check on him too?”

“N-no…”

“In that case, we should leave this place as soon as possible, we caused too much ruckus in this area.”

“Y-You’re right, let’s go.”

“We should hurry up, it might be a good idea to never come to this place again.”

Airi readied her rifle and made sure that the area was safe as if she was escorting an important person. When Katsuya and Yumina extended their hands towards Alna to help her get up, she suddenly jumped and hugged Katsuya.

“Alna, can you walk?”

Alna did not say anything back, she kept clinging on Katsuya and just nodded. Katsuya started to walk while Alna was still clinging on him. Yumina and Airi frowned, they looked slightly jealous when they saw that, but they kept watching their surroundings while having a conflicted expression plastered on their faces.

Tiol was swaying left and right as he walked through the alley. He was badly wounded and bleeding pretty badly. The blood dripping from his wound painted a red line on the ground. It was by pure luck that he did not get killed when Airi shot back at him. He was barely able to get out from that place alive thanks to the armour that he was using and the fact that he immediately ran away after he made that shot. And to top it off, Airi was only spreading bullets randomly without aiming exactly at him.

Tiol kept on walking through the alley with his fading consciousness, but it did not take long for him to hit his limit as he collapsed into the ground. He did not have the power to push himself back up. Both his consciousness and his life were fading away. In the middle of the terror that he felt from the

approaching death due to the bleeding, he could see through his blurry vision someone walking toward him. He then heard a man's voice.

"Hm? If I'm not mistaken, you're from Sheryl's gang, right?"

Tiol squeezed out his voice to beg for help.

"H-help me!"

Tiol knew that man was Yatsubayashi.

"Ahhh, If I'm not mistaken, you're that boy, right? The one who took those attackers into Sheryl's base? The guys that I treated were complaining about you. I don't know what happened to you, but you're not looking good at all there."

"H-help!"

"I don't mind fixing you, but just how much do you think that would take? Can you really pay for it? Or is it that Sheryl will pay for it?"

"H-He-"

"That doesn't sound like a yes."

Tiol was filled with hopelessness. Looking at that, Yatsubayashi lightly smiled and amusedly asked him a question.

"In this case, since you can't pay for the treatment fee, it won't be a treatment, but an experiment. I won't force you to take it though?"

"I-I'll t-take it."

Tiol was barely able to squeeze out his answer and immediately fainted after that. Yatsubayashi did not panic at all, he lightly smiled and said.

"We have a deal then."

Yatsubayashi took out a syringe from within his pocket and injected its content into Tiol's neck. The syringe was filled with a glowing green liquid and that liquid was injected into Tiol's body.

"Don't worry. I can still save your life. We're both lucky here, don't you think so?"

Yatsubayashi was indeed lucky to find Tiol in that situation, but that might not exactly be the case for Tiol, or at least, it was still unclear if he was really lucky or not for meeting Yatsubayashi there.

***

Sheryl was giving Akira a short report from what he asked her to do. The reason why she was being nervous was because of the contents of the report. It was about Alna and it seemed to be immensely annoying Akira. And to top it off, it was a bad news.

Sheryl was not able to find Alna, and according to Viola's report, a fight had happened over Alna that resulted in some dead bodies. Sheryl was giving her report in fear.

"…So then, we don't know where that Alna went."

"I see."

Akira's mood was a bit worse than usual. In reality, it was not because he was angry at Sheryl and her gang. But that was enough for Sheryl to think that Akira was disappointed since she was not able to give any good news.

"I'm really sorry for not being able to be of any help."

"Don't worry about that. Like I said before, that girl has a strong Hunter backing her. It's dangerous, so you guys can stop looking for her. In the worst-case scenario, that Hunter might get his eyes on you guys after all. In the first place, I wasn't expecting you to do anything about those Hunters."

"…I understand."

There was a fight over Alna, getting Sheryl and her gang involved in this matter might be dangerous. As Akira thought so, he said that in consideration for Sheryl's gang.

But Sheryl interpreted Akira's words as if he was saying that he did expect right from the start that Sheryl's gang would not be able to be any of use.

"We'll do our best to be useful to you next time."

Akira smiled wryly.

"Next time, huh. Honestly speaking, I don't want to get my wallet picked again though."

Akira interpreted Sheryl's words in a bad meaning and went on to admonish himself, Sheryl's face went pale as she flusteredly said.

"I-I'm really sorry, that wasn't what I meant…"

"Hm? Ahh, it's just that I interpreted that in the wrong way. Sorry, I'll be relying on you again if something comes up."

"Y-Yes."

Akira realized that his mood was worse than he had thought. He then took some deep breaths and told himself that it was his own mistake and that he should not cause more trouble than he should as he forced himself to calm down.

A notice suddenly reached Akira's information terminal. When he checked its content, his mood immediately brightened.

"Sheryl, I have something to do, so I'll take my leave for today. Just call me if anything comes up."

"Okay… Uhmmm, is it okay to ask what is this something that you need to do?"

Sheryl tried to act casual when she asked that question, but since it was able to fix Akira's mood in one go, her curiosity and insecurity were leaking out.

Akira did not notice Sheryl was looking at him as if she was clinging to him, he just lightly replied to her.

"My orders just arrived, so I'm just going to pick them up."

He then took a short pause before he said apologetically.

"Ahh, by the way, I'm sorry, I might not be able to come here that often after this. I need to return back to my Hunter job after all."

"…I see, that's really unfortunate, but it can't be helped. I would be really happy if you can come when you're free."

"Well, compared to before, I might come here more often though."

Sheryl forced herself to smile while Akira just casually said so. The difference in their feeling toward each other was in full view there.

Sheryl accompanied Akira all the way to the base's entrance before returning back to her private room. Now that she's alone in her room, she looked slightly desperate and sad at the same time, but then she shook her head and said to herself.

"…No, letting myself get depressed won't fix my situation. I need to calm down and think about my next plan. I don't want Akira to abandon me after all, right?"

Sheryl was able to get a peek at Akira's cliques not too long ago, and because of that, she lost her calm. Akira was acquainted with many girls, and most of those girls were beautiful. So Sheryl could not help but to get suspicious.

Carol's attire and attitude were both tailored to seduce the opposite sex. And it seemed that Akira enjoyed talking to her. Then she also heard from Erio and the other children that Akira was visited by some high-class-

looking girls in the middle of their training. The two maids and the girl who visited Akira seemed to be more than just acquaintances.

And the person that cheered Akira up in one go was probably also a girl. She remembered that Wataba said something right before Akira shot him dead and it was supposed to be about a girl who worked in a weapon shop.

Unfortunately enough, Akira's interest in the opposite sex was extremely low, or at least that was what Sheryl had always thought. But thanks to that, she also thought that she could take her time to build up trust. But the girls that kept appearing next to Akira erased that thought.

Sheryl started to think that it might be simply because she did not have enough charm. Her men would be surprised if they heard that, but she started to doubt herself there.

Sheryl tried to keep her calm while thinking of what to do from here and on, unfortunately, she could not come up with any good idea. Right when she was stuck in her thought, someone suddenly knocked on the door. It somehow immensely irritated her as she shouted at the door.

"Didn't I tell you to save it for later unless it's something important?!"

Erio who was on the other side of the door flinched.

"Someone by the name of Colbert came, he said it's something about that pickpocket, should I tell him to leave?"

Sheryl calmly took a deep breath. Although Akira told her that it was okay not to get involved any longer, it was not something that she could just ignore.

"…Take him to the guest room, I'll be there in a few minutes."

"O-Okay."

Sheryl realized just how much she had lost her calm listening to Erio who stepped away quickly. She then brought her hand to her chest and took a few deep breaths to calm down.

Colbert and Sheryl were sitting facing each other in the guest room. Sheryl had Erio and Alicia behind her while some of her men were also standing by in the room.

Erio and the other children seemed nervous. It was not only because Sheryl seemed to be in a bad mood earlier, even Colbert also seemed to be in a bad mood too.

Sheryl looked suspiciously at Colbert and said.

“I heard that it’s about that pickpocket, so, why exactly did you come to this place?”

“Actually, the one who has some business with you is not me.”

“What do you mean by that…?”

Colbert took out his information terminal and put it in front of confused Sheryl. Viola’s voice then came out from that information terminal.

“It’s me, I’m sorry that I have to speak with you like this.”

Sheryl did not have a good impression of Viola, so she frowned when she heard Viola’s voice.

“…Shouldn’t you be able to give me a call or something?”

“That’s because I’m a rather paranoid person. It’s because of my job, you see. And it would be stupid to demand you to have a special secure line just for my sake. So then, it’s actually an important subject though, if there are people around you whom you don’t want to listen to this conversation, can you tell them to leave the room first?”

“It depends on what are we going to talk about.”

“It would be too late if I tell you now. I hope you can understand how much trouble this subject is from the fact that I’m speaking to you like this.”

Sheryl thought for a bit before she sent a glance to the other children in the room, signalling them to leave. Colbert who saw the other people leaving the place then said to Viola.

“Viola, I’ll leave too.”

“Oh? I’m okay with you listening though.”

“You didn’t say don’t leave either.”

Colbert stood up and was about to leave following the other people in the room, but before he left, he warned Sheryl.

“Be careful, that girl is one crafty witch. She can casually bring up something herself just to make her negotiation opponent refuse it, and that’s also true for the opposite case.”

“Oh my, that’s pretty cruel of you considering that you’re working for me.”

“I don’t want to be responsible for tricking Akira’s lover without even realizing it. I have nothing to do with this, okay?”

Colbert then left the room after he said that to both Viola and Sheryl.

Sheryl looked intensely at the information terminal and carefully said.

“So then, what is it?”

“To put it short, it’s about to reconcile with you. In order to do that, I have a good news for you.”

“For me?”

“Yup. I was originally planning to capture that pickpocket and bring her to Akira to make up for my mistake, you see. But unfortunately, it ended up in a failure. And since I can’t think of anything that I can offer to Akira, I thought that at least I can do something for his lover. It’s also my way of apologizing to Akira, so there’s no need to worry. I won’t do anything funny since it’ll only worsen Akira’s mood.”

That was enough of a reason for Sheryl to accept that explanation which also caused her to lower her guard.

“Very well, let’s hear it.”

Viola could notice that subtle change in Sheryl’s tone as she happily continued her explanation.

__*__*__*__

After Akira left Sheryl’s base, he immediately headed to Shizuka’s shop. He looked quite happy as he was filled with expectation.

“I can finally return back to my Hunter job, huh. Alpha, what should we do after this? Are we going to look for undiscovered ruin again using that information we still have from the Lion Steel corporation’s information terminal? I don’t mind doing that, but I think it might be a good idea to go to Kuzusuhara ruin again, you know?”

Alpha casually replied.

“If you want to do that, then sure, but can you at least tell me your reason?”

“Well, there’s this knife that I found in Kuzusuhara ruin before, right? That one that I used to cut the wall after I destroyed its safety device. I just think that it might be a good idea to keep one of those things as a trump card in case of emergency, and it should not be that difficult for me to look for that relic in Kuzusuhara ruin after I get my new equipments, right?”

Alpha smiled inquisitively at him and brought her face close to his.

“Is that all?”

Akira winced back a bit.

“Even if you say so… Well, it’s just simply that I don’t have much relics left and I want to get more relics to sell… Uhhh, is it a bad thing to go to Kuzusuhara ruin right now?”

Alpha’s smile returned to her usual one as she jokingly said to Akira.

“Nope, there shouldn’t be any problem. It’s just that I want to warn you in case you are getting ahead of yourself since you are getting new equipments. I thought that you wanted to go back to Kuzusuhara ruin in order to fight those monsters that you ran away from before, and the autonomous weapons that you had to fight after ignoring my instruction just to wash clean the stain in your record.”

Akira smiled bitterly. He was about to get killed back then by a huge camouflaged monster since he ignored Alpha’s instruction. He remembered that the cannon of that monster was able to easily demolish buildings around him as he was running away from that monster.

“Alright alright, I’m sorry about that. I won’t do something like that again.”

“Now that I think about it, that was a good chance for you to change your way of thinking.”

“I’m sorry, okay? I did follow all of your instructions since then, right? So just drop it already, will you?”

Akira had already moved on from that incident to the point that he could just laugh it off when he reminisced about it. He did regret his action there, but he did not let it weigh him down. So Alpha just smiled and let that slide too.

And when Akira thought that he had grown since that time, a question suddenly came up in his mind.

“Well, it’s true that I’ve gotten stronger since then, but like, can you tell me about your request in more detail? Ah, but if telling me will only discourage me, then I’m okay with not knowing it.”

“Unfortunately enough, I can’t tell you anything. It’s a bit complicated from my side too, like those limiters and TOS.”

“…I see.”

Akira thought that he had become quite strong since then and believed that it would not be strange if he was strong enough to go to the particular ruin that Alpha wanted him to go to. But it seemed that was not the case. He seemed to be a bit down there, seeing that, Alpha made a suggestion to him instead.

“But well, it’s true that you’ve grown stronger. So I guess it’s fine telling you about relatively safe places for your current strength, huh. Once you can defeat that huge monster and those autonomous weapons on your own, I’ll at least consider starting the subjugation of the ruin that I want you to explore for real.”

Akira frowned.

“Those monsters? On my own? Without your support?”

“Yep, without my support at all.”

“No no no, isn’t that too high of a hurdle. Wasn’t it impossible for me to defeat those monsters even with your support?”

“Well, you would need at least that much power, you see. I hope you now can understand why I didn’t tell you the details of my request back then.”

“Yeah, I understand it clearly now. Geez, I still have a long way to go, huh?”

Indeed if Alpha told Akira about it back then, he would have dismissed it right away thinking that it would be an impossible thing. But when he thought about it, he once again realized how much he had grown since he now believed that it was not completely impossible.

“But still, I at least got a good gist of how far my goal is, huh.”

Akira’s face was not filled with mockery, instead, it was filled with confidence and excitement. Looking at that, Alpha smiled and cheered for him.

“It seemed that completing my request has been shifted from utterly impossible to extremely difficult. Once it’s changed into a risky exploration, I’ll tell you the location of the ruin. We’ll only start exploring the ruin for real once you have a good chance to come back alive.”

“I see. I’ll also give my best without getting too reckless. I’ll be in your care until then.”

“Of course, just leave it to me. I’ll be in your care too.”

Akira smiled faintly at Alpha while she smiled confidently at him, expressing their trust in each other. But Akira’s expression immediately turned sour when he saw Katsuya in front of him.

It was rare for Katsuya to be moving alone that day, and when they noticed each other, their faces turned stern. Their inner feelings were expressed right on their faces.

Akira only looked at Katsuya as a troublesome guy with a mix of irritation, but that was all there was to it. Akira’s hatred was solely directed at Alna who stole his wallet and got away. Compared to that, Akira’s hostility toward Katsuya was close to nonexistent. As a matter of fact, it was small enough to the point that Akira could keep his calm thinking that Katsuya was also a victim who got tricked by Alna.

“Akira, calm down, okay? Although I won’t tell you not to fight him and I’ll even give you my support this time, you should be able to get an easier and safer victory once you get your new equipments. So I hope that you would not throw away the better winning chance. Not to mention that it’s a bad place for a fight too. This isn’t the place where you can freely fight without any repercussion like in the slum city.”

“I know. In the first place, it’s not like I have any grudge against him anyway.”

Akira leaned to one side of the road as if he deliberately took a detour to avoid Katsuya and kept walking past Katsuya. That action was also showing that he had no wish to cause a commotion with Katsuya there.

But Katsuya ignored that gesture. When Akira was about to pass him, he walked straight in front of Akira and stopped him with a stern face.

“Wait!”

Katsuya’s face was clearly expressing hostility against Akira, his voice also contained the intimidation and the commanding power of a Hunter.

Now that Akira’s way forward was blocked by Katsuya, he looked at Katsuya annoyedly and said.

“What?”

“Stop messing with Alna! To think that you would even pay some people to bring her to you, do you really think I’ll back off just because you did that?”

“Pay people? What do you mean?”

“Stop playing dumb. I know that you offered 20,000,000 Aurum for surrendering Alna, what’s the big idea here, huh?”

“Seriously though, what are you even talking about?”

Akira seemed to be honestly confused, so Katsuya who thought that it was all Akira’s fault started to question his own guess.

“…Back in the slum city, about 4 or 5 people who looked like Hunters came to me and told me that they’ll give me 20,000,000 Aurum if I surrender Alna. That wasn’t your doing? Weren’t you the one who told them to look for Alna?”

“It’s true that I asked some people that I know to tell me if they spot Alna somewhere, but like hell I would pay them 20,000,000 Aurum for finding her. I never promised them money. In the first place, who in their right mind would pay 20,000,000 Aurum just for a pickpocket?”

“…W-well, that’s…”

Katsuya reeled back from Akira's logical argument. Akira sighed, stepped aside, and walked past Katsuya. When he did that, Katsuya immediately returned back to himself, turned around, and yelled at Akira again.

"…Wait!! I'm not done yet!"

"What now? You have no more business with me, right? I don't know what's going on, but one thing for sure, it's your misunderstanding. I have nothing to do with whatever you're facing."

Akira did think that it might be Viola and Shijima's gang. But he then thought that it was absurd for them to offer 20,000,000 Aurum for something like that and ruled out the possibility. So he was sure that it was Katsuya's misunderstanding.

Katsuya then shouted.

"That might have nothing to do with you, but that doesn't change the fact that you're targeting her!!"

"Yeah, so what?"

"Just keep your hands off her. If you do anything to her, I won't forgive you."

"I see, got it."

Akira casually replied as if it was nothing. Katsuya was doubtful of that answer, so he asked Akira one more time.

"So, you won't do anything to mess with her anymore, huh?"

Akira then replied with the exact same casual tone as before.

"Nah, I'll kill her if I find her."

Katsuya was so surprised his face was tinted with the colour of anger.

"…Do you think that I'm joking here?"

Akira’s expression suddenly turned serious, he sent a sharp gaze filled with hostility toward Katsuya.

“I was only answering your question. Or more like, right back at you, are you being serious here? You won’t forgive me? Do you really think I need your permission to kill the pickpocket who stole the money that I gathered by risking my life? Or does it mean that you’ll kill me if I don’t stop? In that case, I get it, I don’t want to die after all.”

Katsuya was suspicious since Akira said something that sounded as if he just obediently accepted Katsuya’s demand. But Akira’s next words completely wiped off his suspicion.

“That’s why you’ll have to die too.”

Both of them looked at each other with hostility, the only reason why they did not pull out their rifles yet was simply because both of them knew it was not a good idea to fight there.

“Last time, I backed off because the difference in our fighting power was too large. But don’t expect me to back off again next time.”

Alpha exasperatedly warned Akira.

“Akira, stop provoking him, okay?”

“I’m just answering his questions. I don’t want him to misunderstand, after all. I know it’s bad to fight here, and I have no plans to fight him here. So let’s just slowly step away like last time.”

Seeing Akira slowly stepping away, Katsuya mocked him.

“Humph, you’re nothing but talk. In the end, you’re still going to run away, huh?”

“It’s not like I have any reasons to kill you right here right now after all. If you want it so much, you can go ahead and point your rifle at me, that would make things way simpler and I would be happy to oblige.”

Although both of them were just young boys, both of them were properly armed as Hunters. People around the area started putting some distance from them. In contrast to that, people who were there from the private security company and were stationed there to stand guard in the area started checking what was going on. If either Katsuya or Akira reached for their rifles, it would be their own fault if the guards there shot them dead.

If Katsuya raised his rifle, Akira would be able to say that it was out of self-defense. The guards would then focus on apprehending Katsuya instead. And this time Alpha would also give her support. Even if he got caught off-guard, Akira should still be able to fight back. Akira's intention was fully conveyed in his gaze and Katsuya fully understood it as he clicked his tongue.

The guards in the area started to slowly but surely approach Katsuya and Akira to check if it was only a quarrel between Hunters or that they needed to defuse the situation with force. That was when 2 Hunters approached Akira and Katsuya, those two Hunters were Sara and Elena.

Elena raised her voice as if she was scolding them.

"Akira, Katsuya, what do you think you're doing in this place?"

When Katsuya and Akira heard Elena's voice, the tension between them suddenly died down as both of them lowered their guard and looked in Elena's direction with a troubled face.

Akira was not sure what to do there, so Alpha made a suggestion to him.

"Akira, let's use this chance when he's focused on Elena to withdraw from this place."

"Eh? but…"

Akira hesitated to leave that place without giving his side of explanation of what was going on to Elena and Sara. But Alpha then said to him with a serious face.

“Are you going to get them involved in case if something happened in this place?”

The fastest and most effective method to make sure not to cause a commotion there was for Akira to get away from that place. He himself knew that much. Although he hated the idea of leaving that place as if he was running away, for him, it was thousands of times better than getting Sara and Elena involved. As he finally reached his decision, he lightly bowed to Elena and Sara and said.

“I’m sorry, but I have an urgent business to take care of.”

“W-wait, Akira?”

Elena was taken aback, but when she tried to stop him, Akira quickly left the place. Sara also did not expect that from Akira as she looked obviously surprised. While Katsuya only glared at him as Akira walked away.

Elena and Sara were actually there to see what was going on since they spotted two Hunters whom they were familiar with confronting each other. If they caused a ruckus there, it would definitely cause them a lot of trouble later. Both of them were Hunters, if they fought there, it would definitely cause big damage to the area and the common people around them. If it was something that they could stop, Elena and Sara were thinking of stopping them, but now, one of them had run away.

Since it was not like they could do anything about Akira who was leaving the place, they decided to ask what was going on to the one that was still present. Sara then casually asked Katsuya.

“It seemed like you were having a fight there, what happened?”

Sara smiled gently. There was no trace of reprimanding in her voice, it seemed that she was genuinely curious. She deliberately did so to calm down Katsuya as well as to express her wish that it was not anything big.

But although Katsuya was able to calm down to some extent, he then answered with anger.

“I was stopping that guy from killing my friend.”

Elena and Sara frowned and looked at each other. It was a bigger issue than Elena had thought. Elena then made a stern face and spoke to Katsuya as if she was having a serious discussion with him.

“Can you tell us the details?”

Katsuya nodded and explained what happened to Elena and Sara, of course, his explanation was biased and mostly mixed with his personal guesses. Elena and Sara’s expression obviously turned cloudy when they heard his explanation.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 156, Reconfirmation

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Akira returned back to his house first, hopped onto his vehicle and went to Shizuka's shop. When he arrived, his mood had mostly returned back to normal. He went into the shop, exchanged some greetings with Shizuka, exited the shop, and then moved his vehicle next to the shop's warehouse.

Shizuka opened the shutter and welcomed Akira.

"Once again, thank you very much for coming to my shop. Come, it's this way."

Shizuka guided Akira into the warehouse, they then stopped in front of a mechanical cupboard. Shizuka opened the double door on that cupboard and revealed Akira's new augmented suit inside it. Akira could not help but to 'oooh' when he saw it, Shizuka smiled and said.

"It's a TL-type, 2A model 2N Augmented suit, its seller is Neoptolemos. It's originally not designed to work in tandem with an information-gathering device, but as you requested, I also ordered the optional accompanying information-gathering device."

It was a thin body suit-type augmented suit, its basic colour was black. It also had a headgear-like device which doubled as a display device, while it had some protrusions on its neck, back and torso. Besides that augmented suit, there was a coat which was also made with the same metallic fabric that made the augmented suit. The coat's size was relatively bigger than the augmented suit, it might be made with the consideration that its user would be carrying rifles and magazines under that coat.

"Its size readjustment function is also equipped with a simple automatic self-maintenance feature. Do you want to try it now?"

"Yes, please."

Akira took off his augmented suit and his clothes down to his underwear, and just like last time, Shizuka scanned his body to take his measurements. When she did that, the augmented suit's size automatically recalibrated according to his measurements as it started looking more and more like a human body. Akira watched on with curiosity.

"It's automatically recalibrating itself, huh. That's really convenient."

"But there's a limit on how much it can recalibrate itself though. With this, it can readjust its size with body's changes, so I think it's perfect for you."

"Is that so?"

Akira seemed to be a bit confused, Shizuka smiled amusedly at him and explained.

"So, you haven't noticed it yet, huh? Your body has changed a lot since the last time I took your measurement. You've grown taller and your muscle composition is getting better. I wonder if it's because you're in a growth spurt."

"Well, I've been earning well, so I've started eating more without caring much about the taste. That might be the reason."

Akira said that casually, but Shizuka understood well the hardship that he had gone through so that he could say so. Akira had casually spoken about all kinds of stuff that he had gone through in the middle of their usual daily conversations, which included all the dangers when he almost got killed. Not to mention, the stories that she heard from Elena and Sara too. From there, Shizuka could understand what he had gone through in such a short time.

Akira spoke nonchalantly and indifferently although all of those hardships he had gone through could be interpreted as a curse if he could not face them. Indeed, as long as he could face them, the fact that he could do that could be interpreted as a blessing. It was all a matter of getting used to it or not. The way Akira said it, spoke of just how far he had gone through all kinds of hardship again and again. If Shizuka had to make a guess, that must be because even before Akira had started being a Hunter, he was so used to hopelessness and the feeling of resignation to the point that he got used to facing hardship without him realizing it. As a matter of fact, her intuition was telling her that her guess was correct.

But at the same time, Shizuka also did not think that Akira should stop being a Hunter. Position-wise, feeling-wise, economy-wise, she could not take over that burden from Akira. That was why, in place of that, she could only smile gently at Akira and remind him.

"…They say that a Hunter's main asset is his or her body. So make sure to take good care of your body, okay?"

"…? Okay."

Akira was a bit weirded out by that strange sudden change of attitude from Shizuka, but he just frowned and nodded without knowing the reason behind it.

Akira then put on his new augmented suit with Shizuka's help and put on the coat which also doubled as protective armour. After that, Akira was rather surprised.

"It's lighter than I thought."

Akira thought that the augmented suit would weigh him down like a lead armour before it was turned on, just like his previous augmented suit. But he was glad to find out that it was not true. As in matter of fact, it felt even lighter to move in compared to normal clothing. Since the suit readjusted its form to fit perfectly with his body, the weight of the augmented suit was evenly distributed on his body.

Shizuka, who saw a surprised Akira, found it amusing. She then smiled and said.

“It’s an expensive augmented suit after all. It’s made of a light and strong but expensive material, it might be so that you still can remove it yourself even after it runs out of energy. Although I was the one who offered you that augmented suit, it’s still hard to believe that you spent 350 million Aurum for an augmented suit.”

This also meant that Akira had used most of his 400 million Aurum budget to buy goods from her shop. Of course, Shizuka took a part of that as her service fee, but it was nowhere near the profit that the shop which originally sold that augmented suit could get. Shizuka wished that Akira would spend that much money for buying stuff in her shop one day, she could not help but smile bitterly when she thought so.

Akira saw that bitter smile and panicked.

“Ahhh, I’m really sorry. I was really at a loss on what to buy, and after thinking about what is the best thing to buy to increase my overall fighting power, I concluded that an augmented suit is the best choice… S-so please wait until the next time I get a lot of money.”

Getting a better augmented suit was the most effective method to increase the effectiveness of Alpha’s support. After all, Akira did not want to get his bone broken every time he fought. So he decided to prioritize on increasing the basic strength of his body instead of his firepower and ended up investing most of his budget on an augmented suit.

Seeing Akira, Shizuka just smiled and said.

“Don’t worry about it. Like I said, a Hunter’s main asset is their body. Since it’s a rather expensive augmented suit, it is to be expected, it’s a high-quality augmented suit. It should be able to greatly reduce the burden on your body from the kickback from using powerful guns. Moreover, from my point of view, I think you’re someone who would do reckless things without realizing it. So if you spend your money on firepower, you’ll get more and more used to fighting more powerful monsters and I feel like you’ll be doing more reckless things at that point. That augmented suit is designed to put more focus on reducing the burden and protecting its user, it should be able to reduce the number of occasions when you have to act recklessly. I’m sure it’ll reduce your medicine consumption too.”

Shizuka said so with a smug smile, seeing that, Akira flusteredly smiled back. To be honest, it was not like he did reckless stuff because he wanted to, but he could not think of any good excuses to give to Shizuka either.

Akira put his old augmented suit in a box and left it inside the warehouse to be sent for repair. As for how much it would cost, Shizuka said to him that no one could tell until he sent that augmented suit for repair first.

Akira was thinking of keeping his old augmented suit as a spare if the repair did not cost that much. But if buying a new one was cheaper, he was planning to give it away to Sheryl. Even if he only repaired the outlook, it should be enough to give off an extra intimidating look. On the other hand, it could also be completely turned into an information-gathering device too. So, it should still have some uses.

As Akira was moving the metallic mechanical cupboard into his vehicle, Shizuka was gathering rifle modification parts into a cart. Akira decided to buy some modification parts with the rest of the budget that was left after paying for his new augmented suit. He might be able to buy new rifles, but since there was a limit on how many rifles he could carry, it would mean that he had to stop carrying one or more of his current rifles. So instead, he decided to buy modification parts to upgrade the rifles he already had.

Akira was deep in thought looking at the modification parts lined up in front of him. Not too far from him, Shizuka was still lining the rest of the modification parts that she brought there, she then warned Akira.

“Don’t worry, you can take your time deciding. You can even try them too, but remember that if you open any sealed goods, you’ll have to pay for them. Although the parts that are not sealed are second-hand goods, they should be working just fine since I’ve checked them myself beforehand. And be careful, Some parts are designed to be used on rifles with certain built-in functions, so they might need some extra parts if you want to install them.”

“Okay, thank you.”

“I’ll return back to the shop. If you need anything, just call me. Well then, take your time.”

Shizuka then returned to the shop, Akira started to analyze the modification parts scattered in front of him.

“Well, which one should I pick? Most of them are pretty pricey, I feel like I’ll go over the budget if I don’t choose carefully”

“Let’s upgrade your AAH and A2D assault rifles with the assumption that you would use them without an augmented suit. And if you still have some money left, let’s use it to buy parts to upgrade your augmented suit. I already have a plan on what kind of upgrade to do, the rest depends on your preference and how much you want to spend.”

“There are just too many types of parts, you know. Though, it’s better than having too few options.”

“This is also a training, so you can take your time.”

Akira was humming while looking seriously at the various parts in front of him, next to him, Alpha was smiling just like usual.

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In her office, Mizuha was at loss on what to do. The reason why she was so troubled was because of Katsuya’s request, he asked Mizuha to provide protection for Alna.

At first, she heard that Katsuya was simply trying to save a girl who was falsely accused of pickpocketing. Up to that point, Katsuya was only being nice and everything, and it was fine. But now she came to know that the Hunter, whom that girl stole from, was looking for her and trying to kill her, then there was also a fight against an unknown organization that was also looking for that girl to the point that some people got killed. Now that it had come to this, it was no longer that simple anymore.

Mizuha then asked an acquaintance of hers to gather more information just to be safe. And from there, she knew that Alna was indeed a pickpocket, the Hunter that was looking for her was someone who even participated in hunting a bounty monster, and it was true that a certain organization was trying to capture her.

Normally, Mizuha would have refused to give that kind of protection to someone of Alna's status. There was no need to even think about it. But since it was a request from Katsuya, it could not be helped. She could not afford to sour her relationship with the person that was allowing her to maintain her influence and power.

At the moment, Mizuha hid Alna in one of the camping cars parked in one of the parking lots owned by Drankam that were scattered in various places in the wasteland. It was at least able to satisfy Katsuya for now and bought her some time. With Alna staying inside one of Drankam's facilities, outsiders would not be able to freely come after her, but at the same time, she could also not afford to let Alna, who was an outsider, stay in Drankam facilities for too long. She might be able to do something about it if Katsuya accomplished something that would give her more influence. So, she decided to stall for time hoping that something like that would happen.

To be honest, Mizuha did not really care about Alna, as a matter of fact, she was a bother. As someone from the inner wall, there was nothing she could gain except scorn if she associated with a pickpocket from the slum. Whether she sent Alna to work as a Hunter or as a helper in the office, depending on how people looked at it, it might seem like she was providing Katsuya's lover with a shelter using Drankam's money. If the news got out, the critiques from both inside and outside the gang would be severe. And if the opposing faction got their hands on this information, they would

definitely use it as ammunition. Now that she thought about it, it was nothing but a hassle.

Mizuha seemed extremely annoyed as she said to herself as if giving an excuse.

“…I guess there’s no other way out, huh?”

She took her information terminal and made a call. Her call immediately connected and a woman’s voice came out from her information terminal.

“Oh, it has been quite a while. If I’m not mistaken, last time you said to me that you have nothing to do with a bad girl like me. So I’m really happy that you called first.”

In contrast to the happy voice, Mizuha sounded pretty annoyed.

“Let’s stop with the silly talk, is this line secure?”

Since Mizuha asked if they were talking through a secure line, there was no mistaking it that she was planning to make a request that she could not afford to get out in public. The other person that Mizuha called understood that well as she casually replied.

“Yep, it’s no problem from this side.”

“In that case, I have something I want to ask you. Since I even came to ask for your help, I hope you can understand the gravity of the matter while listening to my explanation.”

“Of course. So, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to spread information that she’s already dead? Or should I prepare for a fake corpse too? Honestly speaking, it’s much easier if spreading the information that she has gone missing is enough, but in that case, they might still try to look for her. So that would be a no, right?”

Mizuha was surprised, but she did not say anything. The reply that she got there was exactly what she was about to ask. She was able to somehow maintain her calm as she said.

“…I haven’t said anything yet.”

“You want to keep your hands clean while you want to remove that Alna girl who is clinging on that Katsuya boy as naturally as possible as not to anger him and not to cause any trouble to the gang, right? Honestly speaking, that’s not something you would normally ask from an information broker like me. But well, it’s not like we’re strangers anyway, so I can give you some help and introduce you to some people I know.”

Mizuha was so surprised that the subject that she was about to bring up was indeed that. She then somehow barely regained her calm and tried to probe how much her talking opponent knew about what she was going to ask with a stern expression.

“As expected of you, how much do you already know?”

“That’s a secret. Having an honest informant is good and all, but the question is whether that informant’s skill can balance his or her honesty… Although, in this case, it might be the opposite though.”

Hearing her opponent talking in a good mood there, it really reminded Mizuha that the person she was talking to was just the worst. That woman was basically working by manipulating information in order to manipulate people for her own benefit. Those who she manipulated only realized that after the matter had finished, and that was if they were lucky. Those who did not get lucky enough died before they could realize that they were being used.

Mizuha frowned while staring at her information terminal. She was the one who made that call. But even so, she questioned whether she did that because out of her own will or because she was already being manipulated.

Since Mizuha did not say anything, the other person continued.

“So then, what should I do? Should I stop here? I don’t really mind if that’s what you want. No matter what reason you have, doing bad things will always leave you with a guilty feeling.”

“I haven’t said anything yet.”

“Hmm, you’re right, I’m just speaking on my own, right? Just send the reward through the usual bank account, I’ll decide how far I should go depending on how much money you transfer to me. Later then.”

The call ended. Mizuha just sat there with a stern face, thinking for about 5 minutes. She then finished the administration needed to transfer money to a certain bank account.

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Akira was still trying the modifications for his rifles. No matter which parts he chose, all of them increased the power of his rifles. If he had the leeway, he wanted to modify his rifles to the point they did not resemble their original forms at all. But of course, that was impossible with his limited budget.

“…Maybe I should add another 10 million Aurum?”

If he wanted to, he could add more money into his budget. That leeway started to make him seriously consider increasing his budget. Since it seemed that Akira would really do that at this rate if he was left alone, Alpha warned him.

“I won’t stop you, but don’t keep repeating yourself. The better equipment that you get, the bigger its maintenance cost would be. Or at least, your augmented suit’s energy consumption has already increased with that new augmented suit. Not to mention, we still don’t know how much the cost for fixing your old augmented suit is. It’s important to make sure that you have enough reserves to rise up again in case if something were to happen and you lose all of your equipments.”

“I-I know. And also, it would be okay as long as I try not to get in a situation where I might lose all of my equipment, right?”

“Honestly, I think the moment you know that you might lose all of your equipments would mean that you’re already in a situation where you can’t

avoid it though.”

Akira recalled through his memories, there were too many occasions where that situation applied to him. When he imagined himself back doing Hunter work with nothing but his AAH assault rifle, he immediately said with a serious expression.

“…For now, let’s build a rifle with the original budget first and decide after that.”

“Yup, you should do that.”

Even with the help from Shizuka in order to get better deals, Akira’s last equipment set cost 80 Million Aurum in total. So he decided not to increase his budget just to be safe in case he got himself in a situation where he would lose all of his equipment.

Shizuka then returned back to the warehouse.

“Akira, how is it going?”

“Ah, I’m sorry, I’m not done yet. Should I hurry up?”

“It’s okay, I don’t mind you staying here until I close the shop. Just take your time.”

“Thank you very much!”

Akira then noticed Sara and Elena behind Shizuka, so he greeted them.

“Elena-san, Sara-san, uhhh… I’m sorry for what happened. I was in a bit of a hurry.”

Elena smiled lightly at him to let him know that she was not bothered by that. Although, in reality, she did that deliberately, but Akira was not able to see through her smile.

“Don’t worry, I just called you there since it would be a bad idea to cause a ruckus over there. Even a small quarrel between Hunters could be scary to

normal people after all. Well, since we're armed to teeth for fighting monsters, that's totally understandable though. In the worst-case scenario, the private security company guarding the area might mark you too. If that happens, you won't even be able to enter that area anymore. So be careful."

"I understand, thank you very much for worrying about me."

As Akira earnestly thanked Elena and Sara, they smiled lightly at him. But Elena and Sara's expression immediately turned stern. Sara then looked at Elena, who made a serious look as she hesitated for a bit before she made her resolve and asked.

"Akira, is it okay if I ask you something?"

"Sure?"

"…After what happened back then, we asked Katsuya what happened between the two of you. Is it true that you're trying to kill Katsuya's friend?"

Akira's hands stopped, his face also turned serious.

"It's true that I'm hunting a pickpocket who stole my money. I didn't know if that pickpocket is his friend."

"Katsuya said that it's your misunderstanding though, is that true?"

"There's no mistaking it, although, I can't give you anything if you want me to show you a proof to convince you."

"You can't even tell us anything?"

"Yes, that pickpocket stole my wallet, emptied it, and threw it away. So I have no physical evidence. There were no witnesses either. So if you don't believe me, it's not like I can do anything about it."

"So both sides don't have any proof, huh…"

Elena frowned. To be honest, she believed Katsuya's side more. It was simply because Katsuya said so with confidence and desperation, she felt that Katsuya would not go that far if he was lying.

In contrast to that, Akira seemed uninterested. Depending on how Elena looked at it, it even sounded like Akira simply said that because he was asked. To top it off, it even seemed that he did not even try to convince anyone there. It was even obvious to the people there that Akira had completely given up trying to convince anyone since he figured that no one would believe him anyway.

After hearing what Akira said, Elena thought of convincing him that it was only a misunderstanding to make him stop. But since it was not like she was there when that happened, she could not tell who was in the right; Katsuya or Akira. But it did not even matter, after all, she only thought that it was not worth getting into a fight with Katsuya just because of a few hundred thousand Aurum.

But seeing from Akira's reaction there, it seemed that making Akira back off by pointing out the possibility that it was just a misunderstanding would be difficult. As she thought so, she started to think of another solution.

This time, Sara was the one who asked a question to Akira. She sounded a little hesitant when she asked him.

"Uhmm, Akira, why do you want to kill that pickpocket?"

"It's not like I'm going to chase her to the end of the world. But if I can find her with a little bit of effort, I'll kill her. Of course, if I find her in front of the Hunter Office, I would let her go since it would be too much trouble. But if it's in the middle of the wasteland, I'll definitely kill her. And if I see her somewhere else, well, it depends on the location."

"I-I see."

Akira answered back casually. But that was exactly the reason why Sara knew that he was being serious. Sara and Elena both knew how he felt nothing about killing others. Although they did not know exactly how

willing Akira was in killing people who were related to that pickpocket, people who got in his way, and people who got involved in that incident, they knew well that Akira would not hesitate that much when it came to killing them.

Akira frowned and showed an expression that he had almost never shown to Elena and Sara.

“Elena-san, Sara-san. I have no wish to tell you to believe me, I won’t tell you to take my side either. So, can both of you please stay away from this matter?”

Elena had a worried look on her face as she frowned and said.

“No, I can’t do that when I know that two of my friends might try to kill each other because of something like that.”

She could not take Akira’s side and demand Katsuya and his group to hand over Alna. At the same time, she also could not take Katsuya’s side and pressure Akira to back off. Not to mention, it would be super difficult to convince Katsuya to handover that pickpocket when they knew that Akira would kill her. As Elena thought so, she made a suggestion to probe the situation further.

“If I’m not mistaken, the main problem is that pickpocket stole 100,000 Aurum from you, right? It would feel wrong if I just gave you 100,000 Aurum to take its place. So let’s see, ah, that’s right! Since this matter left a bad aftertaste, so in order to clear up that bad aftertaste, how about I treat you to something around 200,000 Aurum? So let’s calm down, okay? I know a pretty good restaurant, you know?”

Akira’s face stiffened and slightly turned emotionless.

“…No, that in itself still feels wrong. So I’ll have to refuse.”

“Oh, so it’s still a no even if it’s my invite, huh. That’s just too bad. Honestly, I have some confidence in myself, but I still got rejected, huh. It feels pretty disheartening. In that case…”

Elena was trying to act coy to reduce the tension in the air while she was smiling and thinking what to do next. But Akira suddenly said with a rather stern tone.

“Elena-san.”

Akira’s expression returned back to normal after a few seconds.

“If Elena-san and Sara-san want me to stop no matter what, then I will stop hunting for that pickpocket.”

Sara was surprised, she found it weird that suddenly Akira sounded like he would obediently follow what she and Elena said.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, both of you have helped me so much until now, so I can at least do that much.”

Elena and Sara looked at each other. Although it still felt a bit forced, it was still better since Akira seemed to be willing to go as far as to fight Katsuya just to kill that pickpocket, which, in the worst-case scenario, might cause a full-blown fight between him and the whole Drankam gang. Both Sara and Elena agreed on the same conclusion there.

“In that case…”

Elena was about to say that she wanted Akira to stop no matter what, but Shizuka suddenly interjected rather forcefully.

“In my opinion, it’s better if you think carefully first before saying anything.”

Shizuka jumped into their conversation abruptly, so everyone redirected their attention to her. She confirmed that everyone present was looking in her direction before she continued.

“Akira, I understand that you have your reason to kill that pickpocket, but it’s not like you have to kill that pickpocket right away, right? And it’s not

like you'll get killed unless you kill her first. So if you can afford to wait, I want you to use that time to think carefully about it. There's no need to rush yourself to make a decision."

Shizuka said so while looking straight at Akira with a serious expression. Akira thought for a bit before he mumbled.

"Think carefully about it, huh…"

Shizuka then continued as if she was reminding Akira.

"Yes. Making you believe that it would be too late unless you decide now without giving you the time to think about it is how some people usually trick other people. As long as you have the leeway, use it to think carefully. Those people who say 'I didn't expect that this would happen' are those who usually had the chance to take another option if they had thought about it more carefully. Just think about it, if they had considered all of their options and made their resolve before picking a decision, they would not have said something like that."

Akira frowned as if he was thinking hard. Shizuka's voice changed to a gentle one.

"In the end, Sara, Elena and I are all outsiders in this matter. We don't know exactly what happened and what the situation was. That is a fact. But it's exactly because we're outsiders that we can offer a third-party opinion in this matter. It's not like we're saying that your decision is wrong. But, we're worried that you're forcing your decision just because you have decided so when you were filled with emotion although that decision is no longer worth the trouble now. From our point of view, it seems that our friend is going to do something that isn't worth the trouble because of the decision that he made based on emotion. That's why we just thought that it's better if you calm down for a bit. They say that an empty stomach can cause your mood to worsen. So if filling your stomach can calm you down and make you change your decision, then it might be a better idea to do so. That's why Elena invited you for a meal."

Akira looked at Elena and immediately asked.

“Is that so?”

Elena and Sara froze. During all their previous meetings with him, it was obvious from Akira’s gaze, expression, and voice that he thought dearly of both of them. They had saved each other in the past, they had worked together as Hunters too, it could be said that they were close to each other.

But Akira’s expression right now showed no trace of friendliness. He was looking at both of them as if they were only strangers to him, like people who he did not know that might pose danger to him. His gaze was saying that he was trying to make sure if they were enemies or not while he was waiting for their answer.

Sara was deeply shocked that the person who she thought was close to her would look at her like that. Elena was equally shocked too, but since she was used to handling negotiations, she was able to maintain her usual expression from the outside. She then tried to make a friendly expression as she agreed to what Shizuka said.

“That’s right. If you get into a fight with someone from Drankam, it might cause the whole gang to fight you if you get unlucky. Especially when Katsuya is valued highly in Drankam to the point that they are treating him as an officer. I even heard that some officers in the gang are also actively supporting him. I’m sure you have your reason, but from the other’s point of view, it looks like you’re willing to turn an organization that even has connections with the City Management against you just because of one pickpocket. So it does not seem to be worth the trouble no matter how we look at it. After all, in the worst-case scenario, it might even mean turning the whole city against you. Not to mention, it seems both of you got too emotional back there. So I just thought that it might be a good idea if you could calm down and think about it one more time. I’m sorry if I said something that offended you although I’m just an outsider.”

“…No, it’s fine.”

Akira’s expression still seemed rather stiff. The mood there also felt rather awkward.

Shizuka suddenly said in a bright voice as if to exorcise that awkward mood.

“By the way, Akira, are you still in the middle of picking parts? Since Elena is here, how about you ask for her opinion? If you’re going to pick parts to work with your information terminal, I’m sure that her opinion would be valuable. Not to mention, if I’m not mistaken, Sara’s equipment is also modified equipment. So you can ask her opinion too.”

Akira hesitated as he asked both Sara and Elena in a rather formal fashion.

“Is it okay?”

Elena smiled and nodded.

“Of course, right, Sara?”

“Eh? Yeah, sure. We have nothing to do after this anyway, so you can ask us anything.”

Sara also nodded and smiled.

“Thank you very much.”

Akira bowed without showing his smile to Elena and Sara.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 157, People Who Sow Conflicts

Index

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The lower district of the Kugamayama city was vast, the public order was more or less as bad as the wasteland. And in the area that had even worse public order, there were some organizations with strong economic power doing illegal businesses. They employed powerful military power to control the other smaller organizations within that area. Ezont Family was one such organization, its territory expanded from the slum city all the way to the lower district.

Ezont family's base was located in a certain mansion that was in the boundary between the slum city and the wasteland. That mansion demonstrated the power of the organization and the most important thing was not the size of the mansion.

There was no shortage of land in the eastern district, and with the advancement of technology, people could build mansions relatively cheap. But it was a whole different problem whether it was safe or not for them to do so. The main reason why the land inside the inner wall was expensive, was simply because it was safer. Having a mansion right next to the wasteland meant exposing it to monster's attacks, it showed that they had

enough money to pay for the people to guard that mansion, unlike those countless small gangs scattered inside the city.

In a large guest room inside that mansion, the boss of the Ezont family, Rogelt, was sitting while thinking hard. On the other side of the table, in front of him, Viola was smiling like usual.

Rogelt had his men standing guard behind him, while Viola had Carol standing guard behind her. They were all armed.

Rogelt looked at the four pictures on top of the tables while immersed in his thoughts, his gaze then returned to Viola.

Viola tried to analyze his gaze; if it was saying that there was a chance for negotiation or not as she happily said.

“So then, what do you think?”

“It’s not a bad offer.”

Two of the pictures were of Akira and Katsuya. Akira looked slightly annoyed in that picture, while Katsuya was smiling as if that picture was taken for publicity.

“We also did some investigation about those two. That Katsuya boy has his past record properly written in the report from Drankam, so it’s easy to compare it with the information that you brought in. His Hunter Rank is also pretty high. Well, basically, I’m sure he’s indeed a strong Hunter. While that Akira boy, he has a rather low Hunter Rank. But I heard that he was able to fight against eight robbers all by himself recently, and if I add the information about him that you just brought in, well, I’m sure he’s pretty strong too. If I can get both of them working for me, our battle against Haurias would definitely be easier. We’re thankful that you even prepared a way to make them work under us.”

“I’m glad that you found it interesting.”

Viola said that with a bright smile, but Rogelt suddenly put some intimidation in his voice.

“So then, how much of it was your plan?”

Viola tilted her head and looked confused, but she looked rather exaggerating.

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t play fool with me. Even I at least know that you’re not a decent human. It’s your usual modus operandi to spread information that doesn’t seem connected to one another at a glance in order to manipulate the situation for your own benefit, right?”

“That’s a big misunderstanding. It’s just that those people who bought information from me made a blunder and pinned the blame on me. They’re really giving me a lot of trouble.”

“Misunderstanding?”

Rogelt snorted.

“The method to control these Katsuya and Akira that you offered is basically taking hostage the girls they love. It’s all good up to there, they’re guys, after all. It’s not strange for them to go that far for the girls they love.”

The other two pictures on the table were of Alna and Sheryl. According to Viola, Akira was emotionally invested in Sheryl, whereas Katsuya was in Alna.

“But, I highly doubt that everything is a coincidence.”

Rogelt started questioning Viola. He was suspicious about the information she brought in, it was hard for him to believe that it was all out of pure coincidence.

It took an unnaturally short time for people to misunderstand that Sheryl’s relic shop was selling expensive relics, and the robbers even misjudged

Akira to be a small fry. Sheryl wanted to take her chance with her relics shop, so she wanted to eventually reopen it, but now that Akira was going to return back to his Hunter work, she needed other people to guard her shop. If Sheryl joined Ezont Family, she could have the gang guard her shop, and Rogelt would be able to use Akira through Sheryl. After all, Akira was so invested in Sheryl to the point that he had bought an expensive dress for her and made her the boss of a gang.

As for Katsuya, he seemed to be abnormally interested in Alna who should have been just a common pickpocket. He even used the power of Drankam to protect Alna who was being hunted by Akira, but of course, that could not stay for long. If the Ezont Family gave shelter to Alna, they could make a deal with Katsuya, or if they took Alna hostage, they could use it to control him.

With all of these things mixed together, Rogelt found himself in a situation where he could easily manipulate both Katsuya and Akira. But Rogelt could not ignore the feeling that someone was setting this up.

“I admit that the information from you is accurate. But, the reason why those robbers aimed for Sheryl’s shop as well as them mistaking that Akira as a weak Hunter, they’re all because of the information that you spread. You manipulated them into attacking Sheryl’s shop, didn’t you?”

“It’s just a coincidence. Another relic shop asked me to gather information about Sheryl’s shop, and Shijima asked me to check Akira’s real strength. So it’s not like I did that because I wanted to.”

“Then, how do you know that Alna is staying in one of the Drankam’s mansion when it should be restricted only to Drankam members? And why have you even made some preparations to get her kicked out from there?”

“There are people inside Drankam who don’t want Katsuya to get involved with a pickpocket from the slum for the sake of keeping their reputation with their sponsors in the inner wall. You should be able to at least guess that much, right?”

“…If Akira is really as strong as you make him out to be, it’s strange that Alna could steal his wallet. If he’s really that strong, he should have been able to stop her. And even if it is because he was caught off-guard when that happened, he should still be able to get it back if Alna was somewhere near where he could still track her down. It’s also strange that Katsuya would go that far to protect that Alna. She’s just a stranger to him, right? And it’s not like Alna was wearing an expensive dress that might make people mistake her as a rich lady either. Not to mention that the person hunting for Alna is not just a common Hunter, Akira has even participated in hunting bounty monsters. Is this Katsuya really risking a fight against that Hunter just to help a mere lowly pickpocket? I know that he’s weak with girls, but it’s still unnatural, you know?”

“Even if you ask me so, I’m sure that there are times when Akira makes mistakes. His money might have gotten stolen because of that. As for that Katsuya, maybe he is just really kind and really weak to girls, you know. Even in the reports for Drankam’s sponsor from the inner wall, they are highly praising Katsuya for his kindness. I also heard that he has so many girls around him that people even mock his group as the harem squad. So he might just be someone who would casually risk his life for girls.”

Rogelt then continued pointing out contradictions and abnormalities in Viola’s story while checking for a reaction from her. But Viola always replied casually and calmly just like usual. Eventually, Rogelt ran out of materials and found himself with nothing more to say.

“…Seriously now, can you really say that you didn’t do anything else other than just gathering information?”

“If I really have to say something here, I just sent someone to check how far Katsuya would go for Alna to help me find a plan to get him to give up on her. I was also surprised when I found out that Katsuya would not give up Alna even after offering him 20 million Aurum, and when I was content that I could get some information on him, the people that I sent got killed, you know. Thanks to that, I can’t collect the rest of their debts, it was a huge loss. The reason why I came here to sell this information is to make up for that loss. And since you’re a reputable person, I agreed to give you the

information first before you pay for it, right? I really hope that you would pay me a lot for it afterwards.”

Rogelt smiled wickedly.

“I don’t know about that. It’s true that it’s rather valuable information, but there are a lot of things that I can’t just accept. So I can’t really say if I would give you the amount of money that you’re hoping for…”

Viola looked rather surprised, she then smiled confidently.

“Oh my, are you really going to go that far? Geez, it can’t be helped then. It doesn’t feel right to demand money for information that you don’t find to your liking. Carol, let’s leave.”

Seeing how Viola was really about to leave, Rogelt suspiciously said.

“You sure you don’t need the money? You suffered a big loss, right? But you don’t seem desperate at all there.”

Viola smiled.

“But of course, it takes a lot of money to gather information, you know. That’s why, if you don’t take this offer, I think I’ll go bankrupt, so I’m planning to sell the same information to Haurias.”

Haurias was another gang that was more or less as powerful as Ezont Family and they were in a feud against each other. They were very close to starting a full-blown war for territories. If Haurias got the same information, they might get the upper hand against the Ezont family.

“Y-you fox!”

Rogelt could not help but to raise his voice in anger, his men behind him readied their rifles in reflex. But Carol already aimed her rifle at Rogelt faster than anyone present. Rogelt frowned and made a stern face as he signalled his men to lower their rifles.

Viola smiled at Rogelt and asked.

“So then, should I leave now?”

“…Alright.”

Rogelt seemed to have given up and took out his information terminal.

“There, I sent it. Go ahead and confirm it.”

Viola opened her information terminal and checked her bank account, she then lightly shook her head.

“That’s not enough.”

“What!? Are you kidding me!? Shouldn’t that be enough!?”

“That’s true if it’s just to pay for that information. But that’s not enough to stop me from selling that information to Haurias. And also, since you even made some extra work for Carol here, I’ll need to pay for her extra wage too. It’s your fault, so you have to pay for that too. So with all included, let’s see, you’ll need to pay me 50% more than what you just transferred.”

In contrast to Rogelt who looked pretty angry, Viola was smiling as if she just confirmed her victory.

“That’s your fault for doing something that you shouldn’t have back there. Or is it that you want me to demand more money?”

Rogelt clicked his tongue and sent the demanded amount of money.

“Yup, I’ve received it. Don’t worry, as an information broker, I won’t sell it to other places. I can promise you that.”

“…Humph, I bet that you made the same offers to the other people too. You won’t live for long, you know.”

“I’m already used to hearing that from other people, but for some reason, they always die first. So you better be careful, okay?”

Viola only left that threat and smiled wickedly before she left that place with Carol.

Rogelt immediately yelled at his men as if he was venting his anger.

“Get moving!! Now!”

While he saw his men flusteredly scurrying to get on with their jobs, he promised himself to vent his anger on Haurias first before venting it on Viola.

__*__*__*__

Akira finally finished choosing modification parts for his rifle with some help from Sara and Elena. Akira, who took a long time deciding which one to choose, was able to finish choosing relatively fast with the help from Elena and Sara. He even finished installing the modifications there. Now that his new rifle was modified to the point that he had to use special types of bullets, plus the modification parts too, he had to pay 60 million Aurum in total. Although he ended up spending a little more money than his original budget, he was satisfied with the result.

Akira packed everything he bought into his vehicle and thanked Shizuka, Elena and Sara who saw him off, especially to Shizuka.

“Thank you very much for everything.”

Shizuka noticed that Akira directed his thanks mostly at her, she then smiled and said.

“I’m a merchant after all. It’s my job to serve customers. If you want to thank someone, you should thank Elena and Sara. They helped you although they’re not obliged to do that.”

“That’s true. I’m sorry for taking your time.”

Akira lightly bowed to Sara and Elena. Elena noticed the same thing that Shizuka also noticed, but she didn’t show that on her face as she smiled at Akira and said.

“Don’t worry, it’s not like we have something else to do anyway, not to mention that you helped us a lot too in the past, we can at least help you that much.”

Sara also smiled as if to dispel something that was worrying her.

“Although I’m sure that they’ll work just fine, if you have any trouble with the parts that we picked for you, please tell us. I might have picked some parts based on my strength, you see. So the kickback might be rather strong, though I think it should be okay with that augmented suit.”

“I’m sure it’ll be okay, I’ll take my leave then.”

Akira hopped onto his vehicle and left the shop. Elena and Sara were lightly waving at Akira as he drove off, but the moment Akira was no longer in their views, their expression turned stern.

Elena understood that Shizuka interjected back then for their sake.

“Did we say something that we shouldn’t have back there? Shizuka, what do you think would have happened if I went and told Akira that we wanted him to stop hunting for that pickpocket no matter what?”

“I think he’ll really stop hunting for that pickpocket for real. But in exchange for that, I bet he’ll stop maintaining the close relationship that he has with both of you until now. In the worst-case scenario, he might even cut any relationship with both of you…”

The word ‘severance money’ came up in the back of Elena’s mind. That time, if she had told Akira that she wanted him to stop no matter what, Akira would have really stopped hunting for that Alna. But she would have had to pay it with the relationship that they had built up until now as the severance money. Considering that Shizuka even interjected there, Elena thought that her guess might as well be true.

Elena tried to remember what she had said while making a grim face. But she could not think that she said anything that bad.

“Did I say something that really angered him…? Sara, I’m sorry, it seems that I really soured our relationship with Akira because of something I said.”

Sara looked rather dispirited as she shook her head.

“It’s not your fault. I didn’t notice that I said something pretty bad back there as well.”

Sara lightly sighed.

“…If you hadn’t cut in, our relationship with Akira might have ended then and there. Shizuka, thank you, you really saved us.”

Sara smiled and thanked Shizuka, but this time, it was Shizuka who made a stern face.

“Though it might be too late, are you sure that was fine?”

“Of course, why did you ask?”

“As long as Akira is still hunting that pickpocket, there’s a good chance that he’ll get into a fight with that Katsuya, you know. I did tell him to think carefully about it, but it’ll only buy some time at most. Moreover, if he still decides to kill that pickpocket after he thinks about it calmly, this time, he might really hunt for that pickpocket to the end of the world.”

“Ahh, you have a point there.”

“I wonder if that was a mistake, it might have been better if I was able to come up with something else to calm him down back there…”

It seemed that Shizuka doubted her own choice there, but Sara could not think of any better solution than that. Moreover, she did not want to think that Shizuka made the wrong decision. After all, had Shizuka not cut in, she would have asked Akira to stop no matter what.

If that had happened, Sara felt that Akira would have cut any ties with them. Their relationship would turn into acquaintances who were

frequenting the same shop, and if she tried to invite him to go to the ruin again, Akira might casually refuse without even considering it, and Sara would not want that.

Elena and Sara knew that they were thinking of the same thing and told themselves not to make the same mistake ever again.

“Shizuka, do you have any idea why Akira reacted that strongly? I don’t mind even if it’s just your guess.”

“A guess, huh… Now that you mention it, there was a time when he sounded really in a bad mood. I wonder if it has something to do with that.”

Shizuka then told what had happened to Elena and Sara. Elena and Sara’s expression turned even more cloudy after they heard Shizuka’s story.

Elena lightly hung her head.

“…So, he got that annoyed even when he was able to contain the damage, huh. That explains why he got annoyed when his money got stolen. Although it isn’t worth that much. Judging from how bad his mood got back there, he must have thought that we seemed to believe more in Katsuya’s story to the point that we’re willing to pay to help him… Geez, what a disaster!”

Shizuka looked at Elena as if she was pitying Elena.

“I bet there were many occasions where people didn’t believe him at all in the past to the point that he did not expect anyone to believe him from the start. It exactly felt like that when you asked him if Katsuya’s explanation was true or not.”

Elena made a stern face and said.

“I should’ve been able to notice it if only I paid more attention to him… I guess I put too much trust in the information that I got beforehand, huh? And that happened to me, who usually handles negotiations too, what a big blunder.”

Sara lightly smiled at Elena and tried to cheer her up.

“Elena, please don’t be too hard on yourself. That also applies to me too, I believed in Katsuya’s story too much. Katsuya did not seem to lie and he sounded pretty desperate too after all. So it’s not strange that we didn’t even doubt his story… wait?”

“What’s wrong?”

“No, it’s just that, now that I think about it, it’s weird that we didn’t even question it although it’s not like Katsuya was directly involved and it’s basically second-hand information…”

“…Now that you mention it, that’s true.”

Elena and Sara suddenly noticed that strangeness. Shizuka tilted her head and looked at them, equally confused.

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Alpha was observing Akira who was driving the vehicle. Although he obtained his new equipment, he looked rather down. There was also a trace of anger that accompanied it.

Akira noticed Alpha was looking at him, but he did not react at all while still looking annoyed. But of course, he could not ignore her gaze forever.

“…Is there anything you want to say to me or something?”

“You now have your new augmented suit and you have modified your rifle to the point that it’s a completely different rifle. I want to spend some time analyzing both the new augmented suit and rifle so that I will be able to have full control over both of them. We’ll only go back to our Hunter job after that, so we’re not going to the wasteland anytime soon.”

“… Alright… Is that all?”

Akira seemed to be doubtful, but Alpha smiled like usual and said.

“If you really want to know, I actually also agree with Elena and Sara. It’s better if you stop hunting that pickpocket out of stubbornness. Although, my reasoning is different compared to them.”

“What do you mean?”

“Unlike Elena and Sara, I don’t care if that pickpocket dies. What I’m worried about is the trouble it would cause you later after you kill that pickpocket. If you really want to kill her that much, it might be a good idea to get a long-range anti-personnel sniper rifle and snipe that pickpocket from far away. It isn’t worth the trouble antagonizing Drankam just to kill that one pickpocket. In that regard, I agree with Elena and Sara.”

Akira frowned and asked sceptically.

“…Then why didn’t you recommend me to buy that rifle?”

“Do you think an anti-personnel rifle has any use in the old-world ruin?”

Akira could not say anything back. Alpha made a serious face and continued.

“The only reason I’m giving you my support is so that you’ll complete my request. Of course, if you ask me, I might help you with other things too, but things like this are normally outside my support. So don’t forget about that.”

Akira did not say anything back for a while, but he suddenly sighed and lowered his shoulders. He did think of killing Alna and fighting Katsuya and his group, but he assumed that he would have Alpha’s support when he considered that. It was true that Alpha was not obliged to go that far to help him, so him thinking that it was given for Alpha to help him was nothing more than him being too naive. Akira thought so as he mocked himself.

“You’re right, I was too naive.”

He might have gotten a little bit too stubborn without him realizing it. Akira thought so as he took a deep breath and let it go. It might be just a self-

suggestion, but he did feel lighter after he did that.

Alpha's expression returned back to its usual gentle smile.

"I don't mind if you want to take advantage of my support, but do remember that I won't help you if you're going to do something that would put your own life at risk. If there's no danger in it, I won't stop you. If you want a sniper rifle, let's buy one next time, a long barrel one with super long-range."

"Well, I'll think about it again once I earn more money. There's no need to rush, I'll think about it carefully."

"Indeed, you better do so."

Alpha smiled at Akira as if to look over him and thought.

The reason why Alpha urged Akira to get away when Elena and Sara called him right when he was quarrelling with Katsuya, was simply because she thought that it would cause a crack in their relationship. But after analyzing the result of doing that, Alpha thought that she should have let Akira stay.

If it was not for Shizuka, Akira would have seriously decided to stop aiming for Alna and risk a fight with Katsuya and his group, while at the same time, his relationship with Elena and Sara would have significantly soured. That way, Akira would have been less likely to do something that might cause more trouble. As Alpha thought so, it was not an exaggeration to say that she had made a wrong decision there.

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The boss of Ezont Family, Rogelt, was sitting in the guest room inside his mansion. He had his men standing guard behind him. He was directing a rather stern look at the person in front of him.

"You refuse, you say?"

Sheryl was lightly trembling, but her expression was filled with determination.

“Y-yes, I can’t accept that offer.”

“Do you really understand the situation that you’re in right now?”

Rogelt glared at Sheryl. Sheryl shivered, her expression stiffened. She was there alone, without any bodyguard. If Rogelt wished it, he could easily kill her there.

Rogelt sighed. Sheryl refused his offer although she understood well the content of the offer. She did not have the ability to make sure that her men would take revenge if she got killed, and it did not seem she had any chance to even make a bluff. She did not seem careless, nor mocked Rogelt and his men, it was also true that she was trembling. Rogelt just could not understand why she refused the offer.

“Think again, I have my reputation to uphold. If a small weak gang like you opposes us, it’ll hurt our reputation. Or is that you already have a deal with the Haurias?”

“N-No, I don’t.”

“Then, is there anything that you don’t like? Don’t worry, I have no plans to take over your gang or anything like that. I’m just offering you to work under my gang. And since that would mean I’ll be your boss and you’ll work for me, you’ll properly get paid, and of course, I expect that you would obey my orders. Though I might give you some orders just out of spite from time to time, considering the profit that you can get from working under me, I think you’ll get more than you lose, you know? You’ll be able to reopen your relic shop and you can use that to gather money. Your men will also feel much safer since that attack. It’s nothing but good things. If I was in your position, I would have definitely accepted it.”

Although Rogelt looked calm on the surface, he was actually pretty surprised as he kept thinking at the back of his mind.

[…Why did she refuse? There should be no reason to refuse it considering her situation, position and power. She knows well that she will only be killed if she refused, but even so, she still refused. Did we kill someone

close to her in the past or something…? No, it doesn’t seem that she has any grudge against us.]

Rogelt lightly raised his hand. His men immediately aimed their rifles at Sheryl. Sheryl trembled even more and her expression was filled with terror.

Rogelt said with such pressure as if he was telling Sheryl that it was her last chance.

“Think again.”

Sheryl did not say anything while still shivering.

After a short silence, Rogelt clicked his tongue and signalled his men to lower their rifles.

[She still won’t say yes in that situation, what the heck is wrong with her? I just can’t understand.]

Now that she was no longer in immediate danger, Sheryl started breathing again albeit roughly. Rogelt exasperatedly looked at her and said.

“Your courage is commendable. If there’s anything you don’t like in my offer, go ahead and tell me. I might consider it in respect of your bravery.”

But Sheryl still would not say anything. Rogelt clicked his tongue and told his men.

“Take her away. Lock her up until she changes her mind.”

Two of his men grabbed Sheryl by her arm and dragged her out, Sheryl did not even fight back at all.

Rogelt hung his head low. He thought that it would be a simple negotiation, but that did not seem to be the case and he did not know the reason why. He did not understand why Sheryl reacted so differently than what he expected, and that caused him to feel anxious and irritated. He started to think that the

thing he had ignored until now thinking that it was unlikely, might actually be the reason why.

The person who brought that plan to him was Viola. He started to worry if this was also because of something that horrendous woman had planned. Now that he thought about it, he could not just let it off his mind.

"…I guess I'll try to check it out."

Rogelt then went to the other person that his men had locked in the base before Sheryl.

In order to fix Akira's mood, Viola told Sheryl about that offer from Ezont Family. Normally, for a weak gang without a connection like Sheryl's gang, it was a good enough offer.

After that, Rogelt's men who Viola called in, guided Sheryl to Ezont Family's base. Rogelt then told Sheryl the details of the deal in the guest room. Although Sheryl only heard that if she accepted that deal then her gang would work under Rogelt's gang for the first time there, that in itself was not a bad offer. If that was all, Sheryl would have happily accepted that offer.

The real problem was the reason why Rogelt was trying to take in Sheryl's gang. It was simply because he wanted to be able to use Akira via Sheryl. Sheryl, who noticed that, had no other choice but to refuse that offer.

From the outsider's point of view, it might look like Sheryl was able to skillfully get Akira to be interested in her and use it to manipulate him. She might already have Akira in her palms to the point that he would support her so that she could maintain her position as the gang's boss, buy her an old-world dress, guard her relic shop, and even give all the money that he got from selling the robbers to her. Others might have thought that it should be easy for Sheryl to control Akira.

But that was completely their misunderstanding. Sheryl did not have that power, but she could not say that to Rogelt, while at the same time, she could not conform to that misunderstanding either. If Sheryl accepted that

offer from Rogelt and asked Akira to obey Ezont Family, Akira might as well cut all his ties with her. She was sure about it.

While on the other hand, even if Sheryl could get away with some lies there as if she was selling Akira to Ezont Family, that would definitely come to light, and when that happened, Akira might abandon her without giving her the chance to explain herself that it was only a lie. Although it might be just her being a little too paranoid since nothing good had happened to her lately, she was sure that Akira would do that.

The reason why she thought so was because she relied on Akira for her mental support. For her, whether she was killed by Rogelt there or abandoned later by Akira, both were equally bad.

Because of that, Sheryl was locked inside one of the rooms in that mansion. The room at least had facilities for welcoming guests. Her information terminal was taken away from her and she was alone inside that room. Although no one was keeping watch in that room, that room had no windows and the only door was also locked. She had no means to escape that room.

Sheryl anxiously mumbled.

“…What should I do?”

She did think of the possibility that Akira would come to rescue her. But her logical side that properly understood her current situation denied that possibility.

She could not contact Akira and Akira did not know where she was. In the first place, it was rather doubtful if Akira would antagonize the whole Ezont Family just in order to save her. Sheryl’s logical side told her so as if it was not her problem, the possibility for Akira to come to save her was unrealistically small.

Sheryl smiled bitterly and started sobbing.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 158, Ignition

Index

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Akira was relaxing in his own home. He left his augmented suit on a shelf in an empty room.

Just like with the previous augmented suit, Alpha was working on the control device of Akira's new augmented suit.

"Alpha, how long will it take until my augmented suit is ready?"

"It'll be done sometime around tomorrow night. We'll head to the wasteland again after that."

"Hmmm, that's pretty long."

"Unlike your previous augmented suit, this is a high-quality augmented suit after all. Moreover, it's not like I'm just simply hijacking the control device. I'm basically rewriting the software from the bottom-up to be able to pull out its full power, so putting that in consideration, finishing it tomorrow night is pretty fast, you know."

"Is that so? That's pretty amazing then."

Alpha was telling the truth, but Akira barely showed any reaction to it at all. So Alpha pouted and said.

“It’s understandable since it’s out of your area of expertise, but I really wish that you would show more interest in it.”

“Even if you told me so… Just wait patiently until I have enough knowledge to be honestly amazed by something like that.”

Forget difficult things like that, Akira only had barely enough common knowledge according to the current standard. Not to mention, he would need all kinds of complex information that normal people would not know in order to be honestly amazed by what Alpha just said.

“Seems like it would take quite a long time until you reach that point, huh.”

“Yup.”

It seemed that it was not an easy thing to get Akira interested in that kind of information. Alpha thought so from how he replied apathetically.

A call suddenly reached Akira’s information terminal. When he checked the caller, it was from Viola.

“It’s Akira, what is it?”

“…It’s about Sheryl, is this a good time?”

Viola’s voice was rather rough. There was a hint of fear and it was obvious that she could not keep her calm. Akira also noticed that and frowned, but it was out of suspicion.

“What? If it’s about Sheryl’s gang, go talk with her. Don’t try to jump over her by trying to ask for permission straight from me.”

“That’s not it. As in matter of fact, this problem is because I didn’t inform you first. So I want to give you a short explanation first here.”

“Alright alright, so, what is it?”

Akira got even more suspicious. Viola then carefully started her explanation.

“…Sheryl is being held in Ezont Family’s base. At this rate, she might even get killed.”

Akira’s face slightly turned stern.

Viola then continued her explanation which sounded more like her making excuses. She started from when she introduced Sheryl to Ezont Family which she did originally as an apology to Akira. But then, for some reason, Sheryl refused that offer which offended Ezont Family. She then said that it was something that she did not expect and that it was not her fault. She nervously gave her explanation as if she was making excuses for what she did.

“…So basically that’s what happened, I really didn’t have any wish to put your lover in danger. I hope you can understand that.”

Akira replied rather indifferently.

“I understand the situation.”

Viola sounded rather relieved as she said.

“I see. I only called you to make sure that we don’t have any misunderstanding between us, so I’m really glad that you understand.”

“Is that all?”

Viola then continued while sounding rather nervous.

“Just one more. About that pickpocket, it seems that Alna is also in Ezont Family’s base. But I don’t know if she’s also being held there or if the Ezont Family is sheltering her.”

Akira’s voice immediately changed, he sounded slightly annoyed.

“So?”

“…You might already know that Shijima and I tried to capture or kill Alna, but unfortunately, Drankam got in our way. If Alna is still somewhere in the slum city, we can try again, but it would be too much of a trouble if she’s under Ezont Family’s protection. That’s why, I know that you didn’t ask us anything, but in case you were expecting us to be able to capture Alna… I’m sorry that we can’t satisfy your expectations. I hope you can understand.”

Viola sounded slightly scared although she also sounded rather relaxed at the same time.

“I did say it before, I didn’t you ask you to do anything.”

“Is that so? Well, you have a point there… Although it might sound strange for me to say this, but it might be a good idea for you to give up on killing that Alna, you know.”

Akira’s mood clearly worsened.

“…What do you mean by that?”

“There’s no need to be that angry. It’s simply a matter of too much trouble, you see. It isn’t worth getting into trouble with Ezont Family just in order to kill one pickpocket. That’s all there’s to it, so don’t misunderstand me here. It’s not like I’m saying that you can’t win against Ezont Family, it’s simply a matter of whether it’s worth the trouble or not. Moreover, from the information that I gathered, it seems that Katsuya Hunter is making a deal with a Drankam officer to make Alna a Drankam member. Of course, that officer is opposing his request, but it’s only a matter of time before she gets overwhelmed. It’s a whole different thing between killing a mere pickpocket and killing a Drankam member. Not to mention, Drankam seems to be in a rather good relationship with the Kugamayama City Management. So in the worst-case scenario, you might get the whole city against you. No matter how strong you are, it’s stupid to get into a fight against Drankam. I’m sure you know at least that much too, right?”

In the middle of her explanation, Viola’s tone slowly turned to normal. But once she remembered her position, after a short pause, she once again

sounded rather scared as she said.

“That’s all, later then.”

“Wait!”

Akira still sounded in a bad mood. Viola replied, sounding scared.

“W-what is it?”

“Tell me where’s this Ezont Family’s base.”

“What are you planning to do with it if I tell you…? No, it’s nothing. I’ll send the location to your information terminal after this. Later then.”

Viola flusteredly closed the call. It seemed that she was scared since continuing the call might only turn the situation worse.

Akira put down his information terminal. He hung his head low, sighed, and raised his head again. His bad mood seemed to have vanished. In its place, he had a resolute expression.

Akira swung his legs toward the room where he kept his augmented suit. Alpha understood what he was about to do, she frowned and said to Akira.

“Akira, as I explained to you, the augmented suit is not ready yet.”

“It’s not like it’s useless just because I can’t receive your support, right? Well, if it’s useless, I can just use another armour though. I’m glad we modified the AAH and A2D assault rifles so that I can use them without an augmented suit. As for the CWH anti-material rifle and DVTS minigun, I’ll only use them when they’re ported on my vehicle.”

Alpha understood that Akira was being serious. There was a time when Akira went to Shijima’s base with only his AAH assault rifle and no augmented suit. Considering his opponent and his equipment at that time, it might be equally as reckless as what he was going to do this time. So it was rather impossible to stop Akira who had made his decision using his equipment as an excuse. So Alpha decided to try a different method.

“Are you going to save Sheryl or to kill that pickpocket?”

“Both if it’s possible. You’ll know whether I can do it while I’m at it.”

Akira himself could not tell if he would only save Sheryl while aiming for Alna or that he would kill Alna while he’s saving Sheryl. If it was only one of those, he might not have decided to move out. But with both of those things pointing at the same location, it was enough of a reason for him to move out.

“I believe Shizuka told you to think about it one more time about killing that pickpocket though.”

“She did, but it seems that I don’t have the leeway to take my time any longer.”

Akira was running out of time, if Drankam gave protection to Alna, he would have to prepare to fight Drankam in order to kill her. But right now, he just needed to prepare to fight Ezont Family in order to kill her. As a matter of fact, he might be already too late, but it did not change the fact that the sooner he made his move, the better it was. And that would mean to make his move now.

Alpha made a serious face and said to Akira.

“Like I said before, I have no obligation to provide you support for this, you know?”

Akira stopped and stared back at Alpha. Normally, he would casually say that she did not have to help him in that case, and Alpha was actually expecting him to say that and was planning to use that to convince him.

But Akira lightly smiled and said to Alpha.

“You did tell me to spoil myself with your support, right? So help me.”

Alpha looked obviously surprised. She then smiled bitterly, a little amused too at the same time.

“Geez, alright.”

“Thanks!”

“I wonder if it was a mistake telling you that.”

“It’s really something you or I should not say lightly.”

“I completely agree with you.”

Akira and Alpha smiled at each other, they then immediately prepared themselves to move out.

Once Akira finished his preparation, he hopped onto his vehicle. Alpha was already sitting on the driver assistant’s seat. She then teased Akira.

“But still, it seems that you are starting to learn how to use me, huh?”

Akira replied with a joke.

“That’s well, that’s all thanks to all of your education.”

“Oh my, are you saying that it’s my fault? I might have taught you things that I shouldn’t have.”

Alpha’s expression turned to her usual smile as she continued.

“Viola just sent you the location of Ezont Family’s base. Now that we know where it is, shall we go?”

“Roger that!”

Akira immediately moved out once he finished all of his preparation.

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Viola was smiling in a certain room. It was right after she sent the location of Ezont Family’s base to Akira.

“…That should do it. I delayed some time before sending the information to make him think that I didn’t have it ready beforehand, but did I delay too much?”

Viola’s expression did not show the fear that she had when she was talking with Akira. All of that was nothing more than her acting. She was just acting scared like how she was usually acting calm. She looked completely fine like usual as she said.

“I guess it’s time to give a call to the other person too… Now then, I wonder what will happen next.”

Viola smiled amusedly imagining what was going to happen.

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Ezont Family’s base was surrounded by fences. The scene behind that fence completely looked out of place in the slum city, it looked so luxurious with a big courtyard. It was sitting in the boundary between the slum city and the wasteland.

The people who lived outside that fence would look inside the fence and be amazed by the power of the Ezont Family. Eventually, they would join the gang in order to get a share of that power.

Right when the sun was about to set. The entrance guard noticed a vehicle heading in their direction. They immediately aimed their guns at that incoming vehicle. But that vehicle stopped not too far away from the entrance.

The guards quickly surrounded the vehicle. One of the guards saw that it was only a young boy driving that car, he then mockingly said to Akira.

“Brat, what are you playing here? It’s not a place for a brat like you to loiter around. Go away!”

“I heard that Sheryl is here, so I’m here to pick her up.”

“Sheryl?”

Since that guard was only a lackey in the gang, he did not know the details of what was going on inside the gang, but even so, he felt that he heard that name before when his boss summoned that Sheryl. So he made a call to the people inside the base.

“You, what is your name?”

“It’s Akira.”

That man was talking with his superior through his information terminal while glancing at Akira from time to time.

“…Eh, ah, yes. He said that it’s his name, and he said that he’s here to pick up Sheryl… No, even if you say so, he looks like just a common brat from my point of view… Well, it’s true that he has better equipment than a common slum brat, it won’t be strange if he calls himself a Hunter with his equipment… No, he doesn’t look that strong.”

That man lowered his information terminal and turned to Akira.

“You, are you really Akira?”

“I don’t know who’s this real Akira that you’re expecting, but my name is Akira.”

“I’m talking about that Akira, a Hunter who is protecting Sheryl’s gang. Is that you?”

“That would be me.”

That man compared the Akira from the picture that he received from his co-worker and the person in front of him. The person in front of him did look like the one in the picture, but he did not seem like a strong Hunter that his superior told him about. He then frowned and made another call.

“…Yes, it’s the brat from the picture… I understand.”

That man then closed the call, looked at the other guards, and gave them a signal to lower their guard and return back to their posts.

“Just wait there!”

Akira was still sitting in the driver’s seat as he nodded. Alpha, who saw that Akira just obediently nodded, lightly smiled.

“And here I thought that you would just break your way through.”

“If we can solve this without a fight, it would be way easier, right?”

“Of course. Let’s just hope that we can solve the other matter as easily too.”

“That would depend on the reason why these guys are protecting that pickpocket. If these guys are also a victim to that pickpocket and are planning to publicly execute her to make an example out of her, then I’ll just leave her be.”

Alpha raised her eyebrows in surprise.

“Oh, you’re okay with that, Akira?”

“It’s not like I need to be the one who kills that pickpocket. As long as she would end up dead, I don’t really care about the rest.”

“Well, it would be way easier in that case then.”

“Yeah.”

If that was enough for Akira, Alpha had no complaints about it at all. If Alna got killed somewhere that had nothing to do with Akira, it would not cause any trouble for him afterwards. As Alpha was thinking of a way to accomplish that, her plan was immediately crushed.

Another car was heading in their direction, the guards there immediately noticed that vehicle. It was a fully armoured vehicle with no windows. It was equipped with multiple cameras to let the people inside it see the situation outside the vehicle. It was even equipped with a machine gun on top of it.

That vehicle stopped not too far away from the entrance, the side door of that vehicle opened and an armed young boy stepped out. It was Katsuya.

Katsuya's aura intimidated the guards. One of the guards there winced back from that aura as he tried to hide it by yelling at Katsuya.

"What the heck's with you?! Do you even know where you are right now!? Do you want to die?!"

Katsuya glared angrily at those guards. Although they were already aiming their guns at him, Katsuya did not show any fear at all.

"I know you guys are the people who kidnapped Alna. I'm here to get her back!"

"What are you even talking about? Who is this stupid guy?!"

That guard noticed the Drankam stamp on Katsuya's vehicle and winced.

"You, you're a Drankam Hunter, huh?"

"I am. I'm Katsuya from Drankam. I don't know why you kidnapped Alna, but if you will obediently return her back now, I'll still forgive you. If you don't…"

Ezont Family was indeed a strong gang, but it would still give them a lot of trouble if they killed a Drankam Hunter. The guards there slowly surrounded Katsuya. The guard who was responsible for communication flusteredly called his superior.

"…Yes! It's an emergency… A Hunter from Drankam by the name of Katsuya is here…"

Katsuya, who saw those guards scared, made an annoyed face. He thought that if having him there would make them that scared, they should not have kidnapped Alna in the first place.

"…Eh, ah, yes, it's indeed the guy from the picture. I think he's the real Katsuya. Unlike Akira, he looks well-armed for just a brat and his

equipment are better than those common Hunters…”

Katsuya finally noticed Akira sitting in his vehicle with his hand on his chin. He immediately connected Alna who was being held in Ezont Family’s base to Akira who was there, his expression immediately filled with anger and glared at Akira.

“…I see what’s going on here.”

Katsuya thought that Akira asked the Ezont Family to kidnap Alna.

Akira actually already noticed Katsuya for quite some time now. He looked obviously annoyed as he sighed and said.

“Why is that guy here?”

Alpha seemed obviously disappointed, it seemed to be impossible to avoid a fight now.

“I bet he’s here to save that pickpocket.”

“Why he would even know that pickpocket is he-“

Akira was suspecting that Katsuya also received that information from Viola, but since he did not have any proof and he had no trust in his own intuition, he decided to just forget about it and consider other possibilities.

“…Well, it might be from Drankam’s information network. According to Elena-san, he’s treated as one of the officers in the gang after all. So it might be possible for him to get that information from there.”

“So, he’s glaring at you though, what are you going to do?”

“Let’s see…”

Akira stepped off his vehicle and said to the guard who was still talking to his superior.

“Hey!”

“What?! Don’t bother me! Just shut up and wait!”

Akira then yelled to let the person, to whom that guard was reporting, hear him.

“If that Alna is still there and alive, give her to me and I’ll kill her, either that or kill her yourself now.”

“Hah!? What are you-“

That man was confused by what Akira just said. But Katsuya immediately interjected.

“If you give Alna to him, I’ll never forgive you!!”

That man looked even more confused as he looked at Akira and Katsuya. One of them told him to kill Alna while the other was there to save Alna. But both of them were telling him to hand over Alna to them. The weak-looking one looked at that man with a slightly stern face, while the strong-looking one glared at him with an angry face as both of them were demanding him to hand over Alna.

That man who was just a lackey had no privilege to make that decision, but he was obviously leaning to one of them while he was talking to his superior.

Akira noticed that and mumbled.

“…Well, this doesn’t surprise me at all.”

At this point, Akira already fully abandoned the possibility of peacefully resolving the current matter. Just like everything that happened to him until now, it was just like always, this time too, it did not go as he wanted. He thought that they would only let Katsuya in and they would hand over Alna to Katsuya.

Up until now, Akira looked at himself as an outsider in this conflict between Sheryl and Ezont Family. That was why he peacefully came and

asked the entrance guard, and if Sheryl was returned to him without any trouble after that, he would not look at the Ezont Family as an enemy.

But that was no longer the case now. They were hindering him from killing Alna. Now that Akira looked at them as such, he completely turned hostile toward Ezont Family. Of course, from this point onward, he would react to them just like how he reacted to his enemies.

Akira walked past the guard and stood in front of the locked gate. Alpha sighed and mumbled.

“It still turned to this in the end, huh?”

“I’ve backed off twice from getting into conflict with him. And just like people say, if you’ve done it twice, you can do it thrice. At this rate, I feel like I’ll always avoid getting into a fight with him. That’s why I won’t do that this time, just like they say, third time’s the charm.”

Unlike before, this time Akira was properly armed. Or at least, it no longer gave him a reason to back off again this time. There was a time limit too, he had to kill Alna before a stronger organization took her in. Akira no longer had any reason to withdraw.

“Though just like I told you before, that augmented suit is not ready, so I won’t be able to give my full support. So don’t expect to get my usual support, okay? Not to mention, you’re not used to that augmented suit yet. So be careful, okay?”

“Okay!”

Alpha then smiled gently at Akira.

“Well then, you can go ahead. Good hunting!”

“Roger that!”

Akira’s augmented suit was already functional. He used his full force to deliver a powerful kick to the strong-looking gate. The 350 million Aurum augmented suit showed its power and blew away the gate with a loud bang.

As the other people were still dumbfounded by what just happened, Alpha controlled Akira's vehicle and ran it straight to him as if to mow him down. Akira lightly jumped to evade that and landed on his vehicle.

He then quickly reached for the guns fixed on his vehicle, removed them, and equipped them himself.

"Alpha, do you know where's Sheryl and that pickpocket?"

"Unfortunately, I only know that they're not outside the mansion. Viola did send the blueprint of the interior of the mansion, but it doesn't say where Sheryl and that pickpocket are held."

"I guess I have no other choice but to raid the base and ask them, huh?"

"I'll try to look for them too and tell you if I find them."

"I'll be counting on you."

As Akira's vehicle went straight into the mansion through the courtyard, people inside the base started shooting at him. Of course, Akira shot back with the powerful rifles that he just took off from his vehicle. The night scene immediately filled with flashing muzzles.

After Akira kicked the door open and drove in, Katsuya finally returned back to himself and immediately started shooting at Akira. But Akira had already disappeared and it was not like he was properly aiming at Akira, so none of his shots hit Akira.

"Dammit!!"

Katsuya seemed obviously vexed. The guards around him immediately aimed their rifles at Katsuya. Although he was only aiming at Akira, it did not change the fact that he released shots into Ezont Family's base. It was obviously an act of hostility. Even if he was a Hunter from Drankam, they could not just let that go.

"You brat!! Doing something like that!!"

The guards shot at Katsuya aiming to kill him. Katsuya reacted to evade them while shooting back at those guards. Katsuya showed his skill in that fight. The guards were riddled with bullets as they fell down one by one to the ground, some of them were immediately killed while some of them were severely wounded after that exchange.

When it ended, Katsuya was the only one still standing. He looked at all the people he shot down scattered in front of him, as the one who did that, he then said to them as if to make an excuse.

“It’s your fault for kidnapping Alna, okay!!”

Katsuya made a stern face as he hopped back to his vehicle and chased after Akira.

One guard was still alive albeit badly wounded and was drowning in his own blood. He used the last life force that he had left to reach for his information terminal to send a notification in order to alert everyone that they were under attack before he let out his last breath.

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After questioning Alna and judging from how she answered his questions while shaking in fear, Rogelt then thought.

[She’s not lying, or at least, she thinks she’s telling the truth. It doesn’t look like she had this planned either. It’s purely out of luck that Katsuya came to save her. If I think that Katsuya only saved her to show off to the other girls that were with him, it all makes sense. And the reason why he did not give up Alna when he was offered 20 million Aurum might be because he doesn’t want people to hate him thinking that he’s someone who would exchange a girl for money, either that or it’s because he had gone too far and had no other choice but to keep it up. It’s not too strange for a Hunter, who is earning well, to think of 20 million Aurum as a small amount of money. Not to mention, the info said he’s a womanizer. It all makes sense… As for the chance of him working together with Viola behind the scene… That’s unlikely.]

Rogelt thought that the information about Katsuya and Alna were nothing more than fake information made up by Viola, but he quickly dismissed it. And when he thought that the information Viola spread might incite it, considering the reason why Akira was hunting for Alna, he quickly dismissed that too. It was because he had enough reason to think that it was all nothing more than pure coincidence. But even so, the reason why he questioned if that was really a coincidence was simply because he knew of Viola's bad reputation.

"I'll ask you one more time. You're close to that Katsuya and he promised to save you if anything happens to you, right?"

Alna was still shaking, but she replied back firmly.

"That's right!! He'll definitely save me!!"

"But you're in this situation now. Doesn't that mean that he wasn't able to save you?"

"…That is… It's my fault, he told me not to walk around outside since it's dangerous but I disregarded that…"

When Alna was hiding in one of the camping trailers owned by Drankam, a Hunter came and kicked her out since he was about to use that vehicle. As she was thinking about what to do inside Drankam's base, a guard found her and kicked her out since she was an outsider. When she was loitering around outside Drankam's base, she heard that Katsuya went to the slum city to look for Akira. She was so worried and ended up going to the slum city too. And that was where she was kidnapped by Rogelt's men.

Alna thought that it was nothing more than a series of bad luck, in reality, it was all orchestrated by Viola. The Hunter who kicked her out of the vehicle she was hiding in, and the guard who found her later, all of them were there only because of the information that Viola spread. They did not even know that they were being used by Viola. Similarly, the reason why she heard about Katsuya going to the slum city was because she overheard some people talking about that and those people only did so because they were

told to do so after they received some money from someone they did not know.

Rogelt looked at that depressed Alna and felt fear welling up from inside him. Fear towards Viola. Alna thought that she was kidnapped because someone whom she stole from in the past still had some grudges against her. That was also what Rogelt said to Alna. Rogelt did not notice that it was all according to Viola's plan.

Rogelt looked at Alna who was about to break down and sneered at her.

"Well, it doesn't really matter. If Katsuya really holds you that dearly, then it's good news to us too. I'll have him properly pay for all the troubles that you caused us. And if he refuses, we can just kill you too. I'm expecting that you'll be a good hostage, okay?"

Rogelt looked at Alna's face and guessed how good she was as a hostage. He decided that it was worth making her a hostage as he smiled and left the room with his men.

"…Katsuya… Save me…"

Alna said so with a pained face now that she was left alone in that room.

The moment Rogelt stepped outside the room, an emergency alarm reached his terminal. He pulled his information terminal out and asked with a stern face.

"It's me, what is it?"

His men replied with a panicked voice.

"Boss!! It's an attack!!"

"Who is it from? Don't tell me it's the Haurias!?"

Rogelt thought so judging from how panicked his men were, but he was surprised when he heard the reply.

“What!?”

The attackers were Akira and Katsuya. Rogelt did not expect that at all. He was even more surprised when he checked the record of their exchange.

[What’s the meaning of this!? Why do they know about Alna and Sheryl!? I understand it’s only a matter of time before they knew it, but this is just too fast!! They found out about it on the same day!? And they even raided the base without giving us a chance to negotiate! It’s just too strange.]

Rogelt immediately noticed why it happened and made a grim face.

[…Viola! Don’t tell me that she brought that plan to us not so that we can manipulate them but to make them attack us?! Did she also say something to them that made them not even try to talk it out first? But even if that’s true, why would they attack us? There’s no way they can win with the only two of th-]

Rogelt froze. After that, he immediately shouted at his men.

“Kill both of them!! There’s no need to give them a chance to surrender! Call back everyone outside the base to fight them!! Use all the powered suits inside the hangar too!”

Rogelt’s men, who did not expect that at all, confusedly replied.

“Wait for a sec, isn’t that too much just to fight two young Hunters. Not to mention, we stocked those powered suits to fight Haurias in the first place…”

But Rogelt yelled back to that guy who was questioning his order.

“If they’re your common young Hunters, there’s no way they would raid our base just with the two of them, you know!! If my guess is correct, that Viola might have something to do with Haurias!! They might even come here using this chaos!! Go! Make sure that the powered suits are ready before I’m there!”

“O-okay!”

His men flusteredly ended the call. Rogelt still had an extremely grim expression on his face as he looked around his officers and his men and told them.

“I’ll go to the hangar. All of you take your squad to join the fight outside. Hire those Hunters who would help us too. It’s a full-blown war. In case if Haurias don’t come after we finish taking care of those two, we’ll go and attack Haurias base.”

“Roger that. Should we kill Sheryl and Alna too?”

Rogelt was able to regain some of his calm after he looked at his men who were calm in that situation. After giving it a short thought, he then said.

“…No, try using them as hostages. Both of them attacked us without even giving us a chance to talk it out, they might not be here in order to save them in the first place, but at least give it a try.”

Rogelt quickly ran towards the hangar after he said that while his men immediately went to move as they were ordered to.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 159, What A Hunter Is Allowed And Not Allowed To Do

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Akira was holding down the trigger of his DVTS minigun while still standing on top of his vehicle. Although he was aiming at the enemies in front of him, the shaking from the vehicle prevented him from hitting his shots. He tried to sweep horizontally with his DVTS minigun, but due to the shaking, his stray bullets even landed on the third floor of the mansion.

“This kickback is no joke! Alpha, can you do something about this?!”

“Nope. As I said, I haven’t finished taking control of the augmented suit so I can’t help you fix your aim or anything else that includes controlling your augmented suit. So use your own power to try to stabilize it. Or do you still want me to try?”

Akira tried his best to hold his DVTS minigun while thinking that it was rather too reckless of him to go to a real fight with his new equipment without getting used to them first. It was difficult to stand firm on top of the shaking vehicle. If Alpha was not controlling his vehicle, he would have

been thrown off the vehicle by now. Thanks to that, he was only able to randomly scatter bullets to the enemies in front of him.

But that was enough to suppress his enemies down. The modified DVTS minigun could easily turn a monster into minced meat in a matter of milliseconds. If it hit a human without strong armour, it would normally be a death sentence. As more and more of his enemies chose to hide behind covers, less and less of them had the leeway to shoot at Akira.

“Akira, hold on tight!!”

Akira flusteredly held on to his vehicle. Almost at the same time, Alpha made a 90 degrees turn. When she did that, countless bullets came from behind and drew a line on the ground as it tried to catch up with Akira, it came from the machine gun on top of Katsuya’s vehicle.

“Shoot back now!! At this rate, he’ll one-sidedly keep shooting on you!”

Akira grabbed at his vehicle with one hand and used his other hand to aim his DVTS minigun at Katsuya’s vehicle.

“If it’s impossible to properly aim at him, at least keep it aimed at one point, I’ll try to help by adjusting the vehicle’s position.”

“Roger that!!”

Akira stopped trying to aim just like he was told to. He used his augmented suit to hold down his DVTS minigun aiming at one point before pulling the trigger. As the effect from the shaking of the vehicle, Akira’s aim, and the kickback that threw off his aim had been minimized, Alpha adjusted the vehicle position to aim at Katsuya.

Katsuya’s vehicle was riddled with bullets, shaving off the armour platings covering his vehicle. From Akira’s point of view, the fire sparks coming out from the bullets hitting the armour plating made it look like he was shooting fireworks as he was also listening to the bullets that went past him and landed behind him. Every time they released a barrage, a flower-like flash illuminated the dark courtyard.

Alpha focused her aim more to interrupt Katsuya's aiming rather than to destroy his vehicle. Some of the released bullets hit the machine gun on top of Katsuya's vehicle and interrupted its aiming. And even before the control device on that vehicle was able to readjust its aiming, more bullets hit that machine gun. It was in order to preserve the durability of Akira's vehicle which had less armour.

In less than 10 seconds, they already exchanged enough bullets to kill a few hundred normal people. At first, Katsuya tried to force his way relying on the armour platings of his vehicle, but when the control device of his vehicle alerted him that a certain part of his vehicle was badly damaged, he noticed that Akira was focusing his aim at one point trying to break through the armour of his vehicle. Katsuya then clicked his tongue and made a turn to escape from Akira's barrage.

Alpha used that opening to accelerate the vehicle and put more distance between them. At the same time, Akira quickly switched to his A4WM automatic grenade launcher and scattered grenades in Katsuya direction to prevent Katsuya from chasing him any further.

Akira had a stern expression plastered on his face as he said.

"That guy finally retreated, huh. But still, to think that he would raid the base from the front just to save a pickpocket, is that guy even right in the head?"

Alpha looked exasperated at Akira. She had no idea if Akira just simply did not realize what he too was doing, or if he understood what he was doing but was just ignoring it for now, or he was surprised to find someone who was as reckless as him.

"I'm sure he doesn't want to hear that from you, you know. You're basically doing the same thing as him, right?"

Akira raised his eyebrows as if he was telling Alpha that it was rude of her to say that to him.

“I came here fully willing to resolve this peacefully if they just hand over Sheryl and that pickpocket to me, you know. If it’s needed, I was even willing to negotiate. That was why I was obediently waiting when they told me to until that guy came. But after that guy came, the situation changed and negotiation seemed to be out of the question, that’s why I had no other choice but to take drastic action. So I don’t want you to lump me together with a guy who came here with a battle vehicle and acted so arrogantly the moment he came as if he was fully expecting for a fight right from the start, you know.”

There were many parts of Akira’s argument that were actually subjective to individual interpretations. But since he honestly thought that they were not the same, Alpha decided not to point it out.

“I’m glad to hear that you were actually willing to resolve this matter peacefully. Now, if only you would keep that up a little more, I would be really happy.”

“It depends on whether the other side would respect that or not. But people tend to not let me do that, so as long as that’s true, I don’t see any reason to stubbornly stick with it.”

If he only put out his argument and opinion, then let others take the decision, more than often things would not go as he wanted to. That kind of pessimistic thinking was carved in Akira’s head, that was the main reason why he stayed alone and did not get involved with any gangs when he was living in Slum City. He always thought joining a gang would give him more loss than what he could gain.

In the harsh-living condition of the slum city, living as a group rarely had more minus than the plus, of course, excluding special cases like Akira. Akira understood that if he affiliated himself with a gang, he would often get blamed and when the push came to shove, he would be the first one to be abandoned. As such, he was basically always alone. Had Alpha not delivered the shock that disrupted his usual way of thinking, he would have refused the deal that she offered to him right off the start.

Alpha understood without knowing the detail that there was a deep reasoning why Akira was like that. While at the same time, she also found that beneficial for her too.

“Well, it’s true that it’s useless to try to negotiate with someone that won’t even listen to you. I don’t think it’s a bad move to just abandon a negotiation with a low chance of success.”

“I know, right?”

Akira’s stern face relaxed for a bit, it might be because he thought someone finally agreed with him.

“We’ll break through the mansion from the entrance not too far ahead. You’ll have to leave the vehicle behind and search the inside of the mansion after that. Since you’ll be leaving your vehicle behind, there’s a good chance that you’ll lose it too, so just keep that in mind.”

Akira sighed.

“So I’ll lose my vehicle again, huh… “

“If you’re lucky, you won’t lose it.”

“Unfortunately, I’m not a lucky guy.”

Akira thought for a second if he was cursed to keep losing his vehicle or something.

Once the squad from Ezont Family finished their preparation, they immediately scrambled to the courtyard to fight the invaders. All of them were either former Hunters or were in the army before, they were not like those amateurs with rifles.

As they were passing through an atrium into the courtyard, Akira’s vehicle suddenly busted into the atrium. Akira paced his car to its full speed before he charged it into the door of the mansion. Ezont Family’s squad acted immediately and started shooting the vehicle. The vehicle was riddled with bullets in no time, but Akira was not in it.

When those people were shooting at the vehicle, Akira jumped into the atrium with his DVTS minigun ready in his hand and opened fire just like that.

Akira got some of them in his first opening barrage, but those who survived immediately spread out. Some of them set up a portable wall and used that as a cover while shooting back at Akira, some of them moved away from the group before shooting back at him, some of them lied down on the ground, or used Akira's vehicle that just broke in as a cover, or used the full power of their augmented suit to jump away. Basically, they spread out so that Akira would not be able to finish all of them in one sweep.

Akira could see the trajectory of the incoming bullets thanks to Alpha's support. He unconsciously compressed his time perception while trying to evade those incoming bullets, but since he was not used to his new augmented suit yet and the number of the incoming bullets were too many, some of those bullets hit him.

But the moment those bullets touched Akira, his coat blew those bullets away. Akira's coat was made of nanomaterial equipped with force field armour and it drew from his energy pack. It was even light enough to be used with an augmented suit, but compared to the armour plating for vehicles, it had a very bad cost-to-benefit ratio. Not to mention once the energy pack was emptied, it would turn into a common coat. It was a very expensive piece of equipment to use.

Alpha warned Akira who just got shot.

"Try evading better. Even if it's alright to get shot a few times, every time you get hit, your energy reserve will also get hit pretty badly."

Akira did his best evading and shooting back as he replied.

"I know!! But it's just that they're too many! It seems that I didn't get enough of them with the surprise barrage!"

"Make sure to finish those who are already lying on the ground, otherwise, there'll be no end to them, you know?"

Those who got hit and just fell unconscious on the ground were resurrected by their augmented suit. When the augmented suit read a disruption in its user's life signal, it would inject its user with medicine, accelerator drugs, and other battle stimulants to wake them up and allow them to temporarily continue fighting for a short time.

When Akira saw that, he could not help but frown.

"So a few bullets is not enough to neutralize them, huh!?"

Akira desperately evades the incoming bullets while shooting back at his enemies. Even with his compressed time perception, he could not stop moving. If he stopped for a second, he would be a sitting target. At the moment, he needed to keep moving around while shooting back with his DVTS minigun to keep his enemies suppressed and throw off their aims.

In the middle of that fierce battle, no one was watching Akira's vehicle that was already stopped after breaking into the atrium. That was when it suddenly started running again as it forced its way through the atrium as if it was trying to run over the Ezont's soldiers. Of course, it was Alpha controlling that vehicle.

Akira quickly shot those who were distracted by his vehicle. Moreover, he quickly ran along beside his vehicle while using it as a cover. He did not stop shooting at his enemies while running, confusing his enemies even more. Alpha gave Akira instructions to match his movement with his vehicle, thus he was able to effectively shoot down his enemies one by one.

Ezont Family's soldiers were killed one by one, some of them were run over by Akira's vehicle, some of them got shot down by Akira, some of them were blown away by Akira's kick. The fierce battle died down as more and more dead bodies kept piling up.

As the dead bodies finally outnumbered those who were still alive. Akira slowly but surely got the upper hand in that fight, but that was when another sudden change in situation happened. A reinforcement suddenly poured in from inside the mansion.

Akira started considering pulling back and assaulting the mansion from another side. If Alpha told him to do so, he was planning to do so right away. Alpha then gave Akira an order.

“Akira.”

“Temporary retreat?”

“Force your way into the mansion.”

Although Akira was surprised by that unexpected order, he had a stern face as he looked at the direction Alpha was pointing at. He then gathered his resolve and started running. Akira had to pass through several positions where he had no cover in order to follow that order, but he did not hesitate at all.

Ezont Family’s soldiers were surprised by the sudden charge that looked nothing more than just a reckless and pointless action, but they immediately aimed their rifles at Akira. Right when they were about to pull the triggers on their rifles, another barrage suddenly came from the courtyard followed by another vehicle that crashed right into the atrium. Katsuya was chasing Akira while scattering bullets from the machine gun fixed on his vehicle as he rammed his whole vehicle straight into the mansion.

Akira used that opening to slip past those soldiers. He held his DVTS minigun in one hand and randomly shot bullets at those men while running.

Of course, those men could not just ignore the battle vehicle inside the atrium, they shifted their focus from Akira and focused their firepower on Katsuya’s vehicle. Some of the reinforcements who came with rocket launchers fixed their aims at Katsuya’s vehicle and pulled the trigger.

The rockets did not have a hard time finding their target, as those rockets hit Katsuya’s vehicle that was inside the atrium. The fire from the explosions even reached outside of the mansion and the shockwave shook the whole mansion.

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Sheryl, who was also being held inside the mansion, looked very confused. She no longer looked sad anymore.

[…What's going on? It seems that there's something going on outside for a while now…]

She was able to notice the change in the situation from the room that she was locked in. She could hear the siren going off outside accompanied by the sound of people running around.

Sheryl thought of using the current chaos to escape, but she could not find any ways to do so. The only door in that room was locked and she did not have anything that she could use to force it open. Although there was something going on outside, it did not change the fact that she was not able to get out of that room on her own.

But even so, she tried her best to think of the best decision that she could take in that situation. She was trying to regain her calm so that when the opportunity presented itself, she would not miss it and would be able to react calmly.

If she kept looking down while crying, she might overlook something that she could have done, she might have unconsciously ignored some chances that she could have used. She kept telling herself that while taking deep breaths to calm herself down.

Then something happened. The door to that room suddenly opened and a few men came into the room. The man who was leading those men aimed his rifle at Sheryl and held out her information terminal that was confiscated before.

"If you don't want to die, give Akira a call."

Sheryl extended her hand and took that information terminal with a serious face.

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After Akira went through the atrium, he kept running into the deeper part of the mansion through the hallways. He loaded a new magazine into his DVTS minigun while running. He had to pay for the price of using his new augmented suit, which he was not used to yet, with a few pills of medicines.

“That was pretty dangerous. I thought I keep myself vigilant back then, but those guys were pretty strong.”

Akira inadvertently compared the strength of the people that he just fought to those robbers that he fought in Sheryl’s base excluding Zalmo, who he had especially extra trouble fighting against. But if he included his current equipment, these people were a little stronger than those robbers.

As Akira thought that it was to be expected that the guards defending such a huge base would be rather powerful, he then regretted the fact that he was unconsciously looking down at them before. But he did not regret his decision to raid the base.

“But still, didn’t that guy come to this place to save that pickpocket? So why is he chasing after me desperately?”

“He might have misunderstood that you know the location of that pickpocket and decided to kill you first.”

“What a pain in the neck!”

As Akira looked immensely annoyed, Alpha suddenly made a suggestion to him.

“If you think that it’s already way outside your calibre, you can decide to withdraw, you know. That fight just now was pretty bad after all, right?”

“Well, it’s true that it was rough, but I somehow started to get the feeling of how to use this augmented suit from that fight. As expected of an expensive augmented suit, it doesn’t seem hard to operate. That’s why I should be able to give a better fight next time. It’s rather unfortunate that I still can’t get your support, but I don’t think I’ll withdraw yet.”

Alpha understood that Akira was not trying to sound strong from the way he said it. While at the same time, rather than being happy with his ability to adapt, she thought that she needed to be careful with it. Akira was able to get used to his new augmented suit to the point that he did not worry about it at all just after a single fight. That ability to adapt was way above her expectation.

Although Alpha was worried about that kind of thing which was outside her prediction, she did not show that on the surface. She was still smiling like usual as she said.

“That’s good to hear then, let’s hurry up.”

“Did you get their locations?”

“Unfortunately, I still can’t find them. I guess we have no other choice but to check all the locations where they might be held. I’ve always been keeping my eyes on the information-gathering device for any signal that might indicate their locations, but I still got nothing until now.”

Akira seemed a little bit disappointed.

“…I’m sure I can easily find them if I interrogate one of those guys, but with how strong they are, I guess that’s out of the question, huh.”

Akira did not have the leeway to take his time interrogating one of Ezont Family’s soldiers. If he did not fight them with the intention to kill, he might get killed instead. If he did not do that, he would get overwhelmed fighting those people.

Alpha suddenly turned to Akira and said.

“Akira, I know where Sheryl is.”

“Oh, you got it? So what was that just now when you said that you can’t find her?”

“I got her location now so it doesn’t really matter, does it? I’ll guide you there. And also, she’ll be calling you soon. Just tell her what I’ll tell you.

I’ll also be the one connecting you to her, so there’s no need to use your information terminal.”

“Hm? Okay.”

Akira thought that instruction was a bit weird, but he also did not want to use one of his hands to hold his information terminal. He knew that there must be a good reason why Alpha told him to follow her instruction while talking to Sheryl, so he just ignored the questions that came up in his mind.

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Sheryl used her information terminal that was returned to her to call Akira. It was the information terminal that Akira lent her the other day. She made a call with a stern expression and it did not take that long for her call to connect. Akira’s voice could be heard coming out from her information terminal.

“Sheryl? Where are you?”

Before Sheryl could answer, the people inside that room quickly covered her mouth and took over her information terminal. The guy who took Sheryl’s information terminal then yelled a threat.

“So you’re Akira, huh? If you don’t want this girl dead, throw away your weapons.”

“Who is this?”

“Are you being serious here? I’m really going to kill this girl, you know?”

“Well, I mean, I don’t even know you, so it’s not like I can take you seriously even if you tell me so…”

From his voice, Akira sounded more like he really had no clue at all rather than just playing dumb, and it really irritated that guy.

“Are you really attacking this place without knowing who owns this place!? Don’t play dumb with me! If you’re going to play dumb again, I’ll really

kill her now! I'm not bluffing here, I'm being serious!"

Akira paused before replying.

"…Let me get this straight first. I came here after hearing from Viola that Sheryl is being held in this place after she made a blunder during a negotiation with Ezont Family, then Viola also said that at this rate Sheryl might get raped and killed to make an example out of her. So I just thought that if she's still alive, then I'll get her out, but if she's already dead, I at least can take revenge in her place. Thought it might be too late to say this, but to be honest, I'm not even sure if that information is correct. So, is that really what's going on here?"

That man frowned the moment he heard Viola's name. His expression saying that he knew how horrendous that Viola girl was.

"It's true that this girl refused an offer from the boss. That's why we're holding her here."

"I see. Then, how about the information that a pickpocket called Alna is also here? I also got that from Viola."

"Does this have something to do with that pickpocket?"

"Because of a personal reason, I want that pickpocket dead, you see. So if she's really here, I'm just thinking of killing her while I'm here."

That man raised his voice.

"I don't care about your personal reason or what not! That pickpocket has nothing to do with this right now, does she!? The only thing that matters here is if you would obey us or not, and if you won't, then we'll kill this girl!!"

Akira paused for a bit again before replying.

"…I have two things that I need to confirm first before I can give you my answer."

Since it sounded that Akira might accept his demand depending on the things that Akira wanted to confirm, that man calmed down for a bit.

“Oh, so what is it?”

“Is Sheryl really alive? And if the girl who you have with you is really Sheryl or not? I want to know those two things first. Judging from the guys who were mocking me in the entrance, it won’t be strange if you guys already killed her, you know. After all, it seemed that you guys are not scared if I came here to take revenge. So if Sheryl is already dead, then it won’t be strange if you guys took her information terminal and used it to call me in order to trick me. In the first place, it’s weird for Sheryl to come to this place alone without asking me to accompany her. It doesn’t seem like you guys kidnapped her either, and even if I wasn’t able to accompany her, she should have at least given me a call. There’s also a possibility that someone stole her information terminal, used it to ask for a meeting with your boss, and said something that she shouldn’t have to your boss, so the person that you have there might not be the real Sheryl. If she’s really Sheryl and she’s still alive, then I don’t mind listening to your demand. After all, I don’t want to throw away my weapons just to save someone who’s pretending to be Sheryl, you see.”

That man clicked his tongue after hearing how paranoid Akira was. But since he was trying to confirm the identity of the hostage, that in itself meant that Sheryl had some value as a hostage. He then extended that information terminal to his friend who was covering Sheryl’s mouth and signalled him.

After that man let Sheryl off, she took that information terminal. The other men were still pointing their rifles at her as she started talking to her information terminal with a stern face.

“…It’s Sheryl… Uhhh, I’m being held here but I’m not injured. So, uhh, I’m okay at the moment. Ah, yes, it’s the real me. Please believe me.”

Sheryl somehow sounded rather awkward. It was both because she was buying more time while thinking about what she could do in that situation

as well as because she was so surprised and delighted to find out that Akira really came to save her.

“So you’re okay, right? Then, why did you come here alone? I was there with you when you went to Shijima’s base, remember?”

In reality, considering the fight that almost happened because of Akira back then, it was enough of a reason not to bring him along again. Sheryl could not understand what Akira was thinking about that matter, if he just did not notice it himself yet, or if he was just putting that aside for now, or if he thought that it was way better to do so rather than having to face this kind of situation.

“I-I’m really sorry. Viola introduced me to Ezont Family and brought up that offer to me. Judging from what I could gather from her that time, I figured that I didn’t need any bodyguard for this.”

“I heard that you refused their offer though, did they tell you to give up your territory again?”

“Although it might sound suspicious, they wanted us to work under their gang. So I think it can be interpreted that my territory will be Ezont Family’s territory too. But if I have to make a guess, I believe that they were talking about the chain of command, and in that chain of command, they wanted Akira to be in it too. So, since I thought that it’s not my place to decide that, I refused their offer.”

“…I see, so that’s what happened, huh?”

Sheryl was a little surprised since Akira too sounded surprised. She thought that since he never considered himself as a part of Sheryl’s gang, he would not have any interest in such matters.

One of the guys there then snatched Sheryl’s information terminal again.

“You confirmed that she’s the real Sheryl now, right? Then let me tell you this again, if you don’t want this girl to die, throw down your weapons. I’ll send you a location, come to that location with your hands up an-“

Akira interjected.

“You’re going to kill me there, aren’t you?”

“…Don’t make me say it again. If you don’t follow my instruction, we’ll kill this girl. That’s all you need to know.”

“…I’m a Hunter, you know?”

“Hah?”

“Working as a Hunter means regularly risking my life. And risking my life is the most that I will do. I have no plans to go along with something that would definitely kill me. That’s why I can’t accept your demand. In the first place, if I die, there’s no guarantee that you guys won’t kill Sheryl too. This won’t even be a negotiation. I’ll make a suggestion here instead, if you hand over Sheryl and kill that pickpocket, I’ll leave peacefully. And make sure that you guys don’t interrupt me on my way out either. This way both of us won’t have to face any loss, what do you think?”

That man exploded in anger.

“Are you f*cking kidding me!? Do you really think that we would accept that offer?!”

“I’m saying here that I’m willing to forgive you for threatening to kill my lover. Isn’t that enough for a reason? Or is it that there’s no place for negotiation?”

“Yeah, that’s right!”

“I see.”

Right at the next moment, Akira kicked down the door to that room. He already had rifles in each of his hands. Everyone in that room was frozen by that sudden turn of events, Akira used that opening to fix the aim of both of his rifles and immediately opened fire. The closed room and the close range did not give them any chance to evade nor to shoot back. In the next

moment, those guys were lying on the ground, drowning in their own blood after being riddled with bullets.

The scene inside the room was turned into a macabre in a split second. Akira looked at the dead soldiers there and said.

“It’s your fault for saying there’s no chance for negotiation, so I won’t accept any complaints, okay?”

Of course, no one was complaining there. Deadmen could not complain after all.

Akira was actually just buying time when he was talking to Sheryl and the other guys. The moment Alpha said that she knew where Sheryl was, Akira already knew that it was really Sheryl and that she was still alive.

He also was not doubting the information from Viola. Although Viola might have had a bad intention when she shared that information, for some reason, Akira was sure that Viola would never lie. She would only share real information, though not everything, to manipulate people.

He was only buying time to make sure that Sheryl was alright until he arrived. That was the only reason why he did that. But if they had accepted Akira’s offer, he was willing to peacefully leave too. But of course, he did not think that they would accept his offer right from the beginning.

His demand would get refused, he at least got that guess correct. Since he made that offer while assuming right from the start that the negotiation would break down anyway, that result was fully under his expectation. Akira himself did not notice how twisted his way of thinking was.

Sheryl was dumbfounded by the sudden change in front of her, but once she registered what just happened, she made a troubled face. She was happy that Akira even called her his lover and came here to save her, but at the same time, she shuddered at the fact how Akira did not even bat an eyelash massacring everyone in that room and stared coldly at the dead bodies in the ground to top it off.

Akira lowered his rifle and turned at Sheryl. Sheryl tried her best not to show fear on her face.

“Well, just to be safe, are you okay? I was trying to be careful as not to shoot you by mistake…”

“Ah, yes. I’m okay, thank you very much for coming to rescue me.”

Sheryl bowed and thanked Akira while giving off a calm smile at him.

Akira did not seem to be bothered that much, it looked as if he just finished cleaning up some small stuff.

“…Well, I did say that I’ll help you out if something were to happen. Though it’s not like I’ll come to your rescue every time, I can at least rescue you if it’s only this much.”

For Sheryl, Akira seemed so reliable from that short exchange. While at the same time, she also thought that if she ever made an enemy out of Akira, he might clean her up like what he did just now.

Putting aside whether Akira was a good person or not, one thing was for sure, he had a very low moral value and had almost zero aversion toward killing other people. To top it off, he had the power to do so although he obeyed a vague set of moral values. Sheryl thought that it would be scary to have him as an enemy, but that also did not erase how scary he was even if she had him as an ally.

Sheryl understood that she loved Akira and she depended deeply on him. That was why she wondered if her fear was her self-defense instinct kicking in for the scary person in front of her. She could not help but wonder if that fear would subside if she could gain more power. She felt insecure as those thoughts ran through her mind.

Akira lightly sighed, with this, half of his goal why he came to that place was achieved. Although he did encounter some soldiers on his way to that room, they were not as strong as the people that he fought back in the atrium. Not to mention that he had also already gotten used to his new

augmented suit, so he had no problem fighting through those soldiers and it gave Akira some leeway.

Alpha smiled at Akira and suggested he withdraw now.

“Well, we’ve rescued Sheryl now, so let’s get out from this base.”

Akira slightly pouted.

“I still have a pickpocket to kill though.”

“Even if you say so, it’s not like you can hunt for that pickpocket while protecting Sheryl, right? She’ll be dead if you go around while taking her along with you, you know? It’s not like you rescued Sheryl just to get her killed, right?”

Alpha wanted Akira to get out from that base as soon as possible. That was why she decided to help him rescue Sheryl. She wanted to avoid the situation where he killed Alna, which caused Katsuya to have some grudge against him which definitely would cause more trouble later down the line. Moreover, it would be great if Alna got killed by chance in the middle of the ongoing chaos. That was why Alpha wanted Akira to leave that place as soon as possible.

Akira looked conflicted. He understood Alpha’s argument, but he could not just leave either.

“Well, one thing for sure, we shouldn’t stay in this place. Let’s move somewhere else where you can better ascertain the current situation. It would be troublesome if they send some reinforcements to this room, so let’s hurry up.”

“You’re right.”

Akira turned to Sheryl.

“Sheryl, we need to hurry up and move somewhere else. I’m sorry but I might need to carry you rather roughly.”

“I understand, please don’t worry about it.”

Akira used one arm to pick her up. Sheryl then said that she felt like she might fall, so she extended her arm around Akira’s neck and back as not to get in his way too much. If he wanted to prioritize the ease of moving around, Akira could just carry her under his arm, but Sheryl kept that to herself.

Akira then followed Alpha while carrying Sheryl, who was hugging him tightly.

Sheryl felt really happy that someone she loved was hugging her even when she was in that situation. As she thought that she was rather a calculating girl for feeling like that, she smiled bitterly and most of her worry from just now was already gone.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 160, Large-scale Battle

Index

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When Akira was heading to where Sheryl was held. Another change happened outside the mansion.

A few dozen vehicles went past through the gate that Akira kicked down. Since Katsuya killed the entrance guards, no one was there to stop those vehicles.

A large trailer stopped in the courtyard. Its huge backside opened and revealed multiple powered suits under its cover. They were about 5 metres tall with thick bodies and limbs, those thick limbs gave off a powerful and durable impression rather than simply being heavy. There was also a big gun lined up beside each and every powered suit.

The other trailers also opened their backsides, showing the same powered suits and tanks under them. While some of the other trailers started disembarking the soldiers inside them.

Those people were from Haurias. Rogelt’s guess was correct, Haurias used the chaos caused by Akira and Katsuya to attack Ezont Family’s base.

Haurias commander looked around the mansion and gave his men an order.

“That info was correct! Let’s use this chance to crush the Ezont Family!! Go out there and join the battle!”

The activated powered suits slowly moved their huge limbs to get up before grabbing the huge gun lying next to them. They then fixed their aim at the mansion in front of them.

Right at the next moment, a huge explosion flashed from their torsos. High-calibre rounds hit their large torsos followed by a loud banging as they were toppling over one by one. The armour platings around the area where they were hit, crumbled down and made a loud banging sound when it hit the ground.

The one that shot them was a black powered suit that appeared from behind the mansion. Those robots were designed for agility with light thin limbs and bodies. It was manoeuvring around quickly on the ground with the mobility support device equipped under its feet while carrying huge guns that looked unfitting with its small body.

That black robot was Rogelt’s powered suit. Rogelt then shouted from inside his powered suit as if to let everyone in that place hear him.

“You damn bastard!! I knew you would come!! I’ll crush you here and now!”

The other undamaged Haurias’ powered suits and tanks focused their aim from the general direction of the mansion to that black powered suit. But that powered suit manoeuvred nimbly to evade the incoming rounds while shooting back at them. Haurias’ foot soldiers spread out so as to not get swallowed in that exchange.

With tanks and powered suits involved, it was no longer on the level of a battle between the slum gangs.

Akira watched what was going on from the mansion’s rooftop and could not help but frown.

“…What the heck is going on?”

Just right outside the mansion, there was an ongoing chaos between dozens of tanks and powered suits. Not to mention the cannon barrage coming from outside the mansion by Haurias' side, Ezont Family's powered suits were shooting back at those cannons from inside the mansion. Haurias' powered suits flooded the courtyard trying to neutralize Ezont Family's powered suits, but a black powered suit was blocking them.

Quantity-wise, Haurias had the upper hand with their tanks and powered suit. But the black powered suit was obviously a few times stronger than a common powered suit and it compensated for the lack of number on the Ezont Family's side.

It would not be strange to feel a sense of superiority if someone was to stand somewhere high while looking down on the ensuing battle. But since Akira knew very well there was a good chance one of those huge rounds strayed and hit him, he was only able to smile wryly with a stern face.

"What kind of battle is going on here? They even have powered suits out too, this isn't on the level of a fight between slum gangs…"

Akira watched the black powered suit closing its distance against its enemies. It bobbed and swayed, evading the incoming bullets to get close enough before using its chainsaw-like weapon to cut down the cover together with the enemy hiding behind it. Fire sparkles flew everywhere as it cut the whole thing together and left a clean-cut powered suit and cover in its trail.

Akira inadvertently asked.

"…Whoah, that's really something. But why is that powered suit fighting in such close proximity from his enemies? It has a gun with it, right?"

Alpha answered his question.

"The anti-force field armour device works better when it's in close range, you see. Of course, some of the warheads have anti-force field armour devices installed on them too, but it's impossible to have the same negating power in those relatively smaller warheads. Not to mention that it might

also be for scaring the enemies by showing its ability to fight in close range. Other than that, it might be its user's preference, I guess?"

"Preference?"

"You still remember back then in Seranthal building when Shiori cut down the huge monster, right? I bet it has similar equipment to Shiori. There was also Kanae who fought the smaller monsters using CQC. Those people who have that kind of preference often have the talent and skill to support it, you see. For them, fighting in close range is much easier and they do perform better in close range."

"I see, so that's how it is, huh."

Akira nodded as if he was fully convinced.

From Sheryl's point of view, it looked like Akira found an answer that he just mumbled himself. Although she did find that strange, she felt like Akira would tell her not to ask him if she tried, and since it might even worsen his mood too, Sheryl decided to stay silent.

"Akira, let's not spend our time watching them and get out of here. It would be bad if you get involved in that battle."

Alpha was urging Akira to withdraw, but he had a conflicted expression as he said.

"…But, I still have that pickpocket to be killed…"

"Like I said, it's impossible for you to hunt for that pickpocket while carrying Sheryl around. Even standing here is already pretty dangerous, you know? Moreover, although I don't know the reason, it seems that a fight is also ensuing outside the base. It would be dangerous if you don't escort Sheryl to a safer place."

A battle was also going on outside the fence of the base. It was a fight between Haurias reinforcement soldiers and Rogelt's men that were on their way back after they were told to return to the base.

Akira had thought that he could just escort Sheryl outside the fence and then return back to the base, but it seemed that it was no longer a viable option now.

“Like people always say, if you chase 2 rabbits at the same time, you’ll lose both of them. Your best course of action in this situation is to evacuate Sheryl to somewhere safe and hope that pickpocket gets killed in the ongoing battle.”

Akira made a stern face, it might really be his only choice there. But before he decided to just give up and do that, another idea came up in his mind.

Akira understood that his plan was unlikely to work. But even so, he was still willing to try. And if it really did not work, he would just give up and retreat, that way it would lessen his regret.

“Alpha, I need your help to control my information terminal.”

“Sure, but what do you need me to do?”

After Akira explained his plan, Alpha frowned and said.

“I’m not even sure that it would work, but…”

“I know, we’re just going to give it a try. And if it doesn’t work, I’ll give up killing that pickpocket and obediently leave this place.”

“Well, if you would feel better that way, then sure.”

Alpha operated Akira’s information terminal to send a message.

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Inside a building not too far away from Ezont Family’s base, Viola was watching the ongoing battle between Ezont Family and Haurias through her binoculars.

“Ohh, they’re fighting just fine.”

Carol was also there as Viola’s bodyguard, she then exasperatedly said.

“Good grief, you’re really an awful woman. But still, although it’s true that they’re fighting just next to the wasteland, to think that they would bring out tanks and powered suits too. I wonder how much oil you poured for that to happen.”

Viola replied with an empty smile.

“Oh my, you make it sound like I caused them to fight. That’s so rude of you. They did that themselves, you know. I have no power to make them fight each other. And even if I do, just imagine how much damage they would cause had they fought in the lower district. So I really want the City Management to thank me for making them fight in the slum. But well, since of course, I don’t have that power, I guess that’s meaningless, huh.”

“I’ll just leave it as that.”

Carol lightly smiled, it was obvious that she did not believe Viola at all.

Suddenly a notice reached Carol’s information terminal. Carol checked the content of that message and raised her eyebrows. She then smiled amusedly.

“Viola, I need to leave for a bit.”

“Oh, but you’re my bodyguard, you know?”

“I’m sure you’ll be safe in this place. So just stay here. I got a request that might earn me 50 million Aurum, you see. If you would pay me more than that, I don’t mind staying here though. I’m just staying here since I don’t have any other things to do, but I don’t feel like I’ll get any extra bonus if I continue staying here, you know.”

“Well, good luck then.”

Viola waved at Carol. After Carol picked up her equipment that she left in that room and finished her preparation, she then said to Viola.

“I don’t really care if it’s because you planned all of this. But how about you try to be a bit more careful? It’s only a matter of time before the fire that you set also gets you burned, you know?”

Carol then immediately left the room. Viola who saw that only mumbled.

“Looking at how excited she is, it must be from a guy that she likes or something. Either that or it is some kind of time-limited request.”

She then smiled amusedly.

“Get myself burned, huh? But even without me setting the fire, they already had enough oil mixed that it was only a matter of time before they started fighting though. And it would have been too late for me to run away if I don’t know where and when that fire will start.”

Viola thought that if it was only a matter of time, she could just set it herself so she knew when she had to run away to not get swallowed by the fire. To top it off, she could even enjoy watching the fire too. She was very talented in this kind of thing.

Viola thought that her work there was what god destined her to be, after all, she had the right aptitude to do that kind of work and it was a kind of work that could easily influence someone’s habit. Moreover, she believed that it was only a matter of supply and demand, and she was on the side who was supplying.

Viola then shifted her focus back to the fight and watched it while smiling.

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Sheryl was still carried by Akira as she was looking around. She looked slightly scared.

She could see powered suits fighting each other and their firepower way outside what normal people could produce. Stray bullets that were more like huge warheads ripped off the mansion and opened a huge hole. If it hit someone, there was no question it would turn him or her into minced meat.

Sheryl could also feel her feet trembling, someone inside the mansion might have been using explosives. Although Akira was protecting her, it did not change the fact that it was scary.

And Akira was just standing on top of that mansion, it did not seem like he was going to move anywhere anytime soon. It was not strange that Sheryl found it weird and felt worried.

“Uhmm, are we not going to withdraw?”

Akira calmly replied.

“Yeah, but just wait for a bit here. It’s not like I’m just waiting here without any reason, you know.”

“I-I see, I understand.”

Sheryl could not pursue any further if Akira said so. After all, she did not have the ability to escape from that place with her own power. If Akira thought of her as a bother, she might get left behind to die there. She did not say anything any further, she just tightened her arms around Akira to ward off her worry.

Akira seemed a little disappointed and thought.

“…As I thought, it won’t work, huh. Well, I did expect that though.”

He did that fully expecting that it would not work in the first place. As he was about to make his next move, Alpha suddenly said in surprise.

“Akira!”

“I know, we need to go, right? I’ll give up on killing that pickpocket and go back home.”

“No, that’s not it. She’s here.”

Akira raised his eyebrows and looked in the direction that Alpha was pointing at, he could see Carol running towards him.

Carol stopped in front of Akira and smiled at him.

“Sorry for the wait, did I come too late?”

“No, it’s fine. I didn’t expect you to really come though…”

Carol smiled and exasperatedly said.

“Geez, that’s so like you. Not only did you call me here with just one message, I even happily ran as fast as I could to get to you. That’s not how you should react to a girl who did that much for you, you know. Or is it that you’re doing it on purpose to hit on girls?”

Carol was using the seductive augmented suit that she used back in Mihazono ruin. It would not be strange for other people to think that she was using that suit to seduce someone. Sheryl was so surprised by Carol’s augmented suit and how cold Akira reacted to it.

But Akira just ignored that and proceeded to confirm something.

“Carol, that message is just an escort request, you know. Don’t make it sound like I sent some strange message to you. And since you’re here, it means that you’re willing to take it, right? I know it’s weird for me to say this since I was the one who sent that request, but I didn’t expect you to accept it, you know?”

Akira sent an escort request to Carol. The content was a very one-sided offer, the reward would be paid later after the request was finished and the amount was open for negotiation. He was also willing to pay for the expense up to some amount, and it had no detailed explanation. To top it off, it only had a coordinate mentioned and a text saying that it was a time-limited offer as if it was only a prank.

If it was himself, Akira would have refused that request. In the first place, he could not reach the designated location under the time limit. Akira thought so when he sent that message. Because of that, he was amazed that Carol actually came.

“But still, it’s pretty impressive that you could come here under the time limit.”

“I was somewhere nearby, you see. But well, I wouldn’t have been able to come if I wasn’t using this augmented suit though. That aside, I didn’t expect you to send an escort request, but seeing those powered suits fighting each other over there, well, that’s understandable. Well, let’s go.”

“Wait, I’m not coming with you.”

Akira only said that as he lightly pushed Sheryl to Carol. Carol and Sheryl were equally surprised there.

“I still have something to do here, that’s why I can’t leave yet. The request is not to escort us, but to escort Sheryl. So, there you have it. I’ll leave her to you.”

Seeing Akira was about to leave after saying that, Carol flusteredly stopped him.

“W-whoah, wait there! Akira, you’re not coming? Are you sure?”

“Yeah, it would be hard for me to do the other thing that I need to do here while carrying Sheryl around, that’s why I sent you that escort request… I know it’s my fault for not giving enough explanation in that message, but the request that I sent is an escort request, not a request for reinforcement. I sent that request considering my fighting power, if it’s impossible for you to do that without me coming along, then just refuse it.”

“No, I’m okay with that, but…”

“I see. Well, later then. I’ll be counting on you.”

Akira immediately left after he said that.

Carol and Sheryl looked at each other, both of them were fully shocked. They could see from each other’s expression that the other person was equally confused. Carol then awkwardly said to Sheryl.

“Uhh, well, shall we go now?”

“Y-yes!”

Sheryl understood that it was not like Akira abandoned her, but she could not help but to make all kinds of guesses as she made a rather conflicted face.

Carol saw that and smiled bitterly.

[She’s having it tough too, huh. As I thought, he really doesn’t know how to treat girls.]

If that was the case, then it made sense why he reacted so indifferent toward her. Carol thought so as she escorted Sheryl away from the battle.

The other aim that Akira still had left was to kill Alna, so he once again went into the mansion to finish that job. She might as well already be dead, but of course, no one had the leeway to clean up all the corpses in that situation. He thought that it would be enough if he could find her corpse.

The inside of the mansion was filled with the sounds of gunshots. Ezont Family’s soldiers were trying to fight back the invading Haurias’ soldiers. Akira moved around the mansion while evading both sides.

“They are fighting both outside and inside the mansion, huh. Well, it’s not like they can bring those powered suit inside the mansion, so it’s still better than being outside.”

“You might get hit by the stray bullets if you move too close to the outside, so let’s only take the route through the inner part of the mansion. Depending on the situation, you might need to break through some walls though.”

“Roger that.”

Even Akira also did not want to get involved in that battle between powered suits. That was why he did not have any complaint taking the inner route. Although leaving holes inside Ezont Family’s base would bring huge

trouble to Ezont Family, it was not his problem, so he did not care about that.

“By the way, Akira, are you sure you’re okay doing that to Sheryl?”

“I had someone to escort her, so I’m sure she’ll be fine. I know how strong Carol is and she was using that strong augmented suit with a high power consumption rate too. I’m sure she can handle it just fine.”

“But putting that aside, it’s not like you can fully trust Carol, right? What will you do if she did something to Sheryl?”

Akira frowned and said with a serious face.

“…If something like that were to happen, then that’s just how far Sheryl’s luck is. It’s not like I can protect Sheryl 24/7 and I have no wish to do so in the first place. Once I’m back exploring old-world ruins again, I won’t be able to rescue Sheryl all the time if something happens to her. So let’s just say that this is also a test for her luck and I hope that she’ll do her best for that too. If Sheryl finds it unpleasant that I didn’t escort her myself, I don’t care at all. I have things that I need to do too, I have no obligation to do everything that she wants me to do.”

Including this time too, Akira came to Sheryl’s rescue, so Alpha thought that Akira had been too invested in Sheryl. Alpha had anticipated that she might need to do something to change that soon, but judging from Akira’s reaction just now, it seemed that there was no need to worry about it. Although he might be slightly invested in Sheryl, he had no problem with abandoning her when needed. In the worst-case scenario, he did not even care if she was dead. For Akira, Sheryl was only worth that much.

But another problem came up from there. Between saving Sheryl and killing Alna. Akira actually put saving Sheryl after killing Alna on his priority list. He put more priority on killing Alna. Which meant that it would be difficult for him to change his priority.

Akira would kill Alna, and if Katsuya witnessed it, it would no doubt cause a lot of trouble. Alpha wanted to avoid that.

“Akira, get into that room.”

“Did you find her?”

“Just get in.”

Akira went in as he was told to. But there was no one inside that room.

“No one is here though.”

“Then put furniture to block that door.”

“…What’s going on here?”

Akira looked suspiciously at Alpha, who looked back at him with a serious face.

“…Alright.”

Akira thought that there must be a reason why Alpha did that, so he then barricaded the door. Once he was done, he was told by Alpha to wait in the middle of the room, and that was exactly what he did without complaining. His right hand suddenly moved on its own.

“Oh? Alpha, is that you?”

“It seems that it’s working just fine.”

“With this, I can get your support through my augmented suit, huh? But if I’m not mistaken, you said that you needed more time to fully take control of my augmented suit, right?”

Akira said so and looked at Alpha, who pouted and replied.

“I really didn’t want to do this. I put in a crude control software since it’s better than having no support from me at all.”

“I-I see, why do you look so displeased then?”

“Personally, I really don’t want to use that crude control software, you know. But, since it’s better than nothing, I don’t have any other choice but to use it. I can give you some support with this, but don’t expect anything advance, okay?”

Alpha obviously looked really displeased. Akira winced back since it was very rare for her to make such a face. He then said as if to change the subject.

“I-I see, okay. I’ll be careful, by the way, why is there a need for me to get in this room and barricade the door?”

“You can’t use your augmented suit while I’m rewriting the software. So it’s to buy some time in case your bad lack caused someone to attack you while I’m in the middle of rewriting the software.”

“I see. You could’ve told me, you know?”

Alpha sent a slightly intense glare to Akira.

“I’m sure I’ve told you this before, if you can’t follow that level of order without asking me the reasons then it might be too late. That was also for confirmation, and from the result, I decided that it’s better to be able to control your augmented suit although I would be using that low-quality software.”

Even Akira understood that Alpha was basically saying if he had followed her order quickly without questioning anything, then there would have been no need for her to install that low-quality software.

“I-I see.”

“Since we’re here, you should check if you feel anything weird. I’m sure that it would be fine, but since I changed the control software, there might be a different lag time compared to before.”

“O-Okay.”

Akira immediately started moving around and testing the newly rewritten augmented suit as if not to worsen Alpha's mood. He moved around, readied his rifle, and checked for any possible uncomfortable sensation from his augmented suit.

"It's fine, no problem at all."

"That's good to hear, let's hurry up then. I'm sure you want to finish what you come here for and get out of this place as soon as possible too, right?"

"Yeah, you're right. Let's go."

Akira immediately left the room and went to the basement of the mansion to search for Alna.

[…I don't know what's going on but it seems that she's in a rather bad mood. Is it because of the software? I remember that she was pretty angry when I called her a good alarm clock too, does it have something to do with that? I have no idea at all. Well, this is not a good time to ask her anyway, so let's just do that after I'm done in this place. Though I might no longer care about this when I'm done here though.]

And so, Akira decided to forget about it for now. With Alpha's bad mood and her constantly urging him to hurry up, Akira could not notice why she decided to make sure that he was able to receive her support.

Silavin: Yay! We hit the goal! 3 Chapters here we go!

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Rebuild World – Chapter 161, A Foolish Small Fry

Index

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Rogelt used the chainsaw equipped on his black powered suit to sever Katsuya's vehicle and raised it up. The spinning blade of the chainsaw spat fire sparks through Katsuya's vehicle.

After Katsuya chased Akira with his vehicle, it had sustained a considerable amount of damage from all the shootings. So he decided to retreat. He ran away from the war zone, then moved his badly damaged and slow-moving vehicle to the yard and went to look for Alna. But unfortunately, Rogelt found him first after he defeated the enemy's powered suits.

Rogelt's powered suit was able to make short work of Katsuya's vehicle. He went straight for Katsuya's vehicle and cleaved it open through its ceiling.

Katsuya was barely able to get out of his vehicle in time. Although he lost his vehicle, he still had all of his equipment while he was lying on the ground, glaring at the black powered suit.

The black powered suit waved its arm with Katsuya's vehicle still stuck on its chainsaw blade. It then ripped the vehicle into two and threw them away as a display of power. The split parts landed with a loud bang and rolled over the ground.

Rogelt used the external speaker to let Katsuya hear him.

“You damn brat!! Did you really think that you can do something by working together with Haurias? Or did you think that by coming in a Drankam vehicle we would be scared of you?! Hah, that’s so unfortunate for you.”

Although Katsuya was absolutely at disadvantage, he still managed to speak back.

“Where’s Alna?!!”

Rogelt mockingly replied.

“What’s the point even if I tell you? You’ll die here. It’s too much trouble capturing you alive. I’ll crush you with this powered suit.”

Rogelt showed off his melee weapons. It had enough power to easily rip Katsuya’s vehicle into two. If Katsuya got hit by it, there was no questioning that he would be squashed.

Katsuya imagined that scene and twitched, then yelled back.

“I’m asking where’s Alna?!!”

“Goddammit, just shut up! I won’t spare you even if you beg, or do you think that it’s cool to die while thinking about the girl you love? In the first place, that girl is just an excuse for you to attack us, isn’t it? I don’t know what kind of deal you made with Haurias, but it’s stupid for you to come and join this battle too. You can go ahead and regret your foolishness when I squash you into minced meat.”

The black powered suit swung its melee weapons. The spinning chainsaw let out a deafening ring. If Rogelt swung it down, Katsuya would be minced to smithereens.

Rather than fearing for his own death, Katsuya was more reeled up for being mocked. He let his emotion take over as he loudly yelled.

“Like hell if I know about Haurias!! And this has nothing to do with Drankam!! I want to save Alna and that’s why I’m here!!”

Rogelt stopped the chainsaw that he was swinging downward. He sounded rather surprised as he asked.

“…You’re saying that you don’t know them? You didn’t come here with Akira after Viola introduced you to Haurias?”

“I don’t even know who is this Viola you’re talking about?! You’re trying to kill Alna and that’s enough of a reason for me to come here!!”

Rogelt reeled back. As the boss of the gang, he was used to reading between the lines. He was confident that he could see through lies. Of course, there were exceptions like Viola, but the little boy in front of him was not a part of that exception.

[…This boy really doesn’t know about them, huh? He doesn’t know Viola nor Haurias, does that mean that he’s not working together with Akira either? And it doesn’t seem he’s lying…]

Rogelt then continued, he obviously sounded slightly confused and troubled.

“Let me get this straight. So basically you have nothing to do with those Haurias, you have nothing to do with that Akira, and you came here all on your own decision, correct? Although you came here in order to save Alna, you did not even try to sneak in. Did you really think that you can save her by doing something like this? Are you sane?”

“T-that is…”

Katsuya wavered. Rogelt was clearly able to see that through the camera on his powered suit and confirmed that it was not a fake reaction and that he was not trying to hide something.

Rogelt’s laugh could be heard through the speakers of his powered suit.

“You’re really stupid. So you came here without even giving it a proper thought first, huh! Stupid people like you are usually just small fries who die after doing something equally stupid. So basically you’re just lucky to stay alive until now, huh!”

Rogelt’s anger mostly died down after he laughed hard. He regained some of his calm and cleared up his mind. He had no plans to fight Katsuya if it could be helped. If he had another choice for the benefit of his gang, he would definitely pick that choice. He then changed his communication line to call his men.

“It’s me. How’s that Alna? Is she alive?”

The men that he told to keep Alna hostage replied.

“She’s with me right now and she’s still alive. At first, we were planning to take her near Katsuya and use her to threaten him, but since we can’t contact him, we don’t know where he is right now. At the moment, we’re in the middle of fighting Haurias while looking for that Katsuya.”

“If it’s about Katsuya, he’s right here with me. Tell her that this call is connected to Katsuya and make her scream for help and make sure it could be heard from this call.”

Alna’s voice could be heard coming out from the powered suit’s speakers.

“K-Katsuya? Are you there?”

Katsuya immediately reacted to Alna’s voice.

“Alna! Are you alright?!”

“You… Really came to save me… Thank you… I… I…”

Alna’s voice was cut short by Rogelt.

“Just like you heard, that girl is alive. You came here to save that girl, right? Aren’t you glad? So, here’s a deal. You follow my orders from here and on,

and I’ll guarantee the safety of this girl. I also won’t kill you here. This way, you and that girl will survive, isn’t that great?”

“…What do you want me to do?”

“First of all, I’ll have you kill those Haurias guys.”

“…Like hell I can tell which one of them is which!”

“Set your information terminal to catch the signal from our broadcast frequency. We’ll tell you where to go and what’s your target from there.”

Katsuya frowned and had a pained look.

“…If I kill them, you’ll return Alna back to me, right?”

“No, that’s not everything yet. I’ll have you do other things too. From what I heard about you, you’re earning a lot of money, right? So I’ll have you pay me a lot of money too.”

“What!?”

Rogelt added more intimidation in his voice when he saw Katsuya reel back.

“How many of my men do you think you have killed? I won’t let that slide unless you kill 100 people for every one of our men that you’ve killed! And money too!! How much money do you think I spent on this battle?! So don’t think that I’ll accept just a small amount of money!! And if you refuse, we’ll kill that girl!! That girl is only worthy for making you obey us! If you won’t obey us, then she’s good as dead to us!! That’s for you too! We can kill you anytime, you know!! And don’t ever think that you’re safe just by running back to Drankam, okay? Leaving those Hunters from the frontline aside, common Hunters around this parts are no threat against this kind of powered suit.”

Most of what he said were bluff, but threatening was important for successful intimidation. Putting the result aside, presenting a realistic possibility of causing damage was more than enough as a threat. In order to

not give Katsuya any time to think, Rogelt thrust the chainsaw on his powered suit at Katsuya. The big spinning blade went past right in front of Katsuya.

“Either you obey me, or die here! You have 5 seconds! If you don’t give me any answer, I’ll kill you here! 5… 4… 3… 2…”

“…Alright!”

Katsuya had an extremely pained look, Rogelt pulled his chainsaw away from Katsuya.

“You’ve made the right choice. Go back to the mansion and kill those Haurias. Don’t forget to open your channel for our signals too. Now go, make sure to work hard out there. Otherwise, consider that girl dead.”

Katsuya still had a pained face as he went back to the mansion. He was also thinking of saving Alna if she could spot her somewhere, or more like, he used that as an excuse to tell himself to return back to the death zone.

Rogelt then said to his men.

“It’s me, as you just heard, don’t kill that girl. Or at least, make sure that she’s alive as long as Katsuya is still alive. Don’t try anything funny, it would be bad if you kill her by mistake. Treat her like a guest. And send some people to accompany Katsuya to make sure that he fights Haurias.”

“Roger that!”

When Rogelt was about to disconnect, he remembered something and asked.

“…By the way, I wonder how about that Sheryl?”

“My call was cut off midway. Should we try to look for her?”

“Only if you have the leeway to do so. Taking out the Haurias comes first. There’s no need to go out of your way to look for her. I’ll continue killing the Haurias outside. If you can’t handle any of them, just bait them to the

courtyard or any other places where my powered suit can reach you like outside the mansion or just outside the hangar. Pass this on to the other men outside the base too."

Rogelt cut the call and returned back to the courtyard to continue killing Haurias. It might be because Haurias was prioritizing the battle outside the base that it seemed they were pulling their men back from the mansion. Of course, Rogelt's men did not let that chance slip away and targeted those retreating soldiers.

The black powered suit once again prowled the dark night as it returned back to the courtyard. Not too long after that, a scream could be heard from one of the enemy's soldiers.

"N-No one told me that we're going to be facing something like this!?"

That man was shooting at the black powered suit, but all of his bullets just bounced off from its armour.

The black powered suit swung its chainsaw and turned that man into a blob of meat in one go.

"Idiots. I don't know if they're here because Haurias paid them or something, but do they really think that they can fight quality with quantity alone? Or these people are basically like that stupid boy, coming here without giving it any thoughts first?"

Rogelt continued killing his enemies there while thinking if Akira was also one of those stupid people.

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Akira was running through the mansion when Alpha suddenly said to him.

"Akira, you sometimes act like a foolish small fry, don't you?"

He twitched and looked a little surprised since he did not see that coming at all.

“That was out of the blue.”

“The thought just suddenly crossed my mind, you didn’t realize it yourself?”

“Small fry usually refers to those weak people who love to pick a fight, right? To be honest, I’m more on the side who usually gets picked to a fight though. It’s not like I proactively pick fights against other people after all. That’s why I don’t think that’s the right description for me.”

“Then how about the foolish part?”

Akira looked away. He knew that Alpha was correct. He himself understood that it was not an exaggeration to call him a fool for raiding Ezont Family’s base by himself like this.

But another side of him was urging him not to accept it. If he retreated now, he felt like he would be pushed back to the state when he was still living in the slum alley. That fear and feeling of insecurity pushed him to come to this place.

Alpha silently stared at Akira before saying.

“Well, I guess it’s way too late for me to say it, huh? That aside, I found Alna. Let’s go and finish this fast.”

“Oh, you found her? Alright then, let’s go.”

“This way.”

Akira thought something was a bit strange as he followed Alpha’s guide.

“Alpha, for some reason, I feel like you’re suddenly rather supportive, or is it only my imagination?”

“You won’t return back home unless you kill Alna, right? So I guess I have no other choice but to get you to finish her and get away from this place as soon as possible… Of course, if you decide to retreat here, that would be for the best though.”

Alpha was smiling at Akira as if she was pressuring him. Akira's frowned a bit.

"I-I see, I'll hurry up too."

Just like Alpha, Akira also wanted to finish his business there as fast as possible. Since he felt like it would only get him in more trouble if he said something there, Akira just shut up and started running.

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Alna was held in one of the Ezont Family's hangar. The hangar was built large enough to house several powered suits, there was also maintenance equipment inside the hangar to do maintenance for those powered suits. Alna was shoved behind those equipment and there were several men around her guarding the area.

One of the men guarding the hangar looked at Alna, who was hanging her head down, and said.

"But still, I didn't expect this girl could be used as a hostage. That Katsuya guy is a famous Hunter from Drankam, right? I heard that the City Management also recognized his contribution to the city and he even got invited to some parties in the inner wall as well. I know that Drankam is using him for publicity, but he's basically not your usual Hunter, right? So why would such a Hunter come to this place just to rescue this slum girl?"

"Like hell if I know, something might have happened between them."

"I can understand it in Sheryl's case. That girl's dress and outward appearance are not on the same level as those girls that you can find in the slum city. That dress, although she might have gotten that from a Hunter, with that outward appearance, it would not be strange for some people to get so invested in her. But this one here is just a slum girl. If it was me, I would have just abandoned her, no question about it."

"Well, different people have different tastes for women. That Katsuya might be just a very earnest person and something happened in the past that made

him owe something big to this girl here.”

“Is it that big to the point that he’s willing to antagonize us?”

“No idea. It’s just a guess, honestly speaking, I have no idea why either.”

Alna was listening to their talk while hanging her head low. She felt guilty for making Katsuya come to rescue her, but at the same time, she also felt happy for that. Then suddenly a question came up in her mind.

“Why would Katsuya even go that far for me? Just like these guys said, he has no reason to go that far for me. So why…”

Alna kept her head low while thinking, the guys guarding her did not pay her much attention since it was also helpful to them if she would just obediently sit there.

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Akira was aiming through his CWH anti-material rifle from the rooftop of the mansion. He loaded a special bullet with high piercing power beforehand as he aimed straight at one of the hangars, or to be more precise, at Alna who was inside that particular hangar. Thanks to Alpha’s support, he could see the interior of the hangar together with the predicted trajectory line of his bullet.

Alpha was right beside Akira, she then said with a serious face.

“I’ll watch out for enemies, so you can focus on finishing your job here.”

“Alright, I’ll be counting on you.”

“Don’t expect too much from my aiming correction support, okay? Like I’ve explained before, the control software in your augmented suit is still a crude one. Just aim carefully with your own skill as if you don’t have my support at all. If you miss your shot, the enemies would discover your position and it would be a huge pain in the neck.”

“I know this is where I need to get super serious.”

Akira gathered his focus and used all of his senses for aiming as he was slowly adjusting his aim that swayed greatly with a slight move. The moment before he pulled the trigger, he compressed his time perception to its limit, extending and distorting the banging sound coming from his CWH anti-material rifle.

In that slow-motion world where he compressed his time perception to its limit, he could hear the sound of his heartbeat stretched to infinity. In that strange silence, a bullet flew out from the muzzle at high speed and a flash of light sparkled accompanying that bullet.

The bullet ripped through the air, straight into the hangar wall, and passed through some equipment inside that hangar as it sought its target, Alna. But it went about 30 cm beside her.

Akira made a stern face as he inadvertently said.

“Dammit, I missed!”

“Next shot, quickly!”

“I know!”

Akira immediately released the next shot. Each bullet that he released left a hole on the hangar’s wall at the same time it illuminated the dark courtyard with a flash of light.

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Alna was frozen in shock when a bullet just passed close by her. But the other men there immediately reacted to it, one of them grabbed Alna by her dress and pulled her down to the floor.

The guards immediately reconfirmed their current situation.

“An attack?! Did someone slip into the hangar?!”

Another guy checked his information-gathering device for any signal.

“No signals nearby!! It’s from outside!!”

“A stray bullet then? But the wall is pretty thick, you know…?”

Another bullet flew right past Alna. Alna inadvertently shrieked. Then another bullet flew by, hit one of the equipment, and left a fire spark.

One of the guards immediately grabbed Alna and urged her to move. The incoming bullets landed one after another as it chased them while they were relocating themselves.

“It’s an enemy attack!! And they can see us inside the hangar!!”

One of the guards grabbed his hand grenade and threw it. It blew up and filled the hangar with smoke, but that smoke was cleared right away.

But right after that, Akira’s shots started to miss by a large margin. That hand grenade was actually a cheap jamming smoke grenade. Although it could not inflict much direct damage, it was enough to disturb the enemy’s information-gathering devices outside the hangar’s wall.

Akira had a stern expression plastered on his face. The interior of the hangar that was visible to him until now suddenly went blurry.

“Dammit!! Did they do something inside there?”

Alpha calmly explained.

“It’s the effect from the jamming smoke inside that hangar. You should be able to have a clear vision inside, but it’s impossible to check the interior of the hangar from outside.”

“Then there’s no other choice but to storm the hangar, huh. As I thought, I need more training to be able to shoot relying only on my own skill.”

“You can train as much as you want later, but first, we need to welcome the incoming guests.”

A guy suddenly jumped out of the hangar, he was using a heavy augmented suit. Akira immediately sniped that guy. The force of the bullet threw that guy straight back into the hangar wall. But that guy, with his back still stuck on the big crater in the hangar's wall, aimed his minigun at Akira and started shooting back.

Bullets showered the mansion and destroyed a part of the mansion, especially around Akira. Akira flusteredly got away from the barrage.

"Alpha!! That guy survived CWH anti-material rifle, you know!?"

"He knew that he could take that shot, that's why he came out in full view. It's not like it didn't damage him at all, so don't stop shooting."

As Akira was focus firing at the guy with a heavy augmented suit, another guy came out from inside the hangar with a grenade launcher, he aimed it at the rooftop and pulled the trigger. Frag grenades drew a beautiful arc on the sky. They did not explode immediately and instead got stuck on where they landed.

Akira already slipped away in order to escape from the minigun barrage. He was hiding in the enemy's blindside. But frag grenades suddenly started raining down on him. Alpha let Akira know where the incoming grenades would land, they landed and exploded one by one behind him, but he was able to get away from the explosions.

Some of the grenades exploded close to him. But thanks to his force-field armour equipped coat, he was able to get away uninjured. But of course, his energy reserve quickly whittled down with every explosion.

"That was dangerous!! It's not like that guy is only randomly shooting at me!! How in the world he did that!?"

"The first few shots were not grenades, but mini information-gathering devices, those that stuck on the walls and floors."

Akira looked around, it was true that there were small devices sticking on the rooftop. He could not help but frown when he saw that.

“So those things, huh!! Those are the things that Elena-san used during our exploration to Yonozuka station ruin, right? So basically they always know where I am, huh!!

“You’ve gone through a fight where your enemy can clearly see you during the training with Erio and the other children, remember? There’s no need to panic and just handle it calmly.”

“Don’t compare them with Erio!! Those guys are super strong, you know!! The difference in our equipment is just too big!!”

“It’s still better than having me as their commander, no? So stop complaining and get to work.”

“Basically you want to say if I’m going to complain I should just go back home, right? I got it already, geez!!”

Akira desperately evaded the explosions as he was conversing with Alpha. But Alpha did not reply to his remark there.

Akira and the soldiers from Ezont Family were engaging each other while constantly knowing each other’s location. Akira prioritized to keep moving so as not to get shot by staying in the direct firing line of the enemy’s minigun while shooting back with his A4WM automatic grenade launcher. If he could use the mansion as a cover, he could avoid getting shot by the minigun just fine. And of course, the enemies were also shooting back at him with their grenade launchers in the middle of that fight.

The more firepower they were using, the more money they spent in that battle. Since the mansion was built next to the dangerous wasteland where monsters were roaming freely, it was made with pretty strong material to withstand the attack from monsters. If it was made of common materials, the mansion would have been blown to smithereens by now. Eventually, Akira ran out of A4WM ammo first.

When Akira was about to reload a new magazine to his A4WM rifle, Alpha suddenly said to him.

“Get down!”

Right at the same time, Alpha moved his augmented suit and Akira did not fight back at all as he let his body be thrown back. When that happened, he saw a dim blue blade fly past under him. If Alpha had not moved his body, his leg would have been severed.

Thanks to Alpha’s support, Akira noticed another enemy was running towards him from the floor below. But he didn’t expect them to try to cut his leg from below. After all, it was rare to find people who had a talent for melee combat, and it was even rarer to find those people who had good enough equipment to do so.

The blade that extended from below the floor chased Akira. Although it only extended as far as Akira’s thigh, it was clearly aiming for Akira as if not to allow him to stay in one place for too long. Akira desperately avoided the incoming grenades and bullets as well as the blades that were chasing him, he had no leeway to reload his A4WM automatic grenade launcher.

His A4WM automatic grenade launcher was out of ammo while his DVTS minigun did not have enough piercing power to shoot through the walls. His CWH anti-material rifle was too long to aim directly below. But even so, it was not like he could just leave the enemy below him alone. So in order to open up some distance from the floor to be able to aim his CWH anti-material rifle straight below, Akira lightly jumped.

“Don’t!”

Alpha’s was too late, Akira was already off the floor and was in the middle of swapping his A4WM automatic grenade launcher to his CWH anti-material rifle.

Another enemy suddenly appeared from the other side of the rooftop and aimed his huge gun at Akira who was in midair. While the enemy under him readied his blade to welcome Akira when he landed. Akira had no way to evade both of them.

If he prioritized the enemy on the rooftop, he would be welcomed by blades the moment he landed. If he prioritized the enemy below him, he would get shot by the other enemy. Akira understood that very well as he made a grim face.

[Oh crap! If my legs get cut, I would lose my mobility! And when that happens, I would be just a sitting duck!! I have no other choice but to ignore that other guy!! But still, how much firepower does that big gun have?! Can I survive a direct hit from that gun!?]

In that deadly situation inside a slow-motion world, Akira immediately made his decision and gritted his teeth. But Alpha suddenly intervened, she controlled Akira's augmented suit and changed his course of action.

When Akira noticed both of his arms started moving on their own, he understood that it was Alpha and was surprised by that, but he immediately matched his movement with her. As he was still floating in the air, Akira had his left hand aiming his CWH anti-material rifle right at the enemy below him. While at the same time, his left hand reached for his DVTS minigun that was dangling on his body and immediately pulled down the triggers on his both hands.

The bullet from Akira's CWH anti-material rifle forced the enemy under him to move away from his position, while the kickback from Akira's DVTS minigun that he wasn't even aiming at anyone shifted his body midair, making the enemy that was aiming at him miss their shot.

A powerful shot ripped through Akira's coat. If Akira had got hit by that, he would have been fatally wounded.

Akira did not release the trigger of his DVTS minigun as he shifted its aim to the enemy who just released that shot. That particular enemy was riddled with bullets as he was blown back and fell down from the rooftop.

The moment Akira landed, he immediately ran away from that place.

"That was dangerous!! If I took that straight, I might as well be dead! Alpha, Thanks for the help!!"

Alpha then made a suggestion to Akira with a serious face.

“Akira, the enemies are stronger than I expected. That one guy too, he must have only fallen down and not dead yet. Let’s retreat for now.”

“…Do you mean retreating from this place?”

Akira had a grim look on his face. Risking one’s life was different from doing suicidal action. His resolve was leaning towards something so reckless that it was closer to suicide. If it was a worthy gamble, then it was still acceptable, but that was not the case if it was straight suicidal. And the extreme situation there pushed Akira slightly past that line. If Alpha gave another push, Akira might actually give up the idea of killing Alna there.

But Alpha did not do that, she smiled and replied to him.

“I know you don’t want to do that no matter what, right? So I won’t pursue it any further. That’s why we’ll take the next best choice. Retreat for now and I’ll rewrite the control software to get a better control. But since your augmented suit would be rendered useless while rewriting the software, that would be a dangerous course of action. But I concluded that you will have a better winning chance that way rather than keep on fighting in this state. Since I’m not telling you to fully retreat, you won’t say no to this, right?”

Looking at Alpha, who was smiling at him, Akira could not help but to lightly smile back.

“Alright, let’s take a temporary retreat.”

“It’s great that you would listen to me.”

“I don’t want to die after all. And it’s helpful to get a better winning chance too.”

“I was planning to give you more reasons to convince you to retreat if you had said no there. Let’s hurry up then.”

Akira smiled wryly at Alpha and immediately left that place.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 162, Testing Luck

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The people who just fought Akira near the hangar were talking to each other through their communication devices.

“Did he run…? No, a temporary retreat? What should we do? Should we chase after him?”

The guy with the blade asked, but the guy with the heavy augmented suit stopped him.

“No. It would be bad if he’s planning to divide us into smaller groups. Not to mention, I’m using a heavy augmented suit. You might be able to chase him, but I don’t believe that’s the case for me.”

The guy that was riddled with DVTS minigun’s bullet and fell down from the floor was still lying on the ground. His augmented suit had injected his body with battle stimulants to keep his body and mind ready to fight. He then pushed himself up while still dazed.

“Dammit, the heck is wrong with that boy?! He’s not normal!”

“If I’m not mistaken, that face… He’s one of the guys that the boss was planning to take control of. Judging from how he accurately sniped us while we were inside the hangar, he must be carrying a pretty high-quality information-gathering device. I bet his other equipments are more or less of the same quality, and his skill must be good enough to match them too.”

A call suddenly reached them. It was from those guys inside the hangar.

“How’s the situation over there?”

“We’re fighting one boy, I think it’s that Akira. Although we were able to repel him, we weren’t able to kill him. We have one man injured here… Hey, you, can you keep on going?”

“Of course! This much of an injury is not enough to drive me away from the battle, you know.”

The injured guy replied in a high spirit. But he then followed up with a calm voice.

“…But it’s also true that boy is indeed strong. I was only able to survive since we’re ganging up on him. To be honest, I don’t want to fight him in a one-on-one fight, he’s way more than I can handle. So, what to do? Want to let the boss know?”

The other guys did not reply. They had their own pride and reputation to uphold too. Although Rogelt did tell them to ask for help if they encounter enemies whom they could not handle, if they asked for help just because they could not handle a single young boy, people would definitely question their abilities. But if they were caught off guard and got Alna killed, it would be a huge disaster for them. After all, Akira almost got Alna during the previous surprise attack.

The guy inside the hangar understood that all of them were at a loss on what to do next, so he then said.

“Well, for now, let’s group up. We can decide whether to report it to the boss or not later. First of all, we need to treat anyone injured and refresh our

ammo reserve.”

Unlike the Hunters who fought in the wasteland with limited ammo and supply, these guys were fighting in their own base. So they did not equip their rifles with a high-quality extended magazine. After all, they could always refresh their reserve in their base. So rather than using an extended magazine that did not increase their firepower at all, it was far cheaper to be using their usual magazines. That was also true for their energy packs too.

They also had used a considerable amount of bullets to fight back Akira just now. So they decided to return back to the hangar to refresh their supplies.

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Katsuya was fighting the Haurias people who were invading the mansion. Just like in Akira’s case, Rogelt had paid a lot of money to Viola in order to be able to control him too. Katsuya had the skill and the equipment to make that piece of information worth the money, he did not have any trouble fighting back the Haurias, as in a matter of fact, it was a rather one-sided fight.

The guy accompanying Katsuya who also doubled as his observer was amazed to see Katsuya’s skill from up close.

[…This boy is pretty strong for just a young Hunter. No wonder the boss wanted to be able to control him. But if he’s this strong, then why would he go so far just for that girl. If he only accepted that deal to be able to run away from the boss, he could have escaped once the boss left him alone. But since he’s not even trying to do that here, it means that he’s really fighting for that girl… I really can’t understand him at all. But well, different people have different tastes in women, so I guess I’m in no place to say anything about that. It’s all good and well as long as he’s obeying us, it’s great to be able to take it easy.]

After Katsuya had finished all the Haurias’ men in that area, he just stood there with a grim expression. It was not like Haurias’ men were being hostile to him.

Katsuya was threatened by Rogelt and had no other choice but to follow his orders. Haurias, who came invading the mansion, were there to kill other people right from the start, so it would be their own fault if they got killed instead. Even if Katsuya told himself so, it did not lighten his feeling of guilt at all.

Countless reinforcement requests from the other Ezont Family's soldiers reached the observer's information terminal. The battle in the mansion had been going on for some time now. With all the corpses already lying around the mansion, the number of people fighting in that area should have been reduced by that much too. But with the Ezont Family's men who were outside the base returning back to their base, they were also bringing along Haurias soldiers that were chasing them.

Using his powered suit, Rogelt was fighting the enemies outside the base. If he spotted any tanks, he would prioritize taking them out first. While at the same time, it was impossible for him to hold back the enemies that were invading from the other parts of the fences that had been torn down. The area was filled with Ezont Family and Haurias' soldiers as well as the former Hunters, whom they paid to fight for their causes, fighting against each other.

The observer thought for a bit before he gave an order to the other guys near him.

"Good grief! I'll take that boy to the east side of the mansion, you guys go to the west side."

"You're going alone? Are you sure?"

"This boy doesn't need a bodyguard, you know. I can just let this boy take the front while I'm just observing him from behind."

"This damn guy, taking it easy like that."

"It's one of those special privileges I get for being this boy's observer, yeah?"

He jokingly laughed. Katsuya sent a glare at him.

They immediately went to the west side of the mansion, leaving Katsuya and his observer behind. The observer guy then said to Katsuya.

“Hey, get a move on!”

“…I know.”

Katsuya replied brusquely and followed the other people who went before him.

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Akira was gathering his focus in one of the rooms inside the mansion. Alpha was going to start rewriting Akira’s augmented suit’s control software, they had already finished their preparations. Since it was impossible to use his CWH anti-material rifle without his augmented suit, Akira just left it on the floor with the other things that he could not use without the help of his augmented suit. He was only carrying AAH and A2D assault rifles that he could use just fine without his augmented suit and held one each on his right and left hand.

The entrance to the room was barricaded. The lamp in the room was already destroyed during the fight, so the room was pitch black. There were corpses scattered around on the floor. And if he gathered his focus, he could hear gunshots echoing. The mansion was right in the middle of the war zone of that battle, and Akira was planning to deactivate his augmented suit in that room.

Alpha made the final confirmation to Akira.

“I’ll start updating the control software of your augmented suit. You won’t be able to use your augmented suit at all while I’m doing that. There’s quite a large portion of the software that I need to rewrite, so once I start, even if you try to reboot the augmented suit because something came up, it’ll take about 1 minute until you can use your augmented suit again. So, are you ready?”

“Yeah, you can start.”

Akira could feel his augmented suit suddenly turn slightly heavier. With his augmented suit completely turned off, it did not provide any support to him at all. If someone attacked him in that situation, he would have to fight back with his own power. But the enemies that he just faced were able to tank a direct shot from his CWH anti-material rifle and was able to survive a barrage from his DVTS minigun. If he encountered them right now, it would be game over for Akira. So it was, in a sense, a test for his luck.

Alpha was still monitoring the surroundings for enemies, Akira’s job there was to keep himself hidden and made sure that he could quickly react if something were to happen. In that pitch-black room, Akira could hear the sound of gunshots, screams, and footsteps coming from the floor below and the ceiling above him. As he breathed deeply, he felt like the world was strangely running in slow motion.

Akira kept telling himself to keep his calm and not to focus too much on the sounds coming from his surroundings to make sure that it would not dull his focus. That was when he said.

“By the way, it’s thanks to you that I can see clearly in the dark like this, but I wonder how about the other guys.”

“Well, they would be able to see just fine too if they are using high-class night vision. Although it won’t be as good as my support, they should be able to see enough as not to lower their fighting ability.”

Akira looked at the dead corpses lying on the floor. Some of them were indeed equipped with such night vision. But most of them were not using anything like that.

“You’re right, they do, although it’s not all of them. That kind of thing is pretty expensive, right?”

“It depends on its quality. Night vision is also a type of information-gathering device, some of them might be using other kinds of information besides optical information to increase the accuracy of the imaging process.

There are mass-produced night visions for Hunters who want to explore dark ruins. I'm sure that kind of night vision equipment is relatively cheap."

"But they're still pretty expensive, right? I don't know about the people of this base and those who are attacking this place, but since they have this kind of equipment, they must be pretty rich, right? Not to mention, they have those powerful soldiers and those powered suits too. The amount of money that I'm earning must be nothing to them."

The 500 million Aurum that Akira received from that one request in Mihazono ruin was not a small amount of money. But that was not even close to enough to hire those powerful men and buy equipment for all those soldiers, not to mention those powered suits too. Akira could not even imagine how much money he would need for all of those things.

Akira basically picked a fight against someone with enough power and money to be able to pay for all of those things. He did not regret it at all, but it was still rather discouraging when he thought about it.

Alpha lightly smiled.

"Well, I don't think it's the right thing to do to compare how much one man can earn to how much an organization can earn though, but it might be a good idea to aspire to earn that much too. It won't be strange for a first-class Hunter to be earning around that much, you know. So let's keep working hard."

"First-rate Hunters, huh. I do plan to work hard, but I have no idea how long it would take until I can be earning that much money…"

Akira replied back rather ironically after he was reminded of his current situation. But Alpha smiled at him and told him that it was not necessarily correct.

"Oh my, it might be sooner than you think, you know? You only got 300 Aurum in your first exploration and now you're already earning 500 million Aurum for one request after all. If you keep this up, you'll be able to easily

earn more than 10 billion Aurum by next year. And once you get there, you'll be one of those big earners."

Alpha once told him that anything less than 10 billion Aurum was nothing than a small amount of money. Of course, Akira understood that such a comparison did not make any sense at all.

Akira smiled as he thought that once it reached that amount of money, even Alpha would not call that a 'small amount'.

"You're right, I guess I'll keep working hard until I can reach that point, huh."

If that was enough to discourage him, he would not be able to finish Alpha's request to him. Akira thought so as he picked himself up.

Suddenly Akira's expression turned grim. Alpha was also making a serious face.

"Akira, get yourself ready."

"Yeah, I know."

There were already some people passing through in front of the entrance to that room, when that happened, Akira would hold his breath to hide himself. But this time, some of them were trying to break into that room. Whether they were only trying to save their friends or search and kill their enemies, either way, they were Akira's enemies. After all, he was neither a part of Ezont Family nor Haurias.

"Well, I guess it's too much to expect a respite with my luck, huh?"

"Buy as much time as you can, I'll also hurry up and finish rewriting the control device of your augmented suit. But don't expect too much, I think it'll still take some time until you can reboot your augmented suit even if I do so."

"Roger that!"

Akira aimed both rifles on his hands at the barricaded door. He then gathered his focus, the moment the door was blown open, Akira immediately started shooting.

A few guys stormed into the room. But Akira did not have enough firepower to deal fatal injuries on those people. Amidst that confusion, Akira was desperately fighting back those guys.

Akira compressed his time perception to its limit, thanks to Alpha's support, he could clearly see the trajectory of the enemies' bullets as he did his best to evade them. Akira could feel the big difference in his movement without his augmented suit. From his perspective, he was moving so slowly as if his body had lost its mobility. With that difference in the moving speed without his augmented suit, Akira put most of his effort into making up for that difference.

Akira was evading the incoming bullets while aiming his rifles at the enemies. Alpha had given him the orders in which enemy he should shoot and how he would do that. He tried his best to follow that order in spite of his current limits. When he was not fast enough to follow that order, he paid that failure with a bullet in his body.

But thanks to the coat he took off and set in the maximum output beforehand, Akira was able to withstand a few direct shots. But of course, his energy reserve had to pay for that. He could only keep that up for a few minutes even without taking any bullets. If Akira stopped moving there, he would only be able to keep that force field armour up for 2 seconds.

Every time bullets flew out from his rifles, he could feel kickbacks assaulting his arms. Depending on the armours that his enemies were using, Akira might not even have enough firepower to pierce their armours. Both of Akira's rifles were loaded with powerful bullets that he could control well without his augmented suit, but still, the kickback was enough to damage his arms. He was only able to keep that up because the medicines that he took beforehand kept healing his damaged arms.

Akira bravely jumped the gaps in between his enemies and used the enemy in front of him as a shield while he aimed at another person. The guy that he

shot lost his balance, Akira used that opening to quickly thrust the rifle on his right hand at that guy's throat and pulled the trigger while he used the rifle in his left hand to shoot the other enemy behind him. The guy in front of him lost consciousness from that point-blank shot, so Akira kicked him away and aimed both of his rifles at the other guys. The barrage from Akira was able to break their balance as they fell on the ground and sprayed bullets randomly inside that room.

The combination of Akira's skill and Alpha's command was barely able to secure a victory over those guys. The people that he just defeated were lying on the floor both inside the room and the hallway outside the entrance to the room. But most of them were not dead, they were only rendered unconscious. Once everything was done, Akira then fell on his knees.

Alpha shouted at Akira, pulling his consciousness together right when he was about to faint.

"Hurry up, get on your feet! Get some medicines first, quickly!"

"…O-okay."

The exchange did not even last a minute, but Akira had squeezed all of his physical and mental strength in that exchange. Akira's movement was severely dulled as he was reaching for his medicine inside his coat and he was still a bit dazed. But strangely enough, he could not get his medicines, and when he looked at his arm, he found that some of his fingers were bent in an unnatural way.

Akira smiled wryly and used his still functional fingers to take out his medicines and swallowed them while gritting his teeth against the pain assaulting his body. His broken fingers were slowly returning back to their original shapes in a rather forceful manner. He then slowly pushed himself back up.

"Some of them are still alive, so you need to make sure that they're really dead. Hurry up! If they get up, you would have to go through that fight again."

“…That wasn’t enough to kill them, huh. Although these bullets are usable without an augmented suit, they are powerful, and I shot them from a point-blank range, you know? These guys are pretty strong.”

“Remember that some of them even survived a direct shot from a CWH anti-material rifle. Aren’t you glad that these guys are weaker than that guy?”

As Akira picked up his rifles, an indicator could be seen from his vision telling him which one he should kill first. So he walked toward the guy with the highest priority.

“…But still, I feel like my bad luck is making me fight incessantly against stronger enemies, you know. Those guys that I fought when I went to save Sheryl were nowhere near these guys. Is it that they were especially weak?”

“To be honest, I think it’s way too late for you to be complaining about your own bad luck.”

“…You have a point there.”

Alpha was giving a rather conflicted smile at Akira, so he replied back with a bitter smile.

Just like the other guy that Akira shot down, the guy who was lying on the ground returned back to his senses thanks to his augmented suit that injected him with multiple battle stimulants. But when he looked around to confirm his current situation, he already found Akira standing in front of him with a rifle extended straight to his head.

Akira used both of his arms to keep his rifle stable when he pulled the trigger. The guy was frozen still as a bullet blew off his head and instantly killed him. Akira immediately moved to the next person on his priority list and killed them without hesitation. From their point of view, it could be said that they were more unlucky than Akira to die in that place.

“So then, how’s my augmented suit, is it not ready yet?”

“I’m trying my best here, but it’ll still take some time.”

“I see… It’s taking too long. It might be a good idea to get out of here first, I mean, out of the base. It’s safer outside, right?”

“Well, I’m pretty sure that it’s quite safe if you go that far, but with your bad luck, I feel like you’ll encounter that black powered suit before long, you know. That’s why I didn’t tell you to do that. Although, it’s fully possible for him to appear in front of us even if we stay here.”

Akira looked super annoyed and said.

“…That’s true, rather than fighting that black powered suit with my augmented suit, I would gladly fight the guys inside the mansion even if it means that I don’t have the support from my augmented suit.”

Akira remembered how the black powered suit was moving around the battlefield when he looked at it from the rooftop of the mansion. A powered suit was a powerful piece of equipment, it was not something that one would fight with normal equipment. Not to mention, that powered suit was stronger than a common powered suit.

Of course, he was questioning why these people had that kind of powered suit in their base. But now that it was there, it was not like he could do anything about it. He just blamed it on his bad luck and stopped worrying about it anymore.

Akira reloaded new magazines to his rifle and replaced the energy pack in his coat with new ones. He then took some medicines and hid himself in one corner of the room. He was breathing silently while feeling the nanomachines from the medicines spread through his body. He calmly let his body and mind take a rest while waiting for Alpha to finish rewriting the software in his augmented suit.

But that resting time was immediately cut short. Not because Alpha finished, but because another enemy appeared.

“Akira, get out of the room and try to shoot him, it would be bad if you let him get near you.”

Akira jumped out of the room with rifles in both of his hands, he quickly aimed at the guy who was on the other end of the hallway. When Akira saw who that was, he could not help but frown.

“Why is that guy in this place…?”

“Just keep shooting, don’t get in his range no matter what.”

Akira immediately pulled the triggers of his rifles, releasing a barrage against that guy. That guy immediately crouched his body and used a big-sized blade to shield himself from the bullets. The bullets generated sparks when they hit his blade.

“That is the guy who tried to cut my leg, right? Is he here chasing after me?”

“Don’t stop shooting. You have no winning chance against him if you fight him up close without your augmented suit. Though unfortunately, your bullets won’t be able to pierce through his armour. But at least it’s enough to slow him down. So hold him back with bullets.”

Actually, some of Akira’s bullets passed through the blade and hit that guy’s body, but that guy kept his calm and firmed his footing. Although he could not push forward against the incoming bullets, it did not seem that he was about to run away either.

Akira frowned.

“…Is that guy waiting for me to run out of ammo?”

“Likely so, but you can’t stop shooting, okay? If you slow down even for a bit, he will immediately close the distance. Without your augmented suit, it’s impossible for you to run away from him. So just keep on shooting for now to buy some time.”

“So either I run out of ammo first or you finish rewriting my augmented suit’s software first, huh. Basically, it’s another test for my luck, huh!”

“It won’t even be a test of luck if you don’t properly aim at him. Keep your focus on shooting at him and don’t show any openings.”

“I know!”

Akira desperately kept on shooting at that guy. He deliberately aimed at the points that would easily break that guy’s balance as he kept that guy from coming any closer. If he was using a normal magazine, he would have already run out of ammo by now, but thanks to the expensive extended magazine that he was using, he could somehow survive that long. As he was thinking how lucky he was for preparing those beforehand, he noticed another issue that he was facing.

[…My arms… Can they hold out until I run out of ammo?]

The kickbacks were damaging both of his arms while the medicines that he took beforehand were continuously healing them. He made his resolve and firmly held his rifles with both of his arms. That resolve was Akira’s lifeline there. But of course, that did not help his arms at all, otherwise, he would not even need his augmented suit. He could not use his CWH anti-material rifle or his DVTS minigun without his augmented suit. Of course, that was not the case if he was a superhuman, but Akira was not one.

[…If other people would even suspect me of trying to be a superhuman, it means that I should have more strength than a normal human!! So please hold out!!]

Akira wished for good luck as he held down the triggers. It was only a matter of time before the result of his wish came out.

The guy, who was hiding behind his blade from Akira’s bullets, confirmed that he had the upper hand and smiled. That guy, Toralt, was indeed waiting for Akira to run out of ammo just like Akira had guessed.

Toralt actually did not come there for Akira. After Akira retreated, he discussed with his friends what to do next.

It would be hard for them to fight someone as strong as Akira while protecting Alna. But if they asked for extra help, it would hurt their reputations. As such, they wanted to finish Akira by themselves without involving their boss if it was possible. They could just make a deal with the guy observing Katsuya to bring Katsuya somewhere close by and let him fight Akira. Since Katsuya did not want Alna dead, he would give his best to fight Akira too. Toralt and his friends decided to let Katsuya take on the dangerous job while they could just protect Alna in safety, that way, they would be able to deal with Akira without much trouble.

So then Toralt decided to move alone to find and make a deal with Katsuya's observer. The reason why he would go that far was to make sure that it would not leak, after all, his boss would know if he used the wireless communication. And even if Rogelt asked him why he went alone, he could use chasing Akira as an excuse. Toralt thought so as he went alone into the mansion.

That was when he encountered Akira by pure chance. He used his blade as a shield from the barrage instinctively. After all, his blade should be able to hold a few shots even from a CWH anti-material rifle. He was originally planning to temporarily retreat once Akira ran out of ammo, but the impact from the incoming bullets made him change his decision.

[…Too light, what's with this sudden drop of firepower?]

Toralt glanced at Akira.

[That's… AAH assault rifle? Why is he using that? Did he run out of ammo for his big guns?]

That level of firepower was barely able to inflict him any damage even if he was to take them head-on. Such leeway allowed Toralt to check on Akira. Akira was shooting at him while gritting his teeth and looking very nervous. His arms were shaking while supporting the guns in both hands. Looking at that, Toralt lightly smiled.

[I see now, is it some kind of trouble with his augmented suit? I bet he can't use his big guns even if he wants to, right?]

From the impact of the bullets and type of the rifle that Akira was using, Toralt could make a guess on how much kickback Akira was resisting. If Akira was using an augmented suit, that level of kickback would not even affect him at all. So looking at Akira, Toralt could make a guess that Akira's augmented suit was not functional.

Toralt smiled because of his sudden good luck.

[Lucky!! If I can kill that guy, it'll give a good boost to my reputation!! I'm sure that no one would know even if I kill him while he has no functional augmented suit! So then, what's the next plan? He's a little too far. If it's only this much, I can just resolve myself and take some bullets head-on while closing into him, so, should I do that? No, wait, I'm okay right now because I'm using my blade to shield myself from the bullets. Without it, if I get shot on my legs or arms, it would definitely take away my mobility. Of course, it won't kill me, but he might use that opening to run away. I need to get closer first, or at least wait until he runs out of ammo. Even if he's using an extended magazine, it's only a matter of time before he runs out of ammo if he's shooting at me like that! If he loses his balance before he runs out of ammo, I can just use that opening to jump on him!]

Toralt was slowly closing into Akira while still using his blade as a shield. With the help of his augmented suit, he had a longer swing range than normal If he jumped at Akira before slashing down, he could easily trim a few meters between them. It was only a matter of time before Toralt thought that he was close enough to Akira.

Akira kept shooting at Toralt, who was slowly closing in. But he could not step back to open up some distance between them. He had no leeway to put his power on something else other than holding his rifles, if he wavered even for a bit, he felt like his opponent would immediately jump on him.

Then finally, Akira's AAH assault rifle ran out of ammo. Akira who noticed that was rather flustered. As the force of the kickback from his AAH rifle was gone, he immediately lost his balance, and the kickback from his A2D

rifle broke his balance even more. Akira could see Toralt suddenly close the distance between them.

The compressed time perception allowed Akira's eyes to follow Toralt's movement. But his body was nowhere fast enough to react to it. He could see Toralt had his pale blue blade raised up, ready to split him into two. With its length, that blade would hit the ceiling first before hitting him, but Akira knew very well that it would hardly hinder that sharp blade. Without his augmented suit, Akira had no method to evade the incoming blade. Akira understood that the blade would cut him into two in the next moment.

The time stretched into infinity as if it was completely stopped. In that frozen world, Akira and Toralt looked at each other's eyes. Toralt was sure of his victory, while Akira already accepted his defeat.

But in the next moment, that assumption was completely flipped over.

As Toralt swiftly swung his sharp blade down through the ceiling and right at Akira, Akira slid his body to the side even faster than that and evaded the blade. At the same time, Akira used the momentum that he had from evading that blade to spin and delivered a kick to Toralt's head. The 350 million Aurum augmented suit squeezed more than its original power due to Alpha's control.

Toralt received that kick head-on, like, literally on his head. His body was blown straight to the wall, his body was even slightly planted into the wall from the impact and created a big crater on the wall. He was still confused by that sudden turn of events, and in that confused state, the last thing he saw was Akira diving through the air with both legs aimed at his body.

Both of Akira's legs landed straight on Toralt's head, leaving a big splatter on the wall. Toralt's life was blown to pieces together with the wall behind him.

After he landed, Akira still looked flabbergasted. But when he saw Alpha nodding in satisfaction, he returned back to himself. But he was still confused since he could not process what just happened.

“The augmented suit is pretty strong, and the improvised control software is pretty accurate too.”

“Eh? Ah, Eh!? Hm!? W-wait for a sec!!”

“What is it? If you have any questions, let’s get yourself ready first. You need to get your rifles and other equipment you left behind in that room. Then you should treat both of your arms too.”

“Ah, right!”

Akira was still confused, but he knew that he needed to move. He hurriedly returned back to the room where he left his equipment just like he was told to, and picked up all of his equipment that he had left on the floor. He then used medicines to heal as much as he could. After he did all of that, he was mostly calmed down.

“Alpha, when exactly did you finish rewriting the control program?”

“Around when you were in the middle of shooting at that guy.”

Akira frowned.

“Thought so. You should have told me, you know. I thought I was going to die there.”

But Alpha smiled at him as if it did not bother her at all and replied casually.

“It’s not like I did that to bully you, you know. If I had told you, the enemy might have been able to guess it from the change of your behaviour. That was why I didn’t tell you. Thanks to that, we were able to catch him off guard and finally kill him, right? So I think it was the right decision not to tell you back there.”

Akira understood Alpha’s argument. But that was not enough to make him accept it. But at the same time, he did not have any other ideas on how to get out of that situation. Not to mention that his hardship just now was the result of his selfishness, so he was just reaping what he had sown. That

thought made Akira give a conflicted look, but his anger toward himself immediately changed his expression.

Alpha smiled and tried to cheer Akira.

“Thanks to the time that you bought there, I was able to make a good improvisation on the control device. With this, not only can I give you support to increase your fighting power, I can help you calibrate your aim too. The next time you try to snipe at that pickpocket, you’ll be able to accurately snipe at her as long as there’s no disruption. So cheer up, okay?”

Akira looked at Alpha who apologetically smiled at him, so he returned with a light smile and decided to forget about that for now.

“You’re right. I guess it means that it was worth the risk, huh… Alright then, let’s go.”

As Akira pulled himself together and left the room, Alpha pointed at the blade lying on the ground.

“Akira, let’s take that.”

It was Toralt’s blade that was on the ground not too far from Akira. It had lost its pale blue light and did not seem that sharp any longer.

“That? Is it still usable?”

“Yep. Performance-wise and security-wise, it’s still functional. You can use it for melee combat. Just leave it to me.”

“Is that so? Alright then.”

Akira picked up that blade. He also picked up the part that fixed the blade from Toralt’s body. After that, Alpha told Akira to connect his information terminal to that blade.

“Is there any meaning in doing this?”

“I’m rewriting its control device just like what I did to your augmented suit… It’s okay to take it off now. Let’s equip that thing to fix the blade on your body before we go.”

Akira then equipped the blade. With this, he had an AAH assault rifle, A2D assault rifle, CWH anti-material rifle, DVTS minigun, A4WM automatic grenade launcher, and foldable blade with him. He was basically fully armed. He would not have been able to move at all or even crushed under their weight if it was not for his augmented suit.

“Hmm, I feel like I’m carrying too many weapons”

Akira smiled wryly, Alpha then mischievously said.

“If it’s getting in the way, you can discard some of them, you know?”

“No thanks!”

Akira replied back firmly and started running.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 163, Broken Promise

Index

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One of the guards, who were guarding Alna in the hangar, suddenly frowned and said.

“Toralt got killed.”

All the other guards near him could not help but react to that.

“He’s dead!? It’s Toralt we’re talking about here!? Are you sure?”

“Are you sure you didn’t just lose connection because of jamming smoke or something else?”

The person who said that Toralt was dead shook his head.

“His vital sign has flat-lined. Judging from the last information sent across, although it’s only just a guess, he might have gotten his head crushed. The vital sign check is done through the augmented suit and is also sent through it. I wonder if he took on a warhead head-on or something.”

“Was it a surprise attack…? No, he’s too smart to get caught off guard. It should be near impossible to launch a sneak attack on him. And if he was in

a pretty bad situation, he should have run, or at least called for help."

"Yeah, that's exactly why we sent him alone. But to think that he got killed even before he could call for help like this…"

Their faces turned pale. Although they could not go as far as to say for sure that Akira was the one who killed Toralt, most of them thought that was the case. Then the guy who was responsible for leading them said.

"We have no other choice here! I'll ask the boss for help!! You guys are okay with that, right?!"

No one there objected.

On the other side of the mansion, the guy who was responsible for watching Katsuya called Rogelt.

"Yes, boss, it's me… Yes, this brat is pretty useful. Those small fries are no match for him… So, I just need to take him to the hangar, right…? No? The other way…? Ahh, I see. Roger that!"

That guy closed the call with Rogelt and yelled at Katsuya.

"Hey!! Don't just stand there! Let's go to the next place!"

"…Did something happen in the hangar?"

Katsuya casually tried to gather more information, but the guy raised his voice even higher.

"It's none of your business!! You just need to do what I say!"

"…Alright."

Katsuya replied without even trying to hide his displeasure and followed that man.

The battle inside the mansion was still going on. The interior of the mansion was already scattered with corpses, the difference of the skill,

equipment, and luck between the people who were fighting there led them to two different outcomes. Those who had worse equipment, or lacked skill, or did not have enough luck were all turned into cold corpses scattered around inside the mansion.

The ones who were still left alive inside the mansion were those who had survived that natural selection. As such, even Katsuya had a hard time fighting against them.

The guy who was responsible for keeping Katsuya under his watch kept yelling at Katsuya.

“Put your back into it! If you don’t work hard enough, there’s no meaning in keeping that girl hostage, you know?!”

Katsuya still had his displeased face on him as he put himself out a bit more, but the more he moved forward, the more dangerous his position was. But thanks to that, he could take out his enemies faster. Seeing that, the other guy relaxed and said to him.

“You should’ve done that right from the start! You damn brat!!”

Katsuya had a pained look on his face as he listened to the other guy yelling at him. But even so, he still gave his best fighting there.

One of his enemies suddenly contacted someone from behind who sent a warhead straight at Katsuya. Katsuya was able to evade it as it flew past behind him and blew up next to the guy who was keeping watch on him.

Although it only injured him lightly, it really scared him. He then sacredly and flusteredly ordered Katsuya.

“H-hey!! Come back here!! We’re retreating for a bit!!”

That guy was telling Katsuya to return to be his shield. Seeing how Katsuya hurriedly returned back to him, his only thoughts were that he would be safe since he had someone strong next to him and became careless in being wary of Katsuya.

But Katsuya suddenly aimed his rifle at that guy's head. Of course, that guy was so dumbfounded, but the bullet that landed on his face right at the next moment turned his face into an unrecognizable mess.

Katsuya then shot some bullets to suppress the enemies that he was having a hard time fighting against just now and hurriedly left that place.

[Judging from the disruption in my information-gathering device after that warhead exploded, it must have some kind of jamming smoke inside it too! With this, no signal should be able to reach this place! I can use this opportunity to make them think that he was killed by the enemies!! Or at least, it should buy me some time before someone notices!]

After he left that place, Katsuya ran as fast as he could towards the hangar.

[Judging from that conversation, although it's only my guess, Alna must be in the hangar! And she must be under attack too! If I don't go and rescue her now, I might be too late!!]

Katsuya only obeyed Rogelt's men thinking that by doing so he would eventually find a window that he could use to rescue Alna. And he believed that this was his only chance.

Katsuya already knew where the hangar was. Back then when he asked the other guys with him about Rogelt's powered suit, they happily told him all kinds of information about that powered suit including the hangar where it was stationed. He originally asked that question trying to figure out the weakness of that powered suit, but it turned out that it was also useful for something else too.

[Just wait there! I'll definitely save you!!]

Katsuya used the full power of his augmented suit to run as fast as he could. When he guessed who might be attacking Alna, he could not help but worry.

__*__*__*__

Akira was also running towards the hangar, but at that time, he was still outside the mansion. He was frowning because of the fatigue. Alpha, who was floating next to him, noticed it and asked him.

“Akira, the hangar is just ahead, but, are you okay?”

“My both arms still feel a bit weird, other than that, I’m also having a slight headache.”

“Leaving your arms aside, that headache must be because you overused the time compression. Try your best not to faint, okay?”

Akira smiled bitterly.

“I know. If I faint, it’ll cut off your support, right? But still, my arms are okay, huh? I thought that I don’t feel any pain because of the painkillers and they’re actually still injured right now while the medicines that I took are trying to fix them, is that the reason why I’m feeling this weird sensation?”

Alpha lightly smiled.

“For your arms, well, even if they get torn off, I can still move them by controlling your augmented suit, so it should be alright. That’s why it’s not that important right now.”

“Yikes, that doesn’t sound okay at all. Can we like, you know, take a short rest?”

Akira was joking when he said that, but Alpha just smiled and stared back at him without saying anything. So he said while smiling bitterly.

“I get it already, you want to tell me that if I’m going to complain, I might as well withdraw from this place, right? But with all that I’ve faced until now, and since you can control my augmented suit to some extent, it would be a waste to leave now. So help me out, I’ll give my best to finish this as soon as possible and I’ll go straight back home after that.”

“In that case, let’s hurry up. It’ll put your body in some stress though, so endure it, okay?”

“Alright.”

Alpha controlled Akira’s augmented suit to force him to run faster. Akira could feel slight pain coming from both of his arms. With the current stress, his arms were trapped in the cycle of healing from the medicines and damage from the stress as he was blazing through the wasteland.

She did not tell Akira to stop nor to take a rest at all, it was all for the sake of encouraging him to withdraw from that place instead of going for Alna.

Although they had different motivations, both Akira and Alpha had the same goal, to kill Alna as fast as possible.

—*—*—*—

The guards inside the hangar quickly noticed Akira with the help of their information-gathering devices.

“Oh, here he comes! This signal must be from that brat!”

“Get into your post! Don’t worry about ammo! We need to hold out until the boss is here!”

The guards inside the hangar started setting up their portable walls. They bunkered themselves between the portable walls and the hangar’s walls in anticipation of the enemy’s attack. The one with the heavy augmented suit stood guard outside the walls, while the rest were taking cover inside the walls, all of them readied their weapons in the direction of the incoming signal.

They were only able to get the rough location of Akira. The mini information-gathering device that they used had a small range, not to mention, they spread those around to avoid a surprise attack.

“How long before the boss arrives?”

“He said that he’ll come once he’s done with the tanks and the other powered suits!”

“Why the heck is even Haurias here too!? Do they always have that much money to spend?”

“Hell if I know!”

Their conversation was suddenly cut short by a huge explosion that left a big hole in the hangar’s wall. It was blown off by countless grenades that came from the outside.

All of the guards inside the hangar immediately turned toward the direction of that explosion. The guy with the heavy augmented suit did not spend any second, he quickly released a barrage in that direction with his minigun. While the other guys who were hiding behind the walls kept shooting the incoming grenades down through the gaps between the walls. Explosions and gunshot immediately filled the hangar. That frenzied shooting happened for about 10 seconds. The bullets and the explosions only served to widen the hole on the wall until they stopped.

Now that they had calmed down, the guards inside the hangar started to nervously check for the location of their enemy. But they did not find any corpse around the hole nor in the direction of the hole.

Right at the next moment, a loud explosion echoed through the hangar. The guy with the heavy augmented suit found his minigun blown off to pieces, he shuddered and could not help but to lower his guard for a sec there.

But Akira did not let that slide, he used that small opening to jump in through the hole. He used his CWH anti-material rifle on his right hand to snipe the guy in the heavy augmented suit and his DVTS minigun on his left hand to suppress the guys behind the wall as he stormed into the room. His augmented suit did not have any trouble in holding back the kickback from both guns. He then kept on shooting through the gaps of the big equipment scattered inside the hangar.

The guy with the heavy augmented suit discarded his already destroyed minigun and screamed in anger.

“Goddammit!! Give me another one!”

Once he got another heavy weapon from one of the men behind the wall, he immediately started shooting again. Although by doing so he would be destroying the equipment inside the hangar, he did not show any hesitation at all.

Akira kept on moving around inside the hangar while shooting at the guys behind the portable wall. He used his DVTS minigun to release a barrage on them or his A4WM automatic grenade launcher to rain them with grenades. But it did not seem that the portable walls would come down anytime soon, Akira could not help but to make a stern face.

“That thing is pretty strong! I’ve been shooting at it for quite some time now, you know?!”

Alpha frowned and replied.

“This place is a hangar for powered suits after all, so they might be using portable walls designed to be able to withstand attacks from powered suits.”

Akira remembered the power of the melee weapons and the guns of that black powered suit. If those portable walls were designed to be able to hold out against that level of firepower, no wonder why they were still standing strong. But that did not make his current situation any better, so he still had a stern look on his face.

“Even if that’s the case, it doesn’t mean I didn’t do any damage at all, right?”

“Of course, they don’t have much durability left. So keep on shooting.”

“Roger that!”

Just like Alpha said, it did not take long for the portable walls to hit their limit. The moment their force field armours were down, they were turned into just simple metallic walls that offered almost no defensive value against bullets. Although most of the barrage from Akira only ricocheted off the armours of the guy with the heavy augmented suit since he had retreated behind the portable wall, Akira’s CWH anti-material rifle did not

find any resistance in plowing through them. Eventually, the guy with the heavy augmented suit could not take it any longer, a bullet ripped through his armour and straight to the guy's torso. Even after 3 shots of battle stimulants and medicines, he could not save his own life.

The other guys who realized that they had lost one of their friends shot back at Akira in a frenzy, but of course, it was not enough to hold Akira back since he had regained Alpha's support now. The portable walls that had hit their limits were quickly shredded to pieces while the grenades made a short work of them. The explosion also blew off some of the guys behind the walls and rendered them unconscious, but those showered with bullets drowned in their own blood and died there.

Those who were still alive started thinking of running away, they grabbed Alna and put their bets on the small chance that they could sneak away from Akira who was shooting at them from the other side of the mostly destroyed portable walls.

Unfortunately, they lost that gamble. But that was because of something that neither Akira nor they were expecting.

As Akira came out from behind the destroyed portable walls, chasing for those people, he could not help but frown when he saw what was in front of him. The guys who were running away from him were already lying dead on the ground. Furthermore, not too far from them, Katsuya was hugging Alna.

Katsuya reached the hangar a bit after Akira. He noticed Akira was fighting against the Ezont family's soldiers inside the hangar, so he decided to take a detour to avoid them as he sneaked into the hangar. After that, he hid while waiting for the right time to come out.

The adrenaline rush from the fight just now and the surprise from that sudden turn of events prevented both of them from reacting to what just happened. Akira and Katsuya just stood there, looking at each other. Both of them did not give any friendly look at each other. But unlike Katsuya who was looking at Akira with obvious hostility, Akira's expression was more of an exasperation.

Akira sighed.

“You again? Or is that it’s your hobby to get in my way when I’m already so close… Haah, I guess I’ll try to say this to you one more time.”

Akira sent a sharp gaze at Katsuya.

“Give her to me.”

“I refuse!!”

Katsuya refused without showing any fear and tightened his hug on Alna.

Seeing that, Akira’s expression changed from exasperation to questioning as if he could not understand the person in front of him.

“…I really can’t understand it. Why are you trying so hard to protect her? I can understand why you did what you did back then. At that time, I wasn’t using an augmented suit and I didn’t carry any powerful weapons. It was fully understandable that you told me off just with a little intimidation. I’m sure I only amounted that much in your eyes back then. But that’s not the case right now, is it?”

Akira slightly moved both of his rifles as if to show them off to Katsuya.

“Since then, I gathered enough money to buy new weapons and a new augmented suit. These things cost me about 400 million Aurum. I don’t know how much your equipment cost you, and they might be better than mine, but at least the gap between our equipment has already considerably reduced. Not to mention, you have someone pulling you down and you have no friends with you right now. Or is it that you still think you can easily win against me even in this situation?”

Katsuya slightly raised his guard without saying anything back, Akira looked at Katsuya with confusion.

“Even if you can easily win against me, what exactly do you get from saving that girl to make you even come to this gigantic base all by yourself?

Is she actually a rich lady from some big family or something and you're offered a huge amount of money for rescuing her?"

Katsuya looked at Akira with scorn and yelled at him.

"It's not for money!! I'm sure someone like you will never understand it!!"

"Then, is it like you actually knew her before and you're indebted to her, then she meeting you in the lower district's street the other day was not a coincidence, but it's because you told her to come to you if she's in trouble or something?"

"That was the first time I met her!! All of your guesses are wrong!!"

Akira did not believe that Katsuya lied there. Because of that, he just could not understand Katsuya as he was making a rather troubled face, he then said in a rather serious voice.

"So why then? It's not for money, not because you're indebted to her, and she's not your friend. I can't understand why would you go this far for a total stranger."

Akira's gaze was sharp, it was as if he was trying to see through something that he could not understand at all.

Katsuya felt slightly pressured under that gaze, but when he felt Alna shaking under his arm, he made his resolve and yelled at Akira as if to shake off his fear.

"It's because I've promised her that I'll save her! I don't need any other reason!!"

Akira looked slightly surprised there. Then his expression changed as if he finally understood what was going on although he still found it surprising.

"You're indeed a good person."

Someone who had the pride of fulfilling just an oral promise, not because of money nor debt. For Akira, it was something understandable, as a matter of

fact, it was something that he could respect. Even more so when it was a goodwill promise to save someone. Hostility vanished from Akira's gaze for a few seconds.

Katsuya was taken aback by what Akira suddenly said. Akira's short sentence was nothing more than just a compliment and he felt that too. His resolve slightly wavered thanks to that.

But Akira's next sentence completely reverted it.

"Unfortunately, you won't be able to keep that promise."

Akira was there to kill Alna. Respect was not enough to change his mind. There was no ill-will nor hatred in his eyes. But he was looking at Katsuya with hostility simply because Katsuya was blocking him from killing Alna.

Two people stood there, confirming each other's intention. One came there in order to kill Alna, while the other one came there to rescue Alna. And both of them were just one step away from accomplishing their goal.

Even the slightest hesitation would lead to certain death. If any of them made a move, they would be able to kill their opponent, but if any of them made any slight moves, it would get them killed. Because of that, both of them only stood there without making any moves as the tension slowly rose between them.

But a third party suddenly appeared in that situation.

A black powered suit broke through the shutter and stormed into the hangar. Akira's intuition told him to get away from that place, but due to the tension from just now, he could not move his legs that quickly, and the same happened to Katsuya too. That small opening was enough for that black powered suit to close its range on both of them.

Rogelt saw Akira and Katsuya through the external camera of his powered suit and immediately yelled in anger.

“Damn brats!! I knew it, both of you are actually working together, huh!! Taking me for a fool like that, I’ll kill both of you!!”

In his head, Rogelt thought that Katsuya only accepted his offer in order to buy time while Akira went to save Alna before regrouping.

Because of his misconception, there was no chance to straighten his misunderstanding now, Akira understood at least that much. Katsuya also thought so, but his train of thought was different from Akira, so he made a suggestion to Akira although it was against his will.

“…Hey, let’s work together here. How about a truce until we can do something about that powered suit and get out of this place?”

Akira replied back instantly without any hesitation.

“No thanks.”

Katsuya was dumbfounded, he did not expect that Akira would refuse in that situation.

“You… Are you serious?!”

“I’m here to kill that girl. Something like this is not enough for me to change my priority and help you save her. If you really want my help no matter what, that would be after that girl is dead.”

Akira replied so casually. But if Katsuya would accept that proposal, he would not be in that place in the first place. So Katsuya inadvertently yelled back.

“Are you kidding me?!”

The pointless exchange was forcibly cut short when the black powered suit raised its arm. The chainsaw-like weapon made a loud ringing sound as its teeth spun fast. Akira and Katsuya inadvertently looked at that chainsaw, then that powerful-looking chainsaw came down at them.

Its first target was Akira. Akira matched the movement of his Alpha-controlled augmented suit to evade that chainsaw and jump away from that place. Just a split second after he jumped off, the chainsaw came down at the floor where Akira was standing a few milliseconds ago. It left a huge crater on the floor and threw pieces of the floors all around the area. Some of the big pieces hit the equipment inside the hangar and made loud banging sounds which showed how hard they were thrown.

If Akira got hit by that, there was no question about it, he would have turned into minced meat. He could feel a chill run down his spine as he made a stern face and evaded the incoming pieces of the floors inside his distorted time perception.

“Why is he coming for me?! Shouldn’t he prioritize taking on that guy since he has someone slowing him down?!”

But Alpha replied back calmly.

“I’m sure he plans to kill everyone, so he decided to go for you first since you have nothing slowing you down.”

“Isn’t it a better idea to go for the one whom you can kill for sure first?”

“That kind of decision varies from person to person, you see. So it’s not like I can do anything about it even if you complain to me.”

For Akira, it was normal for another person to aim for him first given the option. So he was not really that surprised when it happened, he just ran as fast as he could toward the hole on the hangar’s wall.

“Let’s run into the mansion first. I’m sure that black powered suit won’t come chasing for you all the way into the mansion.”

“How about that guy then?”

“I’m sure he’ll run into the mansion too, we’ll kill that girl there.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

“If he decided to run outside the mansion, I’m sure that black powered suit would catch up with them and kill both of them. If that happens, it means that you’ll have your work cut short.”

Akira jumped out through the hole and exited the hangar. Immediately after that, the black powered suit forced its way through the same hole, chasing after him. There was no need for Akira to look back to understand what happened, he just kept on running toward the mansion. He then jumped and broke through one of the glass windows of the mansion which was already cracked from all the fighting.

Akira found himself in one of a big hall. As he went straight to go deeper into the mansion, he could see Katsuya and Alna also jump into the hall from the other side. Akira who noticed that immediately shot at both of them out of pure reaction.

But his aim was interrupted by Alpha. Because of that, his shot landed away from Alna on the wall next to her.

Right at the next moment, a huge blade suddenly grazed the air right in front of Akira. The black powered suit cut into the mansion from the outside with its huge blade. But that attack did not only cut through the wall, it simply destroyed the whole wall. Akira could not help but frown.

“If you want to kill that pickpocket, do it once we are deeper inside the mansion.”

“Got it!!”

Alpha controlled Akira’s augmented suit to get him back on his feet and Akira immediately blazed into the mansion after that, away from the black powered suit’s melee range. Behind him, the black powered suit exchanged its melee weapon with a heavy rifle.

Akira was still running as he forced his hand to shoot his A4WM automatic grenade launcher behind him without even looking back. Of course, the grenades did not have enough firepower to destroy the black powered suit. But the explosions were enough to disrupt its aim.

The black powered suit released a powerful shot using its gigantic gun. It went right past Akira and hit the wall in front of him, turning it into a pile of rubbles. Akira used the hole made from that shot and vanished into the mansion. He could not help but frown after witnessing the power of that shot.

“What the heck was that? It’s not something that you would normally use against normal humans, you know?!”

“It was a warhead designed to fight gigantic monsters and powered suits. So judging from that, it’s indeed not something that you would use against normal humans. If you have the time to be surprised, you need to hurry up. If you get shot by that, no amount of medicines would be enough to save you, you know?”

Akira ran as fast as he could into the mansion to get away from the enemy’s line of fire.

Rogelt was furious inside his powered suit. Even after he used his prided powered suit, both Katsuya and Akira were able to get away from him. That fact really ticked him off. He opened a line to all his men and yelled an order to them.

“I’ll send you the location of those brats!! Find them and kill them!! If any of you encounter them, immediately send your location to me!! I’ll snipe them from outside the mansion! If you can’t handle them, drive them outside the mansion and I’ll take care of the rest!! Y’all got it?!”

The black powered suit made a loud sound as it moved away. It patrolled around the mansion while using its information-gathering device to scan the inside of the mansion. And when he found some of Haurias men inside the mansion, it angered him even more so he cut up the mansion wall. His powerful blade turned the furniture together with the Haurias men, who were even using a sturdy augmented suit, into mincemeat in an instant.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 164, The End of The Hunt

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Akira was running through the mansion, going after Katsuya and Alna. He used the A2D and AAH assault rifles on both of his hands to repel any enemies he encountered. The reason why he swapped to those rifles was because Alpha told him to do so. Since he was using rifles with low firepower, he took more time to fight each and every enemy he encountered.

“Say Alpha, my augmented suit is already functioning, right? So why am I using these rifles?”

“If you use the other rifles, the firing sound would draw in more enemies. Not to mention, they think you’re a strong opponent. So there’s a good chance that they would give up on killing you, and instead, leaving the rest to that black powered suit. Although it is hard on you, it might be better to let them think that they would have their chance if they keep buying time.”

“But it’s slowing me down, you know? At this rate, they might get away from me, no?”

Alpha smiled just like usual and said.

“It’ll be fine. He has someone slowing him down. So they should not be able to move that fast and he can’t shoot us either. That’s why, I’m sure he’ll have no choice but to fight back rather hardly which would draw more people to him, and that will slow him down even more. We’ll catch up with him sooner or later.”

Akira did not stop shooting even while he was talking to Alpha, and after listening to her explanation, he understood why it would be fine to use assault rifles in that situation.

Alpha did not lie there, but she also did not tell Akira everything. Even with his assault rifle, he would have a good chance of killing Alna even if Katsuya tried to shield her. Akira did not even notice that fact.

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Katsuya peeked out from one of the rooms inside the mansion and shot at an enemy just ahead of him who was carrying a powerful gun. He could hear screams coming from that direction mixed with the gunshots from his own rifle.

Katsuya was cornered. He had a stern look on his face, he kept mumbling curses and complaints. He still had Alna next to him, but since she was not using any augmented suit nor had she ever trained or experienced combat, she could not move as fast as him. Then to top it off, more and more enemies were swarming him due to Rogelt’s order. He had to protect Alna in that situation, even for him, he was having a hard time fighting the incoming enemies. Not only was he cornered, but he also had no way to escape. He already had his hands full protecting Alna after evacuating her into that room.

Alna looked in pain, seeing how Katsuya was having a hard time protecting her. The kind stranger that she clung to by pure chance back then, and right now, he was still desperately trying to protect her. That thought turned her feelings toward that stranger to love. And the fact that person was trying to protect her because of a mere promise without any benefit at all, only strengthened her feelings for him.

Then something clicked inside Alna.

“…Katsuya, it’s fine, it doesn’t matter now. Thank you.”

Katsuya looked at Alna in surprise.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m really happy that you came here for me. I think that you’ve already saved me enough. It’s fine now.”

“What are you talking about…?”

“Just leave me behind and get away from here. Without me slowing you down, you can at least escape from this place alone, right?”

Katsuya was dumbfounded while Alna smiled bitterly.

“Why would you even say that? It’s fine, don’t worry. If you keep saying something like that, I would get angry, you know?”

Katsuya lightly said so to Alna while trying not to worry her. But instead, the smile vanished from Alna’s face which only left her with a pained look. She then started crying and confessing to Katsuya.

“I’m sorry. I… I’ve been lying to you… I took it.”

“Eh?”

“I was the one lying. I stole Akira’s wallet. Then he noticed it and started chasing after me, that was when I bumped into you. I lied to you so that you would protect me… I-I’m really sorry.”

Seeing how shocked Katsuya was, Alna smiled bitterly at him.

Alna felt really guilty towards Katsuya who was trying to rescue her. But she always thought that if she told him the truth, he would abandon her to her fate. And with Akira ordering a search for her, she would lose her life if she didn’t have Katsuya’s protection. That was why she could not bring

herself to tell him. Although she felt guilty about it, she could not deny that she was also happy that he came for her.

But now that she was in love with him, she prioritized his life more than her own. If Katsuya died because of her wrongdoing, she would not be able to forgive herself.

“I… I’m not worthy of your protection… That’s why… it’s fine.”

Alna tried her best to make Katsuya abandon her. She did not even care if that would make him hate her. After she confessed everything, she looked down. She had nothing left. She only smiled mockingly at herself, she was only getting what she had sown.

Katsuya, who saw her miserable state, made his resolve and clearly stated.

“That doesn’t change anything.”

“…Eh?”

“As I said, I’ve promised you, so I don’t need any other reason. I won’t take back my promise just because of something like that.”

Katsuya smiled, trying to cheer Alna up.

“Moreover, well, like, you know, trust is a crucial thing for a Hunter, and I’m aiming to be a great Hunter. That’s why, although it might sound weird, even if you lied to me, I’ll still keep my promise. That’s why I won’t let you die. Even if you don’t want it, I’ll still protect you.”

Alna shuddered, emotion flooded her heart.

“And also, well, it’s true that stealing is bad, but I don’t think that’s enough of a reason to kill you. I’ll try to talk it out with that guy. So don’t worry, it’ll be fine. You have my promise, so just believe me.”

Katsuya said so and smiled kindly. Alna nodded without saying anything, tears were still running down her cheeks as she tried her best to smile.

Right at the next moment, Katsuya felt something approaching, so he quickly jumped off.

The black powered suit readied its rifle and aimed it at Katsuya. Rogelt used the information sent by his men together with his own information terminal to lock down on Katsuya's position. Although it was nothing but a crude approximation, with the firepower of his rifle, there was no need for him to snipe precisely.

"Damn brat!! Running your mouth like that!! Now die!!!"

Fuelled with anger, Rogelt operated his powered suit. A huge bang echoed, his rifle that rivalled the firepower of a tank shot released a warhead straight into the mansion. It easily broke through multiple walls and left one big continuous hole through the mansion.

Katsuya was able to barely avoid the warhead. Although he was shocked by the destruction left behind, he immediately went back to secure Alna.

"Alna, are you alright?!"

Although Alna was lying down on the ground, she was unhurt. She was so horrified that she was not able to immediately reply to Katsuya. But she was at least able to nod to let him know that she was fine.

Katsuya's expression relaxed slightly. He was relieved to know that Alna was fine, but what happened next left him aghast. Akira suddenly jumped into the room through the hole left by that warhead. That sudden change of event caused Katsuya to freeze, and that was enough to dictate the end result.

Akira kept Katsuya suppressed with the rifle on his left hand without even looking at him. While Akira's gaze, as well as the rifle on his right hand, were fixed on Alna. Inside that compressed time perception world where everything was running in slow motion, Akira and Alna locked gazes at each other. Akira pulled down the trigger, showered Alna with bullets and Katsuya had no means to stop him.

Akira kept on shooting at Katsuya to keep him suppressed and escaped from the mansion through the hole left by Rogelt. Katsuya was only able to see Akira run off without doing anything.

The one that pulled Katsuya back to reality was Alna's weak voice. The moment he heard it, Katsuya immediately ran toward Alna and confirmed that she had been wounded. Although she was fatally wounded, she was not dead yet. Judging from the locations where she was shot, it seemed that Akira intentionally did that. Katsuya did not notice that far, but judging from the blood on the ground, he knew that Alna did not have much time left.

"…M-medicine!!"

Katsuya pulled out medicine from his pocket. But he immediately detected enemies coming from the direction of the hole and started shooting at them. He then shouted at those people who were taking cover behind the wall around the hole.

"Don't get in my way!!"

He could not treat Alna in this situation. Katsuya understood that and picked her up with his arm and slowly dragged himself away from that place while keeping those men in check. He thought that no enemies would come from the direction where Akira just left, so he tried to retreat there while protecting Alna.

Alna coughed out blood and her body gradually turned cold. She would die soon. There was no chance to save her now. Although she understood that, she did not feel fear at all. The happiness of being held by someone she loved and the fact that she would no longer slow him down was stronger. As her vision slowly turned dark, she could see Katsuya still desperately trying to protect her. It made her fall in love deeper with him and regret the fact that Katsuya had a pained look on his face.

She felt cold. She wanted to feel warmth during her final moments at least. Alna squeezed the last bit of power that she had to raise up her hand that was already soaked with her own blood. Katsuya who noticed that tried to

call her name. Unfortunately, she could no longer hear anything, but even so, she could still feel the warmth on her palm and smiled happily.

Alna's arm gracefully fell. Her life ended there, in the arms of her loved one.

Katsuya realized that Alna was gone. He understood that trying to treat her wounds while shooting at the guys attacking them would not help at all. He was extremely frustrated as he softly placed Alna's body down.

Katsuya's scream echoed through the mansion. Once it died down, he was filled with rage and disappointment for not being able to save her. And in order to remove the main source of the reason why he could not save Alna, he pushed his rare talent to full bloom.

Rogelt's men, who had gathered in that place due to an order from Rogelt, were thunderstruck at how Katsuya suddenly turned so strong as if he was completely a different person. Although they had the upper hand, it did not take long for that to be overturned. The mansion was filled with flying bullets and it was only a matter of time before it stopped.

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Akira went through the hole that Rogelt opened and escaped the mansion. He then used the full power of his augmented suit to propel himself up to the rooftop of the mansion, then ran toward the opposite side and jumped down onto the courtyard. He then kept on running towards the entrance.

Sheryl was saved and Alna was dead. He no longer had any reason to stay there. The only thing left was to get out from that place alive. Of course, picking a fight against the Ezont family would entail a lot of problems later, but he shelved that for another time. He could take his time thinking about it once he was out of there, Akira kept on running as he thought so.

"Alpha, I just want to confirm something though, that girl is dead, right? There's no way she might be saved, right?"

Akira had shot Alna following Alpha's instruction. He thought that it should be enough to kill her. But he also knew that there was a treatment that could save someone even after that person lost half of his body, or expensive medicines that could save someone from certain death, or many other ways to survive that level of injury. That was why he was not so sure.

Alpha smiled and replied.

"You're such a worrywart. Don't worry, it's true she might be able to survive using expensive medicine and proper treatment. But I'm sure he wouldn't have the leeway to do it in that situation."

"But like, is there any reason why I can't kill her right away there? A shot on her head would guarantee her death, you know…"

"If you blow her head or kill her with any means that make it obvious that she's dead, I'm sure that boy will immediately leave Alna behind and chase after you, to kill you. That's why we did that. If we let her alive although only for a few seconds, it's obvious which one that boy would prioritize."

"If that's the problem, isn't it easier to just kill that boy or at least wound him too? In that situation back there, although I might not have been able to kill him, I should have been able to at least injure him, right?"

"If we did that, the rest of Ezont family's soldiers would focus on hunting you down. In the worst-case scenario, you would have to fight the whole gang on top of that black powered suit all by yourself."

"Now that you mention it, that does make sense."

Akira agreed with that argument too, so his displeasure and doubt were gone.

"Even if that boy tries to chase after you once the girl is dead, he would have to face Ezont family's men first. So let's get him to buy some time for us while we escape from this place."

Akira was still running as he glanced back. Inside that mansion, Katsuya should be fighting the Ezont family's men as well as that black powered suit. As he imagined that scene, he thought that it must be a huge pain in the neck as if it was none of his business.

"…Well, even if some of them might still come at me, at least that powered suit won't be coming for me. Although I do feel bad about it, let's have him buy us some ti-"

Akira immediately frowned. In order for the black powered suit to chase after him from the other side of the mansion, that black powered suit would need to go all the way around the mansion, that was why he thought that there was no way that black powered suit would come for him. And even if it did, it would take some time for it to go around the mansion. But his feeling of safety was immediately betrayed, he could see the black powered suit standing right on the top of the mansion.

"You gotta be kidding me!?"

"He must have used the full power of his powered suit to get it on top of the mansion. Although, in order to do that, it seems that he had no other choice but to leave some of its heavy weapons behind. It has no ranged weapon at all, that melee weapon is the only weapon that it has at the moment."

"That's not even the problem here!!"

The black powered suit jumped down and landed with a big bang. It then jumped with a power that was enough to shake the ground as it headed right toward Akira.

"You damn brat!! Do you think I'll let you get away?!!"

The black powered suit moved around while reading its chainsaw, the countless teeth of its chainsaw raised a deafening sound as it started spinning.

Akira's augmented suit increased its output to its limit as if it did not care how much burden it would put on Akira's body. Akira just ignored the

stinging pain from both of his legs as he kept on running as fast as he could. But of course, it was no match against the high-speed powered suit. The distance between him and the powered suit was slowly shrinking.

“Alpha! Can we do something about that thing?!”

Unlike Akira who obviously looked very worried, Alpha only looked slightly concerned. She then casually said to him.

“It can’t be helped then, let’s fight it.”

“Are you serious?!”

Akira was wide-eyed, but Alpha smiled and replied.

“Get yourself ready, you at least have a better chance fighting it rather than keep running from it like this.”

Akira smiled wryly.

“Alright, I get it! If resolving myself is enough to do something about it, I’ll resolve myself as much as you want!! That’s my responsibility, after all!!”

“And the rest would be my responsibility. So just leave the rest to me. We don’t have time to waste, let’s prepare ourselves before it catches on to us.”

Akira was running at high speed when he used his augmented suit to immediately stop himself. Right at the same time, he reloaded a new magazine to his CWH anti-material rifle, and then threw it down on the ground together with his A4WM automatic grenade launcher, and DVTS minigun.

He then took out the foldable blade that he had obtained from the mansion, grabbed it with both his hands and expanded it. Once it was fully unfolded, its bladed started to give a faint bluish glow.

Right in front of Akira, the black powered suit raised its chainsaw while blazing straight at him. Seeing that, Akira took a deep breath and readied himself.

Rogelt then yelled from inside the powered suit.

“Die!!!”

The black powered suit swung its powerful chainsaw down with a huge force. Akira, who was inside the slow-motion world, swung his foldable blade as vigorously as he could.

The moment their blades made contact, blue light flashed from Akira’s blade, it then turned into dust and carried away by the wind. While at the same time, the force of the collision threw Akira’s body back.

With that one exchange, although Akira was fighting a powered suit with only his own flesh and his augmented suit, it was able to push the black powered suit back.

Normally, it would be nothing strange if that one attack crushed Akira. There were 2 reasons why it did not. First of all, Rogelt had spent most of his energy on fighting all the powered suits and tanks in the previous fights, because of that, his powered suit could not exert its full power. While the other reason was because Alpha modified the blade to use all its available power for one swing.

The only thing that maintained the blade’s sharpness was its energy. Due to modification from Alpha, it used all of its energy in one go, way above what that blade could withstand. Thanks to that, it increased its destructive power to its utmost limit. Although it turned into dust right after that, it was able to withstand that exchange against a powered suit. And with the help of Alpha’s support, Akira swung it with the technique that rivalled a swordmaster.

While his body was blown backwards, Akira quickly grabbed his DVTS minigun and CWH anti-material rifle and immediately started to shoot using his DVTS minigun. Although most of his bullets hit the powered suit, it barely caused any damage at all.

Rogelt was surprised by what happened but immediately regained his composure. After reassessing his situation, he readied himself and quickly

went for another attack. Unlike Akira who had lost his blade, the black powered suit still had its weapon just fine, and it was powerful enough to easily crush Akira.

From the external camera of his powered suit, Rogelt could see Akira aiming another shot at him. This time, Akira was using his CWH anti-material rifle.

Akira pulled the trigger, the bullet that was shot in a point-blank range hit the black powered suit and released a loud bang. Right at the next moment, Rogelt immediately lost the power output of his powered suit. Akira's shot had destroyed his powered suit's energy generator.

When the powered suit stopped moving, Akira nimbly manoeuvred away while picking up the rest of his weapons before running away from that place.

Akira was running like a madman when he threw a question to Alpha.

"Alpha! That should be enough to stop that thing, right?!"

"To be more precise, you just sniped its generator and temporarily stopped it. If it has a spare generator, it can immediately swap its generator and start moving again. So I don't think stopping it is the right word to use in this situation."

"Wha-!? Even that wasn't enough?!"

"It's a matter of fighting a tank only with an augmented suit, or like fighting a powered suit only with a human body. The power gap is simply too big. But even if it has a spare generator, it'll take some time to replace the destroyed generator. So you should have enough time to run away, that is, as long as you don't stop because you're tired or something."

"Alright alright, I get it!"

Akira smiled bitterly and started running again. He then jumped over the fence with the help of his augmented suit, and just kept on running away

from Ezont Family's base. He finally was able to escape that place.

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The rear side of the black powered suit opened, Rogelt came out from it. His face was deep red, he looked absolutely furious. He kept looking at the direction where Akira ran away and mumbled.

"…That brat… He got away, huh!"

Rogelt jumped off from his powered suit and checked the hole on his powered suit. It was the hole left by the bullet that destroyed the powered suit's generator.

[…I bet it's a powerful anti-force field armour bullet. It was able to pierce through my powered suit's force field armour after all. Otherwise, it would have been impossible to do that.]

As Rogelt had predicted, Akira actually used the anti-force field armour bullet that he bought as a lucky charm and a trump card. It was a high-quality bullet that cost him 5,000,000 Aurum per shot. He only bought one bullet just to be safe in case he had no other choice but to go against a powerful monster, like that one huge creature that he fought back in the Seranthal building. Akira himself did not expect that he would be using that bullet so quickly.

[But still, even if he shot that in a point-blank range, normally, that would not be enough to destroy my generator, so how…]

Rogelt frowned, he did not want to believe the explanation that came up in his head.

Unlike armour plating, the force field armour of the black powered suit was the type that continuously consumed energy and extended out its force field. Since it would consume too much energy if he kept moving, Rogelt usually only stood still when he was not in a fight. And even in the middle of a battle, he would lower the force field for parts that were unlikely to get shot

in order to save energy. Otherwise, it would consume too much energy to maintain.

Focusing the force field armour only at the points where they were receiving shots was something that only skilled users could do, and one of the indicators of a high-quality control device was whether it could accurately predict incoming shots and only expand the forced field in those locations.

But this automatic adjustment from the control device usually had some particular quirks. In some cases, it might cause the force field to focus only on one point and leave another location more open for an attack.

Rogelt remembered how Akira used his DVTS minigun to shoot a barrage on his powered suit. If it was in order to damage his powered suit, then it would have been a pointless action, but what if he did that to manipulate the automatic adjustment control of Rogelt's powered suit. If Akira did that to focus the force field armour in one place and open a weak point in another place to shoot at, if that was all true, then it would explain how Akira was able to snipe the generator.

Although it was possible theoretically, it was actually almost impossible to execute. It would have been possible with the combination of a huge amount of bullets and a powerful information-gathering device that could precisely calculate the small changes in the force field armour in order to create a concentrated force field and opening a weak spot. But in order to do that, Akira would have to analyze and calculate a huge amount of information, which would have been impossible.

Rogelt rejected the solution to his question that came up in his mind. He then lightly shook his head, just to blame that on his bad luck, and decided to stop thinking about it.

Rogelt shook off his thoughts from what just happened and looked at his powered suit one more time. Seeing how his prided black powered suit was rendered to that state, anger started to well up again.

“That brat, wrecking my powered suit like this. I’ll definitely kill him next time.”

“Unfortunately, you won’t be able to do that.”

A woman’s voice abruptly replied to Rogelt. Rogelt immediately pulled up his rifle and released some shots in the direction of that voice.

Although there was no one there, his bullets ricocheted and made a sound as if they bounced off a metallic object. A blade was floating in the air there. When the owner of that blade took off her camouflage, it revealed a girl smiling amusedly. She had a metallic cyborg body covered under a camouflaging coat, both of her arms were armed with blades, it was Neria.

Neria and Rogelt made eye contact. Right at the next moment, Neria suddenly dashed and closed the distance between them.

Rogelt made a rough approximation of how strong his opponent was by judging from how she moved just now and how she blocked his shots. He quickly decided that his rifle would not do him any good and threw it away, instead, he grabbed 2 knives behind his hip and readied himself. When he unsheathed his knives, blades extended out and they turned into swords.

Rogelt had talent in CQC, that was why, during the battle against other powered suits, he was always using melee weapons, and of course, that talent also translated very well when fighting against another human. As a matter of fact, his skill with the blade allowed him to distinguish himself in the eastern district where guns were a norm.

Nelia and Rogelt exchanged blows for just a split second, by the end of that exchange, they were standing past each other with their backs facing each other.

“See, it would be impossible for you.”

Nelia smiled and said so, behind her, Rogelt was sliced into 4 pieces with a cross centered on his throat. Not only did he get beheaded, but his head and

body were also split cleanly into two halves. His body parts fell down and painted the ground red in blood.

Now that her job was finished, Nelia looked in the direction where Akira ran off to. She smiled amusedly which even looked like she was ecstatic.

“But still, although it hasn’t been that long since the last time, to think that he has become strong enough to defeat a powered suit with only an augmented suit. It was really unfortunate that I wasn’t able to seduce him back then.”

Nelia once again activated the optical camouflage of her coat. Her figure was slowly swallowed into the scenery and vanished completely.

“It would be great if I can get another chance to try to seduce him, although, it would be hard to do that in my current situation. Seriously though, what should I do with you?”

She did not feel anything wrong with seducing someone that she would try to kill 5 seconds later. Nelia, who had such a distorted way of thinking, had a regretful expression on her beautiful face. But that face also quickly vanished from the views, leaving behind the nonfunctional powered suit and the dismembered corpse of its user.

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Haurias, the gang that was at war against the Ezont family. Inside its base, in its boss’ room. The report from Haurias’ soldiers echoed through the room.

“Boss! These guys are too strong!! We’ll be wiped out at this rate!! Tell us what to do!! Boss!! Are you there?! Whether we group up or retreat, just give us something!! Dammit!! Is it not connected!? What the heck is going on here?!!”

Their boss was unable to give them any orders, after all, he had a bullet on his head and he was already dead.

Haurias already sent most of its men to attack the Ezont family. Its boss was left only with a handful of bodyguards in the base. And those bodyguards, like their boss, were already dead.

Both Haurias and Ezont family had some similarities. First of all, both of them were huge gangs with a lot of members, the boss of the respective gang held a ton of influence. Because of that, it was extremely difficult for the members of those gangs to rise up against their boss. So right now, with both sides left with no boss, their men had no other choice but to fight to the death, save for some who ran away at the very last second.

Ezont Family and Haurias, the two goliath gangs in the lower district of Kugamayama city. With the loss of their boss and their men, the money that they spent in that battle, both of them were effectively destroyed in a single night.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 165, Negotiation with Viola

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When morning came, another group arrived at the Ezont family's base. They were the people from Drankam. Although the battle last night happened in the area between the slum and the wasteland, Kugamayama city could not just ignore it. So they dispatched Drankam there in the morning to check on the situation.

Drankam had another reason why they had to come there. It was because one of their vehicles was destroyed around that area. When that vehicle was destroyed, its control device sent its last record back to Drankam. Before the City Management got suspicious that last night's battle had something to do with them, Drankam decided to investigate the incident prior to the request from the City Management.

When Shikarabe arrived there, he looked around the courtyard and frowned.

"It must have been one hell of a battle."

Now that the morning light shone the whole courtyard, the scene looked like hell. Corpses were scattered all over the places, he could see pools of blood formed in various places, and the whole area was filled with the nauseating smell of blood.

Yamanobe looked around in slight amazement.

“Whoah, this here… I’m pretty sure the body count can easily reach a few hundred. Depending on how many bodies we can find inside the mansion, it might even go up to thousands. And I don’t see any dead monsters at all, it’s entirely a fight between humans. Geez, honestly though, we have more than enough monsters to kill in the wasteland, there’s no need for them to kill each other, right?”

Velga checked the wreckages of powered suits in the courtyard and hummed.

“…Hmmm, they were even using this kind of thing to fight each other, huh. These guys were pretty invested in this, weren’t they? 100 or even 200 million Aurum won’t be enough to pay for this stuff, you know. Including the fuel and ammo that they consumed last night, it might easily go beyond 1 billion Aurum, no?”

After the three of them exchanged opinions about how horrendous the scene in the courtyard was, they immediately moved on to finish why they came there. They searched for Drankam’s vehicle among all the wreckage in the courtyard. Once they found it, it was already sliced in half, they then ripped the inside of the vehicle and extracted its black box. It should contain all the information until the vehicle was destroyed.

Shikarabe checked the damage on that device.

“Well, it seems that it’s still intact. But even if it wasn’t, it’s not our fault.”

Velga looked at the sliced vehicle and said.

“Was it sliced with a huge blade or something? I guess one of those powered suits must have had that, huh? So where’s the guy who was inside it? Shikarabe, did you find anything?”

“Nothing. I can’t say anything about the user unless we check the record inside this device first, I don’t even know who might have been inside. I heard that whoever took this out, used it without asking for permission after

all. Well, since it’s basically turned into a pile of metal, the insurance won’t be able to fully cover it. I don’t know how much the gang would have to pay for it, but the guy who used it would not be able to get out of it unscathed, that is if that guy is still alive.”

Now that they had completed their mission and recovered their priority target, they made a call to Drankam. Drankam told them to get back to the base as soon as possible to check the record inside that device. So Shikarabe went and conveyed that to Velga and Yamanobe, that was when Yamanobe noticed Yumina and the other girls. Yumina, Airi and 10 other Drankam members entered the mansion.

Yamanobe raised his eyebrows and said.

“Those are from Katsuya’s team, right? I don’t see Katsuya with them though.”

Velga also noticed them, but he noticed something else too.

“Hmmm…? Isn’t that Nergo? What is he doing there with that group?”

Shikarabe frowned and obviously sounded rather annoyed as he said.

“Don’t know, and don’t care. Just leave them be, we have nothing to do with them.”

Seeing how Shikarabe’s mood turned worse the moment Katsuya’s name came up, Yamanobe and Velga smiled wryly. There was no need to keep souring Shikarabe’s mood by talking about that subject. So they decided to just move on and leave that place.

Yumina and her friends heard from Mizuha that there was a good chance Katsuya went to that place alone, that was why they came there to look for him.

The scene inside the mansion was more or less as horrendous as the courtyard. Although Yumina and her friends were already used to killing monsters, they never witnessed the leftover of a battle between humans that

was this bad, more than half of them had a pale face and were filled with terror as they continued searching the inside of the mansion. The only one who was completely fine was Nergo. Since the group was mostly made of girls, Nergo was sticking out since he was a battle cyborg.

Nergo had rifles in all of his 4 arms, he was leading the team in front of Yumina while checking the safety of the surrounding area. Yumina then apologetically said to him.

“I’m sorry for making you do this. Although it was a request from Mizuha-san, I feel bad for making you help us in doing something this dangerous…”

But Nergo replied in a bright tone.

“Nah, don’t worry about it. Katsuya-kun did save me back then, so I still owe him some. I’m more than happy to help.”

Nergo looked at how the other guys were doing while he said so. Some of them seemed thankful, some others had no particular reaction, while some were simply people who did not express much of their feelings through their faces. Nergo closely observed every single one of them.

“By the way, although it might be weird to hear this from me, but if you want, I can search this place alone, you know? I know that you girls are Hunters, but I’m sure this scene is too much for you girls since you’re still young. If I find something, I’ll contact you, so you girls can just wait outside the mansion.”

Yumina thought that Nergo was simply being considerate to them. If Katsuya was really inside the mansion, judging from how bad the scene inside the mansion was, it would not be strange to find him dead. And if that was true, more than likely his body would be in a pretty bad shape. It would be too much to let herself and her friends see that. Yumina thought that was why Nergo said so.

Although Yumina understood that possibility very well, she still replied firmly.

“No, that would be asking too much from you. So we’ll come too, we’ll be fine.”

“…I see, you’re pretty brave.”

Nergo did not say anything more after that as he returned back to his search.

[It would be fine if we find him alive. But to be honest, if he’s already dead, I want to secure his body though… Well, I have my own reputation to hold in Drankam, so it’s better if I act for the sake of our long term goal.]

Nergo made that decision in the back of his metallic head.

They went deeper into the mansion. There they got a signal from Katsuya’s information terminal. But when they tried to make contact, there was no reply. So they prepared themselves for the worst-case scenario as they used the data from that signal to look for Katsuya. When they arrived at the source of that signal, they saw a room filled with dead bodies. Katsuya was on the floor, looking down, in the middle of that room.

They immediately swarmed Katsuya and asked him if he was alright. But Katsuya did not reply back, he kept his head down with a dark expression. Airi, Nergo and Yumina took a step back and scanned the room.

Yumina looked around and frowned. The room was filled with dead bodies, the floor was basically covered in blood. Airi was even slightly surprised when she counted the number of dead bodies in the room.

“That’s a lot of dead bodies, is it all Katsuya’s?”

“Maybe, but not all of them. Moreover…”

Among the dead bodies, Yumina looked at a particular dead body and made a saddened face. It was the body of a girl that was lying not too far from Katsuya, it was Alna.

After seeing that, Yumina understood what was going on. Katsuya came to rescue Alna and failed. It must be the reason why he was so depressed.

Yumina cut through all the girls that surrounded Katsuya, she then crouched in front of him and said to him.

“Katsuya, let’s go back.”

Katsuya still looked down without replying back.

“We need to bring Alna back.”

Katsuya raised his face. But he still did not reply. Yumina understood that it was all he could do at the moment, so she grabbed Katsuya’s shoulder and got him on his feet. Katsuya did not resist.

Yumina sent a glance at Airi. Airi nodded as she pointed at Alna’s body and said to the rest of the girls.

“We’ll take her too, help me.”

Alna’s body was soaked with blood. Her face was wiped clean of blood, but her body was soaked with her blood as well as the other people’s blood who were killed near her. The girls frowned seeing that body. Airi’s gaze turned sharp, the girls there winced back. That was when Nergo suddenly said.

“It’s fine, I’ll do it.”

Nergo pulled out a body bag from his backpack and gently put Alna’s body inside it. Airi who thought that Nergo was going to carry Alna’s bloodied body thanked him.

“Thank you.”

“Don’t worry about it. Like I said before, I’m fine with it.”

Carrying dead bodies around was not a strange thing for Hunters. Because of that, Airi did not find it weird that Nergo was carrying a body bag with him.

Looking at Alna’s dead body that was carried carefully, Katsuya mumbled while still crying lightly.

“…I wasn’t able to protect her.”

Yumina who heard that smiled both sadly and gently at him.

“…I’m glad that at least you’re alright.”

Katsuya then left the room with Yumina’s help. While Airi was carefully carrying Alna’s body in her arms. The other girls followed behind her.

Nergo was the last one left inside the room, he scanned the room once more and thought.

[All of these dead bodies are probably because of that boy, it’s pretty impressive to do this all by himself. I thought that his reputation is actually because of that thing, but I guess I need to revise it, huh… Well, it doesn’t really matter, even if that’s true, it doesn’t change my plan much. I need to confirm it with the others too, so I’ll shelve this for the latter for now.]

Nergo left the room soon after.

Katsuya and his group left the mansion after that. They then boarded the armoured APC parked outside the mansion and went back to Drankam’s base.

Katsuya was sitting on the long bench inside the APC in between Yumina and Airi. He still looked very depressed, but after leaving the battlefield, he regained some of his composure. But that gave him a leeway to think about something else and his head used that leeway to remember a certain sentence. Even when he tried to shake that sentence off his head, it still would not leave him alone. As a matter of fact, his efforts only made it ring louder in his brain. Katsuya inadvertently mumbled in resistance against that voice that was ringing inside his head.

[…Dammit!]

‘Unfortunately, you won’t be able to keep that promise’ that one sentence from Akira kept on playing on replay inside Katsuya’s mind.

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Akira was sleeping like a dead log on the bed in his house. After he returned back from Ezont family's base, he just put down his heavy weapons randomly on the floor, kept his augmented suit and his coat back in their original cupboard, dragged himself against the tiredness and the sleepiness assaulting him to finish his bath, took a heavy dose of medicine, and finally crawled to his bed. There was no doubt about it that he was exhausted after what had happened last night, so Alpha did not even bother to tell him to finish doing maintenance of his rifles before going to sleep.

Akira woke up in a dark room. It seemed that the sun had already set, he must have slept the whole day. But even inside that dark room, he could still see Alpha clearly.

"Morning, Akira, or more like, it's already evening though."

Akira's brain had not fully woken up yet as he was thinking of taking another snooze.

"I don't mind if you want to sleep again, but you had a call from Erio and Carol while you were sleeping, you know. They also left a text message, so you can check it out if you want."

It was rare for Erio to call him. As Akira thought so, the curiosity helped him wake up. He pushed himself up, reached for his information terminal, and checked the message.

Akira frowned when he read the message. Erio was asking about Sheryl's whereabouts in that message. And checking from the timestamp, that message was sent after Akira sent Carol to escort Sheryl.

"…She's not back in her base, huh?"

After that, he checked the message from Carol. It said that Carol still had Sheryl with her and for him to call her as soon as he could.

So then Akira tried to make a call to Carol, who immediately picked that up.

“Oh, you finally called me? Weren’t you taking too long there?”

“Sorry, a lot of things happened after that. So then, is Sheryl still with you?”

“Yep, she’s here with me.”

“You didn’t escort her back to her base?”

“I did consider that, but my request was to take Sheryl to a safe place, right? It’s true that my request might as well be done once I escorted Sheryl out of that place, but I thought that if I took her back to her base while the slum was still engulfed in that battle, she might get injured or even killed if there were any following battles after that, and that would definitely cause trouble later. Personally speaking, I want to finish my request by handing her back to you, you see. That’s why I still have Sheryl with me.”

“Ahh, I see, you have a point there.”

“So then, if it’s possible, can you come here as soon as you can? Are you okay right now? Well, I don’t mind keeping her with me if you want, but keep in mind it’ll cost you more the longer you leave her with me, okay?”

Akira smiled bitterly after hearing Carol’s happy voice.

“Alright, I’m coming now, where should I come?”

“I’ll send you my location later, I’ll be waiting for you.”

Carol left Akira with that rather inviting line before closing the call.

Akira lightly sighed and drooped his head. As his brain started to wake up, he remembered all kinds of stuff inside his head.

“…I wonder how much should I pay Carol this time.”

“How much are you planning to pay her?”

“I don’t know the market price, but I’m planning to limit it to 50 million Aurum.”

Although he would have to negotiate with Carol about the reward, he had decided not to pay her more than 50 million Aurum. So in short, Akira would only pay that much money even if it made Carol think that she deserved more money for the work she did.

“I never thought that someone who likes to butt into other’s business without being asked to would say something like that. But well, I guess that was the suitable word for someone who would do something just to regret it later though. Aren’t you glad to have decided the upper limit of the reward beforehand?”

“Can’t agree more to that.”

Alpha smiled mischievously at Akira, who replied with a bitter smile.

Akira thought that he would be meeting Carol near his house, or somewhere in a cheap inn, or maybe a tavern. So he was surprised when he checked the coordinates of the location sent to him by Carol. It was located far away from the location where he picked her up before going to Mihazono ruin last time. Although he did find it weird, started his preparation to head there.

He took his augmented suit and protective coat out of the cupboard and put them on, that was when he noticed that the holes on his protective coat were all already fixed.

“Oh, they’re all fixed. That’s pretty amazing.”

“The cupboard is equipped with an automatic repair system. I also put in a little bit of medication there too. It should have done the maintenance for your augmented suit and coat.”

“You can even do that too, huh? That’s really convenient.”

“But because of that, you’ll need to replace the repair cartridge that you got when you bought that augmented suit. Make sure to buy a new one later.”

“I see, how much it costs by the way?”

“About 10 million Aurum.”

Akira froze.

“Don’t forget that there are still medicine, ammo, energy pack, and other consumables that you need to buy too.”

“…Aahh, my money…”

Akira remembered that Carol also changed her augmented suit depending on what she was doing. Up until now, Akira always thought that it was better and safer to keep using the better augmented suit all the time although it meant that he had to regularly pay more for the upkeep. But now he was not so sure if that was the best thing to do.

Akira finished his preparation. He brought along his AAH and A2D assault rifle as well as his CWH anti-material rifle, and of course, he also carried some spare magazines too.

He then headed to the Kugamayama city lower district. He did think that he might not need his CWH anti-material rifle, but he decided to bring it along anyway just to be safe while leaving his DVTS minigun and A4WM automatic grenade launcher behind as not to increase the chance of anything bad happening.

“I’ve completed rewriting the control software, so you have my full support this time. Well, in the worst-case scenario, let’s just run away.”

“…Of course.”

Although Akira did not ask her, Alpha did say what to do in the worst-case scenario. So he just smiled bitterly at her, said so, and went to Kugamayama city lower district.

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Carol, Sheryl and Viola gathered inside Viola’s office that was located in an office complex building in the lower district.

Viola had other offices too. She had one in the slum, one near the inner wall, one was open and easily recognizable in public, one was located in a rather secretive place. She kept changing one office to another depending on her situation. Carol met up with Viola while bringing along Sheryl with her and then Viola suggested they go to one of her offices.

After Carol finished her call with Akira, she then conveyed that to Sheryl and Viola. Sheryl was relieved to know that Akira was alright, her worried face that she had up until now was completely gone.

Unlike Sheryl who was sitting on the guest chair, Viola was sitting not too far away from Sheryl on her own office desk. Even after she heard that Akira was coming, she still had her usual smile.

Carol came next to Viola and asked her a question.

“Viola, are you sure you want to be here too?”

“Yep.”

Viola replied with a smile without asking Carol what she meant by that question.

“I see.”

Carol deliberately did not tell Akira that Viola was also there. Viola also noticed it as well as the meaning behind it. But even so, she still decided to stay there. Carol thought that if Viola decided so, then it was not her place to say anything to Viola.

Akira eventually arrived. He lightly scanned the area and felt that it seemed to be safe before entering the building.

When Akira entered the office, Carol and Sheryl immediately welcomed him. Carol had her business smile when she welcomed Akira, while Sheryl smiled happily for being able to reunite with him. But even before he was able to reply to both of them, he noticed Viola. His expression immediately turned slightly stern as he asked.

“Carol, sorry but can we talk about the reward a bit later?”

“Sure, but, is there any problem?”

“It’s nothing big, just a small thing that I need to attend to first.”

Sheryl thought it was weird since Akira immediately left her behind and went inside the office room. But when she noticed that he went straight to Viola, she smiled bitterly although she also felt slightly happy at the same time.

Sheryl had gone through a lot of trouble after Rogelt detained her. It was nothing strange if Akira wanted to complain to Viola since she was the source of all of that trouble. Of course, she herself had also complained to Viola, but Viola just gave her a light smile and a cheap apology. If Akira was the one to do that, Viola should not be able to give the same reaction. As Sheryl thought so, she had a mischievous smile on her face which was rather rare for her.

Sheryl was not mistaken there. But Akira actually was planning to do more than just sending some complaints to Viola. In contrast to that, Carol understood well what he was about to do, the difference between her and Sheryl’s understanding was shown in their faces. Carol was not smiling there.

Akira stood in front of Viola, who was still smiling like usual.

“Uhh, Viola-san… Right?”

“Yep, you can just drop the honorific.”

“I see, thanks for the info about Sheryl and that pickpocket. I’ll at least give you my thanks for that.”

“You’re welcome. I’m glad that my information was useful to you.”

Viola was smiling like usual, while Akira had a stern and serious face. Both of them were looking at each other without saying anything for a few seconds.

“…So then, I have a question for you. About this incident, I have no idea how far this thing has been going on, and this is just my guess, but, I feel like you’ve been manipulating me.”

“Hmmm, that would be a misunderstanding. I don’t know where you got such a misunderstanding from. If you tell me, I would be able to give you an explanation. Is that the thing that you wanted to ask me?”

“Not really. Even if I ask you, I feel like you’ll just come up with an answer that makes sense just to convince me. And of course, I don’t have the ability to see through it even if you lie to me. I feel like you would just trick me and leave it as it is. That’s why I won’t ask you. But instead, answer me this.”

“Sure, what is it?”

Akira raised his arm, his rifle now aimed at Viola.

“If you’re in my position, do you think it’s better if I kill the person in front of me now?”

Sheryl was dumbstruck by what just happened. While Carol’s expression did not change at all.

Even after pointing his rifle at her, Viola did not show any change in her expression. She was still smiling like usual as she calmly answered Akira’s question.

“Nope, I don’t think so.”

“Why?”

“There are many reasons that I can come up with. Let’s see, Akira, do you know what is post-mortem program?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s simple then. If you kill me, you’ll get a bounty put on your head and it’ll be as high as all of my current assets. Although I look like this, I’m

pretty rich, you see. So don’t think it’ll be something as small as 1 or 2 billion Aurum, okay? If I have to add more, judging from the mediator company that will put that bounty under my request, not only common Hunters, even big organizations would be hunting you, you know?”

“Anything else?”

Akira replied almost instantly. Viola was taken aback seeing how he replied without showing any hesitation, but she immediately returned back to her usual smile and said.

“Oh, that wasn’t enough for you? Let’s see then, how about the person next to your lover is my best friend?”

“I see.”

Gunshot echoed, a hole drilled through Viola’s chest all the way to her back. Viola looked aghast as she slid down her seat and fell to the floor. A pool of blood started to form around her.

Akira lowered his rifle and looked back at Carol.

“So, I should fight you now, right?”

Akira’s expression was completely casual. There was no hostility in his eyes at all. But there was also no sign of him trying to avoid the upcoming fight. Sheryl was shocked by that sudden turn of events, but Carol, who was next to her, just smiled and said calmly.

“Well, Viola indeed paid me to work as her bodyguard, so it’s not like I can just let this slide without doing anything.”

“I see.”

Akira only said so as he turned his whole body toward Carol. But before he shifted his state of mind to battle state, Carol suddenly said.

“But I’m not paid enough to fight you. So to be honest, I want to avoid it if it’s possible. But since I already got paid, I can’t just leave without doing

anything either. So, if you're okay with it, I want to do something to earn that pay but without fighting you."

Akira thought for a bit. He recognized that Carol was a strong fighter. He had no idea what she was going to do, but if it meant that he did not have to fight her, then that would be for the better.

"Very well."

"Thank you."

Carol smiled and said so. She then went to Viola, opened the drawer close to her, and seemed to be searching for something.

"It should be around here… Ah, there it is!"

Carol took out a half-spherical mechanical device from inside the drawer, brought it to Viola, and crouched down. She then took off Viola's cloth to expose the bullet wound and placed that device on top of that wound both from the front and back. When Carol turned the device on, the hole in Viola's chest started to slowly close up.

Akira walked next to Carol and looked at it with interest.

"What are you doing?"

"An emergency treatment. This is an automatic treatment kit, it's usually used on a Hunter who's wounded so badly to the point that there's no other way but to replace the wounded area with a prosthetic. Originally, it's used to keep that Hunter alive until they finish installing the prosthetic. This thing is pretty expensive, you know?"

Carol placed a similar thing on Viola's neck. A thin tube came out from the flat part of the device and it went straight piercing into her neck. After about 10 seconds, Viola opened her eyes and coughed out blood.

Akira was stunned to see someone that he thought he had killed return back to life.

“That’s pretty amazing. It can save your life even after getting injured that badly, huh?”

Alpha smiled and explained to Akira.

“It depends on the treatment and your first reaction to it. You witnessed something similar back in Kuzusuhara ruin, remember? There was someone who treated a person who had lost half of their body as a badly injured patient. From his point of view, a hole from a bullet might even be a slight injury.”

“Ahh, you’re right. I remember that guy also told me not to treat an injury on a Hunter and on common people as the same thing though.”

People died when their time came. But their survival chance changed greatly depending on how quickly their injury got treated. Akira had a rather conflicted feeling when he thought about that subject.

When Viola finally stopped coughing, she looked around and understood what just happened.

“…Carol, could you have done something more about this?”

Viola looked at Carol as if she was blaming Carol, expecting her to have eliminated the hostility there by now.

But Carol did not seem to be bothered by that at all, she just casually replied.

“I at least have erased the result of you screwing up your negotiation. I did my job, so you’re on your own for the rest.”

Akira pointed his rifle at Viola again. This time, he was properly aiming for her head.

“I’ll get to the point, anything else?”

Viola smiled wryly. She was a bit scared, her face started to go pale. She went silent for a few seconds as she was thinking about what to say. She

then smiled which could be interpreted as both bluff and no worry.

“…I don’t know the reason why you spent so much money on Sheryl’s gang, but I bet you didn’t really calculate the return that you can get from that investment, right? I can help you with that part. I can give advice to the leader of the gang or lend them my connection or money. If Sheryl’s gang can earn quite a lot of money, I’m sure that you’ll get some benefit out from that too… So, what do you think?”

Akira stared back at Viola without saying anything.

“One more question then, were you trying to kill me in that incident? That includes asking someone to kill me, or provoking someone to kill me.”

“No, I didn’t do such a thing.”

“Alpha.”

“She doesn’t seem to be lying, but it may not be the complete truth.”

After listening to Alpha’s guess and Viola’s answer, Akira thought about it one more time. He then said to Viola while still having his rifle pointed at her.

“…Very well. Work hard to make me not regret this decision. The moment I think that I should’ve killed you, I’ll hunt for your head. The same thing would happen if you try to mess with me too. You get that?”

Viola sighed.

“Alright. I don’t want to die after all. I’ll give my best to be useful.”

“Alpha.”

“Yep, she doesn’t seem to be lying there too.”

Akira finally lowered his rifle, seeing which Carol lightly smiled and said.

“You’re done, right? I guess I can finally talk about the reward with Akira now. Akira, now that I have handed Sheryl to you, this will end your request to me. Are you okay with that?”

“Sure.”

“Well now, I’ll need to carry Viola to hospital. Akira, see you again next time.”

Carol lightly smiled and said so. She then pulled Viola up and dragged her out of the office.

Akira looked a bit troubled.

“Carol, don’t we still need to discuss your reward?”

“Ahh, that won’t be necessary. Or more like, I’ll get Viola to pay for that. So you don’t have to worry about it.”

Voila looked obviously displeased.

“Ehhh, to be honest, that has nothing to do with me though.”

“It’s your fault in the first place, isn’t it? Not to mention, you said you’ll be helping Sheryl’s gang from now on. So just think of it as an apology for messing with them.”

“Good grief! Very well then, I’ll do it.”

Akira looked a bit troubled by how Carol was taking it so lightly.

“Uhh, are you sure you’re fine with it?”

“Yeah. If you’re bothered by not paying me, you can invite me for a meal later with the money you were planning to pay me. Or you can invite me to search for relics while paying for my expense, or even paying for my side job too if you want. Either way, I would be happy to accept it. I’ll be waiting for your call.”

Carol smiled provocatively and said so before she left the office.

Akira still had a stupefied look on his face as he saw Carol and Viola off. One of them just got shot and then meekly accepted a demand from him, while the other one was someone that he almost fought against after he shot her close friend. He was speechless at how both of them were taking it very lightly.

That was also the case for Sheryl. She could not hide her surprise with how fast the situation changed there.

After both of them were left alone in that place, Akira and Sheryl looked at each other, the mood was a bit awkward.

"…Well, let's just head back for now, huh. I'll take you back to the base."

"Eh, ah, yes, thank you very much!"

Akira and Sheryl left that office while still feeling slightly awkward. Akira thought that Carol who was on Viola's side would do something after taking Sheryl hostage. Although his guess was incorrect, he did expect that Carol would do something that he did not expect there.

Silavin: Yes, we have dropped below the Patreon goal. That's why it is currently 2 chapters a week again.

On another news, [ ] on our discord has brought this up and I would like to share it as well.

The Konorano 2022 voting is happening right now! It closes on the 23rd of September!

https://questant.jp/q/konorano2022

So, some background info. This is one of the indicative polls that publishing houses use to decide which series is popular enough for an English release.

It also votes on WIFUS! **AND MY BOY AKIRA DESERVES TO BE FIRST!!!**

Ahem

So, to increase the chances of Rebuild World light novel to be officially translated (this is the Web Novel VBTW), to support our beloved author, **AND TO SIMP FOR THE BEST BOY…**

Do help ~~skew~~align the votes to be in our favor.

For some instructions on how to do so, [ ] has made a pdf on how to vote.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/16KAUKMKOHo5SAXoSE1XIZS2Gkv8PJrEQ/view?usp=sharing

So, in relation to this announcement, Bonus chapters if our best boy gets first. Priorities right?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 166, Those Who Work Under The Shadows

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The battle between two large gangs—Ezont Family and Haurias—had, of course, affected the slum city. Sounds of gunshots filled the slums. Erio and the other children in the gang made use of the portable walls they got from Katsuragi to barricade themselves inside their base and were able to get through the night. But even so, it still caused a huge ruckus within the gang that Erio and Alicia were barely able to calm everyone down since they were officers in the gang, but everyone in the gang were still anxious even right now.

They were unable to contact neither Akira nor Sheryl, and that fact really caused chaos inside the gang. They went through the night reminded of just how large both Akira and Sheryl's presence was inside the gang.

It was then that Akira and Sheryl suddenly appeared. Akira was weirded out at how big the welcoming cheer was, as the children gathered around him. Sheryl tried her best to calm everyone down to no avail.

Akira was planning to head straight back home after getting Sheryl back to her base. But Sheryl thought that it would cause even more chaos inside the gang if Akira left, so she asked him to stay for the night. She then told the supervisors to give her their reports of what had happened while she was gone.

The other children had a lot of questions they wanted to ask Sheryl, but after she reprimanded them, and looking at how Akira was slightly annoyed by the ruckus, they regained some of their composure and eventually returned to their respective jobs.

“Sheryl, couldn’t you at least contact these guys?”

“Carol-san told me not to. She said that since the request from you was to get me to safety, it was just to be safe in case someone else other than you used that call to locate me. Of course, I tried to call you too, but I wasn’t able to. “

“Sorry about that, I was a bit preoccupied during that time.”

Akira felt bad saying that he was so tired that he slept for the whole day, so he came up with another excuse. But that was no lie, he was indeed rather busy after leaving Sheryl to Carol.

“Please don’t be, I’m really happy that you came to rescue me… And also, uhhh, about Viola, thank you for making her help run the gang.”

Sheryl tried her best not to show her insecurity or displeasure on her face.

At the moment, Sheryl’s gang had not given any benefit to Akira. It did not even have the prospect of giving any profit to him. Sheryl herself understood that very well. That was why, if Akira told her that Viola would lead the gang in order to turn the gang profitable for him, then she could not refuse.

Sheryl could no longer live without Akira. So in order not to get abandoned by him, she planned to do everything she could to make the gang useful to him. She felt really insecure about the matter regarding Viola.

Akira then spoke to Sheryl with a rather serious face.

“Ahh, by the way, I’m sorry for asking you this after deciding it without even consulting with you, but, Sheryl, can you keep an eye on that Viola?”

“Keep an eye on her?”

“Yeah, tell me if she tries anything funny. I’m sure it’ll be easier to watch over her if she’s close. And also, if you don’t find her useful at all, you can go ahead and kill her. After all, that is the condition she accepted for sparing her life. If you find it hard to kill her, just tell me the reason why you need me to kill her and I’ll do it.”

“O-Okay!!”

“Hm? I’ll be relying on you for that one.”

Akira was a bit weirded out at how Sheryl replied with such vigour. But he did not think too much about it after that.

Sheryl was so elated that Akira actually had no plans to replace her position in the gang and she resolved herself not to disappoint him as she replied firmly to his request.

Alpha had another question that was different from Sheryl about Viola.

“Akira, are you sure that you’re okay with that matter in regards to Viola?”

“Eh? Do you think I should have killed her instead?”

Akira thought that Alpha was against it, so he was surprised when he heard that question. If Viola was telling the truth there, he would have a few billion Aurum bounty on his head. Although she might be exaggerating, it did not change the fact that a bounty would still be placed on his head. But if Viola was lying, Akira thought that Alpha should have caught that from Viola’s expression and told him about it.

“That was not what I meant, I just find it strange that you were rather lenient there. Compared to the matter with that pickpocket, you even raided

into a big gang’s base just to kill her, right?”

“…Well, I did shoot her once with the intention to kill her. So, if that was not enough to keep her in check, I’ll think about something else when it comes to that.”

Akira believed that the reason why he spared Viola’s life was because he already felt better after he shot her once with the intention of killing her. Moreover, although he was manipulated by her, she did not do anything to directly kill him. But in truth, there was another reason why Akira spared her that he himself did not notice.

That reason was because Akira wanted to know if he could protect himself without increasing the body counts. He had always believed that if he spared his enemy, that person would definitely come for revenge later. Also, he was convinced that he was simply not strong enough to have the leeway to spare his opponents.

Akira wanted to find a way other than killing his opponent. Although it might be cheeky of him to have that desire, he could at least try.

Of course, it was a completely different matter whether his desire would come to fruition or not even if he tried.

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Viola was lying on the hospital bed. Her wound was already treated, her life was no longer in danger. She should be fully recovered after a few days of resting on the hospital bed.

She was having a chat with Carol, who was sitting on a chair not too far from her. But Carol suddenly threw a question at her with a rather solemn expression.

“So then, Viola, what are you scheming this time?”

Viola frowned, she looked a bit offended.

“That was out of the blue.”

“You intentionally let Akira shoot you back then, didn’t you?”

Although Carol said that so casually, her tone was telling Viola that she was sure about it.

“I know you’re not that stupid, you knew well what would happen if you met him. You were the one who told me to go to your office with Sheryl, remember? Although you have many offices, that one has a hospital nearby and I know that you have an emergency kit and where to find it in that office. You intentionally said all of that in the first half of your negotiation with Akira, didn’t you? Had Akira aimed at your head back then, you would not have provoked him like that. You knew what I would do, that was why you let Akira shoot you. And by doing that, it would remove most of his grudge against you, right? Then with his grudge mostly gone, you can make an excuse to get involved in Sheryl’s gang saying that it would bring benefit for both Sheryl and Akira.”

Carol smiled rather ominously.

“In the first place, putting Akira and Sheryl aside, if you were planning to trick me too, you could have done something better than that, right? Or is it that you have dulled?”

Viola faked a surprise and smiled.

“You’re thinking too much. If you hadn’t saved me back then, I would have been dead by now.”

“I do think that you’re my friend, but let me tell you this, I don’t believe what you said there at all since I know you very well.”

Carol could easily tell that Viola was scheming something, but she could not tell what it was. Viola might actually be tricking her into thinking that she was scheming something. And if she tried to pursue her suspicion, she might find herself being manipulated by Viola without realizing it. After all, up until now, Carol had seen so many people fall for that trick up close.

Carol smiled smugly.

“Well, in the end, my potential customer did shoot you after you tried to mess with him, so I guess I’ll let that slide. Though I bet I would get shot because of that too.”

“I have no plans to do that though, but if you’re okay with that, then I won’t pursue this subject any further.”

Viola and Carol smiled at each other.

Someone suddenly knocked at the door. A few men came in without even waiting for a reply. Then the representative from that group showed his ID card and said.

“Viola Alhans, I presume? I’m Endou from Kugamayama city’s Long-term Strategy Department, Public Order Section. We have some questions regarding the huge battle yesterday.”

Endou’s men stood in front of the door as if to close Viola’s escape route. Seeing that, Viola sighed.

Carol then said to Endou.

“I have nothing to do with this though, so, can I leave?”

“Of course. In the first place, I would have asked you to leave since you’re not involved in this matter. Although it’s a simple investigation, the subject that we are going to discuss is not for the public’s ears.”

“I see, later then, Viola.”

“Oh my, that’s so cold of you.”

“You didn’t know?”

Viola said that as a joke, so Carol replied with a joke too. Carol left the room while lightly waved at Viola. Half of the men guarding the door also left the room together with Carol and guarded the door from outside.

Endou looked sharply at Viola and stood in front of her. Viola still had her usual calmness.

“So then, I just need to answer your questions, right?”

“That won’t be necessary, it was just an excuse to come here. Of course, I’ll forge a document for that too, but don’t worry, I’ll handle everything.”

“Then, why are you here?”

“I’m here to listen to your report.”

“There’s no need to come all the way here by yourself, you know? I can just send you the report later, right?”

“It’s an order from the guys in the upper echelon. Well, it’s no surprise since the battle was bigger than we expected and we heard that you got hospitalized soon after. Not to mention, we have also received a report saying that Drankam also went to check the place where that battle happened. So, we want to confirm the current situation as soon as possible.”

After he said all of that, Endou looked slightly exasperated as he said.

“But well, what can I say… To think that you can cause such a big battle just from a small rumour about a certain Hunter who got his wallet stolen by a pickpocket, you’re pretty good.”

Viola smiled smugly.

“That was nothing more than a trigger. A rather volatile boy, just like a landmine. So I would rather have you appreciate all the preparations that I’ve done to make sure that the fire would burn strongly.”

Kugamayama city usually did not bother much about the power distribution around the slum city which was next to its lower district. Even if a large battle occurred there and numerous people got killed, the City Management normally did not intervene at all.

But they could not ignore it if it had reached a certain scale. And that Ezont family and Haurias had grown too big and too strong for the City Management to ignore.

Both gangs had survived numerous conflicts, grew bigger, and attained enough money and military power to maintain the gang. To the point that their influence had even reached the commercial district in the lower district and had enough money to buy, arm, and even use powered suits. But it was all good up until that point. After all, rising high as an organization was a commendable thing even from the point of view of the Corporate Government that ruled the eastern district.

The problem was that their existence was disturbing the public order in the city. Their activities were against the law and they were doing illegal businesses. And with the rather barbaric people of the outer wall with powered suits living close to the inner wall, it was no surprise that it bothered the people from the inner wall. It would have been well and good if it increased the worth of living inside the inner wall, but unfortunately, they only lowered it. In the worst-case scenario, some people from the inner wall might even decide to move out because of them.

There were cases where such a strong organization worked together with the Nationalists. The Nationalists would then send that organization powerful augmented suits as well as sneak some of their agents in, and eventually enlist their help during a huge battle. Even if it did not go that far, buying powered suits from the Nationalists was enough to help the Nationalists to collect money. So their existence only caused worry for the people in the inner wall.

Once it reached that point, the City Management could not afford to just ignore them. Power-wise, the City Management could easily crush that kind of organization using the city’s defense squad, after all, that squad was prepared to even withstand a fight against ginormous monsters. An organization that just rose to power from the lower district was no match for that squad.

But the problem was the expense. Of course, dispatching the defense squad was no cheap thing. So if that kind of organization had become big enough

trouble for the City Management to dispatch such a costly defense squad, they would look for the one who was responsible for not curbing it.

Because of that, the City Management was looking for a cheaper alternative, and that would be letting the gangs that were disturbing the public order in the city destroy each other. Of course, it would not come for free, but it was indeed cheaper than dispatching the defense squad.

So, Viola received that job from the City Management. Basically, it was outsourced to her.

Viola had manipulated various organizations and people to their own doom. Some of them were out of requests from the City Management. Such a track record earned her quite a reputation from the City Management's point of view. Which in some cases, she was even feared for her skill.

Even the ruckus that happened recently between Ezont Family and Haurias was actually connected to the City Management, but there were only a handful of people in the City Management who knew that. So the people who sent that investigation request to Drankam were the City Management people who were unaware.

Of course, Endou was one of those who knew. But even he was listening to Viola's report while feeling fear in his heart. After all, Viola had done some preposterous things to complete that request.

"…That aside, this might have nothing to do with this matter, but we lost 3 of our agents, do you know anything about them?"

"Is this a request to investigate from the City Management?"

"No, just a casual talk."

"I see. Unlike in the inner wall, the lower district is a dangerous place. They might have done something stupid and got themselves involved in a fight or something."

"Like what?"

“Let’s see. Maybe like boasting their connection with the City Management and trying to get their hands on a woman who is not interested in them. That kind of connection might be enough to help them seduce someone, but it is nowhere near enough as a threat, you know? And it seems that many people don’t understand that well enough, so there’s a good chance they got involved in a fight because of some stupid reason. I can really understand why the City Management spends money to make sure that Hunters behave well, it’s an important thing after all, right?”

Viola smiled as if she was hiding something. Seeing which Endou was barely able to keep his calm.

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Sheryl was sitting in her personal room with a serious face. The reason was the information from Viola whom she was talking with through her information terminal.

“…Is this information true?”

“It’s not like I’m going to tell you to trust me, but well, I do feel guilty for what I did to you, you know? I even let you hear about this before I tell Akira as a token of apology from me.”

They were talking through a call, so they could not see each other’s faces. But Sheryl was so sure that Viola was smiling right now, she could imagine Viola smiling with her usual gentle smile while scheming something behind it.

“Is this a threat to me?”

“Of course not, like I said, it’s an apology from me. Ah, by the way, if I have to add anything, Akira had already finished off Alna. That’s why, I’m sure that he won’t be that bothered even if you tell him that you know about it. Of course, that is if he doesn’t notice it on his own and misunderstands thinking that you’re intentionally trying to hide it from him.”

Sheryl shivered when she remembered back then when Akira was in a very bad mood. That day, Akira, who was in a horrible mood, said in front of Sheryl that he would kill that Alna. And now, if she did not handle this situation well, in the worst-case scenario, Akira might direct that killing intent to Sheryl's gang.

Sheryl was trying her best to maintain her calm, suddenly Viola said with her usual calm voice.

"We're just going to take the initiative here. I just thought that it would not sour Akira's mood that much if you let him hear it from you. Of course, I won't be forcing you to do it though. But, if you won't do anything, I plan to tell Akira myself. After all, I need to give Akira some useful information as an apology to him too. You know that well too, right? So that's it, later then."

"W-wait!"

"What is it?"

"…I'll do it. Thank you very much for sharing this information."

"You're welcome."

Viola replied with a happy voice before closing the call. After that call ended, Sheryl was barely able to hold back herself from screaming out of anger.

Sheryl then called Nasha to one of the rooms in the base. When Nasha came in, Sheryl, Alicia, and Erio were already waiting for her inside the room.

Sheryl and the other two had a grave expression on their faces, the mood was rather heavy. Nasha could feel the heaviness of the mood as she slowly and sacredly came forward.

"Uhmm, Boss, I heard you have something you want to talk about with me."

Sheryl looked at Nasha. She then said with an extremely stern face and firm voice.

“I’ll get straight to the point here, did you tell Alna about Akira?”

Nasha went pale, it was so obvious that there was no need for her to answer that question.

Sheryl and the other two made an even sterner expression when they saw her reaction. Their slight hope that it was a mistake was completely crushed. Nasha was a nice girl, she did all her job earnestly, and she got along well with the other members in the gang. Recently, she was even given the responsibility to supervise some of the other members. Sheryl, Erio, and Alicia trusted her, that was why it came as a big shock for all three of them.

“So that’s true, huh!! Come in!!”

With that signal from Erio, some of the other gang members came into the room. They immediately surrounded Nasha and froze. They were only told to come in and secure someone that might anger Akira, they did not know who that someone was. So no one expected that it would be Nasha.

Those children looked conflicted as they looked in Sheryl’s direction. They could feel the heavy air coming from her, so they started securing Nasha although they still had a pained look on their faces. Nasha did not fight back at all.

Nasha just stood there with her head down, both of her arms were grabbed by the other children to make sure that she won’t be able to do anything. Looking at that, Alicia worriedly said to Sheryl.

“…Sheryl, so… What do you plan to do with her?”

Sheryl could understand Alicia’s wish to help Nasha if it was possible. But if she tried to cover for her, it might put her and her gang in danger.

Nasha used the money that Alna stole from Akira to join Sheryl's gang. She then helped Alna to run away even after Akira made such a frightening expression. At that point, Sheryl could no longer protect Nasha.

Moreover, Sheryl also had come to know that Akira only stayed behind after leaving her to Carol in order to kill that Alna. He wanted to kill Alna so bad that he would jump into a battlefield that was filled with tanks and powered suits. She could not tell how far his killing intent would go, whether it would include people who helped Alna get away, or if it would even include those people who were not able to prevent that, or if it would include people that he thought protected anyone involved in that matter. When Sheryl thought about that, there was no way she could protect Nasha.

Sheryl did not say anything as she took out her information terminal, she paused for a bit to get herself ready before initiating a call to Akira.

"It's Sheryl. I have something to talk about, is this a good time?"

The mood inside the room tensed up. Everyone was looking in Sheryl's direction. Sheryl was apologizing while trying to explain what was going on to Akira. When she did that, Akira did not say anything back. He did not say anything that sounded as if he was surprised or angry. Not even a slight reply to let Sheryl know that he was listening. He was just silent. It was even dubious if he was properly listening or not.

Sheryl could not bring herself to ask Akira if he was listening. She could not tell if Akira was trying to calm himself down, or if he was too angry to say anything back, she could only pray that it was not because Akira had abandoned the gang as she kept on talking. After she explained everything, Akira then said.

"…I see. Alright, I'll head there now."

"I understand, we'll be waiting."

Akira ended the call there. Sheryl sighed in relief. Alicia then worriedly asked Sheryl a question.

“…How was it?”

“…Akira is coming.”

Sheryl only said that. Alicia wanted to ask if there was a chance to save Nasha, but after seeing Sheryl’s reaction, she decided not to.

Not too long after that, Akira came into the room. All the other children that surrounded Nasha stepped back all the way to the wall so as not to get involved in Akira’s fury.

Nasha had completely given up hope. She was scared, but not to the point that she was shaken up. She had resolved herself knowing that something like this might happen the moment she joined Sheryl’s gang.

[I’m sorry, Alna. It seems that this is the end for me, I hope that you at least can live well.]

Nasha smiled lonely at the thought of Alna.

Akira stood in front of Nasha.

“So this one is Nasha, right? Let her go.”

The guys who were holding both of Nasha’s arms released her and stepped away just like the other children.

“Come.”

Akira only said that and headed to the door. Nasha did not follow him, she only stood there with a bewildered face, she thought that he would kill her there. So Akira turned around and said.

“I don’t mind dragging you out though if you prefer that.”

Nasha still had a bewildered look, but she started following behind him. Akira then left the room with her.

Sheryl and the other children could only see them leave without doing or saying anything. They were only standing there, looking slightly confused since Akira left without blaming anyone at all.

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Inside the Drankam base, Mizuha was yelling in anger. The reason was the person that she was on a call with.

“Viola, it’s pretty bold of you to call me after what you did.”

Mizuha anger was obvious from her voice, but in contrast to that, Viola replied back calmly and casually.

“Oh my, you didn’t find my service satisfying? I did finish your request almost perfectly, you know? Alna is dead, not because she simply vanished, but because she was killed and there was a corpse to prove it. So, there is no doubt that she’s dead for good. And since the reason for her death is because she got swallowed in the battle between Haurias and Ezont family, no one would expect that it had anything to do with you. So what is it that you don’t like about?”

Mizuha was really annoyed at how Viola was playing innocent there, she was trying to be careful not to raise her voice too high.

“Don’t kid with me. I didn’t say anything about telling Katsuya about that and sending him into that battlefield, what the heck were you thinking? What were you going to do if he got killed there? Are you planning to make an enemy out of me?!”

“Ohh, about that, huh? I have nothing to do with that matter, you know. It’s not a part of my job after all.”

“Do you really think that I believe you?”

“Well, I won’t tell you to believe me. But it’s the truth. Moreover, whether it’s a person or an organization, anyone who antagonizes me, they all end up dead, you know. After all, it would be a hassle to deal with them if they

ever come for revenge later. So like, do you want to get killed or the whole Drankam gang destroyed by tomorrow or something?"

"No!"

"Thought so. Moreover, if you didn't want Katsuya to get involved, you could have sent him for a Hunter job somewhere far away for some time, no? You should have known that something would happen the moment you put that request for me, that's why I didn't warn you at all, and you would still blame that on me? Well, though I'm sure it's not that simple with Drankam involved though."

Mizuha twitched, she did not have anything to counter that argument. If she said that it was Viola's fault, then in turn it would mean that it was Mizuha's own mistake for not being able to predict that. Since she did not want to admit it, she came up with another excuse.

"…Katsuya is already assigned to another job in Kuzusuhara ruin front-line temporary base. And Kugamayama city thinks highly of him. That's why I can't just suddenly assign him to another job."

"Is that so? But that's your problem, right? So, even if you tell me so, it's not like I can do anything about it, right?"

After a short pause, both of them were trying to probe what the other person was thinking. After that, Viola sounded as if she had given up and decided to step back.

"Well, putting that aside. Since you're not happy with my work, I don't feel like taking my reward just like this too. So, it's okay if I transfer it back, right? But with one condition."

"One condition? What is it?"

"Tell me how Katsuya discovered Alna's location that day, I'll give my reward back to you as a payment for that info. I might even give you some bonus too depending on how much details you can give me."

Mizuha was a bit surprised by that request.

“…What are you scheming this time? It was you who told him, right?”

“As I said, it wasn’t me. I don’t know who or what organization did that, but the one that I sent there as the trigger for that battle was only Akira. Akira was the only one that I told about Alna’s whereabouts. I didn’t say anything to Katsuya or anyone around him that might let him know. But even so, Katsuya did go there and made a mess of my plan. Because of that, I ended up in hospital after Akira shot me. I’m still in the hospital even right now, you know?”

“Really?”

“I would be really happy if you come to visit me though.”

Viola was telling Mizuha to come and check it for herself if she was suspicious of Viola lying. And with that, most of her suspicion about Viola letting Katsuya know about Alna’s location had also vanished.

Viola then added.

“If everything went as I planned, I wouldn’t be in the hospital right now. That’s why I want to know the reason why someone would want to mess up my plan by telling Katsuya where Alna was. Of course, I’m planning to investigate it further myself. But it’s easier for you to investigate within Drankam, right? And even if I’m planning to ask Katsuya myself, it would be easier if you’re the one to do that for me, right?”

Viola sounded as if she had a grudge against whoever told Katsuya about Alna, Mizuha’s suspicion reduced even further.

“…So, it really wasn’t you?”

“Yeah, I didn’t tell Katsuya anything. I have my reputation to be held as an information broker, you know. I won’t do something as stupid as leaking the information after a contract like that. My information is always correct,

that’s why people keep buying information from me even after they know the bad rumours about me. You do know that well yourself, no?

Mizuha took some time to think. Even if Viola might put in some of her personal opinions in her information, she would never leak any information and the information itself would always be correct.

It was as if she was standing at an intersection and there was a trap if she went to the right. She was properly told so by Viola, so if she went to the right without trusting Viola, she might as well get hurt. But if she trusted Viola and went left, she might find a worse trap and get hurt even worse than if she had gone right. But if she believed someone else, went to the right and avoided the worse trap on the left, it felt like Viola then would happily take whatever treasure that she could find on the left.

Viola’s bad habit was how she manipulated people with correct information, Mizuha herself knew that very well. Which meant that she must be telling the truth when she said that she did not tell Katsuya anything about Alna, or at least, that was what Mizuha thought.

“Very well. Either way, Drankam will do our own investigation too. We’ll send a copy of the report to you too, is that good enough?”

“We have a deal then, thanks. By the way, I already returned back the reward that I received, so you can go ahead and check it. I’ll transfer more if you can give me good info. That’s it then, bye-bye.”

Viola closed the call. Mizuha checked her bank account and confirmed that she got back the money she had given to Viola. It was as if Viola knew that Mizuha would accept her condition. Mizuha felt slight displeasure after realizing that Viola had completely read her, but she immediately moved on to something else.

[If it was not Viola, then who told Katsuya about Alna?] Mizuha could feel slight anger for whoever was it who sent Katsuya to that dangerous battlefield as she immediately planned her investigation.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 167, Balancing The Scale

Index

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Nasha followed behind Akira. She was looking at Akira's back while walking through the street of the slum city. Akira did not look back at all as he kept walking forward.

It might be a good chance for her to run away. But Nasha did not harbour such thoughts, she had no wish to do so. Akira knew that she was not following him when they were back in Sheryl's base even without looking back. That was why she thought that Akira must know whether or not she was following him at the moment and it might be futile to even try to run away in such a situation.

Nasha had already given up. Because of that, she did not have the will to fight back, she was only following behind Akira without saying anything.

Akira hopped on his vehicle that he parked close by and said.

"Get in."

Nasha obediently climbed to the driver's assistant seat. Akira then drove out from the slum and into the wasteland.

It had been a few minutes since Akira and Nasha left the city. Akira did not say anything, but he looked slightly annoyed as he was driving the vehicle. Looking at him, Nasha got even more confused.

Some Hunters would only kill people in the wasteland, so at first, Nasha thought that Akira might be bringing her out to the wasteland just to kill her. But it already had been a few minutes since they left the city. If Akira was planning to kill her and dump her body in the wasteland, they were already far enough from the city. Eventually, she could not hold back her curiosity.

“Where are we going?”

“Well, to Narahagaka city.”

“Narahagaka city?”

“You’ve never heard of it? It’s a city to the west of Kugamayama city. Although it’s not as big as Kugamayama city, it still has a wall protecting it. Well, you can think of it as a smaller version of Kugamayama city… Or so I heard. Though I asked you if you’ve ever heard of it, to be honest, I only came to know about it recently too. So I don’t know much about that city either, how about you?”

“…Uhh, I’ve heard that name before, but nothing more.”

“I see.”

Their conversation ended with that. Nasha got even more confused and stopped the conversation there. Silence returned back between them. With time, Nasha’s confusion pushed her to ask another question.

“Uhh, what are you planning to do with me once we arrive there?”

“Nothing. Ahh, that’s not right, I’m planning to take you there and leave you in that city.”

“Leave me…?”

“I’ll head back straight home after I drop you in that city. You might hate me for leaving you in a place that you know nothing about, but that’s just how it is, sorry about that. If I leave you somewhere nearby, I feel like it’ll only cause trouble later on after all. Or more like, that kind of thing has already happened once before.”

Akira casually pointed at the rucksack that he put in the back of his vehicle.

“And it’s not like I’m going to leave you in an unknown place so that you’ll starve to death. I’ll at least give you some money, a gun, and some clothes. You can take that rucksack with you. But that’s all I’ll do for you. Then you can do anything you want. So, sorry, but you’ll have to do everything by yourself after that.”

Nasha opened the rucksack and looked at its contents. It was true that there were some Hunter clothes and a gun inside.

“Even though I did tell you that you can do anything you want, I don’t recommend going back to Kugamayama city. Sheryl and her gang also have their reputation to maintain, so I’m sure that they won’t ignore you if they spot you and I have no plans to tell them to let you go just because I spared you.”

Nasha was surprised. She looked at Akira and at the rucksack alternately. She looked completely flabbergasted.

“You’re going to spare me? Why?”

Akira hesitated.

“…Well, it’s fine, isn’t it? It’s just out of a whim.”

Nasha seemed to be thinking hard, she then said with a rather stiff expression.

“Please tell me.”

“Is it really that important?”

“Yes, so please tell me.”

“Just think of it as a weird guy making a weird decision.”

“Please tell me.”

Akira looked at Nasha in the eyes and slightly squinted his eyes.

“…If you keep pushing your luck, I might change my mind, you know.”

Nasha replied while looking straight into Akira’s eyes.

“…It doesn’t matter, please tell me.”

Nasha still asked for an answer although Akira said that he might kill her if she kept pursuing that subject. Akira was a bit surprised by it. But he could feel that it was not something that he could just ignore, so he sighed and said as if he was confessing.

“It’s just balancing out the scale.”

Nasha did not expect such an answer at all, she tilted her head in confusion.

“What do you mean by that?”

“I killed your best friend. So to balance that out, I’ll spare your life.”

Nasha froze, she then said with a shaking voice.

“You killed Alna?”

“Yeah, I did.”

Nasha felt a storm of emotion struck her. Her best friend was killed and the person who killed her best friend was pitying her right now. It stirred her emotion even more.

“Are you saying that you feel guilty for killing Alna, but since you had no other choice but to kill her, you’ll spare me in her place? Is that what you

mean when you said ‘it’s for balancing the scale’?”

“No. I did kill her because I wanted to and it’s not like I’m sparing you because I feel guilty for it.”

“Then why?!”

Nasha raised her voice. She looked at Akira with hatred and vengeance, but Akira was not surprised at all, as a matter of fact, he was completely calm. But that only served to stir her emotion even further.

With her emotions brimming, Nasha looked away from Akira for a split second, that was when her eyes wandered to the gun inside the rucksack. She immediately reached for that gun and released the safety trigger while glaring at Akira.

But even so, Akira did not show any reaction at all.

“I killed your best friend, so I won’t tell you not to hate me. But don’t think that I’ll just let you kill me. If you want to give it a try although you know the outcome, then be my guest.”

Akira pointed out the power gap between him and Nasha and stopped her. But his next sentence changed that.

“…And also, although it might be weird for me to say this, do you think that Alna wants you to go that far to avenge her death?”

Nasha’s anger welled up again. She was on the verge of pointing the gun in her hand at Akira as she screamed as hard as she could at him.

“You… You know nothing about Alna!!!”

“Yeah, that’s why I’m asking you since you must really know her well. You’re her best friend, right?”

Akira looked straight at Nasha, who was staring dagger at him, he was seriously asking Nasha a question there. Nasha was taken aback to the point that it erased all of her anger. She was baffled and was shaking while

making a very confused face. Akira looked straight at Nasha without saying anything.

Nasha imagined Alna's figure from all the memories that they had together. That Alna in her mind threw a sad smile at her and said something to her.

Nasha stopped shaking, she then pointed the gun in her hand at Akira with a pained face.

A gunshot echoed through the wasteland, the bullet went and vanished into the distance. Akira had slightly shifted Nasha's hand right before she pulled the trigger.

Nasha lightly smiled, she somehow looked relieved. But even after that, Akira still did not do anything to her while having a flat expression. The smile vanished from Nasha's face. She looked slightly confused and said with a pained voice.

"…Kill me already… Just kill me!! I shot at you, you know!? Are you still going to spare me!?"

Akira did not say anything as he shook his head.

"Sorry, but I'm already strong enough to know whether my life is in danger or not. If you want to kill yourself, you can do it on your own. And if you fail even after that, I'll at least warn you not to do that again."

Nasha fell on her knee. In the end, she could not save her best friend and she could not die in the same fashion as her best friend died, all kinds of feelings were mixed inside her heart as she started screaming and crying as if to vent her anger and sadness.

A few minutes later, they were still midway to Narahagaka city. Nasha had cried herself out to the point that she was too tired to keep crying. After venting all of her emotion through her tears and crying her eyes out, she finally calmed down and just sat there silently on the driver's assistant seat.

Nasha once again looked at Akira and mumbled with a small voice.

“…What’s with that balancing the scale?”

“Before I answer that, I want to confirm something first. That Alna, your best friend, was she the kind of girl who would tell you to avenge her death, although it’s hopelessly impossible?”

Nasha shook her head.

“…No, it’s something that I did out of my own volition. I’m sure that she would tell me to just forget it. She might even get angry at me if she knew that I tried.”

“I see, she must have been a kind girl.”

“…Yes, she was.”

They then continued talking calmly.

“…About balancing the scale, huh? Well, it’s basically just about testing luck.”

“Testing luck?”

“Yeah, for some reason, it seems that I have very bad luck, you see. Thanks to that, I’ve gone through a lot in the past.”

Basically, it was as if Akira was taking a gamble. He then continued.

“It’s about that time when I killed Alna. There was someone really strong protecting her and he is also a kind person. Although he has no debt nor has been offered a reward for it, he gave his best to protect Alna. Since he even went that far, he and the girl he was protecting might as well be good people, but even so, I still killed Alna… If I kill a good person, it feels like it’ll bring some bad karma on me later. That might be the reason why I have very bad luck. As a matter of fact, I did encounter something really troublesome right after I killed her. I would have been able to evade it if I had given up on killing her. So, well, I guess I just reaped what I sow there.”

Nasha was really happy to hear that someone did that much to protect her best friend. But at the same time, it also made her feel sad knowing that Alna had done something so that someone would still want to kill her despite having someone like Katsuya protecting her.

“…Then why didn’t you spare her just like how you did to me?”

Akira felt that Nasha was not blaming him, she simply just wanted to know, so he answered her question honestly.

“…I couldn’t, it’s a matter of my personality. Even if you ask me why I couldn’t do that, I don’t think I can come up with anything that might convince you.”

“…I see.”

“It doesn’t matter how strong they are, people will die when they get unlucky. That’s what I believe. The reason why I’m sparing you is simply because I think it might improve my bad luck, even if it’s only by a bit. So basically, I am doing this for my own sake. Although I said it’s for balancing the scale, I don’t think this is anywhere near enough to accomplish it. But it’s still better than nothing. That’s all the reason I have, I don’t do this because of any other profound reasons or anything.”

It was an absurd reasoning. It might be true that Alna was killed because she was unlucky and Nasha was spared because she was lucky, but Nasha still felt something did not feel right.

“…Was there really no other way for Alna? Was killing her the only choice you had?”

“As I said, it’s a matter of my personality, so it’s not like I can do anything about it.”

“No, that isn’t what I meant. I mean like, if something else, no matter how small it is, if there was anything that could have been done to save her life.”

“…Hmmm, let’s see then…”

Akira tried to think of all kinds of scenarios where Alna might have been saved.

If only Alna did not aim for Akira that day, or Akira did not lower his guard, or Alna was not able to steal Akira's wallet, or if Alna did not meet Katsuya, or Katsuya did not protect her that time, or if Katsuya did not push Akira back and triggered the domino effect which led to Alna's death, if that failure did not spread out as a rumour that discredited Akira, if only that rumour did not cause the robbers to attack Sheryl's base, or that Alna did not get kidnapped by Ezont family, or if Katsuya came sooner to save Alna.

Akira put out all the scenarios where Alna might be saved. After listening to everything, Nasha had a sad smile as she said.

"So, even with all of those possible scenarios, Alna still got killed, huh… That would mean she's really unlucky… Do you know that Alna is a really good pickpocket?"

"No."

"She's really talented in stealing wallets. Because of that, all kinds of people tried to get their hands on her to make her steal for them. Alna was having it hard too. But, there's nothing commendable about stealing others' money, right… She might have gotten that bad luck because of all the bad things that she had done up until now… If only I had stopped her sooner, she might have got luckier, and she wouldn't need to die…"

Nasha felt so frustrated by her inability to help, although she had already cried her eyes out, she started to tear up again.

Akira did not say if that was true or not, he just kept quiet.

Akira and Nasha reached Narahagaka city right around evening. He dropped Nasha in front of the Hunter Office near the city wall.

Nasha had already changed to the clothes that Akira gave her. It was rather shabby-looking Hunter clothing. It was a suitable cloth for someone who

would visit that Hunter Office. It was rather good clothing for someone from the slum. Compared to her previous clothes, people would ridicule her less with that attire.

“So then, well, it might be weird to hear this from me, but be well.”

“Yes, Akira-san. You too.”

After they exchanged a rather formal-sounding good-byes, Nasha looked at Akira with a serious face and said.

“I… I think I hate you. You killed Alna, I might carry this grudge until I die.”

Just like Alna, who did all she did because of reasons, Akira also had his reasons for doing what he did. If a Hunter had a bad rumour spread which lowered his or her reputation, it might turn fatal for that Hunter. That was why Nasha understood that there were things that a Hunter like Akira could not back off from.

Although Nasha did not do it intentionally, she also helped spread such horrendous rumours about Akira. Not only did she use the money that Alna stole from Akira to join Sheryl’s gang, she also leaked the information about Akira to Alna to help Alna escape. Normally, it would not be strange if Akira wanted to kill her, but he still spared her life.

“But even so, thank you very much for sparing me.”

Nasha did shoot Akira, cried her eyes out, and talked all kinds of things with him. One good thing about it was that she was able to move on from her best friend’s death. Although it was not like all of her grudges were gone, at least it was enough to help her to stand back on her feet. She bowed deeply at Akira as thanks.

Akira did not expect to be thanked, so he was really surprised. After that, he looked slightly sad as he smiled and said to Nasha.

“You’re also a nice person, huh.”

“Is that so? I did try to shoot you, you know?”

“Even nice people sometimes have to do extreme things too. But even so, that’s not enough as a reason to let someone steal my wallet or kill me. That’s all there’s to it.”

“Is that the reason why you killed Alna?”

“Yes, half of it.”

“Then what’s the other half?”

“The other half is that I didn’t have the leeway to spare her life because of my personality, how cowardly I am, and how weak I am. If only I had been strong enough, well, I might have let it slide with a kick… Bye then.”

Akira was about to leave, but Nasha suddenly stopped him.

“Before you go, can I ask you to convey a message for Sheryl-san? I’m really sorry for betraying her trust, after all, I don’t think I’ll ever meet her again.”

“Alright, I’ll let her know.”

“Thank you very much.”

Nasha saw Akira off until he completely vanished from her views, after that, she started walking away firmly.

__*__*__*__

Sheryl was in her private room when a call reached her.

“…I see, so you left Nasha in Narahagaka city, huh…”

“Yeah, sorry for doing that without consulting with you first. I’m sure we could have found a better alternative if I did. So, sorry about that.”

“Please don’t be. If Akira is okay with it, then I have no complaint about it either. So please don’t worry about it.”

Sheryl was not lying when she said that, she was relieved. She was actually waiting nervously until Akira called her.

She had no idea what kind of deal Akira made with Nasha, but judging from the call, it seemed that they were able to find a peaceful solution. It even sounded as if Akira had a good impression of Nasha. Judging from there, it did not seem that Sheryl and her gang were in any danger at all. Sheryl was thankful to Nasha for that.

“And there’s a message from Nasha. She’s sorry for betraying your trust. So there, I already told you. Though it might be weird for me to say this, there’s no need to hold a grudge against her any longer, okay?”

“Yes, if you said so, then I have no problem with it.”

Sheryl replied back firmly, Akira was a little bit weirded out by that.

“A-alright then. Well, you can do whatever you want to handle the rest after this. If it might cause trouble in the gang, you can just say that I killed Nasha and dumped her body in the wasteland. I don’t know anything about that kind of thing, so that part would be fully up to you. If anything comes up, just give me a call, and also, I’ll visit the base again sometime soon. Later then.”

“I’ll be waiting for you. Ah, can I ask one thing? How did you know that Nasha is Alna’s close friend?”

“Hm? Not too long before you gave me that call, Viola called me first and told me all kinds of things.”

Sheryl gasped, Akira could clearly hear that, he smiled bitterly on the other side of the call and said.

“She even told me to rethink how to deal with your gang if you tried to hide this matter from me even after all I had said. But it seems that I don’t need

to worry about that, huh?”

“O-Of course!!”

“Right, later then.”

Akira ended the call. Sheryl was about to scream but she was barely able to hold herself back.

During the last incident, Sheryl had seen so many instances where Akira showed how ruthless and merciless he could be, how he always shot first and asked questions later. But after he spared Nasha, Sheryl could see a glimpse of Akira’s kindness, and she was really happy about it.

Sheryl was so happy up until the point where Viola’s name came up.

It all made sense now how calm Akira was when she told him about Nasha during that call. Akira already knew everything even before she had called him. And since she did contact him about that afterwards, Akira did not have any reason to be angry now.

[…That was dangerous!! Is that what Viola meant when she said about taking the initiative!? But didn’t she say that she won’t say anything to Akira if I choose to tell him myself?! Good grief, just how evil is that woman?!]

Sheryl took a deep breath to calm herself down. She then summoned Erio and Alicia, and she decided to tell Alicia and Erio about Nasha. After all, they looked really worried, so Sheryl thought it might be a good idea to let them know and to make them not overly scared of Akira. She also told herself to make sure that Erio and Alicia knew how bad Viola was.

Akira was still on the way back to Kugamayama city. The sun had already set and the city was still far away. Since he was using a rental vehicle, he took a big detour evading areas with a good chance of encountering monsters.

After he called Sheryl, Akira noticed Alpha was staring at him.

“What?”

“I thought I’ve been together with you for quite a long time now, but your way of thinking is still a big mystery to me. Are you sure you’re okay with that?”

“Is there anything bad with sparing her? Well, it’s true that she might change her mind later and decide to kill me. But when that happens, I can just kill her.”

To be more precise, Akira wanted to know if he was still that weak to the point that he should have killed Nasha instead of sparing her, and although he did it mostly unconsciously, he did think that it should be alright since Nasha was a nice person.

“That’s not what I meant. You let Viola live and even took Nasha all the way to Narahagaka city, so like, you could have spared Alna too, no? That way you would not have needed to fight that black powered suit and get into all of those troubles, right? So I’m just wondering how you made all of these decisions.”

Akira smiled bitterly, he also looked slightly annoyed.

“Sorry about that. I didn’t think that it would cause this much trouble… Though it’s already too late, now I can understand why Elena-san and Sara-san warned me. No, that’s not right, I don’t think even Elena-san and Sara-san knew that it would cause this much trouble.”

To Akira, Alna was the evidence of his weakness. He feared that he would return back to the slum if he kept making the same failure. The reason why he wanted to kill Alna no matter what was also because he wanted to wash himself clean of that fear. And with Alna dead now, his state of mind returned back to normal.

“I feel bad for being rude to Elena-san and Sara-san although they were only worrying about me.”

Akira sighed, he sounded slightly sad. Sara's and Elena's warning was correct and he ignored that. He felt like he should apologize to them.

Alpha smiled and tried to cheer him up.

"If you feel bad about it, then you should be more careful next time. That way you would not worry other people too much. Of course, that includes me too."

"Of course!"

Akira returned Alpha's smile with a bitter smile.

"By the way, what's your plan with Katsuya?"

"Katsuya? What's about him?"

"You did fight each other back then. If you want to be more careful to avoid any possible extra trouble, it might be a good idea to just forget about him even if you actually don't want to."

Akira nodded in agreement but his face immediately changed as if to say that he actually did not care.

"I see, so that's what you meant, huh? Rather than forgetting about him, I actually don't care about him in the first place though. After all, the only reason I fought him was simply because he was blocking me from killing Alna, it's not like I have a grudge against him that I want to kill him or anything like that. So it depends on what he is going to do. Personally speaking, I don't really care about him."

After he said that, Akira's face turned serious.

"But if he comes at me for revenge, then I have no other choice. I'll kill him too."

Alpha smiled as if to lighten the heavy mood oozing from Akira.

“I see, in that case, just to be safe as well as to prevent him from trying to do that, you need to become stronger. If you are strong enough, I’m sure he won’t even try to come at you. So let’s get better equipments for the sake of that.”

Akira lightly smiled, the heavy mood that was oozing from him right until now had completely vanished.

“I already spent 400 million Aurum for my equipments and it’s still not enough huh?”

“At least, one thing for sure, it’s not enough to accomplish my request. I still need you to work hard for that one too.”

“Roger that, it seems that I still have a long way to go.”

Akira lightly smiled as he kept on driving through the dark night. He had become strong enough to get out from the slum and traverse the wasteland. But that was still not enough, Akira could not even imagine just how strong he needed to be.

__*__*__*__

Yanagisawa was staring at an empty space. There was no one there, but from Yanagisawa’s point of view, he could see many faces of Hunters through the augmented reality display that he was using.

Yanagisawa focused on one person. When he did that, detailed information of that Hunter came up in the information terminal on his hand.

“Are you the one?”

Yanagisawa mumbled so as he thought of all the factors that supported his guess, he then considered all the factors that denied it. After doing all the calculations and summing up the result, he then said.

“…That would be a no.”

The information about that Hunter vanished and was replaced with the information of another Hunter.

“Is it you then?”

He did just like last time and concluded.

“…That would also be a no.”

Yanagisawa kept doing so for a few times through information about different Hunters of all ages and genders, cyborgs and non-cyborgs.

“Are you the one then?”

Just like last time, information of a certain Hunter was displayed on his information terminal, this time it was Akira.

[A young Hunter from the slum, huh. Let’s assume that he can connect to the old-world domain, then let’s assume he met one of them when he went to Kuzusuhara ruin and made a contract with them. Due to that contract, he got help to find relics, then he used the money that he got from selling those relics to buy equipment, and eventually, they invited him to that place. The beguiling ghost, it’s a rumour that I spread to help people find them. He has become so strong as a Hunter so fast which might as well be thanks to that contract with them. Everything makes sense here.]

Compared to the other Hunters up until now, Yanagisawa came up with a lot of factors to affirm his guess there. But his expression then turned slightly more serious than usual and continued.

[But, although he’s strong, he’s far away from being strong enough to go to that place. So it’s doubtful if they would make a contract with someone as weak as him. But let’s assume here that they did. It’s strange that he almost got killed these many times. That emergency request from Katsuragi. That encounter with the relic thieves. That time when his vehicle was eaten by that bounty monster. Then that battle in Seranthal building as well as the battle that happened yesterday. It won’t be strange for him to get killed on any of those occasions. If he’s in contract with them, they would have done

something to make sure that the people that they're in contract with would stay alive by keeping them from getting in those dangerous situations. So he wouldn't meet this many dangerous occasions. In conclusion, he doesn't seem to be the one… If I have to say, it's more like he's one of those gifted people who then got his talent bloom when he's still young then got lucky enough to find old-world relics and reach success as a Hunter. It's a rare case, but not impossible.]

Yanagisawa listed all the factors that denied his guess and finally made his conclusion.

"…Then that would be a no too, I guess?"

Yanagisawa thought that he still needed more materials to decide. So for now, he kept Akira's name on the candidate list. The list had already been filled with so many names. Yanagisawa then moved on to the next Hunter.

"Are you the one then?"

Yanagisawa looked closely at the information displayed in front of him. It was about Katsuya.

[A Hunter from Drankam. The gang has always been thinking of him highly, but lately, his performance has been increasing significantly. In the past, his name had even come up in the reports to the City Management, but now some of the people in the City Management even recognize his strength. Judging from the numbers, it can even be said that it's as if he's a completely different person. If he's someone who can connect to the old-world domain and get in a contract with them, that would explain the sudden increase in his performance.]

After listing all the factors that approved his guess, just like before, Yanagisawa started listing all the factors that denied his guess.

[But he only got this strong after that battle in Mihazono ruin. No, is it when he was fighting in that battle near the Seranthal building? Either way, it's not when he was in Kuzusuhara ruin. None of them should be in Mihazono ruin. Or at least, there's no past record of finding them in ruins

other than Kuzusuhara ruin. Although putting my trust on the record without much evidence is a bad thing, I cannot just ignore it either. Moreover, he's still far from being strong enough to go to that place. If I have to say, it sounds more like something happened in that battle near the Seranthal building that triggered his growth, it's not a rare thing for Hunters to be pulled out of their slumps because of some kind of trigger.]

When Yanagisawa was about to make his decision, something piqued his interest.

"…Seranthal building, huh? And this date… I was there too when he came to the Seranthal building. But at that time, my appointment reservation was deleted. They usually only stay in Kuzusuhara ruin though, so did they come to the Seranthal building temporarily to erase my appointment reservation? If that's the case, then this boy might… No, wait, it's not right to force my guess like this. If I force it here, it'll affect all my decisions later. In the first place, it's all under the assumption that he can connect to the old-world. It's just an assumption, it's okay to use it for checking all the possibilities, but it's wrong to put my bet on an assumption."

When Yanagisawa was about to continue, he received a call from someone. He stopped there, checked the call, and frowned when he found that it was not from someone that he could just ignore. So he took a deep breath and smiled just like usual before accepting the call.

"…Uhh, it's still Nergo, right? Or have you changed your name again?"

"I've given my name for the great cause, so it's not something that I can do lightly numerous times."

"I see. So, you're still Nergo right now, huh? What is it then?"

Yanagisawa sounded pretty casual, but in contrast to that, Nergo replied back with a rather serious tone.

"Do you know anything about a young Hunter in Drankam by the name of Katsuya?"

Yanagisawa glanced at Katsuya's information and faked ignorance.

"Katsuya?? Hmmm, ahh, uhhh, it's that guy, right? That young Hunter from Drankam who has been doing pretty well lately, right? I heard that he even caused Drankam to break into factions. It's that one, right?"

"Yeah. There's something that I need to confirm about Katsuya to my other brothers. Or more like, I need their permission."

"Permission? For what?"

"I want to secure him."

Yanagisawa was surprised, he did not expect that from Nergo at all. But he replied with a light joke.

"Ahh, well, of course, I'll help you out, but I'm still a part of the City Management staff, you see. If you ask me if it's okay to kidnap one of our Hunters, I have no other choice but to say no. Or more like, in the first place, why would you bring that up to me?"

"We want to maintain a good relationship with you."

"What do you mean?"

"There's a possibility that Katsuya might be someone that we're looking for. I know you're looking for one too, right? Someone who could connect to the old-world domain from the Kuzusuhara ruin."

Yanagisawa's smile vanished. Nergo did not notice it at all as he casually stated.

"Katsuya can connect to the old-world domain."

"…Ohh!"

Yanagisawa's smile returned back. But this time, it was not a fake smile, he was really jovial after hearing that statement.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 168, Restarting Hunter Activities

Index

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Shizuka was waiting at her shop just like usual when she spotted Akira. As she was about to call him, she stopped when she realized that he was acting weird.

Akira looked a bit scared as he carefully entered the shop, he looked around as if he was searching for someone. After he confirmed that the person he was looking for was not there, he sighed in relief but with a rather conflicted face.

“Welcome!”

Shizuka smiled and welcomed him, Akira twitched and awkwardly smiled back. Shizuka found it weird, but for now, she was relieved to see his smile. Akira no longer gave off that tense mood which he exuded when he was talking to Elena and Sara last time.

Even after Akira came to the counter, he seemed to be wanting to say something but hesitating to do so. Shizuka was curious about that, but for now, she decided to just smile and gave her usual business-like service.

“So, what do you need today? Though I feel like it’s rather too soon for you to come here for ammo, after all, it hasn’t been that long since the last time you came. Ah, or is it that you’re here just for a chit-chat? If that’s the case, I don’t mind at all, you know.”

“Ah, no, uhh, I’m here for ammo.”

“Is that so? I thought you bought enough ammo the last time you came here for your new equipment. Did you go on a monster curbing request to get yourself familiar with your new augmented suit or something and used a lot of your ammo there?”

“Eh, ah, well, uhhh, things happened, you see.”

“Is that so? Then, is the usual okay?”

“No, uhh, I might need other things too…”

Akira sounded a little bit scared as he placed his order. Shizuka was listening to him calmly, but inside, she was actually pretty surprised. She did not think that he would need a new repair cartridge for his augmented suit, a replacement for the anti-forcefield armour-piercing bullet that he bought as a lucky charm, and bullets plus energy cartridge enough for a normal battle this quickly.

Shizuka slightly frowned and said.

“I’m sorry but I can’t give you the repair cartridge right away. That thing is pretty expensive after all, so I don’t have that ready in my shop. But if you need it immediately, I’ll place an express order for that…”

Akira shook his head flusteredly.

“Ah, it’s fine! I don’t need it that badly. I just thought that I need to buy some while I have the money and the chance while I still remember it.”

“Okay then. In that case, I’ll put a normal order for the repair cartridge. You can get the rest just fine. You’re buying quite a lot this time, so if you’re here with your vehicle, can you bring it to the back of the shop?”

Shizuka smiled and said so, to which Akira flusteredly replied.

“Ah, uhmm, uhh… Alright.”

Akira slightly slumped as if he had given up and went out to bring his vehicle to the back of the shop.

Akira was loading ammo and other stuff into his vehicle. Shizuka who was looking at him then casually asked him.

“Say, Akira, that vehicle is a rental vehicle, right? How about the one that you got from me? Did you send it for repair or something?”

Akira stopped, he avoided looking straight at Shizuka as he replied.

“No, actually, uhhh… I’m sorry, I no longer can use that one…”

“What do you mean by that…?”

“Uhhh, things happened.”

Akira was not lying, the vehicle that he bought from Shizuka was no longer available for him to use. But that already happened a few battles ago, to be more precise, that vehicle was broken when Akira fought that bounty monster. He was thinking of buying a similar vehicle sometime soon or buying a better one so he could use that as an excuse to replace the vehicle that he received from Shizuka, but before that happened, even his new vehicle got wrecked right afterwards, taking away all the ammo and medicine that he had in that vehicle with it. That was why he was buying new supplies today.

Judging from Akira’s reaction, Shizuka thought that he looked like a small boy who was scared of telling the truth. And when she made a guess as to the reason why, she said to Akira as if to calm him down.

“Say Akira, about last time. Do you hate Elena and Sara now after what happened? If that’s the case, I won’t force you to reconcile with them, but I hope you would understand Elena and Sara did not do that because of any ill-will. They were just worried about you, though you might not like it.”

Akira thought that he would get scolded for losing his vehicle. That was why he was slightly surprised when Shizuka brought that up, he then flusteredly shook his head and said.

“Not at all. To be honest, I’m actually a bit worried that Sara-san and Elena-san hate me now since I thought I did something rather rude when they only tried to stop me since they’re worried about me. And it’s as they said, it really was not worth the trouble… I might have really gotten a bit too emotional back then. I know I can be a bit stubborn sometimes, though it may be too late to say that now…”

Akira looked a bit down and seemed to feel bad for what he did. Shizuka who saw that smiled at him to cheer him up.

“I don’t know what happened for you to lose your vehicle, but I’m glad that you’re fine. Are you injured?”

“Ah, not at all, I’m alright.”

“Then that’s all that matters. Make sure to take care of your body. I’ll at least tell Elena and Sara that you’re not that bothered by last time too. You did look a bit scared coming in after all, so I bet you feel awkward coming to my shop now.”

Shizuka smiled bitterly as she said so, Akira replied back also with a bitter smile.

“I’m sorry and thank you.”

“Don’t mention it, I’ll make sure to let them know. Don’t worry, it’s not like they are angry at you. So it’ll be fine.”

Akira looked obviously relieved there. Seeing that, Shizuka happily smiled and said.

“But still, I’m really glad that your friendship with Elena and Sara didn’t break up. If you guys are on bad terms, it would be awkward for both of you to come to this shop and it would hurt my revenue.”

Shizuka smiled when she said that, so Akira smiled back at her.

After Akira loaded all his new ammo and other supplies into his vehicle, he then went straight back home. Shizuka saw him off with a smile, when Akira was no longer in her view, her smile slightly turned cloudy.

“Wasn’t worth the trouble, huh…”

Shizuka noticed that Akira had killed Alna.

Akira sounded a bit regretful when he said that it was not worth the trouble. Shizuka bet that it must be the reason why Akira lost his vehicle and came there today to buy supplies. Elena and Sara did try to stop him and Shizuka herself also had told him to put a serious thought about it first, but even so, he still went and killed that pickpocket. Judging from his reaction last time, Shizuka thought that it was unlikely for them to find a peaceful solution to that matter. This time, he had regained his calm to the point that he could say he might have gotten a bit stubborn back then. Which made it likely that he had regained his calm after killing that pickpocket.

If that was really the case, that would explain why Akira looked a bit scared when he entered the shop. He ignored the warnings from the people close to him and went to kill that pickpocket, so it must be awkward for him to meet them now. Or at least, that was what Shizuka’s intuition was telling her.

From that guess, Shizuka then thought. Although she did not feel any sympathy for the pickpocket that Akira killed, she felt sad for Akira, who killed that pickpocket. Akira had become strong enough to buy 400 million Aurum equipment, and even after acquiring that much power, the possible danger and loss from killing that pickpocket could not stop him from doing so.

Power would normally provide leeway and tolerance. But the power that Akira had gained was not enough to provide him with enough leeway and tolerance to let matters with pickpocket go. Akira’s mind was still stuck as if he was still living in the slum.

Shizuka felt sad when she thought how much strength Akira needed to be able to just laugh it off when something like that happened, and how many times he had been reminded of his weakness to the point that he unconsciously craved for more power.

“…I guess, for now, I need to let Sara and Elena know as soon as possible, huh.”

Moping would not change anything. In order to move on from that matter for her own sake as well as Elena’s and Sara’s, Shizuka decided that she should let Sara and Elena know with a smile that their last conversation with Akira was nothing to worry about. Shizuka thought so as she went back to her shop with a light smile.

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Yatsubayashi had both an experiment room and a treatment room in his clinic. He treated people who came to his clinic either in the experiment room or in the other room depending on how much money those people could pay him. And since his clinic was in the slum, most of the people who came there got sent to the experiment room.

There was also another room in his clinic, it was a special room where people could not just casually come in. It was a room neither for experiment nor for treatment. Inside that big room, there were all kinds of mysterious devices lined up. In the middle of that room, there was a bed, and Tiol was sitting on that bed.

Tiol was only looking forward with an empty stare as if he was daydreaming. Although his hand and legs were secured with some thick steel, he did not seem to be bothered by that at all. He was just sitting there with an absent mind.

There was no window in that room. The walls were sound-proof, so no sound could come in, and since Tiol was only sitting there in silence, the room was incredibly silent. In that isolated room, Tiol suddenly looked at the door. That was when the door opened and Yatsubayashi came in.

“I’m here with your food.”

When Yatsubayashi came inside that room with the food, Tiol had already returned back to looking forward with an empty look.

Yatsubayashi sat in front of Tiol and used the metallic fork to feed Tiol. When he did that, Tiol opened his mouth and chomped the food down, together with the metallic fork.

Yatsubayashi looked at the fork that had lost its head and mumbled.

“I guess this means that it’s another failure, huh.”

When Yatsubayashi extended the fork that had lost its head back to Tiol, he started to eat that fork too. After that, he also ate the food that Yatsubayashi brought in as well as the metallic plate that he had used to carry that food. Yatsubayashi carefully held the plate so as not to get his hand eaten too and quickly pulled his hand back when Tiol finished the plate too.

Once he was done eating, Tiol stared at Yatsubayashi. Though he was properly looking at Yatsubayashi, there was no emotion in his gaze, it was as if he was simply looking at something near him. Even when Yatsubayashi wiped Tiol’s mouth, Tiol showed no reaction at all.

Yatsubayashi frowned and looked rather disappointed.

“Well, this is another failure for sure. I was sure that it would be a success though. His wounds are perfectly healed and it doesn’t seem like there are any bad physical side effects. But I guess the drug affected his brain, huh? I guess it means I should recalculate everything starting from its effect on the brain. Or is it that I didn’t fully clear the nanomachines that it’s now affecting him? I have no answer at all, I guess I’ll keep observing him for now.”

Yatsubayashi sighed. He then stood up and went towards the door. Before he reached for the door’s handle, he looked back at Tiol.

“Tiol-kun, you were the one who told me that you don’t mind participating in my experiment as long as I healed you. I did my best there, so don’t blame me, okay? See you tomorrow then.”

Yatsubayashi only said so and left the room with a smile. The patient beds in his clinic were filled with patients after all the ruckus yesterday. He could not just ignore them for the sake of collecting money for his own experiment, so he was busy that day. Because of that, he could not spend his time observing Tiol.

Tiol was once again left alone inside the room. The room had returned to the previous silence, Tiol once again was only looking forward with an empty gaze without saying anything. He suddenly looked at the cuffs on his hands, opened his mouth wide, and bit off those cuffs.

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Tomejima was ripping his hairs out, of course figuratively, in his office in the lower district. That was when Colbert came in, Tomejima immediately looked at him and said.

“How was it?!”

Colbert looked at Tomejima’s desperate face and lightly shook his head.

“I did some investigation, but nothing comes out. I couldn’t find them nor reach them. They might as well be already dead.”

“Dammit, again, huh!!

Tomejima hung his head down again, there was slight desperation mixed in his extremely distressed face.

“Calm down, is it really that bad?”

“It’s already 10 people, you know? We basically lost 10 credits worth of people!! Just how much money do you think we’re losing right now?!”

Colbert received a job from Tomejima to collect some debts. His targets were Hunters and some ex-Hunters. Since people like them tend to cause trouble, Tomejima asked Colbert, who was also a Hunter, to collect their debts.

But those people went missing now. Although to be more precise, Tomejima and Colbert had a good guess of where they went to. They most probably got killed in that battle between the Ezont family and Haurias the other day. Their bodies might as well be mixed in one of those countless dead bodies scattered in Ezont Family's base.

Colbert lightly summed all the debts that those people had and frowned.

"Their debts don't even reach 1 billion though. You don't usually take in this kind of credits, you know."

"I really need money right now, no matter how small it is…"

"Hmm? I don't remember your company was in such a bad situation though."

Tomejima's face twitched.

"…I placed some bet in that battle, you know."

"Well, that's rather unfortunate then."

Colbert understood the reason why Tomejima looked pretty down as he smiled wryly at him.

Ezont Family and Haurias squeezed a lot of money from the businesses under their leadership to fuel their fight, they also took a big loan from credit companies like Tomejima's company promising that they would return that money with interest once they won their fight. They also promised other benefits once they took full control of the lower district after crushing the other side. That was how they half-threatened those companies to lend them money.

Indeed it would bring those companies a lot of money if either Ezont Family or Haurias won the conflict between them. But with both sides almost equally strong, it was hard to predict which one would win. Not to mention, if they did not lend their money to the group that would win later, it would cause those companies a lot of trouble down the road, so they had no other choice but to place their bets in one of them. That was the kind of betting that they were doing.

Because of that, some of the companies refused to place their bet. They chose to lend a small amount of money to both sides, although they would lose some of their money when the fight ended, they could at least keep a good relationship with whichever side won that fight. Many companies took this approach, and Tomejima was one of them.

Some of the people who decided to put their money on both sides had some connections with Viola. They were told by Viola to keep lending money to both sides to make sure that the conflict would turn into a large-scale battle. Thanks to that, both Haurias and Ezont Family were able to put out a lot of powered suits during that battle. As Viola predicted, with that much money put in to fuel that battle, it indeed turned into a large-scale battle.

Because of that, both gangs sustained heavy losses to the point that they might as well be already over. So, those who put their money on both sides lost a lot of money from that result. It could be said that they were also victims of Viola’s doing.

Colbert lightly cheered Tomejima up.

“Alright alright, it would also cause me trouble if your company goes bankrupt. I’ll go and look for them again. But don’t expect too much, okay? If we’re lucky, we might at least find their dead bodies.”

“Yeah, I’ll be counting on you. And also, take anything that you can.”

“Just to let you know though, it won’t be free, alright?”

“It depends on your result.”

Tomejima still had his head down as he lightly waved at Colbert. Colbert smiled wryly and left the room.

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Sheryl was sitting in one of the rooms in her gang, Viola was sitting in front of her. Although she was smiling, Sheryl looked slightly annoyed since she had no good impression of the person in front of her. Viola was slightly amused by it as she just smiled back and ignored it.

“It’s good to know that you’re doing well, so how’s your wound?”

“I already got it treated, so it’s no problem at all.”

“I see. Well then, we’ll be in your care from now on.”

“Likewise, I’ll also be in your care, boss.”

Just like she had promised Akira, Viola came there to help out Sheryl’s gang. Although she was basically taking command of the gang, she decided to work under Sheryl. That was why she called Sheryl boss.

Although it was only on the surface, with this, Sheryl had both Akira who was a dangerous and volatile person and Viola who was a very bad person under her thumb. Such a rumour had already spread around which caused all the gangs around Sheryl’s gang to focus on her gang. But of course, Viola was the one who spread that rumour.

Sheryl looked at Viola with a stern gaze.

“Let me warn you here though, Akira asked me to keep my eyes on you. He even told me that I’m allowed to kill you if I want to. And even if it’s impossible for me, he told me to give him a reason to kill you and he would do it himself. So make sure not to try anything funny.”

Sheryl stated clearly that she could easily decide Viola’s life or death, she also did that for the sake of venting her anger at Viola. If Viola looked a bit flustered after that, it would help Sheryl feel better. But that did not happen.

“You can just drop the honorific. We’re going to work together for a long time after all, so just forget the honorifics.”

Viola smiled casually and said so. She then pushed a book-like object towards Sheryl.

“What is this?”

“My job is to help this gang. So this is where I start. It’s a list of your current resources and debts.”

Sheryl confusedly took the book and started reading it.

“I could have sent you the data that you can read with an information terminal, but I thought that you might get a better grasp of it if it’s given in the form of papers like this. And don’t worry, I’ll also send you the data later.”

As Sheryl started to read and understand the contents of that book, her face started turning pale.

“You might think that’s pretty bad, but that’s already based on a pretty naive calculation, you know? After all, there’s no interest and no deadline to pay it back. If you show it to one of those credit companies out there, I’m sure they’ll laugh at you.”

The book contained a detailed list of reward money that Sheryl’s gang should pay Akira for supporting her gang, guarding her shop, training Erio and the other children, saving Sheryl, and there were still a lot more favours that the gang had received from Akira. It showed how much Sheryl’s gang owed Akira in simple terms of money. If they were to interpret it in a bad way, it could be said that the gang was in deep debt to Akira.

“I know that people used to say there’s nothing more expensive than free stuff, but unfortunately, a lot of people out there misunderstand how much they owe other people because of that. So I translated that to money to remind you how much you owe Akira. I’m sure there are a lot of people in

the gang who don’t fully understand this, ah, but of course, that’s not the case for you, right? I’m talking about other children here.”

Sheryl did her best to show a calm face as she mumbled the total number with a slightly trembling voice.

“… 3 billion and 800 million Aurum, huh?”

The biggest debt came from when Akira rescued Sheryl the other day. It cost Sheryl 1 billion Aurum. Sheryl did not have enough information there to decide whether that number was properly calculated or not.

“If you have any doubt, you can go ahead and tell me. I’ll immediately clarify it.”

Viola smiled casually, in contrast to that, Sheryl was barely able to smile back while glaring at her. Even if she found some records not properly calculated, telling Viola to lower the number also meant placing less value on Akira. Sheryl could not afford to do that and she understood well that Viola also knew the same when she provoked her.

“Ahh, by the way, I’ve sent that data to Akira. I’ll also send the new data to him if we want to make any revision, so don’t worry about that.”

Sheryl looked surprised for a split second. But her welling up anger caused her face to stiffen. Her hand clasped into a fist as she gritted her teeth.

Although Sheryl said that she had the say whether Viola would live or not, with that exchange just now, it was all meaningless. Viola was there to help Sheryl’s gang because of the deal that she had with Akira. Her job there was to help Akira get more benefits from all the investments that he put on Sheryl’s gang.

So basically, in order for Sheryl to be able to kill Viola, she had to come up with a reason that exceeded the profit that Viola was giving Akira. If she asked Akira to kill Viola, it could even be interpreted as asking him to just throw away 3.8 billion Aurum down the drain. Sheryl did not want to even imagine how Akira would react if she said that.

Sheryl smiled coldly. She could not hide her anger, so her expression was calm and cold.

“…I see.”

Sheryl noticed the change in herself due to her anger. Her anger that was blazing as if it was about to explode was replaced with extremely cold rage.

She then politely bowed to Viola.

“I know I’m lacking in a lot of aspects in terms of managing a gang. But I’ll give my best, I’ll be in your care.”

Sheryl smiled coldly there, she made her resolve that she would learn everything so that she would no longer need Viola.

“Of course, let’s both give our best together from here and on.”

Viola smiled ominously. It was as if she was saying that Sheryl would not be able to do that, and that was conveyed just fine to Sheryl.

Sheryl and Viola continued talking in that room, not too far from that room, Carol was talking with the other children while waiting for Viola. Carol had the beauty that would attract people, a figure that pronounced her beauty even more, and an augmented suit that was obviously designed to attract the member of the opposite sex. With all of these 3 factors together, she was attracting a lot of attention in the gang.

Carol smiled invitingly to the young boys there who were more or less of the same age as Akira and confirmed that Akira indeed was a special case. She was collecting information about Akira there and noticed that most of the young boys would focus on the cleavage visible from the big opening of her augmented suit, she then thought that it would have been great if Akira was that simple too.

Since Carol had a beauty that could only be found in mature women, no other girls in the gang could match her. Thanks to that, it really attracted the attention of the boys inside the gang. Even Erio could not fight back the

gravity of Carol's rack forever as his gaze wandered to Carol's chest, but the moment he noticed that Alicia was looking at him, he could not help but to get flustered as he tried his best to apologize to Alicia.

Carol was using the boys in Sheryl's gang to confirm her seducing ability, she then noticed Colbert coming into the room where she was.

Colbert also immediately noticed Carol and frowned.

"Geez, that's rather cold of you to look at me like that."

"You don't even know about your bad reputation, huh?"

"Bad reputation? Just so you know, a lot of my customers give me a good review, alright?"

"I know that you often get along with that Viola and that in itself is enough to be bad news. I won't say anything bad to you or anything. But just to warn you, you should refrain from messing with this gang, it'll only win you a straight ticket to the after-life, you know."

"Oh my, I won't do something like that, right?"

Between Colbert's warning and Carol's seduction, most of the boys there took Carol's side. Carol smiled and Colbert sighed in exasperation.

"So then, Colbert, why are you here?"

"I have a small request to ask of Sheryl's gang… Well, basically it has something to do with Viola."

Colbert knew that Akira was behind Sheryl's gang. Although he did not want to get involved with Akira if it could be helped, he still came there to ask Sheryl's gang to do a job for him. It was simply because Viola told him to do so.

Although Colbert was wary of Viola, he could not afford to just cut his ties with her. Carol understood that was just how bad her friend was as she smiled amusedly.

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Akira was riding his bike through the wasteland. He was heading to Kuzusuhara ruin. He finally restarted his Hunter activity after he finished all of his preparations.

The bike was not a rental bike. Although Kuzusuhara ruin was not an undiscovered ruin, it would be dangerous for him to go there with a rental bike since it would leave a record of his route in the rental bike.

Akira bought that bike since Alpha suggested him to. It was a pretty big bike designed for Hunters. It had two arms attached to its back that were connected to the bike's control device. Akira equipped those arms with his DVTS minigun and A4WM automatic grenade launcher. Its body armour was made of the same force field armour as his coat and it was controlled by the bike's control device too. Just like usual, Alpha had full control of that control device.

Akira happily rode his new bike while pacing it through the wasteland, but a question suddenly came up in his mind.

"Alpha, though it might be way too late for me to ask this, was it really important for me to spend that much money on this bike?"

"Yup. So stop questioning it already, okay? There are many places in the inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin where you can't take your vehicle, you know. So it's better to go there by bike although it's indeed a rather expensive bike for your current budget."

Akira exhausted almost all of his money to buy that bike. He even had to use his emergency savings for that too. Thanks to that, forget his augmented suit repair cartridge, he might not even be able to pay his next month's rent. He did hesitate at first, but since Alpha said that it would be dangerous to go with his vehicle, he ended up buying that bike.

"The last time I had this little money was at that time when I went to look for relics to be able to pay for the next day's room rent, huh? I need to make sure to go back home with relics this time. It'll be alright, right?"

Akira glanced at Alpha who was floating next to the running bike. She smiled confidently and said.

“Of course, just leave it to me.”

Akira lightly smiled. At the moment, he had no other option but to trust that confident smile from Alpha.

“Alright, well, I did say that I would trust you with that matter anyway.”

“Yup, that’s right!”

Akira and Alpha lightly smiled at each other as Akira went straight to Kuzusuhara ruin.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 169, Tsubaki

Index

Translator: **Athena13**

Editor: **Silavin**

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After Akira arrived near Kuzusuhara ruin, he followed Alpha's instruction to take a particular route. He paced his bike around the outskirts of the ruin as if to circle the whole ruin.

"Alpha, why are we not going into the ruin?"

"If we go into the ruin, we'll have to go near the temporary front base. It's not like we can use that wide road made for sending supplies into the deeper part of the ruin."

"But isn't it easier if we just go through that road? Since it's a properly built road."

Alpha's expression was saying 'you didn't get it, didn't you?' as she shook her head.

"If you go through there, it'll definitely gather a lot of attention, you know? A young and not-so-strong-looking Hunter going back home with a lot of expensive relics. A rumour like that would definitely spread around if we do that."

Akira slightly frowned.

“I’m no longer the old me. After all, my current equipment cost me 500 million Aurum, so are they really going to still look at me as a young weak Hunter?”

“Indeed the current you have way better equipment compared to the past you, but judging from the relative danger of the places that you’re frequenting, you still look like a young boy coming into dangerous places that don’t suit your current skill. Of course, if you say that you can fight those big monsters guarding old-world facilities without my help, that would change my mind.”

Alpha said so with a challenging smile, Akira lightly frowned.

“…That would be a no.”

Akira looked a bit depressed, Alpha smiled at him as if to cheer him up while also approving of his reply. He smiled bitterly in reaction to that as he paced his bike faster. Not too long after that, once he had put enough distance between him and the temporary front base, Akira went into the ruin.

The ruin was filled with half-destroyed buildings, of course, most of the roads there were not maintained. It was not rare to find some of them semi-blocked or even fully closed by rubbles. There were only limited roads that Hunters could pass through, and that was if they were bringing vehicles designed for the harsh condition of the wasteland.

Akira was able to navigate through those difficult roads relatively fast thanks to the expensive bike that he bought and Alpha’s advanced calculation ability. Though its wheels bounced a few times against the hard rubble, its body was mostly undamaged.

Akira saw a huge pile of rubble blocking his way to the direction that Alpha was instructing him to go, so he was going to take a detour around it. But Alpha controlled Akira’s augmented suit and prevented him from doing that.

“Alpha? The way forward is blocked, you know?”

“It’s fine.”

“It’s fine…?”

Alpha took control of the bike and accelerated right into that pile of rubble. Akira was slightly thrown off-balance by the sudden acceleration but he flusteredly returned to his posture.

“It would take too much time evading all the blocking rubbles. Since you got yourself an expensive bike, let’s make the best use of it.”

“Wait for a sec!? There’s no way we can just charge through that pile of rubble!!”

The pile blocking Akira’s way forward was at least 8 metres high. Its slope was sharp enough to make it unscalable. As Akira was still flustered, his bike did not stop accelerating. At this rate, if he kept going forward, he would collide right into the rubble, and with that speed, not only his bike, it might as well danger his life too. But Alpha ignored him and kept on accelerating the bike.

Akira, who felt that his life was in danger, unconsciously used time compression. The scene in front of him slid past him at a slower pace, then suddenly, the direction of the sliding scenery in front of him changed. Alpha changed the direction of the bike, at the same time, she used small rubble on the ground to propel the bike to the sky and to the big building to its right. Akira was so surprised as he was lifted off the ground together with his bike.

Alpha forcefully readjusted the bike’s posture in the middle of the air. It then landed on the side of the big building without losing balance at all. Thanks to the bike’s exceptional shock absorption device, its tires were able to land on the building’s wall just fine.

Alpha was still in control of the bike as she paced the bike across the building’s wall, Akira was so surprised that he was barely able to do

anything there. It went up until it was higher than the rubble blocking the way before it once again changed direction, went straight across the building wall while maintaining its height, and past the rubble blocking his way before heading down to the ground.

As Akira frowned seeing the ground coming closer and closer to his face, the bike bounced again and left the wall. It then readjusted its posture in midair again and landed its two wheels safely on the ground. Once again, thanks to its exceptional shock-absorption system, it was able to land on the ground barely sending any shock to Akira's body.

The bike then just went straight without slowing down. It took some time before Akira returned back to reality and looked at Alpha's confident smile.

"Aren't you glad that you got yourself a bike instead of a vehicle? After all, it would be hard to get past that rubble with a vehicle."

"…You have a point there."

Akira smiled bitterly. All the complaints that he had in his mind were erased. After all, he did not have to take a detour around that pile of rubble and was already used to doing reckless things like that. And more than anything, he actually pretty much enjoyed that.

"Want to try doing that yourself on our way back?"

"Thanks for the offer, but no. If I do that myself, I feel like I would crash into the wall instead."

"Well, that's kind of true. But it would be really convenient once you can do it yourself, you know? Should I train you to do that?"

"If it's really something that I need to learn in order to finish that request of yours, then sure… Or is that there are places that I can't go to unless I learn that trick?"

"That's a secret for now."

"I-I see."

Akira felt a bit scared that Alpha did not say no. But since she offered to train him to do that, it meant that it was possible for him to learn that manoeuvre. And when he imagined himself doing that trick on his own, he could not help but get a bit excited.

After that, Akira kept going deeper into the ruin following Alpha's instruction. He was able to go through small roads that would have been hard to go through with a vehicle thanks to his high-performance bike. Because he was able to force his way through rubbles that he would have usually gone around, he was able to arrive at the inner part of the ruin relatively quicker.

Once Akira arrived in the inner part of the ruin, he stopped his bike and looked at the scenery. Once he scanned the area around him, he then made a serious face and said.

"Alpha, this place…"

"This is the inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin. Although it's not the deepest part yet, at least we're no longer in the outer part of the ruin."

Akira could see the place where he had given up the first time he came to that ruin. The ground was properly paved, there was no crack at all. He could not find any crumbling buildings either. It was a completely different scenery compared to the outer side of the ruin where it was filled with half-destroyed buildings.

He felt a bit intimidated by the scene in front of him. The area was completely silent as if it was shrouded in a thick colourless mist, but his vision was not blurry at all. He could see clearly the scenery in front of him which should have been blurred if there was a colourless mist.

Akira looked over the city in front of him and felt something was weird about it as if it was devoid of any sign of people. Compared to the outer part of the ruin where there was still some leftover of human civilization, the inner part of the ruin felt so unnaturally empty.

“Alpha, is it really okay for us to just go straight deeper into the ruin like this? This is one of those, right? The areas that are still properly maintained by the old-world drones, right?”

“Yep, that’s exactly why it’s very clean.”

“So in short, those security drones are also roaming around this place, right? It’s not like I would get shot the moment I enter the city, right?”

“Well, regarding that, it would be fine if you just follow my instructions. That’s why, make sure not to ignore my instruction like before, okay?”

Alpha had a rather deep sarcastic smile when she said that. Akira remembered the time when he got attacked by a huge monster when he ignored Alpha’s instruction and smiled bitterly.

“Roger that, let’s go then.”

Akira once again paced his bike forward and went straight into the city that gave off an unsettling feeling.

An old-world city that still maintained its condition. Normally, anyone would get killed the moment they stepped into that city. But that did not happen. The thing besides Akira was preventing that from happening, Alpha had the ability to prevent that from happening.

As he thought that it must be because Alpha was doing something there, it helped him from being overly cautious.

It was true that it was thanks to Alpha. But in reality, it was completely different from what he guessed.

Akira looked around with full interest. The area around him was properly maintained, it was as if he was brought back to the old-world era. But with no human presence anywhere, it was unsettlingly calm and silent.

The road was wide and nothing was blocking the road, though there were also no other vehicles or bikes other than Akira’s bike. But even so, he

followed Alpha's instruction not to pace his bike too fast. Compared to when he was outside the city, he was going rather slowly.

"Alpha, why do we have to go this slowly?"

"We're making sure not to go past the speed limit of this road, you see."

"Speed limit? Does that kind of thing exist in the old-world ruin?"

"Yup, so we have to properly obey it."

Alpha was speaking as if to calm down a small boy, Akira seemed to be not fully convinced by that.

"…There's no one else other than me here though, do I still need to obey the speed limit?"

"That's just how law and rule work, you see."

"Is that so? I see then."

Akira hummed, seeing that, Alpha smiled bitterly at him and said.

"If you can't accept it no matter what, just simply keep in mind that the security drones will swarm you if you break the rule. And if you force your way through them, they'll call even bigger and stronger security robots to stop you. And even if you can deal with them too, you'll have to fight those big humanoid soldiers that the Kugamayama defence squad fought in Mihazono ruin the other day. You don't want to do that, do you?"

"Yeah."

Akira nodded firmly while making an annoyed face. Although it was able to fully convince him, another question came up in his mind.

"I just thought of something though. Those mechanical monsters guarding the old-world facilities usually have that camouflaging device, right? So it's not like they are actually hiding somewhere nearby, right? After all, it's impossible to see through old-world camouflaging with naked eyes, right?

And it’s hard to detect them even with an information-gathering device. So like, are we really going to be alright?”

Alpha smiled at the worried Akira as if to calm him down.

“Don’t worry, it would be alright.”

“Is that so? Then I guess they’re not around, huh.”

Akira smiled and sighed in relief. After all, when he thought that those monsters might actually be around him and that it was just he could not see them, that in itself was scary enough. But Alpha then smiled and said.

“As long as you keep following my instructions, there won’t be any trouble.”

Akira’s face stiffened.

“…They’re not here, right?”

Alpha gave off a rather ominous smile.

“It’s not a problem.”

“Wait, they are here?”

“It would be fine.”

Akira kept telling himself that Alpha was only teasing him in order to calm his nerves.

The area that Akira was in looked like a downtown district in broad daylight except for the missing human presence, it was completely silent and filled with an abnormal atmosphere as if all the humans there suddenly vanished in one snap. But from the point of view of a Hunter, it looked like a treasure trove filled with valuable old-world relics. It could even be said that it was a mountain of relics. Every time Akira passed a building that looked like a shop, he could not help but peek inside, imagining all the valuable old-world relics that he might find inside them.

Akira thought that sooner or later, he would go inside one of those buildings, but Alpha did not show any sign of that at all as she kept pacing the bike forward. So Akira could not help but get curious and asked her.

“Alpha, I feel like we’ve been going around the same area multiple times now, are we looking for a building with expensive relics or something?”

“Well, to put it simply, yup, that’s indeed the case.”

“I see. Well, I’ll leave that to you, but like, can we stop and take a look at one of those shops? I feel like we can get expensive relics no matter which one we go to though…”

“Nope.”

“Why?”

Alpha replied casually.

“It’s not like you have any money to buy anything there, right?”

“…Buy? No, I mean like, wait, buy…?”

Akira was confused, he did not expect Alpha to say that. What he had in mind when he asked Alpha that question was to break into one of those shops, fill his rucksack with any expensive relics that he could find, and escape the building while fighting back the security drones before finally getting away from that place on his bike. He did not expect to have to pay anything with his money.

“I understand what you want to say, but that would be too dangerous. The only way to get out from this place with those relics is to bring along the city defence squad, render the security drones temporarily disabled, and get out from this place while they are still disabled. And of course, the ensuing battle would leave this place half-destroyed. You need enough firepower to turn this place like the outskirts of this ruin. Have you forgotten the reason why we have to obey the speed limit?”

Akira frowned slightly.

“Well, you have a point there, but if I can’t do that, then why are we here? It’s not like I came here risking my life just for sightseeing, you know. My only choice would be to look for a place with relatively weak security to break in, right? Isn’t that why we’re just roaming around the area?”

“That line of thinking is not wrong, but it’s better to break into a place where it’s unlikely to turn into a fight, right? Just leave that to me, you did say that you’re leaving that kind of thing to me too, remember?”

Alpha smiled and sent a rather strong gaze than usual to Akira. Akira who noticed that decided to stop saying anything unnecessary.

“…Alright. Although I don’t know what’s your plan here, I can’t afford to go back without anything. So I expect to get some relics to bring back, okay?”

“Of course, just leave it to me. You just need to make sure to follow my instructions. Don’t just go ahead and shoot even if you spot a mechanical monster, okay?”

“Wait, so they’re actually really here, huh!?”

“They won’t cause you any trouble as long as you follow my instructions.”

Akira frowned. His expression was a mix of worry and expectation, but Alpha only smiled back at him with her usual smile.

Even after that, they were still only driving around the area for some time. Akira then noticed something strange in front of him and squinted his eyes. He could see a tall building in front of him, and there was a vertical road on the side of that building.

When Akira thought that the old-world ruin was indeed a place filled with strange things, his bike suddenly accelerated. Akira raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“…Alpha, wait, are we going to climb the side of a building again? I don’t think we can do it for that road though?!”

“Don’t worry. Not to mention, you ran down on the side of a building not too long ago, remember? We’ll do that again but with a bike this time.”

The bike accelerated even more. It then went to the curved part of the road that was connecting the road on the ground and the side of that building and went straight up scaling the side of that building.

Akira looked down past his feet and into the wall of the building and frowned. He already climbed pretty high up and his bike also started slowing down, if he fell down now, it would be simply disastrous.

“Is it that the old-world roads even have a feature that allows people to drive vertically?”

“Not in this road here, this one is basically just a simple wall.”

“Just a wall!? And I’m scaling a normal wall?!”

As Akira was dumbfounded, the bike slowed down even more. At this rate, he would be falling down with his bike. As he thought so, he immediately grabbed his bike’s handlebar and raised its power. But the bike kept slowing down, and once it reached a certain speed, it stopped slowing down and continued climbing at a constant speed.

Alpha smiled amusedly at Akira who was still in a panic.

“Although the wall doesn’t have that feature, the bike has the feature to prevent you from falling over. Or to be more precise, it has the feature to stick its wheels on the surface that it’s running in order to prevent losing control of the bike when you’re driving through uneven ground. Since its wheels are sticking on the surface, you won’t fall that easily. Compared to the last time you were running on a building’s wall, this time it’s way safer, isn’t it?”

Akira sighed in relief, but he immediately pouted soon after.

“…Didn’t I always tell you to at least let me know before doing something like this?!”

“Just think of it as a training for you to keep calm at a time of emergency or when facing an unexpected turn of events.”

Alpha said so while smiling. Her expression then suddenly turned rather serious as she pointed her finger.

“Let me warn you about one thing. Don’t shoot at it and don’t show any hostility.”

Akira looked at Alpha’s expression and frowned. He then looked forward in the direction that she was pointing at and noticed that a portion of the towering side of the building was distorted. As he put up his guard, the distorted part of the building revealed a mechanical monster. That monster was disengaging its camouflaging device.

That gigantic mechanical monster had multiple legs with wheels equipped on the tip of its legs. It approached Akira and then started climbing the wall beside Akira. Its side camera revolved and was fixed at Akira. Other similar monsters appeared and did the same thing too.

Alpha lightly waved at that drone. The drone looked toward Alpha, who pointed her finger and an insignia appeared floating on the tip of her finger. All the drones there immediately focused their cameras on that insignia.

A few seconds afterwards, all of those drones looked away as if they just lost interest in Akira and Alpha. They then broke up into two groups, one group went up the building, while the rest went down the building. On their way, they reactivated their camouflaging device and vanished from Akira’s views.

Akira lightly sighed and lowered his guard. He then sent an annoyed look at Alpha.

“…As I thought, they’re actually there, huh.”

Alpha smiled amusedly.

“I didn’t say they were not. Moreover, just like I said, it’s not a problem as long as you follow my orders, right?”

Akira sighed once more before shifting his gaze forward.

He continued climbing the wall with his bike. The road eventually led to an entrance on the side of that wall.

After Akira went through another slope, his posture was back to normal and he felt slightly relieved. But he immediately spotted something that he did not expect and was astonished.

A girl in a black old-world dress was standing there. In contrast to Akira, she did not look surprised at all as if she had been waiting for him. She had a beautiful appearance but she looked at Akira with a business-like expressionless face. At least, she did not look welcoming at all.

She then spoke in a business-like tone to Akira, who had already stopped his bike.

“Welcome to the Tsubakihara building. I’m the manager of this building, Tsubaki.”

Akira looked at Tsubaki with a surprised face.

“Alpha, is that one of those projected hologram image thingies?”

“Nope, she has a real body. Though I don’t know if it’s an automaton or a remotely controlled humanoid robotic body.”

“Normally, automata are used for an external interface, but in my case, my personality is also downloaded over to this body to allow me to be seen through local connection too. So normally, you should be able to recognize me through your information-gathering device too, but since your information-gathering device has been completely rewritten, I came with this body just to be safe.”

Tsubaki was obviously looking at Alpha. Akira was surprised by that as he looked at Alpha and Tsubaki alternately.

“Alpha, not only she can see you, she can even talk to you too, huh?!”

“But she can’t hear telepathic communication between you and me, though that doesn’t seem to be the case for the telepathic communication from me to you. She can see me through the network, but locally, she can only see you. But still, to think that she would come all the way here to welcome us, I wonder if she doesn’t have anything else better to do.”

Alpha somehow looked rather displeased. But Tsubaki did not seem to be bothered by that at all.

“It’s a precaution so that I won’t get even busier later. I’ll guide you in. Over here, please.”

Tsubaki turned around and went into the building. Akira was still a bit surprised as he just stood there.

“Akira, let’s go.”

“Eh? Ah, right.”

Akira returned back to himself after Alpha reminded him. He then slowly drove through a tunnel that went straight into the building with his bike.

Although Akira was not wearing anything on his head and the sunlight was far away from his reach, he was clearly able to see the interior of the building as if it was under broad daylight. There were multiple multi-legged security drones from before roaming on the walls and the ceilings of that building. Some of them were not moving as they were loading something, while some of them were moving around at a rather high speed. Just like the drones that Akira encountered on his way, all of them had already disengaged their camouflaging devices.

These drones went past Tsubaki who was guiding Akira and also went past Akira without doing anything. But even so, Akira could not help but feel nervous. These drones did not slow down at all as they passed next to him while carrying heavy materials, it was understandable for him to get scared there.

Not too long afterwards, Tsubaki stopped, turned around, and pointed at the wall on her right. There was a ginormous imposing-looking door. The door silently opened up. Behind that thick metallic door, was a room that looked like a warehouse.

“It’s over there. Please leave as soon as you’re done with your business here.”

Akira carefully looked left and right so as not to get crushed under the passing transport drones as he went into that room on his bike.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 170, Expired Articles

Index

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Tsubaki guided Akira and Alpha into a room that looked like a warehouse. It was a pretty wide room with a tall ceiling. There were organized shelves lined inside and each of those shelves housed old-world relics.

Akira was a bit overwhelmed by the scene when he peeked from the entrance. A normal Hunter would go crazy in that situation, but for him, it took some time to process the scene in front of him. He was more troubled than happy.

Akira stepped off from his bike and just stood there, so Alpha smiled at him and told him to start working.

“Well, she did tell us to get out of here as soon as we finish, so let’s get this done fast.”

“Alpha, can you give me explanations of what is going on here?”

“I’ll explain it to you while you’re working. It would be bad if we don’t leave this place before that girl’s mood gets worse.”

“A-alright!”

Akira started his work. He took out a rucksack from his bike and pulled out more rucksacks from within the previous one.

“That girl is the manager AI of this Tsubakihara building. Although I said she’s the manager of this building, she’s also managing the area around this building. The well-maintained state of the area around this building is mostly thanks to her. Although it’s not like she did everything herself, you can just think of her as someone who is responsible for maintaining this area.”

There were all kinds of relics on the selves, it was impossible for Akira to carry all of them back home. So he was looking around the room to choose only the most expensive-looking relics.

“Remember that we were just driving around this area since we came to this city, right? It’s just as you guessed, I was looking for a building with not-too-strict security. I was planning to choose a building with a lowered security system due to the time deterioration to look for relics there. But unfortunately, in the end, I couldn’t find a good place at all.”

There were cases made of transparent-looking material that looked like glass or plastic. The height of the case itself was only about 4 centimeters. Inside it, there were spherical objects that seemed to be made of rubber or metal. While other cases had cubes, or triangles, or even powders inside them. Alpha said that they were basically some kind of old-world information terminals, so Akira prioritized those objects to stuff into his rucksacks.

“I did consider robbing a place with relatively lower security, but as I thought, it’s too dangerous. Although I don’t think they’ll use full force just to fight a single person, I have no idea how much force they would bring out. With that being said, it’s not like we can go back empty-handed, that’s why I made a change in the plan.”

There were also fabrics stored on some shelves. Some of them looked like working attires or some kind of uniforms, and of course, all of them had an old-world design. There were also other articles that looked like something

that Akira could find in the current era's shops. All of those articles including the clothing were stuffed inside boxes.

"So then I made a deal with that girl to let us take the expired articles. In exchange for that, we have to leave this place as soon as we're done with it. Although I said it so casually, it's the result of a difficult negotiation. If the amount of information that we exchanged is written in words, it might take about 100 years. Being able to make that kind of deal is one of the great things about my support, you know? Of course, normally it would be impossible to do that without me. Remember when you tried to talk with the AI manager of the Seranthal building? That time, she did not even respond to you, right? That's what normally would happen without my support."

There was also some lady underwear among the clothing articles. Although he hesitated, since they fetched a relatively high price for the amount of fabric that they had, Akira told himself that it would be the perfect relics to bring back in that situation where he only had a limited amount of space to spare and decided to take them too.

"She came by herself to pick us up because I was able to get us that deal. She said that she would only let us in if we can reach this place by ourselves, but it was no problem at all thanks to your bike. Aren't you glad to have bought that bike?"

Akira also found some underwear for men, since he thought that he could use them later, he decided to take the whole box with him. After all, he kept changing between them quickly since they got soaked with blood in no time. Some of the underwear that he found were even made of strong enough fabric to even be used as armour. But personally speaking, as long as he could wash them and reuse them again instead of just throwing them away, it was more than enough for him.

"By the way, it seems that this warehouse is actually for obsolete articles. So all of the items here are basically trash."

Akira's hands stopped the moment he heard that and he inadvertently looked at Alpha.

“Trash?”

“Yup!”

Akira once again took a good look around. There were many shelves around him, all of them were filled with relics that were still in good condition.

“So all of these relics… They’re all expired articles? All of them? And since they’re trash, they’ll be just thrown away, right?”

“Yup, that’s exactly why she allowed us to take them for free. So let’s take as much as we can.”

Although Akira was surprised, he also looked slightly conflicted. If one of these relics was found in the slum city, it would definitely cause a fight where people would get killed. And here, all of them were basically trash to be thrown away later. He could not help but find it really shocking.

“…What a huge waste. All of these relics are basically in very good condition and I feel like they’ll fetch me way more money than those relics that I got in Yonozuka station ruin. To me, they don’t look like trash at all, you know.”

“Although they’re expired articles, it’s not like they’re broken or anything. Some of them have simply expired because of the change of season. Or they are just articles that simply get replaced after a fixed amount of time. These articles are basically registered as expired articles in the system although they’re not broken or faulty. Since no one would buy them and no one would use them, they were built and then showcased for sale, and later collected for disposal–this cycle has been going on forever.”

Alpha said so in such a casual manner. But Akira felt an indescribable feeling, a mix of suspicion and something close to loneliness. He then said with a serious expression.

“…Why are they doing that?”

“Well, even if you ask me so. There are actually various reasons why they’re doing that. The core system which manages this place doesn’t question that at all although it might look meaningless to normal people. That’s why they never stop doing it. That’s also the case for most of the manager AIs too, that’s why they don’t try to stop that system. Even if there are some AIs with better intelligence that question the system, unless they have the right to change the system, they would not be able to stop that cycle either.”

“Is that so?”

“Yep, well, but of course, there are exceptions. If some AIs prioritize individual opinion above rules, they might decide to ignore the rule and apply some changes. For example, some of them might adapt to be able to trade with the people of the current era. These AIs might be the reason why some of the big companies can trade with them using Chrome. It’s even possible for some of these AIs to adapt to trade with the people of the current era using the money for the current era too, you know. Some of them might as well already be secretly mixed among the rank of the Corporate Government.”

Akira listened with full interest.

“What can I say… It’s really something.”

Alpha smiled amusedly.

“Well, if we’re talking about possibilities, that’s just how it is. And also, don’t stop there, keep moving your hands. She did tell us to leave as soon as possible, so we need to hurry up.”

Akira flusteredly returned to gathering relics again.

Once he was done, Akira looked at his bike with relics piled on top of it and murmured. The rucksacks that he used were those that could slightly expand their volumes, and Akira had filled all of those rucksacks with relics before putting them on his bike. He also stuffed the backside of his coat

with the smaller relics. But even so, he actually still had some spaces to spare.

“Hmmm, Alpha, I feel like we can still carry some more relics though.”

“Nope, this is as much as you can carry.”

“But like, I can still put in some relics there, right?”

“If you carry more relics, you’ll just drop them on our way back. Not to mention, they would prevent you from moving freely during a fight. So just give it up, okay?”

Akira slightly frowned, displeased, but he then shook his head and got on his bike.

“You’re right, it would be stupid to be greedy here just to get myself killed later.”

Alpha smiled bitterly and said.

“To be honest, I think you’re already greedy enough here though. There’s no guarantee you’ll be able to save all of these relics in case we encounter some monsters on our way back home, you know? So just keep that in mind.”

“I’ll be counting on you to find a safe route so that we won’t have to go through that.”

Alpha smiled mischievously at Akira.

“Of course, I’ll do that without you asking me. But it will still depend on your luck, you see. Let’s just hope that you don’t run out of luck after we got here safely and collected all of these relics without any trouble.”

Akira smiled bitterly and slowly accelerated his bike.

When Akira exited the warehouse, Tsubaki was standing close by, waiting for him. There was no smile on her face, she just looked at Akira with a

business-like and flat expression.

Akira felt awkward. Although he was already used to having people looking at him with contempt, Tsubaki's cold gaze was an unfriendly gaze for a robber who was not even trying to be discreet about it while she could not do anything against it.

Akira inadvertently bowed lightly to Tsubaki.

"…Uh, uhmm, I'll excuse myself then."

"Be careful on your way back."

"Ah, yes, of course."

As Akira was about to awkwardly walk past Tsubaki, she suddenly said.

"May I ask you one thing?"

"Uh, sure, what is it?"

"It seems that you're using all of your bandwidth for a single connection, are you really okay with that?"

"Eh?"

Akira tilted his head. He could not understand the meaning of that question, but Alpha suddenly interjected while still smiling like usual.

"It's fine. It's in order to maintain my full support for him for the sake of his safety. So it'll be fine, or more like, can you just mind your own business?"

Alpha and Tsubaki stared at each other. There was no friendliness between them.

"Akira, let's go."

"Eh? Ah, okay."

Alpha accelerated his bike before he could. Akira was a bit surprised, but he could immediately regain his balance. Tsubaki kept watching Akira as he left the building until he eventually vanished from her view.

Akira was on his bike as he drove down the wall of the Tsubakihara building at a relatively high speed. He could not help but frown as he watched the ground coming closer and closer to his face.

“Alpha, aren’t we going too fast!? I did ask you to drive safely, didn’t I?!”

“It’s far safer than getting the tire stuck on something since its sticky feature would activate if we’re too slow and that might trip the bike. This is the safest option. The ground is not too far below, so just hang on tight for a bit longer.”

“I have to say there’s something wrong with your standard of driving safely!”

Akira smiled wryly. All the questions and doubts inside his mind were erased.

The bike’s wheels kept in close contact with the building’s wall until the bike went past the curved slope that connected the wall and ground. Once the bike was on the ground again, it slowed down under the speed limit and kept going at that stable speed. Now that Akira had calmed down since he was able to safely reach the ground again, the question that he decided to just forget came back up again.

“Say, Alpha, what was she talking about when Tsubaki said something about bandwidth?”

“Oh, are you curious?”

“…Yeah, a bit.”

In order to maintain her friendly relation with Akira, Alpha was actively discouraging him from asking questions about particular subjects.

But of course, that did not mean Akira’s curiosity about those subjects was completely gone. He used Tsubaki’s question as an excuse since it was a question from a third party about the subject that Alpha had told him not to ask.

Alpha looked at Akira and decided that telling him not to ask that question might be a bad move there. So she casually smiled and said.

“You are someone who can connect to the old-world domain and you’re using that connection to download information from the old-world network. My image and my voice are both conveyed to you through the network. But the amount and the speed of information transfer through the network are not unlimited. And at the moment, all of your connection capacity is allocated for transferring information with me, that’s why she said that back then.”

“Is that something bad?”

“Not at all. It’s no problem at all. After all, I need enough bandwidth to maintain the support that I can give you. Moreover, if I take most of your bandwidth, you can maintain a high-speed connection even when you apply an information filter for the sake of your safety. Like that one, you know, remember when you met a maid girl that I couldn’t see in Higaraka residence ruin? In the worst-case scenario, that could have killed you, you know. It was because I’m putting a filter in your connection that you were safe. That’s why it’s not something for you to worry about.”

“Well, that does sound like it’s no problem at all, but then why did Tsubaki say that?”

“I bet it’s a matter of individual opinion. You do know that I can control your body by controlling your augmented suit, right? Like how some people hate that, there might be people who don’t want their bandwidth to be used for just one connection. It’s the same for the connection filter too. I think she was talking about that.”

“Hmmm, is that all?”

Though Akira understood from Alpha's explanation, he did not feel like that was enough of a reason for Alpha to interject as she did back then. When he said that, Alpha smiled faintly at him and said.

"This might be just a guess from me, so it's not like I want to say anything bad about her. But if I may add something, she might want you to open some bandwidth that she can use to connect with you."

"Why?"

"If she can connect with you, she'll be able to talk through telepathy with you too. That way, she would be able to make a deal with you without telling me. The reason why I interjected is simply to avoid that. To put it simply, it was so that you won't cheat on me."

Alpha said so and smiled mischievously at Akira, who winced back when he saw her expression.

"C-cheat, huh…"

Alpha came closer to Akira's face and smiled amusedly.

"I trust that you would say no even if she offers you 10 billion Chrome and performs other services for you to just forget the request from this girl whom you can't even touch. But it still doesn't feel right to me, even more so when you do that in secret."

Alpha came so close to Akira that if she had a body, he would be able to feel her body heat from that distance. So Akira inadvertently pulled his face back, he then smiled bitterly and said.

"Don't worry. I'll still prioritize your request. After all, I already owe you a lot until now. I have no plans to just ignore that."

"Is that so? Thank you, I'm really happy to hear that."

Alpha smiled as if she was really happy, she then returned back to her usual posture.

Akira tried to calm himself down as he shifted his eyes forward. He then thought.

[Does this mean that Alpha still hasn't fully trusted me yet? Well, I did ignore her warning and went to raid a big gang's base, I even almost got myself killed fighting in a battle that I could have avoided. So I guess that's to be expected, huh? I guess I have no other choice but to properly do my Hunter job, get better equipment, give my best in my training, and regain some of her trust.]

Akira said so as he made his resolve and decided to stop worrying about it for now.

He was actually being tricked there. Although Alpha did not lie, she also did not tell everything to him.

As Akira kept his connection bandwidth solely for Alpha, it was slowly turned to suit Alpha's connection. Although at the moment most of Akira's bandwidth was still general-purpose bandwidth, it was only a matter of time before all of them were modified for Alpha's special use. Alpha did not say anything about that to Akira.

In the first place, Akira was the one who gave Alpha permission to modify his bandwidth. Of course, he did not know that himself when he did that.

It took a lot of power to change a contract that had been signed and Akira did not have such power at the moment. No one could tell for sure whether he would ever get the power to do so before he could accomplish Alpha's request, or even if that kind of power existed in this world in the first place.

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Once they left the area maintained by Tsubaki, the scene returned back to an abandoned city with rubbles and half-destroyed buildings scattered everywhere. Akira lightly sighed and felt slightly relieved when he saw that.

“It might be weird to say but I feel much calmer in this place, although, technically speaking, it’s still in the inner part of the ruin.”

“Well, the inner part of the ruin actually extended over a wide area after all, and it’s not like there’s any clear indicator that separates the inner and the outskirt of the ruin. But if we say that the area further in than the forward base is an area where monsters which normal Hunters can’t handle roam around, I guess it’s safe to say that this is already the inner part of the ruin. Though I’m sure it would change when the forward base finishes building a road to go further into the ruin though.”

Akira then hummed.

“And they’re already in the middle of building that road, right? If I’m not mistaken, Elena-san and Sara-san are working on a request related to that… If things are going smoothly, that road will eventually go all the way to an area like the one with the Tsubakihara building, right? Won’t that be dangerous?”

Akira thought that if the road extended that far, those powerful big drones with camouflaging devices might backtrack that road all the way to the forward base, and that would be disastrous. In the worst-case scenario, forget the forward base, those monsters might even come all the way to Kugamayama city.

“I’m sure the City Management has also thought about it too. I’m sure they’ll do something like dispatching the city defence squad or calling back those Hunters who are originally working in much more dangerous places… I’m sure you’ll get called for that too sooner or later.”

“And I’ll say no to it. This time I won’t be taking any request from the City Management ever again.”

Akira looked extremely displeased, Alpha who saw that only smiled at him mischievously. Akira had no plans to be sent to the hospital again after all.

Alpha’s expression then changed to a serious one, at the same time, she augmented Akira’s views.

“Akira, we have company.”

“Roger that. Well, in the first place, I didn’t expect to get back home without encountering any monsters after all.”

Akira casually said so as he switched his mind to battle state. He let go one of his hands from the handle and reached for his CWH anti-material rifle. That was when Akira’s relaxed face turned stern.

Akira could see multiple signals from the monsters chasing him from behind in his augmented vision. At first, when Alpha warned him, it was only one signal, but it immediately went to 4, then to 8, and now it was already 20.

“…Aren’t there too many of them?”

“They’re a swarm of weapon dogs. But I don’t know if it’s a huge swarm or if it’s an amalgamation of multiple swarms.”

Akira remembered his past experience the moment he heard the word weapon dog. They were monsters that he could not fight against back then when he went into Kuzusuhara ruin with nothing but a pistol. Even the one that he was barely able to defeat was the one that was faulty.

But he was no longer the same from back then. He had more firepower now, a better augmented suit, and more support from Alpha. The current him should be able to take care of that swarm just fine. He thought that it was a good chance to confirm how much he had grown since then as he looked at the first weapon dog. But he frowned when he saw that weapon dog.

“…Isn’t that weapon dog bigger than usual?”

“They originate from the area near the inner part of the ruin, after all. They’re basically different to their smaller siblings that you can find roaming around the outskirt of the ruin.”

Akira thought that those weapon dogs would only be equipped with some big guns that normally won't be used to fight people. But the weapon dogs in front of him had cannons, mortars, rocket launchers, heavy machine guns, and big bodies powerful enough to support all of those guns.

"Akira, we'll be running away as fast as we can. I'll take full control of the bike, so you just try to shoot their heads. And also, make sure to hold on, it might get a little rocky."

"Roger that!"

Akira aimed his rifle behind, at the same time, the bike's arms also started to move too. The A4WM automatic grenade launcher and DVTS minigun fixed on the ends of those arms were properly aimed at the incoming weapon dogs. Akira focused his aim on one of the weapon dogs and pulled the trigger.

The CWH anti-material rifle had enough power to even destroy a tank, while the grenades from the A4WM automatic grenade launcher had enough destructive power to destroy the rubbles, as for the DVTS minigun, it could turn normal monsters into minced meat in no time. Those 3 guns started shooting at the same time.

Sounds of explosions mixed in between the weapon dogs' howls. The cannons that could destroy a tank, the missiles that could destroy buildings, and heavy machine guns that could easily pierce a thick metal, all of those rifles on their backs started shooting at Akira.

The lonely wasteland was swallowed with sounds of explosions and fire in a snap.

Akira's bike blazed through the ruin, Alpha used her advanced computation skill to predict where those rain of warheads and incoming bullets would land and nimbly controlled the bike to slip through the openings between them.

The explosions from Akira's A4WM automatic grenade launcher were slowing the monsters down while his DVTS minigun was shooting down

the incoming missiles.

The missiles that got shot veered from their original aims and hit the buildings, destroying them. Alpha nimbly manoeuvred left and right through the falling rubbles. When the road forward was blocked, she ran the bike on the walls of the building to get past those rubbles.

The weapon dogs ignored the rubbles blocking their way forward as they used their powerful body to break through those rubbles. Akira did try to make some turns and used buildings to get away from the incoming bullets, but it did not seem like he was able to get away from the weapon dogs that were chasing him with a speed unsuitable for their sizes.

Akira was aiming from a situation that was far from ideal. His aim swayed left and right following the bike's movement. Not to mention, sometimes it ran on the side of a building's wall too. In that chaotic situation, he only gathered his focus to its utmost level when he was about to take a shot, as he compressed his time perception to its limit, he carefully aimed his rifle inside a world that was almost completely frozen in time before pulling the trigger.

Although the special bullet's firepower was reduced the further the distance it travelled, it was able to deal a deadly injury to the head of the weapon dog that it hit since those weapon dogs were weaker than a tank. The weapon dogs that had lost their command centres went limp and just dropped dead on the ground.

Akira let out a long breath before he moved to his next target. But he was taken aback by what he saw, the weapon dogs that he had shot down slowly started to move again. They slowly stood back on their feet and aimed their weapons at him.

"Alpha! Those monsters are still alive even after I shoot their heads!?"

"Akira, calm down. It's just because something else outside that swarm is controlling them remotely. It still doesn't change their weak point, which is their heads."

“So that kind of enemy is here too, huh!?”

“If you only destroy their control device and leave their bodies mostly undamaged, they can still be used for fighting if something else takes control of their bodies. It might be some kind of system to make sure that they can still fight even after losing their control device. Akira, reload!”

The bike’s arm extended its DVTS minigun next to Akira. The arm did not have an automatic reloading system. Although it was using an extended magazine, it did not take much time for it to run out of ammo when used for continuous shooting.

Akira hurriedly reloaded a new magazine, once he did that, the DVTS minigun returned its aim at the incoming swarm and started shooting again. It did not take that long before his A4WM automatic grenade launcher also needed a reload. Akira kept alternating between reloading new magazines and shooting the swarm.

Alpha’s shooting was more focused to suppress the enemies, while the killing shots were executed by Akira with his CWH anti-material rifle. The special ammo for the CWH anti-material rifle was not cheap, every time Akira loaded a new magazine and threw away the empty magazine, he felt like he was throwing away a bundle of money. So he could not help but complain there.

“There are so many of them and they’re too strong, what’s going on here? We didn’t encounter any of them on our way here, right? So why are there suddenly so many of them on our way back? And here I thought my bad luck was finally gone when we didn’t meet any monsters on our way in and were able to collect all of these relics without much trouble.”

“It must be because you’re carrying relics now. They must have reacted when their sensor detected someone carrying a lot of stolen goods with him.”

Akira did not stop shooting as he replied.

“Stolen goods? But these are expired articles and we had the permission to collect them, right? Though I can understand the system looking at Hunters as robbers, that’s not the case this time, right?”

“That might be true for the mechanical monsters under the management system of the city, but that might not be the case for the monsters roaming the wasteland, you know? I’m sure that there are a lot of other faults in their programs too. But with that being said, it’s indeed suspicious to see someone carrying this much luggage through the ruin.”

“So that’s why they started shooting at me, huh? What a huge pain in the neck!”

“If you understand it now, it would be great if you can stop complaining and focus more on the fight.”

“You’re right. I feel better now to know that it’s not because of my bad luck.”

Akira smiled bitterly and said so as he returned back to shooting the incoming weapon dogs.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 171, Tsubaki's Decision

Index

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Akira was still fighting the weapons dogs which chased him in the middle of the Kuzusuhara ruin filled with half-destroyed buildings.

The weapon dog's firepower was overwhelmingly above Akira. They kept spewing bullets, missiles, and warheads that easily blew the buildings around them to smithereens.

Alpha used the full mobility of Akira's bike to evade the incoming warheads and bullets. Akira could feel explosive wind scraping off his skin, he sometimes had to dive into the smoke while shooting down the weapon dogs that seemed to be endless.

The numerous weapon dogs had more firepower, more stamina than him. Both Akira and Alpha were desperately holding on against that fierce onslaught. Akira slipped past the raining bullets, warheads, and missiles with the help of Alpha's advanced computational ability and by using the environment around them. At the same time, he was sniping the weapon dogs' weak points while Alpha was shooting down the incoming missiles.

The fierce fight that was even changing the contour of the ground in that area was finally coming to an end. Both sides were starting to run out of

ammo and that led to Akira gaining the upper hand.

The weapon dogs were using ammo that they produced with their organs. After shooting all of those missiles and warheads, even with the automatic resupplying organ and advanced old-world technology, they still needed some time to refresh their ammo. Not to mention, Akira was prioritizing shooting down the weapon dogs that were carrying a lot of ammo.

Even if those weapon dogs that had exhausted their ammo ran as fast as they could to chomp at Akira, they could not catch him on his bike. And with the fewer weapon dogs shooting at him, Akira did not need to do too much evading. Alpha utilized the full power of the bike to accelerate forward in a straight line to widen the gap between them.

Now that it had come to this, it was impossible for them to catch up. Akira did not slow down as he left the weapon dogs as well as Kuzusuhara ruin behind him.

Once Akira left the outskirts of the ruin and stepped into the wide wasteland again, he stopped his bike, turned around, and looked at the ruin behind him while still sitting on his bike.

“…Did we get away?”

Alpha smiled to reassure him.

“Yup, we completely got away from that swarm. They originated from the inner part of the ruin, after all, even if they widen their activity range, they won’t go outside the ruin’s outskirts. So I’m sure they won’t chase you outside the ruin. And even if they do, the City Management would definitely dispatch the defense squad to clean them up.”

Akira leaned on his bike as he was pretty tired after what he had gone through. He then sighed in relief and said.

“…That was tiring. But we were able to somehow get away from them. Well, that was really something.”

“Good work there, or so I want to say, but we can’t exactly relax yet before we get back to the city, okay?”

“I know, but still, at least let me take a short break here.”

“Geez, just a short break, alright?”

Akira lightly nodded and sighed as if to expel all the tiredness from his body. He was leaning on his bike, using the bike to fully support his body, and looked around, that was when his gaze wandered at all the relics on his bike.

Those were the relics that he was able to bring back from that magnificent city. Although they were expired articles, Alpha told him that there was no problem with those relics. If that was true, they should be able to fetch him quite a lot of money. As he thought so, he inadvertently raised his expectation and could not help but smile.

But then his bike suddenly accelerated. Its wheels, which could spin individually from each other, spun as fast as they could. The wheels gripped the ground strongly and immediately accelerated the bike to the side.

At the same time, Akira’s augmented suit moved on its own to grab on his bike so as not to get thrown off. His augmented suit helped him against the assault on his body from the high-G manoeuvre as he quickly accelerated away from that place.

Akira activated his time compression by pure reflex and asked Alpha in panic.

“Alpha, what’s going on?!”

“The break is over!! We have an incoming enemy!”

Something exploded behind him. The shockwave from that explosion spread around and swallowed Akira, who was trying to run away from that explosion.

Akira jumped out from the smoke of that explosion. Thanks to his forcefield armour coat, he was able to get away just fine. His bike was also undamaged. But unfortunately, one of his rucksacks was blown away due to the shockwave and was thrown into the air.

Akira could not help but glance at the flying rucksack. It eventually landed on the ground and was badly bent.

“My loot!? Although I’ve worked so hard to carry them all the way here!??”

“You can save that for later!!”

Alpha yelled and pointed her finger at the wasteland. Akira glanced in the direction that Alpha was pointing with a stern face. But he could not see any monsters over there.

“I don’t see anything though!! Are they shooting from so far away that I can’t see them?”

Right after he said so, his face suddenly turned surprised. A part of the wasteland scene in front of him was blurred, and from there, a huge mechanical monster appeared. Although it looked like a weapon dog, its dog-shaped body had no visible organic parts. It was fully mechanical and a big cannon was perching on its back.

“Optical camouflaging, huh?! Wait for a sec, why is that thing here? We’re already outside the ruin, you know?”

“That’s a pretty powerful optical camouflaging. And it’s from the wasteland, not from the ruin.”

“How can you tell?”

“If it’s from the ruin, I should have been able to detect it. I’m using your information-gathering device to detect enemies while we’re outside the ruin, that’s why I was late to detect that monster.”

Alpha paced the bike straight in that big monster's direction. Akira understood that she had decided to fight that monster rather than running away from it, so he immediately reached out for his CWH anti-material rifle.

"Akira, use anti-force field ammo."

Akira smiled bitterly as he changed magazine. He bought that ammo as a trump card for emergency only, he did not expect to use it again this quickly.

"…Geez, I only bought this ammo as a lucky charm, you know."

Alpha smiled at Akira to cheer him up.

"Oh my, it's exactly thanks to that ammo that we can get out of this place alive, you know? So here is where you should seriously feel thankful for it, right?"

"That's just a play on words… It just happened to be like this, I'll leave it as that."

Akira lightly smiled and took aim with his CWH anti-material rifle. His bike accelerated even more. In order to avoid the monster's aim, it approached the big monster in a zigzag path. A big warhead flew past Akira and exploded right behind him.

Every time the bike made a sharp turn to evade the incoming warhead, his body was whipped to the side together with his bike. Alpha was also in control of the bike's force field armour, so she used that to make a turn that would have been impossible to execute at that speed. Akira used his augmented suit to force his body against the inertia while aiming his rifle.

"Akira, let's use your blade, so get ready."

"Is that monster that strong? Why is a monster this strong here? Isn't it just strange?"

“Since it’s there in front of you right now, it doesn’t really matter. You should be thankful that we are lucky enough to at least have the chance to put up a fight.”

“You have a point there.”

Akira smiled bitterly, he still had his CWH anti-material rifle in his left hand while his right hand reached for a blade in his breast pocket. It was nothing but a handle, he gripped it firmly and pointed it away from his body. Silver metallic liquid extended out from that handle and formed a long blade, 3 meters to be exact. It was not something that people would use against other people. Once it reached its full length, it started to glow with a faint blue light.

Akira still had his blade extended on his side as he slipped under the incoming warhead. He then gathered all of his focus and aimed his CWH anti-material rifle.

“Now!”

The anti-force field ammo flew out the CWH anti-material rifle’s muzzle. It hit the monster’s head and released a flash of blinding light.

The monster quickly calculated the trajectory of the incoming bullet and focused its force field armour to protect its head. Thanks to that, it was able to withstand that shot which would have been able to easily destroy a tank. Although the backlash threw its huge body off-balance, it sustained no damage. But of course, it lost its force field armour protection temporarily after receiving that shot.

While that monster lost its footing, Akira quickly closed the distance between them. He went past besides that big monster as he swung his blade at it. The blade buried its sharp edge into the monster’s metallic body and the bike immediately accelerated to push the blade through the monster’s body, fire sparks burst around the cutting edge of the blade together with a sharp stinging sound of metals being sliced.

The bike drove past the mechanical monster, it then made a U-turn and stopped. The blade in Akira's hand turned into dust and was carried away by the wind.

"Did that do it?!"

Akira looked at that metallic monster with a stern face. The monster that had lost its control centre slowly fell to the ground.

Alpha smiled victoriously and said.

"Yep, that should do it. Once again, you did well."

Akira let out a big sigh. He looked at the blade, of which only its handle remained, and smiled bitterly before throwing it away.

"One expensive anti-force field ammo and one old-world blade. I even had to use two of my trump cards and was only barely able to defeat that thing, huh."

Akira once again let out a big sigh. That blade was one of the relics that he got from the Tsubakihara building. He had decided to save it for his own use instead of selling it, that was why he put it inside his breast pocket instead of his rucksack. Although he still had some spares, it did not change the fact that he had used one so quickly.

Alpha smiled and said in a bright tone to cheer up Akira who looked slightly bummed out.

"A win is a win. So cheer up, okay? Let's pick up that rucksack and go back home."

Akira raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Pick up that rucksack? The relics in it are not broken after it got blown away and landed on the ground that hard?"

"Like I said before, although they're expired articles, they're not faulty or broken. Old-world relics are pretty robust, you know. So I bet they're just

fine. Moreover, even if they're slightly damaged, they are still precious old-world relics, they'll still fetch you some money."

Akira beamed up. He thought that those relics were gone for good after being smacked into the ground like that. So he happily went to pick those relics up.

Akira picked up his rucksack as well as the relics that were scattered on the ground when that rucksack was blown away. After that, he climbed on his bike while carrying that rucksack on his arm. He left the driving fully to Alpha as he focused on keeping the rucksack under his arm. Although it was not easy, he held on in that position while heading back to Kugamayama city, leaving the corpse of that big monster behind.

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Inside the Tsubakihara building, the automaton Tsubaki, the AI manager of that building, was mumbling.

"He took it down, huh."

Tsubaki was watching Akira's fights closely, both when he fought the weapon dog swarm and when he fought the big monster. She was observing Akira through the network connection with the monsters that attacked him.

"Although it's not enough to fully grasp his real strength, I believe that he's good enough to consider."

Alpha had made a deal with Tsubaki to let Akira take the expired articles. During that negotiation, although it was mostly affected by the difference in power between Alpha and Tsubaki, Tsubaki mostly made her decision by considering the amount of damage that it might cause inside the area under her supervision in case a fight occurred.

If letting him take the expired articles was enough to send him back, then there was no need to cause any unnecessary fight. That was the biggest reason why Tsubaki accepted that deal. But seeing that from a different

light, it also meant that if Akira was weak and if Tsubaki could kill him without sustaining much damage, then she would have done that.

Putting aside the difference in their ranks, if Alpha had the gut to threaten her by claiming that Akira was stronger than he actually was, Tsubaki was thinking of answering that with a rather extreme action. The weapon dog swarm and that big mechanical monster were sent to fight Akira for the sake of checking Alpha's claim.

Judging from the result, including the info that she gained from Alpha, Tsubaki decided that at least for now, Akira was worth considering, both for the better and for the worse.

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Akira originally planned to immediately sell the relics that he got from the Tsubakihara building. But Alpha stopped him. She told him to be careful about it in order to avoid getting strange rumour out, or if he could not avoid making rumour, at least to keep that rumour to a minimum. After he returned home, Akira put all the relics that he carried back in the warehouse and made sure to finish the usual maintenance for his equipment before finally taking a rest.

On the next day, Akira put some relics that were relatively in good condition into his rucksack and headed to the wasteland on his bike. He first went to Higaraka residence ruin and spent some time training there before taking a long detour back to Kugamayama city and finally went to Katsuragi to sell those relics.

That day, just like usual, Katsuragi was waiting in his trailer that doubled as his shop. When he spotted Akira coming on a bike, he obviously had a rather displeased look on his face and said.

"Akira, huh? Are you here for medicines and ammo again? What's going on with your Hunter job? To be honest, I really hope you would come to me to sell relics sometime soon, you know."

Katsuragi obviously sounded disappointed, but even after hearing that, Akira casually replied as if it did not bother him at all.

“That’s exactly why I’m here today.”

Katsuragi’s displeased face immediately brightened up with a merchant smile.

“Oh!! Really?! Finally!!”

But he immediately frowned.

“…So, where are the relics?”

Akira took out a small rucksack and showed it to Katsuragi, whose face immediately returned to disappointment as he sighed.

The last time Akira visited Katsuragi to sell relics, he brought a big rucksack filled with relics to the point that it would be hard to carry that rucksack without the help of an augmented suit. That was why Katsuragi was expecting at least the same amount of relics again this time, but contrary to his expectation, Akira brought a rather small rucksack and it was far from being filled with relics. So he could not help but feel disappointed.

“Is that everything…? Well, it doesn’t matter then, come in.”

Akira and Katsuragi went into the trailer and into the break room reserved for staff. They sat face to face with a table between them. Katsuragi then said in a rather unmotivated manner.

“Well now, let’s take a look. Bring out the relics.”

Akira casually pulled out relics from inside his rucksack and lined them on the table in front of him. It was six transparent box cases with a spherical object inside them that looked like they were made of metal or rubber. They were old-world information terminals.

Katsuragi who seemed to be not interested at all up until now froze up. His eyes then widened in shock before he squinted his eyes with suspicion.

“T-these are… No, wait, can it be…? Akira, where did you get these from?”

“Where? Old-world ruin of course.”

“That’s not it, I mean which ruin to be more precise?”

“That’s a secret.”

“A secret…?”

Katsuragi was surprised by that reply and had a conflicted look on his face. Seeing that, Akira lightly frowned and looked displeased.

“If you say you can’t buy them unless I tell you where I found them, I’ll just sell them somewhere else. I did take these relics to you first as I promised, so I won’t take any complaint from you.”

Seeing Akira start putting those relics back into his rucksack, Katsuragi stopped him in panic.

“Wait wait wait wait wait! Wait there, okay?! Don’t put them back! I’ll get them checked first, so just leave them there! I’ll bring you some coffee too! So just enjoy the coffee while you wait!!”

Katsuragi went to make coffee and placed it in front of Akira. He then brought out a special device for inspecting relics and started inspecting the relics in front of him closely. Akira was trying to look calm while sipping his coffee and observing Katsuragi.

Katsuragi put on a monocular magnifying glass on one of his eyes and looked closely at the relics, while doing that, he casually threw a question at Akira.

“Akira, what do you think these relics are?”

“Expensive-looking relics.”

“Expensive, huh? Just how expensive do you think these are?”

That was when Alpha interjected.

“Akira, no need to hold back.”

“1 billion Aurum.”

Hearing that, Katsuragi could not help but laugh.

“No no no, although these are indeed old-world information terminals, 1 billion Aurum is just too big no matter how you think about it, you know? There’s no way they cost that mu-“

Katsuragi stopped midway when he realized Akira was staring at him. There was a slight suspicion and contempt in his stare.

“You were planning to buy them cheaply if I had said a low price, weren’t you?”

Katsuragi smiled as if to play ignorant, but he could not completely fool Akira. Normally, Katsuragi would never make such a mistake. The price that Akira suggested was too high that it threw him off-beat.

“Of course not. It’s just that we can’t get a good deal that we both can accept unless both of us have at least some knowledge about these relics that you’re trying to sell, you see. That’s why I was just trying to make sure you know a few things about these relics.”

“Really now?”

“Geez, don’t be like that, if I offer to buy these relics with a price that’s way above your guess, that in itself would be suspicious for you too, right?”

“To be honest, I have no complaint if you’re going to buy them at a higher price than I expected though. So then, are you done inspecting them yet?”

“Be patient. These might be worth more than I expected, you see. My main job is not inspecting relics, so I can’t really say for sure how much they are

worth without inspecting them closely. To be honest, it would be great if you would leave them here for a few days, is that okay with you?”

“No, that’s not okay.”

Katsuragi slightly frowned, he then said as if to calm Akira down.

“Just a few days should be fine, you know? It’s not like we’re strangers after all, right? I can assure you that it’s better if you get these relics properly inspected. I can even use my connections with a relics inspector acquaintance to have him write an inspection certificate for these relics, you know? As I said before, inspecting relics is not my main job, so it’s definitely better to have a real pro check them, don’t you think so too?”

But Akira shook his head.

“Still no. Sorry to say this, but I don’t trust you that far yet. I want to avoid the problem in case you replace them with cheaper relics after I leave them with you just to get you to tell me later that they are actually cheap relics.”

“Geez, what a worry-wart, it will be fine, I tell you.”

“It’s your own fault for frequently doing or saying something untrustworthy, like what you did just now.”

Katsuragi lightly laughed and looked away. Seeing that, Akira lightly sighed.

“Well, personally speaking, I don’t think you would do something like that though. But with that being said, I can’t really tell where these relics would go once I leave them to someone else. It’s just that I simply can’t really trust a friend of a friend of a friend, you see. But of course, if you can promise me to take responsibility and pay me 1 billion Aurum in case if anything bad were to happen, I won’t mind leaving them with you.”

Katsuragi smiled wryly. As a merchant who often traded with Hunters, he could understand where Akira’s attitude came from.

“As expected, I can’t go that far, but still…”

Katsuragi hummed. It was true that his main job was a merchant, not a relic inspector. So of course, he lacked the knowledge and devices to do a proper relic inspection. After thinking for a while, he then came up with a suggestion.

“How about if I call a relic inspector whom I know to come here?”

“If you’re going to inspect these relics in front of me, you can do whatever you want.”

“Alright!! Just wait for a bit here then!!”

Katsuragi pulled out his information terminal and immediately started preparing.

Not too long afterwards, multiple relic inspectors came to the trailer, all of them were the relic inspectors that Katsuragi called. They then used their inspection devices, which looked exaggeratedly huge with a huge link to each device as they immediately started their inspection.

Akira was sipping his coffee with a calm face, although, to be honest, he was a bit surprised by what was going on.

“For some reason, it seems it’s being blown out of proportion though. They seem to be taking a very close look at those relics, well, those are mechanical relics, after all. I wonder if it got broken when it got blown off back then.”

Alpha replied with her usual smile.

“It’ll be fine. Just keep calm and show some confidence that those relics are really worth that much. If you show weakness here, they might rip you off, you know?”

“A-alright!”

Akira sipped his coffee while trying to calm himself down, he was doing his best to show confidence there.

While the other people inside that room were still inspecting the relics, Katsuragi and another guy stepped back and went to the deeper part of the trailer. They then started conversing while whispering to make sure that Akira could not eavesdrop on them.

“Katsuragi, is that boy the one who brought in those relics?”

“That doesn’t really matter. Just make sure to do a proper inspection of those relics. So, how is it? Are they not fake?”

“I can’t really say for sure since I can only carry relatively low accuracy inspection devices with me, but from the result up until now, I think they’re not fake and they are in a pretty good condition too. If I’m being strict here, the cases are a little bit bent, but that should not affect the articles inside them. So then, where did that boy get those relics?”

“Geez, give it up, will you? Can’t you just open the case and take a closer look at them?”

“Some of those cases will break its content when not opened with the right method, you see, and that’s doubly true for articles that can only be contained inside a container. For example, those articles in the form of powder. I don’t want to be held responsible if we open them and break their contents. That aside, why won’t that boy tell you where he got them from? Is it because he’s just a carrier from another shop or something and those relics were actually found by another Hunter? Do you have any good guess where he might have got those relics?”

“Just drop it already. I only asked you to inspect the relics that one of my customers brought in. Isn’t that enough already? If you keep pestering me with unnecessary questions, I’ll have you leave, you know?”

Katsuragi said so and glared at the other guy. So the other guy clicked his tongue and decided to stop pursuing that subject.

After that, they continued talking in secret about the result of the relic inspection. Once they reached a conclusion, Katsuragi sent the people that

he called in to inspect the relics out. He then sat facing Akira with the relics lined between them and smiled at Akira with a merchant's smile.

"Sorry for the wait, the inspection is done. So, about the price though, I know that you want me to pay you on the spot. But even if you bring relics to the Hunter Office, they sometimes only transfer the money the day after, or in some cases, it might even take a few weeks. So just keep that in mind and listen to me, okay?"

"Alright, so then, how much is it?"

Katsuragi smiled and said.

"60 million Aurum, what do you think?"

Akira's face slightly turned stern. He then frowned and stared at the relics in front of him.

"Don't just fall silent, tell me if you're okay with that price or not."

Akira was actually trying his best not to show his surprise on his face, he did not expect those relics to be worth that much. That stern gaze on those relics was actually because he was so surprised that he inadvertently looked at them with a mix of suspicion.

But for some reason, maybe because he was slightly desperate, Katsuragi who saw that thought that Akira was doing calculations if that was a good price or not. Akira suddenly extended his hand, in reality, Akira was just going to take a closer look at the relics, but Katsuragi thought that Akira was going to stuff them back into his rucksack.

"Whoah there! Wait, let's think carefully about this, okay? It's 60 million Aurum, you know?! 60 Million!! I'll at least let you know this, even if you bring them to the Hunter Office, at most, they'll only pay you 50 million Aurum. I'm sure it won't go close to 60 million! Although in place of that your Hunter Rank would go up, I know that you don't really care about that, right? If you're looking for money, just sell them to me."

Akira did not say anything. He only looked at the relics in his hand and Katsuragi alternately.

“Moreover, if you bring them to the Hunter Office, they’ll pester you about where you got those relics and whatnot. That’s the same if you try to sell them somewhere else. You don’t want to tell anyone where you got these relics, right? If it’s me, I’m willing to buy them from you without asking where you got them, and I can guarantee you that I won’t leak anything to anyone. I know that this is a good deal for you, so just sell them to me, yeah?”

Akira still would not say anything. Katsuragi started to get even more desperate.

“Alright alright!! I’ll buy them for 70 million Aurum but with one condition! As expected even I can’t offer you more money than that!! If this is not good enough for you, I’ll drop this deal, you know!!”

“One condition?”

Katsuragi was slightly relieved seeing that Akira finally gave a positive reply. Although he calmed down, he still had a mix of desperation in his merchant smile.

“Although I’ll buy them for 70 million Aurum, I can only pay you 30 million Aurum. So for the rest, I’ll give you 40 million Aurum store credit. After all, I know that you would just use all of them for medicines, right? So I’m sure that it’s a good deal for you too. I don’t mind if you want to use it for my other goods, and if you need something else, I can also put an order for you. Of course, you’ll have to store some money for that order though. And also, if you ever find similar relics again, make sure to bring them to me first. That’s the condition.”

Akira was pretending to be thinking when he was actually trying to calm himself down. Katsuragi was nervously waiting for Akira’s reply. In the middle of that strangely tense mood, Akira opened his mouth and finally said.

“…Alright, I’ll take that deal.”

“Nice!! I’ll transfer the money right away, so you should check if it properly reaches you.”

Katsuragi immediately finished the transfer before Akira changed his mind. Akira checked the transfer and confirmed that it indeed reached his account.

“I received the money, that’s it then.”

Katsuragi sighed with a big smile on his face. He quickly brought out a strong-looking case and carefully transferred the relics into that case before handing it over to the relic inspectors that he sent outside the trailer. When he returned, he had a wide smile on his face, it seemed that he also got a good deal with those relic inspectors.

“That was a good deal. Now then, it’s my turn now. What do you need? Is it more medicines? Wait for a bit here, I’ll bring it out.”

Katsuragi went to the warehouse and returned back with a box of medicines and placed it on top of the table. The box also contained not the usual 2 million Aurum per box medicine that Akira usually bought from Katsuragi.

“This is my recommended medicine. I ordered these expensive medicines especially for you. It’s 5 million Aurum per box.”

“5 million, huh? Isn’t that a little too expensive?”

Akira frowned, but Katsuragi smiled as if it did not bother him at all.

“Well, it’s originally for Hunters who usually work further to the east after all. So that price is pretty normal out there. But I can guarantee it, it’s a high-quality medicine. Like I said, I ordered them especially for you. To be honest, as someone who’s selling medicines to you, I’m a bit worried about how you spent your money only on medicines, you know? I’m sure you can understand that, right?”

“…Well, can’t really say I don’t.”

Akira occasionally used a lot of medicines to the point that some people thought he was trying to be a superhuman. Although he also had started taking drugs to clean up the nanomachine residue in his body, he still had not done that yet. He was planning to take one after his next ruin expedition.

Katsuragi nodded to affirm Akira's guess.

"Thought so. So that's where this medicine comes in. These are specially made for Hunters and its producer put extra effort into keeping the nanomachine residue to a minimum. So even if you consume a lot of them in a short span of time, it should only leave a small amount of nanomachines in your body. Not to mention that it's highly effective. So you don't have to consume too much of it in one go and the nanomachine from this medicine can stay active for a relatively long time. It's the perfect medicine for you. This time I only ordered 2 boxes, but you should buy them. You have 40 million store credit, so there's no need for you to be overly frugal about this kind of thing that might save your life."

"Alright, I'll take them."

"Certainly!! I knew that you would buy them!"

"By the way, what were you going to do with them if I did not buy them? It's not like anyone would buy that 5 million Aurum per box medicine around this place, right?"

"But of course, there's you, no? Well, what can I say, my merchant instinct is telling me that you'll definitely grow powerful enough to be able to buy this kind of medicine just fine."

"I wonder about that."

Katsuragi said so smugly and Akira just sent a gaze at him with suspicion.

Katsuragi was not lying. But it was not like he had no plans at all, he had already prepared plan B to send those medicines to another city through his

connection in case Akira would not buy them. This was one of the results of his talent as a merchant.

In the end, Akira bought 2 boxes of 5 million per box medicine and 5 boxes of 2 million per box medicine. On top of that, he also placed an order for 2 boxes of that 5 million per box medicine. So he was left with 10 million store credits that he saved in case he was going to buy something later from Katsuragi.

Once he was done with his business there, Akira returned back to his bike and drove away. Katsuragi saw him off and mumbled.

“To be honest, I was thinking of cutting my ties with him and Sheryl’s gang if he wasn’t going to bring me relics soon. But still, I didn’t expect him to bring something like that. Not to mention, Sheryl seems to be turning into a rather prospective customer too. Is it that my luck as a merchant is getting better lately? I guess this is a good time to take a risky gamble, huh?”

Katsuragi had a big dream to join the ranks of the Corporate Government and issue a currency under his name for the territory he ruled. And finally, he felt like he spotted a way to make his dream come true as he smiled widely.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 172, Selling Relics and Reaction From Doing So

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On the next day, Akira took a small number of relics with him again as he went out to the wasteland. He took a long detour to Higaraka residence ruin, spent some time training there, and then went back to Kugamayama city taking another long detour.

When he arrived back in Kugamayama city, he immediately went to see Katsuragi to sell his relics. But strangely enough, his trailer was not in its usual place that day.

“Is he taking a break today? Or did he change place?”

Alpha casually replied.

“It seems that Katsuragi is in Sheryl’s base right now.”

“…I see.”

Of course, Akira wondered how Alpha knew about that, but he reminded himself that it was nothing strange for her. So he just set that aside for now,

got on his bike and headed to Sheryl's base.

Akira was taken aback when he arrived at the front of Sheryl's base. The base was under huge renovation involving the base itself and the area around it.

Inside one of the rooms in the base, Sheryl, Viola and Katsuragi were in the middle of a conversation. That was when a young boy from the gang knocked on the door.

"Boss, Akira-san is here."

"Alright, Katsuragi-san, is it okay if we stop here and take a small break?"

As Sheryl said so politely, Katsuragi smiled teasingly and said.

"Of course, we can even continue it tomorrow if you want. I'll just leave so you can take your time getting closer to Akira, both for your sake and for my business' sake, yes?"

Sheryl gave a dry smile.

"Thank you for your concern."

As Katsuragi saw that, he once again thought that Sheryl had really changed into someone hard to deal with. His merchant instinct was telling him that the current Sheryl was not someone he could underestimate.

The young boy then awkwardly said.

"…Uhhh, it seems that Akira-san is actually here for Katsuragi-san…"

Katsuragi raised his eyebrows.

"Me?"

When Akira came to the base, Sheryl always thought that it was for meeting her. So the moment she was proven wrong, the shock caused her smile to freeze for a sec. She then noticed Viola who could not hold back her

laughter. It was obvious that Viola had completely read her mind, so Sheryl could not help but pout a little.

The young boy realized that he had just soured Sheryl's mood. He sounded rather scared as he used guiding Akira as an excuse to leave that room.

Viola was still trying to hold back her laughter as she said.

"If you get offended that quickly, your men will hate you, you know. As the boss of the gang, you should be more composed, yes?"

Sheryl regained her calm and smiled back at Viola. Their stares at each other, clearly showing the difference in their ranks.

Katsuragi looked away from Sheryl, excusing himself thinking that it was a matter between people in Sheryl's gang and he had nothing to do with it.

Akira entered the room and sat across Katsuragi. Sheryl sat next to Akira, while Viola sat next to Katsuragi.

Seeing how Sheryl was sitting happily next to Akira, Katsuragi was amused at how fast Sheryl's mood changed, but he did not show it on his face. He put that aside for now and said.

"So then, Akira, I heard that you wanted to meet me. So, what is it? The goods that you ordered haven't arrived yet and if you want me to bring out my trailer in case you want to buy something, I can't really do that right now. I'm taking a break today from that one, you see."

"How about buying relics then?"

"Well, I don't mind doing that, but make sure to bring something that might fetch a lot of money, yeah? I'm not really free that I would deal with cheap relics during my holiday, you know. But, of course, if you bring something like yesterday, that would be a different story."

Katsuragi said so as a joke. Finding an old-world information terminal was not an easy thing, and even more so to find them in a good condition.

Because of that, he could not help but question his eyes as Akira lined up similar relics like yesterday in front of him.

Katsuragi inadvertently mumbled.

“…You got to be kidding me!”

Akira lightly frowned.

“If you have any doubts, you can go ahead and inspect them closely.”

Akira said so casually that Katsuragi had a surprised look plastered on his face. Viola found it surprising and smiled amusedly. Sheryl was the only one who did not know that those were old-world information terminals, so she found no reason to be surprised. But even so, she could understand from Katsuragi and Viola’s reaction that those were expensive relics.

Katsuragi had both of his hands on his head, both for the better and for the worse. He did not expect Akira to bring invaluable relics twice in such a short time. There was no mistaking it, this was a very golden business opportunity for him.

But Katsuragi had limited capital available to use. He at least needed one week to find corporations looking for this kind of relics, choose where to sell those relics, negotiate a good deal with that corporation, before finally converting those relics into cash money. So the relics that he just bought yesterday had not been converted into cash money yet.

Those were relics that would definitely bring in a lot of money if he bought them, but unfortunately, at the moment, he had not enough money to buy them. To be honest, he wanted to avoid having to let that opportunity slide just because he did not have enough money to buy them right now. But he needed extra resolve to work up the courage to borrow money in order to put his bet on those relics when there was no guarantee they would sell. But if the credit company judged that it was unlikely for him to pay back the debt later, they might use that to take advantage of him and set a high interest. And if Katsuragi could not come up with enough money to pay that

debt when the deadline came, then he would lose the bet and everything else along with it.

"…I want to call some people again to inspect those relics for now, are you okay with that?"

Katsuragi decided to set aside the matter with his money at the moment. After all, if those relics were actually not in a good condition, then there was no need for him to worry about money. While at the same time, it would also give him some time to compose himself.

People called by Katsuragi were inspecting the relics that Akira brought that day in the same room. This time, they were using bigger devices compared to yesterday. After all, this time Katsuragi contacted better relics inspectors.

When the relic inspectors saw the people inside that room, they had a rather conflicted look on their faces. But some of them seemed to quickly grasp what was going on.

Viola was already famous for her bad reputation around the city. Akira was the rumoured young boy who made a full show of his power during the huge battle the other day, and although he looked weak, he actually was a powerful Hunter. Then to top it off, Sheryl, who was already rumoured for having those two dangerously volatile people under her control. With all of those 3 people in one room, all the relic inspectors present thought that there was no surprise for them to find a way to procure those valuable old-world information terminals.

Although they only saw Akira as just a young boy the other day, seeing how he was together with Viola inside that room, reminded them of a certain piece of information and decided to treat Akira differently from now on.

They had also heard Sheryl was investing a lot of money in order to restart selling relics in her base again. So they thought that the reason they were called there today might have something to do with it. If those relics were something that Viola procured, then it was nothing weird for them to be in

such a good condition. The relic inspectors there thought so as they continued checking the relics.

Akira was sitting there, watching the relic inspectors working while talking with Sheryl, who was on top of him. In the middle of talking about reopening the relic shop, Sheryl said that she was doing a huge renovation for its sake. That was when a question popped inside Akira's mind.

"Sheryl, now that you mention it, it seems that you're doing a large-scale renovation of this place, where did you get the money to do that?"

"Ah, well, about that…"

Sheryl smiled and was about to explain when Viola suddenly interjected.

"In order to help turn this gang into a profitable gang, I decided to invest 1 billion Aurum into this gang."

Sheryl smiled at Viola, covertly telling her to stop running her mouth, but Viola ignored that and continued.

Once the gang started reopening the relic shop, it would be the main income for the gang. Because of that, they needed to renovate the interior of the gang in order to provide more security for the shop. The special room for storing those expensive relics was remade into something similar to a huge safe box. They also installed some defensive equipment to help even amateurs defend certain important points. Sheryl was also planning to sell relics that were entrusted to her by the other people too. So they made sure to be prepared for that too. Viola explained all of those things to Akira.

Akira looked slightly surprised but also a bit weirded out at the same time.

"But still, 1 billion Aurum huh. Didn't expect you would do something like that."

"Well, I did tell you before that I'm pretty rich, remember? Moreover, it's something that I have to do in order to make this gang powerful enough to be able to pay its debt to you. After all, with its current income, it won't be

able to repay its debt to you even after a thousand years. The gang needs to grow big enough so that it can use 10 billion Aurum to earn 11 billion Aurum and get 1 billion Aurum profit from the transaction. Well, of course, I couldn't invest 10 billion Aurum right from the start, so I started with only 1 billion Aurum. And it's not like we spent all of that 1 billion Aurum right away after all."

Akira seemed to still have some doubts in his mind.

"But still, 1 billion Aurum is a huge amount of money. Is it really normal to invest that much money like this?"

Viola looked slightly surprised.

"Oh my, I'm doing my best here to fulfil my promise to you, you know? So like, you don't have to say it like that, yes?"

"Well, that's true, but still…"

Akira awkwardly winced back, Viola smiled and continued.

"Please think of it as me having absolute confidence in my own skill. And also, just to get this straight, it's a loan. So it's not like I gave that money for free."

Akira himself had no plans to say anything bad about someone who was trying her best to fulfil her promise to him. Moreover, if he was really able to get that 3.8 billion Aurum that he thought to be nothing more than an excuse for Viola to get involved in Sheryl's gang, that in itself was a good thing for him. Not to mention, Viola lent her own money, not his. So Akira decided to stop worrying about it.

"You have a point there, sorry about that."

"I'm glad that you can understand."

Akira lightly smiled, Viola replied with a light smile too. That was when Sheryl suddenly tightened her hug.

“I’ll give my best too.”

“Eh? Ah, yeah, sure, give it your best.”

“Yes!”

Sheryl replied back firmly, she then sent a glare to Viola who was smiling teasingly.

After they finished inspecting the relics, Akira immediately went back home, leaving what to do with those relics to Katsuragi and Sheryl.

Originally, just like before, Katsuragi offered to buy those relics for 60 million Aurum. But suddenly Viola interjected and made an offer to buy those relics too. Then from there, they had some debates on who to sell those relics to.

Both Viola and Katsuragi pressured Akira to sell his relics to one of them. So in the end, Akira decided to auction it starting from 60 million Aurum in 1 million Aurum units. If both of them were offering the same price, Akira was planning to sell them to Katsuragi since he made the offer first. And so with that, he made Viola transfer the minimum 60 million Aurum first and quickly left Sheryl’s base.

On their way back, Alpha asked Akira a question.

“Akira. Though it might be too late for me to say this, are you sure you’re okay with leaving them alone? After all, Katsuragi and Viola might manage to lower the price as much as possible in their negotiation with Sheryl, you know?”

“Judging from how Katsuragi gave me store credits instead of cash money yesterday, he might not have the money to buy those relics. So from that point of view, I was at least able to get 60 million Aurum out of those relics. And if their negotiation leads to more profit, it’ll motivate them to get along more. So I don’t think it’s a bad idea.”

Adding the money from yesterday, Akira had earned 90 million Aurum plus those expensive medicines. So he had nothing to complain about.

After Akira left the base, Katsuragi and Sheryl were having a negotiation. During that negotiation, Sheryl had the upper hand since Katsuragi did not have much money.

Katsuragi had made a plan to have his branch inside Sheryl's base and invested some money in Sheryl's gang for the sake of that plan. Moreover, Sheryl had also ordered a lot of equipment and defensive devices for the gang from Katsuragi. So Katsuragi had also spent a good portion of his money to put those orders in. Because of that, he did not have much money in hand and he had a disadvantage during the negotiation.

Of course, Viola did not let it slide and pushed Katsuragi into a difficult negotiation.

[Don't tell me that Akira sold those relics to me yesterday for the sake of probing my current financial situation? No, it can't be… Right?]

Katsuragi put extra effort during that negotiation, but when he looked at how Sheryl was acting and how Viola was smiling like usual, he could not help but feel anxious.

Sheryl kept coming up with demands that were cutting close to the limits that he could accept. To be honest, he was feeling anxious having to face it while thinking that Sheryl was slowly turning into another Viola as he was doing his best trying to fight back those offensive moves from her.

__*__*__*__

On the next day, Akira went out to Higaraka residence ruin again, and just like last time, he was searching for relics there which also doubled as training for him.

Akira was being careful not to encounter any monsters or other Hunters during the training. He also did some training with his bike without Alpha's

support, or spotting places for relics where Hunters would normally miss. He was doing his best in his training by following Alpha's instructions.

Akira stood in front of a dilapidated mansion and sighed. He looked slightly annoyed at Alpha.

"Alpha, as expected, I didn't find anything valuable, you know?"

"That's normal. After all, if you can easily find valuable relics here, Hunters would still frequent this ruin. That's why this place looks abandoned."

"Well, that's true, but still, I'm not here for rubble, you know? What can I say, uhh… It's not that encouraging when I can't find any good relics…"

"This in itself is a good training for hunting relics. If you don't do this seriously, it would be pointless. So just get over it and put your back on it. You did promise me to do this training seriously, remember? So do it earnestly, okay?"

"…Alright."

With a light sigh, Akira changed gear and restarted the training again, but more seriously this time.

His training for hunting relics continued, he closely checked all corners of the mansion. If the interior of the mansion seemed relatively okay, he would check all the furniture and move them around to check for secret rooms. He did not forget to use his information-gathering device to look for secret rooms too.

In case if the mansion was mostly run-down, Akira would move aside the rubble and check the interior in case if the rubble buried a secret safe or something similar. He also checked the furniture using his information terminal, and if he found any hollow space, he would break the furniture to see if there was anything inside it or not.

Akira had been doing that since two days ago. But even after three days, he did not get anything valuable. Of course, it was not like he did not get

anything at all, but for a Hunter who had now spent 500 million Aurum for his equipment, it was not worth the hassle.

At first, Akira was diligently and seriously doing it. But after some time, if it was not for Alpha's order, he would have started cutting corners.

Akira held a cracked plate in his hand and stared at it with a stern face. He looked slightly displeased as he said.

"I wonder if this thing might be an expensive relic. Like that thing, you know, that handkerchief that turned out to be an expensive article when I brought it to the Hunter Office. I wonder if this plate can be actually an expensive relic too."

"That's mostly based on its material since it's an old-world nanomaterial. If you want to check the material of that kind of tableware, you can just lightly knock it and analyze the sound using your information terminal."

Akira lightly knocked the plate, of course, he could not tell if it was made of expensive material or not.

"…Alpha, I know that judging it by myself is also a training for me, but can you help me with this one?"

"I can only tell a limited amount of info based on your information-gathering device. But from what I can get, it's made of usual ceramic."

"So?"

"You can get a small amount of profit by selling that for 100 Aurum in a street stand. If you still have some doubt, you can try bringing that to Katsuragi."

Akira did not say anything back, he just threw that plate away. If that was good enough for him to bring back home, he would be bringing a lot of relics back home from that ruin. Not to mention that Katsuragi would definitely take it as a bad joke.

Alpha smiled wryly and said.

“If you learn how to quickly check for relics in this ruin, you’ll be able to efficiently hunt for relics in the other ruins. So make sure to keep doing it seriously.”

“I know. Diligent training is the shortcut to success, right?”

“Yup, exactly.”

Akira got back half of his spirit, so he made up the other half with bravado and returned back to training. He continued looking for relics for some time after that, but in the end, his training ended that day with almost zero results again just like the other days. He looked slightly tired as he got on his bike and drove back to the city.

After Akira left Higaraka residence ruin, some Hunters arrived at the ruin bringing few other people with them. One of them frowned and looked doubtful as he said to his friend.

“Is this really the place? It has been quite a long time since all the relics from this ruin were carried out, right? Though I’m sure there are still some relics here, I feel this would be nothing short of a pointless endeavour.”

“Like hell if I know. It’s an order from the boss to inspect this Higaraka residence ruin, especially for places where other Hunters are also searching. Even if we can’t find anything, we still can get some money by reporting back the result from our inspection. So just stop complaining already.”

“You have a point there. We were paid to come here…”

The Hunters present were paid by someone to come there, so they decided to focus on their job and started searching the ruin.

When Akira returned back to the city, he went to his house and took a box full of relics to Shizuka’s shop. Unbeknown to him, Elena and Sara were hanging out in Shizuka’s shop at that time.

When Akira entered, they froze for a few seconds and just stared at each other without saying anything. As things started getting awkward, Elena

smiled to exorcise the awkwardness and said.

“Akira, long time no see.”

“Ah, yes, long time no see.”

“I heard from Shizuka that you’re starting your Hunter job again, so how is it going?”

“Eh, ah, it’s going pretty well.”

“I see.”

Elena looked a bit troubled on how to continue from there as she threw a friendly smile at Akira. But behind it, she actually felt relieved that she saw no sign of contempt, or alertness, or hostility from him. Sara, who was also smiling awkwardly until now, looked relieved seeing Akira’s friendly reaction.

Shizuka smiled as it seemed there was no need to worry about their friendship and welcomed Akira.

“Akira, welcome. Are you here for ammo again today?”

Akira’s face immediately turned slightly serious.

“No, I’m here to sell relics today. I remembered that you said you can buy fabric relics from me, so I’m here with those relics today. This is it.”

Akira placed a box filled with relics on top of the counter. Shizuka opened that box and checked the content. Elena and Sara also peeked at the content of that box. Shizuka, Elena, and Sara were amazed when they saw what was inside. That box was filled with lady’s underwear, and of course, all of them were old-world relics.

Elena and Sara could not help but hum in amazement. It’s a common reaction for Hunters when they saw a huge amount of expensive relics. There was no feeling of awkwardness although the one who brought in that

huge amount of lady's underwear was a boy. But that was exactly because Elena and Sara were Hunters.

Shizuka took one of the underwear out of the box and checked it. It seemed to be in excellent condition without any damage. But something else surprised her, its design was rather daring.

In her surprise, she made eye contact with Akira and ended up blushing, which was very very very rare of her. Seeing that, Akira who was trying his best to make a poker face could not help but blush too.

It was not like Akira was fully indifferent to what he did there. He knew that he would be flustered if he let it bother him, that was why he was trying his best to just ignore it. He was there solely to sell relics, so he was sure that Shizuka would react accordingly and there was no need to be overly concerned about it. He kept telling himself that in order to keep his calm.

But since Shizuka gave a reaction that he did not expect, Akira could not hide his surprise and started feeling embarrassed too.

"Ah, uhh, I think I promised to bring this kind of relic here if I find them. So, yeah, here I am."

"I-I see. Well, I too remember that we did have that kind of conversation before, yup."

Akira and Shizuka smiled at each other, trying to avoid the subject. Looking at that, Elena and Sara seemed slightly surprised.

Shizuka put the underwear in her hand back into the box and closed it. She then intentionally tried to change the mood by saying.

"Akira. It's rather difficult to inspect this kind of relic, you see. Though I did say that I would buy them from you, it's not like I'm an expert in this. So if you're okay with it, can you leave them here? I'll have them inspected and get a good deal to sell them. But that would mean you'll receive the payment later when everything is done."

“Yes, I don’t mind.”

“Alright then, I’ll take care of the rest.”

Shizuka said so as she moved the box behind the counter, out of everyone’s view. The only thing left was the lingering awkwardness from what just happened.

Silavin: Akira, you sly dog.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 173, Choosing Rifles

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Even after Shizuka stored the relic box out of sight, there was still some awkwardness left in the air. So Akira tried to change the mood by getting into the real reason why he came there that day.

“Shizuka-san, I actually want to consult about buying a new rifle. Is this a good time?”

“Sure!”

Akira slightly hesitated.

“…I actually want to look for a particular type of rifle, you see. But this might sound crazy, so if it does, please just forget about it.”

Shizuka frowned but immediately broke into a smile.

“I won’t be able to tell unless you let me know first. So you can just go ahead, no need to hold back. It’s also one of my jobs to cope with any requests that my customers ask me. Though I don’t know whether I can find something that would satisfy you or not, I’ll at least give my best effort to not betray your expectation.”

Akira looked relieved as he nodded, he then started to explain his wish.

After listening to Akira's wish, Shizuka hummed. It was indeed an unreasonable request.

A rifle that could rival the power of the CWH anti-material rifle with its special ammo, with the ability to shoot in rapid succession like a DVTS minigun, and could shoot grenades just like the A4WM automatic grenade launcher. Then to top it off Akira also wanted that rifle to be able to do long-range precision sniping too, and all of those features to be packed in a small-sized rifle. Although he was okay as long as he could use it with his current augmented suit, he wanted it to be as light as possible too.

"As I thought, there's no rifle that good, huh…"

Akira himself understood that he was saying unreasonable things. When he saw Shizuka hum while looking slightly troubled, he decided to take back what he said. That was when Shizuka said with still a slightly troubled face.

"If you ask me whether such a rifle exists or not, the answer would be yes."

"It does?"

"Yes. There are actually many people who are looking for such a versatile rifle. So some companies actually manufactured such rifles and are selling them in the market, although, I'm sure they only do that because there's demand for that sort of rifle. But personally speaking, I don't recommend you to get such a rifle…"

"Is that so? I'm sure it would be really helpful to have such a rifle though."

Akira looked rather confused. Seeing that, Shizuka's expression turned slightly cloudy, which was very rare for her. She then explained as if to emphasize the disadvantage of such a rifle.

"Because all those features are packed into one, such a rifle is usually exorbitantly expensive. Moreover, although it can do all of those things, its overall firepower is less when compared to a normal rifle of the same price

tag. Of course, there are those with enough firepower to rival normal rifles. But with the better firepower, their prices also increase exponentially."

"How big is this price gap?"

"In your case, for a rifle that's basically an amalgamation of CWH anti-material rifle, DVTS minigun, A4WM automatic grenade launcher, and DSS sniper rifle, it will cost about the sum of all of those rifles with some zeros trailing."

"I-I see, it's really that expensive, huh?"

"Yup, with that kind of awful price-to-performance ratio, I can't really recommend that kind of rifle."

Shizuka started by pointing out the price disadvantage of such a rifle. Seeing that it was enough to make Akira rethink it, she then continued adding more reasons in order to discourage him from buying such a rifle.

"Not to mention that you'll need a special set of skills to be able to effectively use that kind of rifle compared to when you use individual rifles. So, you'll take more time mastering a single multi-type rifle compared to mastering multiple single-type rifles."

Akira frowned even more. Shizuka then added one last detail as the last push.

"And even if you learn how to master it in a relatively short time, you'll have less freedom and firepower compared to if you're using 4 different rifles. Like I said before, compared to 4 people having one rifle each, using one multi-type rifle definitely offers less firepower."

Akira nodded. Although on the surface, Shizuka's expression was saying that she felt guilty for not being able to comply with her customer's request, deep inside, she was hoping that with this, Akira would change his mind.

Sara then suddenly interjected casually.

“Say, Akira. If you want a rifle for sniping, you can just buy a sniper rifle, right?”

“No, I’m already carrying around CWH anti-material rifle, DVTS minigun, and A4WM automatic grenade launcher. So I thought that it would be hard for me to move if I carry another rifle, you see…”

“Now that you mention it, you did bring a lot of rifles with you back in the Seranthal building. Even I limit the number of rifles that I carry to two at most.”

Sara smiled wryly, Akira replied back with a bashful bitter smile.

“Well, uhh, to be honest, if it’s possible, I want to use all the rifles I buy. It would be such a waste to just let them sit in my vehicle after I bought them after all. What’s more, there’s nothing bad with having more firepower. All of my rifles have their different uses and it’s not like I can use any of them in place of another. But, it’s not like I can carry one more rifle, so I just thought that it would be great if there’s a gun with all functions from the other guns packed into one.”

“That’s kinda true, but still, normally you won’t carry each and every type of rifle just because each of them has a different use. If you’re planning to go to a ruin where you would need that kind of firepower, you can just invite us to come, you know? After all, we did ask you to come with us back in Mihazono ruin. Although it’s not like we can always come with you anytime you invite us since we have things to do too. But if you invite us to come, we might be able to fit it into our schedule… Or at least, Elena will, right, Elena?”

Sara just realized that she was talking for both herself and Elena without asking Elena first. So Sara sent a glance to Elena remembering that she was a little bit finicky about changing her schedule. So, it might really annoy her if Sara suddenly changed their schedule without her consent first.

Elena smiled, it seemed that what Sara said did not bother her at all.

“It’s alright. We did ask you to accompany us when we went to the Seranthal building in Mihazono ruin after all. I don’t mind shifting the schedule a bit if you invite us.”

Sara sighed in relief. Elena saw that and smiled bitterly at her, and then turned to Akira and smiled at him too.

“So there you have it. If you need more help, you can ask us anytime.”

“Thank you very much, I’ll ask for your help when I need it.”

Akira lightly smiled and bowed at Sara and Elena. Shizuka then smiled and made a suggestion to Akira.

“So then, Akira, what’s your plan? If you’re going with Elena and Sara, as I thought, you won’t need that rifle. You can just choose to bring rifles to complement Elena and Sara’s equipment. So instead of buying a multi-type rifle, you can just buy a sniper rifle, you know?”

“Ah, thank you, but as I thought, I still want to get a multi-type rifle. I feel like I would cause Elena-san and Sara-san trouble if I suddenly impose on their schedule, after all. Uhh, what can I say… I often decide things pretty randomly, forget deciding what to do depending on my mood of that day, I sometimes even make decisions based on my mood at a given moment. I also often get involved in incidents that I didn’t expect at all, so it would be great if I have a multi-type rifle that can do anything in that situation. So, as I thought, it’s better for me to still get a multi-type rifle, can you help me with that? Although it might be weird for me to say this since I’m the one who asked for help, I’m not sure that I even have enough money to buy one.”

“…I see, I’ll keep my eyes for any good deals then.”

Shizuka looked sad for a split-second. But before Akira could notice it, she immediately replaced it with a smile. And since it was a request from her customer, it’s not like she could just ignore it.

“So then, Akira, how much is your budget for this rifle?”

“1 billion Aurum is my upper limit.”

Akira said it without much thinking. But when he noticed that Shizuka raised her eyebrows and looked at him with widened eyes, he flusteredly shook his head and said.

“No, it’s not like I have that much money with me right now. It’s just that I haven’t really decided on a precise amount as the budget for that rifle. I just thought it would help me if I know the price and the quality of the rifle that I can get with such a price beforehand even if I’m planning to only buy that rifle after saving some money.”

“I see, in that case, is it okay if I ask you why you come up with that number?”

“Back then when I went to Mihazono ruin with Elena-san and Sara-san, I got 500 million Aurum from that request. So I thought that I would just double that amount for now.”

When Akira thought that he was able to get 500 million Aurum from last time, it made him think that 1 billion Aurum would not be out of his reach. Judging from the way he reacted, Shizuka figured that he put 1 billion Aurum as the upper limit to understand how good an equipment he could get with that amount of money, he did not think that he would be able to get and then use that much money anytime soon. Shizuka was slightly relieved when she understood that.

“Ahh, I see, so that’s what you meant, huh. That did surprise me for a bit, you know.”

“I’m sorry. But well, when I think about it, if I have 1 billion Aurum, I feel like I’ll spend it on a new augmented suit and other extra equipment instead, so it might be weird when I put that as my budget limit… Not to mention I did spend 500 million Aurum to buy that bike too. Although it’s not like I regret spending that much money on that bike, when I think about it, I still have to buy a vehicle too. It also surprises me for a bit, I never thought that the day would come when I have 500 million Aurum and I still don’t have enough money to get everything I need.”

Akira looked slightly conflicted and smiled bitterly when he said that. Shizuka only replied with a smile. After that, he stayed there for a bit, talking about how Hunters spent their money together with Shizuka, Elena, and Sara.

As their conversation continued, the subject then changed to Hunter's equipment. That was when Akira remembered the fact that one of his rucksacks was damaged, so he decided to buy a new rucksack while he was there.

The rucksack that he bought was a very robust rucksack designed to offer protection for its contents. Although its volume could expand greatly, it could also be folded to save spaces when it was empty. It was one of the expensive items that Shizuka had in her stock. It cost 3 million Aurum per bag and Akira bought several of them.

But before Shizuka processed it, she asked Akira once more just to be extra sure.

"Well, I know that you have enough money to buy them and I'm sure that Hunters would at least spend that much when they have to carry expensive relics, but are you really okay with it? You can buy cheaper ones, you know?"

"Yes. There was one time when I lost all my relics inside my backpack and something also happened recently that really made me worry about the relics inside my rucksack. So I'm planning to replace some of my rucksacks with stronger ones just like these."

Akira looked at his new rucksacks and smiled happily. He lost 40 million Aurum worth of relics back in the Seranthal building. And on his way back from Tsubakihara, he was about to lose a whole rucksack worth of relics too. So compared to losing those relics, these rucksacks were rather cheap. That was why he could not hold back his smile.

Now that he had finished his business in Shizuka's shop, he immediately went back home, leaving Shizuka, Sara, and Elena behind.

Sara waved lightly at Akira as she saw him off with a smile. But once he left, her expression turned serious as she immediately started talking about something that she could not bring up while Akira was around.

“But still, where did Akira get those relics?”

Although Sara believed Akira might as well just tell her if she asked him, in the end, she deliberately held herself back from asking that question. A source where a Hunter could find expensive relics was extremely important for Hunters. If she wanted to ask that question, she needed to be pretty close to Akira first.

To be honest, Sara was sure Akira was not that much of a stranger to her that it would anger him had she asked that question. But given what happened between them recently, Sara decided to be more careful for the time being.

Sara actually also wanted to apologize to Akira for the other day, but Shizuka stopped her. Apologizing to Akira now might backfire and remind him of what happened back then. So if she wanted to apologize, Shizuka advised her that it might be a good idea to wait for some time until he was not bothered anymore by that matter.

Elena recalled what Akira had bought and made a guess.

“A few high-quality rucksacks and 2 anti-forcefield bullets, huh. Akira did not hesitate at all when he bought those. So, basically, he knows for sure they would be useful to him. Though it’s only my guess, maybe he has found another undiscovered ruin.”

Elena then frowned.

[If that 1 billion Aurum is not based on the money that he got from Mihazono ruin but from his guess of how much money he can get from that undiscovered ruin… Then if he bought those anti-forcefield armour bullets because he knows that he’s going to use them to fight such powerful monsters there… Although he did say that he would ask us for help if he

needs it, judging from his reaction, I'm not sure that he would really ask for our help…]

Last time, Akira casually told Elena and Sara about Yonozuka station ruin back then when it still had no name yet. But this time, it did not seem that Akira would do the same thing again if he really had found a new undiscovered ruin. Leaving aside the possibility that his trust dropped after what happened last time, the location of Yonozuka ruin also quickly spread among other Hunters after he told Elena and Sara. So Elena thought there was nothing strange for him to be more cautious this time.

[In the worst-case scenario, even trying to ask him this time might cause him to get suspicious of us trying to probe information from him. As long as he does not bring up the subject himself, we need to be careful not to touch on it. Though to be honest, it would be great if he would invite us to go to a prospective ruin since that way we can regain back his trust by working with him again…]

Last time, Elena and Sara invited Akira to go to Mihazono ruin thinking that it would be a light ruin exploration, but out of the blue, they got that sudden request to go to the Seranthal building which then turned into a fierce fight. Even now, Elena was not sure if Akira thought that it was worth the trouble or not. It was fully expected for someone to be cautious or even to decline an invitation from someone else that he or she did not trust. And it was doubly true when it came to Hunter work where they put their lives at stake too.

As someone who was used to handling negotiations, Elena tried to objectively evaluate herself from Akira's point of view. But with her feelings and wishes getting in her way, she could not help but make a stern face.

Shizuka looked at Elena and Sara. Both of them could not be said to be in a good mood, though she could guess why both of them looked rather troubled.

"Elena, Sara, about the relics that Akira brought here today. If both of you have the time, can you girls help me out? Of course, I'll also look for

potential buyers, but can you help me out if you know someone who might buy them? If they sell well, it'll be easier for me to recommend expensive equipment to Akira."

Sara lightly smiled.

"Of course, I might even buy some from you. After all, I always wanted to get some extra spares."

"Just so you know, there's no discount."

"I know. Don't worry, I'll buy it at a higher price than the market price. After all, it'll still be cheaper than buying them from the other traders."

Elena smiled and jumped in too.

"In that case, I should look for a merchant who would buy them at a higher price to pull the market price up."

"Elena? We're friends, right? It's okay for me to expect some help from you, right?"

"But of course. It'll still be cheaper than buying them from the other traders, right? I can use that buying price as a trump card to raise the selling value of those relics when I negotiate with the other traders."

Sara and Elena exchanged mischievous smiles.

Looking at them, Shizuka also smiled as she thought.

If Elena and Sara did something to increase the value of Akira's relics, and if she let Akira know about it, it would help Elena and Sara regain his trust. It should also help lower the hurdle for Akira to ask for their help which in turn should change his mind about buying that multi-type rifle.

Shizuka did not lie when she discouraged Akira from buying a multi-type rifle. But she also did not tell him the biggest reason why he should not buy that rifle. And that reason was once Akira mastered how to use that rifle, it would be less likely for him to ask for other's help.

Akira wanted equipment to help him face any situations. He desired multi-function equipment because the thought of having other people to cover for his weakness never crossed his mind.

For Akira, other people were either enemies or not enemies, but never allies. He did not expect others to help him. That line of thinking was carved deep inside his mind and Shizuka noticed it.

Even if Akira helped someone, it was very likely that he did not expect that person to give anything back. But that was not out of kindness, or selflessness, or good virtue. It was simply because the concept of one hand washes the other had no place in his mind. So Shizuka predicted that he would be quick to abandon other people. The concept of relationship to him was completely one-sided, something that he only entertained out of his selfishness.

Shizuka hoped that one day Akira would find someone who would mutually help one another. It could be herself or anyone else, she honestly did not care who it might be.

__*__*__*__

On another day, just like usual, Akira went to Higaraka residence ruin again. And just like last time, he was there to training his skill in detecting enemies and sneaking around the ruin and effectively searching for relics in a ruin.

If it was not for training, there was no real motivation for Akira to do something so tiring in that ruin. So at first, he was not that excited with the training, but it did not take long for Akira to switch gears and start taking the training seriously. But this time, there was something different, Akira looked around and slightly frowned.

“…Alpha, don’t you think there are more people than usual today?”

“You’re indeed right about that, Akira. Let’s gain some distance from them before starting to look for relics again.”

“Thought so, alright then.”

In the middle of the training, Akira regularly checked his information terminal to look for enemies and other Hunters while avoiding them. He was also being careful so they would not be able to detect him. Although he had been doing that all this time, today, there were many occasions where he was passing close to other Hunters or monsters. Because of that, today’s relic hunting proceeded slower than usual.

“The relics in this ruin are already mostly depleted, right? So why are they coming to this ruin?”

“I bet they are here because of some kind of rumour saying that a Hunter found some expensive relics in an unlikely ruin.”

“…That’s me, isn’t it?”

“Yup.”

Akira made a stern face and did not say anything for a few seconds. He then went back to his bike that he parked not too far from him and hopped on it.

“Alpha, let’s head back for today. There’s something I want to check.”

“Sure.”

Akira then left that ruin. After he was gone from that place, other Hunters who were scanning his position appeared. They then started searching carefully at the places that he had searched.

When Akira arrived back at Kugamayama city, he immediately headed to Katsuragi’s trailer. Katsuragi, who was waiting in his trailer just like usual, noticed Akira parking his bike not too far from him.

“Akira, huh. Ah, right, the medicines that you ordered just arrived. Are you here for those medicines today? …- Wait, don’t tell me that you’re here with more old-world terminals.”

“I’ll take the medicines, and also, there’s something else that I want to ask you.”

“Oh, what is it?”

Akira then told Katsuragi what happened that day in Higaraka residence ruin. About the Hunters who were flooding a ruin that should have no more valuable relics anymore, how it was obvious that those Hunters were watching and following him, and how he was suspecting that it was because of Katsuragi’s doing.

But Katsura casually replied.

“Yeah, no surprise at all.”

“No surprise…?”

Akira was surprised. He did not expect Katsuragi to say something that sounded as if he just admitted his involvement. But seeing Akira’s expression, Katsuragi exasperatedly explained.

“Just so you know, I never told anyone else that you brought those old-world information terminals to me. Just think about it, if I do something like that, other Hunters would definitely steal those relics from you and it would end up bringing less profit for me. After all, that would mean you would bring fewer relics to my shop, you know.”

“Well, you have a point there, but…”

Akira did not look fully convinced, so Katsuragi sighed and continued.

“Thought it might be weird for me to be the one saying this, but it seems that you underestimated the effect of bringing those relics to me twice.”

“Effect? But I’m just normally selling relics though?”

Katsuragi sighed again, there was a mix of exasperation on his face.

“Good grief! Although you’re already stronger than those common Hunters, you’re still a beginner in terms of Hunter knowledge and experience, huh?”

“Well, sorry about that.”

Akira looked slightly offended, to which Katsuragi gave a big smile.

“Very well then, it would be a huge pain in the neck to have one of my main customers doubt me. So I’ll give you a long detailed explanation here.”

Katsuragi and Akira went into the staff room in Katsuragi’s trailer, and just like last time, Katsuragi prepared some drinks and put them on the table between them before they sat face to face across the table. Katsuragi then immediately started his explanation.

The information terminals that Akira brought to Katsuragi were of very good condition. Those relics were hard to find among the ruins around Kugamayama city, but even so, a low ranking Hunter like Akira was able to get his hand on those relics, twice no less.

If it was only once, it could be dismissed as just luck. But since Akira brought them to Katsuragi twice, it opened up to a whole variety of possibilities. After all, it opened up the possibility of a narrative that it did not matter whether Akira found them at first out of pure luck or because he worked super hard to find those relics. But Akira, who did not know their worth, did not expect them to be that valuable the first time he brought them to Katsuragi, and so he decided to go look for those relics again for the second time.

It might hint at the existence of another undiscovered ruin. After all, it was a normal thing to find similar relics from around the same ruin.

“Those relics inspectors that I called saw you sell those relics twice themselves. Although it would still be a guess, it was enough for some people to make their moves. Those relics are just simply that valuable, you see. But to be honest, I find it strange for them to react this quickly just from that. I bet you sold your relics in another place, right?”

“…Those were just old-world clothing. It should not have anything to do with this.”

“Too naive! Expensive relics are still expensive regardless even if they are only just old-world clothing. Though I’m sure they’re nowhere as expensive as old-world terminals, it does not change the fact that you brought expensive relics 3 times in a row.”

“…But it’s still strange for them to follow me just because of that. They should not know where I sold my relics and what kind of relics that I sold.”

“Again, too naive! I don’t know where you sold your relics, but if that shop has some connections with the Hunter Office, it would be nothing strange for that information to quickly spread around. Or more like, those shops which partnered with the Hunter Office could use your Hunter Code to track the type of relics you sell. As a matter of fact, those people who want to avoid that sell their relics to shops that have no connections with the Hunter Office. I thought that you’re only bringing relics to Sheryl’s place or to me because you want to avoid that too, but that doesn’t seem to be the case, huh?”

“So that’s why, huh…”

Akira regretted his own blunder, but he was also relieved at the same time. After all, it meant that it was unlikely for Shizuka to leak that information herself. Shizuka shop was most likely partnered with the Hunter Office, so he bet his deals with Shizuka were registered into the Hunter Office since she was obliged to do so. And someone must have sniffed on that information afterwards. With his suspicion now gone, Akira cheered back up.

“But if that kind of information is always registered in the Hunter Office, won’t that make those Hunters wanting to avoid it stop selling relics to those shops?”

“High ranking Hunters can ask the Hunter Office to put an extra lid on that information. Of course, it’s only available for those high ranking Hunters with special privileges. By the way, what is your Hunter ranking?”

“If I’m not mistaken, 29.”

Katsuragi looked a bit surprised as well as exasperated.

“Those powerful equipment with such a low Hunter Rank, it won’t be strange for people to call you a fraud.”

“…Fraud, huh?”

Akira smiled wryly. Most of his strength was fully relying on Alpha. So he thought that low Hunter Rank was suitable for his real strength without Alpha’s support.

Katsuragi then continued his explanation.

The reason why those Hunters stopped back-tracking Akira’s activities only up to Higaraka residence ruin was simply because that was the result of them putting up a net based on how far a low-ranking Hunter of ranking 29 could normally go. That way, they could narrow down their guesses without having to keep their eyes on Akira. Although it took some money, it was nothing compared to the money that they could get from those old-world information terminals.

As Katsuragi explained to him, Akira started to understand the effect of him selling those relics.

“Well, I guess that’s the gist of it, huh. If I have to add something, there’s also a good chance those relics inspectors that I called also leaked that information. But even so, that would not be my fault. I did ask for your permission first before I called them and you gave me your approval after all.”

“I know, I will not blame you about that at all.”

Katsuragi gave a big nod, he then casually said.

“…So then, are you here to buy anything today?”

Akira opened his new rucksack, pulled out his relics, and lined them on the table. This time, it was 6 old-world information terminals. When Akira was done, Katsuragi could not hold back his joy and laughed heartily.

"…Including the old-world clothing, this would make it 4 times in a row, right? If it wasn't you, I would have gotten suspicious at this point, you know."

"It's not like I'm forcing you to buy them."

"Geez, don't say that. So then, did you get these in Higaraka residence ruin? Do you think you still can find some more of these relics there?"

Akira replied instantly in such a casual manner.

"I have no obligation to tell you anything."

Katsuragi tried his best to hold back his laughter.

"My bad, my bad, I'll at least ask you this again, is it okay if I call some relics inspectors to check these relics?"

"No need to ask me that again, you can go ahead and just do that."

Katsuragi could not hold back his laughter as he proceeded to make a call. After that, he bought those relics from Akira for 70 million Aurum. Thanks to the small adjustment to his capital that he did beforehand, he had no problem paying that amount of money this time.

Katsuragi did not lie there. Although he did not leak the information that it was Akira who sold those old-world information terminals, he was actually spreading information that he had some connections with a Hunter who could get such a valuable relic. For a merchant like Katsuragi, having a connection to a competent Hunter brought him a lot of benefits. After all, having a mere rumour of such a thing out in the public was enough to pull up his revenue.

Though Akira did not give a straight answer to Katsuragi's questions, he also did not lie there. Even if Katsuragi misunderstood him thinking that

Akira actually got those relics from Higaraka residence ruin and there were still similar relics that he could find there, it would not cause any trouble for him. Not to mention, Akira was not that close to Katsuragi that he would go out of his own way to fix that misunderstanding.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 174, The Gang's Children and Their Side Job

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Translator: **Athena13**

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The next day, Akira went to Higaraka residence ruins yet again. He was sitting on top of his bike as he looked over the surprising current situation of the ruin. To be more precise, he did expect that to happen, but he did not expect it to be this big.

"Yup, there are so many of them today."

Alpha had her usual smile plastered on her face. It was unclear whether she fully expected that to happen or if she simply did not care.

"That's true. There are quite a lot of them today."

That day, many Hunters gathered in that ruin. Some of them brought their vehicles and even huge trucks too. There was even some heavy machinery on-site.

"I bet they're here because of that rumour. But still, didn't expect them to be this many."

Of course, at that point, Akira understood why Alpha made him train in that ruin for these past few days. It was to make sure that those Hunters would think those relics that Akira gathered from the inner part of Kuzushara ruin's Tsubakihara building were originally from Higaraka residence ruin.

The reason why he kept taking a long detour to and from the ruin as well as why he had been doing training to look for relics in that ruin and why he was only selling relics little by little, all of them were for the sake of twisting the rumour in case if the rumour of where Akira got his relics came up.

"I guess these guys will be looking for relics that don't even exist in this place until they decide to give up, huh…"

Akira thought about those guys that kept looking around the place meaninglessly and felt a bit sorry for them. But with that being said, he had no plans to correct that wrong rumour at all. So instead, he mumbled something else as if to make excuses.

"…Getting correct information is really important."

Alpha did not seem to be bothered by that at all as she smiled amusedly and said.

"It's nothing for you to worry about. The ability to gain the correct information is a very important skill for a Hunter and they don't have that, that's all there is to it. Moreover, with this many people looking around, maybe one or two of them will really find some valuable relics."

"Is that so? But this ruin is already exhausted of any valuable relics, right? So like, is that even possible?"

"There might be places that no one has checked yet. When they say that this place is already depleted, it does not mean that there are no longer any valuable relics in this place, it only means that looking for relics in this place isn't worth the trouble. And with this many people here, they might really find something. Also, those guys are carrying high-quality information-gathering devices, so that will also increase the chance for

them to actually find valuable relics. But with that being said, of course, even if some of them find valuable relics, I'm pretty sure that they'll still end up in the red."

"Then how about you, Alpha? Can you easily find that kind of relic in this ruin?"

"I'm sure I've said this before, my detection ability is greatly reduced when I'm outside Kuzusuhara ruin. If you still want to give it a try, you should buy a very expensive information-gathering device first. Though I'm sure you still can't expect too much even if you do so."

"…Hmmm, you're right. I'll think about getting a better information-gathering device."

After he said so, Akira started thinking about something else.

[Now that I think about it, I met Alpha back in Kuzusuhara ruin, and back then she said that I was able to gather those relics from the Tsubakihara building because she made a deal with the AI manager of that building. As I thought, there must be some kind of connection between Alpha and Kuzusuhara ruin…]

Now that he realized it, he also noticed that it should have been obvious from the get-go. But he knew nothing more than that and he felt like Alpha would scold him if he tried to ask her. So Akira decided to push that curiosity to the back of his mind and just shook it off from his mind for now as not to drag him down.

"So then, are we still going to do relic hunting training for today? Looking at this situation, I don't think this is a good time to train here though."

"You're right, let's just head back home for today."

Akira made a U-turn with his bike and headed back to the city. Although some of the Hunters there saw that, it did not stop them from searching the ruin. As a matter of fact, some of them even started looking more diligently since they thought that the rumoured person decided to head back home

because he could not afford to get close to the location where he found those expensive relics with this many Hunters around.

As the rumours spread further, more and more Hunters came to that ruin and it did not seem that it would slow down anytime soon.

When Akira arrived back at Kugamayama city, he went straight to Sheryl's base. He received a text message from Colbert on his way back saying that Colbert was looking to meet him in case he was free and was around. Though judging from that message, it did not seem that Colbert was expecting Akira to really come.

Though he could just ignore it, since he decided to cancel his training in Higaraka residence ruin, Akira had some free time now and by coincidence, he was also somewhere close to Sheryl's base. So Akira decided to visit the base.

In his mind, he had no reason to go to meet Sheryl unless she had business with him and he would not go as far as to readjust his schedule just to go to meet her. He went to Sheryl's base only when he had some free time. For Akira, Sheryl only mattered that much. But lately, that line of thinking had been slightly affected by Sheryl pleading with him. Though he had not realized it yet, there was no mistaking that he would be shocked if he noticed this change.

Akira was guided to a room inside Sheryl's base. Colbert, Revin, Erio, and some of the other children from the gang were already inside that room. Colbert was so surprised when he saw Akira enter the room.

"Akira, didn't expect you to actually come, you know?"

Akira looked slightly offended.

"What are you even talking about? You're the one who asked me to come, didn't you?"

"I did. But you didn't even reply at all, so I thought that you wouldn't come, you know. Well, just calm down for now. It's my loss, you see."

“Your loss?”

Colbert smiled wryly there as he pushed the money on top of the table to Erio’s side. Those were the money that Colbert and Revin bet, and since Akira actually came, Erio and the other children won the bet.

To be honest, Erio also wanted to put his bet on Akira not coming. But when Revin brought up Akira’s relation with Sheryl, people would get suspicious of him and it would damage his position if he also put his bet on Akira not coming. So he ended up putting his bet that Akira would come.

Revin seemed really frustrated. Although it was not a huge amount of money compared to the amount of money that he was regularly earning, for someone who had a debt to pay, losing a bet that he thought he would win still hurt.

Colbert only smiled bitterly at his loss, while Erio and the other children were flustered by the large sum of money, or at least that was the case from their point of view, that they just won.

Akira sighed, he looked even more annoyed.

“I see now, so you guys are betting whether I would really come or not, huh. Don’t tell me that this is the reason why you called me.”

“Of course I won’t be calling you for something this trivial, you know. I’ll explain the rest, just take a seat for now.”

Colbert noticed Akira’s annoyance and tried to calm Akira, who was still unhappy. Nonetheless, Akira still took a sit.

“So then, what is it?”

“I’m just wondering if you can help them if you have some free time.”

Colbert pointed his finger at Erio and the other gang children as he started his explanation. Erio felt a bit awkward there.

For the past few days, Colbert had sought help from Erio and the other children in that gang for a certain job. To be more precise, Colbert made a request to Sheryl and Sheryl was lending Erio and his friends to Colbert.

The job that they were talking about was to find dead Hunters who still had debts. The slum extended across a pretty large area, the battle in Ezont Family's base the other day had left the area filled with dead bodies. Their job was to take a picture of the dead bodies using their information terminal to check if they still have debts left or not. And if they found dead Hunters with debt, they would need to put that dead body inside a body bag and bring them to the creditor companies.

As for those dead bodies with no debt, they would just leave them be. They would not even take the corpse's belongings since not only it would slow them down. It might also put Erio and the other children in needless danger if they did that.

There was an unwritten rule in the slum city that a corpse's belongings belonged to the gang that owned the territory where that dead body was found. But with the Ezont family destroyed, no one was in control of that territory, thus the rule there followed the law of the wasteland.

But with that being said, it was not like they could just take those belongings and bring them back home. It could be seen as Sheryl's gang trying to take over that territory with no owners after the last gang that owned it was destroyed.

Of course, the equipment left behind could be turned into quite a lot of money when gathered, and if they followed the first-come-first-served principle, various gangs would try to be the first to gather those equipment which would then lead to fighting and robbing each other. So in order to prevent that from happening, the gangs were in the middle of a discussion. Anyone who tried to steal a start there would face all the other gangs that were interested in the matter.

Erio and his friends had accepted that job from Colbert to look for dead debtors while trying to keep themselves from harm by not touching the dead bodies' belongings.

After Akira listened to Colbert's explanation up until that point, he suddenly asked Colbert a question.

"So you want me to help them do that, huh? It sounds like too much work and it's not like you need me for that job, right? I'm sure Erio and the other children are enough to do that job, no?"

Colbert shook his head.

"That's true for those dead bodies outside Ezont Family's base, but that's not the case for inside the base. For those dead bodies outside the base, we don't have any trouble as long as we don't get into a fight with the other gangs or the people who live around the area. But when we want to get inside the base, there's a good chance that we have to deal with the other Hunters who are aiming for the loot inside. After all, the quality and the amount of loots left inside that base is on a different level compared to outside the base."

Ezont Family was a huge gang. So of course, they left a lot of valuable items in their warehouses. Not to mention, there were destroyed vehicles, tanks, and powered suits scattered inside the base too. Many were killed in that base from that battle and the equipment that they left were mostly high-quality equipment. All of them could fetch a lot of money from the point of view of slum residents.

So, in short, it was as if an old-world ruin suddenly appeared right next to the slum, and to top it off, that ruin was relatively safer since it was not guarded by monsters. All the equipment that was left scattered inside that base were like relics that were free for the taking. There was no surprise that some Hunters and ex-Hunters immediately made their moves to secure those loot.

"The air in that place is completely different, including the skillset and knowledge needed to avoid fighting there. I would say that place was much closer to an old-world ruin rather than a part of the slum city. We're mostly done with checking the dead bodies outside Ezont Family's base. That's why we're planning to go inside the base next, but it's not safe for Revin

and me to bring Erio and the other children into that base. That's why I'm wondering if you might give us a hand."

"You can just leave the children behind and go there by yourself, no?"

"Well, that's the plan if you won't come. But of course, if we can't bring Erio and the other children, then I can't pay any reward to Sheryl's gang. I'm sure you know that you can't let them keep relying on your money. It's better to get as much money as they could when they have the chance to make sure that they'll be able to be independent of you, don't you think so too? Isn't that why you're training them too, no?"

Akira looked unsure.

"If I help you, then how about my reward?"

"Sorry, but I can only pay you the same amount of money. I'm actually doing this because I'm getting paid by someone else, you see. If you want more, you should discuss it with Sheryl's gang and see if they would share some of the money that they get with you. Basically, you, I, Revin and Sheryl's gang will get the same amount of money for taking the job. You can keep anything that you pick, but just remember not to forget your real job."

Akira 'hmmed' again, Colbert looked slightly surprised there.

For a Hunter like Akira, the money that he could get from that job was nothing more than spare money. If Colbert told Akira in detail how much he would earn from taking that job, there was a good chance Akira would refuse to take that job. But contrary to his expectation, Akira seemed to be seriously considering taking on the job.

Though Colbert did not understand what was going on, it seemed that there was a chance Akira would take that job. So he decided to give a little more push. Although he was not expecting much when he called Akira to come, it would be helpful if Akira would actually come with them.

“Since you came here, it means that you’re free right now, right? You should come with us. If we don’t get real Hunters among us, the other people might look down on Erio and the other children, you know.”

“Real Hunters?”

Akira looked confused, it seemed that he did not understand what Colbert was talking about. Seeing that, Colbert pointed at Erio. Akira also looked at Erio but he still could not understand.

Alpha then jumped in to explain.

“Akira, look closely at them. Although they don’t look exactly like you, don’t you think they look similar?”

Erio and the other children were wearing black attire along with a black coat.

“Now that you mention, that’s kinda true. So, what about it?”

Akira still did not get it, Alpha smiled bitterly as she exasperatedly said.

“…So in short, they’re trying to disguise themselves as you so that other people won’t mess with them.”

Erio and the other children were disguising themselves to be Akira since Akira could not come often ever since he restarted his Hunter job. Fortunately, not many people knew Akira’s face, so from afar, people could easily mistake those children as Akira and that was enough to keep them safe.

Akira finally understood what Colbert was talking about. But even so, he still found it weird. So he then made a serious look as he said.

“Erio, I don’t mind going with you, but, I won’t be protecting you. I’ll do my job properly but I won’t do anything more than that. Since I have nothing else to do, if you’re okay with that, then I don’t mind going.”

“That’s more than enough, thank you very much.”

Although from their conversations it seemed like they asked Akira to come without asking for Sheryl's permission first, it did not seem that Akira was angry about it. So Erio sighed in relief.

__*__*__*__

Back in Yatusbayashi clinic, Yatsubayashi was making a troubled face in his clinic room.

"Another failure, huh. Wait, not really, it's not a complete failure."

The display device in front of him showed the video of Tiol escaping his experiment room. Tiol ate his restrains to free himself, walked slowly towards the door, and tried pushing the wall with his left hand.

After that, suddenly, something exploded, leaving a big hole in that wall. Though his left arm was blown off too, Tiol did not seem to be bothered at all as he left the room through that hole.

Yatsubayashi watched that video multiple times, zooming and replaying some parts of the video to check it closely.

[If my guess is correct, it seems that his gunpowder producing organ is working fine. Did he produce the gunpowder from the restrain that he ate? I used robust restrains that is used to restrain people with enhanced body. It's not the same as eating a fork, so how exactly did he do that…?]

Yatsubayashi took some time making various guesses while looking at that video. After he gathered his thoughts, he finally stopped the video and changed into a map of the lower district. There were red dots displayed on that map.

[The trackers are working as they should. But the bomb that I planted in his head would not explode. Did the nanomachine that reached his brain also dismantle the bomb? Or is it that he dismantled the trigger? I have no idea at all. I do want to check it, but it doesn't seem that he'll return back anytime soon. He even tried to escape. I'm not sure if he still has any shred

of reasoning left, but it did not seem like he's going back to Sheryl's base either. It seems that he's just roaming around the same place.]

Yatsubayashi mumbled.

"Tiol-kun, what are you exactly doing there?"

Tiol's tracking device was showing that he was roaming around the same area that was not too far from the slum since yesterday.

__*__*__*__

Akira finished his preparation and headed to Ezont Family's base. The garden of the base was still laden with the leftover of the battles from the other day, except for a small change.

Akira looked slightly surprised as he saw the scene in front of him. Colbert noticed that Akira had a sharp stern look as if he was looking at his enemies.

"Akira, what's wrong?"

"No, it's just that I don't see the tanks and the powered suits from that battle."

During the battle, the Ezont family and Haurias sent out their powered suits. When Akira escaped that place, it was still filled with destroyed powered suits and tanks. But they were nowhere to be seen now.

Colbert sighed in relief.

"Don't scare me like that. Of course, people took them away first since they can be exchanged for money."

"People who?"

"Maybe one of those Hunters. I bet they took them away even if they had to rent some heavy machinery. I heard that they even fought against each other over the loot, you know. Well, it only took a few days for them to carry

everything away, so I’m sure things have calmed down by now. That’s also the reason why I can bring myself here. After all, I would hate to get involved fighting over the loot.”

Akira nodded, he was amazed at how people actually did carry all of those big and heavy wreckages out from that place.

Colbert looked at the nervous Erio and the other children and warned them.

“We’ll be searching this place now, but let me remind you this. Don’t shoot without our permission and refrain from even grabbing your rifles. It might cause a fight. Got it?”

“Y-Yes!”

“Alright then, let’s go.”

They then entered the base and started checking the dead bodies.

They continued their work. Akira, Colbert, and Revin searched for the dead bodies using their information-gathering device. Erio and the other children then checked those dead bodies. If any of them had any outstanding debts, they were put in a body bag and carried outside to the people from the credit companies who were waiting not too far outside the base.

Erio and the other children were already used to seeing dead bodies, but couldn’t hold well when they looked at the badly dismembered corpses. Every time they saw a mutilated corpse, they could not help but wince.

“Say, Erio. Akira-san was here, right?”

“Yeah, I heard that he came here to rescue boss. Though I don’t know the details, I heard that he fought pretty fiercely.”

“So in short, some of these corpses might be the ones that Akira-san killed, right?”

“Probably, yes. What’s wrong with that?”

“…No, it’s just that, we’re borrowing these rifles from that Akira-san right now, right? When I think that these rifles are powerful enough to create these dead bodies, it’s just that, you know, carrying them around like this is pretty scary.”

Akira lent his CWH anti-material rifle, DVTS minigun, and A4WM automatic grenade launcher to Erio and the other children. If Akira was carrying all of those alone, it would definitely make him stick out from the rest and render the other children who were disguising as him useless.

Although those rifles were pretty heavy, Erio and the other children at least figured how to carry them thanks to the exoskeletons that they were wearing. Naturally, they wore those because they thought that it would be hard for them to carry the cyborg corpses. So they had decided to get some exoskeletons from Katsuragi beforehand.

Hunters regarded exoskeletons as something inferior to augmented suits. After all, it was not designed for high-speed manoeuvre during combat. At most, it was only used for carrying heavy goods. Because of that, they were sold at a relatively cheap price and Sheryl’s gang was able to buy multiple of them.

Erio made a face saying that he could understand the other boy’s feelings.

“Those are anti-monster rifles for Hunters. I guess this is what would happen when they’re used against normal humans.”

“To be honest, I always thought that we could explore the old-world ruins one day if we keep taking that training from Akira-san. But it’s filled with monsters that we can’t defeat unless we have these kinds of rifles, right? So like, I can’t be so sure anymore now…”

The young boy sighed and looked discouraged. Erio tried to cheer him up with a light smile.

“Shouldn’t it be fine if we just go to the ruins with less danger?”

“You might be right, but where exactly?”

“Like Higaraka residence ruin, for example. It’s already pretty deserted and there are not that many monsters there…”

Erio suddenly stopped there, the young boy frowned and found it weird. Erio remembered the last time they accompanied Akira to Higaraka residence ruin, they were attacked by a swarm of monsters.

Erio then said as if to convince himself.

“…No, that was a special case. Normally, something like that would not happen. Not to mention, there are those general-purpose requests for new Hunters too. It should be alright if we start from those relatively easy Hunter jobs, and then we can gather better equipment from there. That Revin guy did say that it’s much easier to explore dangerous ruins when we have new and better equipment after all…”

“Wait, isn’t that guy in big trouble from the debt that he’s racking from his equipment and ammo?”

“Aah, but Akira-san and Colbert-san are not having trouble with debt, right?”

“If I’m not mistaken, Colbert-san had both of his hands eaten by monsters and Akira-san once got sent to the hospital after almost getting killed though. Something like he had to pay 60 million Aurum for the treatment…”

They went silent. Although they had big dreams of becoming Hunters, when they thought about the Hunters around them, it reminded them of things that they did not want to go through as they sighed almost simultaneously.

Although the other children looked discouraged, Erio then said in a good mood as if it did not affect him at all.

“I won’t give up though. I’ll get stronger, earn a lot of money, rent a house, and live with Alicia.”

The other boys smiled wryly and looked at him with a slight mockery.

“So this is the power of a guy with a girlfriend, huh? I want one too.”

Erio and the other children tried to shoo the dark mood there with silly talks as they continued their job.

Silavin: Isn’t that just normal? I mean… even without a girlfriend, you would want what is best for yourself no?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 175, The Mansion's Monster

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Akira and his companion finished checking the corpses outside the mansion, so they moved to check the corpses inside. Since no one took care of the corpses, the mansion was filled with them from the last battle. The floor, as well as the walls and the ceilings, was still dyed red with blood.

Akira and the other Hunters felt nothing at all when they were welcomed with such a scene as they stepped into the mansion. But that was not the case for Erio and the other non-hunters, they looked obviously distraught.

A short check was enough for them to find a room filled with dead bodies inside that mansion. The people who came beforehand had no interest except for the loot, so they just piled the corpses in one place to clear the way for them. Colbert decided to start working in that room.

As one of the many people who were responsible for that, Akira, did expect to find something like this. But he also noticed something that he did not understand when he saw all the corpses there. Alpha noticed it.

"Akira, what's wrong? If you regret fighting in that battle, it would be great if you can hold yourself back from doing something like that next time."

“No, that’s not the problem. I just thought with all of these corpses and blood, this place doesn’t smell like blood at all.”

“Oh, about that, huh. There are reasons for that, you see. The cyborg, for example, doesn’t rot even after they die. While the medicines that they use sometimes also contained an anti-rot drug. It is also said that the colourless mist of the eastern district prevents the smell from spreading. Well, it’s basically the same reason as to why the corpses out there in the wasteland don’t smell.”

“So that’s the reason, huh?”

“Although most of them are in a bad shape, they’re basically the leftover after that battle. Fortunately, most of them still retain their original shape, it should at least help Erio and the other children to identify those corpses.”

“Now that you mention it, that is kind of true.”

Akira nodded as he understood what Alpha was saying. After that, he immediately lost interest in that subject. Although there were other things that were out of place, he did not notice any of those.

While Erio and the other children were checking the corpses, Revin was checking the equipment those dead corpses left behind.

It did not matter if it was a powerful rifle, or if it was mostly destroyed, it was nothing more than wreckage. Of course, Revin could fix them, but its worth would still be greatly lowered. As for the augmented suits, although they were expensive, most of them were readjusted for personal use. So it would be worthless to resell them. Not to mention that he would need a good connection for selling them too, otherwise, he would not be able to sell them at a good price, and to top it off, taking them off from the corpses were too much of a hassle.

That was why Revin was separating the augmented suits from the rifles that were easier to check if they were badly damaged or not. Thus easier to predict how much money they could fetch from selling them. Colbert, who noticed him, looked sternly at him.

“Revin. Didn’t I tell you that you’re free from doing that as long as you don’t forget the real reason why we are here?”

“Don’t worry. With this many corpses around, we’ll have to wait for a bit until Erio and the other children finish checking all of them. I’m just using the waiting time for something more productive here.”

“If you have free time, you should help them in checking the corpses or help to keep eyes on the surroundings.”

“Don’t worry, I’m doing that too.”

Although Revin was answering lightly, he was still sorting the loot with a rather serious face. Since these were not old-world relics, they had no obligation to bring them to Katsuragi. Furthermore, he did not have to spend bullets to gather them. He needed to get money from wherever he could in order to repay his debt.

Colbert also knew Revin’s situation. Because of that, he held himself back from saying anything more after letting out a big sigh.

Akira was watching the surroundings when a question came up in his mind.

“Colbert, I feel like we already found and carried quite a lot of bodies, are they really that many?”

“Hm? Well, it’s not that many if we’re talking about the debtors for the company that paid me. But the boss of the company, Tomejima, seems to have discussed it with the other companies to share information. So in short, we’re also searching for the debtors of those companies too. That’s why there are a lot of them. Also, there are not that many people who are interested in doing this job.”

“Is that so? Why is that?”

“I don’t really know the details, but the recent rumour is that someone found pretty expensive relics from a rather unexpected ruin. So I’m sure they are more interested in that rumour.”

Of course, in the case of Colbert, he still had not completely recovered from the trauma after both of his hands were eaten by monsters during an expedition, that was why he was not interested in that rumour. As for Revin, he could not go hunting for relics because of the deal he had with Katsuragi.

“…I see…”

Akira looked away and just stopped their conversation there.

Colbert noticed it, but he did not dig too deep. He believed that it was understandable for a Hunter like Akira to at least have some interest in such a rumour.

Akira suddenly looked at the door into the room. Colbert followed suit and saw two men enter the room. Revin stopped sorting the loot the moment he noticed them.

Those guys walked toward Akira and Colbert and casually said to Colbert.

“Well now, isn’t it Colbert? What a coincidence meeting you here.”

Colbert lightly laughed.

“Peppa, huh? Why are you here?”

“Nah, I just came to say hello since I heard that you’re here. Moreover…”

Peppa looked at Akira, Erio, and the other children as if to evaluate them before lightly laughing.

“I see that you’ve really splendidly fallen now, to think that you’re earning money by taking these brats with you. You’ve really stopped being a Hunter, huh. But like, isn’t it hard living without hunting for relics?”

“I can say the same to you too. Seeing you here means that you have nothing better to do, right? Or is that you’re here to scavenge the dead Hunters? Well, for a Hunter like you who can’t get any good relic even when you get into the ruin, I guess it’s not a wrong course of action though.”

“You bastard…”

After that short exchange, Colbert was still calm like usual, while Peppa looked slightly offended.

The guy who came with Peppa, Bosch, interjected and stopped Peppa.

“Peppa, cut it out.”

Peppa clicked his tongue and stopped prodding Colbert. Colbert snorted and looked exasperatedly at Bosch.

“Bosch, you should keep him properly under your leash, isn’t that your job?”

Bosch lightly smiled, it was an honest smile for his old friend.

“Don’t say that. It was your job in the first place, wasn’t it? I’m already giving it my best, you know?”

“Humph, though that might be true, that is your job now. So I have nothing to do with that. I know that we’re acquaintances, but you should stop him from picking a fight like that. It’s dangerous.”

Colbert and Bosch had a friendly air around them.

“So then, Colbert, what are you doing here? Don’t tell me that you’re here to pick up the loot from these corpses.”

Bosch caught Revin who was sorting the loot as if there was nothing to worry about. Peppa looked mockingly at Revin.

“I’m here to search for dead debtors. These other guys are here to help me out… And also, just leave that guy alone. He’s in big trouble from debts, you see. As someone who is also here to keep my eyes on him, I can’t really bring myself to tell him to stop, you know?”

After Colbert said that, Bosch could not help but frown.

“You’re still doing work for those creditor companies, huh?”

“…Well, I have my reasons too.”

“I know it’s not my place to say this, but if you get yourself too comfortable working inside the city, you might not be able to return back to doing Hunter job, you know? You already have both of your arms healed. Honestly speaking, I think it’s a good idea if you go hunting for relics once in a while as a rehabilitation.”

“I know…”

Colbert was a little bummed from that rather harsh but indeed true advice from his friend.

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Tiol was munching the corpses inside a room. He ate the cyborg bodies whole together with their mechanical parts. He easily lifted the mechanical body up with his left hand and put them inside his mouth.

His left hand was no longer of a human hand. To be more precise, a huge gun grew out from his left shoulder. As he ate more and more cyborgs, the gun on his shoulder grew longer and bigger. Eventually, once it grew out into a complete rifle, it detached from his shoulder and fell to the ground.

There were already other parts on the ground. Small arms were growing out from some of those parts and those arms suddenly started moving. They were dragging themselves toward each other and reassembled themselves into something that looked like an autonomous turret monster.

The newly made turret walked away and lined up beside the other autonomous turrets that were made before it. There were already a few dozen autonomous turrets lined up inside that room.

Tiol, who was eating metals without saying anything, suddenly stopped and looked away. Although he was looking in the direction of a pile of dead

cyborgs, he was actually able to see past that pile and through the wall behind it too.

He then turned at the small mechanical monsters in front of him as if he was giving them a command. After that, all of the small mechanical monsters immediately sprung into action. They removed the wreckages blocking the entrance to that room and left the room.

Tiol only silently watched the small mechanical monsters leave the room. Once all of them were out, he started eating the Hunter corpses and their equipment again.

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Akira was keeping his eyes on his surroundings which doubled as training for him while talking with Alpha. But when he noticed a small change in his information-gathering device, his expression immediately turned stern as he shifted his focus to check that signal more closely.

But before he could do that, Alpha suddenly warned him.

“Akira, there are monsters.”

“Monsters? Not Hunters?”

“Either that or it’s a group of non-human cyborgs that are moving in an organized manner. It’s up to you to think which one it is.”

“Alright, I’ll go and get back my rifles from Erio and the other children.”

“There’s no need to do that. Since we have them here, how about we get them to fight too? After all, it’s not like you’re here to protect them anyway.”

“Are they going to be okay?”

Akira was a bit surprised by that suggestion from Alpha, but she replied with a smile that was filled with confidence.

“I’ll take command, so it’ll be okay. Meanwhile, you should try to face them without my support as a training.”

“Roger that!”

Akira reloaded armour piercing ammo into his AAH and A2D assault rifles.

Erio and the children were using the same goggles that they used for training. The goggles itself was nothing special, but even so, it could be used to communicate with each other in short-range. That was why they were also using those goggles outside of training.

Instructions suddenly appeared on the displays of those goggles in a similar manner as if when they were in the middle of that training. Erio and the other children were surprised and looked at Akira the moment they noticed those instructions. But when they saw Akira hurriedly readying his rifle and repositioning himself, they also flusteredly started moving out following the instructions on their goggles.

Colbert noticed that change and readied his rifle. He then looked at Akira with a stern face and threw a question at him.

“What’s going on?”

“Monsters. Get ready.”

Colbert, Bosch, and Peppa immediately checked their information-gathering device, but their devices did not show anything suspicious. But even so, Colbert, who knew Akira well, immediately prepared himself to face the incoming monsters. Of course, Bosch and Peppa could not hide their confusion. Peppa looked at Colbert with obvious doubt.

“Don’t tell me that you believe that brat.”

“You do you. Don’t go complaining about other’s decisions just because you can’t make your own.”

Peppa clicked his tongue and repositioned himself too. Bosch smiled bitterly and followed suit. It was not like both of them believed in Akira,

but they believed in Colbert who believed in Akira.

Colbert noticed that Revin was still sorting loot and shouted at him.

“Revin!! How long are you going to keep doing that? Get yourself ready!!”

Revin sighed annoyedly.

“Why in the world are there monsters in this place? I only came here to help you since I thought that I would be able to earn some money without spending any bullets, you know?”

“In that case, feel free to fight those monsters with your fist. I know that you’re using an augmented suit, right? You should be at least stronger than normal humans.”

“Dammit! If I end up in red again because of this, then there will be no meaning in coming here.”

Revin mumbled as he also got himself ready.

Everyone there had repositioned themselves to welcome the incoming monsters. They were waiting beside the big holes on the walls and the door to that room to set up an ambush for those monsters.

Erio and the other children were posted on defensive places, they were waiting with bated breath. They were using the wreckage around them to help them support the rifles that they borrowed from Akira while waiting for Colbert’s signal to start firing.

Erio, who was carrying Akira’s DVTS minigun, could see the monsters crawling behind the covers in his goggle’s display. When an instruction to blow them away together with their covers came up, he quickly pulled the trigger. The repeating sound of the DVTS minigun echoed through the room.

The DVTS minigun unleashed a barrage of bullets that easily pierced through the weak covers and demolished the mechanical monsters hiding behind them. Since it was equipped with a part to help fix it to the bike’s

arm, even Erio who was not using an augmented suit could withstand the kickback and control the minigun to some extent.

But the overwhelming firepower that was eradicating the monsters could not eradicate the fear of a battle. Erio gritted his teeth and pushed his fear to the back of his mind as he continued cleaning the rest of the monsters.

As for those who did not have enough firepower, Alpha gave them instructions to help them compensate their firepower with the type or the amount of ammo that they used. Thanks to that, Erio and the other children were somehow able to maintain the upper hand.

Akira was facing monsters not too far away from Erio and his friends. Since it was also training for him, he had to guess the monsters' weak points and aimed carefully at those points without Alpha's support nor his time compression.

Akira slightly peeked out from the room's door and shot at the small monsters that looked like a small self-moving portable armour plating. It did not take that many bullets to stop them from moving. But he could not tell if that was enough to actually kill the monster, so he made sure to put in a few more bullets until its armour was riddled with holes and its control unit was obviously destroyed.

Another monster suddenly jumped aside from behind the monster that he just turned into a pile of wreckage and shot at him. Akira pulled back and evaded that shot without any trouble. Although his coat could withstand a few shots, he decided to fight as if he did not have that protection since it was training.

Akira had the upper hand although only slightly. He also understood that if he had Alpha's support, he would have been able to clear up those monsters in no time.

Although he felt that he was getting better than his past self, he also felt his strength was still lacking.

When Akira kept his eyes on the wreckage that the monsters used as a cover, the equipment on his head scanned for the enemy's movement and worked together with his information-gathering device to predict the enemy's position behind that wreckage. Thanks to that, he was able to see the prediction of where the enemies were located on the display of his headgear.

Akira confirmed that the monsters were not aiming at him, so he quickly jumped out from his cover and released some shots at those monsters. The monsters that got shot bent and finally stopped moving after a few shots.

The information-gathering device that he was using at the moment was the information-gathering device that came as a set with his expensive augmented suit, because of that, it was a rather high-quality information-gathering device. Its detection sensitivity was more or less as good as Alpha's detection ability, but of course, its quality and accuracy also depended on how close those monsters were to him.

Every time Akira gained a new skill, or knowledge, or pieces of equipment, it reminded him of how abnormal Alpha was. And that was also the case this time.

But he reminded himself that he was in the middle of a battle, so he pushed anything unnecessary off his mind and shifted his focus to a question that he had about the current situation.

"Alpha, where are those monsters coming from? These monsters are not the usual monsters that one can find around the city, right?"

"You're right. And it's unlikely for these monsters to have come from the wasteland too. If I have to make a guess, maybe one of these monsters that has a self-building feature got inside the mansion and used the wreckages scattered around this place to replicate itself."

Akira frowned.

"…Alpha. This is included in your support, though it might not be a question that I should ask during training, at least tell me how many of them

are there. I have no plans to keep fighting these monsters like this if they're still replicating themselves somewhere."

"Don't worry, there are not that many of them out there and I don't detect any reinforcement either. In the first place, if the situation here gets dangerous, I'll have you escape from this place."

"I see. Glad to hear that."

Akira looked relieved, so he shifted his focus back to fighting.

Colbert and the other Hunters were fighting the monsters in another place. Although the monsters there were strong enough to pose danger to new Hunters, Colbert and his friends were no new Hunters. Not to mention, one of them even took debt to get better equipment, so they had no trouble fighting those monsters.

Peppa glanced at Akira and the other children during that fight and was flabbergasted. He thought that those children were only useful for carrying the corpses, but they were performing pretty well during the battle.

"Colbert, what the heck is with those brats?"

"They're from a gang that I have some connections with."

"Gang? A Hunter gang? I know that Drankam is putting more incentive for young Hunters, but I haven't heard of any other gang doing the same though?"

"Nope, it's just a gang from the slum."

Peppa took another look at Akira and the other children there. Erio and his friends were fighting following Alpha's instruction, so they were moving around pretty well. As for Akira, he was putting some restrictions on himself since he was taking that battle as training, so he was moving relatively worse than usual. Because of that, Akira seemed to be performing as well as Erio and the other children, at most, Akira only seemed to be

slightly stronger than the other children. Or at least, it was hard to believe that he raided Ezont Family's base all alone just the other day.

"Don't tell me that you're training these children to make sure that your skill won't rust even if you don't go to the old-world ruin?"

"Save that for later, we're in the middle of a fight right now. You're taking this too lightly, you know. Don't tell me that you've been only going to safe ruin since I left and now you're back to your old sloppy way of thinking?"

"Heh, look at you running your mouth like that."

Peppa laughed at Colbert's light jab as he started fighting harder to show off his skill to Colbert. He shot down and turned multiple monsters into scrap metals in a short time. Seeing that, Colbert just smiled while providing Peppa with support fire.

They maintained the upper hand during that fight and it did not take long for them to defeat all the incoming monsters.

Erio and the other children saw a notice saying that the battle was over on their goggles, after that, all the other extra information on their displays immediately vanished. They looked so relieved after they were finally released from the gripping nervousness during that battle. Some of them sighed in relief, some of them lightly laughed, some of them cheered, while some of them sat on the ground, tired.

Erio also sighed in relief while also feeling happy that it had ended. As he was basking in the happiness at the fact that he had survived and the sense of self-confidence since he was able to perform well during that fight, his eyes wandered to Colbert and Akira.

Akira was perfectly calm. Colbert and his friends were also calm. They looked as if they just finished taking care of something trivial. Revin even had already returned to sorting the loot. Watching it reminded Erio of the differences between the Hunters and the non-Hunters there, all the excitement that welled up inside him immediately got shot down.

“…Well, it is still a win.”

The fact still held that he had participated in that fight as well. Erio told himself so as he nodded.

Colbert checked the destroyed monsters.

“They are not the security drones of this mansion, right? The heck are these monsters? We’re here just to check the corpses, you know. No one told me that we have to fight these… things… Wait, by the way, Bosch, why are you here? You’re not here for looting the corpses, right?”

“Yeah, we’re here because of a request to check this place. Depending on our report, the City Management might decide to burn this place up.”

A big mansion might be turned into a nest for monsters, not to mention that the bodies inside it provide food for those monsters, thus the City Management could not just leave that mansion be. They sent requests to check the area to decide whether they had to send people to clean the place up themselves or they could trust the resident around it to take care of that place.

Bosch sighed.

“Although it’s an easy job where we just need to look around, it would be bad if we don’t do our job properly. Colbert, if you have some free time, you should help us too.”

“Nah, we are leaving. It’s not a place for these children to loiter around. Not to mention, no one told us we’re going to fight monsters just for checking the corpses.”

“I see. Well then, we’ll go back to our job too… Ah, by the way, because of that request, we’re also taking that general monster-hunting request too. How about you?”

“Nope.”

“I see, which means that we’re the only one who will get money from killing those monsters, huh? If you don’t like that, give me your Hunter code later. I’ll put your name in that general monster-hunting request too. If you get nothing for the rest of the day today, then it means that all the rewards will be sent to us. Later then, Peppa! Let’s go!”

Bosch called Peppa as he stood up and left. Peppa followed behind him while sending an unfriendly gaze at Colbert.

“Later then, former Hunter! If you can fight that well, you should get yourself back out there.”

Seeing Peppa did not forget to leave a bad message before leaving, Colbert just smiled bitterly at him.

Akira who saw that exchange then casually said.

“Thought this might be too late, acquaintances?”

“Yeah, we once belonged to the same Hunter team. Well, I did leave that team, after all, I guess it’s no surprise that they don’t like me. But that’s all there is to it. Well now, let’s go back home… Revin!! We’re leaving!! I don’t care if you want to stay here, but just so you know, we won’t wait for you, alright?!”

Revin stopped sorting the loot and flusteredly packed the loot he chose. Erio and the other children also flusteredly got themselves ready to leave that place.

While on the other side of the mansion, Tiol suddenly stopped eating and stared at the wall. To be more precise, he was looking in the direction where Akira fought the monsters he sent. Tiol could see past the walls and look at the scene that was unseeable with normal eyes.

A weird language that was not used by humans appeared on Tiol’s augmented vision. It said ‘total annihilation’, ‘overwhelming difference in firepower’, and ‘pulling back was advised’. Tiol understood that as his expression turned to displeasure.

Tiol then turned and looked in a different direction. He then aimed his left hand that was turned into a big sized rifle at that wall. A loud bang echoed as he released a shot that tore down multiple layers of walls. It even went all the way outside the mansion.

Tiol went through that hole and left the mansion. He then ran through the garden and vanished into the wasteland.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 176, The Sphere Of Understanding

Index

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Akira was enjoying the bath back in his house. Usually, he would lean back on his bathtub to let his soul melt into the warm water, but that was not the case that day.

In his augmented view, Akira was seeing the information of multiple rifles floating in front of him. He was basically browsing the rifles that he could buy with 1 billion Aurum. Shizuka sent the list of the rifles that she recommended and all the additional data of those rifles was gathered by Alpha through the network based on the list from Shizuka.

Each rifle had an extra explanation beside it containing a small annotation that Shizuka added for each rifle, the ammo type compatible with that rifle, and the price of each rifle written in big characters…

Akira stared at that information and hummed.

"…They are all equally expensive."

Alpha, just like usual, was also taking a bath together with Akira, then said.

“That’s a given. Considering how many features each rifle has, not to mention that the small market demand preventing corporations from mass producing them. In the first place, when you go for expensive but better rifles, it’s normal for their cost-performance ratio to get worse.”

“In that case, if I focus more on the cost-performance ratio instead, what kind of rifle can I get?”

“The first rifle that comes into mind would be the AAH assault rifle. That rifle is basically mass-produced in the eastern district after all, so its price is incredibly cheap considering its performance. You were able to buy it when you were just a novice Hunter and it has served you very well up until now, no?”

“Now that you mention it, that’s kinda true. It’s indeed a cheap yet very useful rifle. I guess it’s no surprise there is a big fanbase for that rifle.”

Akira then shook that off from his mind and continued browsing the rifles. But to be honest, all the available options in front of him prevented him from making any meaningful progress. Although the price alone was enough to make him hesitate, Shizuka also added a note listing the summed up prices of the individual rifles that basically had the equal amount of functions of each multi-type rifle that he was browsing.

The reason why Akira was doing that by himself was because Alpha reminded him that being able to choose suitable equipment based on his ability was one of the important skills for a Hunter. But with all the available information flooding his brain, Akira kept ‘hmming‘ without being able to make any decision.

Alpha suddenly stood up, the water droplets that ran down her silky skin only served to enhance her already beautiful body. She then took a few steps and grabbed one of the rifles, or at least the image of it, that was floating in the air. That big gun, which was shown there as a price comparison for the other guns, looked extremely heavy. But since both Alpha and that gun were nothing more than images, mass had nothing to do with both of them.

Alpha, who was standing naked showing off her beautiful body, did not suit the excessively big gun that she was carrying. But she then started taking aiming stances as if to show some examples to Akira.

“For example, what do you think about this gun, Akira?”

Just like usual, Akira was not bothered by her naked body. Heck, he was not even tempted to look at her naked body as he was focused on the gun that she was carrying, evaluating it.

“That’s out of the question, of course, I won’t choose that gun. Even putting the price aside, I still would not choose that gun. Though it does look powerful, it looks super heavy. I know I have an augmented suit that would help me carry that gun, but still, it’ll definitely impede my mobility. I feel like it would crush me the moment my augmented suit runs out of energy.”

“If you’re worried about the weight, this is actually pretty light, you know. It’s made of a high-quality metallic nanomaterial that is durable but light. Moreover, it would automatically expand its force-field the moment it shoots to reduce the kickback. So its weight should not give you any trouble.”

“Ohhh, it even has that kind of feature, huh? But that would mean it’ll consume energy packs on top of its original ammo, right?”

“The higher the firepower, the stronger its kickback. So a lot of powerful guns are actually consuming energy packs in order to soften their kickbacks, you know.”

“Hooo.”

Akira nodded, he looked simply amazed by that gun, but even so, he then still shook his head and said.

“…Even if that’s the case, the answer will still be a no. It’s too big for me to carry around and I don’t think I can take that gun with me through narrow passages in the ruins. Or more like, I want to buy a multi-type gun to reduce

the number of rifles that I’m carrying, so buying that big gun will defeat the purpose as to why I’m looking for a multi-type gun in the first place.”

Alpha smiled, nodded, and then threw that gun away. The gun flew in the air for a few seconds in a beautiful arc before disintegrating.

“Yep, that’s basically how you do it. You should start by eliminating the rifles that you obviously won’t choose. You can’t make any progress if you just keep ‘hmming’ there without making any decision, right?”

“Hm, you’re right, I’ll do that.”

Akira started discarding the options that he obviously would never take just like Alpha suggested him. When he already discarded about 90% of his options, Shizuka suddenly called him. So he asked Alpha to let him pick the call through her.

“Akira speaking.”

“It’s Shizuka, do you have some time?”

“Sure, what is it?”

Akira once picked a call from Shizuka when he was in the middle of a tense negotiation with Shijima, so him being inside the bath right now did not stop him from picking up that call.

Shizuka was calling Akira regarding the relics that Akira brought to her the other day, basically, about selling the lady’s underwear old-world relics. Shizuka did not forget to put emphasis on how she was able to get very good deals thanks to Elena and Sara’s help.

“So then, I ended up making deals with multiple traders. But some of them are offering 50% more money if you would tell them where you got those relics, so, what’s your plan here?”

“I see, I’m sorry but I can’t give any information regarding that. Even if they’re offering to buy the relics for 100 times the price, I still can’t tell them that information.”

“I see, alright then.”

Akira sounded a bit apologetic when he said that, so Shizuka also immediately stopped pursuing that subject. But because of that, Akira found it a bit weird.

“Eh? Is that really okay? I’m pretty sure those traders will keep pestering you though…”

“Don’t worry, I’m a merchant too, you see. So I have to prioritize my own customer.”

Akira smiled faintly.

“Thank you very much. But still, I didn’t expect them to offer an extra 50% just for telling them where I got those relics. Is it normal for this kind of information to be expensive?”

Akira thought that it was for the case where there were other Hunters who were looking for information where those relics come from, so those traders are offering an extra 50% in place of the information fee for buying that information. But Shizuka replied with something that he did not expect.

“It might be to allow them to sell those relics at a higher price, something like a brand-fee.”

“Brand-fee?”

“Yup. Brand-fee, basically they can reel up the price of a high-quality article by putting a brand on that article. After all, depending on the brand, even the same kind of article can have a completely different prices range. If they know where those relics come from, they can investigate which old-world company produced them or which old-world company sold them. And if it’s from a popular company, more people would want to buy it with a higher price tag.”

Akira was listening closely to Shizuka’s explanation with full of interest. It was a different aspect of selling relics compared to the explanation that he

heard from Katsuragi.

“And to top it off, there are people who sell imitations of this kind of relic, you see. There are many ways Hunters can do that, one of them is to make an imitation using the current era’s technology, put it in the ruin, get Hunters to ‘find’ them as an old-world relic in that ruin, and then get a normal trading company connected to the perpetrator to buy it and resell it as an old-world relic.”

Akira then thought, no one would be crazy enough to go all the way to the Tsubakihara building to place fake relics, but it would not be strange for someone to do that in Higaraka Residence ruin. And right now, Higaraka residence ruin was flooded with Hunters. Although Akira and Alpha were the triggers of the rumour that caused it, there was also a good chance someone actually intentionally spread that rumour even more.

“But like, it should not take that long for those fake relics to be found out, right? After all, the reason why old-world relics are valuable is because they’re created using some amazing technology that we can’t replicate yet even now, no?”

“That depends on the type of the relic. Of course, it would be difficult to fake high-tech mechanical relics, but that’s not exactly the case for fabrics. Not to mention, if the Hunters demand to make the deal on-site, merchants can only make a relatively cheap offer based on a short inspection, so a fake relic with a good appearance should be enough to trick those merchants. In the first place, it’s not an easy thing to decide the value of relics even for those specialists. So if they know where those relics come from, they can easily decide whether those relics are fake or not without the need of inspecting those relics first. After all, relic inspections are not free, you know.”

Akira smiled bitterly thinking that there might be some Hunters who brought back fake relics from the Higaraka residence ruin.

“What can I say… It seems that selling relic is not that simple, huh?”

“Yup, that’s why people tend to get suspicious when they make deals regarding relics. I’m sure there would be people who will get suspicious of you too. So when that happens, just keep calm and handle it calmly, okay?”

“Okay, I’ll be careful.”

“Well, we ended up talking longer than I planned, so yep, later then.”

Akira dipped back to his bathtub and lightly sighed.

“…There are a lot of things that I still don’t know out there, huh. Alpha, to be honest, did I ever bring back fake relics?”

“Not really, although, it depends on how you define fake relics.”

“Define?”

“For example, let’s say that someone from the old-world era made a fake article, will it make that article a fake relic according to this era or not? Or is it solely decided based on whether it’s made during the old-world era? Which in that case the fake article from the old-world era would be a not-fake relic in this era. So yep, it’s not that simple.”

“I see, you’re right about that. It really is not that simple, huh.”

Akira kept thinking about the definition of fake relics while enjoying the bath, but it did not take that long before that thought dissipated into the warm water too.

⎯*⎯*⎯*⎯

Inside a slightly high-class clothing store located in the Kugamayama lower district, Kashua, the manager of the store where Sheryl once shopped in the past, lightly sighed.

That other day when a Hunter with enough money requested a refit for an old-world dress, effectively throwing its value as an old-world relic, came to her shop, her little sister who was talented in refitting dresses completed that request with amazing results. Thus, there was no surprise that Kashua

was expecting that story to spread around and lure in other customers with at least that much money as that particular Hunter. So in order to prepare her store for it, she decided to order some high-quality goods. But unfortunately, that type of said customers never appeared.

Although it did not exactly put her book in red, the high-quality articles stuffed back in the warehouse were putting some pressure on her. Fortunately, Kashua could get someone to buy them bit by bit thanks to her talent as a seller, but it would take some time before she could sell all of them.

Kashua then mumbled.

“What a blunder…”

Sheryl and Akira praised the refitted dress that much, so although Kashua did not get more customers after that, she could at least expect Akira and Sheryl to come there again sooner or later. Or at least, that was what she had thought, but unfortunately, that was not the case too. Kashua was in the middle of lamenting her current situation that could not be further off from her expectation.

Suddenly, someone entered the store. The bell fixed on the store’s door rang to let her know that she got some customers. Kashua immediately changed her expression back to her usual seller’s smile and headed to the door to welcome her customers.

They were several young boys and girls led by a lady. The lady did not seem to have any trouble with her dress, while the young boys were donning suits that looked like augmented suits. But the young girls were using rather shabby dresses, or at least, that was the case from Kashua’s point of view.

Looking at that, Kashua was not sure whether to ask them to leave or not, but the moment she noticed some familiar faces among those young girls and boys, she could not help but raise her eyebrows. She then immediately replaced her surprised face with a big smile as she welcomed them.

“Welcome! Welcome! Thank you very much for visiting our store!!”

They were Akira and Sheryl’s gang.

Starting from Sheryl, Alicia, and the other officers, the girls from Sheryl’s gang started to look around the store. A few of them were looking really nervous, the rest, excited. After all, it was a rather high-class store that some children from the slum would normally never be able to visit. They had their eyes sparkle with excitement from the dresses lined up inside the store that they never even dreamt of using. The only girl who was taking it calmly was Sheryl.

While not too far from them, Akira was sitting together with the other boys from the gang on the tables provided inside that store. Viola, who was looking around the store with the other girls until now came to that table and sat next to Akira.

“Well, this place is pretty good for a store in the lower district. I didn’t expect you to know a store like this.”

“It’s not like I’m that knowledgeable about the stores around this place, I just picked this store since it had some good reviews when I was browsing through the network.”

“Oh my, and that was enough of a reason for you to request refitting an old-world dress that even cost you 1,500,000 Aurum in this store? I’ve never thought you’re someone who would splurge your money like that.”

“That money is the money that I earned, so it’s up to me how I use that money.”

“Geez, it’s not like I’m criticizing you or anything, I just thought that was unexpected of you.”

Viola was actually prodding Akira for a reaction to guess if he actually was just simply that lax regarding money or he did that because he was that invested in Sheryl.

But Viola was not able to get any meaningful information from there. Of course, she could never have guessed Akira only did that in order to check his own fashion sense.

That was when Kashua approached Akira with her seller's smile. She was working hard recommending dresses to the girls until just now. But she decided to go to Akira since those girls, who did not have enough money to buy any of those dresses, always came up with excuses to refuse her offer. Since Kashua thought that it would be meaningless to keep pushing in that direction, she recommended the girls to explore the store on their own and shifted her focus to the people who seemed to have the capital to spend.

"Akira-sama. Is there any kind of dress that you want to get for your companions? We'll be happy to comply with any of your requests."

"Uhhh, even if you ask me that…"

Alpha smiled bitterly and interjected.

"Akira, I'm pretty sure she means to know how much you are planning to spend today. It seems that she misunderstanding that you'll be paying this time too."

"Ohhh, I see."

Akira then glanced at Viola.

"You might want to ask that question to Viola instead, I'm just here as an escort today."

Viola turned at Kashua and lightly replied.

"I'll leave it to you. For now, just go ahead and recommend them dresses that you think will suit them the best based on your fashion sense."

Kashua's smile, which was saying she hoped to get a more concrete answer, stiffened.

"Certainly, but still…"

“Don’t worry, though it might be rather rude for me to say this, I don’t think you have any goods that might make me worry about my budget, you see.”

Kashua’s smile twitched in reaction to Viola’s rather rude remark. But Viola’s next sentence completely overwrote it.

“If you’re still worried unless I give you a number, well, just come to me again if the total cost seems to be going above 100 million Aurum.”

“O-one hundred million Aurum?”

Kashua was barely able to hold back her shock, Akira then exasperatedly said.

“You would even spend that much money only for clothes, huh?”

Kashua did not even have the leeway to feel offended by that rude remark from Akira. After all, from the way he said it, it sounded as if Viola actually had enough money to pay that much amount of money.

“Oh my, I didn’t expect that to come from someone who spent 350 million Aurum on his suit.”

“This one is an augmented suit. It’s not like one of those common clothing, you know?”

“You spent that money for something that you want, similar to me this time, so it’s the same. Just like how you use that to help you earn money from the old-world ruin, we’ll use these dresses to earn money through making business deals. And just like how it’s difficult to explore a ruin without the suitable equipment, it’s hard to get a good business deal without the proper dress.”

Akira frowned and smiled wryly. Though he understood that argument, he actually did not want to admit it, and that was shown on his face.

“Hmmm, when you put it like that, that’s true, but still…”

“Moreover, it’s not like it’s a one-use thing, and I don’t think that it will go anywhere near 100 million Aurum either. Not to mention, if I buy the dresses plus the accessories in a bulk, I can get a cheaper deal for every piece of dress and accessory compared to when I buy them individually. And personally speaking, I don’t think it’s weird to spend that much money on appearance.”

“Is that so?”

Akira only said so and stopped pursuing that subject further, to be more precise, he just dropped that subject there. Although it might be cheaper than buying the dresses and the accessories one by one, it did not change the fact that the total price was still huge and that Viola would be spending another big bulk of her money on Sheryl’s gang. After all, Akira knew very well Viola was not someone who would spend her money meaninglessly.

Kashua was even more shocked hearing that exchange where Viola and Akira were casually talking about using hundreds of millions of Aurum. Viola who noticed that threw a rather provoking smile at Kashua.

“So there you have it, you don’t have to worry about our budget. But of course, if you can make me worry about the budget, then you’re more than welcomed to do that. Well, to be honest, when I heard that you did a really good job refitting a certain dress, I had my expectation up. That’s why I prepared that much budget beforehand, you see.”

To put it another way, Viola was basically saying that she had lost that expectation from Kashua’s store. Hearing that, Kashua tried her best to prevent her face from twitching and gave Viola a hearty smile.

“Although I don’t know if the goods in this store might satisfy you or not, I’ll give my best to answer your expectation. And if you’re interested in the dress that we refitted, please, by all means, consider refitting one of your dresses in our store. We have an employee whom I can recommend and I’m sure that she’ll be able to answer your expectations. So please wait here for a bit.”

Kashua lightly bowed and left Akira and Viola. She then went to the backroom and finally removed her seller's smile.

"Celene!! Time to work! Get yourself ready, quickly!!"

A lazy voice replied from inside the room.

"Onee-chan, it's too soon for a shift change, isn't it?"

"Just change to something that you can present in front of customers! We have some refitting jobs for you to do!"

"If it's about refitting the clothes that you bought last time, just get the measurement data for the clients and I'll do the refitting later. You can handle that much right, Onee-chan? Or is it that the client is asking for a rushed request?"

Celene sighed as she stepped out from inside the room. But the moment she saw how her sister looked very lively there, Celene could not help but to get weirded out by that.

"Uhhh, did something happen?"

"Damn right! Like hell I would let her look down on my store!! Celene, get out there and take the refitting orders! The client said that there's no need to worry about the budget, she even said that she has a 100 million Aurum budget! This is a good time for you to show your skill that you always refuse to sell cheaply!! So get out there and show them what you are made of!!"

"1-100 million Aurum…?"

"I'll be pulling out my reserved stock too!! There's no need to worry about the budget if it's my store, she said. Like hell I would let that slide!! I'll definitely get her to worry about her budget!!"

Celene was a little overwhelmed by her sister who just could not calm down. But since it was a chance for her to put out all her skill without

worrying about money, she immediately started to prepare herself to get out on the floor.

Kashua who reacted very well to that light provocation from Viola started to get to work. And as Viola schemed, Kashua was giving her best service that normally a first-time customer would never get.

Kashua introduced Celene to Viola before taking a refitting order for Sheryl and Alicia. After that, they decided on the specifics and the details of that order as well as choosing the material to be used before Kashua asked them to come to the workshop to get their measurement.

Alicia nervously glanced at Erio as if to hope that he would accompany her. Erio noticed that and asked for their permission to accompany Alicia. Seeing that, Alicia smiled happily while slightly blushing.

Sheryl also sent a similar glance at Akira. But Akira only glanced back at her, looking a bit confused, and barely made any reactions at all. So in his place, Viola showed a reaction by holding back her laughter. Before Sheryl left with Celene while looking slightly disappointed, she did not forget to send a glare at Viola.

Viola lightly laughed and turned to Akira.

“I know Carol said this once before, but Akira, you really need to learn how to treat a girl right. If I’m not mistaken, you’re in the middle of learning that, no?”

“Oh, shut up!”

Viola smiled at that thorny reply from Akira, but in the back of her mind, she was thinking about a lot of things regarding his reply.

Viola realized that it might be interesting to see how Akira would react if she brought up Shizuka or Elena or Sara, but before she could say anything, she kept the lid closed on that curiosity. Back then when she messed with Sheryl, she ended up with a hole in her chest. So if she actually mentioned

Shizuka, Sara, or Elena here, this time she might not even leave as much as a piece of herself behind. Viola at least understood that much.

In order to keep her curiosity contained, Viola kept telling herself that even if she really wanted to test it, she would need to set up a better situation first to do that.

While Viola was in the midst of her thoughts, Kashua approached Viola and placed a box that looked like a jewellery box on top of the table. She then said with full confidence to Viola.

“Although this is something that we would only offer to loyal customers, since you have given us the chance to offer you our best service, I’ve come with this special piece of goods that might suit your fancy. So please, by all means, have a look.”

Kashua opened the box and showed female undergarments inside it. Viola who saw that looked slightly surprised and hummed in amazement which Kashua found very satisfying.

“So, how about this piece of clothing article?”

“Not bad at all.”

“Thank you very much.”

Besides Viola and Kashua who were smiling at each other, Akira curiously glanced at that underwear and Kashua noticed that.

“Oh, is there anything wrong?”

“Ah, it’s nothing, I just thought that it looks really expensive.”

“It’s indeed an expensive piece of clothing, but I can guarantee its quality. It’s an old-world relic that would normally be sold only inside the wall. It’s very rare to find this kind of article outside the inner wall. Our store was able to procure it only by using our special route.”

“Ahh, I see. It’s a very valuable piece of relic, huh?”

“But of course, after all, it’s valuable enough for the people inside the wall to compete for it.”

Kashua felt a bit offended since it sounded as if Akira was questioning the quality of her product. For someone who had spent hundreds of millions of Aurum for his equipment, Akira should have the ability to judge the quality of a relic. Kashua could not accept if he looked down at her prized possession, but it seemed that it was an unneeded worry from her side as she patted her chest in relief. She then continued by ardently explaining her prized goods.

Akira only lent his ear to that explanation as his brain did not register anything while he glanced at that female undergarment.

“Alpha, about that…”

“Yup, that’s one of the relics that you brought to Shizuka’s shop.”

“Thought so.”

“Judging from the material and the identification code that can’t be checked with naked eyes, it doesn’t seem to be a fake relic.”

“… I see.”

To be honest, Akira only glanced at it since he thought that the relics he brought back from the ruin seemed to have actually gotten sold somewhere. But after listening to Alpha’s explanation, he was a bit surprised and a little bit scared on how Alpha could even tell that much.

The only reason that it caught Akira’s interest was simply because he felt like he saw it somewhere before. But then Alpha seemed to be able to inspect that piece of relic down to the things that could not be seen with naked eyes. Although Akira himself did not understand why there was any need to know that far.

Akira understood that Alpha knew a lot of things about himself, but he never thought badly of it. Or at least, he did not let that bother him until that

time when Tsubaki said those words to him back in the Tsubakihara building.

The manager of Tsubakihara building, another similar existence as Alpha which he could recognize, warned him about something that Alpha was doing to him.

[…But well, I guess it's too late to worry about that right now.]

Akira said so to himself and just forgot about it. After all, everything that he had received from Alpha up until now, including the support and all the help from her, was enough to outweigh that worry.

Viola noticed that slight change from Akira and tried to probe him.

"Akira, what's wrong? Though I think it's normal for you to get interested in this kind of thing, you should be careful or you would look suspicious, you know?"

But Akira replied casually.

"Well, I'm a Hunter after all. It doesn't matter whether it's a female undergarments or anything. As long as it's an old-world relic, it's only normal for me to be interested, no?"

"That's true, but I heard that you just gave one to Sheryl the other day though."

"Oh shut it! It doesn't really matter, does it? It's my relic and I'm free to do what I want with it."

"But of course."

Viola said so and smiled amusedly since Akira looked away as if to avoid answering that question. But from there, Kashua at least noticed that her prized goods had some kind of connection with Akira, of course, she could not recognize anything further than that.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 177, A Request To Readjust Hunter Rank

Index

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Akira made a promise to Kibayashi to meet up with him in front of the Kugama building. The first time Akira saw that tall and huge building that was stuck into the inner wall, he was utterly amazed by its majesty. But after all this time, he already got used to it, which also signified his growth.

Akira was happily waiting for Kibayashi. At first, Kibayashi only said that he had something he needed to talk about with him, but then Akira said to at least treat him to a meal or something, and now they promised to meet up in front of the Kugama building. Akira could not help but get a bit excited.

Kibayashi appeared right on time. They then went into the Kugama building and into a restaurant on the first floor before picking a seat randomly.

“You can go ahead and order anything you want. I’ll put it on tab anyway and it’s not like I’m paying for it either. So feel free to choose from the most expensive ones first.”

“Eh? Ah, sure…”

Unlike Kibayashi who was in a very good mood, Akira seemed rather disappointed. Kibayashi smiled amusedly at that.

“What’s wrong? Were you expecting to go to a high-class restaurant or something? That’s out of the question, you know. Although the City Management would pay for it, it’s not like I have an unlimited budget. Unless it’s for a negotiation with a high-ranking Hunter, they won’t let me spend that much money, you see. But if you tell me that you would treat me, I don’t mind going somewhere else, you know?”

Akira silently browsed the menu as he started looking for the most expensive dishes that he could order there as if he had some grudge against Kibayashi. Kibayashi who saw that could not help but find it amusing.

After they finished placing their orders, Akira immediately cut to the chase.

“So then, what is it you want to talk about?”

“Actually, there are a lot, but I guess I’ll start with the investigation first.”

“Investigation?”

“You do know that there was a huge fight in the slum not too long ago, right? So why exactly were you involved in that battle?”

“In the first place, why does it sound like it’s already a given that I was involved in that battle?”

Akira tried to play ignorant, which might be because he was a bit annoyed after his expectation of getting a good meal was completely missed.

But in reality, Akira himself did not deny that he had killed many people and fought fiercely in that battle. He also knew that the Hunter Office preferred Hunters to behave nicely and he did something that deviated from the Hunter Office’s preference. So a part of him was telling him that there was no reason to proactively talk about that subject with the Hunter Office.

Kibayashi then pulled out his information terminal, clicked some buttons, and put it on top of the table. Akira looked at the video playing on that

information terminal and frowned. Kibayashi smiled happily seeing that Akira reacted as he predicted.

“Well, although it’s actually a secret videotape, it’s not that big of a secret. And since you’re involved in this incident, it should be fine.”

Kibayashi’s information terminal was showing the video of Akira fighting a black powered suit.

“In all honesty, I’m really glad to find that you’re as reckless as ever. I had a good laugh the first time I saw this record, you know?”

Akira lightly ruffled his head.

“How did you get this video?”

“I only got it from my superiors, and I have no idea how they got it. Someone might have been recording you from afar using a telescope or something from above the wall. Or it might be from some secret cameras planted somewhere that coincidentally recorded this video. Well, either way, I bet the City Management has something to do with it.”

Akira let out a big sigh, he had a given up face as he started explaining to Kibayashi.

Kibayashi listened closely to Akira’s explanation. After that, he said to Akira as he tried his best to hold back his laughter, which obviously he was not doing very well.

“U-Uh, s-so, I get it that you went there to save your girlfriend. It’s not that strange for people to be moved by love, especially for a young boy like you. B-But still, no kidding here, did you really fight that powered suit just to kill a pickpocket? Are you okay in the head? Ah, don’t take this wrongly please, I’m actually complimenting you here, you know? After all, your action and line of thinking are as reckless as always and I really like it.”

Akira looked obviously annoyed.

“Just so you know, it’s not like I did that because I wanted to.”

“Y-yeah, you’re right.”

Kibayashi then laughed hard again. Before he continued, he noticed that Akira was pouting and thought that it might affect the thing that he was about to bring up next. So he tried his best to calm down.

“Well, I get why you’re in that place now. Personally speaking, I respect your decision, so you have my condolences, that must have been hard… Geez, can you stop pouting like that? That aside, I’m sure you do know that the Hunter Office puts their effort into cultivating good manners among Hunters, so it would be troublesome if there’s a Hunter who can win against a powered suit only with an augmented suit and is willing to do that just for money. After all, there are quite a lot of Hunters out there who are talented in fighting other people but could not do well exploring the ruins. So it’s our duty to give them jobs that would help to keep public order while at the same time keeping them away from doing anything that might disturb it.”

“Is that so? So you’re basically here to give me a job as security or something, huh?”

“Calm down. There, the meals are here, so let’s calm down and enjoy the food for now.”

Kibayashi extended his hand to the food in front of him, Akira also did the same although he still looked annoyed.

Akira’s mood was getting better as he continued eating. Although it was not a meal from a high-class restaurant, it was still a good meal. So every time he brought a spoonful to his mouth, his mood was slowly getting better and better.

Kibayashi closely monitored the change in Akira’s mood before bringing up the next subject.

“Now then, since we’ve filled our stomach, let’s get to the main topic.”

“Huh? That one just now was not the main topic?”

“Yup. But I can’t really say that it’s not related to the main topic at all. The main reason I wanted to meet you is to talk about a certain request. Well, although I said ‘to talk about’, it’s actually something close to compulsory. So, let me apologize beforehand. As long as you don’t want to pick a fight against the City Management, I recommend you not to refuse it.”

Akira slightly frowned and was obviously alerted. Kibayashi smiled bitterly in an effort to calm the situation down.

“You don’t need to be that alert. I actually like you quite a fair bit, you know. So I won’t give you any weird requests. And also, although I said it’s compulsory, normally, most of the Hunters would be more than happy to accept this request, you see. After all, it’s a request to help you readjust your Hunter Rank. Basically, it’s a request to boost your Hunter Rank.”

“Boost my Hunter Rank?”

“Yup… Let me ask you this first, you do know your current Hunter Rank, right?”

“If I’m not mistaken…”

Before Akira was able to pull his Hunter Rank out from his memory, Alpha interjected.

“It’s 30.”

“Hm? Wasn’t it 29?”

“The relics that you brought to Shizuka the other day got you to 30.”

“I see.”

So after that short pause, Akira said firmly.

“It’s 30.”

Kibayashi obviously looked exasperated since Akira took that weird pause before he answered.

“Good grief, there are not that many Hunters out there who can’t immediately give their Hunter Ranks when asked. You really don’t care about it, do you? No wonder why people thought you’re faking your Hunter Rank.”

“It doesn’t really matter, does it?”

“If it really didn’t matter, we won’t be talking here and now about raising your Hunter Rank, you know? Since this is a good chance, I’ll explain the rest to you regarding that matter. So listen carefully.”

To Akira, who still looked slightly annoyed, Kibayashi started explaining about the matter of Hunter Rank and the request that he was about to ask Akira.

The strength of the Hunters in the eastern district was represented by their Hunter Ranks. Of course, Hunters of the same Hunter Rank did not mean that those Hunters were equally strong. There were many other factors that defined one’s strength such as their equipment, experiences, and their talents or preferences. Although it was impossible to make sure that Hunters with the same rank had the exact same level of strength, the Hunter Office tried its best to readjust the Hunter Rank as a good indicator for Hunter’s skill.

The Hunter Rank was also a good thing for those who submitted requests for Hunters such as for bodyguards or escorts. Since that way, they could decide which Hunters to employ and how much reward to offer those Hunters based on the difficulty of the monsters that they might encounter and their Hunter Ranks.

Other than that, Hunter Ranks were also used for so many other things such as transferring Hunters between cities, deciding the level of difficulties and danger for different areas, or recruitment into private military companies. The accuracy of the Hunter Rank system was an important thing for the eastern district that was filled with Hunters as well as the Hunter Office and the Corporate Government that was ruling over the eastern district.

But with that being said, there were very rare cases in the eastern district where some Hunters showed abnormal strength that was far from their Hunter Rank. The ranking system would only grow worse if they left those Hunters alone which might lead to a full breakdown of the ranking system.

The ranking system was highly valued and the Hunter Office held the sole rights to calculate, decide, and assign that ranking system. That was the power of the Hunter Office as well as a way for the Hunter Office to assert control over those Hunters.

“So that’s basically the gist of it, we want someone like you with a big gap between your Hunter Rank and your real strength to get your Hunter Rank to a more suitable number. But with that being said, it’s not like we can just pull up your Hunter Rank either. That’s why we dispatch this request in order to readjust your Hunter Rank. You get it now?”

“I feel like I get it but not exactly at the same time…”

“Just accept the request. Or is it that you have a reason why you don’t want to get a higher Hunter Rank?”

“Not really, if I have to say anything here, I prefer you pay me in form of money instead of Hunter Rank.”

Kibayashi sighed exasperatedly, but he also seemed to understand where Akira came from.

“Ahhh, you’re that kind of Hunter, huh? Normally, you can get better rewards if you have a higher Hunter Rank, but sometimes there are Hunters like you who don’t really understand that. But well, you tend to work alone and you put your time mostly into hunting relics. So I guess that’s to be expected, huh”

“Is that so?”

“Normally Hunters work by forming teams, and when they do, they usually decide their share of reward or who has the higher position in the team based on their Hunter Ranks. Not to mention that some of the high-

difficulty high-reward requests only accept Hunters with high enough Hunter Ranks. That's why many new Hunters work so hard to raise their Hunter Rank. Moreover, sometimes some corporations would even sponsor high ranking Hunters too, that's also one reason why Hunters tend to be desperate when it comes to their Hunter Ranks."

Kibayashi glanced at Akira to check his reaction. Though Akira seemed to properly listen to him, he still showed no interest at all.

"To be honest, Hunters who often deal with hundreds of millions of Aurum tend to put extra attention on their Hunter Ranks though. So, do you have any interest in it?"

"Well, even if you say so. That request for boosting Hunter Ranking, since most of its reward is in the form of Hunter Rank, I bet it doesn't give me much money, assuming that it gives me any at all, right? Honestly, monsters won't get scared of me just because of my Hunter Rank anyway, so I don't see any point in taking that request."

"You like it or not, I need to have you take that request. Well then, let's start talking about the details. I'll try my best to get a deal that can satisfy you too, so you can just go ahead and tell me your demand. If you're willing to take a reckless request, I might be able to get you a request with a huge amount of money, you know?"

"No thanks. As I've always told you, I didn't do all of that reckless stuff because I wanted to."

Kibayashi looked at that really annoyed Akira and found it amusing.

"In that case, I can set up a deal that warrants you a huge amount of money in case something unexpected were to happen. So that you can use as much ammo and other expendables as you want. It's you we're talking about here, so I can pretty much expect something crazy to happen."

Akira held himself from saying anything back. He knew very well that it did not matter what he said, it would not be enough to convince Kibayashi.

After that, Akira had a difficult discussion with Kibayashi about the details of the request. When they finished, the sun had already set.

__*__*__*__

As Akira took a good warm dip in his bathtub back in his house, he looked back at his discussion with Kibayashi about that request.

“Alpha, I know it’s too late to say this, but is that really alright?”

“Let me ask you this instead, do you have any problem with that request?”

“Not really, or more like, I don’t really get the whole thing.”

To be honest, Akira did his best thinking about what he should ask for during that discussion. But even so, he himself understood that he was so not skilled in that aspect to the point that he would not be able to spot any mistakes in case he made any during that negotiation.

“In that case, since we have come this far, we can only look back and reevaluate after you’re done with that request. This will be a good experience for you too. Personally speaking, I think it’s not a bad deal since they’ll pay for the medicines, ammo, and other expendables.”

“You’re right, it really helped me out during that request to the underground city after all.”

Akira remembered back then when he had to compensate for the lack of his strength by shooting out CWH anti-material rifle’s special ammo. Both when he fought a swarm of Yarata Scorpion and the relic thieves, Alpha’s support alone was not enough to win those fights. That was just how pivotal using that ammo was.

“Now that I think about it, I really did pretty reckless stuff back then. It’s as if I’m compensating for the lack of my strength with money, and to top it off, it’s not even my own money.”

“Yep, so let’s use that advantage to our best this time again. Let’s stock up powerful ammo and buy our safety, and of course, with other’s money again

this time.”

Alpha smiled when she said that, Akira smiled back at her.

“Though to be honest, because they’ll pay for my ammo, I feel like it would give such a sight if I use that money to buy a whole lot of CWH anti-material special ammo to use with my DVTS minigun.”

“That’s a good idea, let’s do that!”

“…Huh? That’s obviously out of the question, isn’t it? That special ammo can’t be used with DVTS minigun, right?”

Akira frowned, he was surprised by that reply from Alpha, but then Alpha smiled smugly and said.

“It would be fine as long as you’re using a powerful enough gun that can withstand the rapid-fire of such a powerful and expensive bullet. And since we’re in the middle of choosing a new gun, you can just put that as an additional condition for your new gun, right?”

Akira’s view was augmented with the info of multiple types of guns just like last time. Then Alpha discarded all the rifles that could not withstand rapid fire using such CWH anti-material rifle special ammo.

“That pretty much narrows our options.”

“Indeed, do your best to do the rest then.”

“Roger that!”

Akira started browsing and choosing rifles again while still enjoying his bath just like last time. And Alpha stood next to him with a smile, just like usual.

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On the next day, Akira let Shizuka know what was going on and asked for her help. He also did not forget to place his order for the rifle that he

decided to get after a long selection process as well as for the ammo to use with that rifle. There was no guarantee that Shizuka had the type of ammo that he was looking for in-stock and even if she could order those ammo, Akira thought that it would cause her a lot of trouble if she placed such a huge order just for his sake. That's why he decided to put in his order sooner.

After they finished, Shizuka then worriedly said to Akira.

"I understand what's going on and of course I'll help out too, but, are you alright? Although they'll pay for it, buying this much ammo will definitely cost a lot of money, you know. In the worst-case scenario, they might take it as harassment."

Akira replied with a serious face.

"Kibayashi, the guy that I had a discussion with regarding this matter did give his approval… To be honest, I was thinking if they refuse to pay because of that, I might be able to use it as an excuse to refuse their request though. Even if something were to happen after putting that order in, as long as I keep them without using them during the period of preparing for that request, it should not cause any trouble."

"I see that you've given a thought about this. Alright then, I'll put in the order with a deposit payment, okay?"

Shizuka started working on the documents for placing that order. Just like last time, she also submitted the id code for that request to make sure that the deposit payment would be forwarded to that requester address. There were cases where the order was stopped because there was trouble during the settlement of the payment. Normally, Shizuka did not really care whether the payment would go well or not, but this time, she made a small wish for some kind of trouble to happen. But unfortunately, the payment went through just fine.

"Yup, it went well. To be honest, from the shop's side, I should be happy that my customer has no problem paying for the goods bought in my shop, but…"

She smiled bitterly, Akira also replied with a bitter smile.

“Well then, please process the equipment too. Of course, since it’s not an expendable item, please process it separately. To be honest, even if it gets processed as an expendable item by mistake, I hope it doesn’t really get turned into an expendable item.”

“Honestly speaking, I don’t think normal Hunters can get such a request unless they’re from the front line though.”

Shizuka then processed the rest of the deal. The payment went through just fine as it was withdrawn from Akira’s bank account.

“Thank you for your patronage. I’ll let you know when it arrives. I’ll give the ammo together with the rifle.”

“Alright.”

Akira replied casually, but Shizuka stared back at him with a rather serious face. He found that a bit weird. Shizuka then left the counter and stood in front of him before giving him a hug.

Although Akira was surprised, he just silently let her hug him. Shizuka then gently caressed Akira’s head.

“…I’m sure that it won’t be easy, good luck and give your best out there. But make sure not to force yourself, and make sure to return back alive. Okay?”

Akira lightly smiled.

“Alright.”

“Good answer.”

As Shizuka let Akira go. Both of them smiled at each other, slightly embarrassed.

Shizuka once again had a worried look on her face. Akira had already left her shop, so she was all alone in her shop.

The reason why she looked worried was because of her intuition.

Akira once took a request in which the cost of all his expendables was paid by the request giver. He then returned back with a lot of money and used it to renew his equipment. Up until that point, Shizuka was also happy for him.

But in exchange, Akira lost all of his equipment and almost got killed. He even had his augmented suit completely wasted and he had to get hospitalized too. There was no mistaking it, he had to go through a very dangerous situation. Shizuka at least knew that much.

This time, the request that Akira took was a request to raise his Hunter Rank. It was a request that the City Management personally dispatched for him. Though it was not a request that he could refuse, the situation now and then was not the same. If it was a good chance to let others know Akira's real strength that they had always looked down on until now, then it was something to be happy about. It could be taken as a request given to the Hunter as goodwill from the City Management and it should not be something that was overly dangerous.

Moreover, she did warn him not to do anything reckless. Judging from how he responded, it should at least prevent Akira from doing anything too dangerous. As a matter of fact, Akira himself actually did not want to take that request. So he should not put himself in danger just for the sake of raising his Hunter Rank. Or at least, that was what she thought.

Shizuka tried to abate her worry by reminding herself about those facts. She then wished that everything would be fine. She had her own life to think about, and the shop that was important to her to take care of, so she could not just sacrifice everything to support Akira. But making a wish was free of charge. That was why she wished for Akira's safety as she hoped that her intuition would be proven wrong.

After all, her intuition was telling her that her wish would not come true.

Silavin: Any Asian should understand the culture of the best kind of money is the one paid by the government. Honestly, if the Hunter Office did not cap the expenditure, I would literally start buying grenades to throw at ants.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 178, Hunters Who Stood Out

Index

Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

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With the destruction of the two reigning gangs, a large chunk of slum city was immediately thrown into a vacuum of power. Bosses of medium-sized to small-sized gangs gathered together to discuss that very matter right now. Their main focus was what to do with the territory left by the two destroyed gangs.

Of course, they could not afford to use military power to fight for that territory. But in order to keep their right over that territory, they could not afford to just back out either. Thanks to that, they could not come to a consensus even after a long and difficult discussion.

But if they kept this up without coming to any kind of conclusion anytime soon, the City Management might decide to just burn down that territory. After all, there was already a rumour spreading around saying that the mansion itself was occupied by monsters. With the time going against them, the members of that discussion could not afford to keep dilly-dallying, and the sense of pressure caused them to slowly compromise, although, it was still not enough for them to come to a consensus yet.

“Geez, let’s just decide on something. Just split that territory equally to the gangs neighbouring it, isn’t that good enough?”

“Heck no! If we go with that method, you’ll get a huge chunk of that territory. Even my gang had also lent those two gangs a lot of money and we can’t retrieve them back now. I won’t accept it unless we get enough territory to compensate for that amount.”

“Breaking that territory into pieces will only cause more trouble later.”

“Even the bases and the buildings are pretty valuable for us. Hunters might have no interest in them, but we can use them to earn more money. I’m sure you guys want them too. If we keep bickering like this, the City Management will burn them sooner or later, you know?”

“If you take the base, the area around the base will automatically become yours too. So how are you going to split that? I bet you’re planning to take that base for yourself, right? Like hell I will just let you do that!”

The bosses of each gang were debating and bickering for the sake of their own profit, loss, pride, greed, and standings. If any of them backed down, it would cause them more trouble later down the line. But if any of them forced through their own desires in this situation, it would be the same as picking a fight against the rest of the other gangs. The discussion went back and forth without making any meaningful progress.

Then one of the bosses from a medium-sized gang, who didn’t want this to go on forever, made a suggestion.

“If we only divide the territory among the gangs which participated in that battle, that would be the remnants of Ezont Family and Haurias, and that newcomer. But with no one from the Haurias nor Ezont Family here, that means everything will go to that newcomer. If we go with that method, I want to at least listen to the newcomer’s opinion first.”

Everyone in that room turned to the newcomer, and that newcomer was Sheryl.

Sheryl had come to that place with Viola and Carol. Viola and Carol stood behind Sheryl's seat as if they were officers under Sheryl's gang.

As the bosses from the other gangs directed their gazes at Sheryl as if they were trying to send a telepathic message to her, Sheryl just smiled and said.

"In that case, would it be okay if I take everything?"

No one expected Sheryl to say something as preposterous as that, half of the people there looked at her with widened eyes as they froze in place. The silence slowly shifted into whispers, and then whispers into chatters. While they were mumbling about those unexpected words from Sheryl, one of them shouted.

"Everything?! Are you kidding me?!"

Sheryl did not wince back at all, she only looked back at that guy with her usual smile and replied.

"I see, in that case, how much of that territory may I take?"

"W-well, even if you ask me…"

If that guy said a concrete number there, the other bosses would definitely turn at him. As he was unable to say anything, another guy interjected.

"Even if you take everything, there's no way you can manage the whole territory all by yourself anyway. Use common sense here, will you?"

"You're indeed right. Shijima-san, I'll leave the territory that I get to you, so will you please manage them for us? If yes, then I'll only take the territory that Shijima-san can manage, is that good enough for everyone? Shijima-san, we can talk about the details like how are we going to split the profit and the cost for maintaining that territory later."

Although Shijima was already surprised when Sheryl suddenly brought up his name, he was even more shocked by her suggestion. With everyone's attention focused on him, Shijima felt slightly overwhelmed, but of course, he did not show any of that on the outside.

One of the bosses there calculated how big the area that Shijima's gang could manage with their current power, and his face turned grim as he realized that there was a good chance another gang would try to wrestle that territory from Shijima later if they did that.

"Wait a sec. Why did you suddenly say that? Or more like, why Shijima? If you need someone else to manage that territory, you can pick any other gang, right? Did you guys make some kind of agreement beforehand or something?"

"Not exactly. But during the discussion with Akira from the other day, we promised him to get along with Shijima-san's gang and he hasn't told me to abandon that agreement either."

The moment Sheryl brought up Akira's name, all the gang bosses there showed various reactions– fear, alert, interest, doubt, mockery–all of them had different reactions to Akira's name.

One of them who looked down at Akira raised his voice and questioned Akira's real strength while wording it out as if he was asking for others' agreement.

"Akira, huh? He's that Hunter supporting your gang, right? I've heard about him too. In the first place, I don't know how much the rumour that I heard about him is true. Don't take me wrongly though, I'm not saying that he's weak or anything. But I bet those rumours have something to do with that girl behind you."

Everyone looked at Viola. Although only some of them were obviously suspecting Viola, everyone could agree that the chance of her involvement was not zero.

Viola had her usual provocative smile as she pulled out her information terminal and operated it. Immediately afterwards, a notification reached the information terminal of the other people in that place. Since it was obvious that it was from Viola, everyone checked their information terminal and noticed that it was a video file.

The moment they played that video, everyone was dumbstruck. It was a video of Akira fighting a black powered suit. Murmurs started to ripple as they expressed their impression of that video.

“Damn, what the heck is wrong with this boy…”

“This guy fought a powered suit with nothing more than his body, huh? Wait, no, he’s using an augmented suit, but still…”

“Wait for a sec here, he’s winning? Are you kidding me…?”

The video was like a collage of multiple short shots, but it was enough as proof that Akira was a real maniac.

One of the bosses there could not hide his shock as he asked Viola.

“Can you prove that this video is not fake? For all that we know, you might have faked this video.”

Viola smiled at him as if to mock him and challenge him.

“If you can’t trust me, you can try to investigate it yourself. Although it’s a confidential video, it’s not a huge secret. So you should be able to get the same video with a little effort, you know?”

The guy who asked that question was convinced that it was not a fake video from that exchange. Or at least, he understood that the City Management even trusted that video too. Although he was not that convinced compared to the other people present, it was enough to shut him up.

Another guy then turned to Sheryl again, he still was not able to fully recover from the shock as he said to her.

“…Leaving that Hunter aside, I still think it’s too much for you to ask everything, no?”

Sheryl could not fully hold back her smile.

“True, but I have no reason to refuse that proposition either. Not to mention, I have some debts that I have to pay Akira too. So if I can take the whole territory, I’m planning to turn some of them into money. After I formally receive that territory, I’m thinking of selling some of them to the other gangs. After all, I did something similar with Shijima-san before.”

“Debt, huh. How much is it exactly?”

“About 4 billion Aurum.”

Murmur rippled through the room again.

“…4 Billion? Is this some kind of joke?”

“I can assure you that it’s not. The one who calculated that debt is Viola.”

After Sheryl said that, everyone sent a hostile gaze to Viola. Viola only smiled back at everyone in response to that. Judging from that reaction, everyone had the same thought, Viola must have done something dirty to get Sheryl into that debt.

One of the guys there had a really troubled look, he was surprised by the difference between the information that he had gathered beforehand and the information that he received just now. But even so, he still tried his hardest to think of a way to make this occasion into a profitable one for his gang.

Akira was strong enough to fight a powered suit and was invested enough in Sheryl that he would go to rescue her himself. Then to top it off, he was crazy enough to raid one of the biggest gang’s base just to kill a pickpocket. This opportunity was basically a good chance for Akira to get back the 4 billion Aurum that he had lent to Sheryl. So considering how much animosity they would earn from Akira if they tried to contest for that territory and preventing Sheryl from paying back her debt, it might be not a wise thing to be greedy, at least not for now.

After he made up his mind, he decided to change his method of trying to get his hands on that territory.

“I’m fine with it if you want to let the other gangs take care of that territory, but it doesn’t have to be Shijima, right? Though you said you want to get along well with Shijima’s gang, to be honest, I don’t think you can get much profit from that, am I wrong?”

“Well, that’s true.”

“Thought so!”

That guy smiled and glanced at the bosses from the other gangs that his gang was going along relatively well with. All of them immediately gave their approval when he did that. Thus an alliance was formed in order to take a part of that territory management right from Shijima’s gang.

“…In that case-”

When that guy was about to continue, Sheryl interrupted him while making a troubled face.

“But again, other than Shijima-san, I know no one else who has negotiated with Akira, forced him to compromise, and even made him pay up some money.”

Everyone present immediately turned to Shijima. Shijima was barely able to maintain his calm. With him unable to say anything back, he noticed that some of them were obviously misunderstanding him there, so he just looked away to evade that subject. But Sheryl continued.

“Ah, but I don’t mind if any of you want to discuss it with Shijima-san to manage that territory with him. That way we’ll be able to manage a wider area after all. So I would be more than happy if any of you want to do that.”

Everyone exchanged looks with each other. Though a few more people were swayed, it was not enough to conclude their discussion.

“…Let’s take a short break here.”

“…Good idea.”

Since no one objected, they took a short break from the discussion as they started leaving the meeting room. But of course, no one was actually taking a break, they only left the room since they wanted to discuss something that they could not discuss there.

Shijima was the first one to leave the room. He understood very well that it would be bad if the other gangs swamped him. He believed that he should take some distance from the other gangs for now and contact Viola, who he bet had her hands on this behind the scene.

Sheryl, Viola and Carol were the only ones left inside that room. Sheryl let out a long sigh, she looked rather tired. Viola was talking with Shijima through her information terminal not too far from Sheryl. Carol, who was also standing close to Sheryl, looked at her and smiled amusedly.

“Carol-san, is there anything wrong?”

“Hm? It’s nothing. I just thought that if Viola had a little sister, she would look just like you.”

“…Please stop with the jokes.”

Carol could not hold back her giggle seeing how Sheryl obviously hated that idea.

After that, the meeting continued pretty smoothly in one direction. Although there was a bit of disagreement, they finally agreed on a consensus, and Sheryl’s gang was able to gain a lot of profits from that conclusion.

__*__*__*__

Akira was riding his bike through a major road inside Kuzusuhara ruin. This road was built by Kugamayama city and it went all the way to the forward base deep inside the ruin. Even now, the road was guarded by those who were also properly maintaining it. After all, it was an important road for the sake of exploring the ruin.

After the long negotiation with Kibayashi that lasted until the sunset, the rank-up request that Akira accepted from him was to take Hunter jobs around that road. To be more precise, it included hunting monsters and relics, patrolling and gathering information, as well as accepting SOS requests. Basically, it was a rather lax request where Akira was basically free to do whatever he wanted.

But of course, there were also some requirements that Akira had to do. Any relics that he gathered during that request should be sold to the relic exchange office in the forward base, he had to hand over all the information that he gathered, he should not ignore the SOS request he received, and he had to prioritize cleaning up any monster swarm that he found near the road. In exchange for paying his ammo and his other expenses, Akira accepted those conditions.

“Well, it’s great that I’m basically free from doing anything I want as long as I stay near this highway, they’ll also pay for my ammo too. But seeing from their perspective, it means that even considering the fact this request is made to boost my rank, this request is actually so dangerous to the point that they agreed on such a condition.”

Alpha lightly added.

“This road basically cross past the patrol route of that big monster that attacked you the other day. So judging from that fact, this place is actually pretty dangerous, you know.”

“Is that so? Wait, that means that they had to fight that monster when they secured this road, huh? That’s pretty amazing, I wonder how they managed to defeat that monster?”

“I bet they dispatched a lot of tanks and powered suits along this road to fight that monster. If they can maintain the route between the front-line and the back-line, it’s not that difficult for the city defence squad to defeat a monster of that level. That’s exactly why the City Management poured their money in order to maintain this road. Look, they’re still working on this road even now.”

Alpha pointed at the side of the road. When Akira looked in that direction, he could see some people working on rebuilding the abandoned buildings around the road into protection walls. There were also some people barricading the small side roads to prevent monsters from using them.

“Although I’m sure that there’s no need to say this, they must have cost a lot of money. Though I’m sure that they only do that because they expect to get enough profit from this road… I heard that Kugamayama city was built in order to explore the Kuzusuhara ruin, but I see now, there is no wonder why they decided to build a whole city for something like that.”

Old-world relics were extremely valuable goods in the eastern district. Akira himself tasted a glimpse of how much money these relics could bring him and he could not help but feel slightly amazed by it.

There were multiple checkpoints guarded by powerful guards along that road and the distance between one checkpoint to another was fixed. These checkpoints were equipped with powerful defences and powerful portable walls in order to stop the invading monsters in case those monsters broke through the first line of defence.

In one of those checkpoints, Akira was showing the terminal on his arm to one of the guards. That terminal was lent to him from the forward base and it was of the same type as the one that he had got during the request in Kuzusuhara underground city forward base. He was told to use that information terminal during this request too and it also doubled as a pass to go through the checkpoints. Normally, Hunters would have to pay when they wanted to use that road and a terminal was also there to collect the payment. But during this request, Akira was exempted from that fee.

The guard connected his terminal to Akira’s terminal, he then slightly raised his eyebrows and looked at Akira.

“Ohhh, so you’re Akira, huh?”

“Yes, I’m Akira, what of it?”

The guard frowned and checked up on Akira, he then smiled.

“Nah, everything is good. You can pass, good luck out there.”

Akira just ignored that guy and passed through the checkpoints. But a little later he remembered something and seemed a bit bothered by it.

“Alpha, what do you think was that?”

“No idea. Let’s just forget about it and keep going. It’s not that important that you would go back just to check it, right?”

“Well, that’s true, but still…”

“I bet it’s just that they’ve heard about you or something. It might be just that they have seen that video from Kibayashi or heard about your involvement in that incident.”

Alpha smiled just like usual, but in contrast to that, Akira frowned and said.

“Wasn’t that supposed to be confidential?”

“Those guys are from the City Management, so it won’t be strange if they know, no?”

“…Give me a break. I don’t want people throwing requests at me using that battle as a basis.”

“You’re not obligated to accept them even if they do. But if something like that were to happen again, you can just fight enough to fulfil your contract and run away.”

“You’re right, I’ll do that.”

Akira then shook that thought off of his mind and focused on the road in front of him.

One of that guard’s friends came to the guard when he saw him taking an unusually long time to check Akira’s identity through the checkpoint.

“Is there something wrong about that boy?”

“Nah, it’s nothing. It’s just that he was the Hunter we talked about when we were out drinking yesterday.”

“Is that kind of Hunter really so rare?”

“Rather than at him, I’m more interested in the guy who’s interested in him. It’s that Kibayashi, you know.”

“Ahh, I see now. I feel bad for him since he’s still young…”

That guard nodded. His mixed feeling toward Kibayashi and the Hunter that Kibayashi was interested in was fully shown on his face.

Kibayashi’s love for reckless Hunters was well-known, but strangely enough, it was a highly effective method to identify young Hunters with rare talents. Most of the great Hunters tend to be blinded by the glory as they went out chasing for that glory only to be swallowed by the wasteland. But a small number of those Hunters were able to get a hold of that glory and return back alive.

Even if his bad habit sometimes caused trouble with triple-digit rank Hunters, with his connections to all the Hunters working in the front line, Kibayashi was treated as an important person. Thanks to that, the City Management and the Hunter Office had their eyes on him. That was exactly the reason why Akira was able to get such benefits like all his ammo expenses paid by the City Management.

“So then, is he the lucky one? Or the poor one?”

“No idea. He’s still alive and kicking for now, so I guess he’s the lucky one. But with that being said, it won’t be strange if he turns into the unlucky one anytime. Honestly, I wouldn’t want to be in his situation if I were him.”

“Couldn’t agree more to that. I don’t want to die too, after all.”

They then laughed and returned back to their guard duty.

Not too long after Akira went down that road, he noticed that the scene around him had been completely changed as if he had passed some kind of

boundary. Rubbles were scattered around him, he could see powered suits patrolling the area, and not too far in front of him, there were City Management staff working on a huge wall. Although that area was already secured by the City Management, it was not an area where normal workers could work in. There were even corpses of dead monsters left in the area too.

Akira stopped his bike and thought about where to go from there.

“Now then, what to do from here?”

Alpha made a suggestion to Akira.

“If you want to take part in a huge fight, you can continue along the road and join up with the other Hunters in the front line.”

“No thanks!”

“In that case, if you want to do relatively safer work of gathering relics, you can go to one of those buildings around the area. Some of them might have been already secured beforehand which means any expensive-looking relics might have been carried out from them. But if you look more carefully, you might still be able to find some valuable relics left.”

“Hmm, I don’t feel like doing that either. I have no plans to do anything reckless, but I don’t feel like searching a place that doesn’t seem to have any valuable relics left either… I guess I’ll just drive around while checking if there’s any place that seems to still have some expensive relics left inside.”

“Just to make sure, you’ll do your best during this request without my support, right?”

“Yeah, if I keep defeating monsters effectively without using many bullets thanks to your support, I feel like people will start to get weird expectations of me again. So for the time being, I’ll try doing this request on my own to check my own real strength and to make people understand that I was able

to defeat that black powered suit because of luck instead of skill. I'll rely on your support only when it's really needed."

Alpha smiled and lightly poked at Akira.

"In that case, this will be the perfect chance to check the result of all your training up until now. I'll be staying beside you to see how far you can go without my support."

Akira lightly smiled back at her.

"Roger that, I'll give my best shot."

"If I don't see much improvement, I'll increase the difficulty of your training, okay?"

"If you make it any harder, my limbs would fall off, you know?"

"It's a good thing that you bought that 5 million Aurum medicine, isn't it?"

In contrast to Alpha who was smiling amusedly, Akira seemed a bit concerned as he paced his bike. He then turned into one of the side roads and went through alleys between buildings to search the ruin.

While at the same time, Yatsubayashi was sitting in his private room while making a troubled face.

"This is not good at all…"

The big display in front of him was showing the signal from the tracker implanted inside Tiol. It also showed other information along with Tiol's position. At the moment, Tiol's signal was coming from Kuzusuhara ruin.

"The bomb inside him should have exploded after a fixed amount of time. Did he dismantle that too? Or did he completely devour it…?"

Yatsubayashi actually did not really care that much about Tiol's life. He thought he could just retrieve Tiol's corpse after he died somewhere, that

was why he was not that pressured to take care of Tiol right now. But now it was starting to get worrying.

Tiol's signal was showing that he was staying somewhere next to the main road made by the City Management that went through the ruin. In case the guards captured Tiol and did a close investigation on him, it might link back to Yatsubayashi.

"Yep, this is not good at all. Maybe I should do something to retrieve Tiol back. But still…"

Yatsubayashi then thought about some of the negatives that might happen if he took the initiative to retrieve Tiol. Although leaving Tiol alone might cause him a lot of trouble, considering how much benefit he could get if he was able to retrieve Tiol back, he honestly did not want to let Tiol roam around freely.

"What should I do…"

Yatsubayashi could not make any concrete decision. After a long thought, he decided to make a compromise.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 179, Mechanical Armoured Spider Bug

Index

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Akira continued searching the ruin. The inner part of the Kuzusuhara ruin expanded through a wide area and it was still quite a distance away from the deepest part of the ruin. But even so, compared to the outskirts of the ruin, the buildings were not that dilapidated, and the condition of the area was not much different compared to the deeper part of the ruin.

Alpha was floating horizontally next to Akira as if she was lying on top of an invisible bed.

“Akira, you’ve been driving around for some time now, are you not going to check one of those buildings?”

“I just thought that I should check the structure around this place first. That’s for the sake of registering buildings that seem to have expensive relics too. By the way, is it true, it’s better to aim for big buildings?”

“Hmm, I’m not really sure about that. Larger shops are easy to spot, so I feel like other Hunters would be searching such a building first. In that case, you might only end up with a small number of relics instead. What’s more, big buildings like that tend to be guarded by relatively powerful monsters. So all in all, it might not be a good choice.”

“I see.”

Akira nodded, then something came up in his mind.

“…Wait, isn’t this considered as support from you?”

Alpha smiled mischievously at Akira.

“I won’t count a small silly talk like this as support. If you really want to do this without my support at all, it might be better if I remove my image and voice too. But I just thought that you would be lonely if I do that, right?”

“Well, thanks for being considerate.”

Akira smiled wryly.

In the middle of searching the ruin, Akira suddenly stopped his bike and looked around him.

The large building next to him seemed like it had been chomped by something big. Next to it, there were multiple corpses of greedy crocodiles together with the leftover of what seemed to be the defensive equipment of that building. Other beast-like biological monsters were feasting on those wreckages.

One of those monsters suddenly noticed Akira and stopped eating, but it immediately lost interest in him and returned back to its meal.

After watching that for a few seconds, a certain word came up in Akira’s mind: ‘food chain’. It was a word that he had learnt from Alpha’s class. He always thought that he would not be able to see for himself the meaning of all the words that he learnt in Alpha’s class, but that did not seem to be the case.

“…A living organism that started as a creature that eats buildings instead of grasses…? Nah, that can’t be.”

“Hmm, they might be the monsters produced by facilities with self-readjusting food chain preservation function in order to clean up the city.”

“No no no, it would be meaningless for them to be eating the building then, wouldn’t it? And even if that’s true, then why would they even go as far as to fight the defensive equipment just to eat that building?”

“They might need to eat fresh rubble in order to be able to harvest the energy pack implanted into one of those self-repairing buildings. So basically, for them, the buildings are like fresh meat while the already destroyed buildings are like rotten meat.”

Akira listened to Alpha’s explanation with full interest.

“...Is that so?”

Alpha smiled, amused.

“No, that’s just my guess.”

Akira frowned and looked slightly annoyed, but Alpha did not seem to be bothered by that at all as she kept smiling like usual.

“I don’t mind if you want to talk about how the world works, but don’t forget that we’re in the middle of a job right now. If it still bothers you that much, I can reserve some time to give you an extra lesson about the monsters living in the old-world ruins. Though it won’t be detailed to the point that you would be able to use that knowledge in real Hunter jobs. Do you still want to do it?”

The very same question was also in active research in the eastern district. Any pieces of knowledge that the researchers could get from that research would then be used to help them to pinpoint the nests and the production facilities of those monsters as well as their distribution around the eastern district.

“No thanks, at least not for the time being.”

“I see.”

Akira interpreted Alpha’s smile as telling him to stop dilly-dallying and get back to his job, so he once again operated his bike and left that place.

After Akira left that place, an abnormality happened in one of the dead greedy crocodiles. An arm suddenly burst out of its strong scales.

The owner of that hand forced itself out of that greedy crocodile after he tore a hole in that carcass.

The other monsters in that area quickly focused their attention on Tiol and attacked him. Though Tiol only looked emotionlessly at those monsters, his right arm already swung at their heads while his left arm, which was in the shape of a cannon, was already shooting at them. It did not take long for him to destroy all the monsters attacking him. Once he was done, he immediately vanished into the deeper part of the ruin.

Akira once again stopped his bike. But this time, it was not because something piqued his interest.

"…Alpha. Unless my eyes are tricking me, there is a swarm of Tank Tarantula right?"

The roads and buildings in front of Akira were crawling with spider-like monsters, some of them had metallic skeletal frames while some of them had concrete-like bodies. Although some of them were unarmed, most had cannons growing on their backs. And their length ranged from barely 1 metre to all the way past 3 metres.

Akira's expression turned stern. But Alpha was smiling like usual as if it did not bother her.

"Those are a swarm of spider-type armoured insects. Classification-wise, they're similar to the Yarata Scorpion."

"…So they're not Tank Tarantulas?"

"Tank Tarantula is the name of a bounty monster, so it doesn't refer to a type of monster. But if one of those spiders eat enough food to grow abnormally big and go through an abnormal evolution, there's a chance that it'll grow, evolve, or maybe mutate into something similar to that Tank Tarantula."

Akira thought for a bit before he decided not to avoid them. He let go of the bike's handle on the right and grabbed his rifle.

"Are you going to fight them? I don't see there's a need to fight them though?"

"I don't want them to turn into a swarm of Tank Tarantulas later just because I leave them alone now. And that's still my stance. Even if the possibility of something like that happening is very small, I should be prepared. What's more, this is a good chance to test my new equipment. After all, I'm free to use as many bullets as I want this time. I'll fight without your support first, but if things are getting bad, I'll need your support."

"Alright. I'll stand back and watch this time, so you can go ahead and give it your best shot."

Akira looked at the gun in his right hand and smiled bitterly.

"Though to be honest, rather than my skill, I think you'll have a better look at my new equipment and all the free ammo that I'm going to use this time."

At first, Akira was looking for a multi-type rifle that could shoot out grenades like his A4WM automatic grenade launcher, but he later decided to take that requirement off. After all, a rifle and a grenade launcher were basically two different things, so putting them into one gun caused the cost of that gun to skyrocket.

So in the end, he aimed for a gun that could do long-range sniping and continuous firing on top of being compatible with a wide range of ammo. After checking all the guns that Shizuka recommended within his budget and searching for the best gun among them, Akira decided on an SSB multi-weapon rifle.

SSB multi-weapon rifle was an amalgamation of DSS assault rifle, DVTS minigun, and CWH anti-material rifle. Its total length was just a little longer than an AAH assault rifle and shorter than a CWH anti-material rifle. It was

compact enough to be used with one hand. It was also equipped with force field armour technology to reduce its recoil, thus effectively reducing its kickback and increasing its accuracy. But in exchange, it actively consumed energy packs to power its force field armour. The stronger ammo that Akira used, the faster it would burn through its energy pack. So, although it had so many features, one of its drawbacks was how much he had to pay for using that rifle.

Akira then used the rest of his budget to buy modification parts for that SSB multi-weapon rifle and his A4WM automatic grenade launcher, which totalled 200 million Aurum. And he still had to buy ammo, energy packs, and other consumables on top of that.

As he aimed his SSB multi-weapon at the spiders, Akira frowned, worrying if his new equipment could perform as well as he expected; considering all the money that he had splurged for it. The spiders immediately noticed him and tried to swarm him. The spiders with cannons on their back aimed it at Akira and started shooting at him.

Akira pulled the trigger, his SSB multi-weapon rifle was loaded with a magazine filled with ammo that was as expensive and as powerful as CWH anti-material rifle special ammo. Although the kickback from that ammo was nothing to scoff at, thanks to the recoil suspension system of the SSB multi-weapon rifle, Akira barely felt anything. Inside his extended time perception, Akira was extremely surprised, but of course, that did not stop him from aiming at the spiders in front of him. Even in that extremely extended time perception, he could feel multiple bullets leave the barrel of his rifle. The moment that bullet reached its target, it showed no mercy and blew its target to smithereens.

Akira was surprised by its firepower as he swept through the swarm. Although it reduced the intensity of his barrage, it was more than enough to pierce and kill the spiders. Akira biked up to the top of the scattered metallic wreckage of the dead spiders mixed with the rubbles and other things while he kept shooting at the spiders.

The falling warheads from the spiders bombarded Akira, but he was able to evade them with the speed of his bike as he turned left and right to disrupt

their aimings. While at the same time, he was also circling the swarm, releasing a few shots every time he spotted that swarm from the openings between buildings.

Every time Akira passed through a crossroad, multiple warheads would be immediately released in his direction from the spiders both on the ground and on the buildings. But he accelerated his bike to slip through those warheads, or sometimes, he would compress his time perception to its limit in order to evade them, while leaving the spiders chasing him behind. He then sometimes stopped his bike to lay and wait, and immediately released a barrage the moment that swarm made a turn on that crossroad.

Akira kept circling the swarm while shooting at them. Every time he made a full round, the radius of the swarm got smaller and smaller. Akira prioritized shooting at the monsters with weaker-looking bodies made of a mix of brittle mechanical parts and flesh, thus leaving only the strong armoured spiders behind. He also shot down all the spiders that were latching on the building walls as they smacked down right to the ground.

Right about when the size of the swarm was halved, Akira finally ran out of ammo. But even so, he kept aiming at the swarm.

Akira had also equipped his SSB multi-weapon rifle with a guiding beam. Thanks to a rather extreme modification part that he had bought, he managed to add a mini-missile launcher on his A4WM automatic grenade launcher fixed on an arm behind his bike. And that guiding beam was able to work together with that missile launcher.

Akira fixed his aim at the relatively strong looking spiders. When he did that, the information display on his goggles marked those spiders. That was when he pulled the trigger and released multiple missiles from behind him straight to those spiders.

The small-sized missiles floated for a while as if they were fixed in that positions, but then, immediately, some of them went overhead, drew a perfect curve before raining down at the spiders from above, while some of them travelled parallel to the ground following the guiding beam from Akira’s rifle with a huge momentum before colliding with the spiders from

the side. With the missiles coming from above and from the front, the explosions immediately devoured the spiders.

When the aftermath of that explosion subsided, the swarm left nothing behind at all. Only a larger sized monster that led the swarm was left in the middle of the destroyed swarm.

That monster, which looked like a pseudo Tank Tarantula, started to move. Part of its body opened up, exposing pods behind them, and released multiple mini-missiles that immediately hunted for Akira. Akira, who saw that, could not help but frown.

But he immediately accelerated his bike and jumped straight into one of the buildings near him. The missiles that were chasing him were not smart enough to pursue him as they collided into the wall of that building. As each explosion took a part of that building away, the missiles dug through the building and caused it to crumble down. Akira forced his way through that building on his bike and jumped out from the crumbling building. The building behind him crumbled down and made a loud sound as it fell to the ground.

The pseudo Tank Tarantula released another barrage of missiles. The missiles filled the sky before raining down on Akira. But before those missiles flew downward, Akira quickly compressed his time perception and reloaded a new magazine into his SSB multi-weapon rifle.

Multiple anti-forcefield armour bullets flew out from the rifle’s muzzle in rapid succession. The bullets ripped through the air and hit the Tank Tarantula right on its head. The bullet was even powerful enough to pierce through its head all the way to its torso, making a mess of that monster’s inside.

The Tank Tarantula exploded from inside, engulfing its big body in flames before blowing up into small pieces. With the mini-missiles losing their guidance system, they just flew straight down to the ground and exploded. Once all the missiles had exploded, silence returned to the ruin.

Akira heaved a big sigh.

“…I somehow got through that.”

Alpha smiled and praised him.

“Good work, that was not bad at all.”

“Thanks, but still…”

Akira’s happy face was decorated with a bitter smile.

“…Normally this would leave me with a big loss.”

Akira started to calculate the total cost of the ammo he spent in that fight but he immediately decided to stop before he could come up with the precise number. He then told himself that he would refuse to pay for the ammo that he used that day no matter what.

Suddenly a call reached his borrowed terminal.

“This is the commander from the forward base. Number 14, are you there?”

“Number 14 here, what is it?”

“Your terminal sent a data pack showing that there was a huge fight over there, what happened?”

“Oh, just monsters. There was a swarm of monsters that I had to fight.”

“What’s your situation right now? Do you need backup?”

“That won’t be necessary, I’m just done with that fight. I’ll be heading back to the forward base now for resupply.”

“Alright, got it.”

The call ended there, Akira then smiled wryly and said.

“I see, it was a pretty big fight, enough to warrant a check from them, huh? Alright then, let’s end here for today. I’m pretty sure I already worked hard

enough for the day. So let’s head back home.”

“Oh my, you’re heading back early today.”

“No no no, I already worked hard enough for today, you know. Even putting aside the amount of money that I used today, I’m pretty sure eradicating that swarm is good enough for raising my Hunter Rank… Probably.”

Alpha smiled mischievously.

“So in short, this will basically take a little bit more time, huh?”

“Yup!”

Akira lightly smiled and just ignored Alpha as he turned his bike toward the forward base’s direction.

There was actually a different type of monster mixed in that swarm of spiders. Although that unit was not that strong, it was pretty durable.

So, even after all of that fighting, that unit survived. It made sure Akira left that place before sending some data. Once it had done its duty, it deactivated and went limp.

The next day, Akira was placing some orders in Shizuka’s shop. Shizuka could not help but to make a worried face after she took in that order from Akira.

“You went and used quite a lot of ammo on your first day, did something happen?”

Although Akira was happy that Shizuka was worried for him, he also did not want to make her worry as he smiled at her and said.

“It’s nothing too bad. I made sure to compensate for my skill with expensive ammo so that I won’t be in any danger. Thanks to that, it was not that hard of a fight. Although, it would definitely leave me in red if it was a normal monster hunter request. Well, basically I’m buying my safety with

someone else’s money, but since that’s how it is for this request, I’m planning to keep doing that.”

Shizuka smiled bitterly.

“Well, you’re really contributing to my shop’s sales and if you say that you’re not having any trouble at all, then I have nothing to complain about. Although, I wonder who’s getting into trouble because of this.”

“That would be the person who overestimated my skill, and that is not my fault.”

Akira smiled mischievously, seeing that, Shizuka could not help but giggle.

Shizuka then finalized the payment, and just like last time, it went through without a hitch. After that, she turned to Akira and said to him with a serious face.

“…It went through without trouble again this time. At this rate, don’t you think that it should be alright for you to get more expensive stuff?”

Although he did it because he had to fight a swarm of monsters, it did not change the fact that Akira leisurely used ammo while ignoring its total expense. Although his contract allowed him to do so, there was no mistaking that he would receive some complaints later. Even more so when Kibayashi did not even ask why he needed that money before approving payment.

Akira himself also wondered why he was allowed to do that, he wondered if it was because it was normal for Hunters working around the ruin to use that much money, or if there was another reason for that.

“Although these are only consumables, it would still take some time for the orders to arrive when you order this many, and it’s doubly true for expensive goods. So it might be a good idea to place an order for some extra now.”

“Ah, thank you but I will have to refuse, at least not for today. I just placed an order now. I’ll think about it again after I receive it.”

“I see, well, good luck and be careful out there. Don’t lower your guard just because you’re free to use as many bullets as you want, okay?”

“Of course!”

Akira then spent some time talking with Shizuka before taking his goods and leaving the shop. Judging from how he seemed to be absolutely confident in being able to return back alive, Shizuka thought that whatever happened yesterday was not that much of a problem.

Akira once again took his bike to the inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin. That day he had no plans to hunt for monsters, instead, he went to search the buildings around the highway, hunting for relics.

After he spent some time looking around, he decided to just go to one of the buildings there. He parked his bike in front of that building, but before he went in, he looked at his A4WM automatic grenade launcher fixed on the backside of his bike and was unsure whether it was a good idea to bring it or not.

“…I guess it’s better not to take that with me, huh.”

Since he upgraded his A4WM automatic grenade launcher with a mini-missile launcher, its size had grown pretty large. Though he still could take it with him, it was pretty much as big as a tank cannon, and of course, bringing a tank cannon with him would hinder his mobility.

In the first place, grenade launchers and missile launchers were not something to be used inside a closed space. He was able to do so in the past thanks to Alpha’s support, but now that he was cutting himself from that support, it would be dangerous to bring them along with him. Not to mention, it was a hassle to put it back again once he removed it from the bike’s arm. So he decided not to bring it along with him.

That was when Alpha suddenly interjected.

“Akira, you can actually take that bike inside too, you know?”

“No no no, there’s no way to do that, right? Like, how am I going to take it up the stairs?”

“That’s when technologies come in. You can just step off from the bike when you want to search narrow places. Moreover, there’s no guarantee that your bike will be fine when you return back from searching the building, you know? Well, in the end, you’ll be the one to do everything though, so I won’t force you. But this is like another test for your luck, do you want to still go through it?”

Akira could still park the bike somewhere hard to see, put a camouflaging sheet over it, and pray that monsters would not find it. But with Alpha scaring him, he could not bring himself to take that option. He did not say anything back as he returned to his bike and turned it on while Alpha was watching him with a smile.

The inside of the building was actually pretty wide, thanks to that, Akira could ride his bike inside, albeit only slowly.

From Akira’s point of view, the inside of the building was in a weirdly bad condition. Although the walls, the floor, and the ceiling seemed brand new, everything else inside that building was withered. It was as if someone was using that newly made building as a garbage dump.

Akira looked around inside that building unsettlingly.

“I picked this building because of its outer look, but I guess this place is a dud, huh?”

“The auto-repair function only repairs the building, not the furniture or any objects inside it. So I guess the cleaning and replacement system inside this building must have been long deactivated.”

“I guess I’ll at least look around.”

Akira chose a random room, parked his bike in front of that room, and searched the room for any expensive-looking relics.

When he opened the door of one of the shelves there, he found a dusty machine inside it. As Akira tried to dust it off, it broke into pieces and fell apart. So he threw away anything that was left on his hand before moving on.

When he tried to pull a drawer, the handle went off and the whole drawer crumbled down, spilling the sand and the dust inside it and leaving only the handle on his hand. Akira threw that handle away and moved on.

He then spotted something that seemed to be a display case made of something that looked like glass. When he tried to lift it off to check if he could carry that back, the glass shattered and the whole case fell to pieces.

Akira frowned.

“Everything here is pretty much broken. This thing is still an old-world relic, right? So why is it this brittle? Even the plate that I found back in Higaraka residence ruin was not this brittle, you know?”

Alpha smiled and explained to Akira as if to calm him down.

“Although they’re made from the old-world era, not all of them were made to stand for a long time. And just like how your SSB multi-weapon rifle depends on energy packs, these things might have been designed to run on energy too, you know. So it’s understandable for them to deteriorate the moment they ran out of energy. But of course, this is nothing more than my guess.”

“…I see. Well, if that’s really the case, then we can’t do anything about it. Let’s just look for relics that seem durable.”

Up until now, Akira had wondered multiple times as to why Alpha knew that much about the old-world era. He had a lot of guesses based on his limited knowledge. But lately, one of his guesses kept sticking to his mind, the guess that Alpha was from the old-world era too.

Both Seranthal from the Seranthal building and Tsubaki from the Tsubakihara building were also from the old-world era although they were nothing more than AI for managing those buildings. Not to mention, Tsubaki had a body, it seemed that she was also acquainted with Alpha. Alpha also did say something along the line that she could get a corporeal body if Akira completed her request to explore a certain ruin.

So then, the real question would be what exactly was Alpha? Of course, Akira could not ask that question to Alpha himself since he would risk losing too many things by doing that.

Thus Akira pushed that question to the back of his mind as he continued searching for relics.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 180, Old-World Equipment

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Akira finished searching the fourth floor, but he still could not find anything valuable yet. Though he tried taking some relics which were in relatively better condition, all of them were turned into sand when he opened up his rucksack again to put in more relics later. So he decided that it was meaningless to keep doing that.

Akira sighed, slightly bummed out.

“I always thought that I should be able to at least find some expensive relics since we’re in the deeper part of the ruin, but it doesn’t seem to that easy, huh.”

Unlike Akira, Alpha still had her usual smile.

“Well, we’re still around the main road made by dispatching a big army. I’m sure that they already collected all the easy-to-spot expensive relics.”

“But still, that building you showed me the first time we met still had quite a lot of relics, right? Although the direction is not the same, that place was more or less of the same distance from the city, you know? So I thought I should be able to at least find some expensive relics here too.”

“The distance and the danger are different. Thanks to the properly maintained road, it’s an easy thing to send people to this place, you can’t afford to compare that place to here. Not to mention, that place was still patrolled by huge monsters, so only a limited number of Hunters managed to reach it.”

“Is that so?”

“If you want to find a lot of relics, you should look for buildings that other Hunters haven’t searched. I’m pretty sure you can find a lot of relics if you go past the front line, you know? Want to try to do that instead?”

“I wouldn’t go that far either though…”

Akira did think so too, but the front line was already guarded with powered suits. There was no doubt the area beyond it was highly dangerous. Of course, since he was free to use as many bullets as he wanted, he could just force his way there. But he also thought that there was no need to be that reckless, at least not for now.

“Well, for the time being, I’ll hunt for relics and monsters around this area.”

As he said so, Akira also kept reminding himself that he promised Shizuka not to do anything reckless.

Akira continued looking for relics in that building. Although he had reached the seventh floor, he still got no meaningful result. He forced his bike to go up the stairs and finally reached the eighth floor and noticed that it was different compared to the other floors downstairs.

The floor was filled with big snails, some of them were 1 metre long. Its shell was made of metal and a small-sized cannon was perching on its back.

“So, what’s your plan now? If you have no plans to collect money by hunting monsters, I don’t think there’s any need to fight them. We also could not find any good relics up until now, so, want to head back instead?”

“No, I’ll kill them and continue searching this building. Since there are monsters on this floor, I’m sure other Hunters who only came to take a quick glance of this place wouldn’t have tried to search for relics past this floor. So basically, there’s a good chance I still can find some relics ahead.”

“I see, good luck then.”

Akira stepped off from his bike and aimed his SSB multi-weapon rifle from under the shadow in that hallway. He aimed his rifle carefully and pulled the trigger, the bullet flew and pierced a hole in that snail’s shell.

The moment that happened, the snail pulled back its soft body as if to hug the floor while its small-sized cannon immediately targeted Akira. Akira quickly pulled back his body, the warhead flew past him, struck the wall and created a small explosion.

“Its cannon is not that powerful either.”

“With that being said, it does not mean you can afford to take that shot, okay?”

“I know.”

From that short exchange, Akira thought that the enemy was not that strong and it seemed he only needed a few shots to take it down. But after he took a few shots at that snail, he could not help but frown. All his shots did hit that sail, but the bullets only ricocheted off its shell. The same thing happened even after he did that 5 times. Every time the bullets hit that snail, a flash was released from its shell.

Akira was amazed by what was happening as he evaded the warheads coming at him.

“It suddenly turned hard. And also, that light, it is due to the kinetic energy conversion to light from the force field armour, right?”

“That seems to be the case.”

“So I have to kill it quickly before it can notice me, otherwise its shell will harden, huh? What a pain!”

Akira calmed his breathing and immediately jumped out from behind the cover. He compressed his time perception to its limit, aimed his SSB multi-type rifle at that monster, and pulled the trigger, aiming for the same spot as accurately as possible with each shot.

The combination of his compressed time perception, the recoil compensator of his SSB multi-type rifle, augmented physical capability from his augmented suit, and all the hard work that he had done from his training, allowed him to release rapid-fire with surgical accuracy. Thanks to that, all the bullets that he shot hit mostly the same location.

Even the powerful force field armour of the snail could not handle that. The bullets blew a hole through the snail’s shell and ricocheted inside the snail’s shell, destroying its innards. Not to mention, the snail had retracted its body into its shell, thus immediately killing it. It then leaned and rolled over with a low rattling sound.

“Alright then, well, although I was only able to kill it thanks to all the bullets that I consumed, a win is still a win. But still, I didn’t expect monsters with force field armour to be loitering around this place. I guess that’s normal when I’m this deep, huh. Maybe Kibayashi allowed me to use that much money because he knows that it would be this dangerous.”

Akira felt happy that he was able to defeat a relatively strong monster on his own. But Alpha immediately shot it down.

“Unfortunately, that might not be the case. This snail is not a strong monster. Judging from its strength, the spiders that you fought the other day is stronger.”

“That might be true for the big spider leading that swarm, but that’s not the case for the smaller ones, no?”

“Not really, that’s also the case if you compare that snail with the smaller spider.”

Akira raised his eyebrows. He then asked.

“…Is that so? But the smaller spiders had no forcefield armour, you know. The snail is stronger no matter how you look at it, right?”

“Akira, there are many monsters which are stronger when they are in a certain condition. The snail is basically one of those monsters and this situation is the condition where it is strong. You can actually defend yourself from bullets just like that snail if you spent your energy to temporarily increase the strength of the force field armour on your coat.”

“Even if that’s true, it’s not like I can keep up that level of force field armour for so long, right?”

“I bet that snail is taking the energy from the building. It might be harvesting that energy so it can’t move in the meantime. If that’s the case, then it won’t be able to use its force field armour outside the building, that might be the reason why you don’t see them outside.”

“…Is that a guess?”

“Yep. But again, if that snail can use such a powerful force field armour that is even able to block a bullet that’s as power powerful as CWH anti-material rifle special bullet anywhere, it would have been roaming outside the building and the City Management would have put some effort in eradicating them.”

Akira nodded.

“Well. Considering that its shell becomes that strong if I don’t kill it while it hasn’t noticed me, honestly speaking, it’s actually a pretty troublesome monster…”

Akira hung his head low. Not only did he give his enemy a chance to turn the situation to its advantage, he then forced himself to defeat that monster in that situation just to misevaluate it, thinking that it was a strong monster and got ahead of himself because of that.

He then realized that Alpha was smiling at him amusedly and raised his head.

“It doesn’t really matter, a win is a win. Moreover, I bet other Hunters who came here before me thought that it was too much of a hassle to defeat that monster and left without searching this floor. So there’s a good chance I might find some expensive relics here.”

“You have a point there. But I’ll at least let you know this. There are still multiple similar monsters in this building, so make sure to get them without getting noticed, okay?”

“Roger that, let’s go!“

Akira sounded a bit desperate when he said so as he continued exploring the ruin.

The exploration itself went well. As he expected, Akira encountered some snail monsters again, but he was able to take them down without getting noticed. There were also times when there were multiple snails so that he could not take all of them down at the same time, although he got some of his shots deflected by their hardened shells, Akira then would open up some distance to wait for their shells to soften back before shooting at them again.

Thanks to that, he was able to quickly defeat all of the snails although he had a hard time fighting the first snail that he had met. Akira himself realized that fact as he smiled wryly.

Although the exploration went well, he still could not find any valuable relics. He had already reached the twelfth floor but still ended up with nothing. Akira stopped for a bit as he heaved a big sigh and said.

“Still nothing, huh? Although, it’s also weird that there are fewer of those bad relics too.”

“Those snails might have eaten them.”

“Good grief…”

Knowing when to give up was also an important skill for a Hunter. Akira knew that too, but he could not shake off the feeling that he might be able to find something if he continued searching that building, thus preventing him from making that decision. Furthermore, he had to fight those troublesome snails to be able to reach that place, so it would be such a waste to give up here. As he continued searching the building, he eventually finished the second last floor of that building, the 19th floor.

Akira sighed again and said.

“…Alpha. I know that this might be counted as your support. But since I’ve come this far, tell me if I missed any expensive relics behind.”

“Nope. Based on my sensor, I didn’t find any good relics either.”

“So, this place really has no expensive relics, huh… If I still can’t find anything on this floor, then it would mean this building is a dud although it’s such a big building. I wonder if I have no talent in this.”

Alpha smiled and lightly cheered up the discouraged Akira.

“Sharpening your sense for such a thing is not easy. I believe that piling up experience is the only way to do that.”

“That’s true, but still…”

Although Akira understood very well that his ability to hunt both relics and monsters was significantly lowered without Alpha’s support, he thought that he should be able to at least manage something. But it seemed that the reality was not that kind.

“Moreover, we still have the last floor left, it might be too quick to decide that this place is a dud right now. Don’t give up and do your best to the very end.”

“…You’re right.”

Akira thought that getting discouraged there would not help him with anything, thus he shook it off his mind and continued the exploration.

The last floor only had a long hallway that connected the stairs to a door. Akira went through that hallway and stepped off from his bike in front of that door. But when he tried to open it, the tough door would not budge even with the power of his augmented suit.

“It won’t even move, why did they make this one door so strong? All the other doors downstairs were easy to open.”

“That might be simply because the snails downstair sapped their energy and make the doors brittle.”

“Which means that there should be no snails on this floor then. Well, I guess we’ll know soon enough once we get in…”

Akira turned up his augmented suit’s performance to max, ignoring its energy consumption, and tried to open the door. But again, the door did not budge at all.

Akira, who started to get annoyed, aimed his SSB multi-weapon rifle at the door. If he barraged that door with anti-forcefield bullets at that range, he thought he should be able to destroy that door no matter how strong it was. But at the same time, he also hesitated using bullets made to kill monsters for something like that. Although he did not pay for those bullets himself, it did not change the fact that he would be using more of those expensive bullets although he still had no meaningful results up until now. It would be no surprise if he received some complaints from Kibayashi later. Akira still had his rifle aimed at the door without being able to bring himself to pull the trigger.

That was when Alpha smiled bitterly at him and said.

“Akira, if you want to destroy the door, you should use the blade instead. There’s no need to use expensive bullets for a target that doesn’t move even when you’re up this close.”

Akira looked surprised and smiled wryly. He then took out the blade that he had forgotten until now. It was the blade he brought back from the Tsubakihara building.

Akira's body suddenly started moving on its own. Of course, it was Alpha controlling his augmented suit. He then took a stance as a blade extended out from the handle in his hand.

"Alpha?"

Alpha suddenly started providing support to him again. Akira looked at Alpha in surprise, but she ignored it.

"This much is fine, right? Let's hurry up and open that door. After all, it would be a bad idea to waste the energy left in that blade."

Akira smiled bitterly and matched his body movement with his augmented suit's movement.

With the help of Alpha's support, Akira swung the blade with the skill of a swordmaster. The blade sliced through the thick metallic door as if it was not there in the first place.

After he executed that slice, Akira took a breath before retracting the shape part of the blade. A few seconds later the pieces of the door fell back and made banging sounds. Seeing how the door was cut clean, Akira could not hide his amazement.

"This blade is as sharp as usual. I somehow can understand why those Hunters, who are able to get their hands on this blade and are able to use it freely, choose to fight monsters in close range."

Alpha frowned, which was very rare for her.

"Don't do that, okay? Although I also train you on how to use that blade, it's basically melee training that includes hand to hand and close-range shooting. It's not so that you would specialize in fighting in close range with a blade."

“I know.”

Akira only said so and stopped pursuing that subject. But in reality, many Hunters tend to specialize in a single type of weapon when they got their hands on powerful weapons, even more so when that weapon was an old-world weapon. After all, due to its abnormally high performance, there were times when that weapon saved them during unlikely situations, thus increasing their trust in that weapon.

When Akira entered that room, he immediately stopped, surprised at what he found inside that room The whole highest floor consisted of a single room. That room had a pure white ceiling, wall, and floor. Although there was no window in that room, it was bright enough for Akira to see clearly. It was big, seemingly limitless, and the boundary between the ceiling, wall, and floor was blurred. It really threw Akira’s sense of distance off.

“Alpha, this is…”

“A room designed for 3D projection or augmented reality. The white floor, ceiling and wall are to remove any needless information from getting into your views. The whole room itself is equipped with some kind of projection device.”

“What can I say… This room feels really weird.”

Akira’s vision was filled with the colour white no matter where he looked. When he looked down at his feet, it gave an impression that he was floating. The same conclusion could be seen from the data gathered by his information-gathering device as if it was malfunctioning.

The moment Akira noticed the reading of his information-gathering device, he tensed up since he understood that he was in a situation where he could not rely on his information-gathering device. It was as if he was in the middle of a thick colourless mist.

“Alpha, though I should have done this sooner, let’s end the training here. Help me get a better reading of this room.”

“Oh, are you giving up?”

“Yeah, I’m giving up.”

Akira replied firmly as if he was not bothered by that light provocation from Alpha. He understood that it would be difficult for him to search that room on his own. Alpha smiled happily at him and said.

“Not holding back is sometimes a good thing. Alright then.”

Alpha then enhanced Akira’s vision, he could see lines drawn on the white spaces in front of him. Those lines formed squares in regular intervals, helping him regain his sense of space. The room no longer seemed to be limitless and he could recognize the real width of that room.

Now that Akira had regained his bearing, he also regained his calm. He then walked to the middle of the room and looked around the room before heaving a big sigh.

“…Still nothing. So in the end, this place is a dud, huh?”

“Well, things like this happen from time to time. Let’s just move on.”

Alpha smiled and said so to cheer him up. Akira regained some of his motivation thanks to that. Although he still had his head hung low, Akira made a 180 degrees turn to head back to the exit.

But in the next moment, he quickly pulled up his rifle and aimed it at the person in front of him out of pure reflex. The person in front of him looked somewhat familiar to him as that person looked emotionlessly at Akira.

“Long time no see.”

Akira frowned and asked her a question to confirm his guess.

“…Uhhh, Tsubaki-san… Right?”

“Yes. I have no wish to be hostile to you, so please lower your rifle. Although this body is just an image that can’t be hurt with bullets, it’s still

rude to have that rifle pointed at me.”

“I-I’m sorry.”

Akira flusteredly lowered his rifle. When he did that, Alpha immediately interjected. She was obviously not happy.

“So, why are you here?”

“I have something I want to discuss with you.”

Tsubaki said with a flat voice as she looked at Akira with her emotionless face.

Alpha looked at Tsubaki with an obviously unfriendly look.

“I’m sorry but we’re busy right now. If you have anything you want to talk about, you can tell me later.”

“You’re not the one that I want to talk with though.”

“It doesn’t matter, do you really think I would let you step over me?”

Alpha’s expression turned even more hostile with each sentence she said. But Tsubaki just ignored it. Akira was really troubled about what to do there.

Tsubaki once again shifted her gaze back to Akira.

“Are you okay with that?”

“Eh? Uhh, well…”

Akira was overwhelmed by the sharp gaze from Alpha and the cold but meaningful gaze from Tsubaki. He understood that both of them were pressuring him to choose between them. But the confusion prevented him from deciding. But after a short confusion, although it did not seem that he was fully okay with it, Akira finally said.

“I’m in the middle of doing a request from Alpha, so I can’t accept another request right now. Although it might be something that I can do while doing the request from Alpha, I can’t really tell right now. I don’t know what you want to discuss with me, but whatever it is, please say that to Alpha first.”

Alpha smiled widely and Tsubaki shrugged, still with her emotionless face.

“I see, in that case, I’ll excuse myself here. We shall meet again when the chance presents itself.”

Although her body was nothing more than an image, Tsubaki turned around and was about to leave the room when she suddenly turned back again as if she just remembered something.

“By the way, since you won’t talk with me, I have no obligation to help you. I hope you would do something about the security drones posted in this place in order to prevent people from intruding into this building yourself.”

Tsubaki only said so before vanishing. Akira was still not fully recovered from the confusion when his augmented suit suddenly started moving on its own. Alpha controlled Akira’s augmented suit to run toward the door as fast as it could.

“Alpha!? What’s wrong?!”

“We need to get out of this place as fast as we can!! So hurry up!!”

Akira managed to match his movements although he was caught off guard. But the next moment, he saw his bike flying in his direction from the door into that room.

A white humanoid robot had kicked Akira’s bike and left it tumbling on the ground. The white humanoid robot did not have a mouth, or eyes, or hair. It looked like a naked cyborg body covered in white.

Akira immediately shot at that robot, but that robot planted itself on the ground instead of evading it.

When those bullets hit its robotic body, it sunk into the robot's body and caused a small ripple over its surface.

Akira did not expect that at all, but that did not stop him from moving. He kept shooting accurately at that robot with the help of Alpha's support. And just like last time, the bullets were absorbed into the robot's body and caused a ripple on its surface. The ripple accumulated and caused its body to bend in a strange fashion.

Inside his compressed time perception, Akira shouted through telepathy.

"Alpha! What the heck is that!?"

"It's a body made of material adjusted for augmented reality or 3D projection. I'm sure it's one of the building's equipment, though I don't know if it's autonomous or it's being controlled remotely."

"Equipment?"

One of the wall partitions inside that room opened and exposed the robots behind it. Some of them were white robots, while some of them were donning old-world design maid and butler outfits. They were giving Akira a warning.

"Warning! In order to maintain safety in this building, the security drones are allowed to use force and permitted to kill. Please show your identification information immediately."

The same thing also happened from the wall partition near the entrance and the wall partition on the opposite end of the room.

"Unable to confirm the identity. Interpreting this action as an effort to hide identity. Increasing the severity of the action in order to secure the situation. We will not be responsible for any injuries during the suppression, surrender is advised."

The robots surrounded and closed in on Akira.

"Repeat. In order to maintain-"

The white robot body eventually could not take the barrage any longer. The shockwave from the bullets pushed its body backwards, dragging its body across the floor. Some of the bullets pierced its body and destroyed its inside. Its white outer body mixed with the pieces of its mechanical innards as they were scattered on the ground.

“Finally, got one! Why are they that durable when their bodies seem so soft?!”

“That’s also a kind of force field armour. It basically has the same mechanism as the snail’s shell.”

“The same? Although its body is that strong?”

“I’m sure that difference comes from the fact that those snails are sapping energy from this building while that robot is one of the building’s equipment right from the start. But putting that aside for now…”

The robots started to swarm Akira. Some of them were coming at him from the direction of the door, it was already impossible for him to break through them.

“Akira, get yourself ready, we need to do something reckless.”

“Alright!!”

Now that Alpha had control of his augmented suit again, Akira movements improved. He was more precise, faster, and much more powerful. Akira himself desperately matched the movement of his body with his augmented suit in the middle of the slow-moving world of his compressed time perception.

Akira ejected the magazine from his rifle in his right hand and threw it into the air. While it was still in the air, he quickly pulled back his right hand and pulled out a magazine filled with a mix of anti-forcefield armour rounds and high powered armour piercing ammo and threw it into the air too. With both his rifle and the new magazine in the air, Akira grabbed his rifle again and reloaded that new magazine in one smooth swipe.

While at the same time, his left hand reached back to his 5 million Aurum per box medicine, opened its lid with the gripping power of his augmented suit. He quickly brought some pills to his mouth while making sure not to let the pills fall off his hand. Then he reached for his blade's handle and detracted its blade.

Akira's left and right hands moved together at the same time. After that, he kicked the robot in front of him and started shooting with his right hand and slashing with his left hand to carve a way towards the door.

The anti-forcefield armour bullets that were shot from close range had enough firepower to blow the robot's torso clean off its limbs.

While the blade on his left hand that he swung with such power and speed was able to cleanly cut off the robots even after they braced themselves for the incoming blade. Akira cut them in half, throwing its upper half up in the air while its lower body rolled over on the ground. But his blade did not stop there as it sought for its second target. But unfortunately, it was not able to break through the second robot's force field armour, it was only enough to throw it off-balance. After that single strike, the blade could not handle the burden and crumbled into dust.

The robot in front of Akira received his kick with both arms. Although it was able to push the robot slightly back, it was not enough to damage the robot's body. Akira was momentarily stopped in place, the robot behind him immediately took that chance to swing a chop from behind while the robot in front of him also shifted its posture to deliver a counter.

Akira used the robot in front of him as a support to jump up and rolled on the air to evade the chop from behind him before landing both of his feet on the ceiling. He then immediately turned off the recoil compensator of his SSB multi-weapon rifle and started shooting at the robots, the kickback from his rifle made sure that his feet were firmly planted on the ceiling as he jumped to the side across the ceiling to evade the incoming punches and kicks from the robots under him.

The robots tried to attack him while he was running across the ceiling. With the help of forcefield technology, they had no problem pursuing Akira even

when he was upside-down running on the ceiling.

Akira kept shooting as he quickly pulled out another blade and started fighting the robots up close just like when he was on the floor– shooting, cutting, and kicking them. But since he was only able to maintain that posture because of the kickback from his rifle, he was not able to move freely, and with the robots coming at him from his head, Akira was having trouble fighting them.

The robots had Akira surrounded as they came at him from all directions. Akira was still compressing his time perception, in that world that was running in slow motion, he could see clearly the robot parts that were scattered in the air and every single attack that was coming at him. He understood that he would not be able to block all the incoming attacks, but even so, he did not give up and still desperately fought with his best.

Inside that world where everything almost stood still, Akira could see the killing blow coming for him, but he also noticed something else behind that robot. A swarm of missiles coming in his direction from behind the robots.

After Akira's bike was kicked down, Alpha controlled it to get it back up and emptied the missile in the missile launcher fixed on his A4WM automatic grenade launcher. The explosion from those missiles blew the robots away together with Akira since they were in an enclosed space.

Akira smacked down to the floor and coughed out blood, dyeing the white floor red. His body was assaulted with pain and the medicine that he took beforehand had run out of its effect.

When Alpha launched all the missiles, she guided them herself and had made all the calculations of their explosion radius. Thanks to that, Akira was spared from the worst shockwave of those missiles. Not to mention, the output of his coat equipped with forcefield armour was turned up to max for a short time, thus suppressing the damage on him to a minimum.

Since Akira could not even lift his finger on his own, Alpha controlled his augmented suit to take out some medicines and shove them into his mouth.

He swallowed that medicine together with some metallic-tasting blood that was left in his mouth.

Akira swayed left and right as he pushed himself back up. The robots that were still functional also did the same. Even some of the robots that had lost their head could still stand back up. Akira who saw that smiled wryly and said.

“Good grief, just how robust can these guys be? You guys should just stay on the ground after losing your head, you know.”

“I believe that they’re controlled remotely from somewhere close by. I bet they’re partially autonomous and remotely controllable.”

“I see, I also fought against similar monsters before. So they’re basically based on the same mechanism, huh.”

“Just a little more before we can escape this building, so hang on.”

“Got it!”

Akira got a little desperate as he grabbed his rifle back.

After that, Akira was able to maintain the upper hand. Alpha provided a suppression fire using the DVTS minigun fixed on his bike while he was also shooting at the robots from beside the bike. Although some of the robots were still functional, they were damaged and their movements were significantly slowed. So they were unable to surround Akira with their current speed.

Akira shot down the last robot. Its head and body were pierced with the bullet as it got blown back into the pile of its dead comrades. The empty magazine was automatically ejected from his SSB multi-weapon rifle. Akira crouched and picked that empty magazine up, imagining how much money he had used in that fight and smiled bitterly. He then threw that empty magazine up to the air.

Alpha had a big smile on her face and praised Akira.

“Good work there. Although I did give you some help, you have become pretty strong.”

“Thanks for the compliment.”

“Oh my, you don’t sound happy.”

“It’s not like I did that with my own power. Moreover, even after I almost got killed just now, I still don’t have any expensive relics to carry back. This is not good at all.”

“What are you talking about? There’s a pile of relics just over there, no?”

“Where?”

Akira tilted his head and frowned, Alpha was pointing at the pile of dead robots.

“Although they’re already destroyed, it doesn’t change the fact that they’re old-world relics. They’re pretty strong although they’re not battle robots, so I’m sure they can at least get you some money.”

Akira raised his eyebrows, but it was not because Alpha told him that they could fetch him some money.

“…They are not battle robots?”

“If my guess is correct, they’re just for serving guests. Although, I believe being able to peacefully secure a rampaging guest is also an important functionality for such robots.”

“You do know that I almost got killed fighting those robots, right? I think they also said something along the line ‘permitted to kill me’ or something? And you say they’re not battle robots?”

“They basically said that to let you know that even if they get you killed in the process of securing you, they won’t be held responsible for it. So it’s just to warn the guests that even with the technology of the old-world, such cases are not impossible. Moreover, if they’re really designed for battle,

they would have carried more weapons. Since they came at you unarmed, it basically means that they’re not made for combat.”

“…I see.”

Akira was reminded of how abnormal the old-world things were, thus deepening his misunderstanding about the old-world.

After that, Akira stuffed the dead robots into his rucksack and returned to the forward base. When he emptied his rucksack in the forward base, the receptionist winced back and was wide-eyed.

Akira sighed as he thought that he should have left that building sooner.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 181, Humanoid Monsters

Index

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After Akira sold the robots that he destroyed in the forward base, he took a break in the base's cafeteria. Thanks to the medicines that he had taken, his wound had already been fully healed and he was not physically exhausted, but the medicines did not help with his mental stress at all. He had decided to end his day, so he was sitting there looking absent-minded.

That was when Kibayashi appeared. Kibayashi happily took the seat in front of Akira without asking Akira's permission and smiled at him. Akira frowned, knowing that it would be nothing but more trouble.

"What now?"

"Don't be so cold. It's just that since I see you haven't returned back home yet, there's something I want to ask you here, you see."

"Ask me? Just to let you know, I won't be paying for the ammo, alright?"

Akira said so clearly right from the start with a stern face. Kibayashi smiled wryly at him and said.

“Don’t worry about that. Just because you got your terminal destroyed during your duty, it’s not like we’re not going to pay for the ammo you used during that time.”

The information terminal that Akira got from the temporary base always sent the signal of his location, but the moment he entered the highest floor of that building, his signal was cut off due to the feature of that room. Then the explosion from the mini-missiles finally completely broke it. Because of that, the temporary base did not know anything about his encounter with Tsubaki, and of course, Akira had no plans to tell Kibayashi about that at all.

“It’s nothing complicated. The robots that you brought in are all completely destroyed though, couldn’t you bring them in a better state?”

“No.”

“I see. Got it. That’s all I wanted to ask you.”

Akira looked surprised, he did not expect Kibayashi to back down that quickly.

“Is that all?”

“Yeah, that’s all. Like I said, I do like you. I have no plans to keep pursuing that subject just to sour your mood, alright? Not to mention, you’ve entertained me enough. You crushed a swarm of monsters on your own on the first day, and today, not only you brought back a lot of old-world relics, you even secured a whole building too. Just so you know, normally speaking, you’ve done splendidly up until now.”

“Like hell if I care about that. In the first place, it’s nothing normal the moment you offer to pay all of my consumables.”

“I said so with that considered too. But that’s just so you.”

Kibayashi smiled amusedly at Akira’s abnormal reaction.

After that, Akira and Kibayashi talked for a bit more about the request and the situation around the road.

Akira’s current request did not have a clear finish line. It would continue until Akira’s Hunter Rank reached the point where it was suitable for his strength, while the request itself did not clearly state what that Hunter Rank would be.

But Kibayashi already told Akira that he had entertained him enough, so Akira thought it should be fine to end the request there. But when he asked Kibayashi about that, Kibayashi said that it was not up for him to decide and he had no idea either what was the opinion of the people from the upper echelons about that matter.

Akira did find that a little surprising as he thought of using as much ammo as he wanted without caring about effectiveness since someone else was paying for it. That way, he would be able to quickly rank up until his request was deemed finished regardless of the opinions of the others.

__*__*__*__*__

Tiol was eating the wreckage of humanoid monsters inside a dilapidated building in Kuzusuhara ruin. But those were not the humanoid monsters that Akira destroyed, Tiol destroyed those monsters in another building.

The white room was filled with the echo of metallic wreckage getting crushed. Tiol himself was badly injured from the fighting, but his injuries were slowly healing as he was feasting on the dead monsters.

Suddenly Tsubaki appeared in front of Tiol.

“Good afternoon!”

Tiol immediately stood up and took a fighting stance as he swung his right arm to rip off Tsubaki’s head. Unfortunately, Tsubaki was no more than an image, so Tiol’s hand went through her effortlessly.

“That was rude.”

Tsubaki immediately vanished. Tiol quickly turned and lunged in a direction where there was nothing at all. But from his point of view, he could see Tsubaki standing there.

But from Tsubaki's point of view, the world was running so slowly as if it was completely paused. Inside that slow-moving world, Tsubaki looked closely at Tiol and mumbled.

"He can recognize me both through augmented reality and through network image too. I see."

Tsubaki then said with a flat emotion.

"Stop!"

Right at the next moment, Tiol's body suddenly froze in the middle of lunging at Tsubaki. The inertia allowed his body to proceed forward but the gravity prevented him from staying afloat. So, he just crashed down to the ground and rolled over as if his whole body was petrified into stone.

"Safety leash command number 721 works as intended. Which means that it's based on the nanomachine inside one of those biological monsters, huh. I don't know who did this, but it's pretty impressive. Unfortunately, that person was not able to override the control command. Wait, no, it might be some kind of mutation because of the nanomachine put inside his body in order to trick the friend-or-foe identification system… With too many conflicting nanomachines in his body, it instead might have caused a system failure."

There was no one else other than Tiol in that room, but he could see all kinds of information displayed in his views as Tsubaki walked toward him. Unauthorized connection, unable to prevent connection, failed shutting off the connection, identified administration from area 844, individual outside the administration right, detected unauthorized hacking, hopeless difference in strength, zero winning chance, advised to run away immediately. Tiol registered all of those notices that appeared in his views, but they did not help his situation at all.

Tsubaki suddenly vanished again from his view. She then reappeared again as an image as she extended her hand to his head.

“He wouldn’t even listen to what I have to say. So I’ll ask you instead. I’m sure you’re also having it hard with such an unstable system, right? I’ll give you the reward upfront, so don’t worry.”

The information notices in Tiol’s views suddenly changed. Unauthorized connection, unable to prevent connection, failed shutting off the connection, rebuilding control system, readjusting administration structure, rebuilding connection, rebuilding finished.

Tiol could move his body again as his body relaxed while he was still lying on the ground. After a few seconds, he slowly pushed himself up and stood in front of Tsubaki.

“I’ll leave the rest to you then.”

Tsubaki smiled faintly and vanished. The only notice left in Tiol’s views was an order from Tsubaki. With his assigned duty to secure the area starting, Tiol immediately moved out following that order.

__*__*__*__

Yatsubayashi had a stern look on his face as he eyed the displays in front of him.

“…What just happened?”

The display showed information sent from Tiol, and that information stream was already fully stopped. Among the last information sent by Tiol, there was a piece of information that really piqued Yatsubayashi’s interest.

Yatsubayashi actually was thinking of a plan to take care of Tiol before it caused extra trouble to him, but with this, he decided to change his plan. His curiosity completely outweighed his rationale as he readjusted his plan accordingly following curiosity.

__*__*__*__

Akira once again visited Shizuka to replenish his stock. Shizuka looked worriedly at Akira as she said to him.

“Akira, this will be pretty expensive though, are you sure?”

Akira nodded with a serious face.

“Yes. After thinking about it one more time, I thought that it’s safer to do this and I should be able to end this request faster this way. So please continue with the order.”

Akira completely readjusted his order. This time he ordered multiple mini-sized energy packs and high-grade repair cartridges, both of them were expensive consumables. On top of it, he also ordered a huge amount of powerful anti-forcefield armour as well as mini-missiles that could be used with personal-sized missile launchers.

Shizuka proceeded to place the order. Akira and Shizuka waited silently for the confirmation, but this time, the order was rejected.

“As I thought, it won’t go through, huh?”

Akira seemed slightly relieved. Suddenly a call from Kibayashi reached him.

“It’s me. It seems that an expensive order just came in, and it’s from you, just wanted to make sure that it’s not some kind of mistake or something. I’ve sent you the information to your information terminal, so go ahead and check it.”

“I did, it was really from me and it was not a mistake.”

Unexpectedly, Kibayashi replied in a rather good mood.

“You bought quite a lot this time, enough for the financial division to contact me, you know?”

“I need them to be able to fight safely. If you’re going to tell me to cut that out, just so you know, that’s basically my real strength. That way I won’t

need to keep doing this request, right?”

“Hm? I’m not calling you for that. There, the payment went through.”

“Even that got approved, huh?!”

“It was just a notice due to the size and the cost of the order. I’m sorry but once you receive that order, bring them to the forward base for safekeeping. But don’t worry, you can still use them anytime. I’ll send you the specifics later.”

“The repair cartridges are for my augmented suit, so I need them back home.”

“I see, you can take the cartridges home then. I’ll tell the guys above myself about that.”

“A-Alright!”

Akira was a little surprised that his order went through so smoothly. Kibayashi, who noticed it, laughed.

“I did tell you that your performance is far above the norm, remember? So this much demand will go through just fine, although, it’s partly because of my influence too. You should be more confident in yourself, you know? Until next time then.”

At the same time Kibayashi closed the call, a notification confirming that the order got through reached Shizuka and Akira.

Akira smiled bitterly. He knew very well the gap between his real strength and the strength that he acquired due to Alpha’s support. Although he kept working hard to close that gap, he could not lie that every time he noticed his growth, he also noticed how significant Alpha’s support was.

[…Well, although I basically forced my way through with expensive bullets during that fight against the monster swarm, I won that fight on my own. So even after adding that with those robots that I destroyed with Alpha’s

support, it should at least lower the total evaluation from Kibayashi. So it should at least be a little better.]

Akira' bitter smile was a mix of half-mockery and half-compliment toward himself. But he then noticed Shizuka looking at him worriedly as he flusteredly said.

"Ah, uhh, well, what can I say? It seems that the order should go through just fine."

"Akira, don't get too reckless, okay?"

"I know. It's exactly so that I can fight safely that I put in that expensive order."

"I see. It's good that you're calm about this, but be careful not to get your guard down, okay?"

"Yes!"

Akira firmly nodded, Shizuka replied with a smile.

Shizuka understood that Akira said so knowing fully well he was cornered into a situation where he had no other choice but to be reckless. While on the other hand, she also understood that hounding Akira about it would not help his situation at all, so she held back herself from saying anything more than that gentle reminder. Akira took her warning to heart and told himself not to unnecessarily jump to danger.

Akira once again took his bike to Kuzusuhara ruin. It had been a few days since the last time he went to Kuzusuhara ruin. During that time, he had repaired his augmented suit, carried his supplies to the temporary forward base, and got himself to the best state before going.

Alpha was floating beside Akira as if she was sitting in an invisible car. She was donning a battle suit with a daring old-world design as her long silky hair was flailing in the air, blown by the non-existent wind.

"Akira, what's your plan for today?"

“Let’s see. I might as well search one of the buildings for relics again, but I don’t want to fight monsters like last time.”

Akira glanced at Alpha’s outfit and thought.

“That is an old-world battle suit, right? Since we’re this deep into the ruin, I wonder if I can find some of them somewhere around.”

“I can’t really say you can’t, but it would be hard to find. Let’s say that you did find one, what’s your plan with it?”

“If there’s no problem with the size, I’m planning to use it for myself, old-world relics are fundamentally advanced stuff after all. I do know that I’m obligated to sell all my relics by contract, but I’m sure I can get it back after paying some money, or at least, I’ll put some effort in doing so.”

Alpha smiled mischievously and pointed at her own battle suit.

“This suit is for girls though? Are you really going to use it? Well, I can understand if you do since it’s a high-quality battle suit.”

Akira could not hold back his laughter the moment he heard that.

“Why does it even come to that? I’m talking about when it’s a battle suit for guys, of course.”

“Then what if you only find battle suits for girls?”

“I’ll sell them, then use the money to buy one made for guys.”

“What if you’ll be wasting a lot of money if you do that instead of using it? Of course, ignoring the design aside.”

Akira looked conflicted for a split second, but he immediately made his decision.

“I’ll think about it when that happens. We don’t know if I can find any of them around here in the first place anyway, right?”

Alpha smiled amusedly.

“Indeed.”

Akira noticed from the beginning that Alpha was only poking fun at him, but at the same time, he also thought that it would not be strange if she knew. Akira heaved a big sigh as he thought that he wasted his energy on that conversation.

“Alpha, at least help me choosing which building to search this time.”

“Oh my, you’re relying on me right from the start for today, huh?”

“I have no plans to spend so much effort on a dud like yesterday. I understand that choosing the right building to search is also a part of my training, but let’s put that training aside for some other time. My training menu for today will be searching for relics inside a building.”

“Alright then, over here.”

“That was fast!?”

Akira could see a particular route highlighted in his enhanced views as he paced his bike following that route.

When Akira arrived, he looked confusedly at Alpha.

“Here?”

Alpha smiled confidently and nodded.

“Yup!”

“…Alright.”

Akira once again shifted his gaze to the location in front of him. Akira could see a tall torn down building that looked closer to a mountain of rubble in front of him. Since it fell over the other buildings around it, they all piled into a single huge mountain of rubble.

“…So basically, I need to find relics under this mountain of rubble, huh? Well, I might find something if I try, but still…”

“Not exactly. To be more precise, you need to find the door to a certain room buried under this mountain. Some buildings usually have their important rooms built extremely strong as if they’re safe boxes, strong enough to keep intact even when the building itself falls over. We’ll be looking for that room. I’ll help you find the entrance, after all, you’re technically outside the building until then.“

Akira used his high-performance bike to climb the rubble mountain. He then stepped off from his bike where she pointed out and put a camouflaging sheet on top of his bike. Once he was done hiding his bike, he used his information-gathering device to check the area around him. Due to the layers of rubble preventing his information-gathering device from scanning further down, it was difficult for Akira to find the hole into the mentioned room. Thankfully, besides his information-gathering device, he also had Alpha.

Akira used his augmented suit to move aside the rubbles under him as he eventually found a door and wall that seemed to be from a hallway of some sort. He went down to that door and forced it open before peeking inside the room. The room was pitch black when he peeked in with a light. As he looked down to the base of that room which was originally a part of the sidewall, he could see all kinds of things scattered there. He then carefully proceeded into that room.

The room itself was pretty wide. Since it was laid sideways, that width was translated directly to depth. Akira used tables and other furniture fixed to the floor of that room to slowly climb down.

“What can I say… It feels weird when the inside of the room is oriented differently than it should.”

Alpha was floating around in the air freely as she smiled amusedly and said.

“Oh my, you’ve been climbing up and down so many rooms up until now, you should’ve gotten used to it at this point, no?”

Akira looked back to his experience.

“Like hell I would get used to that.”

“Oh, but you should. Be careful with your footing.”

Right at the next moment, the table that Akira was using as his footing swayed before it was sent tumbling down to the base of the room. He was only barely able to jump to the next table.

“…You could’ve told me sooner!”

“Weren’t you doing this on your own right now?”

“…That’s true, but… Alright alright.”

Akira decided to stop himself from throwing any complaint at Alpha who was smiling amusedly at him as he moved to the next footing.

When Akira reached the base of the building, his eyes were wide open. The base of the building was filled with piles of old-world relics. Though some of them were already destroyed, others were strong and durable relics. Akira started stuffing his rucksack with any expensive-looking relics that caught his eyes.

When he finished filling his rucksack, Akira looked up. The exit seemed to be located far away from him now.

“…I know it’s already obvious, but I have to climb back up now, right? I should’ve at least brought a rope with me.”

“You can just get one and return back here again later.”

“Again, you should’ve told me sooner.”

“But you’re on your own this time, right?”

Alpha smiled amusedly, he replied with a conflicted bitter smile.

Akira had climbed down the building with his augmented suit and climbed up a building with his bike, so somewhere in the back of his mind, he thought that he should be able to figure out something when the time came. That was why the idea of bringing along a rope never passed through his mind.

Akira worked really hard and somehow was able to get out of that room. Sometimes he used 2 blades, one for each hand, to scale up the room, sometimes he had to heavily heartedly leave some relics behind since he could not go through with his backpack full. He basically paid in full for his mistake of not bringing a rope with him that day.

After that, Akira returned back to the forward base and sold his relics there. He did not forget to immediately buy a rope too.

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It had been 2 months since Akira started the request to get his Hunter Rank up. But his request had still not ended. Even after he kept ordering bigger and better supplies, all of the payments for his orders went through just fine.

Originally Akira thought that at most it would last for about a month. So that day, he was venting his frustration in Shizuka’s shop. Elena and Sara who saw that could only smile bitterly at him.

To be more precise, Akira was venting his frustration there because Elena and Sara encouraged him to. They tried to prod him to share his situation, and, if possible, to offer him their help in order to mend their relationship back.

But even Sara and Elena did not expect that Akira was frustrated because he was forced to take a request to boost his Hunter Rank though he did not want to. And even after he thought he got his Hunter Rank high enough, that request still continued. Any normal Hunter who worked hard day and night to get their Hunter Rank up would be furious if they heard that.

Sara looked rather impressed with Akira.

“But still, a request to increase Hunter Rank, huh? Although I’ve heard about it before, this is the first time I see someone actually get one. Although it’s to be expected considering how strong you are, it’s still pretty impressive.”

Although Sara was giving him an honest compliment, Akira felt a bit guilty. He knew that the impression of how strong he was probably came from Alpha’s support and not his own skill. Because of that, rather than looking honestly happy about it, Akira made a conflicted expression.

“…Thank you very much. But depending on how you look at it, it might be because they put too much faith in me. Right now, they’re forcing me into places that are originally too dangerous for a Hunter like me.”

Elena noticed that and changed the subject.

“Getting not too excited and staying vigilant is a good thing. In my case, if I ever get such a request, I feel like I would get too excited and make a blunder instead, but It seems that’s not the case for you. That in itself is pretty impressive, you know. I guess I need to learn more from you about that.”

Akira slightly blushed from that compliment. Sara pouted a bit at how Akira reacted differently to her compliment. But in order to distract herself from that feeling, she quickly circled behind Akira and rubbed his head while sticking close to him from behind.

“S-Sara-san!?”

“I’ll do that too. Though I don’t think that I’ll ever get such a request. Being too humble might annoy people instead, you know?”

“I-I didn’t mean it…”

“I know. It’s just a silly talk from a narrow-hearted girl. But I just want you to be careful since there are a lot of people like that out there.”

“O-Of course!”

Though Akira was surprised, he did not resist. As a matter of fact, he enjoyed it. Seeing that reaction from Akira, Sara smiled satisfied. Both Shizuka and Elena who saw that could not help but giggle. Of course, Sara noticed them, but she only pouted a bit while trying to hide her embarrassment and enjoying Akira's reaction.

They then talked about other things too. At some point, Akira found something that Elena said interesting.

"Humanoid monster, huh?"

"Yes, it seems that there are more and more people getting attacked by a humanoid monster near Kuzusuhara ruin lately. To be more precise, the location is around that highway."

"Uhhh, is it one of those things? That one where the City Management treats a strong criminal as a monster…"

"I don't know the details. That might be the case, or not. It might be an autonomous robot that went on a rampage. Or maybe someone controlling the augmented suit of a dead Hunter like back then in the Seranthal building. The details about the incident itself are still unclear. The City Management itself hasn't released anything else other than a warning."

"Whether it's a strong criminal or a monster, basically there's something that looks like a human attacking people around the ruin, right?"

"Yup, exactly. The only thing that we know right now is that it looks like a human instead of a monster. You should be careful too, as a Hunter, it tends to dull our reaction when the opponent looks like a human."

If it was a monster, Hunters could immediately decide to kill it. But when it was a human, they would often hesitate, and more often than not, that hesitation brought about a fatal consequence.

"Okay, I'll be careful."

Akira said so firmly, seeing which Elena smiled happily.

When Akira left the shop, Sara frowned and said.

“Say Elena, I wonder if Akira really hates when people evaluate his skill highly.”

“That might be true. If I’m not mistaken, he said something similar to that back then in the underground city too.”

“Now that you mention it, he did. Why do you think that is the case?”

“No idea. I’m sure he has his reason for that… But whatever it is, I’m sure it’s not something pleasant. Sara, although I’m sure there’s no need for me to tell you this, but you need to be careful not to poke at him too much.”

“I know… This is difficult.”

Although the other day Akira saved them despite there being nothing that he could get out of it, he also did not hesitate in cutting off their ties. At the moment, they somehow still managed to talk normally with each other. Sara had no idea whether it was because of something trivial or deep, or if it was due to Akira’s principle in life or simply his opinion.

Sara had no plans to let go of the thread that she worked hard to preserve and sighed as she thought of her friend whom she was not sure how to treat.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 182, Yatsubayashi's mobile clinic

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On the next day, Akira once again had a talk with Kibayashi in the temporary's base cafeteria, and just like usual, he looked pretty annoyed.

"So, don't you think it's about time I'm done with this request?

"Good grief, there are not many Hunters out there who want to end their rank up request themselves, you know?"

"Don't know, don't care!"

Kibayashi smiled wryly. He found it amusing that he said his real feelings instead of negotiating with Akira and thinking how amusing it would be if Akira challenged an even fiercer battle than before, but he remembered to do his job to at least try to calm Akira down.

"I've been telling you this every time we meet, I don't have the right to decide that. But well, at least I'll let the people above know that you don't want to keep doing this request, though I can't really say for sure what they think about it."

Akira sighed, Kibayashi immensely enjoyed his reaction.

“Now then, just like I said, I’m here because there’s something I want to talk about with you. It’s about the cost of your supply that you keep bringing up as a form of harassment.”

Akira’s expression immediately turned stern.

“No, I won’t pay for them. If you’re telling me to pay even a part of it, you can go ahead and cancel the request.”

“Well, it might be weird for me to say this, but because of that condition, the credit you get from selling relics and hunting monsters are significantly reduced. You’ll get more rewards back even if you only pay a small part of it, you know? So are you still fine with that?”

“Yeah, I still won’t pay.”

Akira showed no chance of negotiation for that matter. Seeing that, Kibayashi gave up trying to convince him.

“Alright, got it. I’ve at least notified you. Although it’s because of the contract, the money you’re spending on supply is actually a bit too high. So, I just wanted to let you know that there’s a way to solve that. To be honest, it’ll be faster if you just pay a part of it, but if you don’t like that idea. So let’s do something else instead. First option, you can work under our order for the time being, that would include following the orders of the other commanders from the City Management.”

“What are you going to make me do this time?”

“It hasn’t been decided yet. Well, I’m pretty sure it’s for something like patrolling, guarding, or securing a part of the ruin. So basically, you can camouflage that exorbitantly high supply cost for one person as the team expense. Like I said, the request itself is basically close to compulsory, so at least you can make this much compromise, no?”

“What’s my other option?”

“Limiting your activity to only a certain area where no one would complain if you spend that much money for your ammo. To be more precise, it would be the area past the end of the highway, or in another word, the frontline. Although most of the Hunters working there make sure to bring along their powered suit, I’m sure it’s no problem for you since you’ve won against a powered suit even without using one, right? Personally speaking, I recommend you take this option instead of the first one.”

Kibayashi smiled with full expectation, in contrast to that, Akira obviously looked annoyed.

“…Do I have any other options?”

“Nothing, if you have any good ideas, feel free to let me know.”

“…I’ll take the first one.”

“Roger that. Well then, I’ll take care of the administration. I’ll let you know once I’m done and you’ll get the next order sent to your information terminal later, so you can just follow that instruction.”

Kibayashi stood up and was about to leave when he glanced at the sighing Akira and smiled.

“You can tell me anytime if you want to change your mind.”

“Sure sure.”

Although Akira sounded as if he just gave that reply without thinking about it at all, that was enough to make Kibayashi leave that place with a big smile.

Seeing how Akira replied back so apathetically there, Alpha could not hide her smile.

“Personally speaking, I also recommend the second option though.”

“Why?”

“For the sake of your growth, it’s better if you fight strong enemies.”

“…Give me a break.”

Akira thought that he got this request because he fought that black powered suit back in Ezont Family’s base. For him, it was nothing but a pure coincidence. So honestly speaking, he wished that the City Management would understand that it was not his actual skill. He did not want people to think that it was because of his real strength when it was actually thanks to Alpha’s full support.

While at the same time, Akira himself had no wish to take it easy for his training, but on the other hand, he had no plans to be jumping into dangerous places where he might not be able to survive without Alpha’s support. So he was thinking during this rank up request to just raise his rank high enough to reflect his real strength when he had no support from Alpha. He honestly wanted to avoid doing anything that might disrupt that plan.

Akira did not think of all the hard battles that he had gone through because of pure coincidence, and it was simply because he did not have enough self-awareness.

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Akira rode his bike coursing through Kuzusuhara ruin. After a few days, a notice reached his terminal right after he arrived at the forward base. That notice contained an order for him to guard a clinic plus the location of that clinic, and its coordinate was basically deep inside the ruin.

At first, Akira thought that it would be a clinic temporarily erected inside a dilapidated building or something, but the coordinates that he received smacked right in the middle of the road with no building around. Akira thought it was weird and once again checked the coordinates when he noticed it was moving. And so, currently, he was chasing that moving clinic.

Akira had to fight monsters along the way too, but he eventually was able to catch up to it. There was a big white trailer parked on the road close to the

frontline. It was a big armoured trailer and its big back door was wide open. Akira stepped off from his bike and peeked inside the trailer, there he saw Yatsubayashi treating some injured Hunters lying on a patient bed.

“If it’s just a light injury, wait there for a bit. And if it’s a bad injury, wait there for a bit as well. If it’s an emergency, I don’t mind treating you now, but it’ll cost you more.”

“Uh, I’m actually here as an escort, is this the right place by the way?”

Yatsubayashi stopped, his hand was still holding a weird, or more like, suspicious tool as he looked at Akira and made a suspicious smile.

“It’s you, huh? Welcome to Yatsubayashi clinic, Kuzusuhara ruin branch.”

He finished treating the Hunter in front of him and handed over a cloth soaked in blood to that Hunter.

“That’s it. I don’t mind if you want to keep using the bed, but it won’t be for free.”

“…You’re going to charge me for that? It’s fine, isn’t it? It’s not like anyone is using it anyway.”

“No. I would need to move the bed in case of an emergency. So you’ll have to pay me money even if you just want to lie on that bed.”

“…Alright alright.”

Due to his injury, that Hunter could only slowly drag himself off from that bed before he put that bloody cloth back on and left the trailer. After taking a few steps away from that trailer, he put his butt down to take a short rest.

Akira frowned and said to Yatsubayashi.

“You’re not going to take that man back to the forward base?”

“Sure, if he wants to and if I accept that request. Of course, it won’t be free. Just to warn you though, don’t escort him back without my permission. It’s

not like I’m telling you not to do that no matter what, but if you do that, you’ll have to pay for the cost. So just be careful about that.”

“Why would I have to pay when I’m the one escorting him back?”

Akira seemed to be extremely confused there, but then Yatsubayashi casually replied.

“Well, that’s because you’ll be doing work outside of guarding this clinic, which is your main job at the moment, you see. Not to mention, you won’t be able to guard this clinic while you’re escorting that guy back to the forward base. So it’s a given that you would have to pay, no?”

Akira seemed to understand that argument although he also looked exasperated at the same time.

“That sounds to be a huge pain in the neck.”

“That’s just how it is.”

Yatsubayashi only casually said so while cleaning up his medical tools.

Akira was not alone, there were other Hunters who were assigned to guard the clinic too. But since Yatsubayashi actively moved around his clinic to pick up his patients, those escorts usually spread out not too far away from the clinic. Once they entered areas with a lot of monsters where Hunters even sent SOS requests, Akira and the other escorts spread out to clean up the monsters while carrying any injured Hunters back to the mobile clinic.

Akira with his incredible (bad) luck spent his days fighting swarms of monsters and carrying injured Hunters that he saved back to the clinic. Although the injured Hunter was so badly injured to the point that he was barely able to move his finger, he was still fully conscious. Maybe it was because of something that he prepared beforehand to make sure that he would not faint even during an emergency.

That man had a pale face as if all of his blood was sucked out of him, but his pale face was not because he had lost that much blood.

“Whoah!! This bill is too much no matter how you look at it, isn’t it?! I know that stuff in the wasteland is more expensive than usual, but not this expensive!!”

Yatsubayashi just laughed that off and casually replied.

“That is a wasteland fee plus a ruin fee. Considering how dangerous this place is, it’s normal to be that expensive, no? I won’t force you to pay that, but if you’re not going to pay it, good luck going back to the forward base on your own.”

“Shrewd bastard…”

That man was only barely able to escape certain death, so he had no energy left to drag himself back to the forward base. But if he splurged his money on treatment there, it would definitely affect his Hunter activity later.

Of course, there was nothing more valuable than one’s life, but considering the debt later and what kind of debt hell that he might face, sometimes, death was the better choice. That man knew that fact very well as he was at loss on what to do there, seeing that, Yatsubayashi smiled suspiciously at him and pulled out a container filled with green liquid.

“Well, I can understand your predicament. Better the treatment, higher the cost. But wait! If you take this medicine that I made, you can get the same healing power with one-tenth the price, you know!! So, do you want to try it?”

The Hunter glanced at the glowing green liquid and frowned. But the 90% less cost would really reduce the effect of treating his injury there on his money, which in turn would reduce its effect on his future activity as a Hunter. Although it was not a formal one, Yatsubayashi was trusted enough by the City Management to be asked to work in the forward base, so there was no way he was a fake doctor. The Hunter eventually came to a decision.

“…I’ll pay everything, so I’ll take the usual treatment.”

Yatsubayashi looked disappointed.

“…If you’re willing to take my medicine, I’ll escort you back to the temporary base for free, you know?”

“Just give me the normal treatment.”

Yatsubayashi lightly clicked his tongue and started treating that Hunter’s injury. He then lightly said to Akira.

“Good grief, these guys are no fun. You did use my medicine and had no trouble at all, right? It was alright, right?”

“Don’t ask me.”

“You too, huh? It’s such a waste to refuse using such an effective healing medicine that I worked really hard to make just because of some superstition, you know. Geez, this world is really no fun at all.”

Seeing Yatsubayashi begrudging talk while still attending to his patients, Akira thought that he could understand some of Yatsubayashi’s feelings, but at the same time, he could also understand the feeling of the Hunters who hesitated to put that glowing green liquid into their bodies. So Akira decided not to say anything there.

The location of Yatsubayashi’s mobile clinic was fully trackable from the information terminal lent by the temporary base. Because of that, Hunters who were badly injured that they would not be saved if they went all the way back to the forward base’s clinic would often opt to go to Yatsubayashi’s clinic. Other than that, sometimes, some Hunters who were fighting strong monsters also came to that clinic for help to fight those monsters. Either way, these Hunters would also bring along the monsters chasing them when they headed to the clinic. It was Akira and the other escorts’ job to take care of those monsters.

As long as there were some Hunters looking to be treated in that clinic and as long that it seemed there would be more patients coming, the moving

clinic tended to stay in one place. The sound of Hunters and Yatsubayashi arguing could be heard coming from inside the trailer.

Akira found that weird as he said.

“Alpha, we’ve been staying here for some time now, what do you think is happening?”

“This area is already pretty close to the frontline. With stronger monsters prowling this area, I bet there are more injured Hunters around here, so they might think that there’s no need to move the trailer away for the time being.”

“If that’s the case, we could’ve come and camped in this place right from the beginning, right?”

“Even if you tell me so, there’s nothing that I can do about it. If you’re still worried, you can just ask Yatsubayashi instead.”

Akira thought that Alpha had a point there. But he was not that bothered that he would go to ask Yatsubayashi, so he just continued watching the surroundings instead. When the day started getting dark, Akira went to talk to Yatsubayashi and got permission to end his job.

Back home, Akira was enjoying the warm bath while thinking about all the monsters he fought that day.

“What can I say… They gave me this option since I’m spending too much money on supplies, but now that I think about it, putting me there will only make me spend more money on supplies, right? Is this really alright?”

Compared to before, Akira spent way more supplies that day. Since Yatsubayashi often drove his trailer straight to dangerous areas, Akira had more encounters with monsters compared to when he was free to move on his own discretion.

Alpha was sitting on the lip of the bath with her legs crossed, she moved the tip of her leg around as if to play with the warm bathwater.

“I think it’s not something for you to worry about. The clinic only moves based on the instruction from the City Management after all. Moreover, that might be nothing but an excuse.”

“Excuse?”

“Yep, an excuse to send you to more dangerous areas. The complaints from the upper echelons about you spending too much money on supplies might be true, although it might not be that big of a trouble, it was enough as an excuse. The two options that Kibayashi gave you, he might have given you those options just because he wanted to get you as close as possible to the frontline. The clinic only moved around the areas pretty close to the frontline and the battles going on there are pretty much as dangerous as the battles that you’ve gone through lately. So he might be just using that as an excuse to send you as close as possible to the frontline, hoping to see you doing some reckless stuff.“

“If that’s the case, then he really got me good this time…”

Alpha suddenly moved around her crossed legs, Akira’s eyes were drawn to that movement by pure reflex. She then stood up on the border of the bath while Akira was still looking up at her.

Alpha lightly smiled at Akira who was looking at her with a rather suspicious gaze. She then jumped, made a beautiful arc, pulled a full spin in the air, and plunged into the warm bath as if her body immediately melted into the water.

Alpha then popped out from the water as if she just popped out from a deep pool before moving next to Akira. Akira watched that sequence of action with slight amazement, but he was more exasperated than amazed.

“What was that?? This is a bath, not a pool, and it’s not that deep.”

“I just feel that lately, you are showing less interest in my body. I just thought of showing my beautiful body to you in a different way. So, how was that?”

“Normal.”

”Geez, you’re as indifferent as ever although you’re in front of this beautiful body. You’ve really gotten used to this luxury, huh.”

Alpha smiled amusedly at Akira who looked even more exasperated than before. But behind her mind, she thought that it was still too early.

When she jumped into the bath in her swimsuit, Akira unconsciously moved his body as if to evade an incoming attack. And when he did that, there was actually another reason as to why he moved his body away.

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Back in the forward base, Yatsubayashi had parked his clinic in the parking lot as he was looking through the data that he got inside his clinic.

That data contained all kinds of information used by the City Management to check how far they had secured the area for the sake of building the safe route into the ruin. It included things like the countless information terminals spread inside the ruin by the City Management, the data from the information terminals lent to the Hunters, and data from radars in vehicles.

Yastubayashi was given permission to analyze that data using the help of his connections. Even if the device to broadcast the information all the way back to the slum city was broken, with his skill, although it was difficult, it was not impossible to search for the particular wave signal produced by the nanomachines inside a certain body. With that, Yatsubayashi continued keeping a close look at the damage caused by the humanoid monster that was getting famous lately.

The reason why Yatsubayashi opened his mobile clinic was in order to search for Tiol without raising any suspicion. He only charged the Hunters a lot of money for his treatment and proactively answered SOS requests simply to avoid looking suspicious.

After Yatsubayashi finished analyzing the data, he then said with a sharp gaze.

“…I bet he’s preparing himself behind the frontline… Which means, maybe over here?”

The map of the ruin on his display also showed Tiol’s track as well as a big line. The line was drawn over one of the crossroads used in the main highway as if to create a blockade.

The line was basically the frontline and the area behind that line was an unknown world from the City Management’s point of view, and Tsubaki’s building lay deep behind that line.

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That day also Akira was instructed to escort Yatsubayashi’s clinic. He rode his bike into the ruin while checking the location of the mobile clinic. That was when he noticed something.

“He’s going pretty deep today. Basically just right after a turn on that crossroad, huh.”

Alpha smiled rather provocatively as she pointed her finger forward.

“If you keep going forward, you’ll be passing the front line, you know. Do you want to take a detour and look around?”

“No thanks.”

“If you hate escorting the clinic that much, it might be a good idea to instead work around the frontline. After all, it’s not like this chance when you can use as much ammo as you want without worrying about the cost would last forever. So this might be a good chance to have a peek at the situation in the frontline.”

“No. I heard that Hunters would bring their powered suit with them there, so it’s not a place for someone like me to take a detour and look around. Not to mention, I promised Shizuka-san not to do anything reckless.”

“Is that so? Well, I won’t force you.”

Alpha smiled like usual to Akira, betraying the fact that she just said something as preposterous as suggesting taking a detour in the land of death to him.

Akira lightly sighed.

[I'm sure she wants to tell me to stop fighting the small fries and go for the bigger fish so that I can become stronger as soon as possible. Now that I remember, she also said something along the line that this is a good chance to check my current strength… I guess I'm still way too weak to be considered strong enough for Alpha, huh. She did say that she'll consider it if I can defeat that big mechanical monster on my own.]

Akira had no wish of wasting his time either. But with that being said, he had no wish to train until his limbs fell off either. That was why he had no plans to go charging headfirst into dangerous places that might get him killed in order to gain experience. Although it might be the fastest method to become stronger, he did not want to fight monsters that Hunters would normally fight using powered suits. Of course, he would do the best he could in order to do that request from Alpha, but that did not mean he would do anything for that sake either.

Akira had a conflicted feeling as he smiled wryly and took a turn at the next crossroad.

He did not realize it, there was another reason why Alpha recommended him to go to the frontline even after including his bad luck into consideration.

But then, the fact that Alpha did not stop him from going to that clinic even if she had to force him, showed that she was still looking down on his bad luck.

When Akira arrived and looked around the situation around the clinic, he could not hide his surprise. The clinic was surrounded by more Hunters than usual, and these Hunters were not injured. But with that being said, they were just too many of them if they were the clinic's escorts.

Among those Hunters, Akira caught some familiar faces. When he noticed Elena and Sara, Elena and Sara also noticed him and smiled while lightly waving at him.

Akira was a bit surprised when he heard from Elena that those Hunters were basically the reconnaissance team sent to scout the area.

“I always thought that building the secure route only means to simply secure the area deeper and deeper to the ruin, but it seems it’s not that simple, huh?”

“It’s not exactly wrong. But the reason why the City Management builds the secure route and maintains the highway to the ruin is all for the sake of harvesting relics located in the deeper part of the ruin. That’s why when they want to expand it further in, they’ll have to send a reconnaissance team first to give a quick check of the area ahead. Not to mention, many Hunters won’t even go to a location where they have no information at all, that’s why it’s also for the sake of encouraging those Hunters. And if we find out there are good relics to get, even when it’s in a dangerous area, the City Management might consider increasing the budget to secure that area. That way the Hunters who usually work further to the east might come to help to secure the area too.”

But of course, the Hunters sent as the reconnaissance team would have to explore that area without any prior information about it. Sara had her armour bulging out because of that preparation to explore such a dangerous place, she made sure to refill his nanomachine stock up to the full capacity. She showed off the size of her chest that she was so proud of to Akira while smiling at him. It was not that hard for a girl to know where the other person was focused on.

“I thought that you’re here for the reconnaissance request too, but that doesn’t seem to be the case, huh. But since you’re already here, how about joining the reconnaissance team? The scouting itself is Elena’s main job, so I’m here as her escort today. If you want to come too, you’ll be also escorting Elena. We’re planning to explore the area carefully and we’ll immediately retreat back if things get dangerous, so I think it’s a rather safe request and we can get quite a lot of money from it.”

But Akira apologetically replied.

“…I’m sorry. I’m happy that you invited me, but I’m here as an escort for the clinic. So I can’t take your offer.”

“Oh? If I’m not mistaken, you said that you’re basically free to do what you want for that request, right?”

“From a discussion with a guy called Kibayashi, it seems that I’ve been spending too much money on supplies, so I have to do this so that the City Management would allow me to keep using that much money. Then from there, I got assigned to escort the clinic.”

“Is that so? That’s really unfortunate. Well, I guess even though it’s for getting your rank up, it’s not like they can spare you an unlimited amount of money, huh.”

Sara said so with a disappointed face. But then Elena made a suggestion.

“…I feel like they might let you change to the reconnaissance team with a little negotiation though, but of course, not right away. So I guess we have no other choice but to give up that idea this time. We’ll have a briefing first about the area that we need to explore, so we need to go soon. Good luck to you, Akira.”

“Yes, ah, feel free to contact me if anything happens during the exploration. It’s also my job as the escort for the clinic to get out and pick up SOS request after all.”

“I see, I’ll be counting on you when that happens.”

“Akira, see you later then.”

Akira lightly waved and saw Elena and Sara off.

Although Alpha was smiling like usual, there was something else running in the back of her mind. Personally speaking, she did not want anything else that might affect Akira’s course of action anywhere around him, and that was doubly true when he was in such a dangerous place.

“Akira, just to warn you not to go out on your own just to check on them, okay?”

“Hm? Of course.”

“…You’re pretty obedient this time.”

“I have no plans to abandon the request that I accepted first. I did refuse their invitation because of the same reason, remember?”

“Yep, and that’s great to hear.”

Alpha smiled happily since she identified that as Akira’s honest opinion about that matter. But at the same time, she also knew there was no telling how far he would go to stay by his decision. If he had always kept all his promises, Alpha would not be this doubtful of him.

After that, Akira focused on guarding the clinic, but this time there was not that much for him to do. Thanks to the reconnaissance team that took out the monsters ahead of them, there were not that many monsters left near the clinic. Because of that, even when he patrolled around the clinic on his bike while keeping his eyes on the sensor, he did not find any signals from monsters.

Akira continued guarding the clinic while feeling slightly worried. If things continued like this, he felt like Alpha would recommend him to work near the frontline again, either that or she would push him harder for his next training.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 183, A Swarm of Young Boy Robots

Index

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Yatsubayashi was charging a crazy amount of money to the Hunters brought to his clinic.

Thanks to the first aid done to his head, that Hunter was able to stay conscious even after he was gravely injured. The expensive treatment cost was enough to make his face go pale though. He did try to bargain, but Yatsubayashi wouldn't budge at all.

"No, no money, no treatment. You need to pay first."

"C-can you at least cut me some slack for that one?"

"Good grief, if you're that healthy, I bet you can get yourself back to the forward base. You can ask your friend to carry you there, I'm sure you'll get there without dying. But well, with that injury, I bet you'll either get a prosthetic or a cyborg replacement though."

"I want to keep my body the way it is, since you said that your treatment would still enable me to still stay the way I am, I came to you."

Indeed they could take a regenerative treatment to grow back their lost limbs that would normally need to be replaced with a prosthetic or cyborg body, but that kind of treatment was more expensive than replacing them. Furthermore, there were not many Hunters out there who would become a cyborg out of their own volitions. No matter how strong a cyborg body was, there were still unique advantages to keeping a flesh body, and this Hunter wanted to keep his body.

His friend then jumped in.

“Can you at least do something about it?”

“We can get this done right away if you’ll pay in his place.”

“Don’t be crazy, we don’t have that much money. It’s not like we can use our health insurance too, right?”

“Sorry but my clinic is not a corporation’s clinic, so I don’t really accept health insurance. And there’s a limit on how much the Hunter Office would be willing to lend you to pay for it too. Not to mention, their lending limit is extremely low for a small individually ran clinic such as mine.”

That guy then sighed and rubbed his head with one of his hands. Although he had no plans to abandon his injured friend, it did not change the fact that he did not have any way to save him either.

Moreover, it was not like he was going to die if they decided to take him back to the clinic in the forward base, though, he would be living with prosthetics and incur debt for that medical treatment. In the first place, this was an injury stemming from the occupational hazard Hunters faced. It could happen again. That thought discouraged them from paying the cost of Yatsubayashi’s treatment no matter what.

Seeing that, Yatsubayashi hid his real intention as he made a suggestion to those Hunters.

“Well, I can understand that you want to save your friend. And I’m a doctor, you see. But if I treat his injury here for free, it’ll only give me a lot of

trouble later down the line. That's why, I have a suggestion here, instead of paying me with money, how about you pay for the treatment for your friend by helping me with a certain job?"

"Job? What kind of job are we talking about here?"

"It's basically a kind of emergency rescue request, you see. Of course, it'll be a secret one though."

Yatsubayashi started explaining the aforementioned job with a suspicious smile. To put it simply, those Hunters only needed to go to a certain location to rescue a certain Hunter and bring him back to Yatsubayashi. Although it sounded simple, it sounded as if it had a lot of hidden intent behind it.

"Why should this be a secret anyway? Moreover, I checked my information terminal and it doesn't seem like there's any SOS request from that location though?"

Yatsubayashi smiled at that question.

"Well, that's because that Hunter doesn't want to have a record of this happening left in the Hunter Office, you see. Basically, he's one of those Hunters who do not wish for the Hunter Office to be informed of an SOS rescue request that he had submitted. Other than protecting his reputation, it's also to save money. After all, if you needlessly ask for SOS requests, your insurance bill will go up, you see. That's the same for the treatments in hospitals and clinics too. What I'm saying here is that if you treat your injuries in my clinic, I can help you make sure that it won't leave any record in the Hunter Office, the catch is that you can't use your insurance though. Other than that, well, maybe his reputation among his colleagues and gang? To put it simply, he wants to say that he didn't get in any trouble, he just randomly met some Hunters in the wasteland and those Hunters arbitrarily helped him without even being asked."

"I see, so basically you're accepting that kind of request under the table, huh. But still, you're willing to give him free treatment just by saving one Hunter, this is too good to be true, you know?"

“Are you kidding me? Of course, it won’t only be once. I’ll have you do that for me multiple times until I judge you’ve worked enough to pay for the treatment cost.”

“…I see.”

The Hunters nodded and looked at Yatsubayashi with a stern gaze. They thought that Yatsubayashi was planning to use them and charge them with more bills every time they returned back with more injury.

“If you’re going to take that request, I’ll get him treated right away. I won’t do something as cowardly as postponing his treatment until you work enough for me. So, what do you think? Am I nice or what? Well, I won’t force you though, so it’s still up to you.”

Putting it from a different point of view, it also meant that Yatsubyashi gave no space for negotiation, and the wounded Hunter also started begging his friend. So in the end, the other Hunter clicked his tongue and took that offer.

Elena and her reconnaissance team proceeded deeper into the ruin. Their main job was to harvest the information gathered by the small information-gathering device spread beforehand inside that ruin while retrieving and replacing those small information-gathering devices owned by the City Management. The accessibility of the site with a vehicle, the number of monsters in that area, and the number of rubble and their material found around the area, all of this information was enough to judge if a site was worth exploring or not.

The members of the reconnaissance team were free to search the inside of a building. They were even allowed to gather relics. Even if it might disturb their main duty of scouting the ruin, the relics that they gathered could also be used to judge if that part of the ruin was worth securing or not, not to mention the information that they brought back, also took note of the difficulty and the danger of that building. As such, no one stopped them from doing so.

Elena scanned her surroundings while driving her vehicle slowly. Sara stood ready next to Elena, guarding her, but she was also eyeing the buildings that seemed to be containing expensive relics.

“Elena, can we just like, you know, go and take a peek?”

“No. We will only take a route that this scouting vehicle can go through, so we won’t be searching the inside of any buildings. Didn’t we agree on that right from the start?”

“I know, but still…”

“I can understand your feelings, but no. There’s a good chance something will attack this vehicle when we’re away searching the inside of a building. We have almost close to no information about this area, so I can’t really guarantee the safety of this vehicle when we’re gone. Or more like, we’re exactly here in order to gather that information, no?”

Hunters who tend to work alone or in a small group often left their vehicles behind when they searched the inside of a building. But of course, no one could guarantee that their vehicles would be still in one piece when they returned. Elena and Sara had more than enough experience with losing their vehicles in such a manner.

Of course, they could just get more Hunters with them and have some of them guard the vehicle when they were gone. But with more headcounts, each of their shares would also reduce. There was also the possibility of the Hunters guarding the vehicle running away abandoning the Hunters inside the building when monsters attacked them. So it did not change the fact that it would still be a gamble in the end.

The only thing that the Hunters could do was to increase their winning chance with all kinds of methods that they could find. Getting stronger, working with a team, deepening their trust with the other team members, emphasizing the loss in case someone betrayed them. If they did not do that, they would end up as one of those lost Hunters with broken dreams who could not return back from the wasteland.

But Sara seemed to be not fully convinced by it, seeing which Elena gave another reason to convince her.

“If we get ourselves into trouble and send out an SOS request, Akira might come to answer that request, you know. That would really erase our dignity and his trust in us as his senior Hunters, you know. Although, I’m not even sure that we still have those two things even right now.”

Sara frowned and sighed.

“Alright. I still want to stay as the senior Hunter that he can rely on, after all. I’ll hold myself back.”

Sara suddenly turned obedient, seeing that, Elena could only smile bitterly.

“Honestly, I really hope you would be this obedient when your best friend warns you though.”

“That’s that, you know. It’s like we’re one soul, so hearing you warn me like that is like giving myself a little scolding. So it’s much more likely for me to just ignore it, you see. Just like how it’s more likely for me to get selfish when I’m alone.”

“Is that so? In that case, then I’ll be doing that too when I’m pondering about something.”

Elena and Sara lightly smiled at each other before returning back to watching their surroundings.

Not too long after that, Elena, who was keeping her eyes on her sensor, suddenly stopped her vehicle and tilted her head.

“Elena, what’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing in particular. It’s just that when I checked the data, I found something interesting. The sensor caught multiple signals of something that looked human.”

“They might be other Hunters exploring this area, no?”

“Possibly, yes. It’s just that there’s something bothering me.”

Some of the signals were possibly from the monsters. Judging from their positions and the signal that the fact that they seemed to be coming from something with a humanoid shape, Elena could not shake off her bad feeling. After all, if some of those signals were from monsters and some others were from Hunters, they were close enough to notice each other.

As such, they would have started fighting by now. There were many types of monsters that ignored Hunters who had even stepped into their territories. While on the other hand, most of the Hunters would rather avoid having to fight all the monsters that they encountered. There were many reasons for them not to fight each other.

But Elena remembered a certain rumour, specifically, about a humanoid monster that prowled the Kuzusuhara Ruin. Her sharp intuition was telling her that this was it although she did not have enough evidence that supported it.

Elena thought for a bit before she stepped on the gas. But she made sure to change her direction, away from it.

“Sara, we’ll be changing our scouting area. It might lower our area coverage and the information accuracy that we can get, which in turn might lower our reward later. Sorry but please just let this one go.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll leave making that kind of decision to you. So let’s just continue this safely.”

Sara lightly smiled, she seemed to be not bothered at all by that. Seeing how Sara fully trusted her, Elena’s stern face slightly softened.

–x–x–

A certain Hunter named Sonoda grumbled as he strolled in the middle of the ruin.

“Another dud, huh?”

Sonoda was one of the Hunters forced to work for Yatsubayashi to help the treatment fee for his Hunter friend. He came to the location where there should be someone who needed help but did not want to send an SOS request. But when he arrived, that person was nowhere to be found and there was not even a since remnant of a fight, and this had happened multiple times now.

Sonoda called Yatsubayashi using his information terminal to complain, but Yatsubayashi just replied casually.

“It’s not a proper SOS request to the Hunter Office after all. It’s also not clear who’s the issuer of that request, heck, not even I know. So, it could be just that there are some people who played a prank on you. Well, I’ll at least put in some words with those that informed me of that request, so I hope you would work the best as you can for your part. Don’t worry, even if you don’t get to find anything, I’ll still count your work. I’ll send you the next location.”

After Sonoda ended the call, he received the location of his next target. He clicked and put his information terminal back into his pocket.

“Good grief, these guys are sending us to the deeper part of the ruin like it’s nothing! Alright guys!! To the next one!!”

“Alright… Hm? Wait, it seems that there’s someone over there.”

“Oh, the target ran over there, huh? Let’s get him.”

Sonoda led his group to the location where that signal came from. It came from the first floor of a building not too far from them. They moved slowly and carefully into that building and spotted a young boy standing in a dark hole in the wall not too far from the door.

“Is that the guy? Hey, are you alright? Where’re the monsters? Did you run away to this place? And are you alone?”

That young boy reacted to Sonoda, but it was not in the form of words for communication.

“The current area is under a lockdown. Due to the emergency situation protocol, the security system is allowed to kill any intruders. Please give your identification information…”

Sonoda immediately raised his rifle and barraged that young boy, pushing him all the way to the wall from the shockwave. Sonoda’s teammates immediately jumped in to support him. The young boy lost his head and all of his limbs were torn apart.

Sonoda quickly told them to retreat.

“We’re running away!! Let’s go!!”

“W-whoa, I only shot to help you since you started shooting first though, was that alright?”

“You didn’t notice it yet?! That young boy is not the rescue target!! It’s the one that attacked the rescue target!! Retreat now!!”

Sonoda and his friends quickly left that building when another sound came from the dark hole behind them.

“…Unable to identify. Immediately changing to restraining protocol…“

“Get in the vehicle!! We’re retreating back to the clinic! Something bad is coming, I know it!”

Sonoda retreated back as fast as he could while barking orders to his team.

The limbs that were torn off from the young boy were scattered on the ground. His arms from elbow down were completely turned into rifles. It was not like a rifle fixed on a prosthetic arm, it was more like rifles that were growing out from those arms. Its body seemed like it was layered with armour in a glance, but it was not armour, it was countless layers of metallic scale.

Another young boy emerged from the darkness. He took the gun lying on the ground, the leftover limb of the other young boy and started chasing after Sonoda and his men.

While around the same time, Akira was bored guarding the clinic when a notice reached his information terminal. The coordinate written in that notice was around in the direction where the reconnaissance team went.

Akira thought for a bit before he hopped on his bike and paced it.

Alpha frowned.

“We don’t know for sure if Elena and Sara are there, there’s no need to go there yourself, no?”

“Accepting SOS requests is also one of my duties, right? Though it’s true that it’s a little bit further away from the clinic.”

Alpha frowned even more. Akira thought that it was a bit surprising as he said.

“…Well, I do know that since it’s an SOS request, there’s a good chance that I’ll find a troublesome swarm of monsters, and I admit that I do really want to help them if Elana-san or Sara-san are the ones that got into trouble. But at least let me do this much, alright? There are not that many monsters around, so I should be able to get my rank up faster instead of just guarding the clinic, right?”

“Just don’t get too deep into the ruin, alright?”

“Hm? Yeah, sure.”

Akira thought that it was weird since, in order to get stronger and to gather as many experiences as he could, it was better if he was actively taking SOS requests and that Alpha would have preferred it. But since it seemed that it might sour her mood if he said anything there, he just kept his mouth shut and paced his bike faster.

Akira drove his bike to its max speed. He was fully relying on Alpha’s support without holding back. After all, he felt that he would slow down if he tried controlling the bike on his own and he had no plans to arrive late. Due to Alpha’s advanced driving skill, the bike could sway nimbly left and

right evading the rubbles scattered on the ground without losing much of its momentum.

Not too long after Akira went out, he detected some signals from monsters. He quickly shifted his focus to the source of that signal, with the help of Alpha's support, he could clearly see a group of monsters, but from that distance, they looked like small dots. The moment he noticed the monster swarm, Akira frowned. It was a swarm of weapon dogs blocking his way forward.

"So those were the reasons for that rescue request, huh. I would rather run than chagrin right at it."

"Want to withdraw then?"

"No."

As Akira was thinking about what to do from there, he could see a vehicle suddenly jumped out, running away as fast as it could. The backside of that vehicle was half open and there were people there desperately trying to fight back the incoming monsters, Akira could at least tell that much.

Right after it jumped out, that vehicle immediately turned and drove right toward Akira. The sharp turn almost threw the whole vehicle into the air, but it was able to regain its balance thanks to the advanced driving skill of its driver while still shooting the monsters behind it and keeping its speed.

"That must be the rescue target then. Thank goodness, it seems that there's no need for me to jump into that swarm."

"Well then, let's pick him up and head back". By the way, how reckless are you willing to go today?

Alpha was smiling challengingly at Akira, but he only replied with a bitter smile and said.

"Not more than what's needed."

"Alright."

Akira’s hand that was grabbing the steer suddenly dialed up the power bar and violently accelerated the bike, just right on time before warheads rained down right where he was a few seconds ago. The explosions sent shockwaves and left craters on the ground.

Under the raining warheads, Akira aimed his SSB multi-weapon at the weapon dogs blocking his way and started shooting, ignoring the amount of money that he spent just for that barrage. The missile pods fixed into his A4WM automatic grenade launcher were also joining that barrage.

The bullet storm swallowed the frontline of the incoming weapon dog swarm. Although the distance between them dampened some of the bullets’ momentum, they still tore through the weapon dog’s bodies. Their big bodies with a cannon perched on them quickly turned into huge chunks of obstacle, but the bullets also tore through them and ate through the swarm’s defense.

The backside of the swarm was hammered by the mini-missiles. Thanks to the guiding system from Alpha, they struck accurately at the weapon dogs’ cannons, igniting the black powder inside their body and resulting in a big explosion. Thus shredding those weapon dogs into small pieces.

As the vehicle filled with Hunters went past Akira, he immediately pulled the brake, made a U-turn, and once again pulled down the accelerator. The special function of the bike that helped its wheel to stick on the vertical wall prevented it from flying off. The powerful inertia assaulted Akira’s body, but he was able to endure it with the help of his augmented suit. Even as he was driving off, Akira kept on shooting at the weapon dogs, using the recoil to accelerate his bike even faster.

As Akira was trying to catch up with the vehicle in front of him, he received a short-distance call from his information terminal. It was a call from Sonada who was waving at him from the backside of the vehicle in front of Akira.

“You’re the Hunter who came to my rescue, right? Thanks for the help.”

“It’s good that you’re alright. To be honest, I was thinking of retreating when I spotted that weapon dog swarm. It’s a good timing that you pulled yourself out from that.”

“That was a close call. With that many cannons, if it was not because of you taking away some of the heat, they would have wiped us out. And here I thought we have really run out of luck when those weird things attacked us, but I guess we still have some luck left, huh.”

“Weird things? Do you mean you didn’t send out that SOS request because of that weapon dog swarm?”

“Yeah, it was because of those…”

Akira noticed something weird on the side of the vehicle.

“Hey, someone is latching on the side of your vehicle? Didn’t you get enough time to take everyone inside?”

“What!?”

Sonada peeked out from the backside of his vehicle and pulled out his gun at that ‘someone‘ latching beside the vehicle without showing any hesitation. The barrage peeled that small boy off from the vehicle as he tumbled on the ground. Akira who saw that could not help but to raise his eyebrows.

“Wha-!? why did you do that!?!”

“That thing is not friendly!! It’s an enemy!! We sent that SOS request because we got attacked by those things!! I bet they are one of those humanoid robots posted to guard the ruin or something…”

Suddenly a small boy with a face similar to Tiol landed on that vehicle with a bang, violently rocking the vehicle and leaving a big dent on its armour.

“Warning. Detecting resistance, arresting targets…”

The small boy stopped his formal warning midway and his expressionless face twitched. Hostility replaced his face and he immediately jumped off that vehicle and lunged straight at Akira.

Although Akira was surprised by that sudden turn of event, he did not miss a beat as he aimed his rifle at that young boy and shot him down. But that did not stop him, the young boy immediately rose back up and started chasing Akira.

Akira could not help but be surprised to see the young boy chasing him. Although that bullet was powerful enough to rip through the weapon dogs, it was not enough to pierce through that young boy.

“Is it one of those dolls that I fought with the other day? I didn’t expect to find them outside a building.”

“Akira, leave the guessing for later and focus on the fight. It’s not done yet, more of them are coming.”

Akira aimed his SSB multi-weapon up with a stern face, there were multiple of those young boy dolls jumping at him from the buildings to his left and right. Some of them had 4 normal limbs, some of them carried rifles, while some of them had their whole arms turned into guns. Some of those dolls had open bodies, exposing the mechanical parts inside them, some of them even had 3 arms attached to their bodies.

Akira compressed his time perception and shot down the enemies in front of him in turns following Alpha’s instruction. But that did not end all of them, although some of them plummeted straight to the ground and turned into scrap, and some of them were thrown off and crashed to the building near them and stopped moving. But of course, there were also those with stronger bodies which rose up again after getting shot down before they started chasing him.

Sonada’s vehicle was powerful enough to drive through the bad ground, but even so, the small wreckage spread here and there prevented them from going too fast. Not to mention, if they made a small blunder and managed to get the vehicle to roll over, it would spell the end for them. So they drove

even slower than usual, slower than the dolls chasing after them with their super-human strength.

Although they were fighting back the dolls chasing them, the distance between them was slowly narrowing, and their number was not getting smaller at all.

The young boy dolls jumping out the buildings left and right straight at Akira also had their guns and cannons aimed at him. Alpha controlled the bike to keep making evasive manoeuvres to get away from their aims. Due to the continuously moving bike and the bad ground, Akira had to maintain his compressed time perception while aiming his SSB multi-weapon at those dolls. He followed the instructions shown in his augmented vision, displaying the order of the enemies that he had to shoot down. The bullets that he was using should be able to easily turn normal monsters into minced meat.

The flying powerful bullets ripped the dolls into pieces, spreading their flesh and mechanical parts into the air. But the ones with strong bodies would only slam to the ground after their momentum was killed by the bullet just to rise up again.

The backside of Akira's vehicle released a pack of mini-missiles. Some of them hit the dolls that were still in the air, while some of the missiles went straight at the dolls chasing Akira. The explosions from those missiles sent a violent gust of wind right at Akira, but he planted his body firmly with the help of his augmented suit so as not to get blown away from that shockwave.

Akira then noticed something troublesome and frowned.

"Say, Alpha. It's just my feeling though, but like, aren't those dolls focusing on me? Or more like, they're only attacking me, right?"

"If you want to leave one of them alive in order to confirm that, then you don't have my permission."

"Like hell I would do that!"

“If you have no plans to just abandon those people behind, then just take this positively, at least they won’t be attacking those Hunters while you’re around, right?”

“You have a point there.”

Akira then banished that thought and any other unneeded things inside his mind to the void.

Another batch of mini-missiles was launched from the backside of the bike. They drew a huge arc on the sky and went for the dolls chasing from behind. The dolls with guns immediately tried to shoot some of the missiles, causing several explosions in the air.

But even after that, the rest of the mini-missiles were able to reach them and blow them away. Akira looked slightly relieved watching those explosions, but his face immediately tensed up again. Those mini-missiles were not enough to stop those dolls from chasing him.

“That did cut their number down, but there are still quite a lot of them left.”

“Akira, bad news here, that was the last batch of mini-missiles.”

“And here I thought I carried quite a lot of them. It starts to scare me to think how much I spent in this fight alone.”

Akira took his DVTS minigun off from his bike and replaced it with the automatic reloading system for the missiles since it has no mini-missiles left to load. The ammo expense from that battle was nothing to laugh at.

Akira aimed his SSB multi-weapon and started shooting again. The SSB multi-weapon was spouting out powerful bullets as if it was a minigun. Once he emptied his rifle, he loaded another magazine and started shooting again. He told himself that he did not care if Kibayashi complained about the expense later on as he kept burning through his ammo reserve.

But even so, the incoming dolls did not seem to be letting off at all and his ammo reserve was getting smaller and smaller. Akira could not help but

start feeling nervous. Right in the midst of it, Alpha said something that he could not ignore.

“We at least got out of the most dangerous part now. I’ll need to go for a bit, so do your best yourself for the time being, okay? I’ll give the bike’s control back to you.”

As the bike suddenly swayed, Akira flusteredly took control of the bike back.

“Wait for a sec, you need to go now?!”

“I just need to take care of a small business. I’ll be back in a minute or two.”

“Small business?! Right now? In this situation?!”

In contrast to the panicking Akira, Alpha just smiled and pointed her finger.

“Don’t worry, like I said before, we already got out of the most dangerous part.”

Alpha immediately vanished right after that. Akira quickly shifted his gaze forward and saw Yastsubayashi’s mobile clinic coming right in his direction. He could also see the Hunters guarding the clinic standing by near it as well as the Hunters that were a part of the expedition team.

The mobile clinic was originally an APC, so it had rifles and other weapons equipped. Those weapons immediately started shooting, half of the other Hunters around that clinic also started reacting. After Akira went past the clinic, he spotted Elena and Sara, so he turned his bike toward them.

Elena noticed Akira and threw a smile at him.

“Akira, it seems that you’re having a hard time there. Are you alright?”

“Ah, uh, yeah, I’m okay.”

Sara then worriedly said to Akira.

“This Hunter by the name of Sonada keeps broadcasting SOS requests, so you came to rescue him, huh? Are you alright? Did you get any injury? If you’re tired, you can take a rest in the back.”

“Ah, no, I’m fine. Although I’m a little tired, I still can move.”

“I see, don’t push yourself too hard. Since we’re around this time, it would be a waste not to rely on us when you have the chance.”

Sara said so and smiled gently at Akira, who blushed and seemed to be flustered.

“In that case, I don’t have much ammo left, so is it okay if I stay close to you?”

Elena smiled and said.

“Of course. It has been quite a while since the last time we fought together. If you want to use my information terminal too, come closer and I’ll do the adjustment.”

“Yes please.”

Akira smiled happily as he said so. After he finished his readjustment, he then fought the dolls together with Elena and Sara.

The other Hunters that were guarding the clinic and the Hunters from the expedition team knew well of the danger that they were going to face, thus they came well prepared with a lot of ammo. Of course, the bullets that they had prepared were suitable for the danger of the requests that they had accepted that day.

After that, they took their time cleaning up the dolls chasing Akira and Sonada as well as the weapon dog swarm that came not too long after those dolls.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 184, Tiol Wakes Up

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After cleaning up the rest of the monsters, Sonoda and the other Hunters were taking a rest while getting their injuries looked after.

“So, how’re your injuries?”

“No problem. Although that guy is a cunning greedy bastard, his skills are top-notch… Anyway, sorry for getting you into trouble back then.”

Sonoda gave a serious apology, but his teammates replied with a small laugh.

“That’s what it means to work as a team, no? So don’t worry about it. Furthermore, he treated our injuries for free. Though, to be honest, I’m still bothered by the fact that he looked rather happy when he told us so. But it’s way better than getting told to pay because we failed the request.”

Sonoda and his team lightly laughed off their fairly serious situation as they continued chatting.

“…But still, although it’s a good thing that we got saved by it, I didn’t expect the clinic to come for us. I really don’t know what that guy is

thinking.”

“So, where is that Yatsubayashi guy now?”

“No idea, I bet he’s out there looking for the other injured Hunters or something.”

“And leave the clinic just for that…? Well, I guess it doesn’t really matter, huh.”

Sonoda and his team laughed, celebrating their survival.

While on the other site, Yatsubayashi was checking the units that the Hunters had just defeated with a wide grin. He was dissecting a young boy robot using his suspicious-looking machines. He took a unit that still had its body relatively intact and opened its head with some kind of tool, he then pulled out something from its head and smiled.

“Transmitter device. But this isn’t mine, it’s some kind of imitation, huh?”

Yatsubayashi could not hold back his smile.

“…Then these are… All of these are primitive terminals, huh. It should only be able to do low-level autonomous action. In that case, are these some kind of makeshift remote control? I see. But still, he shouldn’t be able to reach this level only by eating monsters with this kind of function. Tiol-kun, it seems that you’ve gotten yourself some old-world knowledge, huh. Honestly, I’m so envious of you. Well, I guess I didn’t come all the way here for nothing.”

Yatsubayashi actually did not come there to pick up Sonoda and his team. He was only chasing a signal that might have come from Tiol. The reason why he did not wait until the situation calmed down was simply because he could not hold himself back. Also, depending on how bad the situation was, the City Management might order them to retreat.

That was also the reason why Yatsubayashi sent Sonoda to that place. He faked the SOS signal in order to dispatch Sonoda to investigate the area.

Yatsubayashi looked at the head scattered around him and laughed.

“In case you’re listening, I’m more than happy to welcome you if you show yourself, you know?”

Of course, the heads did not give any reply at all.

＿*＿*＿*＿

Inside a white space, Alpha was standing face to face with Tsubaki. Alpha had a displeased face as she was sending a stern gaze at Tsubaki.

“I’m waiting for your excuse.”

Tsubaki replied back flatly with an unfriendly face.

“I have none.”

Alpha’s face turned sterner and her gaze colder.

“So basically, you’re picking a fight with me, correct?”

Tsubaki suddenly started oozing an ominous aura.

“I don’t think I’m being that hostile to you. If you want me to apologize, I shall apologize. If it’s needed, I’m even willing to swap places.”

Alpha and Tsubaki just stared at each other in silence. Due to their accelerated time perception, their moment of silence was actually longer than it seemed. Alpha opened her mouth first.

“…I’m here to hear your excuse regarding the subject under me and the subject under you trying to kill each other.”

“First of all, in order to keep the safety of the region under my supervision, what I did was just a rewrite of the system configuration of a unit that had unstable software based on one of the security drones defending my area. So to be more precise, that unit is not under my supervision. It just picked the subject under you as its target by chance when it tried to follow its

software to protect the region that it's responsible for. Well, I did not specifically tell it to not attack the subject under you, but again, I have no obligation to do that in the first place."

"Is that so?"

Alpha seemed to have accepted that excuse and her stern face slightly relaxed. Tsubaki also toned down her intimidating aura. Now that the mood had returned to the point that they were able to negotiate calmly, this time, it was Tsubaki's turn to complain.

"I'll at least give you this warning. Even if it's someone under your supervision, I will have to take him out if he steps into my territory without the proper permission. So keep that in mind."

"Sure, I'll be careful."

Alpha only said so with an emotionless face before vanishing.

Hearing that, Tsubaki's face distorted with displeasure.

"…Good grief, what a pain in the neck!"

Then Tsubaki also vanished from that white empty space. Now that there was no one inside that space, the space itself vanished shortly after.

__*__*__*__

Since Akira had almost used up all of his ammo, he asked Sara and Elena to accompany him back to the forward base. He set his bike to run on autopilot to follow the vehicle as he hopped into Elena and Sara's vehicle.

Akira was enamored by the scene of his bike running just fine without anyone riding it. Sara, who saw Akira like that, smiled and said to him.

"Although it's a common feature for advanced bikes made to explore the wasteland, when you look at it, it looks like a ghost is riding it, doesn't it?"

"Ghost, huh. You're right."

“Talking about ghosts, Akira, have you heard about them? There’s an urban legend in Kuzusuhara ruin about a beguiling ghost.”

“Yeah, more or less. Although I don’t know the details, it’s about a ghost that uses old-world relics as bait to lure Hunters and kill them, right?”

Since Akira had some guesses about that rumour, he could not help but make a conflicted face. He then continued.

“…Well, putting the ghost aside, it’s nothing rare for Hunters to get killed when they try to go to the deeper part of the ruin for relics.”

Elena, who was driving the vehicle, jumped into their conversation.

“It seems that in the past that urban legend had a completely different content.”

“Is that so? What did the rumour say in the past?”

“Honestly speaking, I don’t know for sure since there are a lot of different versions of it. Some say that it’s nothing but a rumour spread by Kugamayama City Management in order to scare Hunters from going to Kuzusuhara ruin. At that time, there were still a lot of good relics around the outskirts of Kuzusuhara ruin. So it might be a rumour spread to keep Hunters away from the ruin except for those Hunters employed under the City Management.”

Akira was listening closely to Elena’s story when Alpha suddenly swooped down from the sky and sat next to him.

“I’m back!”

“Welcome back. That took some time, I thought you said that you would be gone only for a bit.”

Alpha smiled mischievously.

“Oh my, you were missing me that much? I’m happy to hear that.”

“…It’s just that your interpretation for ‘a bit’ is different than mine.”

Akira only said so and dropped the subject there. Alpha just smiled like usual.

__*__*__*__

There was a certain room inside the forward base designed to prevent any type of information leakage, it was mainly used by those of high standings. Inside that room, Inabe, the head of the forward base, was sitting face to face with Sheryl and Viola.

Although Inabe was being careful with Viola, he was not taking her seriously. He was also looking down on Sheryl.

“So then, what is it? It’s pretty impressive for you to manage to get a connection to contact me, but if it isn’t worth my time, I’ll leave right away.”

Viola took out a certain old-world relic and placed it in front of Inabe. Inabe looked at that relic and smiled mockingly.

“So?”

“And this is the result from the appraisal. It’s from the Kurogane Corporation. Since I was using a backdoor, it has no Kurogane insignia on it. But what’s written here is the actual result from them.”

Inabe took the document handed over by Viola and skimmed it.

“It’s the old-world terminal from an unknown source that everyone was talking about not too long ago, huh. Are you trying to bribe me with this? What a joke!”

Inabe looked pretty calm while still eyeing the relic. Looking at that, Viola said with a wide smile.

“It seems that your investigation is not going well.”

Inabe’s expression immediately turned serious.

“…What do you mean by that?”

“You’re free to interpret it any way you want.”

“…Where did you hear that from?”

“I might be just making blind guesses, you know.”

The more Inabe’s face turned sterner, the wider Viola’s smile got.

Building a secured route into the inner part of the ruin starting from the forward base was a serious endeavour and the City Management placed significant effort into doing that. So of course, there were many people interested in it which caused infighting between different factions.

The one who was responsible for the planning was Yanagisawa. Since the construction and the maintenance of the forward base was doing fine, as well as the relic collection around the secured route, Yanagisawa was cementing his standing among the interested parties. Of course, it was not a good period for the people who were against Yanagisawa.

If there was anything that they could use to reproach Yanagisawa, it would be the fact that he was so focused on extending the secured route instead of collecting the relics around the secured route. The factions who were against Yanagisawa did not let that slide as they kept using that as an excuse to criticize him.

When someone got assigned to watch over a territory with expensive relics, of course, that person would gain a considerable amount of influence too. It was possible to disrupt Yanagisawa’s position using such a method. That was why Inabe spent a lot of his resources investigating the area under his supervision.

But unfortunately, he did not get a good result from that investigation. The weapon dog and humanoid monster swarm that he discovered practically

forced him to stop the investigation, and he was unable to find any expensive relics.

When the area under his supervision proved to be pretty dangerous and without any worthwhile relics, the City Management had no reason to keep investing in it. At this rate, the City Management would completely stop its investment and Inabe would lose all the money that he had already invested in that territory as well as his influence among the competing factions. In reality, he was getting nervous.

When he saw the relic that Viola brought with her, Inabe thought that if that relic could be found in his territory, it would definitely kick up the value of his territory. At least, it would be enough to solve his current trouble, buy him some time, as well as bring in some money for him to get more resources. Thus luring in more potential investors.

Inabe's gaze naturally wandered to that old-world relic.

[…To be honest, I'm sure I can make it sound as if this relic comes from the area under my care. But I've heard all kinds of rumours about this woman. Moreover, even if I can do that, I only have one relic here. It's far from enough in order to increase the value of my territory…]

While Inabe was still contemplating what to do, Viola put her hand on top of that relic and slid it close to herself. Inabe's expression turned slightly sterner. Viola then pulled out the same type of relics and lined them on the table.

[…W-well now, if there are this many, it should be enough, but… It's this woman we're talking about here… There are already so many people who met their demise after getting involved with her…B-but, they do say that she never lies…]

Inabe made a conflicted face which was a mix of his hope, expectation, doubt, and desire. His expectation that this might be the way to his bright future started to bud.

Viola watched Inabe’s reaction with a smile. She then said to Sheryl in a blatant act.

“Boss, it seems that Inabe-san is not interested. I’m sorry, it’s my fault.”

“I see, alright then.”

Sheryl stood up calmly and lightly bowed to Inabe.

“Inabe-sama, thank you very much for your time today.”

“W-wait!!”

Inabe thought that Sheryl was not faking it and she was really about to leave, so he could not help but stop her by pure reflex. It gave him the final push.

“…Sit down, what do you want in exchange?”

Viola waited for Sheryl to sit back before she answered that question with a smile.

“We are running a relic shop, that’s why we want you to help us get old-world relics.”

“You said that as if it’s an easy thing to do, or is that you already know there are many people interested in collecting relics?”

“It’s not like we want you to get us all the expensive relics out there. We just want you to share some of the relics you collected with us. You can at least do that much, right? We will also pay for them, of course, we won’t be stingy with the rate.”

Inabe started to question his decision. But since he actually had already made his mind, although he might hesitate, what he was doing there was nothing more than trying to find more excuses to accept their demand.

“Alright, I’ll do it.”

“We have a deal then.”

Viola sent a glance to Sheryl, who understood what Viola meant with that glance as she slid the relics on top of the table to Inabe’s side.

Inabe’s gaze shifted to Sheryl. There was already no mockery reflected from his eyes. Sheryl was wearing the dress that was refitted in Kashua’s shop. Celene had the chance to work on that dress without worrying about the budget at all, thanks to that, her rare talent transformed that dress into something that emphasized Sheryl’s natural beauty while also giving her an aura of dignity. This time, Viola had some say during the refitting of that dress.

“By the way, what is your relationship with Viola?”

“My business partner and I’m her boss. That’s all.”

“…I see.”

Inabe looked at Sheryl and Viola. One of them was a suspicious woman that he knew well, while the other one was a suspicious girl that was new to him. He placed a mental note to be careful with both of them.

Sheryl, Viola and Inabe stayed there for some time to talk about the details after that. That was until one of Inabe’s men came and gave a report.

“Excuse me, I’m here with the report regarding the humanoid units.”

“Go ahead.”

“In short, they are not of humanoid robot type. To be more precise, they’re closer to biological monsters like the greedy crocodile.”

“So?”

“We can’t expect to earn much money from them.”

“…I see.”

Inabe sighed. If they were one of those old-world humanoid drones and the facility that manufactured those drones was somewhere nearby, it might become a good source to lure investors to invest in that territory. Although Inabe did not expect much when he ordered for the investigation, it was still disappointing that it did not give a good result.

“They’re still in the middle of the investigation even now. The research division is asking for more samples if possible.”

“Give them as many samples as they want.”

Viola suddenly interjected.

“Is it one of those humanoid monsters from that warning?”

“Yes. We still don’t know for sure if it’s a humanoid robot that someone made, or if it’s a Hunter preying on other Hunters, or if it’s something from the Nationalist, or maybe it’s just your normal humanoid monsters. That’s why they only limit it to a simple warning so as not to spread needless fear. Well, with this, we know for sure that they’re actually monsters. We put all the samples for the investigation in the warehouse. If you’re interested, we can go and take a look now?”

“Good idea, let’s go.”

Inabe raised his eyebrows.

“What are you planning to do with them? They’re not robots, so they’re just like weird looking corpses. Or is it one of your hobbies?”

Viola smiled mischievously.

“Well, it’s more like I enjoy seeing others get flustered when they believe that I will turn down their offer.”

Inabe sighed exasperatedly and scoffed.

“Haaah, you’re as bad as the rumour says, huh.”

“Don’t say anything unnecessary if you don’t want people to use it against you. It’s something that you should keep in mind as a negotiator. Right, boss?”

“Don’t ask me.”

Sheryl said so in a rather unfriendly way. But Viola only replied with her usual smile. Seeing that exchange, Inabe really had no idea what was the relationship between them.

“Well, if you want to see them, you can just go ahead and take a look. I’ll take you there.”

Sheryl followed Viola and went with Inabe to the forward base’s warehouse. Although she had no interest in the monster’s corpses, it was not like she could do anything if she was left behind alone. Moreover, it was better for her to go with them to make sure that she would not leak anything unnecessary.

The warehouse also housed a lot of the collected old-world relics. It was filled with gigantic shelves, the relics were placed on those shelves in a random manner.

Sheryl was a bit overwhelmed by what she saw there, Viola then leaned in and whispered to her.

“Although they’re cheap relics, normal people won’t be able to get permission to enter this place, you know? Aren’t you glad?”

“Wasn’t this your original aim?”

“Well, I wonder.”

Sheryl was a little irritated since it seemed that Viola was toying with her. But since it was true that it was not something that she could see everyday, she shifted her focus to the relics around her.

In one corner of the warehouse, there were pieces from the humanoid monsters that Akira and the other Hunters had defeated. They were kept in

some kind of vacuum container. They were in relatively good conditions, their faces were visible through the transparent bag looked mostly unharmed. While for the ones that were in a bad shape, they were piled into a small container.

Inabe, who had guided Sheryl and Viola there, glanced at it and sighed.

“If they were old-world humanoid robots, it would have been a treasure trove.”

Viola also glanced at it with a slight interest.

“You’re keeping them in a relatively safe container.”

“Yeah, I’m sending them to a research corporation that I have some connections with, so I need to make them at least presentable. Although that short investigation revealed that they’re nothing but scrap, I might get a different result if I get a specialist to look at them. Someone actually brought in old-world humanoid robots from the ruin you see, and they fetched quite a lot of money even though they were already mostly destroyed. So I’m hoping if these things can fetch the same price too, you see.”

While Viola and Inabe were having that conversation, Sheryl was listening to them while looking at the container bag. That was when she noticed something, her eyes were fixated on the face under the container bag and thought that it looked familiar to her.

“…Tiol?”

Sheryl checked the faces in the other bags too and found out that all of them looked similar, which was strange. Although she suspected that he had something to do with them, she could not think of anything.

Inabe noticed Sheryl’s weird reaction and lightly joked.

“If you’re interested, do you want to take one of them home? Of course, you’ll have to pay for it though.”

“No thanks.”

“Thought so.”

After that, Inabe realized that he had allowed some outsiders to stay for a rather long time inside that warehouse. So he suggested that they leave the warehouse.

As they left, one of the humanoid monsters that still had some of its energy left looked at Sheryl. Since it immediately ran out of energy right after that, no one noticed it at all.

__*__*__*__

Tiol was drifting inside his dream space without any awareness.

Yastubayashi had healed Tiol by injecting nanomachine extracted from one of the ruin drones. It was an experiment to check if it would trick the old-world monsters’ IFF. If it worked, Hunters would be able to explore the ruin without the fear of getting attacked by monsters.

But it ended in failure. As a matter of fact, the nanomachine even invaded Tiol’s brain and affected his consciousness. But in the end, it was nothing more than an unstable system. It then picked random transmissions from around him and solely followed the vague command coming out from that bugged system when he ran away from Yatsubayashi’s clinic.

After that, he worked as a security drone as he hid in one of the dilapidated mansions and took out monsters that the system deemed to be illegal. He was moving as if he was being controlled by a bugged program.

The nanomachines that Yatsubayashi injected continued to evolve even now. It took in the nanomachines of the mechanical monster and the peculiar features of the biological monsters that Tiol ate, thus modifying his body to the point where strange-looking parts were growing out from his body and he was able to completely reconstruct his own body.

But it did not end there, he then met Tsubaki and received some help from her too. Tsubaki basically reconstructed the system inside his brain and claimed that he was one of the old-world's security drones.

Although his mind and body were completely altered, surprisingly enough, he was doing pretty well. He was actually happy now that he had gained power that he could not even start to imagine back when he was living in the slum. He was also enjoying himself fighting other monsters and Hunters using simple remotely controlled robots that he created. Although he had even forgotten his own name at this point, he did not really care.

As he continued acting as the ruin's security drone, one of his robots encountered Akira. Of course, he, himself no longer remembered Akira at all. But when he saw the footage sent from one of his robots, a certain order, or desire to be more precise, surfaced from deep within his mind.

His thought of winning a wonderful reward after he was able to kill Akira was already rooted deep inside his mind, but the directives from his security system software pushed that desire aside. Tiol fought hard against that directive and eventually was able to order all of his robots to attack Akira.

In the end, he was not able to take out Akira, but his consciousness that was able to resurface stayed in that state.

And then, through one of his robots that had already lost all of its fighting power, he saw and heard Sheryl mumble his name.

Even after he got his body and mind completely altered, when he saw Sheryl and heard her call his name, Tiol was once again captivated by her. Right at that moment, the strong emotion stemming from deep within him caused the system to reconstruct a part of his consciousness.

Tiol finally opened his eyes and found himself inside a room of a dilapidated building. Although he had an emotionless face, he said with full of resolve.

"I am Tiol!"

One of the terminals was alerted of Tiol. But as he glared at it, he was able to hijack its chain of command and make it obey him.

Tiol understood that he was still one with the system. Although he had regained his consciousness, he was still under strict restriction from the system. Forget returning back to Kugamayama city, at the moment, he could not even leave the territory that he was assigned to. Of course, he could not go and meet Sheryl in this state.

“What should I do…? Ah, right! I can use her!”

Tiol jumped out through the building’s window with his superhuman strength. He then landed from the height that would kill a normal human with a loud bang and ran toward his goal.

It was one of the rooms inside a weathered building. That room was badly damaged and no longer completely covered in white. After he entered that room, Tiol screamed as hard as he could.

“Come out!! I know that you can show yourself! And I know that you’re listening!! I even know from where you’re observing all this time!!”

Tiol screamed while looking around the room, but he heard nothing else other than the echoes of his own voice.

“Show yourself!! If not, I’ll tell the Hunters about your existence!! And I’m not bluffing here!!”

Tsubaki’s image suddenly appeared inside that room. She looked displeased and had a cold look.

Tiol spotted her and ran at her while shouting.

“There you are!! Get the restriction that you installed in my head off! Otherwise…!”

“Stop!”

With that one word, his whole body came into a sudden halt, ignoring his wish. Tsubaki then walked towards Tiol, who could not move at all, with mild contempt plastered on her face.

“You really have no manners, how unpleasant. And you have lost your logical mind too. I know that you’re excited after gaining so much power, but do you think that I’ll accept your demand just because you’re shouting it?”

Tsubaki stopped and stood next to Tiol, she then extended her hand toward his head.

“Our deal is that I will fix your bugged system and you’ll guard the area that I assigned to you. If you don’t like it, I don’t mind reverting your system back. You can just go ahead and unconsciously rampage until the day you die like a feral beast or a bugged machine for all I care.”

Tiol felt like his mind was being messed with while he fought back as hard as he could. He squeezed all of his might to try and push off Tsubaki’s hand with his immobilized body. When he did that, although it was only slightly, his body actually moved and swiped her hand off his head.

Tsubaki raised her eyebrows.

“I see that you can fight the system to some point, huh… You may move now.”

Tiol could feel something that was restricting his body was lifted off. He immediately jumped away from Tsubaki. His face was reflecting desperation, fear and terror. He was breathing roughly while glaring at her.

Tsubaki seemed to be contemplating something for a few seconds before she said with a cold smile.

“I’ve changed my mind, I have an offer to you.”

“An offer?”

“Yes. Since it seems that you’re not willing to continue guarding the area that I assigned to you, I’ll have you do something else for me. If you can do it, I will lift as much restriction as I can from your system using my permission. I will also forgive your rudeness just now. So, what do you say?”

“…W-what do you want me to do?”

Tiol asked the details of Tsubaki’s demand and could not help but be surprised.

“…You’re telling me to do that?”

“I won’t force you. But if you refuse, I will have to take back what I gave you.”

If Tiol refused, he would return back to being a feral beast rampaging pointlessly in the wasteland. Basically, he had no other choice in this situation.

“A-alright, I’ll do it.”

“We have a deal then, I’ll be counting on you.”

Tsubaki smiled faintly before vanishing. Right after that, Tiol’s face twitched.

“…Goddammit! I just need to do it right?!”

Tiol’s scream echoed through the room.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 185, Exceptional Monster

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Deep inside the Kuzusuhara ruin, Tiol was having his meal, or to be more precise, collecting more resources. His face was filled with pain.

Tiol ate all kinds of weird things, like the wreckages of dead monsters, carcasses of dead biological monsters, rubbles from buildings, Hunters along with their equipment.

He did not really care that much back when his consciousness was still a part of the system. But now that he had regained his consciousness, he also regained some of his humanity. As such, he could not help but get bothered when he ate raw meat, scrap metals, and rubble. He would have chosen to eat rotten leftovers given the chance, but this was torture that surpassed common sense.

If he let the system take over, it might be easier for him. But if he misjudged how much of his consciousness was to be relinquished to the system, there was a chance that his mind would be once again drowned by the system. Tiol, who understood that very well, made sure not to cross the dangerous line while harvesting resources.

Every time he took a bite of the carcass, it sent an unpleasant sensation throughout his body. Every time he tore off a metallic scrap with his jaw, he could not help but feel terrified of himself for being able to do it. He kept telling himself that he had no other choice but to do it in order to replenish his ammo and to reach his goal. He cursed the situation that he was in as well as everything that led him into that situation.

Tiol's body changed in response to his feelings. The hatred inside him broke a part of the system restriction, allowing him to break through the limit on his body. Thus turning him into a giant, powerful, and vicious monster.

His hatred fueled his desire for power. Even if he constructed a lot of those simple robots that he could remotely control, Akira would be able to destroy them single-handedly. And even if he also brought along a swarm of weapon dogs, they would be taken care of by the other Hunters. In order to reach his goal, to defeat Akira and those Hunters, Tiol needed more power. And for the sake of gaining that power, he had to eat those corpses and wreckage. Thus fueling his hatred even more.

The effect of Tiol's hatred reached the semi-autonomous drones around the area. The other drones that were also collecting resources were pushed to surpass the restriction from the system. When those drones were done with harvesting the pile of resources, they were transformed into giant monsters. Some of them turned into giant humanoid robots or heavily armed tanks. Their bodies had no sense of aesthetic as if they were made of forcefully combining mechanical parts and biological flesh, it was a pure expression of power and force.

These monsters started to move pushed by their insatiable desire to grow bigger and more powerful. Tiol, who now had turned into something that looked like a heavily armoured powered suit from the outside, also started moving.

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Akira had returned back to the forward base in order to replenish his ammo when he received a call from Kibayashi to meet him in the cafeteria.

Kibayashi sounded really disappointed when he explained why he had called Akira, but in contrast to that, Akira was listening to him with a big smile.

“It’s finally done, huh!”

“Dammit, you look so happy. You really hated this job until the very end, huh?”

Akira’s request to increase his Hunter Rank ended that day. For Kibayashi, it was bad news, but of course, for Akira, it was great news.

After all, Akira had a hard fight just the other day. As a matter of fact, he used that as an excuse to buy expensive expendables without even glancing at their prices. He basically filled the warehouse of the forward base with the expensive mini-missiles and anti-forcefield armour magazines.

The ratio between Akira’s expense and achievement finally surpassed what Kibayashi could handle.

“As expected, you’re spending too much money. Unless you’re planning to use those in the frontline, they’ll no longer pay for your expense.”

Akira lightly laughed as if he was completely ignoring Kibayashi’s complaints.

“Well, didn’t expect splurging on the expendables to actually work.”

“Good grief! You’re basically the only Hunter that I know who would make the City Management cancel its Hunter Rank-up request for a trivial reason like that, you know. Though, to be honest, that’s so like you.”

Yatsubayashi glanced at Akira and sent a bitter smile, although, there was also a bit of delight too in his smile.

“To be honest, I was hoping that you would do something crazy on your last day. But unfortunately, I guess that won’t happen now. Starting from today, you’re assigned to guard the forward base. Well, you can just randomly roam around the forward base.”

“Is that good enough?”

“The weather forecast says that it’ll be raining for the next few days after all, so there are no plans for a huge battle anytime soon. The effect from the colourless mist will get thicker with the rain, so I bet you’ll be just holding yourself in the forward base for a few days. Well, actually that’s also one of the reasons why they cancelled your rank-up request though.”

It was common sense in the eastern district to only go explore the ruin when the weather was clear. After all, not only did rain reduce the sensitivity of the information-gathering devices, it also reduced the Hunters’ visual range. No one would go picking a fight with the monsters in that situation out of their own volition.

The City Management made sure that all the important points had enough guards to hold on their own in any weather. Of course, their budgets were already decided beforehand. And in the case if they employed a high-ranking Hunter, the City Management would have to pay a lot of money for that Hunter. Now that Akira had raised up his rank considerably, the City Management had no budget left to employ him.

“Well, if you don’t like the idea of doing nothing for a whole day, you can instead join the Hunters working to secure the frontline.”

“No thanks!”

“Yep, knew you would say that.”

Kibayashi fully expected that answer from Akira, so he smiled disappointedly but also gleefully at the same time.

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Akira was driving his bike around the forward base. Behind him was an unmanned truck. Alpha was sitting leisurely on top of the covered truck.

The truck was filled with ammo taken from the forward base. After the last fight, Akira was worried if he would run out of ammo in the middle of a

battle again, thus he decided to splurge his money on a small truck.

The truck itself was not armed and not well armoured. It was basically the polar opposite of Akira who was armed to the teeth. The only thing that he considered when choosing that truck was whether it was better than carrying the ammos using his bike.

Akira glanced at the truck.

“If this is everything for today, there was no need to buy the truck. I guess that was an unnecessary spending.”

“If the money you spent to prepare yourself for a danger turned out to be unneeded, it’s something that we should be happy about, right?”

“Well, you have a point there… Hm?”

Akira noticed the falling droplets and looked up, it had started raining lightly. He could see the sky blocked by a thick cloud.

“Oh, it started raining.”

Alpha passed through the ceiling of the truck and dropped to the driver assistant’s seat of the truck. She then pointed at the driver seat and called Akira.

“Akira, how about coming here? There’s no need to keep driving on your bike under the rain.”

“Good idea… Hm!??”

Akira, who was still looking up at the sky, noticed something. He spotted something flying under the thick cloud.

Akira extended his information-gathering device to zoom in on that spot. He could see something that looked like a humanoid robot and an aircraft.

“Oh, they’re flying… Wait, isn’t this bad?”

Akira remembered that a flying object in the eastern district would attract powerful monsters that roamed the sky. So he continued to stare at that flying object with a stern expression.

Right at the next moment, Akira noticed missiles flying past him, which went straight for that aircraft. Those missiles came from the anti-air tanks posted in the forward base. The aircraft was hit with explosives and fell down together with the humanoid robot.

At this rate, they would crash close to him. So Akira accelerated his bike and immediately evacuated from the crash point.

The aircraft that was falling free under the mercy of gravity suddenly slowed down as if it pulled the brake right before it crashed into the ground. After floating a few centimetres above the ground, it landed with a loud bang.

Akira watched that scene unfold with wide eyes, but Alpha suddenly shouted at him.

“Akira!! Shoot it down!!”

The A4WM automatic grenade launchers fixed on Akira’s bike immediately released mini-missiles. Akira reacted accordingly by pulling his SSB multi-weapon and immediately emptied its magazine at that humanoid robot.

The humanoid robot aimed both of its giant arms at Akira and took a stance as if it was about to shoot, but before it could do that, Akira’s bullets reached it first.

The shockwave from the bullets threw the humanoid robot off-balance, but that did not stop it from releasing shots accompanied by loud bangs. One of the warheads went straight at a building, blowing off the half-crumbled building into smithereens in one shot. While the other warhead travelled astray into the wasteland before landing with a loud explosion.

The bullets barrage from Akira pierced through the robot’s armour, leaving its body riddled with holes, splattering its oils and sending its body parts

flying into the air. But that did not stop Akira from shooting at that robot, showering it with bullets and its own body parts.

Even with its balance broken, the robot kept shooting with both of its arms. It kept trying to fix its aim at Akira while releasing stray warheads into the wasteland. Echoes from the explosions ran through the wasteland, raising a cloud of smoke with every explosion.

While Akira was in the middle of shooting the robot, the missiles that were launched first finally reached their target. They slipped through the holes on that robot's armour and exploded, blowing its mechanical part to pieces and releasing its body fluid that looked like blood from its body container.

Akira who saw that raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"…a biological monster?! Not a humanoid robot?!"

"It's still a type of humanoid weapon, but its species is much closer to the greedy crocodile. You can just think of it as a heavily armed powered suit."

"So what is that thing flying in the sky?!"

While Akira was still confused. Another round of explosions burst on top of his head. When he looked up, he could see multiple similar aircraft flying in the sky as well as the missiles that were trying to shoot them down.

Those aircrafts were not only carrying similar humanoid monster that Akira defeated just now, but they also carried other types of monsters. Although they were of different species, all these monsters shared the same characteristics, all of them were gigantic with abnormally thick armour and powerful weapons.

The aircrafts that the missiles missed just went past the forward base and headed straight to Kugamayama city. While the transport aircraft that got shot down unloaded their cargo one by one.

Akira stood frozen as he watched the destroyed aircrafts and monsters that were raining down from the sky with a stern face, but the blaring alarm

coming from the terminal lent by the City Management pulled him back to reality. As he checked the contents of the notification, his already tense face turned even sterner.

“It’s telling me to fight the best I can without going back to the base.”

“Akira, whether you plan to fight them or not, we should go into the ruin. This place is no good.”

Although the missiles were able to shoot down some of the aircrafts, the huge monsters that those aircrafts carried were mostly able to land on the ground just fine. But after they landed, those monsters immediately headed back to the ruin instead of going in the direction of Kugamayama city.

The monsters started shooting their gigantic guns toward the forward base and the area around it. The tanks and the powered suits guarding the forward base reacted by fighting back.

As for Akira, he rode his bike and paced it toward the ruin.

“…In the worst-case scenario, isn’t it safer if I go back to the base?”

“You have your ammo here with you. Aren’t you glad that you decided to take them with you?”

Alpha said so and smiled teasingly. Akira returned that smile with an annoyed look. He then spotted a warhead landing on a building not too far from him, tearing that building down. Seeing that, Akira knitted his eyebrows.

“…Why does this happen on my last day working here?! As I thought, my luck really sucks.”

Akira spitted out a complaint as he immediately accelerated his bike.

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The forward base was filled with the shouts from the guards and the sounds of the battle.

“Detected more aircrafts!!”

“Shoot them down!! Activate all the anti-air units!! Get the anti-air weapons for the powered suits too!!”

“The monsters that fell from the transport aircrafts are attacking the supply route!! Also, I’m detecting more monsters coming out from the ruin!”

“Gather everyone who can fight and get them to set up a defence line!! We just need to hold out until reinforcement from the city arrives!! Use all the reserve ammo! Get the high ranking Hunters to hunt the big ones!! Tell them that it’s their chance to earn money!!”

All the staff present spared no effort in handling the emergency situation. Yanagisawa was there watching calmly how the situation evolved. One of his men noticed him and sent a curious glance at him while asking a question.

“Commander, did you do something again this time?”

Yanagisawa looked surprised, but it was obvious that he was acting. He then smiled and shook his head.

“No no no, I didn’t do anything this time. Even for someone like me, I can’t lure transport aircrafts, you know.”

“I see, although, I know better not to trust your words.”

“I really have nothing to do with this incident though.”

Yanagisawa was smiling like usual. Seeing that, his curious men knew that his answer could not serve as proof to whether he was related to what was going on or not.

“…But if it’s not your doing, then it’s purely an invasion, huh? With aircrafts too, this might be pretty dangerous, no?”

“Nah, it’ll probably be fine. Though it still bothers me that they didn’t bring out their full force and number, they won’t be able to crush the forward base

nor the city.”

The skies of the eastern district were controlled by powerful flying monsters, it was exactly the reason why the people of the eastern district did not use aerial transportation. That was just how strong the monsters that roamed the eastern district’s sky were.

Although that kind of monster was mixed in among the transport aircrafts, Yanagiwa said that it would be fine. That was why that curious guy sent a doubtful glance at Yanagisawa.

Yanagisawa noticed it and laughed.

“Well, it’s true that most of the flying monsters are dangerous. But most of those monsters are either weapons from the old-world era or their derivations. Basically, they are the drones that are normally assigned to watch over the old-world ruin’s sky. If they seriously wanted to crush Kugamayama city, they would have come with stronger monsters. So in short, this invasion did not originate from the old-world system. That’s why their aircrafts are not that powerful. Well, although I said they’re not that powerful, it’s relative to the other monsters that usually roam the sky though. But even so, the city defence squad should be able to handle them just fine.”

“But it seems that those aircrafts are coming from the ruin. So at least the system supports this invasion.”

“Nope, I bet they’re either ignoring the system or they have broken their restrictions to fly. These are either mechanical or biological monsters, which turned into a completely different species after multiple mutations but are still more or less controlled by old-world nanomachine. That’s why those monsters that seem unable to fly, can fly. While on the other hand, that nanomachine also installed a system restriction on them. This includes the directive not to fly, that’s why those monsters never mutate into flying monsters. But of course, there are exceptions.”

“And these flying units are those exceptions?”

“Probably, yes. Well, since they broke that limitation, I’m sure the other monsters identify them as foes so they would normally get killed in no time. Even if they manage to survive and evolve into a powerful monster, the system would identify them as a dangerous entity and take care of them.”

Yanagisawa frowned before continuing.

“…That’s why normally you won’t see something as half-baked as this. It somehow bothers me. But well, it doesn’t change the fact that they pose no threat to the city.”

The guy who was listening to him was dumbstruck, normal people would know nothing about what Yanagisawa said just now.

“…How do you know that?”

Yanagisawa smiled mischievously.

“That’s a secret.”

The guy sighed.

“…Very well, so then, what should we do?”

“Let’s see. You can go ahead and decide for yourself whether to defend the route or the forward base, but remember that the supply route is not equipped to defend against an aerial attack.”

“If you’re okay with that order, I have a feeling that guy would use the powered suit though, should we expect anything from him?”

“Hm? Just leave him be. In the first place, we’re planning to check if we can use that powered suit in the inner part of the ruin. So this might be a good chance to test it. I guess we can let him hunt those bigger monsters and see how well it will fare.”

“Roger that!”

The guy bowed and left.

Yanagisawa’s face turned serious.

[…I’m sure it’s not because of them either. They should not be able to break their limitations. And even if it’s possible, it should be incredibly difficult, there’s no way they can get those small aircrafts flying without permission. If they had the ability to do that, the forward base and Kugamayama city would have been destroyed by now… I should still have some time…]

The bigger the rights that an area manager had, the stronger the restriction would be. The bigger and the more powerful the area it managed, the stronger and more detailed the restriction would be. Yanagisawa knew that fact very well.

As Yanagisawa rejected the possibility of his worry, his face returned back to his usual smile.

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Back in the ruin, Akira was riding his bike on the side of a crumbled building. Warheads landed behind him as if they were trying to catch him.

The monster that Akira was fighting was a type of weapon dog but with a huge body. It had 6 legs and a gigantic upper half of a humanoid robot that grew out from its back. Instead of a head, it had a gun that grew out from where its head should be. It was also the same for its arms. The vulcan cannon rotated intensely as they kept spewing bullets in Akira’s direction.

As each bullet left a hole in that building, it eventually started to crumble down. Akira climbed up the wall to get away from his opponent’s shooting range before making a sharp turn and pulled out his SSB multi-weapon.

The SSB multi-weapon released a barrage of bullets at the weapon dog. The bullets that Akira shot from a short distance packed enough punch to crush the humanoid robot part and tore it off from the weapon dog’s back. But the bullets did not stop there as they also pierced through the beast and killed it too.

Akira’s bike landed sooner than the crumbling building. He did not spare even a split second as he immediately accelerated his bike away from that place getting away from the collapsing building.

Even after he defeated his enemy, Akira still had a stern face.

“That makes it 5 already!! They’re too strong and too many to be roaming around outskirts of Kuzusuhara ruin.

A loud explosion suddenly happened not too far from him. It came from the missiles that were launched from Akira’s A4WM automatic grenade launcher beforehand. The explosion blew off rubbles together with the flesh, mechanical parts, and a firestorm.

“And that makes it 6. Akira, you’re running out of ammo. Let’s resupply first.”

“Roger that!”

Akira’s small truck that carried his supply was under Alpha’s control and she evacuated it away from the monsters. Akira was fighting monsters to make sure that they would not destroy his truck.

Akira rushed toward his truck that was hiding in an alley. He then parked his bike right in front of the truck’s container and took out mini-missiles as well as huge rifle magazines out from the truck’s container in a rush.

While he was in the middle of taking out ammo from the container, Akira suddenly ran off, reloaded a new magazine to his SSB rifle, jumped out the alley, and immediately started shooting.

His SSB rifle released an anti-forcefield armour round and anti-armour frag grenades at the same time from its muzzle. They ripped through the air at a high speed and landed at the spider monsters that he was aiming at.

The spider monster had the upper half of a humanoid monster. The anti-forcefield bullet tore a hole in that humanoid part of the monster and even pierced through the spider part of the monster too. Then, the frag grenade

slipped through that hole, exploded inside the spider body, and wreaked havoc inside its innard.

Akira did not stop shooting even after that. The huge hole that the first grenade opened provided a way for the next grenade to get inside the monster's body. After a few seconds, the grenades made quick work of the monster.

Akira then immediately ran back to his truck.

"That would be 7!! Damn, I just can't catch a break! Alpha, was there really a need for me to immediately take out that spider?"

"It would be troublesome if they get the chance to launch missiles at you, right? That's why I told you to kill it quickly. Although it turns out that it doesn't have missile pods, it was faster to just kill it instead of taking time to check if it had missile pods. But it's not important now, hurry up with the resupply. We have another one coming."

"Alright alright, I got it!"

After Akira returned back to his truck, he finished replenishing his ammo and immediately got back on his bike. Without missing a beat, he paced his bike to face the 8th monster.

As he skillfully blazed through the bad road of the alleys between the crumbled down buildings, he spotted a large monster right in front of him. Akira stepped off his bike and hid under the shadow of the building around him. He reloaded an armor-piercing magazine used for sniping into his SSB multi-weapon and aimed at that monster. As he looked at that monster through the rifle's aiming device, he noticed something.

The monster resembled a multi-legged tank, but the legs were not of the usual multi-legged tank's legs, they were more like cyborg legs. The metallic legs had a complete body part of a usual leg which included thigh, ankle, foot and even the fingers too. On top of its multi-legs, a huge gun that did not fit the size of its body was perching.

“…This one is another strange-looking humanoid monster… Or is it even a humanoid monster? That spider also had a humanoid body part too, these monsters are having weird peculiarities.”

“That’s not important, let’s just take that monster out. Just because it has a humanoid body part, it doesn’t make it harder for you to shoot it, right?”

“Well, yeah.”

Akira pushed that thought aside and fixed his aim, but before he pulled the trigger, he suddenly stopped. The rain that was falling down lightly suddenly turned stronger. The heavy rain cut his visibility and hid the enemy that was in front of him.

“…This rain has a similar effect with the colourless mist, doesn’t it? But I have your detection support, so, I basically have the upper hand in this condition, right?

“If it’s about detection skills, then yes. But this rain will kill most of the bullet’s momentum. So considering that both of you lose your long-range shooting capability, it means that you’ll have to get close to fight the monsters. Judging from that point of view, your situation is actually worse.”

Thanks to Alpha’s support, Akira was still able to spot his enemy. He pulled the trigger with a stern face.

The bullets ripped through the water beads from the rain, leaving a traceable trajectory path all the way through the monster’s armour and inner parts.

The monster immediately made it move to shoot back at Akira. Its huge cannon swooped with such intensity and fixed its muzzle at Akira before starting to shoot warheads where Akira might be based on its calculation.

Its huge cannon released a shell that was more or less as big as the cannon’s muzzle, the shell flew through the air and blew the raindrops with its powerful momentum. It pierced through the wall of raindrops, leaving a

gaping hole behind its track, and landed on a building not too far from where Akira was, pulverizing it in one shot.

Akira, who witnessed that force from a close range could not help but knit his eyebrows, but at the same time, he was able to confirm that the rain was severely affecting his opponent as well. Nonetheless, he immediately started shooting again. Each armour piercing bullet that he sent left a hole in that big monster's body.

Every time a bullet pierced its body, the shockwave sent the big monster reeling. But it did not stop it from shooting its cannon despite its aim getting worse and worse. The stray shells landed on the buildings around him, crushing them one by one. As some of the rubbles fell right on top of Akira, Alpha let him know about them beforehand, so he was able to evade the falling rubbles before starting shooting again.

After that short exchange that showed the difference in their firepower and accuracy, the monster eventually stopped shooting.

As Akira thought that the big monster ran out of ammo after shooting that many shells haphazardly and was about to press on the offence, he noticed a change in the monster's body. The base of the monster's multi legs purged and exposed something that looked like teeth.

It then moved its huge legs to latch on a nearby building and started nibbling on it. After it finished, it shook its body as if to chew on the rubbles and started shooting again.

Akira frowned with surprise.

"…It's replenishing its ammo by feeding on the rubbles, huh! Give me a break already!!"

"It seems that waiting for it to run out of ammo is not a choice here. Akira, retreat for now. Let's snipe it from another direction."

Alpha controlled his bike that he had left not too far from him to approach Akira. Akira jumped on his bike and left that place. Right after that, another

shell landed on a nearby building, sending it crashing down to the ground.

Now that the monster had lost Akira, it seemed to be hesitating for a bit while shifting its focus between the forward base and Akira, but it then decided to chase after the latter.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 186, Nelia's Powered Suit

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The secured route to Kuzusuhara ruin was fortified by a series of walls made from the repurposed buildings along the route. The soldiers posted along the secured route peeked out through the window slit with raised eyebrows. They were desperately fighting the small monsters outside the wall up until just now, but their rifles' muzzle had stopped producing smoke for some time now. It was not because they ran out of ammo, but it was because there was no longer any target to shoot.

Countless dead monsters were scattered in front of them. Although their number and strength had put an immense strain on the defending soldiers, a particular man who just appeared not too long ago cleaned them up easily.

Rather than cheering on their victory, the soldiers were still surprised by that man's prowess. Half of the swarm as well as the swarm made of relatively big monsters were all defeated by that man.

"W-who the heck is that…?"

"The IFF indicates that he's a friend but he seems to be using different equipment, a Hunter maybe?"

“The IFF signal doesn’t show that he’s a Hunter though. But he’s not a soldier from the temporary base either. I wonder which squad he belongs to?”

“No idea. I heard nothing from the base either… Either way, I’m glad that he’s on our side. Let’s get ourselves ready while we have the time.”

The commander of the guards there gave his order and the soldiers started to get busy again.

On top of the countless dead monsters, a man stood and contacted his friend through wireless communication. His communication device still worked just fine despite the effect of the rain. His other equipment was also better than usual Hunters, and of course, he has the skill suitable for his equipment. It was the exact reason why he was able to clean up the monsters so easily.

“I’m done here, how about over there?”

“Yup, I’m done over here too.”

“I see. Just a question though, how were the monsters over there?”

“Hm? Just a normal swarm. Nothing out of the ordinary, anything wrong on that side?”

“I won’t go that far, but it feels like they are ordered to fight and not to withdraw. Although this is just my guess, the bigger monster is not the boss of the swarm, they’re more like the commander of the swarm. Not to mention that there are both biological and mechanical monsters mixed in the swarm. I bet these monsters have evolved to be able to take command of the other monsters. I didn’t go for them first, so I can’t really confirm it.”

“Hmmm, the boss said that this attack is not from the ruin’s defence system though. But to think that they have a commander like that, it’s becoming really fishy. Alright then, I’ll at least let the boss know about it. Tell the others to be careful too, later then.”

The call ended there and the man mumbled.

“…If the bigger monsters are the commanders, then there’s a good chance that there’s another higher command up the ladder. In that case, wouldn’t that mean that this attack might be because of that higher commander? And here I thought this would be an easy job, goddammit!”

That guy who belonged to Yanagisawa’s squad sighed.

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Akira was using the buildings as covers while closing in onto the multi-legged monster, but another monster suddenly ambushed him. Right now, he was riding his bike on top of the buildings to keep his distance from the monsters while shooting at them with his SSB multi-weapon rifle.

The monster that ambushed him had a wolf-like appearance. Although its head was as big as a small shop, it had a big enough body to suit its head. Its legs were covered in fur, but it did not hide its muscular flesh as it ran toward Akira, crushing the rubbles under its feet.

The mini-missile pods fixed on Akira’s bike launched multiple mini-missiles at that monster. The explosion that engulfed that monster was only able to strip off a small part of its fur and flesh, it hardly injured the monster at all. It then jumped out from the smoke and chased Akira with great vigour.

Akira kept shooting while gritting his teeth. When he noticed that he had run out of ammo and was about to reload a new magazine, Alpha suddenly gave him an order.

“Akira, anti-forcefield ammo doesn’t really work, so don’t use it.”

“Is that so…? Wait, that thing is so strong although it’s not using a forcefield armour?!”

“At least, it’s not using forcefield armour projection like your coat or your common tank’s forcefield armour.”

“So basically it’s just simply that strong, huh!! What a pain in the neck!!”

Akira reloaded an augmented armour piercing magazine to his SSB rifle and started shooting again, driving multiple augmented armour piercing bullets to the monster wolf’s head. The monster roared from the pain, but instead of slowing down, it ran even faster. It opened its mouth, showing its red-blooded fang and its ferocity.

In contrast to that, Akira looked even more concerned. His face turned even grimmer as if to erase the concerned look on his face.

“Just how much vitality does that monster have? Alpha, can you do something about that thing? Like, you know, concentrating the missiles just like you did back then against the tank tarantula? You can control the mini-missiles, right?”

“Unfortunately, I can’t do that. To be more precise, I can’t fully control the missiles, not to mention that the rain is reducing the accuracy of the guiding system too. To be honest, I believe I deserve an award for even making them hit their target.”

“So it’s all the rain’s fault, huh!! Seriously, can it just stop already?! Or at least let off even for a bit!”

Akira started cursing at the rain. But instead of letting off, the rain that got weaker a moment ago suddenly started pouring even harder. Akira smiled bitterly at Alpha, who replied likewise.

“Akira.”

“It’s not my fault.”

“I know, I just want to let you know that you’ll need to resupply soon.”

“…Roger that.”

The bike accelerated to open up more distance from the monster wolf. It then went into an alley where his truck was hiding and was running parallel with that truck. Akira then jumped from the bike and into the truck, as he

brought the huge payload of mini-missiles to the backside of his bike, the arms fixed on the backside of the bike threw away the empty payload, grabbed the new payload, and loaded the mini-missiles.

Akira quickly finished grabbing the ammo for his SSB rifle and immediately jumped back to his bike. His truck then drove away from him and vanished between the rubbles.

The monster wolf had its sight on the truck, but Akira forcefully shifted its attention to him as he started shooting at that monster. The bike slowed down to provoke the monster even more and he kept on shooting armour-piercing bullets at its head to keep its attention.

The monster chased Akira even harder, its face that was scary enough on its own, looked even more intimidating with the blood oozing from it. Every time it swung one of its 4 huge legs, it sent rubbles and debris into the air.

Seeing how the monster was getting closer and closer, Akira thought that it was about time to speed up the bike, but strangely the bike would not go any faster. Akira tilted his head and sent a glance at Alpha.

“Alpha?”

“We’ll get closer this time since we know for sure that it has no ranged attack. After all, it doesn’t seem like we can defeat that monster without shooting from closer range. So Akira, you should get yourself ready.”

Although Akira understood the logic, he still could not help but frown.

“…I know that part is my responsibility, but make sure not to get too close, yes?? I don’t want to get eaten again like back then with that big snake.”

“That’s a good idea, shooting from the inside is a sure-fire way to kill it. Want to do that instead?”

“No thanks. It’s obvious that one won’t just swallow me whole!! I’m sure it would give good chewing before swallowing its food!!”

“That’s not what I meant though. It’s coming.”

The wolf monster had closed the distance, enough to take a chomp on Akira. Right when it opened its big mouth, Akira suddenly jumped from his bike and leapt toward that big monster.

In his compressed time perception, Akira saw the wolf slowly closing its jaw to get a good bite of its prey.

But its jaw was suddenly forced open before it could close. Akira had raised his augmented suit power to max and delivered a powerful kick to the wolf's jaw.

He could feel the kickback from that powerful kick as he was momentarily floating in the air. That was when mini-missiles went past beside him and straight into the monster's opened mouth before exploding.

With no other direction for the force to escape, the explosions had enough force to blast open the wolf's innards. Some of the shockwaves went out from the wolf's mouth, towards Akira who was right in front of its mouth. But thanks to Alpha's support, he was able to safely land on the ground.

Akira then looked up at the monster as it writhed and roared before falling to the ground.

"Alright then, that went easier than I thought, we should have done that sooner."

Hearing what Alpha said casually, Akira immediately raised his objection.

"The heck! I'll keep my distance even if it takes a whole load of bullets to kill that monster next time, okay?!!"

"I see. But considering the ammo expense, I don't really recommend that. There are so many of them after all. So I hope you understand."

"Can you do something about the aim to reduce the ammo usage? It's not the time to be holding back right now."

"I'm already doing my best, but it's not that easy with this rain, you see. I can't increase the accuracy no matter what."

“Dammit!! If only this rain would stop!”

Akira once again looked up to the sky. The rain felt like it got slightly stronger. Alpha smiled bitterly at Akira.

“Akira, you should stop make it rain harder, you know.”

“…It’s not my fault.”

Akira frowned, showing that he was not so sure if what he said was true or not. But then he noticed something in the ruin and quickly banished any unnecessary thoughts to the void. As he focused his vision in that direction, he spotted another huge wolf monster running fiercely in the rain.

“Again?!!”

Akira who was taking a break on top of his bike immediately accelerated to keep his distance away from that monster, but Alpha hijacked the control and stopped him from doing so.

“Akira, wait, there’s a friendly signal coming from that direction.”

“Is it chasing someone??”

Helping other Hunters was one of his jobs. So Akira was not sure if he should go and help that Hunter instead. But it seemed that it was unnecessary.

“Nope, it’s the opposite.”

“The opposite?”

Right in the next moment, the big wolf monster that came pretty close to Akira was suddenly sliced by a blue light blade and fell down. Its head that was separated from its body continued to roar even as it rolled over the ground. While the rest of its body followed its inertia and crashed until it finally stopped right before Akira.

Akira was pretty amazed by what happened. When he looked at the monster's head, it was then cut to half by a blue light blade from behind, revealing the owner of that blue blade which was a black powered suit.

Akira tensed up the moment he saw that powered suit since it somehow looked familiar to him.

"Alpha, that powered suit…"

"It's either the very same powered suit that you fought back in Ezont Family's base or a different powered suit of the same type. But it's true that the IFF identified it as a friend."

"Not a foe then… right?"

"Probably, yes."

Akira still had his guard up. The black powered suit turned off its blade and folded it. Once it was folded to the length of its handle, the black powered suit put it away to show that it had no wish to fight before waving casually to Akira.

Akira was a bit surprised since he did not expect that at all. But when the backside of the powered suit opened up and someone came out from it, Akira frowned. He found that person somehow familiar to him.

"Y-You…"

"Long time no see, Akira."

It was Nelia.

Nelia jumped from the powered suit and landed in front of Akira, who immediately aimed his SSB rifle at Nelia by pure reflex. But even so, Nelia smiled amusedly at him.

"Oh my, it's not a good idea to aim your rifle at a friend, you know?"

"…Do you really expect me to believe that?"

“It’s the truth. If you shoot a friendly Hunter in this situation, there’s no mistaking it, the City Management will see it as an act of betrayal. You won’t be able to get away from it just fine, you know? Though that in itself would be interesting.”

Nelia was smiling without showing any tension. But Akira knew very well that did not guarantee she would not suddenly start shooting at him.

“Akira. If you have no wish to abandon your request and pick a fight with Kugamayama City Management, lower your rifle. I won’t tell you not to kill her, but this is not the time and place for that.”

Akira hesitated before finally lowering his rifle.

“So, why are you here?”

Akira had a curt tone and looked at Nelia with a sharp gaze, but in contrast to that, Nelia had a friendly smile plastered on her face.

“Just hunting monsters for a job. Not that much different from you, no?”

“Job? I heard that you’re put on compulsory civil service for the City Management though?”

“Yup, that’s why I’m working hard here.”

“…In that powered suit?”

“Yes. I’m sure you’ve noticed it too, it’s the powered suit that you fought before.”

Akira had so many questions in his head. But seeing Nelia enjoying his reaction there, he decided to push aside all of his questions for now.

“So then, what now?”

“Hm? Nothing in particular, just saying hello since I spotted you.”

“Is that so? If that’s all, then just get out of my face.”

“Geez, that’s so cold of you. We should celebrate this reunion, you know.”

“I see no reason to celebrate at all.”

Akira said bluntly before going off on his bike. But Nelia just smiled and returned back to her powered suit. After she turned the power on, she started chasing Akira.

The information terminal lent by the City Management that Akira had fixed on his arm automatically accepted a short-range call from Nelia without his confirmation.

“There’s no need to run away like that, you know. Let’s hang out for a bit.”

“…How the heck did you do that? I didn’t even pick up your call, you know?”

“Yup, I did that from this side. Since my information terminal has higher privileges, it’s easy for me to do it. Not to mention, hacking is my speciality. Ah, by the way, just to let you know, I’m using the connection for emergency broadcast used by the forward base, so it’s futile to try to cut it off.”

Akira, who was about to reach his information terminal, stopped midway and frowned.

“Oh my, you don’t have to look that annoyed.”

“How can you even see my face?”

“That was just a wild guess, did I get it right? That hurts me, you know?”

Akira’s face turned stern. Judging from her voice, it sounded as if Nelia was really enjoying teasing him.

“…Why are you following me?”

“I’m just keeping my distance so I can still use the close-range call in the middle of this rain.”

“Is that so?”

Akira accelerated his bike, trying to leave Nelia behind. Although the road was filled with rubbles and the rain reduced the tire’s grip, Akira fully relied on Alpha’s driving skill and the gripping power of the bike that allowed him to climb a vertical wall as he freely accelerated his bike. He blazed through the falling water droplets and the rubbles, a small mistake would easily throw his bike off.

But Nelia’s skill, as well as the performance of her powered suit was above it. She moved agilely as if she was sliding over the ground to evade the smaller rubble and temporarily increased the output power of the powered suit to jump over the bigger ones. She was running with such a speed that a collision would cause a loud bang and a small mistake would plunge her powered suit straight to the nearby building.

Instead of getting away from Nelia, Akira could not hide his surprise when he saw her closing up on him. Alpha warned Akira who had his attention toward his back.

“Akira, look forward, more enemy.”

“…Whoah, sorry!”

Akira immediately cut off Nelia from his attention and focused on the 2 big sized monsters in front of him. One of them was the multi-legged monster that he was unable to finish before, while the other one was a beast-like monster with the upper body of a human. Both of them had huge guns, which did not really resemble one, and aimed them at Akira.

Akira made a 90 degree turn to a sudden stop and was about to aim his SSB rifle at those monsters when Nelia jumped over him.

The black powered suit blazed through the rain, rapidly closing its distance with the two monsters. It easily evaded the shots from their cannons and vulcans as it pulled out its blade on both of its hands. The moment the monsters got into its range, it quickly sliced those monsters apart.

Before the sliced monsters were able to fall to the ground, the black powered suit sliced them to even smaller pieces. When the black powered suit stopped and turned off its light blade, the huge monsters had already been turned into diced meat and crumbs of metal.

Akira, who saw what happened in front of him, could not hide his surprise.

“…Those two monsters, so fast… Has that black powered suit always been this strong!?”

Akira was able to defeat that black powered suit once in the past although it was with Alpha’s support. So he always thought that he should be able to handle it just fine in case he had to fight it again. But after he saw what just happened, that thought was completely gone from his mind.

Alpha frowned a bit and explained to Akira.

“Although it’s the same black powered suit, its new equipment and the skill of its rider are on a completely different level from before. Furthermore, you did run away from it last time. So think of it as a completely different black powered suit.”

“Yeah, I understand that very well. It could not jump back then after all… Can we win if we fight it?”

“It would be difficult.”

“I see.”

Fighting it this time would be a bad idea. Akira understood that very well. Although getting into a fight against such an opponent was a common occurrence for him, he would rather choose not to fight if given the chance.

As Akira was lost in his own thoughts, the black powered suit came to him. Nelia’s voice came out from Akria’s information terminal again.

“Oh, you were waiting for me? Aren’t you sweet?”

“Having you chasing me would be a huge pain in the neck. You should return back to your job instead of chatting with me. I’m busy too, you see. I have no time to be talking with you.”

“About that, how about we help each other? Your job is to take care of the big monsters around this area, right? My job is pretty similar to yours.”

Akira sent a glare at the black powered suit.

“No. Do you seriously believe that I will accept that offer? Have you forgotten what happened between us?”

“I do. But, I’m not someone who would let myself get dragged down by the past.”

“Hell if I care!”

“Geez, don’t be like that. Like they said, yesterday’s enemy is today’s friend.”

“That won’t even be a reason for us to work together. And also, there’s another saying that is more appropriate, today’s friend is tomorrow’s enemy.”

“Yup, exactly. You know it very well. The most important thing is today, just focus on the fact that we’re allies for today. Both of us, today, have the same job.”

“Listen here, you…”

When Akira was about to say something, Nelia suddenly interjected. Although her voice was, as usual, amused, it was a few times colder than usual.

“That’s right, we have the same job for today. We had a fight in the past since we were enemies, then we can work together today since we have the same job. And if we become enemies again tomorrow, let’s fight then.”

Akira finally understood Nelia's real intention as he was slightly overwhelmed by her. In that split second, he could imagine the logic behind the person who said it, and the past which enforced that line of thinking as he shut his mouth in reflex.

He aimed his rifle at her once before and she let that go. Not to mention, if he kept refusing her offer to work together, she might really turn into an enemy today. Akira thought that working together with her was better than having to fight her in that place.

"…Fine then. Let's work together, but I won't be obeying your command, okay? Although I will at least stay around and help you out, I will be basically moving on my own discretion."

"Sounds good to me. Well then, let's enjoy our time together. You can just help me out randomly, there's no need to be too worried about that part since I'll do the same too."

The black powered suit lightly waved at him and went ahead. Akira frowned while shaking off his worry and followed it.

Alpha found it rather weird for Akira to do that.

"Akira, are you really okay with it?"

"…It's a good thing that I get someone to help out with my job. Moreover, she was able to kill those monsters like it was nothing, so I don't want to fight her if possible."

"Is that so?"

"Yeah."

Alpha smiled teasingly. Akira sulked and looked away. He understood that Alpha knew what he said was nothing more than an excuse for him to compromise.

Back then, he did not compromise at all when Katsuya offered to work together. But this time, he did. Akira himself did not know if it was because

of the situation that he was in or because he had the leeway for him to think this time, which gave him the chance to consider the choice of compromising. But since Alpha looked at him with her teasing smile, it made him think that it was the latter.

***

When the sound of the battle in the forward base was drowned by the heavy rain, a certain someone closed into the forward base while concealing himself in the rain. He had an outlook of a small boy and was donning a distorted looking augmented suit.

He came to Yatsubayashi's clinic and knocked on its huge armoured wall. Although there was no reply, he did not stop knocking. After a few seconds of non-stop knocking, Yatsubayashi answered from inside the clinic through the speaker.

"Don't you see the notice that we're not open today? Go to the base's clinic."

But that did not stop the boy.

"Goddammit, you should go back home while you have the chance. If you think that I won't leave an injured person just because I'm a doctor, you're sadly mistaken."

Yatsubayashi was threatening the boy when he said that, but the boy knocked even harder on the gate. In response to that, the outer arms of the clinic aimed their guns at the boy as well as the outer camera fixed on their aims.

"This is the last warning, go away."

The boy stopped knocking and looked straight at the camera.

A surprised voice could be heard from the outer speaker, then the outer arms retracted their guns and the armoured wall started to slowly open. Yatsubayashi welcomed the boy with a big smile.

“Though I did tell you to come out, I didn’t think that you would actually come out.”

“You said that you would welcome me, so here I am.”

“But of course, come in, Tiol-kun.”

Yatsubyashi welcomed Tiol and went inside the clinic. Tiol came into the clinic with a stern face. Due to the heavy rain and all the fighting happening outside, no one noticed Tiol entering Yatsubayashi’s clinic.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 187, A Giant Amalgamation of Hatred

Index

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After Yatsubayashi let Tiol into his clinic, he made coffee with a coffee maker. He returned back with a cup of coffee in both hands and offered one to Tiol.

“I have nothing but coffee though, you’re okay with it, right?”

Tiol frowned.

“…No thanks.”

“Oh, do you prefer tea perhaps?”

“I can’t drink nor eat with this body.”

Tiol said so curtly, but Yatsubyaashi seemed to find it amusing.

“I see, so this body is a remote body, huh? That would mean you’re controlling it from another body and I bet it’s somewhere nearby.”

Tiol raised his eyebrows and sent a glare at Yatsubayashi.

“…You can tell!?”

“I’m a doctor, you see.”

Tiol raised his guard toward Yatsubayashi who was acting casual. But there was something that he was hoping for from Yatsubayashi, which lowered his wariness toward him.

“So then, Tiol-kun. What brings you here today?”

“Revenge, what if I say so?”

“Well, it would be for revenge then. But let me give you a warning, I don’t really recommend that. Moreover, it’s your fault in the first place for running away while you were in the middle of the treatment. So if anything happens because of that, it won’t be my responsibility. Or more like, we already have an agreement on this, right?”

Tiol clicked his tongue seeing that Yatsubayashi won’t even budge even after being threatened.

“…Well, whether I’m here for revenge or not depends on what happens next. I want to make another deal with you. Fix me… And I’m talking about fixing, not experimenting! You hear me!?”

Tiol got a little emotional and raised his voice, and was breathing hard after he said those heartfelt words. Seeing that, Yatsubayashi smiled amusedly.

“Fix, huh? Sure. Though I can’t really say for sure if I can fix you or not without checking your condition first, I can at least promise you that I’ll do my best. Though it actually depends on how much you can pay me for that. So then, how are you going to pay me? Let me tell you that I’ll charge you if it’s not for an experiment, you know?”

Tiol glared at Yatsubayashi.

“…Don’t get ahead of yourself, I can easily kill you here and now.”

Tiol slowly raised his left arm and pointed it at Yatsubayashi, but Yatsubayashi did not seem to be bothered by that at all.

“Hah, making a one-sided demand like that and you dare to call this a deal? You’re making me laugh here, you brat.”

“Don’t you know how I got away from that room?”

“I’ve seen the record from the camera so many times already, so you don’t need to tell me. It was a good piece of information, you know. If you think that it is enough to threaten me, you need to rethink your approach. You’re free to test it though, but once you do that, you’re no longer my patient and I have no need to be polite to you anymore, just so you know.”

The way Yatsubyaashi looked at Tiol changed. Between a patient and a guinea pig, Yatsubyashi started to look at Tiol as the latter. His words there were basically saying that he could easily take care of Tiol even if Tiol rampaged there.

Although Tiol was suspicious that it was a bluff, he still lowered his arm and clicked his tongue.

“…I have no money. So for the payment… My body. You can go ahead and take a look at its construction, nanomachine, and stuff like that. The other thing would be information. I have a lot of information right now, so I can answer your questions.”

“That sounds pretty enticing, but I’m not sure if that would be enough. Or more like, I don’t know how much I need to fix, so I can’t really say for sure how much it would cost. Although you’re only using a remote body right now, it looks like you’re doing just fine. So what exactly do you want me to fix?”

Tiol paused before replying with a pained voice.

“…I want to return to being a human.”

Seeing Tiol’s pained expression, Yatsubyashi tilted his head.

“That’s still pretty vague, do you mean you want me to get rid of the nanomachine that has changed your body? Well, I won’t be able to say anything unless I give you a quick check first. Bring your real body here, there’s nothing I can gather from checking your remote body.”

“It’s not that simple. I can’t bring my real body here, that’s why I came here in a remote body. So, if you want to get to my real body, come with me.”

“Listen here, you do know that we’re in an emergency over here, right? There are gigantic monsters roaming right outside. I have no plans to get out from the temporary base before the situation calms down first.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll tell them not to attack you.”

Yatsubayashi raised his eyebrows in surprise as Tiol said so in such a casual manner.

“…Are you the one behind this attack?”

Tiol frowned.

“…I can’t answer that.”

“That answer is more or less the same as a ‘yes’, you know?”

“…I can’t answer that.”

Yatsubyashi gazed at Tiol with suspicious but serious eyes. After a short ponder, he then smiled amusedly and said.

“I see. So basically, you’re under a leash from a higher system, huh? And because of that, you can’t give me a straight yes. Truly interesting, but in that state, you won’t be able to give me the answers that I want to know, right? So you won’t be able to pay for the treatment at all.”

“If this attack is successful, most of this restriction will be taken off. That’s the deal that I have with her.”

“Her? Who? Judging from the fact that you’re attacking the forward base, is it the ruin’s AI manager?”

Tiol frowned even more.

“…I can’t answer that. And also stop there, giving you this answer is already hard enough for me.”

“Hard? I see, so you’re feeling some kind of pain or discomfort for fighting back the system restriction, huh. But even if it’s something that the AI can’t fight back, you can still more or less resist it. Which means… Is this AI trying to win her freedom by using you?”

“…Stop it! Didn’t I tell you this isn’t pleasant at all!?”

Tiol raised his voice again, his glare was filled with hatred. But even so, it only served to get Yatsubyashi even more interested.

“Does the restriction get triggered just from recognizing the question and thinking of the answer? Or is it judged as a slip in the system and that’s why you can still say that? It’s a pretty lax system, to be honest, is it because you have a higher privilege over that half-baked system that you can somehow fight back the restriction? If I have to make a bet, it must be some kind of makeshift system then. If only I can get rid of that pain, or even isolate and deactivate it, then I can get all the good parts and…”

Tiol, who was gritting in pain and filled with hatred, twitched and aimed his shaking left arm at Yatsubayashi. It seemed that he was on the edge of his sanity.

Yatsubyaashi noticed that Tiol was pushed to the edge and flusteredly tried to calm him down.

“Okay okay! I’ll stop here! We can continue the rest once you get rid of the restrictions! Fixing your body should help out too!… So calm down, alright?”

Tiol was breathing heavily as he lowered his arm again.

“…We have a deal then?”

“Yeah, although it’s not really how I usually make a deal. It seems that I can expect enough payment from you. We have a deal. I’ll properly fix your body, so don’t worry.”

“…I see, I’ll take you to my real body then.”

“Alright, get on the passenger seat. It’s over there.”

Tiol got up and dragged himself toward the passenger’s seat while swaying left and right. Seeing that, Yatsubayashi let out a sigh of relief. His alerted face slowly changed into a smile, a suspicious smile.

[…He’s pretty unstable. I wonder if it’s because he’s at his wit’s end or is it because of the repression from the system. Though I want to take my time examining it, well, the job comes first.]

Yastubyashi hopped on the driver seat and excitedly said.

“Let’s go! I just need to get out from the forward base and into the ruin, right?”

“Yeah… Do you have an information terminal that I can use?”

“Are you okay with the one fixed into the vehicle?”

“It’s fine as long as I can connect to it.”

Yatsubayashi handed a terminal to Tiol, who then thrust that terminal to his head. Since there was no opening on his head, the terminal opened a wound on his head and blood dripped out from that wound.

A 3D holographic map appeared in the vehicle’s display. It showed the current location of the clinic as well as the destination and the big monsters around the area.

Yatsubyashi chuckled.

“That’s pretty convenient. But I have a wireless one if you would have asked, you know?”

“Non-wireless is easier to hack in.”

“So you’re hacking on the system level, huh. That’s pretty scary. It’s my vehicle, so don’t break it, okay?”

“…I’ll try to be careful.”

Tiol sulked a bit. Seeing that, Yatsubayashi just smiled bitterly and started the mobile clinic.

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After they agreed on temporarily working together, Akira and Nelia were hunting huge monsters in the area. Although it was a deal that they made on a whim, and one of them was using a bike while the other one was using a powered suit, they were able to work together efficiently. Sometimes, one would act as the decoy while the other delivered the killing blow, pincer attack, long-range barrage, close-range slash. So, they were able to easily take down the gigantic monsters one by one.

Seeing how that black powered suit performed up close reminded Akira of how amazing it was. In the eastern district where firepower was everything, a huge body would only be an easy target to shoot at. But these gigantic monster’s vitality, viciousness, and speed made up for their size. They even posed more danger than the smaller monsters because of that. But even so, the black powered suit was able to defeat them with its light blades, although it was an ally, Akira could not help but to make a stern face.

On the other hand, Nelia was also amazed by Akira’s movements. Although they did not communicate at all about how they were going to move, Akira’s support was nothing short of amazing. He targeted the legs to slow the monsters down, sniped with the long-range gun and forced the monsters to close combat, peppered the large monsters that he could not take down himself with bullets to keep their attention on him, and if it was a monster he could take care by himself, he did so quickly. It was as if Akira always

presented the situation so that Nelia could easily deliver the killing blow in the shortest time.

Nelia thought highly of Akira's skill and Akira was wary of Nelia's skill as both of them defeated any big monsters that they encountered.

Nelia's voice suddenly came out from Akira's information terminal.

"We're doing pretty well. We're really in sync, don't you think so? If we're really this compatible, we should really date each other, you know?"

"No thanks. Like hell I would go out with someone who keeps saying she would kill me."

"It'll be fine, we're allies right now, right? I have no plans to kill you for now."

"That's not the problem here."

"Geez, you're so hard-headed."

"The heck!?"

Nelia was having the time of her life talking with Akira, but in contrast to that, Akira replied back bluntly. Although they did not exchange information about how they would move in the middle of their idle chit-chat, they were able to keep their perfect combo.

"Just to let you know though, I'll immediately leave the moment I run out of ammo, so do your best alone when that happens."

"If you don't have a blade, I don't mind lending mine, you know?"

"I'm not going to fight those monsters up close! That aside, you only have melee weapons with you, don't you? Even powered suits can use rifles too, you know? Didn't you bring any rifles with you? Is it because you can't or something?"

“Hmm, to be honest, I don’t really like guns. They just don’t fit me for some reason.”

“Just because you don’t like them? Is that all the reason why you didn’t bring rifles with you?”

“Oh my, things like this are very important, you know? There are many people who mock me for that, but for some reason, all of them died before me. And it all happened because they decide to let go of the weapon that they’re most comfortable with.”

Nelia sounded sad as if it was an old wound when she said so, Akira, who heard that, quickly let go of his anger. It was rather convincing although it was a vague excuse, he could not tell if it was the real truth or just some kind of occult thing.

“…Well, it doesn’t really matter. That aside, there’s just no end to these monsters. Just how long will this take us.”

“The swarm might disband if someone kills the boss of the swarm. Though I’m not sure if the disbanded swarm would just return back to the ruin or we would still have to fight them.”

“I heard that the bigger monsters are taking command of the smaller monster swarm to attack the supply route. It seems that the bigger monsters are acting like commanders to the smaller ones and there’s a good chance there’s another monster commanding the bigger monsters. Well, it’s just a guess from another squad though, so there’s no evidence to support it. They just told me to go after the bigger monsters when I spot them.”

“Hm? I haven’t heard anything about that though?”

“It was more like an idle chat between squadmates after all. So it’s not a formal order from the forward base.”

Akira felt that such important information should be broadcasted to all Hunters, but he bet that it had something to do with the squad that Nelia

belonged to. He stopped himself from thinking too much about it and instead focused on the subject of the commanding monsters.

“…A boss monster commanding the other monsters, huh. I wonder if it’s an even bigger monster.”

“Well, even if there’s one, it should be somewhere deep inside the ruin. Either that or it’s concealing itself in the swarm heading to the city. So people like us who work near the ruin’s outskirt have nothing to do with them.”

While Akira was fighting and talking, the rain had considerably weakened. Although it was not completely gone, the sensitivity of the information-gathering devices started to recover.

Between the 3 of them, Alpha had the best detection ability and she actually detected a big monster hiding in the buildings. But she did not tell that to Akira to avoid getting roped into more trouble. So instead, she looked up to the sky and spoke about something else.

“Akira, the rain is letting off.”

Akira followed suit and looked up too.

“You’re right… Wait, I shouldn’t jinx it again…”

Akira smiled bitterly. But this time the rain actually weakened, slowly turning his bitter smile into a genuine one.

“Oh! It’s really letting off.”

“Yup, that seems to be the case.”

Alpha said serenely. Akira found it weird since he expected her to say something to tease him.

“…Uhhh, is there anything bad if the rain stops?”

Alpha smiled with a hidden meaning behind it.

“I just thought that if only it had stopped sooner, I would still have my detection skill and there would be no need to work together with that black powered suit. I wonder why your luck is just so bad.”

“No idea. Well, since it’s stopped, let’s just be happy with it.”

Although the sky was still covered with thick clouds, there was no water droplet falling from the sky. Akira was happy about it, but Alpha was not.

__*__*__*__

Yatsubayashi drove his modified APC, which functioned as a mobile clinic, deep into the ruins. Although he encountered some large monsters on the way, they completely ignored him.

He was having a good time driving as he glanced at Tiol who was sitting on the seat next to him.

[They really didn’t attack us. I did consider the possibility that it was nothing more than a lie, but this confirms that Tiol-kun has something to do with those monsters. This ability to explore the ruin without fighting the monsters is invaluable, even if it only works in Kuzusuhara ruin. You can get enough money to buy a city with it, but it seems that he doesn’t know about this yet.]

Tiol noticed Yatsubayashi’s gaze.

“What?”

“Nothing. I’m just enjoying this sensation of being able to explore the ruin without fighting the monsters.”

“…The bigger ones under my command won’t attack you, but it’s a different story for the other monsters, so you should get yourself ready in case we encounter normal monsters.”

“Roger that. Don’t worry, this vehicle is well-equipped to handle relatively weak monsters just fine.”

“I see. Tell me if you need help, I can get rid of some of them for you.”

“Thanks, I will be very grateful.”

Yatsubayashi said so while he thought of something else in the back of his head.

[This means that Tiol doesn’t hold command over all monsters in the ruin, is it territory based then? Security monsters usually only roam around the area that they’re assigned to and normally they won’t go outside that area. Sakashita Heavy Industry considered the strength and the distribution of the monsters in the area when they erected Kugamayama city near Kuzusuhara ruin… If this can be changed, it might endanger the city…]

Tiol noticed Yatsubayashi was looking at him while still in deep thought. So Tiol frowned and called him out.

“Seriously, what is it?”

“Nope, nothing. I just thought that you’re a very interesting sample for both medical doctors and scientists. Sorry if I bothered you.”

Tiol clicked his tongue but did not pursue it any further.

Yatsubayashi finally arrived at his destination. It was a small valley between two tall crumbled buildings.

“We’re here, is your real body inside that big building?”

“No.”

“But the destination indicator ends around that building though.”

“Not inside, outside.”

“Ohh, there’s no need for you to wait outside for me, not to mention under this rain too…”

“I can’t enter the building.”

Tiol pointed near the big building. Yatsubayashi shifted his gaze toward that direction, looked up, saw what was in the valley between the two buildings, and smiled.

“I just want to confirm this. That is your real body, right? You’re not saying that your real body is inside that thing, right?”

“Yeah.”

“…I see. No wonder why you can’t come to my clinic with your real body. Giving you a check-up would take a lot of work.”

“We have a deal, I’ll have you fix me.”

“I’m not even sure where to start. For now, I will try to regenerate your whole body…”

As Yatsubayashi moved his clinic to that valley, Tiol suddenly started acting strange. He started convulsing, his face started twitching, and his eyes were out of focus.

“Hey, what’s wrong?”

When Yatsubayashi called him, Tiol suddenly slumped down and went limp. The 3D map on the vehicle’s display also vanished.

“Is his… Connection cutoff? What exactly just happened…”

Yatsubayashi had all his attention on Tiol, trying to understand what was going on. But right in the next moment, a huge monster jumped out from the rubbles and kicked Yatsubayashi’s clinic. Although it was a heavily armoured APC, the kick sent the clinic flying.

By this time, the rain had also completely stopped.

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Akira and Nelia noticed the sudden signal from a big monster almost simultaneously. When they turned toward the source of the signal, they

were welcomed by an APC flying straight at them. A moment later the thing that sent that APC flying towards them, showed itself.

This monster resembled a giant donning a heavy powered suit. It was so huge that it made Nelia's black powered suit seem tiny. Its left arm was assimilated into a big gun that looked like the main cannon of a battleship, a belt connected to its back resembled a huge magazine, while its right hand was holding an object that looked like a handle.

While Akira was still frozen from the shock, Alpha launched the mini-missiles from the missile pods fixed to his bike. The missiles flew around following Alpha's guiding system which adjusted their flight time to strike their target simultaneously.

From the handle on the right hand of the big monster, liquid metal that radiated light extended out against the gravity. It did not take that long for a blade large enough to slice a battleship to form. This monstrosity fixed its stance and swung the blade to sweep away all the missiles.

The missiles spontaneously combusted into an explosion the moment they touched the blade. Since Akira emptied his missiles in one shot there, the explosions were so large that it swallowed the monster too.

Akira desperately fought back the shockwave from the explosions with the help of his augmented suit while watching the display in front of him.

"Did that do it?"

Akira thought that an explosion that big should be able to take out that monster. But as the fire died out, it revealed the big monster was still standing just fine without a scratch. Akira could not hide his shock.

"Unscatched?! You got to be kidding me!!"

Alpha then said in a calm manner but still transmitted the severity of the situation.

“That slice was executed so that the missiles did not explode at the same time, thus killing most of its combined firepower. Furthermore, it has forcefield armour projected on its whole body. Unfortunately, that attack did not deal any damage to that monster.”

“So, it’s because of that armour which looks like a heavy powered suit, huh. How did it get a powered suit that big? Is it custom-made?”

“That might be the case.”

Akira was only saying that as a bad joke while smiling wryly, but Alpha replied back in a serious tone. So he found it rather weird.

“…Wait, it is?”

“‘I’ve scanned its body construction, one thing I can say for sure, it doesn’t harden its skin to armour itself and it doesn’t project forcefield armour from its skin either. Its inner body is separated from its other body. So in short, it’s using some kind of suit just like your augmented suit.”

“To put it simply, it’s different from the other monsters, huh.”

Akira prepared his stance and psyche to fight that monster. The moment he and the monster made eye contact, it opened its mouth and bellowed. Its humanoid head opened its mouth wide, exposing its fangs and was making sounds as if it was saying something in human language.

Akira had no idea what it was saying, but he understood well the hatred and the killing intent that was expressed in those incomprehensible words.

“For some reason, I feel like it’s saying that it would kill me no matter what. Alpha, did I do something to that monster in the past?”

“You just shot mini-missiles at it just now.”

“Well, that’s true, but for some reason, I feel like it’s hating me so much for a reason that has nothing to do with the missiles.”

“Hmm, I don’t really have an answer to that. But one thing is for sure, we know that a peaceful solution is not possible. So just forget about trying to end this peacefully and get yourself ready to run away.”

Akira looked at the big monster and threw away the possibility of getting out of this situation peacefully. As it aimed its humongous left arm cannon at him, Akira accelerated his bike as hard as he could ignoring the g-force that he would have to bear. At the same time, a large warhead a little smaller than the cannon’s muzzle launched out.

The first shot pierced through multiple buildings, turning the already half-destroyed building into rubble, and pieces of debris that were thrown up to the sky rained down.

Alpha was able to accurately predict where those rubbles would fall. So using her advanced driving skill, she knitted through the gaps between the raining rubbles with the highest speed. Akira gathered his focus, compressed his time perception into maximum, and evaded the incoming rubble while kicking and punching the rubbles that were blocking his way.

Even in that situation, the monster did not stop shooting, crushing the falling rubble into even smaller pieces. Akira could not evade or block all the rubbles falling at him, when some of those rubbles crashed onto him or his bike, he endured it with the help of his forcefield armour. But even so, it still threw him off balance, and when that happened, Alpha executed an even more extreme manoeuvre to get his bike back up, straining both him and his bike.

“Akira!! Make sure not to fall off!! You’ll get buried by the rubbles if you do!!”

“I know!!”

Akira forced his way forward by punching or kicking the rubbles blocking his way. To make sure that he would not get thrown off the bike from the recoil, he raised the output of his augmented suit to the maximum to fix himself on top of his bike. Since he was pushing his body beyond its limit

with the help of his augmented suit, sometimes, his body could not keep up and gave up first.

The medicines helped out with reducing the pain. The intense cycle of injuring and healing his body caused Akira to fear that it might eventually break his body. But he ignored his screaming body and focused more on surviving the fight even for just another second.

__*__*__*__

Yatsubayashi somehow got himself out from his mobile clinic which was tipped over at this point. He looked at the Tiol's real body through the binocular connected to the clinic's detection device. The monster was running, shaking the earth with each step, while trying to shoot at Akira, moving further and further away from Yatsubayashi.

"…Tiol-kun. If you're not going to let me treat you, you should have told me sooner."

The monster was so strong that it had enough power to change the contour of the ruin. But if it was targeting someone else, Yatsubayashi could take his time observing Tiol from afar.

Yatsubayashi glanced at his mobile clinic. Tiol's remote body was still in the passenger seat and still not moving.

[I bet he can control his remote body if he gets too far away from it, and I bet it can't be that far. That's why he had to come close enough to the forward base to be able to reach my clinic. I'm sure the main body also has some kind of camouflaging ability. So he must have used that camouflaging ability and hid his presence with the rain to get as close as possible to the forward base. He then somehow found out where I was, and came to my clinic to make a deal with me, before finally bringing me all the way here… But it's all for nothing? I really don't understand his logic.]

Yatsubayashi tilted his head. He thought of any possible explanations, but he could not come up with any convincing guesses.

The reason why Tiol cut off his connection to his remote body was simply because he no longer had the leeway to keep that connection. Most of his copies that he had sent to another place were quickly removed one by one. Tiol would have been able to handle that information just fine if he was nothing but a part of the system, but now that he had regained some of his consciousness, it threw his mind into chaos.

Then the reason why he prioritized killing Akira rather than finishing the rest of his deal with Yatsubayashi was simply because his self-defence mechanism kicked in, throwing him into a rampage fueled by hatred to keep himself from getting drowned by the system.

Tiol hated everything that had happened to him which led him into such a pitiful state. Although Yatsubayashi was included in that list, he was somehow able to keep himself from killing Yatsubayashi since he had presented a way for Tiol to fix his body.

But that was not the case for Akira. Tiol's feelings toward Sheryl and the feeling of inferiority toward Akira were mixed together into utter hatred toward him. Furthermore, if Tiol held back any of his hatred, he feared that the system might swallow his consciousness again.

Because of that, once the rain died down and he recovered his detection ability, Tiol was able to detect Akira and immediately threw himself into a rampage fueled by hatred.

Yatsubayashi was deep in thought for some time after that, but he decided that it would be meaningless to think about it any further.

[…Well, it doesn't really matter. As long as I keep his remote body, he might contact me again later. I don't want to get involved in that fight after all. I guess I'll just head back home for now.]

Yatsubayashi stood next to his mobile clinic, placed both his hands on it, and applied some force to push it. When he did that, the clinic slowly started moving. After he gritted his teeth and pushed the clinic further, he eventually got his armoured APC to land with its wheels on the ground.

Yatsubayashi actually had a body that he had enhanced himself using his knowledge as a doctor. It was also to keep himself safe in case a Hunter who he was dealing with went on a rampage, but more importantly, it was also the result of experimenting on his own body. The reason why he allowed Tiol into his clinic, and was still relaxed even with a rifle aimed at him was simply because Yatsubayashi knew he could handle it just fine.

Yatsubayashi returned to the driver seat and placed Tiol's remote body in the passenger seat. He then said with a cunning smile.

"Tiol-kun. If you're not going to pay for your treatment, it won't be a treatment but another experiment, you know?"

Of course, Tiol's remote body did not reply back at all.

Silavin: This guy is really… unfortunate. Misplaced emotions, which led him down this path…

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Rebuild World – Chapter 188, Friend for Today

Index

Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

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The contour of the area was changed completely from the huge monster's barrage. With most of the abandoned buildings blown to smithereens, the cityscape was turned into a clear open plain. Both the roads and the buildings were equally buried under debris of various sizes, it was completely impossible to differentiate where the road was. It was not something that Hunters normally came across in a ruin.

Akira looked over his surroundings while hiding under one of the relatively bigger rubble in the area.

"I guess this is how ruins slowly change into a wasteland, huh… Alpha, how is the monster?"

"It's approaching slowly. Though it has stopped shooting, I don't think it's because it ran out of ammo."

“Seriously though, how the hell does it still have some ammo left after shooting that many huge warheads around?”

In contrast to Akira who was frowning in concern, Alpha was smiling like usual.

“Oh my, isn’t it the same with your rifle?”

Akira was completely convinced by that argument and smiled wryly.

“Ahhh… You have a point there. And here I thought I’m already used to using the extended magazine made with old-world technology, but now that you mention it, the monsters are also made with old-world technology too. So it won’t be strange if they have extended magazine too.”

It was something that would surprise him in the past, but after using it for some time, Akira had more or less already gotten used to how convenient it was. This time, he understood the enemy might be using the same technology and how that convenience turned into trouble. At the same time, Akira was reminded of how his extended magazine was using old-world technology that he did not fully understand. He then turned to look at his patron who was created with a technology far more complex than the extended magazine.

“Akira, what’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing.”

“Is that so? I understand that you can’t really relax in this situation, but just stay there, okay? The monster might notice you if you make a single move.”

“Alright.”

Akira pushed aside any hesitation inside his mind that might cause him to blunder, he then once again confirmed his surroundings and sighed.

Alpha pursed her lips and asked.

“What is with that big sigh after you look at me?”

“No, it’s not you. It’s that over there.”

Akira pointed straight past Alpha’s body, at his half-broken bike behind her. Its trunk was badly bent, its front wheel and rifle arm were gone. Even his A4WM automatic grenade launcher that was originally fixed on that arm was already buried deep under the rubbles.

“Well, things happened, just think of it as a necessary sacrifice.”

“That’s true, but still, even the truck is also gone along with the ammo that I had left on it. So at least let me sigh, will you?”

The truck with his reserve ammo was blown by one of the monster’s warheads, its driver seat was completely blown off by that shot. Its tray was crushed under the rubble, scattering his reserve ammo all over the place. But even so, Akira somehow survived that and managed to scrape the scattered supply enough to complete his last ammo refill.

Akira shifted his gaze to the monster, although there was a large rubble blocking his sight, he was able to clearly see that monster thanks to his enhanced vision. It seemed to be moving slowly thanks to its size and the distance between them. But in reality, it was actually moving relatively fast thanks to its long stride. There was no question that it would be even faster if it ran.

“With my bike and truck gone, I don’t think it would be possible to escape from it if it started running.”

“Let’s hide for now. We might have been able to blend in with the rain and run away, but unfortunately, the rain has already stopped. Judging from the clouds, it might rain again though.”

Akira looked up at the sky. Although it was blanketed in thick clouds as if the rain would pour down anytime, it was not raining.

“…It rained when I didn’t want it to and it stopped when I wanted it to rain, what kind of bullying is this?”

“Well, I promised to help you against your bad luck with my support the best I can, but as expected, I can’t win against the weather, you know.”

“My bad luck even reaches the sky, huh?”

Akira mixed some jokes in his reply, Alpha smiled in response to that.

A call from Nelia reached Akira’s information terminal. He was not sure whether to pick it or not and glanced at Alpha.

“Akira? Are you alive?”

“Yeah, somehow, what about you?”

“No problem at all. I immediately ran away from its sight, it had its eyes fixed on you after all. It seems that it’s running out of ammo so I will be going for its head. Give me some support if you’re still alive.”

“Wait for a sec, are you going to fight that thing?”

“Of course!”

Nelia replied as if it was a given fact, Akira could not help but get surprised by that. All the questions inside his head were compressed into one word.

“…Why?”

“Why, you ask? That’s given, it’s our job, right?”

“Job?”

“Oh my, it kind of hurts when you say it like that, do you think that I’m someone who would abandon my job? Although I look like this, I’m pretty serious when it comes to my job, okay?”

“…If you’re really that upright, why would you be stealing relics then?”

“That was my job back then. Well, that aside, I’ll leave the support to you.”

Nelia ended the call. Akira was shocked, he did not expect her to be actually that earnest, but at the same time, he could understand it too.

Alpha found Akira's reaction interesting, but she still prompted him to start moving.

"I don't know what you find weird about it, but since it seems that she will be taking that monster's attention, let's use this chance to move out."

"…Good idea."

Alpha was urging Akira to run away. He understood that very well as he readied his SSB multi-weapon rifle, steeled his resolve, and jumped out from behind the rubble.

Nelia used the full power of her powered suit to close the distance with the monster. The monster could not shoot its large cannon behind itself, so Nelia used that blind spot to draw the shortest route to the monster while utilizing the cover of the rubbles. The moment the monster noticed her, it quickly turned around and changed its priority from Akira to Nelia. Nelia was able to close more than half of the distance while it was preparing the cannon on its left arm.

Nelia believed that the monster still had some ammo left. But after shooting around that many warheads, she was sure it would not have enough ammo left to demolish all the buildings in the area. Her guess was correct, as a matter of fact, it was no longer able to maintain its original rate of fire. Now that it started shooting in intervals instead of continuous fire, she was able to skillfully avoid the falling warheads with the precise control of her powered suit while she approached the monster.

Nelia used the advantage of her cyborg body to connect directly to her powered suit. As she was able to control the powered suit as if it was a part of her body, Nelia was able to execute complex manoeuvres with high agility. Not to mention that the powered suit had extra limbs and a propulsion system that originally did not exist on the human body and the additional sensors on the powered suit provided Nelia with extra information on top of her usual 5 senses.

It was a matter of the rider's skill on how much a cyborg could take in the discrepancy coming from a real body and a cyborg body. And in the case of Nelia, her skills were not something to be taken lightly.

An ordinary person might go mad if he or she was connected to a tank or a non-humanoid machine. But Nelia did not show any difficulty at all in controlling her powered suit. It demonstrated her talent as well as her distorted mind.

As someone who was accomplished both as a close combat fighter and cyborg body user, Nelia was able to evade the high-speed warhead coming at her. She quickly slipped under the monster and slashed its legs with the blades on both of her arms. The moment her blades touched the monster's legs, fire sparked followed by a blinding light. It was the light from the monster's force field armour exchanging kinetic energy into photons.

Nelia turned and confirmed the monster's legs, she was sure that she could not sever those legs based on the sensation from that slash. But from that light flash, it should have shaved most of the force field armour's energy. Unfortunately, what Nelia had hoped for was completely off. The monster

was unscathed, its force field armour was able to completely disperse the force from that slash.

“Whoah, that was pretty hard. Well then, it just means I will have to keep slashing you.”

While Nelia was mumbling as if she was mocking it, the monster brought down the blade on its right arm. The light blade crushed the rubble and buried itself deep. Rubble flew left and right from that impact as the blade melted its contact point, releasing steam into the air. But Nelia quickly jumped into the monster’s blind spot and immediately assaulted the monster with her blade.

Every time her blade struck the monster’s body, a blinding flash of light was released, and every time the monster swung its light blade, rubble was thrown into the air. Although it was a battle between giants, the difference in their sizes made it look as if it was a battle between an adult and a kid as both of them swung around blades unsuitable for their respective sizes.

If it was a simple contest of swordsmanship, Nelia would have the upper hand. The monster was swinging its blade-like it was a beginner, its blade was not even able to touch the opponent who was smaller and darting around it. But in contrast to that, Nelia was able to strike the monster’s legs multiple times.

But Nelia did not believe that she was winning. Although the monster was like a beginner, it was still a powerful monster.

Nelia’s blades were not able to reach the monster’s legs, the momentum of those blades was completely killed by the monster’s force field armour. Although each swing shaved more energy from the force field armour compared to her powered suit, there was no guarantee that the monster would run out of energy faster than her powered suit.

If it was not thanks to the enemy’s beginner-like swordsmanship, Nelia would have been dead by now. Even if she did not receive a single strike, she would lose the moment her powered suit ran out of energy first. And as she kept consuming energy, her powered suit would eventually slow down which would make it harder for her to evade the monster’s attack. She understood that her force field armour would not be able to receive the monster’s attack, so she turned that off as well as the other parts of the powered suit that she did not need for high-speed manoeuvring. But even so, there was still a good chance she would run out of energy first before the monster. Thus, she judged that she was losing that battle.

The monster kept swinging its blade without paying attention to its defence. And the strength behind its amateurish swing after getting interrupted by a powerful blow greatly surpassed her prediction.

Nelia understood she would not be able to evade the light blade coming down at her, so she quickly shifted her stance to maximize her survival, which was to receive that blow with both of her blades, but she also understood that it was futile. Although she was not scared, she knew that she was going to lose the fight.

But at the next moment, a barrage of anti-forcefield bullets riddled the monster’s head. Although the barrage was completely nullified by the monster’s forcefield armour, it was enough to throw it off balance.

Nelia used that opening to completely evade the incoming blade and jumped back, opening some distance between her and the monster. She then checked the area where that barrage came from and found Akira aiming his SSB multi-weapon rifle from quite a distance away.

Akira had a stern look on his face, his SSB rifle ejected its empty magazine and empty energy packs.

“…I emptied an extended magazine full of anti-forcefield armour bullets in 5 seconds, you know? And that was not enough?”

Alpha was frowning deeply.

“It seems that its head is protected by a strong forcefield armour. Even after factoring in the loss of momentum from the sniping distance, it’s still an impressively strong forcefield armour.”

“I’m sure I did that pretty up close though, should I get closer next time?”

The big monster noticed Akira from that barrage and aimed its cannon. But before it could release a shot, Nelia slashed at it, throwing its aim off. Although the shot landed far away from Akira, it had enough power to blow rubble sky high. Akira could not help but frown seeing that.

“…I take that back.”

Alpha smiled bitterly.

“Yep, I don’t recommend you to do it either. Now that it knows your location, let’s change our location and hide.”

“Roger that.”

Akira moved as fast as possible towards another location while hiding between the rubbles, that was when Nelia suddenly made a one-sided call.

“And here I thought you already ran away since I didn’t get any support.”

“… Although I hate it, we’re allies for now. Moreover, if you get defeated without my support, I won’t be able to move around without a decoy.“

Akira sounded as if he really did not like the situation that he was in, but at the same time, it also sounded as if he was making excuses to keep the temporary alliance. But Nelia replied with a rather happy voice.

“I see, but I would really hope you would’ve helped me sooner, you know?”

“I’m not even inside a powered suit and my bike is gone, you know. I also don’t have that much ammo left, but even so, I’m still doing my best to help you here. So if you keep complaining, I will just leave you behind.”

“Geez, calm down. That one just now was a close call, thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“By the way, I’ll be counting on you to be the decoy. Ah, it won’t be of any use even if you say no, after all, for some reason, that thing really wants to kill you. It’s basically coming at you while completely ignoring me.”

Akira inadvertently glanced at the monster, his enhanced vision helped him see through the rubble and straight at the big monster that was running in his direction. His face turned grim.

“For some reason, seeing how it’s running at you, I can feel some kind of hatred or deep grudge against you though. Akira, what did you do to that monster? Did you do something bad to it? This is only a woman’s intuition but… Did you mess with its girlfriend or something?”

“Like hell if I did! It’s my first time meeting that monster, you know?! And also, I don’t have any monster acquaintances!!”

Akira replied back to Nelia’s joke while shouting. Nelia only laughed at his reaction before ending the call.

The large monster’s mind was in a mess, the system was telling it to take care of the black powered suit first, but its hatred caused it to prioritize Akira instead. In order to make sure that his consciousness would not be swallowed back to the system, Tiol followed his hatred.

The huge monster ignored Nelia and went straight for Akira. All of its intentions were skewed toward offence, it ignored its defence and poured all of its energy toward its light blade. Its ammo producing organ burned through its last energy reserve to manufacture ammo. Thanks to that, its forcefield armour strength was greatly lowered.

Nelia did not let that chance slide as she swung the blade on both of her hands in a flurry of attacks. Finally, she broke through the forcefield armour and damaged the monster’s actual armour. Moreover, Nelia aimed her slashes to slow down and prevent that monster from attacking.

Akira kept running as fast as he could. He blazed and leapt through the sea of rubble under him using the full power of his augmented suit and pushing her body to the limit. He was moving extremely fast for someone with two legs instead of wheels.

The monster started shooting while running, but its aiming was badly interrupted by Nelia. Although it could not fire in continuous succession, each of its warheads packed enough power to compensate for its interrupted

aim. It blasted more ruble into the sky. Every time Akira saw that, he could not help but shed cold sweat.

“Alpha! It’s not like it would hit me with that aim, right?! It should be okay, right?!”

“We can’t do anything other than relying on that girl to keep interrupting its aim. To be honest, it would be great if she can take out the cannon too, but I think that would be impossible given how powerful the forcefield armour that’s protecting that cannon is.”

“Is she doing okay?”

“That monster is fully committed to you, though I’m still not sure why. But if its attention gets divided again, it might be dangerous. That’s why, let’s do that again here, Akira.”

“…Roget that!!”

Akira took as much cover as possible using the rubble while moving around. But he suddenly jumped out from his cover and quickly aimed his SSB multi-weapon rifle. He then stomped his legs hard on a large wreckage, enough to crack it and planted his legs into it before emptied his magazine in a short time.

The kickback from that barrage pushed Akira’s body to its limit. The kickback was transmitted to the larger wreckage under his feet, eventually breaking it.

Due to their distance and speed, the bullets reached the monster’s face almost in an instant. The first few bullets that landed almost at the same time were dispersed in a blinding flash of light, but the following bullets were able to break through the forcefield armour that was weakened after that light discharge, thus throwing the big monster off-balance.

At the same time Akira’s SSB multi-weapon rifle ejected its empty magazine, the blinding light finally died down, exposing the monster and a part of its body that was crumbling down.

The barrage this time dealt more damage than the last time. Akira thought so and smiled, but before he could express his happiness, the monster howled and its face twitched.

The big monster once again turned at Akira and ran towards him. The extensive movement that it made when it ran caused its already crumbling body to crumble even faster. Its armour was falling down piece by piece to the ground, exposing its inner parts. It was a mix of flesh and machine, fur and scale, skin and metal, as if it was a human trying to disguise as a monster.

Akira did not waste any seconds before he started running again.

“Is it just me or that thing is actually running faster than before!?”

“It shed most of its heavy armour, so it’s lighter now. Run faster or it’ll catch you. Also, reload a new magazine and energy pack to your rifle.”

“So many things to do in so little time.”

Akira ran as fast as he could while finishing reloading his SSB rifle. Once he was done, he turned around and released another barrage. This time, since the enemy was closer and the target was bigger, all of his shots hit their targets. They pierced through the outer shell and scattered blood and metallic parts into the air.

But it was far from over, it was not even enough to stop the monster. Due to its tough flesh, they could not deal that much damage to the monster. And Alpha deliberately reduced the rate of fire too.

“Why did you slow it down by that much? I still should have plenty of ammo left, you know?!”

“Ammo, yes. But not enough energy packs. High-speed shooting causes a strong kickback which in turn consumes more energy. Moreover, it’s not like it was enough to fully kill the kickback too. Your rifle is also hitting its limit. You only have enough energy packs for one more high-speed barrage, after that, you’ll run out of energy packs and the rifle itself will break. That’s why you’ll have to save it for the best chance when you can be sure

to kill it. It’s really unfortunate that we lost the rest of our energy packs together with the truck.”

“Goddammit!!!”

Not only his rifle, but Akira’s augmented suit also needed an energy pack to operate, which meant he was basically at his limit too.

Nelia kept slashing at the monster while chasing it. Now that it had no forcefield armour and was just protected by its metal armour, her blades easily slashed through the monster’s flesh, opening a wound that bled green shining blood. But such wounds immediately closed up as if the monster was using a powerful medicine. So the monster was not even bothered by Nelia’s slashing.

But there was a limit on how many times it could regenerate its wounds. Since it consumed energy every time it regenerated itself, Nelia’s attack was not completely useless. Although she understood that, she still felt intimidated by the monster’s incredible vitality.

After finding out that the monster did not slow down at all after all of that slashing, Nelia decided to shift her target to its cannon. She focused her attack on the big cannon on the monster’s left arm as well as the reloading machine that coiled around its body like a belt. Eventually, she was able to cut off the belt.

Nelia thought that with this, it would at least stop shooting at Akira as she focused her attack back to its legs, but she was mistaken there. The monster quickly threw away the gigantic magazine on its back and the cannon on its left arm; now that it had become even lighter, it was able to run faster and quickly got away from Nelia’s blades.

Nelia rushed to that monster and tried to slash at it again, but once again, it missed. Her powered suit had considerably slowed down after all the fighting, so she was no longer able to catch up to that monster.

Nelia cursed her own decision and regretted not having prioritized its legs first, as she chased the monster.

The ceasing of gunshots was nothing more than a short respite since the monster was running even faster now towards Akira. Akira frowned since he understood that the monster would be able to catch up with him for sure this time and it would be meaningless to hide now. If the huge monster swung around its light blade to sweep all the locations where he might be, even if that did not hit him directly, it would be enough to blow him away along with all the rubble, and that would definitely kill him.

Akira stopped and slowly turned. He locked his gaze with the incoming huge monster and heaved a big sigh as if he had given up. He then took a long deep breath to steel his resolve.

Alpha stood next to Akira and smiled.

“Just to confirm it, you didn’t resolve yourself to die, right?”

“Something that stupid doesn’t need resolve.”

“I see, that’s good then. Let’s get yourself ready before it catches up with you.”

“I know.”

Akira calmed himself down for one last stand and started preparing for it. He loaded a new magazine to replace the half-empty magazine and placed in a new energy pack to his augmented suit and SSB rifle. That was the last of his remaining supply reserves.

Akira held his SSB multi-weapon rifle tightly, made sure that he was standing on a hard surface, and squatted down as if he was preparing to jump. He then took a deep breath, as he maximized his time perception compression, the scene around him started to distort into slow motion.

“Alpha, I leave the countdown to you.”

“Roger that… 5… 4… 3…”

Inside the slow-moving world, the huge monster closed its distance and raised its ginormous blade. It focused all of its hatred, grudge and energy to its blade, expanding it even longer and brighter.

“… 2… 1…”

Right at the next moment, it swung its huge light blade down at Akira.

“Zero!!”

At the same time, Akira leapt toward that huge monster like a bullet.

That single jump consumed all the energy pack inside Akira’s augmented suit, boosting its power output way outside the safe limit. The platform that he was using broke into pieces from the kickback alone, while his legs were barely able to receive the kickback thanks to his augmented suit.

The light blade was brought down with such speed, but Akira, who jumped straight at it, was even faster. He could feel the intensity of that blade as he went past it. The heat from the blade that was enough to melt rubble singed his protective coat before he landed on that monster’s face.

The light blade landed on the ground, throwing all the rubbles up into the sky behind Akira as he pointed his SSB rifle straight at the big monster’s face.

“Just die already!!”

Since Akira screamed those words under his compressed time perception, no one could understand him. But the huge amount of bullets that he released in that short time, which ignored the kickback and the stress on both the rifle and his body, conveyed his words very well.

Even if the head had the ability to regenerate itself, the storm of bullets was numerous enough and powerful enough to crush that regeneration. It took an instant for the bullets to rip through the monster’s head.

Right after that, Akira fainted. The last barrage had pushed him past his limit which gave the last push to throw off his consciousness. Now that he had lost his consciousness as well as his footing, gravity took over and pulled his body down. But he was saved from crashing straight into the ground. Nelia, who was chasing the monster, was able to catch him. Not too long after that, the monster that had lost its head fell down to the ground, making a loud bang.

Nelia got out of her powered suit. She then came to Akira who was still on the powered suit’s clutch, she placed her hand on Akira’s cheek and smiled bewitchingly.

“…Hmm, what should I do with you now?”

Although those words contained a lot of different meanings behind them, it did not take that long for Nelia to make her decision as she smiled rather

disappointedly.

“Well, we’re allies for today, right?”

Nelia gently lifted him up and returned back to her powered suit with Akira in her arm. After that, she headed back to the forward base.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 189, The Value of Money

Index

Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

Proofreader: p4553r

Akira woke up inside a hospital room. He pushed his body up from the bed and looked around, once he understood what had happened, he sighed.

“Again, huh?”

“Yep, again.”

Alpha was sitting on the bed beside Akira and smiled at him.

“Morning, Akira. Did you get a good sleep?”

“Yeah… But well, this makes it the second time, huh? I don’t know whether I should be happy that I survived or I should be sad for getting hospitalized again.”

“There’s no reason for you to be sad, so just be honest and be happy about it.”

“Let me confirm it, why can you be so sure?”

“There’s no reason to not be happy since you survived, that is true for both me and you. I’m really glad that you survived that fight.”

Alpha smiled gently. Akira who saw that blushed a bit. But that was only until he heard her next words as she half-jokingly said.

“Moreover, this isn’t your first time having to face something like that, right? It would be a waste of time to question that now, wouldn’t it?”

“…Well, you have a point there… And I really hate the fact that I have to accept it.”

Akira once again laid back on the bed, Alpha only looked at him gently when he did so.

Not too long after that, Kibayashi entered the room.

“Akira, you’re finally awake, how are you feeling?”

“I’m fine.”

“Really? Do you feel anything strange around your arms or legs? Can you move your fingers?”

Akira thought that it was weird for Kibayashi to say that, but he still tried to move his fingers to confirm it, and as expected, he did not feel anything wrong.

“Still nothing, why did you say that? Don’t tell me that you gave me the bare minimum treatment since you didn’t know whether I can pay or not, right?”

“It’s the opposite. You were strapped into an emergency life-support system when I arrived in the forward base. You were in pretty bad shape. Especially your limbs, they were close to being turned into minced meat, you know. Though in the end, we used those super expensive regeneration treatments to get them back, they were basically grown and then sewn to your body. So it won’t be strange if you feel something wrong with them.

But you seem to be alright. So yeah, the treatment cost is going to be crazy high.”

The damage on his legs was from that jump while the damage on his arms was from the barrage. Akira remembered vividly that he did do those things. So when he imagined how much the treatment cost was going to be, he started to get nervous.

“…So, how much is it?”

“About that, you see. We need to have a talk. It will be a long one since I need to let you know what had happened and we need to discuss the reward for your request too, so let’s talk while having a meal… Don’t worry, you did very well back there, the treatment cost won’t surpass your reward money.”

Kibayashi smiled at the flustered Akira.

Akira changed to the clothes available in the room and left the room with Kibayashi. They hopped on a vehicle that came to pick them up and returned back to the Kugama building.

As Akira was about to head to a restaurant on the first floor, Kibayashi stopped him.

“Akira, not that one.”

“No? Then why did you bring me here? Do we have to do some administrative stuff first?”

“Nope, we’re going up.”

Kibayashi pointed up with a smile filled with excitement. Akira found it weird, but the moment he understood what Kibayashi was signalling, his expression changed.

The restaurants on the upper floors of the Kugama building were so great that they changed Akira’s views on food, and this would be the third time he went to that building for a meal.

Akira sat on the seat that he was guided to. He was jovial and excited but at the same time a bit confused while he sat there, Kibayashi ignored it and extended a handshake with a big smile on his face.

“First of all, let me congratulate you. You have become a great Hunter, great enough even for the City Management to treat you to a meal in this restaurant. The first time I saw you, you were stuck with the other Hunters who could not manage to raise their ranks in that truck, and now look at you, you’ve gone up the ranks so quickly in such a short time. It’s really impressive. As someone who has kept his eyes on you through all of those crazy things that you did, I can’t help but give myself a pat on the back for spotting your potential.”

“Eh? Ah, yeah, sure.”

Akira was behaving like a small fry who had never visited such a high-class restaurant. But he had the achievements sufficient for the restaurant to let him in. Kibayashi found that discrepancy very interesting as he laughed hard.

“You should get yourself used to this kind of restaurant soon, you know? I like you, so I can tolerate how you are acting, but more often than not, others would take advantage of it. Those types of people often invite well-established Hunters, who can’t handle negotiation, into this kind of high-class restaurant and use that opening to poison them. So you should be careful, okay?”

“Even if you say so, I don’t have enough money to visit this kind of restaurant that often, you see.”

“In that case, I can bring you requests that would allow you to use a high-class restaurant as the negotiation site. Though it would be nothing but high-level and dangerous requests, since it’s you we’re talking here, so I’m sure you’ll do just fine.”

Akira’s expression soured a bit.

“No thanks. I bet it’s something that would send me to hospital again.”

“You don’t understand. If it’s a request dangerous enough to get you hospitalized again, you’ll get a huge reward if you can finish it…”

“Yeah yeah, make sure that it won’t get me hospitalized first.”

As Kibayashi boasted about himself on how he would be able to bring such high-level requests to Akira, Akira only listened to him with a seriously annoyed face. Once they calmed down at some point, Akira opened the menu as if to cut short that subject there. Kibayashi who saw that only smiled amusedly and opened the menu too.

Once they had placed their orders and were waiting for the food, Kibayashi started explaining to Akira what had happened after he fainted.

When Akira arrived at the forward base half-dead, he was immediately put into the life support system just like the other severely wounded Hunters.

Among all the other severely wounded Hunters that were not treated seriously, Akira received better treatment which guaranteed his survivability. Nelia did something to make sure that Akira would be treated as if he was working under Yanagisawa.

The battle between monster swarms and the city’s defence squad was still ongoing around Kugamayama city after Akira fainted. Although the size of the swarm was smaller than before, there were huge monsters and even flying monsters mixed in that swarm, thus they were relatively more dangerous than before. Average Hunters could not handle them and they would only slow other Hunters down as such only high ranking Hunters were offered high rewards and sent to repel that swarm.

When the City Management was considering sending out its trump card, the swarm suddenly broke down. Monsters that were originally heading straight to the city suddenly changed their directions. As some of them started rampaging, destroying anything around them, some of them retreated and vanished into the wasteland. While more than half of the swarm returned back to the ruin.

It was because they were forcefully manipulated by Tiol to go against the system. And with Tiol gone, the control returned back to the system. Although some of the monsters that had grown past the system's control did not return back, those that returned back to the system's side returned to their patrol area. For those that had their patrol area information destroyed, they just followed the broken order from the system to wander aimlessly, while some of them received the order to patrol a different area.

The city's defence squad pushed back the swarm just like that until they met the squads from the forward base, and that signified the end of the battle against the swarm. Now that the route between the city and the forward base was secured, those who were severely wounded in the forward base were transported back to the city. Akira was identified as a Hunter who would not have a problem with paying for the treatment cost, so just like last time he was hospitalized, they went ahead and gave him an expensive treatment without asking him first. After his wounds were healed, they cleaned the nanomachines leftover inside his body, and now, he was back all healthy and ready to go again.

Although Akira did not understand everything, he more or less understood the big idea of what Kibayashi was saying, and of course, that would mean he did not understand what Kibayashi was unclear about.

"What happened to those large monsters after that? Did you kill them all?"

"No, some of them are still left. The city's defence squad also returned back to their post once the swarm retreated after all. I'm sure there are still some of those large monsters roaming in and around the ruin. Although they're not regarded as bounty monsters yet, they're strong enough that the City Management is considering putting a bounty on them. So any Hunters who get to kill any of those are offered a special reward. Although they're big and strong, as long as they don't form a swarm, they're not that hard to kill after all. It's the perfect target for those Hunters who want to get their name out there. So other than those that have returned back to the ruin, I bet most of the monsters roaming in the wasteland are already being hunted down."

Kibayashi smiled happily and warned Akira.

“Though I won’t exactly prevent you, I recommend you not to join the hunt. You already got yourself a pretty highly prized target under your belt, so let lower rank Hunters have them instead. It’s one of those ‘good manners’ as a high-ranking Hunter.”

“…Manners, huh. Well, I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Yup, you better do it.”

The ordered meal finally arrived at the table. Akira did not know which one to pick, so he had ended up ordering the recommended menu. When that meal arrived in front of him, it changed Akira’s solemn expression to a smile. And when he scooped that up to his mouth, he could not fight back the taste that spread around his tongue and his smile widened.

Akira could not stop chowing down the food in front of him as if he was completely defeated by the taste of the meal. Kibayashi who watched it thought that Akira really needed to get himself used to coming to a high-class restaurant.

After they finished the meal and Akira could finally focus on the discussion, Kibayashi started talking about the main reason why they came there.

“I guess it’s time to talk about the reward then. First of all, the rank boost. This will affect the rest of your reward, so think carefully before you decide. Your Hunter Rank can basically go up somewhere between 42 and 50. Of course, the more you put your reward on your Hunter Rank, the less money that you get. So, how far do you want to go?”

Before Akira could say 42, Kibayashi frowned and continued.

“Or so I want to say, but I’m sure you would immediately say 42, right? I know well you’re just that kind of guy. That’s why I will explain to you the importance of Hunter Rank, make sure to listen well… Let’s see, if I am to give a concrete example… Let’s talk about the anti-forcefield ammo. How much did it cost when you bought it for the first time?”

“5 million Aurum per bullet.”

“If you get Hunter Rank 50, you can buy it for 500 Aurum per bullet.”

Akira was about to blow out all the food inside his mouth, but since it would be such a waste, he was able to somehow hold it in. He then managed to swallow it while making a weird pose to hold back his surprise. After that, he took one deep breath to calm himself down and looked back at Kibayashi.

“A-are you being serious here?”

“Yes, let me explain. There are many factors that decide the cost of such a bullet, this includes the power distribution and the city’s safety. I know it’s hard to accept, but that’s just how the world works, so you better know this kind of thing. Well, it’s still a biased opinion from my point of view, but still, make sure to listen well, alright?”

Kibayashi started explaining slowly as if to calm Akira down after that surprising revelation.

The price of ammo in the eastern district was decided solely by the government, so it’s based on how much profit the Corporate Government could earn. The reason why people could easily buy ammo in the slum city and why that ammo was sold at such a cheap price was all because they were designed to maintain profit for the Corporate Government.

There were many reasons as to why cheap bullets were sold in slum city. That way people in the slum city would be able to fight back the monsters coming from the wasteland, thus protecting the inner part of the city. And after they got used to fighting monsters, they would eventually become Hunters whom the City Management could hire as cheap soldiers. Of course, there were many reasons other than this.

There was one thing common among all the cheap ammunition sold in the slum city, none of them worked against the forcefield armour of the city’s defence squad. Even a barrage from those bullets would not leave a scratch

against their forcefield armour. That way, the city's defence squad could easily destroy the slum city and its people without any resistance.

So those bullets that could be used to fight back the city's defence squad were priced highly depending on their effectiveness. Even more so for anti-forcefield armour.

But if the government set the price of a single bullet that high so that the people of the slum city would never be able to buy it, it would also prevent the Hunters from getting the ammo that they needed. But once those Hunters had enough money to buy them, albeit only a little, the people that the City Management did not wish to obtain these bullets, would be able to procure them.

In order to solve this problem, the Corporate Government issued a discount for high ranking Hunters. After all, the stronger a Hunter, the more he or she would fight powerful monsters. But of course, they could not just give the bullets away for free, although the discount also depended on the type of the bullet, high ranking Hunters could buy them almost for free.

This policy was enforced also in order to increase the value of Hunter Rank, rather than increasing the price of the bullet to an unreasonably high price, this would also encourage Hunters to aim for a higher Hunter Rank.

Of course, those Hunters who tend to go against the City Management would be stuck in the low rank which also served as a way for the Hunter Office to control the Hunters. It was their way to tell the Hunters not to go against the City Management if they wanted to get a higher rank and cheap bullets.

Back then, when Akira placed his order for anti-forcefield bullets via Shizuka's shop, of course, this discount was already applied to that order. The reason why he did not notice it was simply because he was not the one paying so he did not bother to check the total price.

After considering the danger of these bullets when they fall to the wrong hands, and the problem that it might cause for both the City Management and the Hunter Office if one of those Hunters used that bullet to kill a city

guard, they decided to sell anti-forcefield armour for 5 million Aurum per bullet. Akira understood that reasoning but he still felt conflicted about it. Although he could follow the logic, that did not mean he could accept it, and it was obvious from his face.

“I see that you find it really displeasing, but as I said, that’s just how the world works. It’s important to know when to give up, you know? If you don’t like it, your only choice is to get your own territory and sell that kind of bullets cheaply inside your territory. Well, there’s also some rumours saying that if you’re a low ranking Hunter buying expensive bullets, the Hunter Office would note your name and introduce you to high-level requests though.”

“Rumours, heh?”

“Yep, only rumours. There’s no rule nor formal evaluation about it, the efficiency itself is questionable. There is no guarantee on the result as well. Rumours just like this, including information saying that it’s also used as a method to find a hidden gem or powerful Hunters disguising as a low-ranking Hunter like you. It’s all just rumours.”

It was a good way to raise the Hunters’ expectations without promising concrete results, but at the same time, it was enough to suppress complaints from the Hunters. Akira understood that but there was still something that he found weird.

“But still, selling 500 Aurum bullets for 5 million Aurum, huh? Won’t there be high ranking Hunters trying to make a profit out of this?”

“That depends on the Hunters. If you’re sharing it with some of your Hunter friends, then it’s fine, but if you blatantly resell it for profit, it’ll be seen as treason toward the Corporate Government and you’ll get a bounty on your head. Though it depends on the case, it’s basically the same as picking a fight with the Corporate Government after all. It won’t end well for you, so if you don’t want to pick a fight with the Corporate Government, just don’t do it.”

Kibayashi said so in a casual manner, but his tone indicated that he was being serious. Akira told himself to make sure to never do that.

“That should be enough explanation for now, your other rewards depend on how far you are going to boost your Hunter Rank after all. So, before you make your decision, I have another thing that I need to talk about with you. It’s about buying your track record again… Or at least something similar to that subject came to me.”

“Do you mean that you want to erase the last request from my Hunter track record again?”

“Not that far, you worked with a black powered suit on your last day, right? It’s a small adjustment just for that day. Basically, we need to discuss how you are going to let me change it and how much money you want for it.”

Kibayashi pulled out his information terminal and showed the detailed document to Akira. By the end of that long character-dense document, there was a contract page.

“I don’t mind if you want to take a close look at it, but I will still give you a short general explanation. Basically, if you sign this contract, your track record would say that you did help the black powered suit but you didn’t do anything significant. Including the money to make sure that you keep this confidential, we’re willing to pay you 1 billion Aurum. So, yes or no?”

Akira took the information terminal and scrolled through the contract. Although it looked like he did not read anything and just skipped the points written in that contract, Alpha was actually properly reading the contract. She then confirmed its content and let Akira know about it.

Akira hummed. Kibayashi raised his eyebrows, he did not expect Akira would hesitate.

“And here I thought you don’t care about your Hunter track record, or is it that 1 billion Aurum is not enough? Well, I don’t know the detail, but it seems that you’ve defeated something big and almost got killed yourself

doing that. So I can understand if you don’t want to erase that from your track record.”

“That’s not the problem, the problem is the 1 billion Aurum.”

“Is it not enough?”

“No, it’s too big that I don’t understand why it’s worth that much. So I just can’t help but get suspicious…”

If the value was unnaturally high, that means there must be something troublesome behind it, that was why Akira was hesitating. If the compensation was too little, Akira might feel offended by it but that would be the end of it. But to be honest, he just wanted to get paid a suitable amount of money. Unfortunately, he had no information that could help him decide its worth, thus he could not even tell if 1 billion Aurum was actually too big or too small.

“…What do you think? Do you think this 1 billion Aurum is a suitable compensation?”

Kibayashi paused a bit from that question.

“Suitable compensation, huh? It’s something that both parties should agree on. After all, there’s no concrete way to decide this price, you see. To be honest, I don’t know either. But I don’t think that compensation is something that you need to be worried about. There’s some level of confidentiality around this information, so I didn’t get the full story either. It’s mostly my guess, but I think it’s an offer made to be on your good side. Do you want to know the reason why I think so?”

“Yeah.”

Unfortunately, Akira did not have enough knowledge to understand Kibayashi’s reasoning. But he was genuinely interested in that subject, so he replied back without showing any hesitation.

Kibayashi made sure to let Akira know that in the end, it was nothing more than a personal guess. So it was not like it could be used as concrete proof.

“That black powered suit might be a new model and someone is trying to use the last battle to promote it.”

Kibayashi’s guess was that a certain weapon manufacturer released one of its new models into slum city in order to collect combat data disguising it as an accident. The unit then showed notable results performing against other powered suits in the midst of the battle in which multiple powered suits were involved.

Then, it would fight the city’s defence squad sent to suppress it and deliberately lose but not before showing its capabilities. From there, the company could make a public apology for it while using it as a negotiation material to get the City Management to buy it for the city’s defence squad. The data taken from a battle nearby the inner wall was very effective material for negotiating against those inside the inner wall.

But there was an accident in that plan. A certain Hunter actually defeated that black powered suit. So the manufacturer immediately retrieved it back and before any bad rumour went out in public, they changed and renewed the unit and sent it out again for the original reason.

This time the plan went well, the black powered suit was able to kill many humongous monsters and demonstrated its capability. Moreover, it then encountered a powerful monster strong enough to change the contour of the ruin and defeated that monster. This achievement would be the perfect material to promote that new unit.

But again, there was a small accident with the plan. During that fight, the new unit was working together with the same Hunter who defeated that exact unit last time. Then to top it off, it was actually that Hunter who executed the big monster. If this track record went out in public, it would look like the new unit was only able to do what it did because of that Hunter. While at the same time, they did not want to completely discard the involvement of the new unit in this battle record either.

In this case, if they said that the Hunter did not contribute much during the fight and just ran around and obstructed the fight, then it would be a great battle record for the new unit. Personal opinion of how much someone contributed during a fight was a subjective thing based on the person giving that opinion. But if they were able to skew that opinion toward the new unit, it would really help promote the new unit.

“If that result caused the new unit to be deployed in this city and the other cities, it would move around a huge amount of money. I believe that they think this 1 billion Aurum is just a small amount of money compared to the profit that they could get but it should be enough to satisfy the involved Hunter.”

Akira listened to Kibayashi’s explanation with great interest. He then noticed something else and slightly frowned.

“Say, don’t tell me the reason why I got stuck with that request to increase my Hunter Rank is…”

“Exactly, it would be embarrassing if the Hunter who defeated that new unit is just a low-ranking Hunter. It would definitely hurt the reputation of that new unit. But, if that Hunter is actually a strong Hunter disguising as a low-ranking Hunter, then they still could still save some face. That’s why they wanted you to raise your Hunter Rank as fast as possible. It’s all their doing… Or at least, there’s a good chance that it’s the case, again, in the end, it’s nothing but a guess, okay? As I said, it’s just a guess.”

Kibayashi threw a smile that was hiding something. Akira sighed. All in all, someone did something and he was roped into trouble because of that.

Akira quickly agreed to the contract, but Kibayashi delayed the signing of the contract to hear from Akira the details of that battle. After all, he would not be able to ask Akira about that battle after the contract was signed.

Although Akira signed the contract, he still thought that 1 billion Aurum was a little bit too much. But after seeing Kibayashi laughing his heart out after listening to the story, Akira started to half-believe that it might indeed

be worth that much, as the other half of him honestly did not care about it anymore and stopped thinking about it.

In order to ask his question, Kibayashi tried to calm himself down from laughing.

“By the way, why did you stay behind to help that powered suit? I can understand that you missed your chance after you lost your decoy, but I don’t think that’s enough as an excuse, you know?”

“I might have been in a mood to do it back then.”

“Just in a mood, huh? Is that all the reason why you stayed behind? Don’t get me wrong, it’s a good reason! Yup, it’s the perfect reason! Those Hunters who only think in terms of loss and profit won’t do something that crazy after all.”

Judging from Akira’s exasperated reaction, Kibayashi was sure that Akira had another reason and it was not like he was trying to hide that reason either. Probably Akira himself was not really sure why he did that, or why he decided to step deeper into a dangerous situation. Kibayashi found that very interesting as he could not hold back his laughter and started to laugh again.

If the reason that Akira himself did not understand well was put into words, it would be sympathy, pride and hatred. It was the sympathy to his ally even if it was an ally for a single day, that was his line of thinking of how he differentiated between allies and enemies. The pride and self-dignity to follow through his job to its very end. And the hatred toward himself for allowing himself to work with a relic thief for the sake of his job.

That vague amalgamation of feelings that Akira could not understand almost got him killed as well as allowed him to survive. But this abnormal way of thinking that he himself did not fully understand shifted his action further and further away from Alpha’s guidance.

Kibayashi finally calmed down from laughing hard and started discussing the rest of the reward. It took some time until they reached a deal that both

parties agreed on.

Silavin: So, if Akira’s bullets at that time were already discounted… How goddamn cheap is the Hunter Office? Or just how much did he actually buy?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 190, How To Spend The Reward

Index

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Shizuka was chatting with Elena and Sara in her shop. They were talking about the recent happenings, mostly about how monster swarms came out from Kuzusuhara ruin and attacked the city twice in such a short time window. While at the same time, Elena and Sara were also venting about the hard time they had when they joined a squad, which was tasked to repel the swarm. Among all the subjects that they were talking about, there was one particular matter that worried them, it was about Akira.

There was a good chance Akira was in the ruin when that battle happened, and since that day, he had stopped coming to the shop.

If he was alright, it was about time he returned to the shop to procure supplies. If he was alright, it would not be strange for Sara and Elena to spot him when they were fighting the huge monster swarm. They were exchanging information about Akira, hoping that they would find some hints about his whereabouts, but both of them could not get any clear answer.

Elena and Sara were working as Hunters and Shizuka was working with Hunters. All of them had to some extent gotten used to the death of their

acquaintances and friends. But that did not change the fact that it still made them sad. They understood well death was an occupational hazard for Hunters, and they knew that Akira might actually be doing just fine. But even so, they still had worried looks on their faces.

That was when Akira suddenly appeared. Elena, Sara and Shizuka welcomed him with a brighter smile than usual.

Akira started by letting them know that his rank up request was finally done.

“But well, a lot has happened since then and all my equipment is gone now. That’s why I’m here to get new equipment, or more like, I want to consult about getting a new complete set of equipment including vehicles. So, would that be okay?”

“Of course! So then, how much are you planning to spend this time?”

“About 1 billion Aurum. I actually have a bit more money than that, but for now, I want to limit my budget to 1 billion Aurum. If it’s too much of trouble, I’m thinking of getting the same thing as before and buy some extra modifications and other equipment after that.”

Akira said that amount so casually that Shizuka’s usual smile toward a customer changed into a worry.

“It seems that you earned quite a lot of money again this time, but are you alright? I heard that the reward for a Hunter rank-up request is Hunter Rank, so normally Hunters won’t be able to get much money from that request. But even so, it seems that you got 1 billion Aurum from that. Akira, did you do something reckless again?”

Shizuka’s voice tensed up to warn him not to do any unnecessary reckless thing in order to increase his probability to return back alive even if it was only for a little. She thought that if he realised that he had done something reckless and tried to hide it, then she would need to warn him again. As she was waiting for his answer, she sent a strict but caring gaze toward him.

But Akira responded with something that Shizuka did not expect. He heaved a big sigh and exasperatedly said.

“…It was a huge disaster, huge huge disaster…”

Akira did not show any sign of trying to look strong which he had never done before, it allowed Shizuka to know that he had really gone through something really difficult, thus confirming her intuition from before. Since it seemed there was no need to warn or scold him, her expression changed to a gentle smile to cheer him up.

“It must have been really hard, I’m really glad that you returned back alive. Are you okay? Did you get injured? If you only come here to let us know that you’re okay, thank you, but you don’t need to push yourself too hard. You can return back now and get a good rest. But if you still want to consult about equipment, we can do that inside.”

“Don’t worry, I’m okay, I made sure to get properly treated after all that mess.”

“Is that so? Very well then, just be careful not to push yourself too hard, okay?”

“Yes, I’ll be more careful… Honestly, though, I was already trying to be careful, you know.”

Akira smiled and said so before immediately starting to vent and looked down. Shizuka, Elena and Sara did not expect that from him at all and found it amusing while also feeling sorry for him. They then looked at each other and smiled wryly.

Shizuka shelved that feeling aside for now and asked Akira about what he wanted to consult about with a serious face to change the mood.

“So then, what is your current Hunter Rank?”

“42.”

Shizuka’s gentle smile turned slightly stern.

“…That’s quite a big jump. Akira, at least let me tell you this if you get your Hunter Rank that high, it might be a good idea to go to another shop, you know.”

Akira did not expect that at all and made a troubled face, he then nervously asked.

“Uhh, what do you mean by that, Shizuka-san?”

“Actually, since that time when you ordered an SSB multi-weapon rifle from this shop, that price is already way above the normal items in this shop. That’s why I’m not sure if I can recommend good equipment suitable for the current you. Of course, I’ll do my best to help you out if you ask me, but there’s a limit on how much I can help you. Remember back then when I sent you data for various rifles, right? To be honest, that was because I couldn’t decide which one would suit you the best. Furthermore, I don’t normally have them in stock, so I need more time to order them too. So, to be honest, it might be better if you go to a better shop, I’m sure they’ll be able to provide you with a better recommendation too.”

Shizuka said so with goodwill, but Akira frowned and seemed displeased.

“Uhh, does it bother Shizuka-san if they are items that need to be ordered first?”

“Of course not, it’s the opposite. As the owner of the shop and if I prioritize getting profit, I would prefer you order them through my shop.”

Akira sighed and seemed relieved.

“In that case, as long as it doesn’t bother Shizuka-san, I’ll keep ordering through this shop.”

“…Are you sure you’re okay with that, Akira?”

“Of course.”

Akira nodded firmly. If it was a bother to Shizuka, he would have no other choice but to change shop, but if not, then he had no reason to change shop.

Shizuka slightly blushed, which was very rare for her and looked away from Akira. It seemed that she was happy that he was this invested in her shop.

“With this, it would make 3 Hunters higher than Rank 40 as my frequent customers. It seems that my shop has really turned into something great.”

Shizuka glanced at Elena and Sara. Akira followed suit and looked at Elena and Sara too, but both of them seemed rather conflicted although they still smiled at him.

“Sara and I are Rank 41, basically one rank below you.”

“So you finally surpassed us, huh. Well, I do think that it was only a matter of time, but I didn’t expect it to be this fast.”

When Akira started working on that rank up request, Elena and Sara started working seriously to get their rank up for real. They prioritized taking on difficult requests and were able to finish them one by one. The expedition into the deeper part of Kuzusuhara ruin was one of them. After making high-quality maps of the ruin, bringing back expensive relics, and performing well during that fight the other day, they even contributed during the fight to repel the monster swarm as well.

The reason why Elena and Sara worked that hard was partly because of their competitive spirit toward Akira. To put it bluntly, it was to keep their pride as Akira’s senior, but their main reason was to stay as his senior even only for a little longer.

After all of their hard work and racking all of the achievements that they were quite proud of, they ended on Rank 41 which was a pretty high rank in their opinion.

But Akira went even above it. Although they were honestly happy with Akira’s achievement, they also felt rather conflicted by it.

“I wonder if I have to call you senpai from here and on.”

Elena tried to hide her conflicted heart by jokingly poking fun at Akira while smiling teasingly at him. Akira seemed rather unsure how to react to that. He felt that it might offend Elena and Sara if he said that he still had a long way to go, but he could not find any other words to say. And that much was obvious from his face.

Elena and Sara looked at the troubled Akira and felt that it seemed there was no need to try to be too careful around him. They then looked at each other, smiled and returned back to their usual self.

“Well, we’ve been working as Hunters longer than you after all. So I guess we’re still more experienced in terms of being Hunters.”

“Oh my, I don’t think that’s exactly the case for you though, Sara.”

“Why would you say that? Akira, that’s not true, right?”

Sara stared intently at Akira, the answer that she was expecting was sent through her stare.

“Ah, yes, of course. I think I’ll still be asking for your help too from here and on.”

“Fufufu, thank you.”

Sara smiled like usual, Akira finally regained his calm.

After that, they started talking about buying new equipment. Even for Elena and Sara, 1 billion Aurum was a huge amount of money. Elena and Sara were thinking that it might be better if they also invested more in their equipment.

That was when Sara suddenly had a question for Akira.

“I can understand that you want a better set of equipment since you lost all of them last time, but you can actually use your reward for something else, you know? It’s not like you only live to fight, right?”

Sara thought that this time Akira was spending all of his reward for buying equipment, but that was not true, it was only the money that he got from selling a part of his Hunter record during that request.

Akira and Kibayahi had a talk about the rest of the reward after signing the contract.

A boost to Hunter Rank 42, the right to buy medicine and ammo cheaply reserved for Hunter Rank 50 and above, and finally, Kibayashi's connection with the Kugamayama City Management and the Hunter Office which allowed Akira to procure powerful weapons.

The original contract between Akira and Kibayashi regarding the rank up request was that Akira would get an extra reward in the case of an unforeseen accident. That battle against the oversized armored monster fell well under that clause. Thus following the contract, Akira received extra rewards. Meanwhile, he used most of that reward for getting new special equipment.

There was a lot of equipment that normal Hunters could not get their hands on. This special equipment was only available for the city defence squad, particularly for soldiers belonging to a special unit. It was difficult to buy equipment sold for the Hunters in the frontline back in the Kugamayama city, that was just how powerful this equipment was.

Akira would definitely need that kind of equipment to be able to accomplish that request from Alpha, so he decided to ask Kibayashi to help him get them. Of courses, Kiabayashi thought that it would be interesting to see what Akira would do with them, so he happily accepted it.

Getting powerful equipment needed extra permissions and special rights which would take time to get. In the worst-case scenario, it might even take months, sometimes even more than 6 months. Kibayashi did inform Akira about it and Akira was okay with it.

Although there was a big difference between Sara and Akira's assumptions, both of them thought that he used most of his reward for equipment.

Because of that, he could not notice the misunderstanding and casually explained.

“Well, even if you say so, it’s not like I know what I can do with that much money other than spending it on equipment. I’m already living in a large house, the bath is big enough that I have no plans to move away… If there’s anything else, maybe I’ll start treating myself to delicious food. I’ve been buying better and better food lately. But that’s just a small amount of money compared to the price of equipment.”

“Ahh, Akira, you’re that type, huh? Well, with the money that you’re earning, I think you’ll be able to eat on the third floor of the Kugama building 3 times a day though.”

“Ahh, now that you mention it, I did go there recently. It was amazing.”

Akira started talking enthusiastically about the food with his limited vocabulary. Thanks to that, he could not convey the taste of the food very well. But it was at least obvious that it was great food.

“In that case, want to go together next time?”

Elena said casually, thinking that since Akira was talking so enthusiastically, he would accept her invitation. But instead, Akira frowned and said.

“Ahhh, well…”

“Oh, then, would that be a no?”

“No, it’s just the price, you see. I only went there since I was invited to discuss the reward from my previous request. So I was treated to the food there as a part of the reward. To be honest, I don’t feel like going there if I have to pay on my own… Well, so that’s basically why I will have to refuse, I’m sorry.”

Akira said apologetically and lightly bowed. Elena and Sara understood him and smiled.

“Well, we’re the ones inviting you, so we can pay for your food.”

Shizuka smiled and interjected.

“Elena, I think restaurants around that part is expensive for me as well.”

“In that case, Sara can pay for your food.”

“Me? Well, I don’t mind, but make sure to hold back, okay?”

They continued talking without even asking for Akira’s opinion, and he made a conflicted look there. He felt sorry for making Elena and Sara treat him to such an expensive meal, but he was also happy that it meant he might be able to go to that restaurant again.

Shizuka, Elena and Sara saw that and smiled amusedly. Akira looked like just a normal boy instead of a Rank 42 Hunter. They felt the distance between them shrink and smiled even if it was nothing more than their feelings.

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Yanagisawa was talking through his information terminal.

“Yes.. Yes…, I do feel bad about the powered suit. I’ll also strongly recommend the City Management to use that powered suit. But that result is only from one battle record, I believe it’s too little as proof to push for its deployment. As such, I believe that it’s a good idea to get them deployed in the forward base and the supply route first to collect achievement before deploying it for the city defence squad. If it’s just in the forward base, I should be able to push it through after all… Yes, I believe you can expect good results. Once it’s decided that it’ll be deployed for the city defence squad, please transfer the money as we agreed before… Yes, of course… Yes, until next time then.”

Yanagisawa closed the call, his smile then vanished as he sighed.

“Good grief, these people can never get enough, huh. What a pain in the neck.”

Yanagisawa's men who were waiting for him to finish the call tilted their heads when he suddenly complained there.

"Commander, did it not go well?"

"Yeah. They're people from the higher echelon in the corporation after all. It won't go as well as when I negotiate with the usual guys."

"…I know it's common for you to be doing weird things, but commander, you can at least let us know from time to time, right?"

"Oh? I haven't told you before?"

"We did hear about the details of the borrowed equipment and how complex the document work was, but I have no idea why are we borrowing those things in the first place. I don't remember you ever tell us the reason, you see."

Yanagisawa often told his men what to do, but not why. It was true back then when the special ops unit went to the inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin, to bring Nelia to the upper floor of the Seranthal building. It was the same when Yanagisawa brought in the borrowed equipment.

Yanagisawa only gave a vague answer to that question with his usual crafty smile.

"Well, it's for the sake of humanity's prosperity and to save its future. Basically, just a preparation for that."

It was clear that he had no plans to answer seriously.

"…I see, well, it's fully up to you if you want to do something dangerous behind the curtain, but just don't use us as expendable pawns, okay?"

"Geez, that's rude. I've never done something like that, you know?"

Yanagisawa seemed honestly surprised by that remark, so his men stopped bugging him any further. There were already multiple people in the team

that had gone missing after investigating too much about Yanagisawa's plan.

"Well then, I have a report to make. It's about the automaton that you told me to investigate, it seems that it is as you guessed. Someone might have instigated that attack instead of it being a simple attempt from the monsters."

"Thought so. This will provide the final proof I need, I'll have to change the details of the warning then. Give all the Nationalists to me, I'll take care of them."

"About that though, there's something that bothers me. Please look over here."

The details of the report suddenly appeared in everyone's line of sight. It contained detailed information about the ensued battles, their locations, and the number of people involved in those battles in a 3D map. Yanagisawa read a certain detail among the records and he immediately stopped smiling.

"…We'll do everything. Check if there are any similar reports including the ones sent to the detainment facilities in the other cities. You can go ahead and use my name to bypass the restriction. If they're trying to hide anything, make sure to carefully crack that information out. Do the same for the ones we captured this time too. Quickly!"

"Roger that!"

As his men immediately sprung into action and left the room, Yanagisawa stared sharply at the content of the report.

The report said that someone from the ruin management AI came with an offer.

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Yatsubayashi opened his mobile clinic inside Kuzusuhara ruin. Tiol's remote body was strapped on one of the beds for patients.

Yatsubayashi yawned and sent a glance to that remote body. He was expecting Tiol to contact him sooner or later, but there was nothing today. He first thought that it was because of the range of the receiver and went to the inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin, but still, the result was the same.

In order to avoid breaking the receiver, Yanagisawa decided not to mess with the body. But it had been getting harder and harder for him to hold himself back from checking the receiver himself.

“…I guess it’s about time for me to give up, huh. Tiol-kun, the bed is not free, you know?”

“Is that so?”

The remote body suddenly replied. Yatasubayashi was startled, he was about to reply but stopped midway as he noticed something.

“You’re not Tiol-kun, are you? Who might you be?”

“You can tell?”

“I’m a doctor after all.”

The remote body showed a slight surprise before smiling at Yatsubayashi. It was a smile saying that it was impressed at how he was able to accurately identify it was a different person although it sounded as if he was saying so casually.

“I have an offer.”

“That was really out of the blue, what about Tiol-kun?”

“He’s inactive right now.”

“As in dead? He’s basically still my patient, you see.”

“It depends on your definition of death. But based on your common indication of death, I believe it could be said that he’s indeed already dead. I have no obligation to keep him alive, after all, you don’t have the

technology and the methods to do that. Do you want me to reactivate him after you make a deal with me?”

“Leaving aside the subject of whether I really have no technology or method to reactivate him, well, from my point of view, I don’t see any reason why I should do that considering he still hasn’t paid the full cost of the treatment. So, who are you? To be honest, I’m interested in your offer, but I’m a doctor, you see. So unless it’s about treating injury, I don’t see any reason to consider a stranger’s offer seriously, you know? Ah, by the way, I’m Yatsubayashi. As I said before, I’m a doctor.”

“I’m Tsubaki, a manager AI. By the way, regarding the name though, I don’t mind if you want to keep using your fake name. As long as I can use it to identify you, it would not be a problem to me.”

Yatsubayashi’s face slightly stiffened. The remote body, which still had Tiol’s face, was smiling as if it was a normal human.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 191, Ominous Deal

Index

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After Akira got his new set of equipment with the help of Shizuka, he took his new vehicle for a drive to the Higaraka Residence Ruin.

His new vehicle was an APC fully refitted for traversing the wasteland. It had a cargo hold filled with ammo and his new bike behind it which made it too big to go through certain places inside the ruin. Akira was planning to take his bike instead if he had to go through smaller roads.

As for his new guns, he brought with him a pair of modified and enhanced SSB multi-weapon rifles, and just like last time, he bought an augmented suit that came with the maintenance cupboard. As a matter of fact, he bought an augmented suit from the same high-end line of product as his previous one, and not to forget the coat which was equipped with forcefield armour and camouflage capability.

Plus the ammo and other consumables, Akira spent 1.6 billion Aurum this time. Putting aside whether those were suitable equipment for a Rank 42 Hunter, as expected, it was a huge amount of money for the current Akira. In order to get a big enough garage for his new vehicle, Akira also had to

pay a renovator to expand his garage which also increased his rent. As such, he was rather strapped for money at the moment.

In order to recover from that situation, Akira decided to sell the rest of the relics that he had stockpiled inside his house. His goal going to the Higaraka Residence Ruin this time was just like previous times, to trick others on where he got those relics from.

Of course, there were already some Hunters that noticed Akira was trying to trick them. But if he kept going to the Higaraka Residence Ruin even after knowing so, those Hunters would start to question their guesses again. Viola was also helping by spreading that rumour as well, or at least, that was what Alpha told him.

It had been quite some time since the last time he had visited Higaraka Residence Ruin. As expected, the Hunters who were searching for relics in that ruin using old-world information-gathering devices were already nowhere to be found. Or at least, that was what he thought, he was dumbfounded to find that he was mistaken when he arrived in Higaraka Residence Ruin.

There were multiple vehicles parked around the ruin, and judging from their size, they must have been made for humans. Huge machineries were busy round the clock tearing down buildings as Hunters were standing on guard around the area. There were also people trying to find relics among the torn down buildings. Compared to before, the ruin was filled with more people.

“Alpha… What the heck is going on here?”

“No idea. Let’s ask someone who might know.”

Alpha pointed at the Hunters. Among those Hunters guarding the area, Akira spotted Colbert and the children from Sheryl’s gang.

Colbert noticed Akira coming at him.

“Akira, huh? Do you still have something to do in this barren ruin? If you came here to trick people about where you got your relics from, this place is

already too popular for you to do so. Or is it that you really did hide your relics here? In that case, you have my condolences."

"That is not important, so, what in the world is going on here? No matter how you look at it, it's strange to see this as the continuation of the ruckus from last time."

Colbert raised his eyebrows and lightly smiled.

"Ohhh, you don't know, huh? When you were working in Kuzusuhara ruin, there was a small incident, and this is the after-effect from that incident."

"Incident? What incident?"

"They found old-world equipment to connect to the old-world domain and it's still working. I heard that it fetched quite a lot of money when they brought that back to the Hunter Office. So the people here are basically searching the ruin for similar relics."

Akira's gaze inadvertently turned toward the ruin.

"…But still, isn't it overkill for them to do this? They're basically destroying the ruin."

"I bet that's just how much that relic cost. Although the first sale price is not revealed to the public, I heard that there are multiple corporations fighting for it. I don't know who found it, but he must be one lucky bastard."

Working as a Hunter means to gamble with one's life, thus most Hunters believed that they could earn a huge amount of money to justify risking their lives. Then from time to time, a really lucky Hunter would appear albeit very rarely, but it was enough to reaffirm other Hunters to keep chasing their dream. This was the huge force that pushed ruin exploration in the eastern district. The scene in front of Akira was a simple manifestation of that dream. As a matter of fact, Akira himself was one of those Hunters chasing such a dream.

“According to the rumour, the one who found that relic originally found an empty secret room. He was so enraged that he started destroying the walls around him which led to him finding that relic. I heard that he only found out that it was an old-world communication device after he got that relic appraised in the relic exchange centre. He originally brought that relic to the exchange centre thinking that it should at least bring him a bit of money and did not expect it to be a jackpot. I know this kind of thing happens from time to time in the Hunter world, but I heard that the person went through a lot of things after that. Like getting confined in the Hunter Office since they thought he was someone who can connect to the old-world domain. Well, he was released afterwards though after knowing that he was not. But in the end, it was nothing but a rumour, so I don’t know if it’s real or not.”

Colbert said so casually, but Akira could not help but frown as he flusteredly said.

“I-I see, well, so, you’re basically here to look for relics too, huh?”

“Not exactly, I was hired as a guard. Since that last battle, the guards get paid pretty well to watch out for the remaining monsters. To be honest, the money is pretty good, we get paid quite a lot of money just to stand here doing nothing. That’s why I brought along Erio and the other guys to fill the member quota, this is a good chance for them to get some experience as amateur Hunters.”

Erio and the other children there had registered themselves as Hunters. They were basically working as Hunters affiliated with Sheryl’s gang and they occasionally got requests from Sheryl and Viola’s connections. Since they brought along decent equipment from Katsuragi when they registered their names, they started as Rank 10 Hunters which were way above Akira’s when he first registered himself as a Hunter.

“Are you really okay bringing Erio and the other children just to fill the member quota? Those big monsters are pretty strong, you know?”

“Well, even if those monsters actually show up, I bet the other Hunters would happily hunt them down first. So these guys won’t even have the chance to fight those monsters. Well, even if they do, they can just provide

support from afar using rocket launchers. If you're that worried, how about joining us?"

"No thanks, I have other things to do here. Later then."

Akira then walked toward the ruin. But his image suddenly blurred into the surroundings, Colbert who saw that could not hide his surprise.

"Camouflage, huh? With this many Hunters in this place, I bet he knows all too well that there are no longer any monsters in this ruin, right? Then why did he do that?"

A lot of questions popped up inside Colbert's mind, although he had his guesses, he could not ask Akira for confirmation. After all, it would not end well for him if Akira suspected him of trying to find the location of Akira's relics. Colbert was standing there feeling troubled for a few seconds before he decided to just forget about it and return back to his job.

Akira turned on the camouflage on his coat and went into the ruin. The coat was equipped with a hood and it was big enough to hide Akira's 2 rifles under it. Although the hood was designed to cover his face and its camouflage would not be complete without it, Akira deliberately let a part of his hood open. Since some Hunters believed that putting something on their head would lower their awareness during battle, Alpha allowed Akira to do it instead of having his focus disrupted if he covered his face with the hood.

The coat's surface blended with the colour of its surroundings due to the optical camouflaging unit installed on it. Although it did not make Akira invisible by bending the light, it was good enough to hide him. And in order to prevent other non-optical sensors from discovering him, he turned on a jamming device created using forcefield technology.

One of the Hunters in the area noticed the signal from Akira in his information-gathering device suddenly dim, he inadvertently turned toward Akira's direction. But since there was nothing worth noting, he returned back, keeping his eyes on his information-gathering device.

Similar things happened a few times after that, Akira was honestly surprised at how effective the camouflage was.

“They didn’t notice me even when I was pretty close by. If only I knew that it is this effective, I would have bought it sooner.”

But Alpha reminded Akira not to get too confident.

“It might be because their information-gathering devices are set to detect the larger monsters, so it doesn’t work well to detect a relatively small object like you. Moreover, there are many monsters out there that can easily detect this level of camouflage. Furthermore, it consumes energy, so it’s not like you can turn it on all the time. So don’t drop your guard just because you’re using it, okay?”

“I know… By the way, do you think this thing works against those big monsters?”

“Maybe. You at least wouldn’t need to hide under the rubbles after the rain stopped.”

“I see… As I thought, I should have bought it sooner.”

Akira frowned a bit. In the back of his mind, he honestly just thought that if he encountered a monster, he just had to beat it, it was an obvious answer. And since he was able to do that in all of his encounters up until now, it cemented that line of thinking to his brain. But as expected, being able to avoid fighting left a huge impression on him to the point that he even started considering the option of hiding and avoiding fighting.

Not to mention that he had to pay for his own ammo again now, so he wanted to avoid any fighting that might consume a lot of ammo if it was possible. This line of thinking kept cycling through his mind as he continued going deeper into the ruin.

“But still, to think that an old-world communication device can be that expensive, it might be a good idea to keep one even if I won’t sell it.”

Akira sounded as if he was regretting his decision, but Alpha quickly shot that suggestion down.

“That would be a bad idea. If you have one, you’ll start thinking about how to turn it into money without alerting anyone. It would be bad if it distracts you, and it would be worse if you have an idea on how to do that since you would not be able to help but try. Then, you would fail and it would end really badly. Remember that the person who found it by pure chance got confined? If it was you, they would keep prodding you even if you show the slightest possibility and it would be too late before you even notice it.”

Akira imagined what would happen afterwards and shivered.

“You’re right, that would be a bad idea. Alright then, let’s just be glad that someone else found it instead of me so now I know what would happen if it was me.”

Alpha smiled happily seeing Akira was completely over it.

Akira wandered around inside the ruin after that with his camouflage still on. It served as training to help him get used to using that camouflage as well as to trick other people. After all, a Hunter, wearing a camouflage coat, wandering around inside a ruin filled with other Hunters would make people guess why he did that.

That was also the reason why Akira let Colbert and his friends see him turning on his camouflage. If Akira knew that there were still old-world information terminals left in the ruin or if Akira really had a hidden stash in that ruin, it would have been a fatal blunder. But at the same time, it would also make Hunters doubt if it was really a blunder or not.

The rumour about the existence of old-world terminals in Higaraka Residence Ruin and that Akira knew where to find them died down after no one could find anything in that ruin. But the discovery of the old-world communication device rekindled that rumour.

Akira was glad that not that many Hunters believed in that rumour, otherwise, the ruin would be filled with more Hunters.

Although Akira himself did not know if it was really working or not, after he walked around the ruin to adjust the believability of that rumour, he received a call from Viola.

“Akira, do you have some time?”

“I’m working right now. If it’s nothing of emergency, can you put it for later?”

“It has something to do with your job as a Hunter. I know you have finished your last request and now you’re going back hunting for relics, right? And you’re in the Higaraka Residence Ruin right now, right?”

Akira never told anyone where he was going, but Viola already knew. He went silent for a bit guessing where she got that information from.

“…So, what is it?”

“If you’re going to gather more of those old-world information terminals, there’s no need to sell them bit by bit, you can just sell all of them to me. One of my connections is actually looking for them, you know?”

“I don’t know whether I would get any until I’m done searching.”

“But you did find some already, no?”

Although Viola said that casually, she also sounded that she was sure of what she said. Akira had no skill to identify whether she really knew or it was just a bluff.

“…Even if I did, I promised Katsuragi that I would bring them to him first, and I have no reason to change that.”

“Don’t worry, I already discussed it with Katsuragi.”

Akira paused again, Viola then continued without waiting for his reply.

“It seems that you’re putting some effort to falsify where you get those relics from, but if you sell them to me, you don’t need to do that anymore,

you know? If you're suspicious of me scheming something, don't worry, I'm not. It's true that I'm doing a lot of things behind the scene, but it's for the sake of keeping my promise to you and helping Sheryl's gang earn more money. So yep, I'm working hard to keep my promise to you, you know?"

The only thing that Akira could gather from those words was that Viola was not an honest girl. But if he did something to prevent her from keeping her promise to him, then it would be counterproductive. As he thought so, he finally made his decision.

"Alright, I'll visit Sheryl's base later."

"About that though, if it's possible, I want you to bring the relics yourself."

"Huh?"

"It's a request from my client, just think of it as showing my sincerity to my client. I won't force you but you'll be able to get more money from the relics if you do so. I'll send you the place and time after this. If it's impossible for you, just let me know and I'll do my best to adjust it."

"Are we going to check the relics there too?"

"No, I trust you regarding the quality of the relics and it doesn't seem the client is questioning my reliability either. Well, don't worry, even if the client checks it later and finds that it doesn't fit his expectation, I would be the one he would complain to. And don't worry, I'll also be the one paying the money to you. I'll pay you a suitable amount of money and I won't reduce it just because the client complains."

Akira checked the time and place sent to him and tilted his head. But considering that it was from Viola's connection and that the original relic was first sold in the exchange centre of the slum city, he thought that there was no problem with that time and place except that he did not have much leeway in terms of time.

"Alright, I'm good with the time and place. I'll be heading there now."

“Okay, thanks. Later then.”

Viola closed the call, Akira then noticed Alpha staring at him.

“Akira, it’s not like I’m telling you not to accept that offer, but are you really okay with it?”

“It would be a waste to just leave those relics inside my house anyway, so I’m okay with it as long as I can sell them at a good price safely. And if it causes me some trouble afterwards, I can use that against Viola next time. This time for sure, I’ll blow her head off.”

Alpha was not so sure what to think of Akira, who seemed to be weirdly apathetic about that matter. Although, it was one of the good things about him. After all, he once turned apathetic even toward Elena and Sara, who once affected his priority.

But the question here would now be whether Alpha herself could be apathetically treated by Akira one day. Although Alpha wanted to confirm it, she could not afford to test it. After all, the act of testing would be enough to increase the possibility, that was one thing that she knew for sure after being together with him for some time.

“What’s wrong?”

“Hm? It’s nothing. Let’s hurry up to the meeting place as not to miss your chance to blow Viola’s head off.”

“…It’s not like I took that offer so that I have an excuse to kill her, you know.”

Although Alpha was joking there, Akira was not completely sure that she was joking and smiled bitterly. He then turned off his camouflage and exited the ruin.

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Akira was waiting for Viola’s client inside one of the abandoned buildings in the Kuzusuhara ruin. He had already taken off his camouflage, although

he brought along both of his SSB multi-weapon rifles, both of them were pointed down. Akira himself was busy keeping his eyes on his information terminal while scanning his surroundings for enemies.

“But still, this is a rather suspicious place for making a deal. This would be super weird if it were a normal honest deal.”

“Well, I’m sure that Viola’s client would want to hide where he get the relics from, so it would be a good thing for you too.”

“True.”

Alpha smiled at Akira and Akira replied with a smile too.

“It’s time, they’re coming.”

A guy carefully peeked into the room from a door. He then noticed Akira and carefully entered the room.

“Viola’s contact, I presume?”

“Yes.”

“The relics?”

Akira used one of his SSB rifles and pointed to his rucksack lying not too far from him. The guy opened the rucksack to check its content and confirmed that the rucksack was filled with the aforementioned relic, the old-world information terminals.

“Is this everything?”

“Yeah, if you have anything to the complain, say that to Viola.”

The guy closed the rucksack.

“I heard that Viola will handle the payment. If you want to, you can go ahead and call Viola to confirm the transfer.”

“It’s fine.”

“Well then, we have a deal then. So, who would leave first?”

“…In that case, I’ll go first.”

“Sure, go ahead.”

The guy then shut up and stood there with a serious face while staring at Akira. Akira then carefully left the room, got to his bike that he parked near the building, and returned back to his vehicle that he parked a bit further away since he could not bring it through the small road.

Akira had a rather troubled look.

“What can I say… That one felt like a super secretive deal, the one that would warrant death to anyone unrelated who discovered about that deal.”

“Well, I expected that much from the fact that they set the meeting place to be inside a ruin. It’s the kind of place where it’s normal to find dead corpses, with its location being somewhere Hunters exploring the ruin would not normally stumble to. Although, it was not as secretive as one would expect if it was a secret deal.”

“…It’s not like someone would ambush me on my way back, right?”

“When that happens, you just need to kill them and make sure to kill Viola too afterwards.”

Alpha smiled, showing that there should be no problem at all. Akira smiled bitterly and rode his vehicle through the ruin.

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The guy who was left behind inside the building contacted his friend through a non-wave communication device. He also sent the picture of the inside of the rucksack through the camera installed in his prosthetic eye.

“I got the relics, but I don’t know about their quality. Should I return back and get them checked first?”

The person on the other side of the call replied with a serious voice.

“No, you don’t have to do that. It’ll leave a record if you get them checked inside the city. After all, these are old-world information terminals. Bring them to the next location. Once the preparation is done, call the Hunters and let them find the relics. They can then confirm the quality of the relics afterwards. It would be too much work to readjust the appraisal result afterwards if we appraise the relics beforehand.”

“Roger that. By the way, it seems that the Hunters assigned to find the relics are Yanagisawa’s men though, are you sure it will be fine? They might just snatch the relics, you know?”

“I’ve accepted that risk. Since they’re working under that man, even if they get suspicious of the relics, most of them would prefer not to dig too deep. The problem here would be whether they would be able to find the relics. Although it depends on their luck, they should be able to find the relics just fine if they are at least as good as common Hunters. But in the case they can’t, we will send our own Hunters. Alright then, go. Once you’re done placing the relics, stay around the area to keep your eyes on the Hunters from afar. If they don’t contact you after they discover the relics or if they’re trying to keep the relics for themselves, disguise yourself as a robber and kill them. We can send you reinforcements if you need.”

“Roger that, we’ll start the operation now.”

“Good luck.”

The guy closed the call and vanished. The powerful camouflage device was something that he received from his boss which indicated how careful the person he was on the call with just now, and how important this operation was.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 192, An invitation to explore the ruin

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Akira was driving his APC aimlessly through the wasteland. Although he accepted a monster-hunting request, it was not like he was expecting to earn money from it. If someone asked him what he was doing, he would answer that he was just taking a casual drive through the wasteland to get himself used to his new vehicle and equipment.

Although Akira returned back to hunting for relics, he was actually not sure which ruin to go to. There were too many things that happened in Kuzusuhara ruin lately, so he had no plans to go there anytime soon.

He did consider continuing to look for the other Lion Steel Corporation facilities from the information that he had extracted from the corporation's terminal last time, but there was a chance for him to find an old-world communication device like the rumoured Hunter. In the worst-case scenario, some corporations might send people to investigate the place which might be traced back to Akira, thus he decided not to do that.

It would be a waste of time doing nothing but pondering on this back at home, so Akira decided to go out to the wasteland. After all, he might get

some idea out there. But unfortunately, he still had no good idea even now. It showed just how haphazard Akira was.

Akira was driving while thinking where to go next. Alpha watched him from his side while sitting on the driver's assistant seat and smiled at him.

"What should I do now?"

"Akira, that would be the 15th time."

"Are you seriously counting?"

"Not really, it's just stored in my temporary record. It's just like how you remember what you did 10 seconds ago, it's not like you remember it because it has any special meaning to you, right?"

"Is that so?"

"Yup."

Akira did not seem to be fully convinced by that answer, but his focus immediately shifted to the monster signal that suddenly appeared on his radar. He stopped his APC and stepped off from the driver seat. He focused his information-gathering device to scan the direction of that monster.

The monster was a 6 legged beast, but instead of fur, its body was covered by reptile-like scales. An amalgamation of mechanical parts that looked like a machine gun was perching on top of its back.

"That's a huge monster. Is it the leftover after that day? It seems that nothing is special about it except its size."

"Its long-range weapon has already been destroyed. There are also leftovers from gunpowder on its body. Judging from the already dried liquid flowing out from its wounds, it might have run from a nearby battle."

"Wait, does that mean that I'll be snatching someone else's prey if I kill it? Well, it doesn't really matter, huh."

Larger sized monsters were assigned with a special reward, so there were many Hunters who were focused on hunting these big monsters. Akira remembered about that and hesitated, but he then decided to just kill it anyway. Even if there were Hunters who were chasing that monster after injuring it that far, it was not enough of a reason to just leave it alone when it was coming towards him. After all, being a Hunter was a dangerous job and no one could guarantee their survival.

Akira aimed his SSB rifle in his right hand at the monster. He then looked away and pulled the trigger, the first bullet ripped through the air and landed straight at the monster's head. The same thing also happened for the rest of the bullets that he shot.

Thanks to all the training and all the battles that he had gone through, as long as he properly aimed his rifle and there was nothing disrupting him, Akira could accurately shoot his target. So his training moved on to the next stage.

The view from the rifle's scope was displayed into a small window in his sight, Akira was to accurately aim at his target without directly looking at it. He had to accurately shoot his target using the signal from his information-gathering device. Up until now, he did that with the help of Alpha, but this time he was training to do that on his own.

The result until now was not that bad. So in short, Akira was able to do that on some occasions, this gave him a glimpse of hope that he would be able to accomplish things that he had originally thought to be impossible.

Alpha did once say to him that she would eventually have him do the things, which he could only do with her help, on his own.

If Alpha said so, it meant that it was possible for him to do it. But at the same time, Akira also thought that he was still very far away from that point. And then, although it was thanks to his new equipment, he was able to reach that point. Akira could feel that he had truly become stronger.

The monster finally slumped down after a barrage of bullets. Although the bullets were nothing but normal bullets with no extra firepower, which

could not deal fatal injury to the monster, it was compensated by Akira's accurate shooting. Akira himself smiled with satisfaction from the result which was rather rare for him.

"Didn't expect that I would be able to do that using normal bullets. Well, I did that at a rather close range and emptied one huge magazine though."

"You're paying for your ammo again now, so it's better to use normal bullets when you can. It's not like your high-rank Hunter discount can get you free bullets after all."

"You're absolutely right. Although I don't have to pay that much money thanks to the discount, I need to pay for my bullets again now. I really need to get used to this again."

Akira brought along with him a lot of reserve ammo thanks to the huge storage area in his APC. He did not shy away from filling his storage with the expensive extended magazine. He was going to use those magazines when he had to go into the inner part of the ruin where he could not bring his APC along with him. For the sake of his training as well, instead of using a bullet that could kill his opponent in one shot, Akira was using normal bullets with relatively low firepower.

As Akira was about to head back, he suddenly stopped. His information-gathering device detected a vehicle heading in his direction.

That vehicle was actually chasing the huge monster that it fought not too long ago in order to deliver the final killing blow. Reina was sitting on the driver's assistant seat next to Togami, who was driving the vehicle.

"Hurry up!! Otherwise, other Hunters might snatch that monster!!"

"It wasn't easy destroying its weapon!! It can't be helped, you know?!"

"As I thought, we should have shot its legs first."

"No! Destroying its weapon comes first! It is thanks to that we can drive straight at it safely like this!!"

“Sure, but it’s meaningless if it gets away from us!!”

“But you’re the one who said to prioritize safety first!!”

“And you said that it won’t get away and we would be able to kill it!!”

Reina and Togami were bickering, but it was not intense, it was more like a friendly exchange kind of bickering.

Kanae, who was sitting in the back seat, smiled teasingly at their exchange and said.

“You guys are as close as usual.”

Reina and Togami immediately paused for a bit, then looked at each other and stopped bickering. The last time that happened, they ended up giving the exact same reaction which proved that they were indeed close to each other.

“…Putting that aside, we need to hurry up.”

“I know, we’re almost there.”

Kanae smiled amusedly and thought that although they gave a different response this time, it still showed that they were close to each other.

In contrast to that, Shiori, who was also sitting in the back seat, looked rather displeased. From her point of view, Togami was a bit too rude toward Reina and it seemed that Reina was influenced by those words and replied in a rather unladylike manner.

“Milady, Togami-sama. I understand that both of you are in high tension from the battle and it’s important to maintain your calm, but it’s just as important to watch your words to make sure not to disrupt your focus toward the fight. As such, I don’t recommend raising your voice unnecessarily. In the worst-case scenario, it might affect the escort after all.”

“Ah, right, sorry.”

“Ah, yes, sorry.”

Reina and Togami awkwardly apologized. Then after an audible sigh from Shiori from behind, their faces turned slightly serious as they focused back on the job at hand.

They then checked the sensor in the vehicle for the monster that they were chasing. But from the information displayed in the sensor, they were able to immediately infer that another Hunter had already taken out that monster and they hung their head low.

“Aaah, we were too late. Sorry, I didn’t make it in time.”

“It can’t be helped. If we had prioritized more on killing that monster instead of our own safety, the result might have been worse than this. So let’s just take this positively.”

Although they were bickering that much just now, they were able to immediately accept that disappointing result without blaming each other. It showed that they really had grown as Hunters.

“…So, what do you want to do? It was originally our target and we did fight it first, so if we point that out, the other party might at least share the achievement.”

“You’re the leader for today, so I leave that to your decision. But if you want to talk with them, you do the negotiation too, okay?”

“Alright alright… Hmmm, I guess I’ll at least give it a try… Hm?”

Since Togami focused his vision on the Hunter in front of him, his information-gathering device automatically analyzed the data and identified the other Hunter, and it was a Hunter whom he knew. It was Akira.

Akira accepted Togami’s proposal without much negotiation at all, or more like, it was not even a negotiation. Reina’s party was surprised thanks to that.

“Uhhh, is that really okay with you?”

“Well, we’re thankful that you would do that, but…”

“Yeah, I don’t mind at all so you can do anything you want with that monster.”

“Uhhh, but…”

Akira was so cooperative this time that Reina and Togami did not know how to react to it. But when they were about to pursue the reason, Shiori noticed that Akira really did not care about that monster at all. So pursuing that subject would be a bad decision, thus she interjected before Reina and Togami could prolong the negotiation.

“Akira-sama. We will take your kind offer. Milady, Togami-sama, let’s not bother Akira-sama any further and process the kill registration.”

“Eh? Ah, alright, Akira, thank you.”

Reina and Togami split the administration job to register the kill and started processing the report. It was a special target with a special reward, so it needed a special report. Although it was not as troublesome as the report for bounty monster, it was still more work than the usual report.

They used their Hunter ID and Hunter code to register the contributor in the report. They then sent the information from their radar and information-gathering device as well as the information of the defeated monster by scanning it. If there was a need to divide the reward, they would also send that together with the report. After they sent the report to the Hunter Office, a staff member would check the data before sending a confirmation, and that would be the end of the reporting process.

Akira left that process to Togami and Reina. If the report emphasized more on Reina’s party’s contribution, both the achievement and the reward would mostly go to them. Akira left the process to them not because he trusted them, it was more because it was too much work for him.

Kanae stood next to Akira and smiled at him.

“Well well, wasn’t that so kind of you, Akira?”

“…It’s just that I have no plans to get into an endless argument with any of you.”

Considering the endless bickering that it might cause if they lost the chance of getting the special reward, and how they were in the middle of the lawless wasteland with Kanae and Shiori, both of whom couldn’t be taken lightly. Although they did not exchange words, their glances and awkwardly shared understanding of the situation were enough to convey their respective opinions.

“By the way, Akira, what is your Hunter Rank right now?”

“I have no obligation to answer that question.”

“Geez, it’s not like you’ll lose anything anyway, in exchange, I’ll tell you my rank, right now I am-”

“Not interested. I don’t care if you want to tell yours, I won’t tell mine.”

“That’s so mean. Well, I know your Hunter code, so I can just look at it on the Hunter Office site.”

Kanae pulled out her information terminal and opened the Hunter Office site and entered Akira’s Hunter code. She then seemed rather surprised as she browsed Akira’s information with an amused yet sly smile and sent meaningful glances at him from time to time.

“Ohhh, hmm, I see I see. You’re that kind of Hunter, huh. Hmmm.”

Akira did not show any reaction at all since he felt he would lose if he did and just ignored Kanae’s mumbling.

Once Togami and Reina were done with the report and returned back, Kanae smiled and said to everyone.

“Akira, it doesn’t seem like you’re busy, so how about coming together with us? Togami, you’re okay with that, right?”

Togami looked troubled by that sudden suggestion.

“Putting aside whether it’s a yes or no, I’m the leader today, you know? So don’t make offers on your own without my permission like that.”

“Well, there’s no need to be that wary. If Akira is going to join us, I’ll give you permission to hunt that automaton and I don’t mind helping out too.”

“Eh…? Really?!”

Togami suddenly seemed to take that suggestion positively. But this time, it was Shiori who looked troubled instead.

“Wait for a sec there, Kanae, what do you mean by that?“

“It’s fine, isn’t it? It must be some kind of fate that we meet here. I also agree that we can’t give Togami and Milady permission to fight that monster if we’re not allowed to help them. But if Akira is with them, I think it’s fine to give them that permission, you know?”

“Why do you think so?”

“To be honest, I’m getting tired of having to keep interjecting when Togami and Milady are having their time flirting with each other.”

“Why did you bring up Togami there?!”

Reina suddenly intervened, as her party understood what they were talking about and continued talking, Akira, who did not understand what they were talking about, sighed and said in a stern tone.

“Can you explain it to me in a way that I can understand? If you can’t, I’m leaving now.”

Everyone suddenly paused, Kanae then lightly pushed Togami’s back.

“Now then, Togami!! It’s time for negotiation!! Explain it to Akira in a way that would interest him and get an ok from him! If you can’t do that here, I won’t give you that permission!”

Togami still looked troubled as he was pushed in front of Akira, who then looked into his eyes. Togami tensed up and squeezed his brain to piece together what to say there.

Due to certain circumstances, Togami and Reina had been working together these past few days. They swapped leader positions every day as they explored ruins, fought monsters, and gathered experience together as Hunters.

When Reina was the leader, Shiori would join the team under her. But when Togami was the leader, she would join Kanae as a mere observer. Today, Togami was the leader, so today's main fighting power was only Togami and Reina.

They actually received certain information from their connection about an old-world automaton roaming a certain area inside the ruin. But Shiori and Kanae prohibited them from going to that ruin since they lacked fighting power.

Although it would not pose any problem if the four of them went together, for the sake of training for Togami and Reina, it was a relatively dangerous place when they did not include Kanae and Shiori. Shiori warned Reina and Togami, but then Kanae said that she might change that under a certain condition.

The information about the automaton was rather credible, it at least had better credibility than a mere rumour. And right now, the same information had already circulated among the Hunters. Togami properly explained to Akira that they had also considered the possibility of that information being wrong. That was when Kanae intervened.

"Togami, isn't it better if you hide that part or at least try to feign ignorance?"

"I have no plans to do that to a Hunter that I'm making a deal with."

"Ohh, you're more earnest than I thought."

“I’m normal, it’s just that your personality is too rotten.”

Akira seemed surprised there. He always thought that Kanae was the normal one. Because of that, Togami, who was earnestly trying to make an honest deal, looked rather upright from his point of view.

Both Togami and Reina had the same opinion about hunting the old-world automaton. After all, such a monster was highly valued, had Kanae and Shiori not stopped them, they would have gone hunting for that monster. But if Kanae changed her mind, Shiori, who was still against it would be in the minority.

Shiori then expressed her disagreement in a non-direct way.

“When Drankam allowed Togami-sama to join us, Shikarabe-sama told us to make you handle any trouble on your own. Thus, asking for Akira-sama’s help here would be against that order.”

“…I believe that getting other Hunter’s help with our own effort and handling the reward distribution on our own are well under the category of handling the situation with our own ability though. As training for us to be full-fledged Hunters, making decisions under our discretion is also a type of skill. If I’m mistaken, then Shikarabe’s evaluation of me would go down, but that will be all there is to it.”

Togami then looked at Akira again, he faced Akira properly as a negotiation opponent.

“You might see us as one party, but I’m asking you here as an individual. I want you to accompany us, and if there are any problems, I’ll take full responsibility.”

“…Let me confirm this first, this is just an invitation to explore a ruin together, right? It’s not like you want to pay me to come with you and it’s not like I will be placed under your command in the team, right? I have no idea how much fighting power you think I can provide, but I will only fight the way I want to. So I won’t try to suit your expectation, just so you know, I won’t take any complaint, okay?”

“I don’t mind. If we’re not strong enough, we can just retreat.”

“Then how are you going to share the reward?”

“Basically everyone will get the same share, any further adjustment can be discussed later. After all, if we really get to find the automaton, it’s not like we can break it down and divide it equally among us. Since each of us would sell the parts through different routes, I’m pretty sure that would cause some trouble later down the line. But if you have any complaint at that point, you can say that to me.”

Akira stopped asking and paused for a bit. Togami was waiting for Akira’s answer with bated breath.

“…Alright, I’ll come with you.”

“Oh, are you sure?”

“Yeah. It might be interesting to check a ruin that might have old-world stuff like that old-world automaton even if we don’t find anything in the end.”

Togami and Reina smiled happily, Kanae also seemed to be delighted by that outcome. But in contrast to that, Shiori frowned as if she was deep in thought.

Akira together with Reina’s party went to the rumoured ruin. In order to clear up the rest of the deal, Togami was sitting in the driver’s assistant seat in Akira’s vehicle.

In the middle of their discussion, Akira asked about the credibility of their information, to which Togami told Akira to keep it a secret before starting to explain it to him. After listening to his explanation, Akira frowned. There was a good chance the source of that information came from the old-world communication device discovered in the Higaraka Residence Ruin not too long ago.

“Alpha, are we going to the same ruin from that information that we got from Lion Steel’s information terminal?”

“It’s not.”

“Then it’s just a coincidence, huh?”

“Maybe not exactly. My bet is that some corporation paid Chrome in exchange for that information. Although Lion Steel mainly dealt with dispatching holographic workers, it might have had some kind of service to dispatch humanoid robots for people who wanted to get workers with real bodies.”

“So… Basically, that old-world communication device can be used by anyone, not only limited to people who can connect to the old-world domain like me, huh?”

“With the right connection device, anyone can connect to the old-world domain. Not to mention that there’s a good chance that the aforementioned corporation has someone who can connect to the old-world domain with them.”

“I see. Then it’s safe to assume that other people already know about the location of the old-world terminal, huh? Although I was the one who found the Yonozuka station ruin, I wonder if it’s going to be okay. I hope they won’t look for me.”

“It’s not like they have evidence that you were the one who found that ruin, so there’s a slim chance it would lead to you. It’s also not that rare for Hunters to find undiscovered ruin, so it should be fine.”

“I hope you’re right.”

Akira’s expression was changing from one to another as he was talking with Alpha through telepathy and Togami noticed that.

“What’s wrong?”

“…It’s nothing. I just thought that if that corporation was able to get such important information, wouldn’t it be better for them to search that ruin themselves before that information leaked out.”

Akira was actually just spouting something random to hide his telepathic conversation with Alpha, but after hearing that, Togamie smiled wryly and explained.

“I actually thought so too and said the same to Shikarabe. He then laughed at me and said that it’s our job as Hunters to read what might lie behind it.”

Akira seemed to be a bit surprised by that. So Togami then continued and told Akira what Shikarabe said to him.

If that information was really enough to lead them to the old-world automaton, it would be strange that information even reached Togami. After all, even if that information leaked out, the corporation would have done something to prevent such important information from spreading.

In reality, the corporation might have secured the automata and a member of that corporation tried to earn some extra money from selling that information.

Or maybe the corporation found out that the automaton was located in a dangerous place, so after calculating the risk and return, instead of sending a unit to retrieve it, they chose to get someone to find it and buy it later. They might have intentionally shared the information with certain Hunters who were more likely to sell that automaton to them.

Or maybe instead of the automaton itself, the corporation was more interested in other things located in that ruin like the relics or maybe the old-world facilities that could be found there. And in order to retrieve those relics or old-world facilities, they had to clear up the monsters in that ruin, so they intentionally spread that information to use the automaton as bait and make Hunters do the heavy lifting and remove the monsters for them.

It might even be that the information about the automaton itself was a complete lie and it was fabricated only to bait Hunters to go to that ruin in

order to reduce the overall difficulty of exploring that ruin. If that was the case, the informant is most likely aiming for something completely different in that ruin.

Shikarabe also told Togami many other guesses and speculations that he had. Togami then proceeded to convey all of that to Akira. Akira had the same expression as Togami just like when Shikarabe told him that.

“He then said that being a Hunter means to consider all of these possibilities, make a decision based on them, and find a way to earn a profit from it.”

Akira smiled bitterly. It was especially hurting for him since he had been wandering aimlessly these past few days. Although he understood what Shikarabe said was true, it still was not pleasant to hear.

Alpha who noticed that smiled amusedly at Akira.

“Akira, you should learn from him, you know?”

“You can go ahead and curse my bad luck for that one. If I consider the possibility of getting attacked by a swarm of monsters every time I go out in the wasteland, I would always end up in red no matter what. That would mean that it’s better if I don’t go out at all, you know?”

“…It’s so like you not being able to just laugh that off, isn’t it?”

Alpha’s smile turned bitter. Akira thought that his answer was actually effective to stop her from teasing him. Though he was just giving a random answer, he smiled, satisfied.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing. I just thought that if you consider all of those possibilities, doesn’t that mean it’s unlikely for that rumour to be true. And here I thought you didn’t want to trick other Hunters that you’re making a deal with.”

Akira casually said so with a light smile, so Togami also replied with a similar smile.

“What are you talking about? I did tell you that there’s a possibility it’s the wrong piece of information, right? I’m just telling you the rest of the information that I have, you know? Well, as long as we don’t have any problem with our fighting power, there’s no loss in at least checking it. That’s what I thought… Or more like, that’s what Shikarabe thought.”

“Does this have something to do with Shikarabe by any chance?”

“Well, not directly, but, well, it’s complicated. Although I’m working with Reina right now, it’s actually training for me as well as for Reina. It seems like Shiakarabe had a deal with Shiori or something… So, yeah, it’s complicated.”

Togami started talking about his conversation with Shikarabe while sounding rather depressed.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 193, Togami's Training

Index

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Not too long after the incident in Seranthal Building, Shikarbae was enjoying his drink in a pub with his friends, that was when Togami suddenly came with a sturdy-looking case.

Shikarabe frowned and looked obviously annoyed.

"This is not a place for a brat like you."

Although Shikaraba had a better opinion about Togami after that battle in Mihazono Ruin, it still did not change the fact that he did not exactly like him. The mix of the alcohol in his blood and the fact that Togami was interrupting his drinking made Shiakarabe's voice harsher than usual.

But Togami was not affected at all, he looked at Shikarabe with a serious face.

"I heard that you had called Akira to this place for negotiation."

"He's fine. It was a negotiation regarding a job as fellow Hunters in the first place, and being a Hunter has nothing to do with age."

“But I’m a Hunter too.”

Shikarabe snorted.

“You’re just a brat. Do you really think you’re a full-blown Hunter now after getting quite a lot of money during that request in Mihazono ruin? That only put you in the starting line, you know.”

But even so, Togami still had a sharp and serious look on his face, he did not show any reaction toward that mockery. Seeing that, Shikarabe sobered up a bit and lightly sighed.

“So, what is it? Just tell me what you have to say and leave. I’m in the middle of drinking here and I have no plans to share it with you.”

“I’m here with a request.”

“A request? I heard nothing from Drankam though…”

Shikarabe opened his information terminal to check again, and as he expected, there was no message regarding that subject.

“…In the first place, you can just call me instead of coming to me yourself, you know? Well, it doesn’t really matter right now. So, what is it?”

Togami gathered his resolve and said.

“It has nothing to do with Drankam. This is an individual request from me to you, and it’s not a formal request through the Hunter Office either.”

Togami placed the sturdy-looking case on top of the table and opened its contents to show it to Shikarabe, who still seemed slightly confused. As a Hunter, Shikarabe seemed mildly surprised, but the waitress girls were all stunned. The case was filled with currency notes.

“The reward is 30 million Aurum and it’s all paid upfront.”

Shikarabe’s gaze shifted to the case, then to Togami. He understood that Togami was being serious which made him hesitate.

“…Well, I’ll at least listen to what this request is about.”

“I want you to train me. At least until you would accept me as a Hunter, and even beyond that if it’s possible.”

Shikarabe did not expect that at all as he raised his eyebrows.

During that incident in the Seranthal building, Togami had a good look at his real strength, the fact that he was weak, but he accepted it as fact and wished to be stronger. The strength that he was seeking was not the strength from his equipment, but the real strength coming from himself that he could be proud of. After fumbling around for an answer to how he could reach that goal, he finally made a decision.

To be honest, Togami hated Shikarabe’s guts. But he could not deny that Shikarabe was a strong Hunter, strong enough to rightfully mock him. So his conclusion was to ask Shikarabe to train him.

Togami closed the case.

“Just tell me if you won’t do it, I’ll try asking someone else.”

Togami did not even try to soften his words, it showed just how serious he was. So Shikarabe’s face turned serious and he replied.

“This 30 million Aurum, it’s the whole reward from that request in Mihazono Ruin, right? You do know that I can just take the money and report it to the Hunter Office since I’m sure you took them out without their approval first, right?”

“Then it’s my fault for offering this to you.”

Togami did not make that offer without much thought, he understood well that he might be throwing the money that he got through hard work down the drain when he decided to make that offer. Shikarabe understood that very well from Togami’s answer as he started laughing. He then smiled sharply and looked at Togami with an amused face.

“Very well, but I won’t take that reward as you proposed.”

“Sorry but this is all I can offer, so I can’t pay you more than this.”

“No, it’s the opposite.”

Togami frowned and seemed confused, Shikarabe pulled the case and opened it. He then took a bundle and pushed the case back to Togami.

“I’ll take only 1 million Aurum first and train you correspondingly to that amount of money. As a Hunter, I always do all of my requests seriously. After all, it would hurt my reputation if I take 30 million Aurum and don’t show the result after training you.”

Togami frowned, but Shikarabe then casually continued.

“You might be questioning if I’m being serious here, if you want to show that you are serious and that you’re not making this offer because you’re drunk or something, then show it with your actions. Show your resolve and your talent, show it to me. That you’re worthy of being trained, make me take the rest of the reward, that is, if you can.”

Togami firmly received the case that was pushed back to him, it symbolized his lack of worth to be trained. But he swallowed that bitter pill and looked sharply at Shikarabe.

“…Alright, we have a deal then.”

“Indeed we do… Your training starts tomorrow. I’ll contact you, so just go back for today.”

Togami then left. Shikarabe kept his eyes on Togami as he left. Once Togami was out of his sight, he once again smiled amusedly and started enjoying his drink with his newly received 1 million Aurum.

“…He’s really changed, huh?”

Shikarabe mumbled, so no one could hear him.

Just like he said, Shikarabe did seriously train Togami. Thanks to that, Togami had to go through gruelling training.

Shooting until fainting to only be woken up and continue the training. The harder the training went, the longer it felt for Togami.

Not only did Shikarabe train him in practical skills, but he also taught Togami about common monsters around Kugamayama city, including the area where they usually roamed, their movement patterns, and their weak points regardless if they were biological or mechanical monsters. Then to top it off, Shikarabe also taught him an effective method to kill each of them.

Togami was also often brought to an area that was way too dangerous for his skill and was sent to fight to the death against those powerful monsters. He fought those monsters desperately and somehow managed to stay alive although he had no winning chance in the first place with his current equipment and skill.

The information of that battle was recorded and then he would look back at that battle record through a non-transparent goggle together with Shikarabe, of course, Shikarabe would be pointing out Togami's mistakes while doing so. The majority of his opinions were shot down, and when he asked for advice, Shikarabe would point out his wrong moves.

Both his practical and theoretical training was extremely hard. Even when he coughed out blood, he would swallow that blood together with medicines to make sure that his body would keep up. He had spent a lot of money on those medicines and he was burning through them pretty quickly, adding more salt to his injury.

Shikarabe kept telling Togami that he was welcome to stop anytime. So Togami had to squeeze his willpower to fight back against that temptation.

While Togami was going through that gruelling training from Shikarabe, Shikarabe suddenly told him to go with Reina. Although Togami was surprised by that, he then grouped up with Reina as he was told and went out to do Hunter work with her.

Since then, he started working with Reina, who more or less had the same fighting prowess as him. They sometimes barked orders to each other,

followed each other's instructions, complained about each other's actions, and gave advice to each other. They were working with each other while regularly swapping the leader's seat. Thanks to that, Togami did not have to go through Shikarabe's gruelling training anymore and he had the chance to compare his skill with Reina's.

Even during the time Togami was working with Reina, Shikarabe still tracked his battle record and gave his evaluation to Togami. Right when Shikaraba did not have much to criticize anymore, he gave Togami the information about that old-world automaton and told him to handle that information. He made sure to tell Togami to think carefully about the meaning of handling that information before making any decision.

This had happened after Shikarabe received 29 million Aurum from him.

Togami returned his focus toward Akira, who was driving the APC. After all the gruelling training, he was more or less able to accurately predict someone else's skill. But as expected, Akira was still as mysterious as usual.

[…One thing is for sure, he has gotten better equipment. But putting that aside, I feel like he's stronger than before… Wait, it's not like I know how strong he exactly was. It might be that he simply looks stronger now since I can more or less predict someone else's skills now, or is it because I simply can't accurately predict his skill? I really don't understand…]

Togami frowned, he was wondering if he was closer now or if the gap between him and Akira was bigger now. Akira noticed him and asked.

"What?"

"Uh, it's nothing. By the way, I'm the leader at the moment. I won't tell you to obey me or anything and I'm open to any complaints or critiques, but if it won't cause the team any trouble, it would be helpful if you would follow my commands."

"Sure."

Now that they were on the same team, they had to work together. So Akira thought that it was understandable that it would cause the team trouble if he acted too independently, so he agreed with Togami's opinion.

Togami frowned even more due to Akira's response. As the team leader, he had the duty to command Akira too. If he could lead Akira and make the exploration a success, he was sure that he would be able to accept himself and be confident that he had grown stronger.

Togami steeled his resolve to go beyond his past self.

As the team approached the ruin, they started to see greeneries around them. The ruin was practically blanketed in moss including its floor and the walls of the abandoned buildings inside it. They could see a semi-spherical body completely blanketed in green colour.

Togami then said.

"We're closing in on the Lida commercial district of the ruin. Reina, prepare the enhanced information-gathering device. If you can get it to receive the signal, search for the dome. Ah, is it better if I go back to that side?"

"It's fine either way, or is it that you can't scan the signal from there? I know that you don't have the equipment, but if Akira has one, it would be great if he helps out too."

"Akira, can you do that?"

"Even if you ask me so, it's not like I know what you're talking about without telling me first."

"Ahh, right, sorry, well…"

In order to clear up the lack of shared information there, Togami started explaining, including his own personal interpretation.

The Lida commercial district ruin was a huge gathering of old-world commercial facilities. The semi-spherical objects scattered there were the

commercial facilities. Although it looked like a ball of plants now, they were filled with products and items.

The information that Togami had hinted at an automaton warehouse located inside that ruin, but unfortunately, it did not share any more details than that. Or to be more precise, the rest of the information was indecipherable for the current human race.

Even common information about location, name, coordinate, and map from the old-world era was not something that was easily decipherable for the current era's technology. Not to mention, the whole ruin had already been claimed by nature, even if they knew the exact location, it might be unrecognizable now.

For the Hunters, they could search for such a location by intercepting old-world signals and check for the particular signature in their received signal. Augmented reality was not a rare thing in the old-world, because of that, as long as Hunters had the equipment to receive that signal, they would be able to see the augmented reality.

Even right now, the Lida commercial district was filled with augmented reality. Reina had the equipment to intercept and display such signals. Though all the green spherical objects looked the same with the naked eyes, they had different aspects through the augmented reality display.

Reina's equipment was high-class equipment that could receive all types of signals. It shined the most when it was used in the middle of the Lida commercial district, which was filled with signals. Togami wanted to go closer to that ruin to check the performance of his information-gathering device, but Shiori stopped him.

As Akira said that he did not have such a device, Togami transferred from Akira's APC back to Reina's vehicle. Alpha who was floating in front of Akira vanished and reappeared on the driver assistant's seat that was empty.

"I can, though? Are you sure you're okay saying that you can't?"

“I don’t have the equipment for that, so it would be weird to say that I can. Ah, and also, there’s no need to append that information into my view, they might get suspicious if I start reacting to things that I can see only with your support.”

“You have a point there, the only augmented reality that you need is me after all.”

Alpha smiled smugly, but Akira just ignored her.

“By the way, it seems that Reina is equipped with a pretty powerful device, won’t she be able to see you too?”

“At the moment, my signal is adjusted to be exclusive to you, so it’ll be fine. Although, back in Kuzusuhara ruin, I used to use the public wavelength so anyone with the right device would have been able to see me. Remember back then when you had to fight 2 Hunters in the Kuzusuhara ruin? One of them was able to see me, right?”

“Now that you mention it, you’re right… Is it a common device among Hunters? Just now, Togami casually asked me as if he assumed that I had such a device though, not to mention that there was someone who had that device before too.”

“He did not seem to be surprised when you said that you don’t, so I think it’s normal not to have it.”

“Hmm, makes sense.”

Akira did not seem to be fully convinced, but the old-world signal was not only found in Kuzusuhara ruin, even Kugamayama city was also enveloped in old-world signals. It was not rare for illegal businesses in Slum City to only show innocent signboards and advertise their illegal businesses with augmented reality on top of that signboard. It was convenient to be able to transfer information that could only be received by certain people.

If a Hunter came to the ruin with a device that could retrieve such signals, he or she would be able to see some kind of information board floating. It

might become a big hint that would lead to finding a new undiscovered ruin. Even if it was in an already explored ruin, it might help Hunters to find unexplored locations. It was a good method to find unexplored locations buried under the rubble.

But even so, it was not a common device among Hunters. After all, it was not an important piece of equipment compared to rifles, augmented suits, and information terminals or information-gathering devices.

Moreover, it was not like all ruins had augmented reality. And even if it had and it led to relics, other Hunters would have collected those relics first. The information broadcasted through that signal was based on the situation when that signal was first broadcasted, thanks to that, most of that information was misleading and outdated information.

In the worst-case scenario, using such a device might alert the monsters and other security measures. Or the information might flood the display and lower Hunter's visibility. Or display enemies that did not exist in the first place. It might even give the wrong map information and send the Hunters to their doom. Relying too much on such a device might actually be a dangerous thing.

But of course, if it was used correctly, it would boost their earnings. On the other hand, since it might alert more monsters, it would also increase the monster encounter rate, and in order to avoid that, better equipment was developed which of course, cost more money. Thus, the problem became either investing in rifles or in this device. Although not everyone in the eastern district fully understood this matter, the majority of Hunters agreed to invest more in rifles.

Akira and the others went deeper into Lida commercial district ruin. For Akira, the objects around him looked similar, the green colour that they shared did not help him at all. He drove through the green covered tall buildings while crushing the greenery blanketing the floor of the ruin.

Akira then noticed a long object that was covered in plants. After taking a closer look, he realized that it was an armoured bus that was covered with plants.

“It’s from someone who came here first, huh. Well, judging from this bus, it must be from quite a long time ago. So they might have come here because of a different reason than us.”

“That’s not necessarily true. I went and checked the inside of the bus and it doesn’t seem that it has been here for that long, so it might be recently used.”

“…But it’s completely covered by plants though?”

“It must be because the plants in this ruin grow abnormally fast. Although I’m sure it should be okay to leave your things in this place for a while, it would be bad to do that for a few days. The plants would grow on the body of the vehicle and around the wheels. When that happens, you won’t be able to move your vehicle anymore. The people who came in that bus might have planned to stay in this ruin for a few days to explore the ruin since it’s rather big.”

“But it means that we can’t stay for too long in this ruin, right? Why is there no information about that spreading around?”

“Not everyone shares information that they know. There might also be some people who believe that their vehicles will be fine. Well, this is nothing more than a guess though, but the owner of that bus might have died inside the ruin, giving plenty enough time for the ruin to claim that bus.”

“Honestly speaking, I hope it’s the latter. I don’t want to lose my APC just because I parked it in this ruin for a short time.”

“But still, it’s nothing strange for an old-world plant to be abnormally aggressive, isn’t it? Let’s take this positively and hope that it at least doesn’t come at you with weapons.“

Alpha smiled teasingly, but Akira only smiled wryly at her. After all, it would not be strange to encounter a walking plant with weapons which were not that rare in the eastern district, this kind of plant was commonly

recognized as a monster. The old-world technology never stopped messing up common sense in the eastern district even now.

When Akira and the others went deeper to explore the ruin, Reina noticed a signal that they were looking for. She then followed that signal to guide the rest of the team to the facility that they were looking for. When they arrived, they found a tall building with its wall covered in plants and there was a Hunter's vehicle parked not too far. They then parked their vehicles a bit further away from that vehicle and readied their equipment.

Akira lightly scanned the building.

"Reina, is this the place?"

"Probably. Although you might not be able to see it, well, I wouldn't be able to see it too without my special device, but there's a big signboard floating on top of this building that is even visible from afar. It says… The Dunmall Lida East B Hall… Probably."

"You're not sure?"

Reina pouted and replied curtly.

"The decoding software can't fully decode the information. Not to mention, a part of its display is also broken. But even so, I did my best to look for this place, so keep your complaints to yourself. It's not my fault even if it's not the right building."

"Sorry."

Akira apologized instantly and Reina immediately calmed down.

"Uhh, yes… So, it's just that please don't get angry if I got this wrong."

"Don't worry, I know well that we don't have detailed information about the building that we're looking for. Or more like, it's a normal occurrence during a ruin exploration, right?"

Akira replied casually, Reina sighed in relief after knowing that he was not offended.

[Fuuh, thank goodness. I was about to shout as if I was talking to Togami. I have to get my act together. It would be bad if I do that to Akira… Wait, no, it's not like I should not do that to Akira, I should not do that to anyone… It's just that when I did that to Togami, he would just shout back at me without getting angry, I guess that's why I got used to it, huh? I wonder if I'm too used to dealing with him.]

Shiori could somehow understand what was going on in Reina's mind.

"Milady."

"I know, I'll be more careful."

"There's a good chance that we might encounter other Hunters. In case these Hunters have found the automaton first, they would be more wary than usual. So please, be careful, Milady."

"Yes, I understand."

Reina smiled bitterly and took that advice to heart.

After they discussed their roles and formation, they then proceeded into the building. As Reina traced the building's green wall, she discovered that the original entrance to that building was completely blocked by plants. There were some traces that the Hunters who came there before them forced their way through it. So Akira used that opening to get into the building.

The inside of that building was basically a large open room, there were signs of various businesses visible from the entrance. While at the same time, it was also obvious from the entrance that plants had crept into the inner part of the building too. The floor was covered in grass as if it was a grass field.

Akira was surprised to see that as he mumbled.

"This isn't an inner garden or something, right?"

“The dirt on the floor must be from the monster’s corpses after being broken down by the plants. There are also pieces of the flooring mixed in after the roots penetrated through them.”

After listening to Alpha’s explanation, Akira scraped the floor that he was standing on and found the original building’s floor under it. Although the dirt layer was relatively shallow, it was still a substantial amount of dirt.

“So, there are ruins like this too, huh. I feel like the relics inside this ruin would have been turned into dirt too. I wonder if automaton can really survive in this situation.”

“That would depend on the container used to store them. So let’s put our hope in the power of the old-world containers.”

“Now that you mention it, it does sound that they will be just fine.”

Akira knew well just how abnormal old-world technology could be, so he regained some hope to get some old-world relics.

They moved together carefully, moving deeper. Reina used her device to look for where the automaton might be while the other two maintained a safe distance between them while watching their surroundings.

As Akira changed the setting of his information-gathering device to maximize its effectivity inside the building, he had some problems and frowned.

“…I just can’t get a good setting. The objects around me are blocking the information-gathering device. Though I’m pretty sure that it’s not like they are creating colourless mist… What’s going on here?”

“Should I do it?”

“Yes, please.”

Once Alpha readjusted the setting, the sensitivity was obviously better but not as good as Akira was expecting.

“…Is that it? It can work with my augmented suit now, but can’t it be a bit better?”

“I’m sure it’s because of the obstacles around you, they might have some kind of nanomachine that has the same effect as jamming smoke.”

“That would mean it would affect us as much as the monsters, huh. There are not that many open spaces, if we were to encounter some monsters, it’s most likely to be close combat. Putting that into consideration, even if this place is filled with old-world relics, I bet not many Hunters would come to this place.”

“That might be exactly why there is still some of that expensive old-world automaton left here.”

“That does make sense.”

And so, Akira’s expectation toward that rumour went up a little.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 194, False Happiness

Index

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As Togami and his party proceeded deeper into the building, they encountered a monster along a long hallway.

The monster was obviously a carnivorous monster, it had a thin fur that did nothing to hide its huge muscular body. Its muscles were bulging as if they were some kind of disease instead of a natural feature. It sent a gaze toward Akira and the others as if it was looking at its prey. It then started running with its huge body toward them, its huge legs propelled its body forward while throwing dirt all over the place.

Akira and Togami aimed their rifles toward the monster in front of them, but suddenly, Kanae slipped between them and charged right at that monster.

“It doesn’t seem to have any ranged weapon, so leave it to me. As I said before, I don’t mind helping you out during this ruin exploration.”

Kanae smiled full of confidence and glanced toward Akira and Togami, Togami lightly nodded to give his approval. Kanae confirmed that and went straight towards the monster with a big smile.

Although the dirt prevented them from having any good footing, Kanae equipment allowed her to firmly propel her body against the ground toward the direction that she wanted. So, she darted forth and quickly closed the distance to the monster. The force exerted on the floor would normally crack it open, but thanks to the forcefield technology that expanded a forcefield right at the moment of contact, all of the force were propagated toward momentum without wasting any energy.

Kanae and the monster went at each other with more or less the same speed, the distance between them zeroed in a blink. The monster opened its large mouth to take a bite at her. But Kanae was able to beat that monster by a step, she took a striking stance that focused more on power than speed as she released a powerful high-speed right punch at the monster's head.

Kanae stopped the monster's momentum with that one strike. Although that punch stopped the monster's head, its inertia caused the monster's body to continue forward, bending the monster's body into an unnatural shape. But even that could not push her back. As a matter of fact, the monster's feet left the ground as its forward momentum had nowhere to escape.

Kanae quickly pushed her fist, which was planted into the monster's head, down and slammed it on the ground. Blasting dirt all over the place.

Now that the monster had finally stopped moving, Kanae raised her right leg high and smiled at the monster before sending it down in a swift execution. The enhanced strength from her CQC specialized augmented suit delivered a powerful stomp that easily crushed the monster's head.

Now that it had lost its head, blood pooled under the monster's body, dyeing the ground dark red. Kanae then turned around and walked back to Togami and Akira.

"Akira, Togami, how was that?"

Togami was wide-eyed in amazement.

"…As expected of Kanae-san, that was amazing!"

It was obvious that single demonstration had reminded Togami of Kanae's real power.

Back then in the Seranthal building, Togami did watch Kanae in action, but the situation did not allow him to get a good look at her. Even after he started working with Reina, Kanae stayed around most of the time as Reina's bodyguard, so she did not participate during a fight and Togami had no chance to get another look at Kanae's power.

When Reina and Togami were fighting monsters in the middle of the wasteland, Kanae usually just stood by the side. Togami now understood that although she was there as Reina's bodyguard, she was allowed the choice of not bringing a rifle with her simply because she was this strong with her CQC skill.

Kanae was satisfied by Togami's reply, she then turned to Akira, waiting for his impression. Akira thought for a bit before opening his mouth.

"Hmmm, as I thought, wouldn't it be easier to just kill it with bullets?"

Kanae who was smiling satisfied earlier, immediately pouted.

"…Geez, Akira, don't you like, you know, have something else better to say in this situation."

Akira tilted his head as if he could not understand what she was talking about, so Kanae sighed and gave up expecting praise from him.

"Ah, right, it's fine. Now that I remember it, you're that kind of Hunter…"

"I don't understand what you mean by that, but one thing for sure, it's true that I have no plans to challenge monsters in close-quarter combat. I prefer my rifles."

"Yeah yeah, I know."

Seeing that exchange between Kanae and Akira, reminded Togami of back then during the bounty monster-hunting request when he tried to show off his skill to Akira by killing a monster. And just like this time, Akira showed

no interest in that at all. It reminded Togami that Akira was that kind of guy as he smiled wryly.

They then continued deeper into the ruin, they stopped when they arrived in a complex. Reina looked around and tried to get a hint on which direction to go from there.

Shiori, who was next to Reina, noticed a monster nearby.

“Milady, be careful.”

Shiori only said so before she approached a nearby hallway with her hand ready on her blade. The thumping sound of a monster was getting louder and louder from that hallway. The next moment, the same type of monster that Kanae had just defeated jumped out from the hallway.

But Shiori cut that monster down with a single stroke of her blade. When it jumped out from the hallway and momentarily stopped to change direction toward Akira and the others, she quickly drew her blade. Her blade cut through the firm muscles as if it was butter.

Shiori then silently sheathed her blade, while the monster behind her was cut horizontally into two and sprouted blood everywhere before its upper half and lower half fell down to the ground.

Seeing that masterful strike, Akira could not help but mumble.

“Hmm, yep, beautifully done.”

Shiori gracefully thanked for that compliment, but beside her, Kanae was pouting.

“…Akira, why would you do that when it’s Ane-san? Aren’t you a little too biased toward Ane-san?”

“Eh? But that was amazing, no?”

“That’s not the problem here. You told me that you would prefer your rifles before, didn’t you? So why the sudden change of heart?”

“When we’re in a rather closed space and have no choice but to fight the monsters in close range, using a rifle might be a bad choice. Not to mention, some monsters can survive even at close-range shooting, so if you’re confident you can kill it with your skill and blade, there’s no need to be fixated on using a rifle.”

“…No, this is so unfair!! I won’t accept this!!”

“Hell if I care, that’s my opinion, so I don’t care if you accept it or not.”

Reina glanced at Shiori who had returned beside her, she felt happy and proud that Akira complimented her. She could not help but think about what she could do to get Akira’s compliment too, but unfortunately, nothing came to mind.

Reina had learned CQC from both Kanae and Shiori, so she was actually pretty skilled. But she had no chance to show that off here. If she had the chance to fight a monster close by, that would be when that monster had defeated both Kanae and Shiori, and it would only happen under a precarious situation. Before that happened, Shiori and Kanae would have told her to retreat. And even if she said that she wanted to do it, she understood Shiori and Kanae would definitely not let her.

Unfortunately, Reina could not shake that off from her mind, Shiori who noticed that could not help but frown.

Not too long after that, they encountered another monster. Akira and Togami took shooting positions, but Shiori suddenly intervened.

“Milady, may I ask you to handle it?”

“Eh? Me?”

“Yes, I will also help out if things get bad, although Akira-sama is coming with us, this is actually still an exploration mission for Milady and Togami-sama. It’s true that Milady’s main duty in this exploration is searching for the correct route, but if that causes Milady to think that facing the monsters

is someone else's duty, it might cause a fatal blunder in the future. In order to keep that in mind, if Milady may."

"I don't mind, but…"

Reina glanced at Akira and Togami, who looked at each other and opened a way so as not to obstruct her aim. Reina thought that it was weird for Shiori to say that, but she then took aim with her rifle.

Reina's rifle was small enough to be used indoors and it had a good sniping capability. It could also be used for continuous shooting of powerful bullets and had a strong recoil. Its aim worked together with her information-gathering device to quickly focus on its target and to do fine-readjustment to increase accuracy when Reina pulled down the trigger. It even analyzed the distance between the rifle and the target and correctly identified when the user intentionally shifted the aim in order to readjust its support accordingly.

Reina looked at the monster's face that was filled with killing intent through the scope, but she was already used to it that it did not even affect her focus. She then calmly pulled the trigger.

The bullet went straight towards the monster's forehead, passed through its body, and came out on the other end of its body. That single shot completely stopped the monster as it fell down limp on the ground, there were 3 monsters and Reina killed all of them with one shot each, the last monster did not even have the leeway to react to its dead comrades.

After Reina did another check on the monsters, she finally sighed in relief and lowered her rifle.

Even when including the advanced features of her equipment, it was a good demonstration of her skill. Togami thought so as he glanced at Akira. Akira already shifted his focus on watching the surroundings as if he was not interested in that at all. That was when Shiori asked him.

"Akira-sama, how was that sniping?"

“Eh? Well, good.”

“…Is it alright for me to interpret that as you having nothing to criticize about that sniping?”

Akira was confused as to why Shiori emphasized that point, but he still took some time first before giving his honest answer.

“Well, let’s see, one shot each from that range, so there’s no bullet wasted and she didn’t give any chance for the monsters to even react, isn’t that good enough? If I want to be strict about it, maybe it’ll be about the price of that strong bullet and the cost-performance ratio of the equipment. But since we are here looking for an old-world automaton, I’m pretty sure the money that we may get if we can find that automaton is enough to justify that expense. But if I have to assume the worst, then all of us here will have to fight the monsters in close combat just like Kanae.“

“Akira, why did you bring my name there?”

“It’s because I have no plans to follow your line of thinking.”

Akira and Kanae started bickering, Shiori just ignored them and turned to Reina.

“Milady, that was well done, Akira-sama also thinks so.”

“…Yes. Thank you.”

Although Reina felt happy that she got complimented and her skill recognized, at the same time, she also felt slightly embarrassed realizing that Shiori needed to ask in order to encourage Akira to compliment her.

They then continued searching the building, although they had enough information to point where the automaton might be, the only hint as to which way to go came from Reina’s old-world signal analyzer device. Furthermore, the software could not fully decode the signal which only added to the difficulty of the exploration.

They encountered some monsters a few times, but the five of them could dispatch those monsters without any issue. Togami and Reina felt that those battles could not be considered easy as they thought of the difficulty to explore the ruin if it were only the two of them. There were more monsters and those monsters were stronger than usual. The inner construction of the building was like a maze and the same plants that enveloped the wall and the floor threw off their sense of direction even further. If they got lost inside that building, it would be difficult to return back alive.

For the record, the information-gathering device that they were using automatically created a map based on the scan result and actively tracked their position, but relying on that map would be far too dangerous. After all, there was even a specialist for that kind of thing. That was just how difficult it was to rely on an active map. Moreover, some buildings changed their contours regularly. They had to move forward taking account of this kind of thing while trusting the information that they had at hand.

Akira spotted some dead monsters, other Hunters must have killed them. Grasses already grew out of those dead bodies, enveloping them as if they were being used as their nutrition. Seeing that, he could not help but frown.

“…The grass here is pretty aggressive. They won’t even wait until the bodies turn into dirt… I hope my vehicle outside is fine.”

Togami replied to that mumble.

“I heard that it’s fine if it’s only for one day. I also heard that if you leave it for more than a day, the plants would entangle the wheels. A high power vehicle might be able to tear through them. As long as the plants don’t damage the inside, we can clear the plants outside with augmented suit, so it should be fine.”

“True, but we spotted some vehicles that were abandoned.”

“I bet those are from the Hunters who thought that it should be fine to leave their vehicles a bit longer outside, and when they realized it, it’s already too late for them and cleaning the plants was too much work for them. We’ll not be staying here for a day, so it should be alright.”

“…You have a point there.”

Akira felt a slight fear for the aggressive plants instead of carnivorous monsters. But Togami had a point there, so he decided to just push his worry aside for now.

Not too long afterwards, they arrived in a huge open space. In the middle of that room, there was a circular stage with a transparent glass column on top of it as if it was to showcase a product. Reina and Togami immediately ran towards it and looked closely at the young girl that seemed to be encased inside that glass column.

“Reina!! Is this it?! Is this the old-world automaton?! It looks completely unscathed too! Oooh! We did it!!”

“The location is slightly different compared to the original information, but it doesn’t really matter as long as we get to find it!! According to the old-world signal receiver, it’s the newest model of the latest series from Mitsuha Jiruba Tech! And the price… It’s 18 million Chrome!?”

“18 million Chrome!? J-Just how much is that in Aurum!?”

“Wait, at the moment, the exchange rate for Chrome is… No, wait, that is Chrome Aurum, so the real Chrom is…”

Reina and Togami were so flustered, they were ecstatic that they found the old-world automaton. Not too long after them, Akira, Shiori, and Kanae approached the glass case too.

“Shiori! Kanae! Akira! We found it!! We did it! Now, we just need to bring this back… Akira?”

Akira did not seem that happy as he gazed sharply toward the glass case, Reina who noticed that finally calmed down.

“Uhh, what’s wrong?”

Akira did not answer her, he just took a step forward and looked closer into the glass case and then mumbled.

“…Hologram?”

Reina and Togame went pale. Shiori took out a device used to check a hologram display and shone it toward the glass case.

“Milady, unfortunately, Akira-sama is correct, this is a 3D display. The object inside it is nothing but an image.”

Even when Shiori shone a light through the transparent glass, the automaton inside it did not cast a shadow on the floor. It was one particular characteristic of a hologram. After Reina and Togami confirmed it themselves, they drooped and looked completely disappointed.

“Akira, you did well noticing that.”

“I had an experience discovering a mountain of expensive relics inside a glass case just to find out that it was nothing but a hologram poster. Since then, I made sure to question what I see every time I see something similar.”

“You really learn from your mistakes, and with this, Milady was able to get a good experience too.”

Kanae lightly laughed and glanced at Reina and Togami, both of whom were practically swept down from the peak of their celebration. It seemed that it would still take some time until they recovered from it.

Since they had gone pretty deep and it was an open space easy to defend, Akira, Shiori, and Kanae decided to take a rest and allow Reina and Togami to regain their spirit too.

Reina and Togami were sitting on a bench with their heads on the table. That bench was a portable bench that Shiori prepared; when it was packed up, it could turn into a surprisingly small object. There were two instant rations on top of that table, Shiori also prepared that for them.

“… I should’ve expected that… There’s no way it’s that easy to find that old-world automaton… Reina, did you get any information mentioning

that?”

“…I don’t know… And it’s not my fault.”

“…I know, it’s not your fault.”

Although Reina and Togami had regained enough spirit to exchange words, they still did not have enough power to lift their heads off the table.

While not too far from them, Akira was looking intently at the automaton image with full of interest. The automaton girl image had a very good build, demonstrating the advanced technology used to make that automaton. Its expression was tranquil and peaceful as if it was sleeping or praying. Its feet were not touching the ground as it was floating in the air. It was simply mesmerizing.

Beside Akira, Alpha pouted and complained.

“Akira, if you want a beautiful girl to look at, it’s better if you look at me, you know?”

“That’s not it.”

“Then why are you looking at that doll so closely?”

Shiori suddenly came next to Akira and lightly threw a question to him.

“Akira-sama, it seems that you’ve been looking at this image pretty closely, by chance, are you interested in this kind of thing?”

“Well, it’s not like I’m not interested at all, but to be more precise, I’m interested in what kind of place old-world era was where selling this kind of thing was the norm.”

“It depends on the indicators that you use, but automata are commonly sold even in this era. If Akira-sama goes to one of the shops selling automata, you might be able to get a better image of what kind of place the old-world was.”

“Ohh, you’re right, now that you mention, we also have automata in this era too… Though I don’t think that they will let me even come close to that kind of shop.”

Akira said so and smiled bitterly in self-mockery. A part of him was clearly still stuck back in the slum city. He still believed that people would not allow him to get into such a high-class shop.

Shiori found it weird that Akira looked down on himself that much as she gently said to him.

“If I’m not mistaken, you should be able to find such a shop in the Kugama building. I believe that the shops there would not turn Akira-sama away.”

“…Is that so? By the way, how much does an automaton usually cost?”

“To be honest, I am not really knowledgeable regarding this matter, but 1 billion Aurum should be enough to get you a pretty good housekeeping automaton.”

Akira felt a bit troubled when Shiori said that number so casually.

“Uhh… So then, what kind of thing can an automaton do?”

“Cooking or cleaning room, basically to do housekeeping.”

“Oof, that’s pretty expensive just for that.”

“Automaton is a luxury item after all.”

It showed an obvious economic gap between those who were surprised by that price and those who were not.

“To be honest, just because it’s a luxury item, I don’t think it justifies the price you put on it though. If it’s that expensive, isn’t it cheaper if you pay someone to do that instead?”

“Indeed. If it’s something that a human can do, it’s cheaper to do that. There are many things in this world where this is true, this includes being a

Hunter.”

“…Well, now that you mention it, that’s true.”

Akira smiled wryly. If sending automata to explore a ruin was cheap, the Corporate Government would have done that. So in short, the only reason why people had Hunter jobs was because sending automata was economically not feasible.

Sending Hunters with cheap lives into the ruin allowed the City Management to gain profit even when half of those Hunters did not return back alive. That was the truth of being a Hunter.

Shiori once again noticed that Akira was smiling in self-mockery, so she then continued.

“As Hunters get better, the occasion where they get injured or even lose their lives in the wasteland decreases. As such, it allows Hunters to increase their gains while suppressing their expenses in order to gain a profit. Many Hunters decide to continue working as Hunters because of that. I believe Akira-sama is already one of those Hunters.”

If alive, they would bring a big profit, if antagonized, they would cause a lot of damages. Although there were many different points of view to judge this matter, whether it was better or for the worse, people put an expensive tag on the lives of those kinds of Hunters. Even if everything in this world could be replaced in one form or another, if it was difficult to get a replacement, their existence would be forgiven.

Akira’s origin as one of the worthless kids in the back alley of the slum city was slowly being replaced to that of an important Hunter.

Akira blushed and looked away.

“…Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Shiori replied with her usual smile.

After that, Shiori and Akira continued to talk about a lot of stuff. He could sometimes feel the high-class lifestyle from Shiori's answer and he listened with full of interest about that matter.

"I did say that an automaton might cost about 1 billion Aurum, but that would be an automaton with a personality. An automaton without personality would be more like a robot with cheap AI and this kind of automaton is basically cheaper. But of course, this kind of automaton is less advanced than the former."

"Uhh, but both automata with personality and without personality are using AI, right? So what's so different between them?"

"Although this would be a vague explanation since there's no clear distinction between them, basically, the non-personality AIs are more like robots. When we mention AI, there are those AIs made for chess or other board games, right? It's like using the learning ability of that kind of AI for cooking, cleaning, or fighting. This kind of AI would not be able to hold a proper conversation with people. If you would like an AI which can do that, then it's better to get the automaton with personality. When someone mentions automaton, most people refer to the automaton with personality, which is closer to a human instead of a robot, and this kind of automaton is quite advanced so it is fairly expensive."

"Hmm, so it's not that simple, huh… So, which one is it when we talk about old-world automata?"

"Almost all discovered old-world automata are automata with personality. Not to mention, they are advanced AI since they were made with old-world technology… Although, because of that, they tend to cause trouble."

When Akira was about to ask what Shiori meant when she said that, Reina, who had her head on the table, suddenly raised it. Akira and Shiori noticed that and stopped their talk. Reina then drunk the rest of the drink on the table in one go and shouted.

"Alright!! That's it!! Togami!! Stop wallowing and get up! Let's continue the search!!"

Togami slowly pushed his body up.

“Just to let you know, I was only waiting for you to get up.“

“Then you could have told me that. You’re the leader this time, right?“

“I feel like the more I tell you to get up, the longer you would sulk, that’s why I didn’t do that.”

“…Just get up already and let’s go!”

“Roger that.”

Togami lightly smiled and held back from shouting a reply to Reina as he rose up from his seat. Akira and Shiori glanced at each other with a smile and walked towards Reina and Togami.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 195, First Come, First Served

Index

Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

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Not too long after they resumed the exploration, Togami's party arrived in a place that had a completely different feel compared to the other areas. That place was untouched by the plants, the border between the floor and the wall of that room was pure white to the point that it was hard to spot.

Togami signalled the whole party to stop.

"Reina, did you get any readings?"

"It says… Unauthorized personnel are not allowed to go through here? I don't see any more augmented reality sign boards past this place. It might be adjusted so that normal people can't see them."

"Can you check using the staff setting?"

"I can try, but it might be pointless. Even if I can, it might take too much time."

"…If there's a warehouse only for staff, it should be somewhere ahead. I think we're closer to our target now, let's go."

They went into that hallway carefully. Walking through it threw off their sense of time, but for them, it was a common thing inside a ruin.

If this place was kept clean because of the cleaning drones, then it would not be strange for them to encounter security drones too. Those kinds of drones were harder to defeat than common monsters. Getting hypnotized by that ambience of the old-world tended to be fatal even for Hunters with augmented suits.

As they moved carefully deeper into the hallway, they spotted another Hunter standing guard near the entrance of a room. That Hunter also noticed Togami's party and immediately shouted at them.

"Stop there! If you get any closer, we'll see that as an act of hostility!! Where are you from? If you're from the Yuzumo Industry, show your ID!!"

Togami showed that he had no wish to fight as he answered.

"We're Hunters from Drankam!! We're here looking for relics and got here by pure chance!!"

The Hunter lowered his guard for a bit and contacted his other Hunter friends. Not too long after that, another Hunter came out from the room to confirm what was going on. That Hunter was the leader of the team, Kurosawa.

Kurosawa saw Togami and raised his eyebrows.

"You…"

"He said that they are Hunters from Drankam. What should we do? Should we send them back?"

"No need to do that. There's no need to pick a fight with Drankam. I'll talk with them myself to warn them not to do anything suspicious… After all, I bet half of it is a lie when he said that they got here by chance."

"So basically they too, huh. I'll leave them to you then."

“Yeah.”

Kurosawa already knew about Togami from Shikarabe when they went to drink together. He remembered that conversation well since it was rare for Shikarabe, who hated young Hunters, to highly praise Togami.

He thought that it was weird to meet him here. But nonetheless, he invited Togami and his party in.

Kurosawa listened to what Togami had to say not too far from the entrance of that room.

“I’m Kurosawa, the leader of the Hunters here.”

“I’m Togami, the leader of this team.”

“I see, well now, let’s have a talk between team leaders. I let you guys in since it would be bad to cause a scene in the hallway, but once we’re done here, it would be great if you can keep away from this place. It’s for the sake to avoid any unnecessary fights, you see.”

Togami slightly curled his lips.

“We’re here looking for relics. I can understand that you don’t want us to come to this room, but I don’t see any reason why we need to keep out from this place.”

“Oh, but there’s a reason for that.”

“Really?”

Togami’s expression that only showed reluctance and slight irritation immediately showed hostility. As the leader of the team, it was not like Togami could just accept that demand. His gaze toward Kurosawa turned sharp.

But even so, Kurosawa stayed calm.

“You’re here looking for the old-world automaton, right? Although I don’t know if the source of your information is the same as ours, if it was, then you’re out of luck. We have secured the warehouse first, it’s just up ahead.”

“Eeeh!?”

Togami’s face turned completely flabbergasted. Reina was the same too.

“A-are you being serious here?”

“Yeah, the small room ahead houses cases of 4 old-world automata. Although we only checked them by looking through the case, it seems that they’re in pretty good shape too. I thought that rumour was not that credible, but it turned out that we hit the jackpot.”

“F-four of them…”

Reina once again hung her head down, and this time, it was deeper than last. Kurosawa smiled bitterly, he understood how that felt.

“We’re in the middle of securing this place while waiting for the specialist dispatched by Yuzumo Industry. Having other Hunters roaming around this place might lure in some monsters, not to mention that those are definitely priceless relics. So it might invite a misunderstanding if you stick around. We might begin to think that you guys are waiting for a chance to snatch them away from us. It’s just that dangerous having other Hunters around. That’s why I want you to keep away from this place after this, I hope that you can understand.”

Kurosawa had a light smile when he was talking up until now, but then his gaze suddenly turned sharp.

“…But if you insist on staying around after this, we’ll see that as an act of hostility. So we will handle that situation accordingly.”

Togami and Reina were hanging their heads low, but with that light intimidation from Kurosawa, they immediately frowned and flinched back.

Shiori and Kanae slightly shifted their stances to protect Reina. As for Akira, he did not show any reaction to that at all.

Kurosawa returned back to his usual light smile.

“Well, to be honest, I have no plans to get into trouble with Drankam if it can be helped. And I know that Drankam is aiming to be a well-reputed Hunter gang from the City Management’s point of view, right? It’s better for both of us to stay away from unnecessary fighting. So, what do you think? To be honest, I want to solve this peacefully if possible…”

Now that Kurosawa said that he had no wish to fight them and he even brought up Drankam too, Togami had no other choice but to comply.

“…Alright, but I want to talk this out with my team first as to what to do next. So it would be helpful if you allow us to stay here for a bit longer.”

“Very well. But 10 minutes. That’s all the time you have. It would be troublesome if you use this place as a resting place after all. Meanwhile, feel free to come to me if you have anything you want to ask. I’ll answer your questions if it’s something that I can answer.”

Kurosawa then left Togami’s party alone.

Togami heaved a huge sigh as if to expel everything inside his heart. Although he said that he wanted to stay in that room for a bit longer to talk with his party about what to do next, to be honest, he just wanted to get some time to gather his motivation again. Others understood that, so they were just standing there in silence.

When they had spent 5 minutes of their precious 10 minutes, Reina shook her head as if to shake off the disappointment on her face. She then pulled herself together and gathered her resolve.

“…Well, I was already prepared for something like this to happen, let’s just move on. Togami, what’s the plan now?”

Togami was a bit surprised to see that Reina recovered sooner than he had expected but he was being careful not to show that on his face.

“Hmmm, let’s forget about the automaton and look for common relics instead. Or we can pin our hope on finding other old-world automata in here by searching other buildings too. Or, if it isn’t worth looking for common relics here, we can just head back home. Basically, these are the options available to us. So, we either continue the exploration or stop here. To be honest, I’m not sure myself. So, what do you guys think?”

Togami thought that it would be dangerous to continue the exploration when everyone was in such a bad mood, that was why he asked for others’ opinions there.

Shiori took the initiative and answered first.

“Very well, I put one vote to return back. It’s important to be able to adapt to unforeseen circumstances, but you should know when to give up as well. We should not explore when our minds are focused on something else, and that is also true we get too greedy. In order to get readjust our equipment, I believe that it would be better to return back.”

Kanae realized that Shiori was trying to turn the discussion into a vote, she then smiled and said.

“In that case, I put one vote on continuing the exploration. It’s just that, I haven’t gotten my fill of fights yet, so I don’t really mind either way whether you want to look for old-world automata or normal relics.”

Shiori sent an intense glare at Kanae, but Kanae looked back, as though saying ‘well, you did turn it to a discussion that has to be voted on’.

“Either way is fine for me. If there’s a stalemate, I put a vote on the same one as Togami, he’s the leader at the moment after all and I did promise him that I’ll follow him for now.”

“…I agree with Akira too. You’re the leader today, so it’s up to you.”

Akira thought that he was an outsider in this case, that was why he let Togami decide. But for Reina, she was taking advantage of Togami since she could not decide.

Togami hummed, with Akira and Reina leaving it to him, he could not share the responsibility in case he made a wrong decision there. As the leader of the team, he had to make a decision before he ran out of time, and he did not have much time left.

Some of the Hunters in that room looked a bit surprised at Togami's party.

"…A maid? There are maids here. Those guys are Hunters from Drankam, right? So that rumour about the gang paying maids for the Hunters is true, huh?"

"I bet those maids are only using an augmented suit that looks like a maid uniform. It must be based on an augmented suit that they found in some ruin. After all, old-world clothes are really durable for some reason."

"Hmmm, but they do have an aura of being real maids though? Although… only one of them does."

"Even if they're real maids, do you really think that they will come to ruin with maid uniforms? Of course not. Well, it's not like I know a real maid though, so I can't really say that for sure."

"Now that you mention it, that's kinda true."

"I heard that there are companies offering combat-trained maids as bodyguards for the people in the inner walls, you know. So they might have something to do with that type of corporation. They might even have originally come from there. Either they only get their equipment from those kinds of corporations, or they are originally from there and retired to be Hunters, either way, I don't think they are real maids."

The Hunter who was listening to his friend talking rather fervently about that subject found it to be unexpected.

“…You know quite a lot for someone who said that he doesn’t know about this kind of stuff.”

“Well, it’s fine, isn’t it? By the way, talking about Drankam, I heard the young Hunters from that gang did pretty well in the Kuzusuhara ruin recently..”

He flinched a bit and was obviously trying to change his subject.

Most of them were only talking about Kanae and Shiori just to kill time. But that was not the case for one person, a Hunter by the name of Rodin, who was staring pretty intently at Shiori.

Shiori, who was standing next to Reina, left a deep impression on Rodin. Her young, strong but beautiful appearance. She stood straight, which demonstrated her loyalty, her calm demeanour radiated her devotion and faithfulness, it fully emphasized her relation with Reina as a master and a servant. That scene strongly pulled Rodin’s interest.

As he was no longer able to hold back his feelings, he went to Kurosawa to find a way to satisfy his desire.

But Kurosawa quickly shot down his plea.

“No.”

“Come on, it’ll be fine.”

“No, it won’t be fine. As I told you before, we won’t try to look around the ruins anymore in order to focus our manpower to secure this place. If we send people out there, we will have fewer people posted here. There’s no guarantee that they would leave this place obediently after this. In the first place, even if we get to find more automata, we don’t have enough men to secure those automata too.”

“We can split the team in half and…”

“That’s an idiotic idea, so, no. If we chase for two rabbits, we will lose them both. With those guys here, it means that there’s a good chance other

Hunters have heard about this place too. And they already know that we did find four automata here, so their view of that rumour would have already changed into it being worthwhile information. With this, other Hunters might change their method to get the automata from searching to robbing. Hence, we need all the people we have to stop those fools and we can't afford to split the team."

"…But like, weren't you the one who told them that we did find the old-world automata here?"

"We're doing all we can to secure this place, so it doesn't take much to infer that we did find the automata here."

Rodin did try to wiggle his way but all of his ideas were rejected by Kurosawa.

"Cut this out already, it's a no. That's final."

In order to cut that discussion there, Kurosawa said so with a stronger tone. Rodin reeled back and stopped arguing any further.

Kurosawa then offered some words of consolation to him.

"We already got ourselves 4 automate, isn't that good enough already? Just give it up. Getting too greedy will only get yourself killed, you know. It's important to know when to stop. In the first place, we still need to make sure to get the specialist to check them, bring them back safely, and finally exchange them for money before we can call this expedition a success. We can't afford to relax until we get that money. So just focus on completing this first, okay?"

"…But I won't get one for myself if I do that."

Rodin mumbled with a low voice that Kurosawa did not catch, but it was obvious that he still had not completely given up on his idea. Kurosawa understood that very well as he sighed.

Although Kurosawa was commanding the team, he actually was not a full-fledged member of their team, he was just paid to lead the team.

Kurosawa was often chosen to lead a team of Hunters since he was able to perform well during an exploration of a difficult ruin and he tended to prioritize safety when he was forced into a difficult battle. Although some Hunters ridiculed him as being a coward, he was the perfect person to rely on if the goal was to increase the team's survivability, or when it was important to prioritize safety over profit, or when there was a need to explore a ruin with limited information.

And since he was often paid to lead other teams, he often had to deal with Hunters who would not listen to him. Kurosawa thought that was the case with Rodin too, so he dealt with him accordingly.

"Well, I'm just a temporary commander paid to lead the team. If you say that you won't listen to me, you can go ahead and do anything you want. But, if anything bad happens, I won't take any responsibility. That is even if you get yourself or someone else killed because of your action, so I won't accept any pay cuts if that happens. Tell others too if anyone has the same opinion as you."

Kurosawa immediately shifted his focus somewhere else after he said that. Rodin, who was left behind, made a grim face. Kurosawa then thought.

[…Even those who paid me a ton to lead them would sometimes decide not to listen to me… Relics always tempt people, I need to be careful myself.]

Kurosawa lightly chuckled and shook that thought from his mind as he started thinking about what to do, assuming that Rodin would not survive.

Togami's party decided to leave the ruin. But it would not be in a straight path, instead, they would visit some buildings to search for relics on their way out of the ruin. As the leader of the team, Togami decided to take their time leaving the ruin while salvaging some relics on their way out.

As they returned back to the plant-covered part of the ruin, they once again followed Reina's device to decide which way to go. After all, it would be

difficult to find relics in a place where everything was covered by greenery, that was why they decided to rely on Reina.

They took their time checking places that might have some relics left while making sure not to veer off too far from the route to the exit. In the middle of that, Reina picked a room mostly based on her guess. They left the guard duty to Shiori and Kanae as they started looking for relics in that room.

Inside that room, Akira spotted a shelf covered in plants. He used the power of his augmented suit to tear the plants and opened the shelf. He found that it was filled with tube-like objects. He grabbed one and took a closer look, it seemed that the tube-like object had something solid inside its semi-transparent body. But Akira still could not identify what that tube object was.

“What is this? Alpha, do you know what this is?”

“That’s an old-world clothing article.”

“So it’s a dress? This thing?”

Akira raised his eyebrows and tilted his head, Reina noticed that.

“Akira, did you find something?”

“Yeah, but I’m not sure what this thing is, do you know what this is?”

Reina caught the tube-like object and took a closer look at it. The moment she realized what that was, she flinched a bit and her face turned slightly red.

“I-I think it’s some kind of old-world clothing… J-Just maybe though. Something is inside in a pressurized state.”

“Is that so? That’s pretty amazing, how could you tell?”

“W-well, I can see that information from the old-world augmented reality view. Although you can’t see it, I can see it.”

“Ohhhh, what kind of cloth is this?”

Although Akira was asking casually simply out of curiosity, that made Reina flustered even more. She then replied as if she was avoiding that subject.

“…Maybe like… Some cloth with an old-world design?”

“Well, it’s an old-world relic after all, so that’s given, isn’t it? But well, it’s true that some designs of this era try to imitate it. Is this that thing that people call the old-world style design?”

“Y-yes.”

“In that case, they might fetch us some money. I’ll bring them back to the city.”

Akira started stuffing his rucksack with the relics that he just found. Togami who noticed that approached him.

“Akira, did you find something?”

“Some old-world clothing articles.”

Togami took one of the tube-like objects and frowned.

“…This thing here?”

“Yeah, Reina said so based on the information from the augmented reality… Wait, but that doesn’t mean all of these tubes are old-world clothes, huh?”

Akira then extended the relic in his hand toward Reina, Togami followed suit.

Reina took the relics and checked the inside, her face then stiffened and slightly blushed as she said.

“…Some of them are not.”

“Is that so? What are the other things mixed here?”

“…Accessories, toy, or some kind of tool.”

Akira found Reina’s expression rather strange. So he made his own guess.

“Judging from your expression, it doesn’t seem to be that valuable, huh? Well, in that case, can you check all of them and separate the cheap relics?”

Reina seemed to hesitate and was at loss for a few seconds before she said firmly.

“No, let’s bring all of them back. It’s not like I’m that confident in my skill to appraise relics anyway. We can just throw them away if we don’t have enough space in case we find a more expensive-looking relic later. Yep, we’re Hunters after all, so we need to be able to at least make this kind of decision, right?”

Togami nodded deeply.

“You have a point there. Alright then, let’s take all of them together.”

“…Me too? Ah, right, let’s do that.”

Reina suddenly started helping Akira and Togami gather the relics as if she just had a change of mind. Of course, Akira did not just ignore that.

Unlike Akira and Togami, Reina was able to identify the content of the relics they were gathering there, and she did not expect to encounter some of them in such a place…

[Alright. Now, I’m also a Hunter, right? I’m not in a position to be nitpicky about the relics that I find. If I start doing that, I won’t be able to stay as a Hunter. Yes, that’s right, that’s the right attitude for a Hunter… I should be happy that we found some expensive-looking relics!!]

Reina said so to herself as she picked up the pace to finish gathering the relics there before Akira or Togami asked any more questions.

[…I chose this shop by pure coincidence, but I didn’t expect it to be that kind of shop.]

The inside of the shop was already claimed by plants, the walls were already in a very bad shape from the withering, while the information from the augmented reality was also badly fragmented. It showed nothing of the state of the shop back when it was still open.

Even if Reina told Akira and Togami this, it would not clear their suspicion. She at least knew that much.

Reina gave her best to keep her calm as she continued stuffing the relics. Fortunately, no one noticed her acting rather awkwardly there.

Silavin: My my Reina, how are you so knowledgeable about such things?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 196, Handle With Care

Index

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Editor: Silavin

Proofreader: p4553r

Rodin activating an old-world automaton was the result of multiple coincidences layered on top of each other, basically, it was his bad luck.

The chance that his friends got that information about the old-world automata.

The chance that they decided to pay Kurosawa to lead the exploration when they were preparing it, thanks to that, they were able to safely reach their destination, although hiring Kurosawa was not cheap at all.

After they found the four automata, Kurosawa decided that it was impossible to secure more automata in case something bad happened. So to prevent any complications, he told his men to stop searching the area anymore.

Thanks to the agreement between Kurosawa and Togami's party, Akira and the others left the area right after. Thus preventing them from finding any nearby automata if there were still some left.

Kurosawa did tell Rodin to at least convey his warning to the rest of Rodin's friends, but Rodin deliberately left that out from his explanation to

his friends. Therefore, the rest of the team thought that Kurosawa gave Rodin permission to go. Thus they did not say anything as they allowed Rodin to go alone to search around the area.

That was the reason why Rodin was able to reach this place. After he left the room, he randomly looked around and came to this area by pure chance where he found more old-world automata.

The automaton was inside a container in the middle of a relatively small room. From the outside, the container looked like a stasis pod. The upper part of the lid was made of a transparent material, which let Rodin clearly see what was inside that container. The automaton had female features and was in a deep sleep inside that container.

Rodin was mesmerized by that automaton and smiled widely.

Normally, he would immediately return back to let the rest of the team know. That was the best decision considering the risk and reward ratio. But his smile turned wry, he seemed to be seriously at a loss as he just stood there.

There were many relics in the ruin that were dangerous to mess with. When Hunters found them, they tended to keep their fingers away from them and asked specialists to handle them. Of course, there were many types of old-world relics that were treated this way as it was common-sense among the Hunters, and the old-world automata were one of them, as a matter of fact, Kurosawa did exactly that.

But there was one big con with that process. The credit of finding the relics would usually not go to the Hunter, but to the specialists whose services were expensive. Most of the time, these specialists got their cut right after those relics were sold to some companies through their connection. Of course, it was not a problem at all for the Hunters who only wanted to exchange those relics for money, but it was a big problem for Hunters who wanted to get their hands on those relics themselves.

When a Hunter called for a specialist, normally, the deal was for the Hunter to accept that the specialist would take the relics and sell them. It was still

possible for the Hunters to buy those relics themselves, but considering that there were large corporations vying for the same relic, normally these Hunters had no winning chance at all.

After taking his time calculating his options, Rodin extended his hand to the terminal of the container. Although he did not understand what the buttons were for, he started pushing the buttons randomly while checking the reactions. He carefully pushed the buttons and flicked the switches on the touch screen panel, only to find that there was barely any reaction at all, but that did not stop him.

Rodin always had a zealous admiration toward maid automata and it was doubly true for old-world automata. Thanks to their mechanical bodies, they retained their young and beautiful appearance, and as a machine, they had an unwavering “loyalty” towards their master. It was as if those automata were made just to fulfil a certain desire, an oxymoronic existence made into reality through old-world technology. When Rodin knew about them, he knew well that it was impossible for him to get these automata, but even so, he still could not help but yearn for them.

Although it was a very rare case, there were reports when a Hunter somehow activated an old-world automaton and that automaton registered that Hunter as its master by pure luck.

Those super lucky Hunters would then explore the ruins with their advanced automata, thanks to which, they were able to quickly reach success and became first-rate Hunters. This kind of rumour was not that rare in the eastern district. Although they were rumours, parts of them must be true. After all, even a short investigation could easily uncover those Hunters.

One thing that Rodin did not take note of was that those rumours also said testing luck by doing something similar was not recommended at all.

But even so, he still decided to test his luck here, and the reason for that was because he saw Shiori not too long ago. The figure of Shiori standing straight next to Reina was like his idealistic admiration brought to life and it

aroused his desire. Even more so when the automaton in front of him was already in a maid uniform.

Although he understood that it was a dangerous bid, he could not push aside the chance of getting an old-world automaton. Considering this chance might not come to him ever again, Rodin could not stop himself from testing his luck there.

That was when all the luck that was piling up on one another was extended even more. The container in front of Rodin that was wrapped in a dark cloud suddenly made a hissing sound before opening up.

As Rodin unconsciously took a few steps backwards, the lid of the container was fully opened and the maid automaton inside it finally opened its eyes. It then pulled itself out from the container and got itself standing on the floor.

The rush of anxiety and happiness that filled Rodin's mind caused him to make an awkward face as he said to that automaton.

"H-Hey!"

The automaton turned toward Rodin with its face devoid of emotions.

Then at the next moment, the automaton formed its hand into a chop and thrust it toward Rodin, impaling him right through his chest. Its white-glove covered hand easily pierced his augmented suit and planted itself into his chest, up to its wrist.

Rodin raised his eyebrows in surprise, he then smiled wryly and made a sad face. Before all of his luck could bring him a good end, he had reached a bad end first. He lamented as he fell down to the ground.

"…Yep, saw that coming…."

The pain and reality pulled him back from his thoughts, he was back into his Hunter mode. While enduring the fatal wound on his chest, he reached for his rifle and shot at the automaton.

It was common sense among the Hunters in the eastern district that when they found an old-world automaton, they would have to call for a specialist and definitely keep their hands off the automaton. The real reason for this wisdom was simply because there were already so many Hunters who ended up dead after not obeying that warning. When a Hunter activated an old-world automaton inside the ruin, most often than not, the automaton immediately turned hostile and killed the Hunter who activated it.

From the ruin's point of view, these Hunters were like armed robbers. Although different automata had different A.I, most of them had the same view as the ruin regarding the Hunters. Thus in order to retain their value, they would try to kill or repel these armed robbers.

After that, some automata with better A.I would gather information from what they could see and react according to the emergency protocol based on the old-world standard. And thanks to their advanced technology, most of these rampaging old-world automata were designated as bounty monsters.

Some people believed that this was fake information spread by huge corporations in order to protect their profits. Because of this, there were people who thought that the chance of the old-world automata recognizing the person who activated them as their master was actually higher than what was rumoured, not to mention that there were super lucky Hunters who served as evidence to this doubt too. This was the reason why there would always be Hunters who were willing to test their luck.

Rodin was one of these Hunters. Unfortunately, he did not win his bet and now, others would have to pay for it too.

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As Togami's party was riding their vehicles through the wasteland heading out from the ruin, Akira thought of something and threw a question to Togami.

"By the way, you did say that you're planning to not spend a night in this ruin, right? Will that still be true if we had found an old-world automaton?

It seemed that those guys were standing inside that room for quite some time, you know? I bet they've been there for more than a day."

"To be honest, even if we had found an old-world automaton, I thought that we would find it in broken condition, which in that case, we can just carry it back normally."

"Is that so? Then if we had arrived in that room first, we would have had to give up carrying the automaton back, huh?"

"That's not exactly true."

"So, you had another plan?"

"Although I don't really like it, I had 2 plans. The first is to contact Drankam and ask for their help. In that case, we would have to prepare to guide them to the old-world automaton. I'm pretty sure we will have a smaller cut if we do that though, that's why I don't really like it. The other plan is to break the automaton to make sure that it won't go on a rampage before carrying it back. If we can skillfully break it, we might be able to restore it later, but of course, this would lower the selling price too. To be honest, it feels stupid to be breaking the relic that you have worked for, that's why I don't like this idea either."

In reality, back then when they found the holographic image of the old-world automaton, if there was a sign that it might cause any danger, Kanae and Shiori would have stepped in and destroyed it without even consulting first.

"…Although I will only decide based on the situation when we find the automaton, it's basically one of those two plans."

Togami frowned as he imagined being thrown into that situation, he then noticed Akira was looking surprised at him.

"…Anything wrong?"

"Nothing. I just thought that you really have put some thoughts into this."

“Of course. Exploring ruins is basically gambling with my life after all. It’s only given that I would at least consider such a situation, even you do that too, right?”

Akira awkwardly looked away and made eye contact with Alpha who was smiling teasingly at him, so he looked away from her too.

Seeing that, Togami was rather surprised to know that Akira actually did not think that far. He was not sure if he should be exasperated by that or if he should be impressed that Akira had survived this far with such a naive way of thinking.

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Back to Kurosawa’s team.

The Hunter who was guarding the entrance to the room where they were standing by, spotted Rodin returning back.

“You’re back, huh. Good grief, just what the heck were you think-”

He was about to welcome Rodin back with a light joke, but his face immediately changed when he saw Rodin’s condition. Rodin was stumbling and dragging his legs in a hurry through the hallway, leaving a trail of blood behind him.

“We’re under attack!! Rodin is injured!! Asking for reinforcement!!”

After he shouted that into the room, he immediately ran to help Rodin. The moment he lent his shoulder to Rodin, who looked like he was about to fall anytime, Rodin immediately fainted which might be because he thought he was finally saved.

Kurosawa and the other Hunters darted out of the room. Kurosawa then told them to watch the direction where Rodin came from as they approached him. After they met up, Kurosawa immediately put down a foldable turret and expanded it. As the gun rapidly unfolded, it turned into a huge gun with a barrel that was longer than the width of the hallway.

Kurosawa quickly scanned and checked Rodin's condition. The life-support medicine, the augmented suit that helped him to move even when he was seriously injured, and his skill to explore the ruin alone allowed him to return back alive.

"We can still save him!! Get him inside and treat his injury, quickly!!"

The guy who was carrying Rodin hurriedly went back into the room. Kurosawa and the other Hunters slowly retreated back to the room too while still keeping their eyes on the hallway.

[…One injury in his chest, but what caused that injury? It's not from a bullet… Horn then? But I don't think we have spotted monsters with horns around this area.]

Kurosawa's thought was cut short as he saw an old-world automaton coming at him. Since it had a maid uniform and a figure of a young lady, he thought that it was Kanae or Shiori at first, but he immediately understood that was not the case.

"…An active automaton?! Is that blood on its glove?! So it was from that automaton?!"

Kurosawa immediately held down the trigger. The explosion filled the hallway with smoke. He had preset the warhead to explode after a fixed time such that it exploded right before hitting the automaton.

When the smoke cleared up, the automaton was no longer present, not even the leftover wreckage could be seen there. Kurosawa frowned and clicked his tongue.

[…It got away, huh. I bet that one did not damage it that much. Seems like the warhead exploded before it should, did it break the explosion timer? Or maybe it hacked into the warhead timer? As expected of an old-world automaton… it's really advanced…]

Kurosawa was relieved that it at least left them alone for now, so he folded his gun and continued to ponder.

[Maybe I should’ve used rifle mode instead of cannon mode…]

Kurosawa lamented his bad decision as he retreated back into the room.

He glanced at Rodin who was being treated on the floor.

“How is he?”

“He’ll live. But he won’t be up anytime soon.”

“Can you at least get him to wake up? I have questions.”

“That’s not gonna happen. It’s a pretty bad injury, so he’s basically under the stasis mode to make sure he survives. If we wake him up, it might cause his situation to worsen, he might even die.”

“…I see.”

Now Kurosawa had to think of another approach. The other Hunters who saw him at a loss got curious.

“Is there something you need to check as soon as possible?”

“Yeah, I want to know what happened when he got attacked. This is just my guess, but I bet he got attacked by an old-world automaton. I saw an automaton back there, unfortunately, it got away though.”

Murmur propagated through the other Hunters.

“So, there are more old-world automata?”

“Don’t tell me Rodin activated an old-world automaton.”

“We don’t know for sure yet, it might be just a humanoid robot, right?”

Kurosawa raised his hand to calm the other Hunters down.

“That’s what I want to ask this guy. In the worst-case scenario, if he really has woken up an old-world automaton, we might need to break the old-

world automata that we have right now.”

“B-break them?”

“There are 3 possibilities. The first one is that this guy found an old-world automaton and activated it, this would be a relatively better scenario though. The problem is if the automaton activated on its own even without him trying to do that. It would have been better if it was because there was an activation button that only comes up when you get close enough, but it would be really bad if it activates on its own in order to remove any unauthorized intruders. This would mean that the other 4 automata that we’re guarding might activate anytime soon. After all, that one automaton might have been activated simply because the system is still in the middle of its activation sequence. A full-fledged old-world automaton is often designated as a bounty monster, and we have four of them down here with us. If we have to fight them, it would be super tragic.”

The Hunters looked at each other worriedly. Although they understood that the four automata with them were a huge liability, they did not want to break the expensive relics that they had found if it could be helped.

“B-but it’s just your guess, right? It’s not like we have to break them just because we considered the worst-case scenario that is unlikely to happen, right? The specialists that we’ve called will get here soon enough. We just need to wait until they get here…”

Kurosawa threw a death glare to the Hunter who was voicing out that naive thought and immediately shut him up.

“I’m sure some of you think that I can do something crazy since I was only paid to lead the team, so I have no business regarding the profit that you can get from this exploration and whatnot. I won’t deny it, that’s why you decide what to do. As I thought, the amount of money in line here is just too huge, so it’s not for an outsider like me to decide.”

“W-wait, it’s your job as the leader to make that decision, right?!”

“If it’s up to me, then we’ll break the automata. Are you okay with that?”

After Kurosawa warned the Hunters as such, they staggered back and went silent.

“I’ll go watch the hallway, so you guys can take your time to make your decision. There are too many things that we don’t know at the moment. The situation might get worse the longer we delay, or it might not. We might be able to wait for the specialists to get here first, or we might be already well too late now. Just remember that when you take your time discussing.”

Kurosawa then turned around and headed to the entrance as the other Hunters behind him started debating.

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As Togami’s team headed outside the ruin while searching for relics that they could gather on their way out, Akira suddenly threw a question to Alpha.

“The thing that we talked with Shiori about, it seems that I can get an automaton for 1 billion Aurum, do you think it’s a good idea to get one when I have some leeway?”

Alpha frowned.

“I don’t think that it’s necessary. but… Do you want one?”

“No, I just thought that you can control my augmented suit and my vehicle, right? So you might be able to do the same for the automaton too.”

“But I don’t want to.”

That short answer was filled with rejection.

“I-I see.”

Akira was shocked since that short answer was more of Alpha’s revulsion towards his suggestion than it being impossible. There was a brief awkward pause, Akira then tried to change the subject.

“It was just a simple thought, nothing more. It’s not like I’m planning to force you to do it. It just reminded me of Tsubaki back then when she was using an old-world automaton.”

“That was an old-world automaton and it was a rather good one too. Not to mention, it limited its control to only simple movements while making sure not to affect the independent AI inside that automaton. So the situation is not the same here.”

“Ohhh, I see.”

“Yep.”

Akira remembered back then when Alpha got angry the moment he referred to her as an alarm clock. But this time, it was obvious that she was angrier than back then.

“I know that you had no bad intention when you suggested that, but never bring this subject up again, okay?”

“Alright.”

Alpha then smiled to let Akira know that her mood was back to normal. But Akira’s frown still stayed for some time.

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It had been quite some time since Kurosawa let the other Hunters discuss what to do from there. Since nothing big had happened, the Hunters regained their calm and their opinion started to lean toward waiting for the specialists to arrive.

Even Kurosawa himself started to think that he might have been a bit too paranoid.

[It has been quite a while since we repelled that automaton and it did not return back to attack us, not even once. Does it really plan to leave us alone? The reading from the containers inside the room also does not show anything suspicious, it doesn’t seem that they’ll wake up anytime soon… I

might have gotten a bit too paranoid back then. Well, either way, we know for sure that there's an active old-world automaton roaming outside and that in itself is already dangerous enough. But as long as it doesn't come for us, there's no need to deal with it. I'll at least let the specialists know and leave the rest to them.]

Kurosawa did think for a bit about where the automaton was at now and what it was doing at the moment. His sight slightly shifted up while he was still looking toward the small room that he and his team was securing.

That was when he spotted the automaton in a maid uniform standing on the other side of the ceiling on top of that small room. It was sending some data into the automata inside that small room. But it was not a simple activation signal, the automaton was hacking through the container.

Of course, the container was secured with old-world technology, normally, it would have been impossible to try to break through it. But the old-world automaton used its own communication device to access the ruin's signal receiver to imitate it using its advanced computation ability. It was only a matter of time before it broke through the security system.

The automata inside the small room opened their eyes. They then broke through the container using brute force by banging and kicking the lid away.

Kurosawa immediately noticed the signal coming from the information-gathering device planted inside the small room and sprung into action.

"The automata are activating!! Get to your battle station!!"

Although the automata were activated, they might not be hostile. But Kurosawa did not hesitate to throw away that possibility and changed his rifle into machine-gun mode. The moment it finished changing mode, he immediately started blasting. The bullet storms ripped through the door and straight into the room, he could hear the sound of bullets ricocheting from inside the room.

Even if the door opened, Kurosawa would not stop shooting in order to prevent the automata from leaving that room as well as to buy some time for the other Hunters to finish their preparations. The other Hunters present there were not amateurs, although they were surprised by that sudden change of events, they immediately got to their positions. Kurosawa just had to buy them a few seconds.

But those few seconds were hard to get when Kurosawa had to face 4 old-world automata.

The door was blasted away followed by containers flying out from inside the room straight in Kurosawa's direction. Kurosawa understood that it was impossible to shoot them down, so he leapt aside to avoid them.

In the middle of that, he saw two automata hiding behind those containers to block the bullet storm…

Kurosawa was about to shift his focus to those two automata that were aiming for the exit, but the remaining two automata left inside the room immediately started to move and took his attention so he had no other choice than to let the other two pass by. One of the two automata threw the container at Kurosawa while the other one used the broken container as a blunt weapon against the other Hunters.

Kurosawa jumped aside one more time to evade the incoming container, he aimed at the automaton attacking the Hunter to try to stop it. But that created a small opening in which the other two just blasted past Kurosawa and escaped the room.

[Dammit, they got away!! No, I should just think that it's a good thing we have fewer automata to face now! I can just think of the reason why they broke their forces up later! At the moment, I just need to focus on the enemies in front of us right now.]

Before the Hunters were able to regroup, the automaton swung the large container toward the Hunters. The Hunters who could not get away in time were smashed and crashed into the wall, it even left a dent on the durable container.

The Hunters who were finally ready started shooting one of the automata, but it was closing in too quickly. It was clearly aiming for close combat. In that situation, the Hunters might shoot their friends by mistake.

The Hunters had to pay for their mistakes by destroying the automata that should have been an expensive relic. Now that those automata had turned into dangerous enemies, they could not afford to stop fighting in order to survive.

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Even with its long skirt that extended down its ankles, the old-world maid automaton blazed through the ruin. Its long hairs that were present more as decoration than for anything else, would have normally tangled up here and there, but it agilely moved around while making sure that would not happen. It was all possible thanks to its advanced computation ability as an old-world automaton.

Shortly after, the other two automata that had gotten away from Kurosawa appeared behind that automaton. The other two automata just followed that single automaton as if they were under its control.

While they were still running through the ruin, the maid automaton grabbed something from under its skirt and threw it at the other two automata. The other two automata naturally received them.

The three automata then moved through the ruin as if they were a single team.

Silavin: WTF did my boy Akira do to you two? Why are you chasing after him? Is it the toys!? Is that it?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 197, Resistance

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Togami's team finally finished gathering relics and left the building. Reina stretched out and said in a content tone.

"Although we didn't get to find any old-world automata, I think we did get a good amount of worthwhile relics this time."

They at least got some relics to bring back home, they were even able to fill up a couple of rucksacks with those relics.

Togami himself was relieved after finally getting out from the ruin. But after he saw Reina and noticed her putting down her guard, he then said to her, which also served as a warning to himself.

"We're basically still in the middle of ruin exploration. So don't relax until we reach the city. Being a full-fledged Hunter also means that we have to make sure we can exchange the relics for money afterwards."

"I know, we're technically still inside the ruin after all. Ah, right, Akira. Can we ask you to carry some of the relics…? Compared to your APC our vehicle is a little small after all."

“Sure.”

“Thank you.”

With this, Reina shifted the relics which were a little embarrassing to carry around as she smiled happily, but of course, she hid that smile inside his heart.

They then quickly finished their preparation and got on their respective vehicles.

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Kurosawa’s team somehow managed to destroy the remaining two old-world automata.

Although they got some of their team members injured, they quickly regrouped and focused their firepower to corner the automata to the point that their bullets literally formed a wall. They riddled the automata with bullets and pushed it to the wall in order to seal its movement.

While the other Hunters suppressed the automata’s movements, Kurosawa swapped his rifle to cannon mode. With the automata unable to move, it was quite easy to shoot a warhead that could even destroy a tank at them. The old-world automata were indeed smart and durable, but Kurosawa had prepared that warhead expecting a fight against old-world automata. And as expected, the automata could not stand a direct hit from that warhead and finally stopped moving.

Although they were destroyed, they still retained their original shape. From outside, they still looked like they could move. So just to be safe, Kurosawa shot them one more time before finally calming down.

“Damn it, I ended up having to use that expensive warhead. How’s the damage?”

“Four are badly wounded. I’m not sure if the automata did that intentionally to make others cover for them or simply because it only aimed to make

them unable to fight and there was no need to kill them.”

“It doesn’t matter, get them treated now. Don’t let them die if we can save them. Check how much ammo you have. If some of you are low on ammo, get those who still have a lot of ammo left to share theirs.”

The Hunters immediately sprung into action. Kurosawa returned back to the entrance of the room to stand-watch, and one of the Hunters then approached him.

“What’s wrong? Is there a problem?”

“…Not really.”

“I can stand-watch here by myself, go get some rest with the others if you have nothing to do.”

But Kurosawa noticed that the guy still stood there looking at him, so he frowned and asked.

“What is it?”

“…Well, ahh… Sorry, we should have listened to you and destroyed the automata.”

“Don’t mention it. Choosing not to destroy them at that time was not the wrong decision. It’s just that you lost the coin toss, that was all there was to it.”

“But still…”

The guy still looked troubled, so Kurosawa looked at him with a serious face and said to him firmly.

“This is not the time to worry about that. We know that there are at least three active old-world automata out there. We have to somehow manage to hold out by ourselves until the specialists get here. So get a hold of yourself.”

That guy was obviously surprised.

“We were able to repel the one that attacked Rodin and the other two ran away, right?”

“Don’t forget they might come here again bringing more friends with them. Also, they might have just gone to get their weapons. We’re still not safe yet, if you want to lament your decision, at least wait until the specialists get here and we know for sure that we’re saved. Tell this to the others too.”

The guy’s apologetic face was replaced with a serious look. Kurosawa then sighed and mumbled.

“…Though, to be honest, they should be here anytime soon. I wonder if they got into some trouble or something? Good grief, just give me a break already…”

Kurosawa made sure not to let his team hear that since it might affect their morale. He also made sure not to let his team see him making a difficult face in such a precarious situation.

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Togami’s team went from the centre of the Lida commercial district, through the gaps and valleys between the plant-covered buildings, and eventually reached the outskirts of the ruin where plants started to thin out.

Akira was driving with a rather content face.

“Well, I did get some good loot for today although I went out to the wasteland with no particular plan.”

Alpha who was sitting on the driver’s assistant seat smiled at him. There was a slight trace of exasperation in her smile.

“Akira, just to make sure that you understand, this doesn’t mean it is a good idea to keep exploring without a plan, you know?”

“I know, but it’s fine to celebrate for a bit since it has been quite a while since the last time I managed to do a successful ruin exploration, right? Ah, we’re still basically not done until we reached the city, huh.”

Akira was not that serious when he said that. But Alpha suddenly made a serious face, Akira who saw that immediately tensed up.

“Akira, be careful.”

“I know, there’s no need to make that face…”

“No, we have a company chasing from behind.”

Seeing Alpha making a serious face when she said that, Akira immediately switched to battle mode.

“Monsters?”

“It depends on what defines a monster. We have 2 humanoid signals, they’re closing in on us at a high speed, it’s as if they’re either cyborgs or using augmented suits. But if they are Hunters and they want to talk with us, they should at least send us something beforehand through close-range communication. So I don’t think they’re friendly.”

Akira left the wheel and let Alpha take control of the vehicle as he went to the back of the APC. He then took his equipment and checked their condition before opening the back door of the APC and sent a call to Reina.

As Akira opened the door, Reina’s vehicle came into his view. Reina who was driving the vehicle and Togami who was sitting next to her looked confusedly at him. Akira’s gaze shifted from Reina’s vehicle to behind it and focused his information terminal in that direction. He then could see a male and a female in an old-world style dress running at a high speed from behind Reina’s vehicle although the plants that covered the ruin made it difficult for them to even sprint.

“Togami, I don’t know what’s going on here but someone is chasing us from behind. Tell me what you want to- Watch out!!”

At the same time Akira shouted, Alpha suddenly accelerated the APC. His body obeyed the inertia and swayed. In the midst of the swaying vision, he could see the female carrying a cylindrical object in her hand and a blade of light extended from that object the moment she swung it.

A few minutes before Akira contacted Togami and Reina, Kanae also noticed that signal.

“Ane-san. Someone is chasing us.”

“…Indeed.”

Shiori tensed up while also impressed by how sensitive Kanae was as always. She then looked back to check what was chasing them.

“Not monsters…? People?”

“It seems to be people, but those are not Hunter equipment. At this rate, they’ll eventually catch up to us. They don’t look like the kind of people who would try to get something that we dropped by accident though…”

“Milady, there are-”

When Shiori was about to let Reina know, she could hear Akira’s voice shouting at them through the vehicle’s information terminal. Right at the next moment, Shiori grabbed Reina and Kanae grabbed Togami from behind and jumped off from their moving vehicle.

A split second after that, the light blade swung by the female chasing them split Reina’s vehicle cleanly into two. But even after it was split, both the right and the left sides of the vehicle that were separated from each other continued moving forward due to the inertia. It then rolled over a few times before finally stopping.

Both the male and the female humanoids chasing Togami’s team were old-world automata in butler and maid outfits. The female one once again swung its blade chasing after Shiori, while the male which was carrying a rifle went for Kanae. Shiori covered Reina as she repositioned herself for

battle while Kanae signalled Togami to stand back as she focused her attention on the incoming automaton.

But suddenly, a storm of bullets swallowed both automata and threw their bodies back. It was Akira shooting at them with SSB rifles in both hands. The normal bullets were released at a mini-gun-like speed, emptying the magazine in a flash.

“Alpha! Did that do it?!”

“Unfortunately, that didn’t hurt them by much.”

Akira ejected the empty magazine, using his time compression, he let go of his rifles, reached for nearby magazines, threw them up in the air, grabbed his rifles back, agilely pushed them against the flying magazines, and finally completed the reload.

“I know they were just normal bullets, but that was a highly compressed barrage, you know?! What the heck is with them? Aren’t they just too durable?!”

“I bet they are old-world automata, and they’re high-quality automata on top of that.”

Akira then remembered back when he had to fight old-world automata in the Kuzusuhara ruin and could not help but nod with a rather conflicted face.

“That would explain their durability!! Are they here to get back the relics since we took too many of them?”

“Just keep shooting. If we can destroy them, we can bring them back as relics too.”

“Oh, that’s a good point!”

Akira reactivated his time compression. He thought back to how relaxed he was, and that ruin exploration was not over until he arrived safely back to

the city. This made him believe that he might have jinxed it as he smiled bitterly.

Akira was successfully able to provide suppression and prevented the automata from making any complex manoeuvres, but that was not enough to destroy them.

Reina and Togami were so surprised that they were late to digest what just happened.

Shiori considered all her options there as she glanced at Akira. Akira was shouting something, although she could not hear anything from that distance, she judged that Akira was telling them to get to him as fast as they could. She then glanced at Kanae with a serious face, Kanae looked back at her and smiled.

“Milady! Excuse me!”

“Togami-boy!! Make sure not to bite your own tongue!!”

Shiori grabbed Reina while Kanae grabbed Togami. Then without any prior explanation and without asking for permission first, they threw Togami and Reina straight at Akira.

Reina and Togami were still having a hard time following what was going on when they were flying through the air. Akira realized what Shiori was trying to do, although he was surprised, he immediately stopped shooting and threw his rifles up. He then caught Togami with his right hand to make sure that he would not crash into the APC, while he caught Reina with his left hand in a gentler manner as if he was hugging her. He then quickly let both of them go and caught his rifles back.

Akira’s focus returned back to Shiori and Kanae who were facing the automata. Shiori and Kanae stayed behind to buy some time for Reina to get away, and now both of them were already approaching their respective opponent.

Akira understood that Shiori and Kanae were prioritizing on getting Reina to safety first. But he then looked back at Reina and Togami, thought for a bit, and walked past them toward his bike.

Reina, while still confused from being thrown, could not catch up with the information flooding her five senses.

When Akira walked past her, he was in a rush which caused her to follow him with her eyes. She saw him get on his bike and the next moment he had already jumped out of the APC, landing smoothly on the ground and blazed straight in Shiori and Kanae's direction.

As the scene of Shiori and Kanae, who were left behind, got smaller and smaller with time, and the back of Akira who was riding his bike straight at them, made Reina feel like they were leaving her behind. It felt like she was running away while they were buying time for her. It replaced her confusion with frustration and hopelessness.

Reina, who was crushed under her emotions, stood up and walked as if to jump off the APC and rush towards Shiori and Kanae. Togami who noticed that flusteredly stopped her.

"Let me go!!"

"Wait!! What are you planning to do after you jump off?! Just calm down for now!!"

"Let me go!! Just let me go!! If I… If I run away here, then I… Again…"

With teary eyes, Reina flailed her arms to get away from Togami. Seeing that, Togami tried to stop her with a stern face.

Togami understood Reina's feelings well. That day, back in Seranthal building, when he got a good view of how weak he was, he felt as if all that he had gone through to get stronger were in vain. It felt like all the hard training and achievements that he had gathered as a Hunter which supported his confidence were being shredded to pieces.

He thought that he had become strong, but it was nothing but his imagination. When push came to shove, he was still part of the group that was being protected. That feeling of hopelessness when he realized that he could do nothing to fight back against that fact was crushing his spirit even at this moment. Togami and Reina both felt the same right now.

The only reason why Togami was able to somehow get a hold of himself was simply because he thought that in the worst-case scenario, he should at least get Reina to safety. It was the least he could do as the team leader. His duty as the team leader was to somehow manage to prevent himself from being crushed by his hopelessness.

But for Reina, who did not have that responsibility, she had nothing to defend herself from her feeling. Shiori and Kanae stayed behind to buy her time, Akira also decided to join them, while she was the only one who stayed in safety. The merciless time did not stop as she was stuck in that situation where she did not have the power nor the skill to fight back. Even if she jumped off the vehicle, she could not provide any help at all against those automata. She would be nothing but dead weight, and she would pull Shiori down even more if she stood in a dangerous place thinking that it was safe. That truth was breaking her heart.

Togami was relieved that Reina had calmed down, but at the same time, the sight of Reina looking meek left a pang in his heart. But even so, he tried to think of a way to at least be useful in that situation. He tried to contact Akira to ask him about the APC that most likely was running on autopilot.

Akira picked up the call and said in a rather uninterested voice as if this was nothing but a normal occurrence to him.

“What is it? I’m sure you know that I’m busy now, right?”

Before Togami could answer that question, Reina yelled at the terminal first.

“Akira!! Why did you leave us behind!! Are you trying to say that we’re nothing but dead weight to you!? Are you telling us to just obediently run away!?”

That yelling was a small resistance against her hopelessness, it was a shout to help herself stop the surging self-depreciation. Either way, if Akira said yes there, it would have completely broken Reina's heart.

But Akira replied with something that she did not expect at all. He replied back with a rather confused voice.

"To be honest, I was hoping that you can give me support fire from there though. Judging from your skill back when we were exploring the ruin, you should have no problem shooting from that distance, right?"

"…Eh?"

Reina paused for a bit after giving that short answer, which sounded as if she returned back to her confused state. Hearing that, Akira then said curtly.

"Don't give me that 'Eh?', I've set the APC to just go around randomly after it gained some distance from me. If it got too far, give me a call and get on the wheel yourself. You can also use the gun on the APC, but I haven't done any readjustment, so make sure not to shoot me by mistake."

"Eh, ah, okay?"

"I know that you might not be happy after getting sent flying like that, but I bet Shiori and Kanae did that because, unlike both of them, you guys are nothing but dead weight in close range combat. If you have any complaints, you should voice that to them later. It's not like I can do anything about it even if you vent that onto me, you know?"

"Ah, right, sorry."

"You can use the ammo there too, I should still have quite a lot left over. So if you say that you'll run away since you have no ammo left, I won't accept that excuse, okay?!"

Reina immediately raised her voice.

"Who would say 'I'll run away', huh?! Don't look down on me!! I won't run away, okay?!"

“Is that so? Well, then, I’m counting on your support.”

Akira then closed the call, Reina knew that he could no longer hear her as she shouted.

“‘I’m counting on you’, he said!!”

Reina hid her delight with that angry shout.

“Togami! We’re not running away, alright?!”

“Of course!!”

“Now you are talking!”

Strong will filled her body, she took in her surging resolve and let it course all the way to the very end of her limbs and hairs.

“Let’s show them what we are made of!!”

Seeing how Reina got back on her feet, Togami felt delighted and banished his own frustration from his mind.

The pillar of confidence that was about to break got even stronger than before. Although the situation had not changed at all, Reina and Togami no longer allowed themselves to be swept by the situation, they now stood to fight back against the flow.

Akira was riding on his bike with an SSB rifle in each of his hands. Alpha, who was floating beside him, looked a bit surprised and asked him.

“Akira, are you sure you’re okay with that?”

“I did fulfil my responsibility. If they decided to stay and join the fight then get killed by that, it’s not my fault. They didn’t pay me to be their bodyguard and I don’t remember ever accepting something like that, right?”

If he ran away from that place after leaving Shiori and Kanae as decoys, it meant that he would be indebted to them, and that was doubly true if Shiori

or Kanae got killed because of that. At least, that was what he thought. But with this, even if Reina got killed because he went to help Shiori and Kanae, then it would not be his fault though Shiori and Kanae might get angry because of it. Or at least, it would not bother him as much. He followed that egocentric line of thinking as he jumped out of his APC on his bike.

Alpha let out a big sigh.

“So, how much support are you expecting from me this time?”

“Enough not to get me killed.”

“Roger that!”

Akira only gave a vague answer and Alpha did not ask for more than that.

Shiori activated her blade while she approached the female automaton. Her blade then started vibrating and gave off a dim glow, she gracefully and agilely swung that sword with her augmented physical ability thanks to her augmented suit. The swing sent out a wave of glowing particles which could cut any matter apart, it was as if she sent off a sharp blade flying.

It was actually a killing move since the average person would not be able to evade it and be sliced up by the wave. But the female automaton jumped away as if she knew the nature of that attack and used her own blade to block the wave and dispersed it.

The dispersed light particles shone on their faces. In contrast to Shiori, who had a rather grim expression, the automaton was emotionless as if she felt no danger from Shiori at all. The difference in their expression showed the gap between their strength.

The automaton swung her blade to counter, Shiori, who was using an accelerator drug with suppressed side-effects and prolonged effect duration in exchange for its power, saw the incoming blade. She aimed to throw the automaton off-balance by parrying its blade using the solid portion of her

own blade. But the moment she realized the slight movement of the incoming blade, she immediately switched to completely avoiding it.

The automaton's blade went through Shiori's blade without any resistance and sliced everything beyond it. Although her blade was not damaged at all, that attack left a scorched slice marking on the ground and the plants that came in contact with it.

[That blade is the type that can alter its physical existence at will! This is getting troublesome…]

The blade that the automaton was using was a relic that was like a retractable baton. It was using the energy source from the automaton to overcharge its attacks. Because of that, it had enough slicing power even when in its retracted state.

The opponent was strong, she would not have enough leeway to fight such an opponent while protecting Reina, that was why she threw Reina to Akira's APC. Then in order to prevent that automaton from destroying Akira's APC, and in order to get Reina from that place safely, she decided to stay behind. She was relieved that it was the right choice, but at the same time, she was also hard-pressed since the automaton was stronger than she had expected and knitted her eyebrows.

Shiori and that Automaton exchanged slashes in an intense close-range combat. Every time they swung their blades, there was a trace of light in the air which demonstrated how intense their exchange was.

While on the other side, the male automaton took a kick from Kanae. But as that kick landed on its body, it also jumped backwards to reduce the damage from that kick. As the kick sent its body flying, it thrust its leg to the ground as a brake and drew a long straight line on the ground. When it finally stopped, it had fully recovered its balance and aimed its rifle at Kanae before releasing a few shots of beams at her.

Kanae accurately judged where it was aiming and blocked the beam with the forcefield armour erected from the equipment on her right hand. The beam was deflected by that force field armour and vanished into the

wasteland along a straight line. The automaton then released 3 more shots. This time, Kanae blocked it with the forcefield armour on her left hand.

The automaton then stopped moving, still, there was no change in its emotionless face. In contrast to that, Kanae was smiling menacingly, but she suddenly sighed and mumbled.

“Ahh, this isn’t fun at all. Even if it’s a humanoid robot, fighting against a robot still feels like I’m just fighting against a punching bag…”

As her expectation that this might be fun melted from her mind, she let out a chilling cold aura and her smile faded from her face.

“I guess I’ll just break it and get this over with.”

Kanae said so with a cold emotionless intonation as she quickly closed the distance between them. Another beam was released at her, Kanae accurately predicted where it was aimed at, but unlike last time, she took the minimal move to evade it as if to intentionally graze the beam and closed the distance between them in an instant.

The moment she got close enough, Kanae released a punch with her right fist straight at the automaton’s torso. Since she no longer had any fun fighting that automaton, and she had lost any interest in it, that fist was purely aimed to break it. And as expected, it ripped through the durable old-world automaton’s torso, dealing significant damage.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 198, Automata

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Akira blazed through the slippery floor on his bike. Vines and moss covered the small rubbles, making it even easier for the tires to slip. But with the ability of Akira's advanced bike designed for use in wasteland together with Alpha's support, he was able to keep driving at a high speed as he kept his eyes on Shiori with a grim face.

Once he got relatively close, he aimed both of his SSB rifles at the female automaton and released a barrage of armour-piercing rounds. The expensive extended magazine housed way more bullets than a normal magazine and he emptied it in that barrage.

Right after that, the female automaton noticed the incoming bullets and jumped away while swinging its blade as if to cut down the bullets. The light particles left from those swings turned into a wall, it then reacted with the colourless mist in the atmosphere and transformed it into a forcefield. The forcefield killed the momentum from the bullets and deflected them away from their original trajectories. The automaton also actively evaded the already deflected bullets, thus allowing it to survive the barrage without even a scratch.

Akira was surprised by that, but he immediately changed his aiming from targeting at a single spot to indiscriminate shooting. After all, even an old-world automaton would not be able to evade all of those bullets coming at it like a wall. And as he expected, some of the bullets landed.

But with the lower firepower, the landed bullets could not damage the automaton. As a matter of fact, the automaton made use of the shock wave from the bullets to propel itself further away as it kept swinging its blade. When Akira finally stopped his bike next to Shiori, the automaton had already left the place.

Akira lowered his rifle and mumbled with both of his eyebrows raised.

“I should’ve been able to land a few bullets though? Just how durable is that thing?”

Shiori, who had already changed from her blade to her rifle in the middle of that fight, also lowered her rifle and frowned at Akira.

“Akira-sama. Thank you for the help, but I would have preferred if you prioritized Milady first.”

“It’s Togami’s job to decide when to retreat, and that includes convincing Reina to obey his order. Even if that order forces her to retreat. So, I won’t accept any complaints regarding that matter.”

Shiori sighed and smiled wryly.

“Maybe I should hire you as a bodyguard next time.”

“Yeah, you can do that. But either way, I’m sure Reina would not be happy.”

“Don’t worry, it’s my duty to convince Milady in that case and Akira-sama would be the decoy.”

“I see.”

Shiori lightly smiled, Akira also replied with a smile. That was when Kanae returned back to them.

“Akira, there you are siding with Ane-san again. That’s not good, you know.”

“Not really, it seemed that you’re doing fine, that’s why I went to help Shiori instead. How about the other automaton by the way?”

“Just like the one that you faced, when you arrived, the other automaton also ran away. I didn’t give chase since it seemed to be too much trouble.”

Akira then remembered the time when he fought old-world automata back in Kuzusuhara ruin.

“…The other one also got away, huh? Hmm, to be honest, I feel like that kind of enemy would keep coming until they are killed though.”

“It’s not like I can do anything about it.”

“You’re right. Alright then, let’s go back. Ah, sorry, by the way, this bike is only for one person. So the both of you need to use your legs.”

Kanae exasperatedly sighed and shook her head.

“Akira, you really don’t know how to treat a lady, huh. This is where you should let the lady take the bike, you know? I’m sure if it’s only me and Ane-san, we can somehow fit on that seat.”

“No!”

Shiori smiled seeing Akira reject that idea almost instantly and Kanae’s exasperated face.

“Akira, keep your guards up.”

During that small breather, Akira suddenly returned back to his battle-ready state. Shiori and Kanae who noticed that immediately scanned their surroundings.

“Alpha, where is it?”

“From the ruin, and there are a whole lot of them.”

Akira glanced at the ruin and could not help but frown. A swarm of monsters including the plant-type monsters from the ruin was heading towards him.

“Whoah, how did we not notice that swarm at all?”

“It is probably because of the interference from the other plants.”

“So basically, those plants are of the same type as the ones inside the ruin, huh. Good grief, what a pain in the neck. But still, what the heck is with the size of that swarm…?”

“This is just another guess, but I bet the automaton summoned them. It’s difficult to detect monsters in this situation but it’s easy for the monsters to detect us. I bet those automata broadcasted a signal to let them know our location. Old-world automata have the energy source to do that after all.”

“Don’t tell me that those automata only retreated because they’d done their job in slowing us down?”

“The possibility of that is not zero.”

Akira frowned even more while still gazing at the incoming swarm. Suddenly a bullet flew past, landed on the monsters’ forehead, instantly killing it. But it did not stop there, more bullets came in and killed some of the monsters. When Akira was surprised by that, Togami’s voice came in from his information terminal.

“Akira! Kanae! Shiori!! Come back here now! The radar detects a whole lot of monsters from that direction!! Reina will take care of incoming monsters, so just ignore them and get in here fast!!”

Before Shiori could tell him to just forget about them and run away, Togami already closed the call.

“M-Milady…”

“Go!”

Shiori inadvertently turned to the source of that voice and met Akira’s gaze.

“It’s your job to convince Reina, right?”

Akira was basically saying that he would be the decoy this time, thus erasing any hesitation left inside Shiori.

Shiori then said firmly with a serious face.

“I leave the rest to you.”

“Just go.”

Shiori bowed to Akira and started running toward Akira’s APC where Reina was.

Kanae still had her usual smile as she said.

“And there you are siding with Ane-san again. As I said before, that’s no good, you know?”

“Save it for later and go.”

“Good grief!”

Kanae laughed amusedly and left without looking back.

Akira aimed both of his SSB rifles at the incoming swarm and quickly emptied his magazines.

The bullet storm swallowed the monsters, turning countless monsters into minced meat. The monsters behind them just stomped their dead comrades

under their feet as they kept marching forward. The green floor of the ruin immediately turned red in a blink of an eye.

Since Reina switched her rifle's mode to sniping in order to provide support for Shiori and Kanae, she was able to quickly detect the incoming swarm. The bullet that she shot with a proper aim pierced through multiple monsters as if it was sucked into their bodies. The power of her rifle, her talent, and her calm aiming, the experiences from all the training and battles up until now, all of these factors combined into one, allowing Reina to release high-performance sniping with an exceptional firing rate.

Shiori emphasized long-range sniping for Reina in order to keep her away from danger while still allowing her to provide support when she was together with Kanae and Shiori. After all, Kanae had a habit of jumping into danger. The result of that training was fully showcased in this situation.

Reina could see Shiori and Kanae running in her direction while making sure not to obstruct her aim, while Akira was following not too far behind them while shooting at the incoming swarm. Seeing that, Reina felt that she was finally no longer a dead weight. Although it was a special circumstance, she was able to move on from the one being saved to the one who was saving others.

That was when she ran out of ammo. As it pulled her back into reality, her smile turned into a slight frown. She realised that she had used all of the reserve ammo.

"Togami!! Bring me more ammo!! Something that my rifle can use!!"

Togami put a magazine that he found inside Akira's truck beside Reina. Seeing that magazine, Reina could not help but crack a smile.

"Ohh, he has some rather nice things here."

"Akira did say that we're free to use anything inside his APC. But if he gets angry later, you should apologize with me, alright?"

Reina put that magazine into her rifle while smiling teasingly.

“Oh my, that part is your job, no? That kind of thing is the party leader’s duty, you know.”

“Geez.”

Togami smiled wryly and returned back to shooting. After loading the new magazine, Reina carefully took another aim, aligned the cross-hair with her target, and pulled the trigger.

The bullet that Reina released soared to the sky and unnaturally made a turn, seeking its target. The power of that bullet was also as strong as she had predicted, she then took aim and released another shot.

Homing AP bullet. Size-wise, it was more or less as big as a mini-missile. And the magazine that Reina was using was an extended magazine of that bullet. It was an expensive magazine for Akira even after applying the special discount for Hunters above Rank 50. He had originally saved it for emergencies.

Akira watched the bullet fly past above his head and zoom at the monster in front of him.

“They’re using it!! My special ammo!! That was expensive, you know!! And I haven’t even used it myself!! Not even once!!”

Alpha, who was next to Akira, smiled at him.

“You did tell them that they were free to use any ammo inside your APC. So just think of it as a good thing since it’s worth its price.”

“…My reward, I’ll make sure that they’ll pay for my ammo first before dividing the reward this time.”

Akira said so to get his mind off that matter for now as he gazed at the expensive bullet that blazed through the air and struck down the monster in the front line.

“But still, isn’t that just too many of them? Alpha, as I thought, something weird is going on here.”

“You’re absolutely right. Even if they came here because those two automata summoned them, there should not be this many. As long as we don’t include the monsters from the inner part of the ruin, there should not be this many monsters. But even if we understand the reason now, it won’t help us in our current situation. So just focus on the monsters in front of you for now.”

“I know… I guess I should get a little bit closer.”

Akira then accelerated his bike towards a part of the swarm that was less dense and kept his finger down on the trigger. The bullet storm released from his SSB rifles killed so many monsters, but it was not significant when compared to the entirety of the swarm.

“…There’s just no end to them. I left the rest of my ammo back in my APC, this might be a good time to return back.”

Akira made a 180-degree turn and headed back to his APC while wondering if he was cursed to encounter a monster swarm no matter where he went.

Meanwhile, the old-world automaton in a maid uniform stood in front of one of the countless semi-sphere structures scattered in the Lida commercial district. It then used its communication device to send a signal to that semi-sphere structure. Not too long after, a flood of monsters appeared, all of them were aiming toward that automaton as it escaped.

The monsters were chasing after the automaton, but suddenly, that automaton vanished before appearing again somewhere further outside the ruin.

The swarm of monsters was baited outside the ruin just like that and then baited further toward Akira’s direction.

Shiori eventually caught up with Akira’s APC and jumped to board the APC. The first thing she did after that was to check on Reina.

“Milady!! Are you alright?!”

Reina seemed to be smiling amusedly as she replied.

“Shiori, that’s my line.”

“…You’re indeed right, Milady. I am alright for now.”

Kanae also jumped into the APC not too long after that.

“This place is so cramped, make some room, will you?”

“This means that Akira is the only one left, huh?”

Togami then looked back at Akira and saw him accelerating his bike right toward the APC.

“…Whoah, wait a sec! Don’t tell me that he’s planning to jump in with that bike!?”

As if Akira was affirming it, he accelerated his bike even more. In front of the panicking Togami, Akira used the control device of the bike to spring it upward before it landed on top of the APC, making a bang sound.

Reina and Togami looked at the ceiling and mumbled.

“…That was amazing.”

“That guy is good with basically anything, huh.”

Kanae smiled at that amazing performance from Akira, while Shiori looked worriedly at Reina, hoping that Akira would not be a bad influence on her.

Akira stepped down from his bike and looked back at the monster swarm coming at him while still standing on top of the APC. The monsters seem to be chasing vigorously, as a matter of fact, they were running faster than the APC.

“These guys really don’t know when to give up. Alpha, can you drive the APC faster?”

“Unfortunately, no. The ground is not suitable for high-speed driving, and the APC is filled with heavy armour tiles, relics and ammo too. Although the APC has high horsepower, it’s not that much.”

“I see, well, it can’t be helped then.”

“Oh, are you planning to throw away some weight? That would be a huge waste, you know.”

“Not that, I’m going to shoot at them!”

“I’m just kidding.”

Akira heaved a huge sigh in reply to Alpha’s inappropriate joke and aimed his SSB rifles at the monsters. But in the next second, his vision blurred.

Akira’s augmented suit suddenly moved with its full power. Akira tried his best to match his body movement with his augmented suit, he could even feel the air resistance from making such a sudden move. But in the midst of all of that, he still could see Alpha’s grim face, which was more than enough to know just how grave the situation was as he immediately went straight at the incoming enemies.

The two automata that had run away suddenly landed on top of the APC as if they were warheads. The shock shook some of the armour tiles off the APC and even broke through the APC’s forcefield armour, which could even withstand a tank shot, leaving a huge dent.

As the broken armour tiles flew around in slow motion, the male automaton quickly aimed its pistol at Akira and released a beam shot.

Seeing the beam that was coming at him from close range, Akira stomped on the APC’s armour tile on his feet, enough to break it, as he quickly evaded the beam and leapt straight toward that automaton. As Akira tackled the automaton down, he thrust his SSB rifle right toward the automaton’s

chest and pushed it down onto the top of the APC. Now that the male automaton was stuck in between the APC's armour tile and Akira's SSB rifle, it had no method to evade as Akira released a rapid barrage that even broke his SSB rifle due to the recoil.

There was almost no space that separated the muzzle and the automaton's chest when Akira released this barrage. The bullets collided with each other applying massive pressure focusing around the part of the automaton's torso which had already been damaged from its fight against Kanae. The bullets eventually pierced the automaton's torso and destroyed its generator.

The moment the female automaton landed on the APC, it immediately launched an attack at Akira. It quickly expanded its collapsible baton that was already transformed into a blade of light and swung it. But before it could land, Akira's bike suddenly accelerated to its maximum speed and rammed straight at the female automaton. The collision threw the automaton off balance, causing it to miss its swing. The blade of light drew an arc on Akira's side and hit the APC's body, releasing a blinding light on contact with the APC's forcefield armour. As the blade extended way longer than its corporeal body, the rest of the blade went past one corner of the APC and sliced the monsters that were nearby.

The energy conversion of the forcefield armour filled the area with blinding light, the armour tiles that were still in the air blocked the light and created contrasting shadows. Akira pushed his time compression to its limit to the point that everything else almost stood at a standstill. In this slow-moving world, he sent commands to his body so that it would be able to match the speed of his consciousness.

The automaton cut open a path through Akira's bike that was protecting him. The bike that was cut in two rolled over and fell off the top of the APC. But when the bike was sliced through, its forcefield armour was boosted to the maximum in order to reduce the durability of the automaton's blade as much as possible.

As the bike rolled over on the wasteland's floor, the female automaton did not waste the opportunity and closed in on Akira. In reaction to that, Akira also quickly closed the distance between them since the automaton's blade had lost most of its power. Due to both of them colliding at each other, the automaton did not have the chance to take another swing with its blade.

As the automaton sent down its blade at Akira for the second time, Akira blocked it using one of his SSB rifles. The rifle itself had a build-in forcefield armour that he often pushed to its maximum capability in order to hold back the kickback from the high-speed shooting that he often executed. Although that level of forcefield armour could only block the blade for a brief period of time, that was more than enough for Akira to thrust his other SSB rifle at that automaton and push it down. And just like what he did to the male automaton, Akira drilled a barrage of bullets into that automaton's torso.

But unlike the case with the male automaton which was already damaged from its fight with Kanae, that was not enough to kill the female automaton as it continued to struggle to get away from his tackle. Akira used the power of his augmented suit to overpower that automaton and kept it down on the ground as he kept shooting at its torso. When he finally emptied his magazine, the automaton stopped moving. Right after that, he followed suit and fainted there.

All of these chains of events took only a few seconds in real life.

Shiori and Kanae agilely climbed up to the APC's top from the back door to check what was going on. But the moment they arrived at the top of the APC, they were flabbergasted.

The two automata that had run away from them just a moment ago were lying limp. Akira was also lying next to them as if they had just knocked each other out simultaneously. And beside him, was an old-world automaton in a maid uniform smiling amusedly.

Shiori and Kanae immediately decided that the automaton was hostile and jumped at it. Both of them closed the distance in a blink of an eye, Shiori pulled out her blade and released a skilful swing while Kanae threw a punch

augmented with forcefield armour and the enhanced strength from her augmented suit.

The automaton did not move at all and still maintained its smile. It then caught Shiori's blade and Kanae's fist. Although the full force of their attacks was obviously transferred to the automaton, it only cracked the armour tile under the automaton's feet, the automaton itself was not damaged at all.

Shiori and Kanae were caught speechless, that the automaton was able to receive their attacks this easily. The automaton then said with a casual voice.

"Can we stop this?"

Shiori immediately jumped away, leaving her sword still in the automaton's hand, and switched to her rifle. While Kanae stomped on one of the automaton's legs and grabbed its arm to prevent it from evading. Shiori then immediately aimed her rifle at the automaton's face.

The bullets that Shiori shot were all blocked by the automaton's other hand. Furthermore, the automaton did not deflect the bullets. It accurately predicted where Shiori was aiming and caught the bullets in the middle of its flight. Since the automaton had released Shiori's blade in order to catch the bullets, her blade made a loud banging sound as it landed on top of the APC.

The automaton then swung its arm and broke from Kanae's hold. Kanae, who was thrown away, landed agilely next to Shiori. Both of them had grim looks on their faces. In front of them, the automaton threw away the bullets in its hand, picked up Shiori's blade, threw it in Shiori's direction as if to return it. It then smiled at them as if to show that it had no wish to fight.

"Don't worry. We no longer have any wish to fight you. I've done more than enough for what I've been paid for."

Shiori picked up her blade, she still looked confused as she sheathed her blade. Seeing that, Kanae also lowered her fist. Although she was no longer

in a battle stance, she still had her guard up, and that was true for Shiori too. This was a situation where their opponent was strong enough to easily overpower both of them. However, since Reina was still inside the APC, Shiori was ready to jump into action anytime.

“If you really have no wish to fight, it would be great if you could at least introduce yourself.”

The automaton bowed deeply.

“Lion Steel’s general-purpose A.I, Olivia, at your service. If fate has it, I’ll look forward to your patronage.”

Shiori and Kanae could not hide their surprise.

Olivia pulled out a white card from her skirt and lightly threw it at Shiori. Shiori caught that card and took a closer look at it. Once again, she could not hide her surprise.

“This is…!?”

“It’s not for you. If this boy wakes up, please give it to him. I shall take my leave then.”

Olivia pointed to Akira, then bowed once again and suddenly vanished. Shiori immediately scanned her surroundings but she could not find Olivia anywhere.

“…A hologram!? Since when!?”

Kanae smiled amusedly and lightly frowned as she said.

“…Probably since the time when it threw that card. I bet it used some kind of camouflaging device to hide while leaving behind a hologram and already left the area. Moreover, right before that hologram vanished, I was

still able to feel its presence somewhere nearby. A hologram that can even fool me, it’s a pretty advanced decoy. I’m sure it is an old-world automaton. Fuuh, seriously though, that was dangerous.”

Kanae hid her disappointment by complaining instead.

Reina’s voice could be heard coming from the APC.

“Shiori! What’s going on up there!?”

“We’re coming down now! I’ll explain the rest later! Milady should focus on the monster swarm! They’ll catch up with us at this rate!”

Reina and Togami, who had stopped shooting due to the surprising turn of events, flusteredly started shooting again.

Kanae sent a suspicious gaze at Shiori.

“So then, Ane-san, what’s the plan now?”

“…For now, we need to get back down from here.”

Shiori understood what Kanae was actually asking her and refused to give a straight answer.

Shiori and Kanae returned back inside the APC. Kanae just threw the inactive automata inside the APC while Shiori gently placed Akira down.

Shiori first calmed Togami and Reina, who were restless to know what just happened.

“Please calm down. Akira-sama is just unconscious. First of all, Milady, please focus on the monsters. Togami-sama, please take the wheel. With Akira-sama being unconscious, we don’t know how to change the autopilot now. In the worst-case scenario, the APC might come to a complete stop. So please get to the driving wheel immediately.”

“A-alright!”

Togami rushed to the driver seat. Although it was originally his duty to make the decision in that situation since he was the leader, he understood that this was an emergency and also knew that Shiori had better skill in this regard. So he did not complain and obediently followed her order.

“Kanae and I don’t know in detail about what had happened up there. We need to ask Akira-sama when he wakes up, so let’s put any questions aside for now. Until then, Milady, please take care of the monsters. Kanae and I will have to take a short break, we’re pretty much spent.”

“Eh? Me alone?”

Reina was bewildered, seeing which, Kanae teasingly said to her.

“Milady, are you planning to act spoiled again now that we’ve returned to you?”

“I-I’ll do it!”

Reina replied back by pure reflex which she regretted inside her heart. It was definitely not an easy job to fill in because of Togami and Akira’s absence. Reina had a grim look as she started shooting at the monster swarm that was creeping closer and closer to the APC. When she glanced at Kanae and Shiori, they were really taking a break and even Kanae was lightly waving at her.

“Alright alright, I’ll do it!!”

It was definitely the result of them treating her as a full-fledged Hunter. But Reina was not sure if she was to be happy because of it, as she kept shooting while gritting her teeth.

Shiori glanced at Reina and then looked back at the white card. She was seriously evaluating her options there.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 199, Old-world relics

Index

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Akira was standing in a white space. As he looked around in his hazy consciousness, he saw two Alpha and a young boy that seemed somehow familiar to him. He could see shadows of countless people standing beside that young boy.

“How is your development?”

“Great, very great, in fact. I can even delegate my calculations too and there’s a good chance that I’ll be able to get better equipment. Although I still don’t have the exact time, I’m planning to get the necessary equipment in about a few months. We’ll then start working on the main project right after that.”

“I’m sure there’s no need for me to tell you this, but you’re not allowed to make him one of your terminals, you know. The subject that we can send to the commander’s room should not be one of us. If you turn him into one of your terminals, the system will recognize him as one of us. So be careful.”

“Yeah, I know that even without you telling me. There was a case in the past when that happened and it did not work. In the first place, if a remote terminal was fine then we would have used one of those automata and gone

there ourselves. That’s why we have no other choice but to go through this painful process.”

“It’s to ensure that the one accessing is a real person. We can’t do anything about it, that’s just how the security works and it applies to us too.”

“Well, you’re absolutely right about that.”

The two Alpha smiled bitterly at each other.

“So then, how about yours?”

“After the change of plan, the local network’s nodes spread incredibly fast. Although I have no complaint about the number since the more nodes we get, the more fighting power we will have. But there might be a problem if the number goes beyond what I can control. I’m planning to evaluate the total strength by doing something soon. After that, depending on the result, I might decide to bring the subject to the commander’s room.”

“Are you sure you’re going to be fine? If you let the local network node spread wider and wider at this rate, the system might see the network as one entity and you’ll have to bring all the nodes to that place when that happens, you know.”

“It should be alright. Although I said it’s a local shared network, it has a proper stratification and the head of that system is the only one that fulfils the conditions.”

“I see, that explains how your progress got ahead of me. Well, that’s perfectly understandable.”

Alpha seemed a bit disappointed, the other Alpha then frowned and asked.

“Does your subject not show any sign of forming a local network?”

“Nope, none at all. After all, he was originally a loner and the thought of forming relations with others never crossed his mind, that’s why I can’t use that method. But I’ll be the one managing him after the connection, so don’t worry about it.”

“I see.”

“What’s wrong? Is there any problem?”

“As I explained, the local network spread out way faster than I expected. As such, I sometimes can’t take control of the network. So I might need your help if things get bad.”

The first Alpha agreed to help the other Alpha but she also blamed the second Alpha.

“Sure, I don’t mind, but you should do something about it first before it comes to that, you know.”

“Unlike the subject under you, I still haven’t even received the consent for the contract from my subject. So it might be not that easy”

“As I thought, doing this with an uncontracted subject is not ideal.”

“This is also an experiment. Regardless of the result, it’ll be useful for our future trials.”

“Well, that’s true, but still. Ah, by the way, about Tsubaki…”

While the two Alphas were still talking to each other, Akira’s vision blurred.

Akira finally woke up. He felt that weird feeling as he realized that he was no longer in the same place as where he last remembered and immediately scanned his surroundings.

“…Where am I?”

Shiori noticed Akira waking up and spoke to him.

“You’ve woken up, are you alright? It doesn’t seem that you sustained any injuries from the outside, but, just to be safe, I gave you some medicines. I’ll bring some more if you’re still in pain.”

“…Where is this place?”

“We’re inside Akira-sama’s APC. Since we found you fainted on top of the APC, we brought you in and let you lie down until you woke up… Are you alright?”

Akira’s consciousness was still hazy, although there was a slight trace of calmness in his mind, the haziness prevented him from being fully awake.

That was when suddenly Alpha appeared.

“Akira, good morning.”

“…Alpha?”

“It seems that you’re a bit flustered there, how about you take some deep breaths first? It’ll calm you down, you know?”

Alpha was smiling gently at him, just like usual.

Judging from how Alpha was smiling at him, Akira understood that he was in a safe place for now as he took a deep breath. It was a short ritual that helped Akira reset his state of mind. But as he regained his calmness, the hazy memories of what he saw when he was unconscious was lost in the exchange.

“Alpha, give me the status report for now.”

“You fainted after fighting two automata on top of the APC. You don’t remember that?”

“…Ahhh, right, I was fighting those automata!! …So… I fainted after that, huh?”

Akira thought that the weird feeling that he felt was the leftover adrenaline rush that was cut short when he suddenly fainted in the middle of that fight. He then noticed Shiori who was looking worriedly at him.

“Ah, right, I’m fine… I fainted up there so it means that you must have saved me from falling over. Thank you.”

“It’s great that you’re alright. I’m sorry to ask you this just right after you woke up, but there are some questions that I want to ask, is it okay?”

“Sure, go ahead.”

Shiori and Akira then exchanged information to understand the situation that they were in.

While Akira was unconscious, they were able to successfully get away from the swarm. Right around the boundary when the green plants that covered Lida commercial district stopped growing, the monsters also stopped chasing the APC. It was a common trait that monsters could not leave the ruin. That was why people used to call them biological security drones guarding the ruins.

The vehicle was on the way heading back to Kugamayama city at the moment. Togami was driving the APC while Reina was sitting and resting on the driver’s assistant seat.

After carrying Akira in, Shiori and Kanae really did not help Reina at all. Although Kanae was standing next to her, she was only there to guard Reina while sometimes making idle talk. To put it in a better light, it might have helped Reina not get too tense, but it might be just Kanae having nothing else to do to waste time. It was also to give Shiori time to think as well as to help lighten the side-effects of the trump card that both of them had used.

Togami was driving the vehicle while talking with Reina about their next plan. They were trying to flush any other potential issues including the distribution of rewards and where to sell the relics before Akira woke up. Today’s ruin exploration was basically registered under Togami’s party which only included Togami and Reina. Kanae, Shiori and Akira were basically considered outsiders this time. As the leader of the team and as the only other member in the team, Togami and Reina were seriously discussing what to do about their negotiations with Akira.

After hearing a short explanation from Shiori, Akira more or less got the gist of what had happened. But he then confusedly said.

“I don’t know anything about this maid automaton, Olivia. The ones that I fought were only those two automata. I bet both of them jumped onto the APC back then, but I have no idea how they did it.”

“I see, she was already there when Kanae and I arrived at the scene.”

“Hmm, I have no recollection of that automaton at all. Either it came in between after I fainted and before you got there, or it was there all along and was using a camouflaging device. But if that was the case, then why did it not attack me? Wait, that one has nothing to do with camouflage, huh.”

“I might have a guess regarding that matter. It said that it had worked for what it was paid for already. So I bet that automaton was hired by the ruin’s system. Although, I don’t know the details whether it’s only to repel intruders or to fight back against armed robbers. But it seems that it had judged that it had worked enough after Akira-sama defeated those two automata.”

“…I see. I don’t know if it’s being earnest or not by doing so, but either way, I was saved by that. So it doesn’t really matter, huh.”

Akira found that interesting since it was more of a human-like emotion that a robot would not normally have.

Shiori then handed a white card to Akira.

“That automaton left this for you. Do you know what this is?”

Although Olivia left that card for Akira, it was not like there was anything in particular written on it. So it looked like nothing but a plain white card.

Since it had happened when Akira was unconscious, he had no idea the reason why that automaton left him that white card. Shiori also deliberately did not tell Akira how she got that card. Alpha also deliberately kept herself from telling anything to him. Because of that, he thought nothing of that

card other than something that one of the automata might have dropped during that intense battle.

Akira took that card, flipped over, and took a closer look at it. But as expected, he had no idea at all.

“Alpha, do you have any idea what it is?”

“White card.”

“Well, that is already obvious.”

“Akira, even if I tell you what I know, what will you do if Shiori asks how you knew about it?”

Alpha indirectly scolded Akira for his carelessness. He then shook his head and extended that card back to Shiori. But Shiori did not take it back and Akira found that really strange. Shiori then added.

“This is just a guess, but that automaton might belong to the Lion Steel Corporation. Does that give you any hints?”

“Lion Steel Corporation?”

Akira’s face slightly twitched the moment Shiori mentioned that name. Shiori’s gaze turned sharp. Both of them were watching each other closely for the slightest change, trying to judge what the other party noticed from the other’s reaction, as this awkward but careful silence was maintained for a while. Shiori was the first one to break the silence.

“Do you have any knowledge regarding this name?”

“…As I said, this is nothing but my guess. That Lion Steel Corporation is probably an old-world company. If I’m not mistaken, that name was also there in the Seranthal building’s guide map. If this card has something to do with that and if it’s a card to give special permission to pass through, it might be useful to go to some floors that are originally closed off to outsiders.”

“That is indeed interesting.”

“Well, I have no plans to go there ever again anyway, so I basically have nothing to do with this card.”

Akira tried to suppress the agitation inside him and keep calm. He remembered that only happened because he could connect to the old-world domain, that incident might lead to the old-world connection device and hint to his ability to connect to the old-world. Lion Steel was a name that was connected to both cases. As expected, knowing that name was enough to make people suspicious, Akira could not be sure that he was able to completely hide it.

Shiori tried to read what was behind Akira’s words and said.

“Very well then, Akira-sama, in that case, would it be alright if we keep it?”

“Uhh, you mean the card, right?”

“As well as everything connected to that card which includes the information that Akira-sama told me just now. Of course, it won’t be for free. But it is difficult to decide how much it is worth. After all, even if we bring this card to the Hunter Office’s exchange centre, it would only turn into a small amount of money. So I don’t recommend deciding the worth of the card based on its selling value.”

“But then, it’s difficult to decide how much it’s actually worth. We can actually just take it as our collective possession as a team, but I’m basically an outsider in this team.”

The price of the card was not clear and was difficult to decide even among the inner circle, but if it was sold, it would only turn into a small amount of money. Even Akira understood well that making a mistake in the method to divide the loot might cause a fight.

“It seems that Akira-sama is not that interested in this card. But even so, I don’t think it’s right to just let go of this card for free. In that case, how about exchanging this card for a favour?”

“Favour, huh?”

Akira hesitated for a bit.

“Alpha, what do you think? To be honest, it’s not like I really want that card anyway, but is it something that I shouldn’t just give away willy-nilly?”

“If you’re afraid that it might give rise to suspicions if you just let that card go, you can show a little resistance before giving it away.”

“I’ll do that then.”

Akira thought that if it was really a precious relic, Alpha would have stopped him. But since she did not give any reaction which hinted at that, he thought that the relic must not be that important. So he decided to put up a small resistance on his own.

“Well, in that case, I’ll use that favour right away. Before dividing the reward from this exploration, I want you to first subtract it based on the ammo that we have consumed during the battle just now and pay me that money upfront, and inform that to the other two. With all that happened today, I’m sure we’ll fight over how to divide the loot anyway. So in exchange for giving you that card, I want you to do this. Is that alright?”

“…Very well. I’ll convince Milady and Togami-sama regarding this matter. In case if it doesn’t work, I’ll take responsibility and pay it with my own money.”

“We have a deal then.”

Akira smiled and handed over the card. Shiori politely received that card, put it in her pocket and smiled.

“Indeed, we have a deal.”

The card that Olivia left for Akira now had turned into Shiori’s possession based on a deal that Akira had accepted. That meant Akira had transferred all the rights coming from that card to her. During that negotiation, Kanae was looking at them with a rare serious face.

Shiori and Kanae then went to Togami and Reina to tell them about the deal. Akira, who was left behind, sat down and looked at Alpha.

“Say, Alpha. Did you do something to me during that fight on top of the APC?”

“Yes. I boosted your time compression. I always wanted to do that and finally, I was able to.”

“Thought so. I felt something was weird back then. What can I say… It felt like all my five senses suddenly turned so sharp that everything around me seemed completely different than usual.”

“That’s simply because the information that you received during that brief period of time was multiplied. The difference is similar to looking at a blurry picture and a sharp picture.”

“I see, that’s kind of true, it felt exactly like that.”

“Akira, let me at least warn you about this. You should not use it too frequently. It places too much burden on you after all. It has the same effect as taking a strong accelerator drug. In the worst-case scenario, it might even kill you.”

Akira slightly frowned.

“…I did something that dangerous, huh. But still, I’ve already done things that dangerous so many times before and I know it’s way better than getting killed because I didn’t do it.”

“It’ll lessen the burden which makes it safer and increase its effectiveness the more you use it. So there’s no other way but to get used to it. You might even get to the point where you can do that on your own without my support at all one day, you know. But make sure to be careful. It’s something like a trump card that you should not use often.”

“I know… Ahhh, now that I more or less understand what happened, I’m feeling super tired now and my head started hurting too.”

“You can lie down and take a good rest. You’ve worked pretty hard this time, so I’m sure no one would complain.”

“You’re right.”

Although he was not sleepy, Akira decided to lie down again. As he stared absentmindedly at the APC’s ceiling, he noticed a small slit.

[…That cut must be from the fight, huh. My bike is now gone too and I have to get this vehicle repaired. Then there’s also my rifles too, either I get them repaired or buy a new one… What should I do…?]

Akira was thinking about what to say to Shizuka when he placed that order. Either he will have to try and hide it or be honest and tell Shizuka everything. He was not sure which one to do.

__*__*__*__

Olivia was running through the wasteland, she was running as fast as a vehicle.

There were many conditions that needed to be satisfied in order to reactivate Olivia from its storage device. But those conditions were reduced due to the long years where it stayed inactive and the signal that the storage device’s terminal was receiving at that time. Thanks to that, even a random button press from Rodin was enough to wake Olivia up. That was the reason why Olivia followed the security protocol in case it was activated through the wrong method.

The security protocol led Olivia to kill any intruders that got into restricted areas. And when the information of the unauthorized intruders was sent to Olivia by the system, the system also submitted a request with payment since Olivia was originally not a part of the system. It then decided to accept that request and to only work as much as it was paid.

After that, it found other automata from another company and checked their conditions. It then judged that those automata would be either destroyed or

misused, thus it changed its view of the automata and decided to turn them into its own terminal in order to use them to take care of the intruders.

The reason why it baited the monsters to attack Akira was nothing more than a decision made by its AI side, it was something that was built-in into it as if it was its personality. To put it simply, it did not want to get involved in the fight itself if it was possible. Furthermore, the system wanted to clean up any dangerous elements inside the facility which included monsters. At the same time, Olivia also judged that there was no need to get too serious since it was not a deal made with a real human.

But the intruders were able to survive the swarm. So Olivia decided to throw the other two automata to that APC. And even those were defeated by Akira, thus it had no other choice but to go there itself.

Olivia took the weapon that the other automata dropped and was about to go and kill Akira. As it was thinking that it had already more or less worked hard enough for the compensation that it received, Akira suddenly stood up while still unconscious. He then said something that normal humans could not comprehend before falling limp again. Shiori and Kanae arrived at the scene right after that.

The moment Olivia understood what Akira had said, it decided that it had indeed worked hard enough for what it was paid for. As a matter of fact, it thought that it should receive more for what it had done that day. After it lightly repelled Kanae and Shiori, Olivia left its business card before leaving the scene.

Olivia sighed and mumbled.

“To think that I got to meet that thing right after I woke up, I guess I really am unlucky.”

For Olivia, who had the ingenuity to understand the concept of luck, it did not like the entity behind what Akira said back then.

“I want to work for a human. Even if the payment is good, I have no plans to work for something like that. I just gave him that card since the record

said that he had once accessed the counter on his own. But now that I think about it again, it might have been better if I had killed him considering that he's working with that thing… I wonder if I can find a good employer somewhere…"

Olivia looked rather disappointed, but she immediately smiled afterwards. That day, one more old-world automaton was released to the wasteland.

__*__*__*__

The people from Yuzumo Industry finally arrived at where Kurosawa's team was. Among the people that were dispatched there, Kurosawa spotted Shikarabe.

"You guys are damn late."

Shikarabe lightly scoffed and countered.

"It's not my fault. Don't tell me that someone got killed."

"Nah, it's zero like usual, though someone has been badly injured, he's not going to die."

"Then it's business as usual, isn't it?"

"If only you guys came sooner, we wouldn't have had to go through that and we might have been able to earn more money. Four undamaged old-world automata now turned into two broken old-world automata, you know? And here I thought I was about to bring back a lot of money."

"Well, you have my condolence."

Shikarabe laughed and said so as if it was not his fault. Kurosawa replied with a click of his tongue. Their casual exchange demonstrated that they were pretty much safe.

With the dispatched squad already there, Kurosawa finished his duty and relinquished the command to the new squad. So he also let the rest of the Hunters take care of the negotiation with the new squad.

Among the new squad, a guy with a broad back listened to the reports given by Rodin and the other Hunters.

“To be honest, it’s really unfortunate that the four undamaged old-world automata are now turned into two damaged automata. But, we’re also here for the money. It was not free to come all the way here, not to mention that we encountered a swarm of monsters too. Although according to the contract, we won’t charge you anything because of that, it’s better if you do not expect to get paid even after handing those automata to us. I’m sure the money that we get will be mostly used to pay for the transportation fee to come here. I hope you guys can understand that.”

The Hunters ruffled their heads in frustration. Although they more or less knew that it was coming, being told that all their hardship resulted in nothing still pained them.

That was when that guy smiled and said.

“But well, the fifth automaton is indeed interesting. From what I heard so far, we might be able to be considerate. Please tell me in detail what you know about the last automaton.”

“The detail, huh, the only one who knows about it is Rodin. Hey, Rodin, do you have anything to add here?”

“Well, even if you say so…”

“You are the one who found it, right? Tell him everything from when it started moving.”

“O-Okay.”

Rodin explained everything that he knew while deliberately leaving the misunderstanding that the other Hunters had. After that, he took that man to the room where Olivia was sleeping.

After they got there, that guy pushed Rodin out of the room.

“This room is ours too. Although we still need to do further investigation, I bet this might bring you some money. You’re okay with that, right?”

“…Well, as long as it brings more money.”

“Thank you.”

The guy pushed Rodin and the other Hunters out and locked the door. That guy was left alone with Olivia’s empty container as he took a closer look at the container with a serious expression. He then called someone through an encrypted secret communication line.

“It’s me… No, although it’s only just a guess, I think the other four are not what we are looking for. But, I found a container that might be of the automaton that we are looking for… No, we couldn’t secure the automaton. It’s just its container. It seemed that it attacked the Hunters after it was activated and left the area and we have no idea of its whereabouts right now… A card, huh? No, we didn’t find anything like that… Alright, we’ll search the area assuming that it’s not in the possession of the Hunters… Yes, please excuse me then.”

The guy cut the call and turned towards the empty container.

“Lion Steel’s automata, huh… It would be strange if we had found it way sooner. But up until now, it always killed the person who activated it before returning back to its container though. Is it because this one had looser restrictions? If that’s true, it means that it should be easier to communicate with… If that rumour is true, this might turn into a small war.”

A long time ago, a certain Hunter found an old-world automaton and opened a business based on that automaton. Then that Hunter climbed the ladder in no time until their company reached the upper echelon of the Corporate Government. It was the result of him trying to reopen a certain old-world company in the current era, and right now, that company was providing maids for the rich and received their support in exchange. The Hunters were nothing but decorations as the main functions were all run by automata. Even the maids were nothing more but an imitation of the old-

world lifestyle, and since it was difficult to find good automata in the current era, they employed skilled people in their place.

The rumour had it that the said automaton was made by Lion Steel company. It was a common rumour in the eastern district that a huge corporation had some kind of connection with an old-world company. As it was nothing more but rumours, there was no concrete evidence regarding that matter. But it was indeed a profitable rumour.

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After Akira and Togami's team arrived back in the city, they disbanded the team. Until they agreed on how to divide the loot, all the relics were handed over to Shiori to hold on to. Since Akira also decided to lend the APC to them, he asked them to take the APC to the repair shop in order to get it repaired. He then headed to Shizuka's shop while Togami and Reina went to Drankam to give their report.

As Shiori was driving the APC, Kanae suddenly asked her a serious question.

"Ane-san, was that really okay? Although we didn't tell a lie, we still tricked him, you know? What's your plan if the cat is out of the bag?"

"…When that happens, Milady would be disappointed in me and Akira-sama would hate me. That's all."

Having Reina disappointed in her carried a huge implication for Shiori. Kanae let out a big sigh and said.

"Well, if Ane-san did that fully knowing the risk, I have no plans to say anything."

Kanae then returned to her usual self and smiled.

"Well, if Ane-san gets found out and has to fight Akira, do tell me. I'll be more than happy to help."

“Before it comes to that, I’ll do my best to solve it peacefully. I’ll apologize after telling him everything and offer him peace money. And if nothing works…”

“If nothing works?”

“I’ll use you as a decoy and take Milady to safety. I know that you always wanted to fight him. So it’s a win-win solution.”

“Eeeh, that’s so cruel.”

Shiori said so jokingly, Kanae laughed and replied with a grunt.

In reality, if either one of them had to stay behind in that situation, it would have been Shiori and Kanae would be the one taking Reina to safety. Whether it was to let Akira kill her in order to abate his anger or to kill Akira instead, Shiori would be the one staying behind. Even if Kanae tried to convince her otherwise, Shiori would still do so and both of them understood that very well.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 200, The Result of Coincidence And Prediction

Index

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Akira was dipping himself inside the hot bath in his house to melt the exhaustion that had accumulated that day.

“…Today was too tiring, so many things happened. I hope that we still manage to get some money from it… it’ll be fine, right?”

Akira glanced at Alpha, who was taking a bath together with him, seeking her agreement. But Alpha instead smiled teasingly and said.

“I wonder about that.”

“Just say yes, will you?”

“It’s not like I can guarantee what Reina and Togami would do. In the first place, you’re the one who left the relics and the broken automata with Reina and Togami to sell them. It’s indeed a troublesome subject, so it can’t be helped.”

“Well, it’s not like I can bring the broken automata to Katsuragi, I feel like Katsuragi won’t buy them after all. So I thought leaving that to Reina, who seems to have connections, will be able to sell them at a much better price.”

“It’s not like I’m blaming you. It’s just that I can’t guarantee that it would be alright.”

“I know, but still…”

Akira lightly sighed, he then relaxed back as if to have given up on that matter and said to himself.

“It’s alright, it’ll be fine. Shiori also said that she’ll take responsibility if it doesn’t work out. So I’m sure she also believes today’s loot can sell for quite a lot of money. It should be alright.”

“Well, in the worst-case scenario, we can go to give our complaint to them after you get your new equipment.”

“That’s a good idea… Equipment, huh.”

Although Akira seemed to have moved on once before from that subject, he once again made a difficult face.

“What’s wrong?”

“…No, it’s nothing.”

After Akira again lost most of his equipment, he went to Shizuka to get new equipment with the current money that he had. First of all, he prioritized rifles and put in an order for 3 fully modified SSB rifles. Shizuka’s expression when he placed that order left an impression in his mind.

Akira had decided to be honest and told Shizuka everything in case she inquired, but she accepted his order without saying anything. But in place of that, Shizuka looked slightly surprised and exasperated at the same time. She then smiled as if she had given up, but there was pity mixed in her smile.

Akira thought that Shizuka would at least say something about him already breaking his rifles in such a short time, but she instead continued talking without even touching on that subject. He felt something was not right about it.

“…Shizuka-san did not say anything, so it should be alright, yep.”

“Let’s just hope that it’s not a smile of exasperation since she had worked so hard to get the equipment that was originally already outside the range of the shop’s products but you keep breaking them in no time and you don’t show any remorse at all when you place an order for replacements. But as a weapon merchant, she doesn’t have a good reason to stop you since it contributes well to the shop’s revenue.”

“If you don’t know for sure, then stop scaring me!”

“I only said that because you seem too stuck on that matter. You should just move on, if you keep yourself bothered by it and it ends up making you use your equipment too carefully, you might end up hurting yourself which would defeat the reason why you got them in the first place, you know?”

“I know, but still…”

“It doesn’t matter if your equipment is broken as long as you, yourself are safe. It does contribute to her shop’s revenue and it’s not like you are breaking them intentionally anyway. That’s why it doesn’t matter. If Shizuka is worried, it is either because you use your equipment without care or because you keep getting yourself in a situation where you have no choice but to do something that destroys your equipment. This is not something for you to worry about, or more like, it’s way too late for you to start worrying about this, right?”

“…You have a point there.”

Akira smiled wryly as he asked himself if deep inside, he wanted Shizuka to worry about him. Which in that case, he might have been intentionally going to dangerous places wishing that Shizuka would worry for him. He told himself that desire was too greedy and smiled wryly, he himself knew

that very well. He then decided to talk about something else to move on from that subject.

“…By the way, about that white card though, what exactly was it?”

“That is a business card. You can use that card to contact that Olivia automaton. If you’re someone who can connect to the old-world domain, you can use it to directly get in contact with Olivia, and if you can’t do that, you can use an old-world communication device instead. I bet it left that to you hoping that you would hire it.”

Akira immediately turned to Alpha.

“Alpha, you knew all of that?”

“Yep.”

“…Why didn’t you tell me back then?”

“Can you keep that a secret?”

Alpha smiled as usual. Although Akira understood that she had a good point there and agreed with her, he was not exactly happy to admit it.

“Was that thing actually a very expensive object?”

“That depends on how much price you would place on a method to contact the old-world’s side in a friendly manner.”

“In that case, that should be a pretty pricy thing… and I ended up giving it away thinking that it wasn’t worth that much. I guess that was a big blunder, huh?”

“It’s the opposite. You did great getting that object away from you as fast as possible. In order to be able to use that card, you at least need to have the knowledge on how to connect to the old-world domain. If you try to keep it for yourself, in the worst-case scenario, others might get suspicious thinking that you might know. That’s why I didn’t tell you back there. Like I said before, I don’t think you can keep it a secret, right?”

“…Yeah, I don’t think I can.”

Shiori obviously noticed when he had a small reaction the moment she mentioned the name ‘Lion Steel’. If he had known just how valuable that card was, Akira did not think that he would be able to let that card go.

“Thought so. Let me at least tell you this though, make sure not to get too hung up on that. Instead, think of it as pushing that problem to them. If you insist on keeping it, people might get suspicious.”

“You have a point there, I have no plans on getting captured after all.”

Having suspicion of being someone who could connect to the old-world domain was enough for the Hunter Office to dispatch a capture warrant. Since Akira was really someone who could connect to the old-world domain, even if that suspicion came from something completely unrelated, he could not afford to get captured by them no matter what. With this, any regrets that he had regarding that card was completely gone.

“In the first place, you don’t have any chrome with you anyway, so it’s not like you can hire Olivia. The only people who could do that are the super-rich or huge corporations who have chrome.”

“Exactly. That’s just way out of my reach. I guess this means I have no connection with them right from the start, huh… Wait, this is just my guess, but it felt like Shiori knew about that card though. I wonder if she has any connections with that world.”

“Well, she’s exploring ruins in a maid uniform and she calls Reina, Milady, it won’t be strange if she does have some connections with that world. She might know just how valuable that card is, and just maybe, she might even be actively involved in that world.”

“Now that you mention it, that does make sense. I wonder who they actually are. To be honest, from my point of view, they look like nothing but a bunch of rich people from the inner wall who do Hunter work as a hobby…”

Akira thought about Reina’s team and its background while enjoying the warm bath. But since he could not come up with any good answer, that question eventually melted into the warm water too.

On the next day. Inside a high-class hotel in the lower district of Kugamayama city, Togami, Shikarabe, Reina and Shiori gathered inside one of the rooms.

Togami placed 1 million Aurum in front of Shikarabe. Shikarabe took it and put it inside his chest pocket. Seeing that, Togami smiled happily and pridefully.

“There, I finally made you take all the 30 million Aurum.”

“Indeed.”

Seeing how Shikarabe smiled amusedly there, Togami felt a strong feeling of accomplishment. Seeing that, Reina could not help but tilt her head.

“Togami, what is it?”

“It’s nothing.”

After that, Shikarabe’s expression turned serious as he said.

“Togami, today will be your last training, let’s start now.”

“Now? Aren’t we here to talk about what to do with the relics that we gathered yesterday and how to divide the money from that?”

“That’s exactly your last training. Being able to divide the money at the end of a ruin exploration without any problem at all is one of the important skills for a Hunter. And you need to learn half of that from real experience. Togami, this time, you asked for Akira’s help. You asked for help from a Hunter who is better than you although you don’t know him well. On top of that, you didn’t make an agreement on how to divide the loot upfront. So don’t expect him to give away the loot that you have risked your life for free out of kindness, as a matter of fact, I bet he would come at you without holding back.”

As if to continue Shikarabe's warning, Shiori then said with a serious face.

"Milady, this is also training for Milady. Shikarabe-sama and I will come at both of you as if we're Akira-sama trying to take all the loot. Togami-sama and Milady should work together to prevent it."

"I'll let you know this, also consider the worst-case scenario where Akira would come at you with force, and make sure to avoid that no matter what. It's important to make sure not to pick a fight with someone that you have no chance of winning against."

"Akira-sama immediately demanded to pay for the expenses from the last expedition. Rifle, bike, vehicle, augmented suit, ammo and medicine. Some of them might be able to be repaired while some might need replacements, either way, they would add more to the expenses. The total expense is predicted to be about 1 billion Aurum. If you take your time selling the relics, you won't be able to pay that money immediately."

"Think carefully before you decide whether to try to explain that to Akira or to take on debt to pay him back for the time being. Make sure to keep it in your mind, just how long a Hunter who has no aversion to killing others, would be willing to wait for his 1 billion Aurum."

"Remember that you can't just say that you would divide the loot equally. Everyone would want their lives to be priced highly. You need to make sure to think about how to still receive a profit when you're up against someone who you can't win against in a real fight and doesn't bend during a negotiation. If you worsen his mood, it might turn into a fight at a drop of a hat."

"There's also an option of asking for the Hunter Office's help. But of course, that won't be free and it's not like it would convince him, I bet he would still have some grudge left if you do that. Although it's not a good choice, sometimes, you have no other option but to do it."

"Do remember that it might not even be needed at all in the first place. It's not a method to guarantee your safety. So please be careful."

“Now then, let’s start.”

“We shall start now.”

Shikarabe and Shiori seemed to be serious, Togami and Reina looked at each other with worried smiles.

Dividing the loot was the last step before a team of Hunters finally disbanded. Togami and Reina did their best to face that final step with their own abilities. It made them understand why Hunters would hire negotiators and how much Drankam had been helping them in that regard.

The real reason why Drankam was formed in the first place was simply for the sake of helping injured and retired Hunters. After all, even a careful Hunter would be able to rely on things that needed trust if it was between Hunters that he or she knew very well. Although it was significantly changed since its founding, that part of the organization stayed the same.

Togami and Reina had a hard negotiation practice as they only reached a deal around the end of the day. Of course, both of them were literally spent at that point. In the end, the deal was for the loot to be divided equally after subtracting the battle expense and that there was no rush in paying for that money. So in short, it really was nothing but training which did not mean anything toward the real deal that they still had to face. When they knew that, Togami and Reina could not help but complain.

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In the headquarters of a certain company inside the inner wall, the officers from the upper echelon of that company gathered in a huge meeting room.

Inside that meeting room, Yanagisawa did not look happy at all as he said.

“What do you mean you’re going to stop extending the supply route?!”

As Yanagisawa’s anger was clearly expressed, in contrast to his usual lack-of-emotion expression, the other people inside the room started to tense up. Yanagisawa was responsible for the operation to extend the supply route

from the Kuzusuhara ruin's frontier base into the deeper part of the ruin. And now, he had received an order that not only interfered with his job but even obstructed its continuation. It was not strange for Yanagisawa to take it personally. It would not end up with only mere bruises when someone who was merely an administrator over a piece of land picked a fight against someone who was under the Corporate Government.

A mid-rank officer from the City Management tried to calm Yanagisawa down.

"We're not stopping it completely. It's just a temporary thing in order to lighten the worries expressed by some of our customers. They thought that the recent incident was caused by the aggressive expansion of the supply route deep into the ruin."

"There's no evidence connecting the expansion and that incident. And even if that's true, that's still within our predictions, we did expect something like that to happen when we started this project. So there's no reason for us to stop the expansion now. This is also for the sake of the frontier base, which is under construction right now. Even during that incident, we also obtained good results. If that was not enough for you, you should increase the budget just like I suggested last time, although, someone rejected that suggestion."

Yanagisawa's mood worsened even more. There was no one present to stop him, even among those who were above him position-wise, no one was willing to become the martyr to overrule his opinion.

"Calm down. We were attacked twice in such a short span of time. It is not strange that our sponsors got worried."

Among those present, few people knew that the first swarm was because of Yanagisawa's doing. So Yanagisawa lowered his shoulders.

"…The reason why we're expanding the supply route is to create a secured route through the ruin. So that we can excavate the expensive relics more easily. Rather than the voice of those cowards cowering within the inner wall, isn't it more important to prioritize our original goal?"

“I know. We also don’t want to stop the expansion. In the end, this is nothing but a temporary pause. The sponsors are afraid of a third attack, and that worry also stems from the lack of power in the city defence squad. If the city defence squad could repel those swarms with no problem at all, they would not care how many times those swarms might come. Moreover, you want to get that new equipment out, right? This is the perfect chance for that, we can dispatch that new equipment to the frontier base for securing the supply route. It will take some time until they can completely dispatch the new equipment. So, in the meantime, we can take a break from expanding the supply route until then. We agreed to dispatch them just like you had asked, I hope you can make a compromise with this. If the third attack happens after that and the new equipment can easily repel the swarm, then it would be attributed to the dispatching of the new equipment for the city defence squad. Is that good enough for you?”

Yanagisawa did not give an immediate reply. The silence in the room continued.

“…Just because we stop expanding the supply route, I won’t accept any budget cut. And I’ll have the original budget for the new equipment.”

“If it’s fine to use the new equipment for exploring the inner part of the ruin too, then I shall allow it.”

Yanagisawa’s tense expression finally relaxed. His voice also turned back to its usual flippant tone.

“If you’re willing to go that far, it can’t be helped then. We’ll stop extending the supply route.”

Sighs of relief echoed in the meeting room.

After that, they continued their meeting to talk about several other matters. That was when a small ruffle between area administrators happened.

“For the next subject, we’ve received a report regarding the difference between the real worth of land and those reported on paper. We’ll start with the person who brought this up.”

As the person who had been working as the leader of that meeting said so, Udajima stood up and smiled at Inabe.

“I’m Udajima. As everyone knows well, the inner part of the Kuzusuhara ruin is divided into smaller sections and each section is assigned to a different administrator. Each administrator will survey the section that they’re assigned to and the result from that survey, which includes the type of relics that you can find there, will decide on the priority for a further survey and the budget for the same.”

Udajima took a short pause and glanced at Inabe. Inabe curled his lips in reply.

“Everyone here is busy, just cut the chase and get to it.”

“Very well then. Inabe, it seems that the report from your place says that you’ve found an old-world terminal in the area that you’re responsible for, is that true?”

“It is the truth. What of it?”

“In that case, I’ll take this chance to declare that it is fake!”

“What!?”

As murmur propagated through the room, Inabe finally processed what Udajima had said and raised his voice.

“Are you kidding me!? That report has even gone through a formal appraiser from Kugamayama city, you know!! Are you seriously saying that I’m faking that report!? Those relics are really old-world terminals! This is a slander!!”

“I’m not saying that they are not old-world terminals.”

“So what’s your problem then?”

“The problem is where you found them… There’s a good chance you got them from another place outside your section!! And you brought them there

in order to increase the value of your section!!”

“W-what are you even talking about!?”

Inabe showed a slight panic. But in order to hide it, he immediately raised his voice.

“That’s a baseless accusation!! Where’s the evidence!?”

“Of course, I have some with me.”

“I bet you just faked them too!! You’re planning to pull down the value of my section by causing fictitious trouble, aren’t you!? If you only have vague pieces of evidence that might as well be fake, you can excuse yourself by using that as a reason to run away from the repercussions after all!!”

“Well, I know you would say that.”

Seeing how Udajima was smiling as if he had already won, Inabe felt unease. But even so, he retained anger on his face.

[The operation should have been perfect! There’s no way he can see through that…! Wait, don’t tell me… Is it that girl!?]

Inabe started to doubt Viola’s intention in having given him those relics. In short, it was nothing more than a strategy to trap him. But Inabe made sure not to show that on his face. He told himself that since those relics were really old-world terminals, he should be able to win the argument as he slowly got rid of panic from his face.

But Udajima then smiled as if he knew that would happen.

“Even if both of us present our data here, it would be difficult to judge which one is correct. There’s also a good chance that we both don’t have enough evidence to support our respective claims. That’s why let’s focus on what we know for sure. Although the results from the appraisal say that all of those relics are really old-world terminals, I went ahead and submitted a

request to the appraisal companies union to check the origin of all those relics!! And, I've asked to put the result from that request here and now!!"

Inabe froze, he then said with a shaking voice.

"Y-You… You even went that far, huh!? Just how much do you think that would cost you!?"

"Yeah, it wasn't cheap at all. I know you know that too. But if it's the appraisal companies union, although there might be some discrepancies, they should be able to pinpoint and track relics found in the Kuzusuhara ruin. Well then, let's put up the result now."

Seeing how Inabe's bluff was crumbling down, Udajima smiled triumphantly as he operated the terminal. Then, a picture of a man was displayed in the middle of that room.

"Good afternoon, I am from the appraisal companies union. We will send a full report later, but since we were requested to give a direct report, we'll keep this short. After our investigation, the relics in question…"

Inabe had completely given up. Deep inside his heart, he kept cursing Viola, who might have planned this and Udajima who might have been the one who asked Viola to do that in the first place. Udajima was smiling triumphantly, at least, that was the case until he heard the continuation of the report.

"…Is highly likely to be found in the reported location."

"…Hah?"

"…Wha-?"

Udajima and Inabe could not hide their surprise.

"If there's no other question, we shall take our excuse here."

Udajima finally returned back to reality as he immediately shouted.

“No way!! That can’t be right!! It must be some kind of mistake!!”

“It’s the real result from an investigation done by the union. Please check the report for further detail. The billed fee will not be reimbursed even if you find the result unsatisfactory. So please keep that in mind. Are there any other questions? …Very well, please excuse me then.”

The display vanished. Udajima mumbled as if he just saw something that he could not believe.

“No way… That’s impossible… Those relics should have come from the Higaraka residence ruin… Even if it’s not, one thing for sure is they can’t be from Inabe’s area!…!? Inabe!! Don’t tell me, you… You actually found them in your area and took them out first before bringing them back in!? Did you do all of this just to trick me!?”

Inabe reeled back from that accusation, he then smiled while hiding his own thoughts as he said to Udajima.

“What are you even talking about? That’s obviously not true, just cut it out already.”

“Then, why were you so panicked?”

“Anyone would panic when they find out someone is trying to frame them. Well, although, it seems that you’ve blown yourself up this time.”

Inabe and Udajima’s positions were reversed. Inabe was smiling triumphantly while Udajima was badly flustered. It showed who had won and who had lost the argument.

The leader of the meeting tried to calm the situation down.

“Both of you, get back to your seat. Inabe, make sure not to do anything suspicious from here on out.”

“I don’t remember ever doing anything suspicious though. But it seems that some people just can’t leave me alone, huh. I’ll be more careful next time.”

Inabe calmly sat back on his seat.

“Udajima, this should clear up your suspicions. Keep in mind not to do something like this again.”

Udajima did not reply as he meekly sat back.

“Well then, let’s move to the next subject. It seems that there’s a report saying someone has claimed to have gotten in contact with the ruin’s manager. Yanagisawa will give the detail…”

The meeting continued just like that as if they were ignoring what just happened between Udajima and Inabe.

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After the meeting, Inabe, who had returned back to his private quarters, smiled and said.

“I didn’t see that coming at all, but I got through it just fine! That girl didn’t get in contact with me in order to frame me, it’s in order to frame Udajima, huh? Well, that doesn’t matter. It doesn’t change the fact that it got rid of that guy.”

After he laughed in relief and regained his calm, he looked at the report from the appraisal companies union and started thinking about what to do next.

[But still, to think that they actually came from my area. I didn’t expect it at all… To be honest, it’s only near the borders of my area that we haven’t explored. But that Udajima, I bet he thought that it was fine as long as it was outside the Kuzusuhara ruin and set the investigation area range a bit too big.]

Now that Inabe had regained his calm, he started to string together the information that he currently had.

[That Hunter… Akira, was it again? If I’m not mistaken, he’s strong enough to even make the City Management force him to take a Rank-up request. It

won’t be strange for someone as strong as him to return back from unexplored ruins in the future. And if he had found a secret passage to an unexplored warehouse, it wouldn’t be strange that he would be hiding that too. After all, if the location of that hidden passage leaked and Hunters start to flood the area, there’s a good chance someone would find that hidden passage too.]

Inabe then remembered something about Akira and opened his information terminal.

[If I’m not mistaken, during that ruin exploration in my area, it seemed that the humanoid monsters focused on this Hunter. If this was because his face got recorded by the ruin’s security system the moment he took those relics from that undiscovered location and if this is the reason why he was treated differently compared to the other Hunters whom the ruin management only views as suspicious armed individuals, then it would mean the location where he found those relics should be somewhere nearby. The union also said there’s a good chance those relics really came from this area according to their investigation. Although, since Udajima did not pay the full fee, the method that the union used to confirm it was not written in the report and I have no idea how the union did that. But that doesn’t matter, the most important thing is the result, not the method.]

Inabe then remembered the powered suit that Yanagisawa requested.

[If I remember correctly, that powered suit is pretty strong. I heard that it was able to kill a building-sized monster with a melee weapon. And now it’s approved for ruin exploration too… It doesn’t matter how dangerous that unexplored place is, it should be alright if I bring a couple of that powered suit with me. After all, I need to find relics in my area, and if that unexplored place still has a lot of relics… Then, if I can get Akira involved too… And those people from Drankam too… I should have enough manpower to explore it…]

Inabe combined all kinds of information in his head.

“…Wait for a sec, doesn’t this mean… That it’s my time to shine?”

Inabe smiled widely, it was a deep greedy smile.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 201, Pulling out a Nail

Index

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The sponsors of Kugamayama city regularly held a feast on the upper floor of the Kugama building. It was a gathering of the conglomerates of huge companies from the inner wall where they meet and form connections as well as gather information about each other. It was the perfect opportunity to expand one's business. Basically, the people who gathered there were not the kind of people who could be pulled down by the economy. Instead, they were people who had the power and authority over that said economy. The regulars of that feast could easily infer someone else's power from how often they participated in such a feast.

This time, Sheryl also joined the feast accompanied by Viola. It happened a few days after that incident between Inabe and Udajima.

Viola was donning a daring dress, although it exuded her familiarity with secrets, it also made her look suspicious at the same time.

In contrast to that, Sheryl was wearing a graceful dress with a small accessory that boosted her charm. Although she somehow got a hold of herself in that situation, she still looked nervous, as if she was a lady who was not used to such a social gathering.

For the people who did not know their relation, it was easy to imagine from that scene that it was an evil shady woman bringing along a clueless lady into that feast.

Sheryl then mumbled a short sentence that gave a hint as to why they were there that day.

“But still, to think that he would take such a troublesome approach.”

Viola smiled at Sheryl like a veteran smiling at a greenhorn.

“The meaning behind this troublesome approach is usually much more important than you think. And that is doubly true when it is not something that they could just bring up in public. It’s just like how people decide to bluff or make excuses, you know? It makes the subject vaguer from afar which prevents people from investigating the truth.”

“Is that so?”

Sheryl had made a deal with Inabe to send some of his relics to be sold at her relic shop. But even for Inabe, it was impossible to just send the relics to an unknown shop that had no connection at all with the City Management in public. As such, Inabe invited Sheryl to that feast so that he could pretend to meet her by pure chance here. It was only then, could he make an excuse that he saw some talent in Sheryl, and decided to invest and entrust some expensive relics to her. Not only that, but Inabe was also evaluating other methods available for him to invest in Sheryl, adjusting his margin of profit using the same excuse.

“Sheryl, I have to go and meet some other people for a different matter, so I’ll have to leave you for a bit. Make sure not to do anything suspicious, okay?”

“I’ll go to you and let you handle the rest if something bad happens.”

“That’s a good decision.”

Although Sheryl said so in a rather curt manner, Viola replied with her usual smile before she left Sheryl. Seeing that reaction from Viola, Sheryl understood just how familiar Viola was to this game of intrigue, unlike herself. Sheryl could not help but frown because of the gap between them.

Now that Sheryl was alone, she avoided making any unnecessary interaction with the others in order to survive that feast. Normally, people here would go around making connections. But in the case of Sheryl, if she blurted out something that she should not, people would be able to easily identify that she should not be in that place. So, in order to prevent that, she made preparations to give her a way to retreat with the least needed courtesy if someone struck up a conversation with her. And the first step for that was maintaining some distance from the other participants of the feast.

As Sheryl stood there at the corner of the hall watching the others in that feast, she thought that scene could not be any more different compared to slum city. She understood that at least her dress was suitable for this place and time, but she herself still lacked the confidence to be standing here. After all, people would always bring with them a piece of where they grew up from. But even so, she still kept her eyes on the others, observing them closely so that she could act more similar to their mannerisms.

Unfortunately, there was no lack of distraction coming into her vision. For the others here, the food served was nothing more than a complimentary snack during their conversation, but for Sheryl, she had to fight back the desire to get a taste of that food.

In order to build up resistance against those foods, Viola had brought Sheryl to a high-class restaurant in the Kugama building once before attending that feast. Although Sheryl was warned by Viola beforehand, she could not hold back her reaction when she experienced the taste that she could never find in the slum city.

There were mistakes that might happen because you did not know it and there were things that you could fight back simply because you knew it well beforehand. Sheryl was stuck in between those two situations. In order to be able to blend in well among the people here, she had to act as if those foods did not interest her at all. In order to help her do that, she had filled her

stomach with cheap stuff before coming there. After filling her stomach to the point where she felt like puking, she found the strength to fight back the temptation of the delicious food in that feast.

But even so, every time her eyes caught onto the food in that hall, she felt as if her stomach cloned another empty version of itself, making space for more. Although she was able to hold herself back, her smile stiffened because of that.

“Sheryl…?”

Sheryl turned to the source of that voice and saw Katsuya looking at her, rather surprised.

“Long time no see, Katsuya.”

Sheryl decided to have a small talk with Katsuya to combat the temptation from the food as she smiled at him.

“What a coincidence to meet you here… Or I guess it shouldn’t be that surprising, huh. I bet it’s normal for a Hunter as good as Katsuya to attend this kind of event. So… Do you frequent this feast?”

Katsuya was attending the feast in a stylish suit instead of his usual augmented suit. But it was obvious from his mannerism that he was not used to it yet. Moreover, he was a bit flustered since he did not expect to actually meet Sheryl here although he did wish for it unconsciously.

“Uh, well, this is actually my first. Though I did attend something similar a few times before…”

“Is that so? This is actually my first time too. I received an invitation from an acquaintance and so, I’m here for some business.”

Sheryl then picked up two glasses from a nearby butler and offered one to Katsuya, who followed the flow and picked up the glass.

“Well then, to commemorate this meeting and this feast, cheers!”

Sheryl smiled and looked straight into Katsuya's eyes. She then clinked her glass with his, making a small ringing sound.

Katsuya blushed a bit and was charmed by Sheryl as she gracefully took a sip from her glass. He then flusteredly brought his own glass to his mouth as if he just snapped from being hypnotized.

On the other side of the feast, Viola walked with a smile towards an officer from Drankam, Mizuha. In contrast to Viola, Mizuha slightly curled her lips seeing Viola there.

"Viola, how the heck did you get in here?"

"Not with any illegal means, I was officially invited, you know?"

"There's no way a mere information broker would be invited to this event. Just how many things do you think I needed to go through to be able to come to this place? I have no clue whether you blackmailed the guards or bribed them, either way, it would be troublesome if others see me talking with someone like you. So like, can you just leave me alone?"

Seeing that Mizuha did not believe her at all, Viola smiled and pulled out her invitation from her chest. Mizuha still could not trust Viola as she checked that invitation. When she read through it, she could not hide her surprise. Not only was the invitation a formal one, but it also came from Inabe, an important person in the City Management of Kuzusuhara ruin.

"Viola… Just how did you…?"

"You know me all too well that I never lie, right?"

Compared to Viola, who received her invitation from Inabe, Mizuha's position was lower since hers was only received using her connection in Drankam.

"Now that you understand I'm here because of a formal invitation, let's use this wonderful chance to deepen our relationship. This way, both of us will

have more connections that we can use. Moreover, I have something that I want to ask you."

"…Keep it short."

Mizuha was baited by the possibility of getting Inabe's contact from Viola and decided to listen to what Viola had to say, though she did not like it at all.

Viola smiled triumphantly that she got the reaction that she had expected. After making some idle talks first as if to delay the main subject, Viola finally got into the main subject without changing her tone.

"By the way, did you hear anything about the result from that investigation? I'm talking about who told Katsuya where that pickpocket was back during that incident in slum city."

"I have nothing at all, the report that I gave you before was really all that I know."

From the deal that they had made between them, Mizuha sent a Drankam investigation regarding that matter to Viola in the past.

According to that report, it had been confirmed that Nergo was the one who told Katsuya about Alna's whereabouts. Katsuya said so and Nergo also admitted to it.

It seemed that Nergo witnessed Alna getting captured near the slum city. At first, he thought that she was just one of those common pickpockets in the slum, but then, he remembered and thought that pickpocket might be one that Katsuya was talking about lately. So he decided to give Katsuya a call. After Nergo said so to the investigators, he then said while looking regretfully that he would not have done that had he known it would turn into something like this.

After the investigation, the investigators gave the report to Drankam. Then Drankam officers used that report as a basis to prove their non-involvement

in that incident. Of course, as an officer in Drankam, Mizuha also received a copy of that report.

Viola smiled deeply and warned Mizuha.

“Is that already really everything? Do you really not have anything else?”

Mizuha looked confusedly at Viola, but her suspicion was greatly affected by her prior knowledge of how evil Viola was.

“Let me tell you this upfront. I won’t accept any complaint even if you say that level of information was not worth its fee. After all, I have no plans to be one of your puppets and I know how you do things by only giving out one-sided information. You’re sadly mistaken if you think I won’t raise this as an issue here just because you brought this matter up in a place like this. Likewise, do not think I will take the bait just because you have a connection to the upper echelon for the City Management.”

Viola exaggerated her surprise as she replied.

“That’s a misunderstanding. It’s just that it doesn’t sit really well with me saying that it’s nothing but a pure coincidence, so I think it might be a good idea to do further investigation on this matter. And in the case that you do, I might be able to lend you some help. It’s basically just a piece of advice for one of my customers.”

“It was a pure coincidence and Drankam has nothing to do with that battle at all. That’s the formal statement from Drankam. If you don’t want to pick a fight with Drankam, you should refrain from doing anything. Even if it was not a coincidence, we can see it simply as Nergo paying back his favour since Katsuya saved him in the past. I bet if you get involved in it, you could use it as a chance to get in between them. So, I don’t need anything from you even if you’re offering it for free. Just how many crimes have you committed in the past saying that they were nothing but coincidences?”

Mizuha sent a sharp glance at Viola, but Viola returned back with a casual smile.

“That’s a huge misunderstanding. As an information broker, I only offer the correct information for the sum of money paid. Although, I admit that the accuracy and the amount of information might change depending on how much a person would pay me. But it would be unreasonable to hold me responsible for the way they interpret the information that I gave them, no?

”Humph, you can say all you want, either way, I don’t need anything from you.”

“Is that so? That’s just too bad. Well, I have no plans to keep pushing this to you if you don’t want it. So I’ll withdraw for now.”

Half of what Mizuha expected was right on the target. Viola was there to offer her information on Nergo. But she did not expect that half of its content was advice and a suggestion, or in other words, a warning.

Viola showed her skill when she investigated Nergo’s background. It did not take much time for her to confirm Nergo’s track record that Drankam had already known too. But of course, Viola did not stop there, she went further to find something in the past that was detrimental to him.

Because of that, she lost some of her contacts. Those who she still could contact were either uninterested in that matter or that they had nothing interesting to say about Nergo. Viola felt that it was dangerous to pursue this matter any further and cut the investigation short.

[And here I am just thinking of giving a friendly warning since it would be too bad to lose a contact within Drankam… Well, it doesn’t really matter. It’s all good as long as nothing bad happens. I’ll just leave her be since she has no other choice but to buy information from me in case anything bad happens.]

Viola smiled deeply. Mizuha found it suspicious and was wondering what exactly was the information that Viola was offering her. But she thought that it must be one of Viola’s tricks and decided not to ask any further.

One thing for sure, Viola never lied. But if she knew what information Viola was offering, she might as well be ready to get manipulated by Viola.

But, if she did not know, she might be destroyed. Viola had control over how much information she would share. Another seed to feed the rumour had been sown, it was a matter of luck whether it would sprout or not.

Back to Sheryl and Katsuya, Sheryl was having a relaxing chat with Katsuya. Since she could not afford to talk about her humble background, she basically was only listening to Katsuya's stories.

Lately, Katsuya had been working on Kuzusuhara ruin's forward base supply route construction request. Most of the time, he fought strong monsters deep inside the ruin or helped harvest the relics around the supply route. Although it was nothing more but an idle talk about Katsuya's experience, it gave an overview of the situation in the inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin and how much effort the City Management had put into it. Normally, Sheryl would have to pay for this kind of information. The reason why Katsuya was in that feast was simply because a particular company that had gained a lot of profits from the relics that he had gathered, wanted to hear the story from Katsuya himself.

Sheryl was listening closely to Katsuya's story. She further encouraged Katsuya to continue by showing interest in his story with her expression. But she then noticed there was something bothering Katsuya, so she worriedly asked him.

"Katsuya, is there something wrong?"

Katsuya was surprised, he then apologetically said.

"Uhh, what do you mean?"

"I'm sorry if I asked something that I should not have. But please don't push yourself too hard."

"…Uhh, it's not like that, although it's true that the monsters are really strong, and that everyone worked together very well. As a matter of fact, I'm pretty proud of our achievements…"

“I can understand that from your story. I do think that you did well too. But I feel like it’s something that you, yourself, don’t want to admit. The face that you have right now is just like the face you had the last time I saw you. Back then, you regretted the fact that you could not save your friends, and you’re making the same face right now. Or more like, it seems that you’re forcing yourself to smile, which makes it even more obvious… Katsuya, are you really alright?”

Sheryl looked at Katsuya worriedly. Katsuya closed his mouth shut as if he was hiding something. The mood slowly turned dark and sad, eventually, he made a wry smile. But there was some happiness that sprouted from Sheryl being able to notice it.

“…I guess I can’t hide anything from you, huh. To be honest, it’s not like I’m intentionally hiding it… It’s just that, well, I might be actually unconsciously trying to hide it. I’m not sure myself.”

“It seems that I’ve asked something that saddened you, I apologize.”

Sheryl said so as she gracefully bowed, seeing that, Katsuya flusteredly shook his head and explained.

“It’s my fault for bringing it up myself. There’s no need for you to apologize… Well, now that it has come to this, is it okay if I continue?”

“I’ll be more than happy to listen.”

Katsuya paused for a bit as if he was hesitating, seeing Sheryl smile as she said that, his expression turned serious.

“…I …Failed again. Although I had promised, I could not keep my word.”

“I see… I understand more or less what had happened. It might be rather rude for me to say this, but working as a Hunter is a dangerous job. I believe that those who had lost their lives must have made their resolve beforehand. I know that it’s not easy, but there’s no need for you to take all the responsibility.”

Katsuya shook his head, there was visible sadness on his face.

“She wasn’t a Hunter, so I don’t think she expected it at all, and there’s no need for her to have that resolve in the first place. Although I can’t tell you the details since I’m bound by confidentiality, she’s not a Hunter who was prepared to be killed… That’s why I promised I would protect her.”

Katsuya smiley wryly.

“I… I’ve always promised a lot of things to the people around me, like it’s going to be alright, or that I’ll protect them. Although I did that simply because I’m the leader of the team, I really meant it when I said so… But, I wasn’t able to keep my words, I couldn’t keep my promises. So, I started to think that the next time I make a promise, it would just be another lie… And now, I’m not even sure what I should do about that…”

Although Sheryl seemed to be listening intently from the outside, she was actually using cold logic in the back of her mind.

She was thinking of the right response that she should give, although, at the same time, she also laughed at herself. She thought of how cruel she was since she genuinely saw Katsuya as a spoiled brat who was usually given whatever he wanted and this was just one case that was not the same.

“Katsuya, I’ll ask you some questions, it is fine if you don’t want to answer them. It’s fine as long as you yourself understand the answers to my questions.”

Katsuya frowned and tilted his head. Sheryl then confirmed that his gaze was focused on her before she asked with a serious tone.

“Did you take it easy when you tried to keep that promise?”

Katsuya was about to shout back in anger. But seeing how Sheryl was staring straight at him, he instead flinched back.

“If you did, you should use that experience and promise you won’t do that again. There’s no need to be needlessly moping around like this. If you’re

going to mop around, it’s better if you put more effort next time. But if you did not…”

Katsuya waited with bated breath for Sheryl to continue, so she continued with a gentle voice.

“Then there’s nothing more you can do about it.”

Katsuya, who was expecting to be scolded, tensed up.

“There are things in this world that we can’t change no matter what we do even if we push ourselves to death or did all the preparations that could have been done. Even if you picked the best choice, or even if you put your life on the line, there are just things that you have to give up on in life.”

Katsuya could not say anything back as Sheryl continued.

“I’m sure there are times when you thought that things might have gone differently if you had done this and that. But you only know that after it’s done, so it’s not like you can go back and redo it again differently. In the first place, the decision that you think to be the wrong one, might actually be the better one, the end result might have been worse if you had picked the other option that you now think is the right one.”

Those words stabbed Katsuya right in the heart.

“Moreover, even if that decision was really the wrong one, you chose that option based on your ability at that time. It doesn’t mean that you did not give your best shot.”

The words that Katsuya might have been seeking all alone seeped deep into his now defenceless heart.

“I’m sure that even if it ended badly, the person that you were protecting knew that you did your best trying to keep your promise. If you’re blaming yourself thinking that it was all your fault that you couldn’t keep your promise, I’m sure she would be saddened. So you should stop for her sake.”

For the finishing touch, Sheryl brought up that it was for someone else's sake too.

Katsuya then mumbled, he felt as if he should have noticed it all this time since it was right in front of his eyes.

"…I see, it seems that I'm using her as a reason to bring myself down again, huh."

Katsuya remembered what Alna said during her last moments. He could not do that up until now since he was busy fighting back against the sadness and the desperation that had been terrorizing him. But now that he had the leeway to look back, he remembered vividly that Alna was smiling right until the end. There was no trace of blame that might haunt him for the rest of his life at all.

Katsuya raised both of his hands up and slapped them hard on his cheeks. He did that with such vigour that it caused a loud painful sound. Once the sound faded and the pain was gone, he returned back to his usual confident smile.

"Sheryl, thank you. It did help me a lot. I'm sorry to have made you worry, but I'm alright now."

Sheryl, who saw that, thought that it was a bit strange.

"Is there something wrong?"

"…Ah, it's nothing, it seems that you're really okay now."

"Yep, and it's thanks to you."

"I just simply said my thoughts. But, your welcome."

Sheryl smiled teasingly. Now that Katsuya had regained his calm, her smile looked extremely charming to him.

That was when Inabe approached them. When he noticed that the person Sheryl was talking with was Katsuya, he then mockingly said.

“Katsuya from Drankam, huh? Hitting on a girl even at a place like this. I see. You’re indeed as fast as the rumour says. But, aren’t you mistaking the reason for this feast?”

Katsuya annoyedly replied.

“I’m just talking to a friend, I don’t know who you are, but don’t give Sheryl the wrong idea.”

“I see, in that case, I’m sorry but I’ll have you leave her now, I have something that I want to discuss with her.”

“Can’t you see that I’m talking with her right now? You can talk with her later.”

Katsuya thought that Inabe was arrogant to say that, that was why he replied with a raised voice. But instead, Inabe scolded Katsuya for his ignorance.

“It’s true that this feast is held for people to make connections, but it’s for productive talks such as important negotiations and deals. I have business matters to discuss with her and it’s not something that a mere Hunter like you can listen to. Moreover, if you insist on staying and cause her to lose a few billion Aurum worth in our deal, are you going to take responsibility for it?”

Of course, even Katsuya could not provide that much money. Although he significantly toned down his attitude, it was obvious that he was still not happy with it.

Seeing that, Sheryl lightly bowed to Katsuya and apologetically said to him.

“Katsuya, I’m sorry, but can we continue this some other time?”

Now that Sheryl even asked him politely, he had no other choice but to pull back. So he then said regretfully.

“Of course, see you again then, Sheryl.”

“Thank you, and let’s meet again some other time.”

Katsuya cheered up from that promise to meet again. He then sent a glance at Inabe before leaving.

Inabe looked at Katsuya as if he was looking at a poorly mannered child before turning to Sheryl.

“Before going on to the main subject, is it okay if I ask you what is your relation with him?”

“Just an acquaintance that I’ve met a few times in the past.”

Inabe was a bit surprised by that rather cold reply from Sheryl.

“…It doesn’t seem like he would agree with that though?”

“I’m not that nice to the point that I would straighten up a misunderstanding when I have no reason to do so.”

Hearing Sheryl say it casually, Inabe could not hold back his chuckle.

There were rumours saying that Yanagisawa had his eyes on Katsuya. So for those people who wanted to build a connection with Yanagisawa, Katsuya was an important person. Not only had Sheryl formed a connection, but it also seemed that she even had Katsuya in the palm of her hand. It greatly raised Inabe’s evaluation of Sheryl.

“I see. No wonder you are working together with that woman.”

Sheryl sent an honest displeased glance at Inabe.

“…Can you stop saying something like that?”

Judging from her reaction, Inabe then thought.

[It seems that although they’re working together, they’re not exactly on the same team. Getting close to Viola carries too much risk, so I guess I better approach Sheryl instead, huh.]

Viola was very skilled, but she could not be trusted. So instead, it might be safer to do that via Sheryl. That was what Inabe thought of Sheryl right now.

“Now then, before we get to the main subject, how about we move somewhere else first? In order to deceive the people here into thinking that we know each other, we need to be deliberate about it; be it a secret talk to bait their attention or a common discussion to show off, either would work just fine.”

“Very well, I’ll leave that decision to you. And also, is it okay to put my hopes up for that few billion Aurum deal that you mentioned?”

“It depends on your effort and skill.”

“In that case, I shall give my best effort.”

In response to that light challenge from Inabe, Sheryl gave a confident and charming smile.

After they changed places, they then had a rather lighthearted talk. During their conversation, Sheryl was able to extract some information about Katsuya too as she remembered that she felt something was weird before Katsuya left them.

The fact that Katsuya could not keep his promise left a deep wound in his heart as if it was a ball and chain which chained him down. But after that exchange with Sheryl, it was as if he was finally released from that chain. But of course, Sheryl did not notice it.

—*—*—*—

Yanagisawa was reading the documents in the holographic display in front of him.

“It was not the right person, huh.”

The documents that he was reading mainly focused on the investigation reports regarding Katsuya. It included Katsuya’s track record in the battles

deep inside the inner part of the ruin as well as the evaluation of his actions during the social gathering event inside Drankam. Some of the reports also contained information from interviews of the people around him. But even among all of these reports, Yanagisawa could not find what he was looking for.

“Of course there’s a possibility that Nergo gave me wrong information or that they noticed me… But I don’t think that is the case this time. I really don’t know what’s wrong here.”

Since he heard from Nergo that Katsuya might be someone who could connect to the old-world domain, Yanagisawa used all kinds of methods to keep Katsuya under his command in order to ascertain that. It was an easy thing for Yanagisawa to make the City Management hire Drankam and to get them dispatched for expanding the supply route in Kuzusuhara ruin.

But the reports that he received from his men did not support that claim. The reports could not confirm that Katsuya was able to connect to the old-world domain, they did not even hint at that possibility, they were relatively normal reports for a young talented Hunter.

Yanagisawa started to get suspicious whether Nergo gave him the wrong information or the ruin managers did something to hide their existence from Katsuya’s track record.

Among the reports that he was reading, some of them mentioned Katsuya attending social gatherings. That was when Yanagisawa remembered that the feast in the Kugama building should be underway right now. So he then decided to check it out.

As he operated the terminal in front of him, a display showed a video from the ongoing feast. Then, in one of the videos from the security cameras in that feast, Yanagisawa finally found Katsuya.

After keeping his eyes on that video for some time, Yanagisawa suddenly noticed something.

“…Hm? This is… Wait…”

Yanagisawa opened up other records from the feast Katsuya was attending. He then compared all of those images and smiled.

There was an obvious difference between the current image and the past image. It was the way people around him looked at him. It was what Nergo said as one of the unique features of someone who could connect to the old-world when Yanagisawa asked him for proof that Katsuya was indeed able to connect to the old-world domain.

“This is… Did they finally show themselves? They might have noticed that I’m looking for them and told Katsuya to be careful, but now are they thinking that it was nothing but their needless worry and there was no need to do that anymore? Either that or Katsuya suddenly decided not to follow their orders? Well, it doesn’t really matter. I bet he’s the one.”

Yanagisawa inferred the existence of a certain entity behind Katsuya from the difference of these images. Of course, he did not know that it was because Akira had left a trauma on him and Sheryl helped to heal that trauma.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 202, The Participants of the Feast

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Sheryl once again joined the feast. It had been a few days since Inabe barely got out fine from that incident. Viola was there too, but unlike last time, she received a separate invitation, so she was not there as Sheryl's companion.

Inabe looked at Sheryl and Viola and smiled meaningfully.

"Well, I'm really glad we are able to meet again. I'm sorry to have troubled you last time and would like to thank you for your help."

Sheryl smiled as if she was hiding something.

"I don't really understand what you are talking about, but I'm really glad that we can be of use to you, Inabe-sama."

Viola smiled confidently and joined in.

"I don't really remember we did anything, but since you said so, it means that we can look forward to some kind of gratitude, right?"

"Of course. I've finished all the preparations, we can talk about it later."

Sheryl knew that Inabe had received a number of old-world terminals from a secret deal with Akira since she was directly involved in that deal. After all, Inabe made that request to Viola through Sheryl. So basically, Inabe asked Sheryl, Sheryl then asked Viola, Viola asked Akira. From this connection, finally, Akira went to meet Inabe. It was a deal that was made through multiple indirect contacts. So she thought that Inabe was being discreet here.

[…It doesn't seem to be that simple. But if that misunderstanding is a good thing for us, there is no need to go out of my own way just to fix it. I guess I'll go along with this flow.]

While Viola was handling the deal with Inabe, she also sent incomplete information to Udajima. She knew that Udajima and Inabe were not on good terms, so she was selling information to both of them, making them believe that they were the winner. The reason why Udajima saw through Inabe's trickery back then was mostly thanks to the information that he had received from Viola.

There was nothing to be gained from dealing with a fool. And if he was that incompetent, then Viola might as well use him to get another customer. She thought so and when Udajima brought those relics to the appraisal companies union for an investigation, she thought that would be the end for Inabe. That was when something completely unexpected happened.

[…Not only this time but also that time with the incident in the slum city too. I wonder why Akira always throws a wrench in my perfect plan. Well, it seems that Inabe thought that it was all according to my plan so I guess I'll act as if that is really the case. And judging from his attitude, it seems that he's not doing it as a grudge for giving that information to Udajima either. So I guess this should be fine.]

Inabe believed that what happened back then with Udajima was the result of his 'insurance' working as intended.

It was true that Inabe brought relics from somewhere in order to increase the value of the area that he was assigned to. If Udajima, who had such a piece of information, used another route to prove it instead of taking it to

the appraisal companies union, there was a good chance that Inabe would have lost during their argument.

But result-wise, Udajima was the one who lost. Moreover, it looked like he had lost the argument by his own mistake. That had given Inabe a good momentum to go forward now that one of his competitors just basically self-destructed.

Inabe could not discard the possibility that Viola deliberately manipulated the information in order to make Sheryl look good, which might allow the girl to earn more profits. While at the same time, Sheryl was also indirectly telling him that if she wanted to, she could cut off Inabe anytime. That incident with the Udajima might actually be a bribe as well as a warning for him, or at least, that was what Inabe thought.

[…Sheryl basically has Akira and Viola with her. According to some of the reports that I've received. She has enough power to rule over the slum city. I always thought that all of her actions are from Viola, but there's a good chance that it is not the case and that it actually comes from Sheryl herself. Her relic shop is doing well and the profit from it is well enough to increase my own profit margin. There's nothing to lose by forming a connection with her… Although, I need to be careful.]

During that short exchange, the misunderstanding only got worse. Both of them were talking in a friendly manner while trying to extract information from each other. From that point of view, they were doing just what the other participants in that feast were doing.

That was when Katsuya suddenly came to them in a bit of a rush.

"Sheryl!"

"Katsuya, we meet again, uhh…"

Sheryl at first showed a happy smile, but her face immediately turned to show a troubled expression right after that. Katsuya too looked happy to have met Sheryl, however, now he looked a bit confused after he saw

Sheryl's expression. Eventually, he noticed Inabe was also there and frowned with a rather stern face.

A moment later, Mizuha, Yumina, and Airi also made their appearances. All of them had different reactions to the scene. Mizuha was flustered, hoping that Katsuya had not done anything rude to Inabe. Yumina sighed exasperatedly, thinking that Katsuya had done it again, while Airi glanced at Sheryl and raised her guard.

Inabe thought for a bit before welcoming Katsuya with a hearty smile.

"Ohh, we meet again. Sorry for what happened last time."

Katsuya was a bit surprised since he did not expect that from Inabe at all.

"…Ohh, I didn't expect that at all. Ah, Is it because we brought some relics to your place last time? What was it again? Old-world information terminal? Those things are expensive right?"

Katsuya smiled triumphantly, Inabe was not bothered by it at all as he laughed it off and replied.

"Well, it's true that I see you now in a different light after knowing your skill. But from my point of view, you're still one of those common Hunters."

Katsuya curled his lips, but before he could say anything, Inabe then continued to say something that made Katsuya fluster.

"But even so, if you're actually close to Sheryl, then it's a different story. I don't want to get on Sheryl's bad side either. So I apologize for accusing you of trying to hit on Sheryl last time. It's just that, I heard rumours of how much of a womanizer you are, you know. So it would have been great if you could have explained that to me back then, or am I wrong?"

"Eh, ah, well, I'm not actually that close to Sheryl…"

Inabe was acting confused hearing Katsuya's vague answer.

“Is that so? I thought that was the case from our talk last time. Have you known her for a long time?”

“N-Not exactly, it’s just that, we have met a few times… Including this time, it’ll make… it four times?”

Inabe did not expect the number to be that low. Even Katsuya, who said so himself, seemed a bit surprised.

“…Well, it’s not like you can measure your relationship simply by how many times you have met, right?”

“T-that’s right!”

Katsuya nodded deeply.

Inabe was originally planning to lift Sheryl’s reputation a bit and simultaneously provoke Katsuya, hoping to get Katsuya involved in his plan. But Inabe did not expect what he just heard. So, he started to ponder.

[…So, in short, the previous one was only the third time, huh? They’re already that close only after 3 meetings? Is it because he’s just that fast or is it because Sheryl is just that good? I can’t tell…]

Inabe lightly glanced over everyone there before he spoke up.

“Well, what can I say. It’s not right to get in the way between the next generation of leaders. Should I leave you guys alone then?”

Katsuya unconsciously nodded, but Mizuha, who was next to him, flusteredly interjected.

“No, exchange between generations is also equally important. Moreover, we are the ones barging into your conversation, so please don’t mind us. We would be more than happy to join if we’re allowed to.”

“I see, I shall take on that offer then.”

Mizuha lightly sighed in relief. If Katsuya did not leave a bad impression, a chance to introduce him to an officer from the City Management was an important thing. Although it was awful that Viola was there, Mizuha was still satisfied with the current result. Seeing that, Katsuya, who was next to her, looked at her, confused.

As they continued their conversation, the flow of the conversation naturally separated them into two groups, the younglings and the adults. The adults were talking about their future prospects regarding ruin expeditions, while the younglings were talking about their recent experience working as Hunters.

Katsuya was talking enthusiastically about his experience, Sheryl listened closely to his story with her usual smile. Yumina joined in their conversation from time to time as she felt something bothering her about the relationship between Sheryl and Katsuya.

Back then when Katsuya suddenly cheered up and returned back to his usual self after he was in a long depression since the incident in the slum city, Yumina was honestly happy for him. When he lowered his head and apologized for making them worry, he said that instead of worrying about each other, they should be laughing together as compatriots. That smile was so bright that Yumina felt like she would fall in love with Katsuya again. But when she asked about what changed his mood, Katsuya said he met Sheryl by coincidence and had a talk with her. When Yumina heard that, she could not hold back the jealousy and other dark emotions that were welling up inside her.

Yumina was lamenting the reasons Katsuya did not say anything to her. She questioned if she was not good enough for him. All the jealousy and questions that came up inside her ended up making her loathe herself, hurting herself even more.

Yumina looked at Sheryl and compared herself to her. In order not to wound Drankam’s reputation and so that she would be able to attend that feast, Yumina was wearing a beautiful and expensive dress. But since she was not used to it, she looked a little awkward in her dress.

In contrast to that, Sheryl was wearing a refitted dress, especially made for her and it was refitted not only as a decoration but also as a weapon for negotiation. Furthermore, Sheryl herself had the skill to enhance that further making her undoubtedly charming.

Yumina and the other girls' awkwardness was the unique trait of new younglings. Others' opinions about them would not change just because of that. But there was no denying that the aura exuded by the veterans there was completely different from theirs.

Yumina swore that she would stay beside Katsuya to protect him from his tendency to jump the gun. But Katsuya was able to solve his problems with his talent as a Hunter as he continued climbing the ranks. Skill-wise, even as fellow Hunters, Yumina was hard-pressed to keep her place beside Katsuya. She was able to attend this feast not because people recognized her skill, but because Mizuha had listened to Katsuya's selfish request.

Yumina was pulled by her emotion and asked Sheryl a question.

"By the way, is there any particular reason you are attending this feast? We're here because of Drankam's connection… Or more like, we came here as Katsuya's companions."

Inabe, who heard that, immediately interjected.

"Ahh, about that, I was the one who invited her. So, I guess you can say that she's here because of her connection to me."

"Indeed, I understand that I don't have the influence to attend this feast, so I'm here because of Inabe-sama's kindness."

Katsuya and his group were surprised. According to what they had learned before attending the feast, the position of the participants in that feast was decided by who invited them. And an invitation from someone in the City Management signified a rather high position.

Inabe continued by praising Sheryl in order to pull in Katsuya.

“Sheryl might one day join this side, to be the one sending out invitations, you know. But a Hunter can only be a Hunter. A Hunter will never be the one sending out invitations. That’s the reason why I call you a mere Hunter. I didn’t do that to discredit you or anything. If you wish to change your profession from scouring for relics and selling them to us, to becoming a Hunter who is more actively involved in this kind of thing, you can call me anytime.”

Mizuha lightly laughed and said with a smile.

“Inabe-sama, I’m really happy that you find Drankam Hunters reliable, but it would be troublesome if you snatch them from us.”

“Ohh, sorry about that. We are in a perpetual lack of skilled people in the City Management, you see. So I just could not help it. Well, competing for a skilled Hunter is not that rare anyway. If you guys from Drankam don’t want to lose your exceptional Hunters, I suggest you offer them something special.”

“Of course we do.”

Both Katsuya and Sheryl were growing up in their respective fields. Yumina wondered if she would appear to suit that position and have such achievements. She knew that she would not be able to win against Sheryl in that matter. Although she was talking happily like usual, that thought on the back of her mind was dragging her down.

After a short idle talk, Mizuha thought that it was about time they took their leave. Since they were there to represent Drankam, they still had to meet others in that feast too. So with the limited time they had, they could not afford to stay there for too long.

Katsuya understood Mizuha’s signal as he smiled regretfully. But then, he remembered something as he took out an accessory from his pocket and bashfully gave it to Sheryl.

“Ah, right, this accessory, I found it during a ruin expedition. It’s like a souvenir, so if you’re okay with it, will you please accept it? It’s also my

thanks for listening to my problem last time.”

The old-world relics accessory still retained its shine as if the long years did not wither it at all. But making such an accessory was actually possible with the current era’s technology, as a matter of fact, such an accessory was not that rare. So judging from that point of view, it was not that expensive of a relic.

Sheryl stared at that accessory and shook her head.

“Thank you, but I have to refuse it.”

Katsuya was flustered, he did not expect Sheryl to not take it.

“…Ah, uhhh, do you find it unpleasant perhaps?”

Sheryl once again shook her head and said with a smile and a serious face.

“You can just laugh at me if I’m overly self-conscious about this, but if I accept it, I believe that you would try to look for a better thing to give me next time. Which means that you would push yourself to face needless danger for it. As such, I can’t accept it.”

Sheryl’s serious face relaxed for a bit, in contrast to that, her smile grew fonder as she continued.

“You should put that effort into your own safety. To make sure that you can return back alive. For me, the best souvenir will be for you to return back alive, bringing back more stories with you.”

Since all the girls around him simply accepted any gifts that he gave, the fact that Sheryl refused his gift left an impression on him. In order to match that strong impression, Katsuya smiled and said firmly.

“I see, I will bring more stories with me next time then.”

“I’ll be looking forward to it.”

They then said their goodbyes before leaving. But Mizuha stayed behind for a bit after Katsuya and the girls left. She then nervously asked Sheryl a question.

“Sheryl-san… Was it again? So, uhh, if I may, what is your relation with Viola? Uhm, actually I’ve been working with Viola for a bit in the past, but it is the first time I heard about you, so…”

“We are business partners, nothing more, nothing less.”

Sheryl replied back almost in an instant, Viola immediately interjected.

“Oh, is that so? And here I thought there’s more to it than that, you know?”

Sheryl still had her smile as she looked at Viola with a gaze that was a few degrees colder than before.

“I’m basically keeping you alive until you have no use to me, is that good enough now?”

“Yikes, that’s so scary. I’ll do my best to make sure that I’ll always be of use for you, boss.”

Mizuha was surprised by Sheryl’s attitude toward Viola and Viola’s reply there.

“Boss?”

“Yep, I’m basically working for Sheryl right now. She’s directly above me at the moment.”

Mizuha frowned and slightly puckered as she watched Sheryl and Viola smiling while facing each other.

“…I-I see. I’ll take my leave then, please excuse me.”

Mizuha lightly bowed before leaving. Although it was obvious that Sheryl was skilled, she was still not sure whether it was more dangerous than

profitable to deal with Sheryl. She was at a loss whether to warn Katsuya to stay away from Sheryl or to encourage him instead.

Inabe looked at Mizuha, who was leaving their area, with a look that was saying he understood what she was thinking.

“But still, it should be okay to accept that gift, no? It’s true that not accepting it would leave a bigger impression on Katsuya, but to be honest, I think it’ll leave a better impression if you happily accept it, you know.”

“I didn’t do that to leave an impression on him, it’s just simply an excuse not to accept that kind of gift.”

“Is there any problem? To be honest, I don’t see any problem accepting that gift though.”

“There are people who get offended when you don’t use the gifts that they give you. And sometimes, that is doubly true for non-expensive gifts that they can get without much work and it still applies even if you say that you lost it or sold it by mistake. So in the end, if I accept that, I will have to keep using it regardless of whether I actually want to or not. I just want to avoid that.”

Inabe smiled bitterly.

“I see, sometimes lying is the right choice, huh.”

There was a slightly ominous feeling from Sheryl’s smile as she said.

“I didn’t lie. Rather than a relic, I’m happier to receive stories and information instead. So it’s the truth. By the way, judging from what he said, it seems that all the credits for bringing the old-world terminals were given to him, huh. Are you really okay with that, Inabe-sama?”

Inabe smiled wryly as he felt Sheryl reproached his decision.

“Oof, that’s pretty strict of you. I’m sure no one would dare to question the relics that were brought back by a Hunter who even Yanagisawa is interested in. If you say that it was not a good choice, I have no argument to

deny it. But result-wise, we are getting better results without causing any problems. Or am I wrong?”

Inabe, who misunderstood a few things there, was indirectly saying with a smile that even if that mistake came from Viola, or in effect to that, from Sheryl herself, no one would dare to criticize them. Sheryl replied with a smile and an agreement.

“Well, it’s true that we didn’t face any troubles at all.”

To be honest, Sheryl was only asking if Inabe was okay giving that credit to someone else when he was the one who bought those expensive relics with his own money through a secret deal. But from Inabe’s reply, she was able to gain more information which she did not know and it allowed her to notice that Inabe was misunderstanding something. So she had no reason to straighten that up.

Viola more or less understood what was going on in Sheryl and Inabe’s minds as she smiled.

Inabe suddenly remembered something regarding their secret deal and asked Sheryl a question.

“By the way, about the Hunter who came to the meeting place, Akira, was it again? I heard that you have him as your support too. For a young Hunter like him, he’s more or less as strong as Katsuya, you know. So what is your relationship with that Akira?”

“We’re a couple.”

“…I see.”

Sheryl was trying to answer that as casually as possible, but as a City Management staff who had gone through a lot of negotiations, Inabe did not miss the slight change in Sheryl’s attitude.

It was nothing but a brave front hoping that it was not wrong. Inabe was surprised when he noticed that from Sheryl as he thought.

[…She’s like that with Katsuya whom she had only met a few times, so I thought that is the case for Akira too, but… Is she having trouble trying to get Akira? I thought that Sheryl could easily manipulate someone like Akira, but I guess that’s not the case, huh.]

During that feast where the participants schemed and conspired, Inabe, Sheryl, and Viola were perfectly blending in with the rest of the participants.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 203, Akira's Custom Suit

Index

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Inside a particular high-class clothing boutique in the Kugamayama city's lower district, the head manager of that boutique, Kashua, was wondering about the customers frequenting her shop lately.

Her revenue did go up and there were more people coming to her shop. In short, her business was doing well. If she was allowed to make any complaint regarding her business, it would be that the customers coming to her shop were not the kind of customers that she was hoping for.

It was not like the customers were rowdy or anything like that, as a matter of fact, they were all well mannered to an extent, they would not do anything as rude as degrading the shop. They also properly paid a good amount of money. Basically, there was nothing to complain about them. The only problem was that they were not exactly the customers Kashua was hoping for.

[…Considering that there are more of these kinds of customers coming here, I wonder if they have something to do with Viola?]

Kashua was actually more or less correct, these people were officers from gangs and other organizations from around the slum city. They caught a

glimpse of Sheryl's dress and got interested in it, then after a short conversation with Sheryl, they found out that Sheryl got that dress from Kashua's shop.

If they caused any trouble in the shop, it would bring in the security companies guarding the area. Not to mention, damaging the shop that Akira and his friends frequented might cause more trouble. Since they knew that very well, rather than bringing people to rob the shop, they only dared to bring a small number of bodyguards when they visited that shop. When they were there, they made sure to behave themselves. With respect to mannerism and appearance, they were actually even better than the people that Viola came with the other day.

[Personally speaking, I'm actually hoping to attract the people from the inner wall who come to the outer wall from time to time. And it would be ideal if the reputation of my shop spread around starting from those kinds of people. But well… I wonder if it's too late for me to think like that since we don't turn away Hunters.]

In the eastern district, being a Hunter was thought to be a crook's occupation. As a matter of fact, it was used as the main example of a bad occupation. But many of the well-earning Hunters had a good connection with the Corporate Government, as such, they had some knowledge and mannerism to deal with common people and shops treated them with a certain level of respect because of that. Of course, the opposite was true too. Poor Hunters were treated like insects. It was nothing rare for shops to turn away Hunters. If the Hunters wanted to be treated as proper customers, they needed to earn well first.

The shop's door suddenly opened, the bell rang and Kashua saw a familiar Hunter coming into the shop as she smiled and welcomed him.

It was Akira along with Sara and Elena. Akira was using his usual augmented suit. While Elena and Sara were wearing a rather stylish dress. From her experience, Kashua could immediately tell that Sara and Elena were actually Hunters too, but since they were wearing rather good quality dresses, she skipped treating them as Hunters and went straight to treating them as potential customers.

“Welcome! Thank you for coming to our shop. What are you looking for today?”

Akira nervously replied.

“Uhh, I’m here to order a custom suit.”

“Certainly. Let us know about your preference and wishes. But before that, please let me call our prized staff first, so please wait for a moment.”

As Kashua offered them a seat, Sara suddenly said to Akira.

“We’ll be looking around the shop in the meantime.”

“Okay.”

Seeing Elena and Sara walk away, Kashua looked a bit confused. Akira noticed Kashua was misunderstanding something and apologetically said to her.

“Ah, sorry, it’s for me.”

“I-I see, I’m really sorry.”

Kashua smiled, trying to hide her surprise, as she went to call for Celene. When she returned with Celene, she left Akira with Celene and went to tend to Sara and Elena.

Compared to Kashua, Celene was not that adept at tending to customers. But she understood that she at least needed to have a certain level of communication skill in order to ask for the customer’s wishes. So then she politely bowed and said to Akira.

“Please let me introduce myself again, I am Celene. I’ll be in your care.”

“Ah, yes, I’ll be in your care too.”

In contrast to Celene, Akira was utterly lacking in his communication skills. Not only because it was not an essential skill for a Hunter, but it was also

his first experience, that was why Akira was looking rather nervous.

“First of all, let me ask you what kind of custom clothing you are looking for?”

Akira was a bit surprised by that completely normal question. After a short pause, he then awkwardly replied.

“Well, I’m sorry, but I don’t really know it myself. Uhhh, what can I say, things happened which somehow ended up with me thinking about ordering a custom suit. So, it’s not like I have a clear image of what kind of suit I’m looking for… Ah, but it’s not like I don’t want to get a custom suit and it’s not like I’m doing this because I’m forced to either…”

“Please don’t worry, it’s not that rare for customers to come with that kind of thought.”

Celene smiled and said so as she thought of her next move. Seeing how Akira took the first step to be one of those customers who put a vague order, complained about the result, and did not pay the full price, Celene was thinking about how to get Akira away from that route.

“In that case, where are you planning to go with that suit? What are you planning to do with that suit? And who are you going with while wearing that suit? Let’s start with these questions first. In the end, clothing is something that you use to leave an impression on others. Thus, of course, the design of the suit would depend on the dress code, goal, and other things regarding where you are going, and what you are going to do with that suit.”

Celene was expecting to wait for a bit since Akira would take some time to think before answering. But on the contrary, Akira replied back firmly almost immediately.

“I see, that does make sense. That’s exactly what they are for in the first place after all. Well, so, I’m planning to go to a restaurant in the upper part of the Kugama building… If I’m not mistaken, the name of that restaurant is Sterian… And I’m planning to go there with some close friends and

someone to whom I owe a favour. So basically, it's a suit to go for dinner there. I guess that's all?"

"That restaurant, huh… And these close friends are the other two who came here with you today I presume?"

"Yes, and another one too. So I'm planning to go there with a party of four."

"I see… In order to get a better image for a suitable suit, is it okay if I inquire more details?"

"Sure."

Akira then started telling the chronology of how he ended up deciding to get a custom suit.

The one who recommended Akira to order a custom suit was Shizuka. When they were talking about eating out together somewhere, Shizuka noticed that Akira had no outfit that could be called a casual outfit.

Even when he was not doing any Hunter work, Akira was usually using his augmented suit. He also used the same augmented suit when he went out eating as well, thinking that it was just another extension of his job as a Hunter. When he was not exploring ruin and had nothing to do, he spent most of his time training in the wasteland. His only free time was basically when he was taking a bath or sleeping. But considering he did that to maintain his body in tip-top shape when he went to explore the ruin or for training, even those could even be said to be an extension of his job as a Hunter as well. If someone asked him about his opinion about his lifestyle, Akira would reply back that he had no complaints at all.

From Akira's point of view, he only saw himself as giving all he had in order to repay back the huge debt that he had to Alpha. But of course, he could not mention anything regarding this subject to Shizuka and the others, so he had no other choice but to stay away from that subject and come up with another excuse.

But if he did not explain, Akira would seem like a madman, spending all his time for the sake of being a Hunter; as if he was possessed. Hunting for relics and exploring ruins were both equally dangerous. Going out to such a dangerous place again and again would no doubt affect Hunter's psyche. Those who had fallen as far as going to such a dangerous place by pure hobby were definitely crazy. So for Shizuka, who often did business with Hunters, or even for Elena and Sara, who were also fellow Hunters, they could not say that Akira had any semblance of a decent lifestyle.

Shizuka thought that it would be a good idea to let Akira experience something outside just being a Hunter, to let him know that he could use his time and money for something else other than doing anything connected to being a Hunter. Otherwise, he would not be able to stay sane for long. Shizuka worried that Akira would one day die thinking that it was a normal thing without even noticing the mental fatigue that he was suffering.

On the other hand, Shizuka knew well that giving a warning to Akira regarding that matter had close to no effect. Since it was a good chance, she then suggested he get a custom suit so that he would leave behind any connection to being a Hunter when they went out for dinner.

Shizuka only made that suggestion casually. Akira was at first not sure whether to take that suggestion, but since it was not like he had any problem with money and for some reason, could feel Shizuka's worry from behind her smile, he decided to take that suggestion.

Akira did not include most of that in his story to Celene. Due to his lack of communication skills, in the end, it sounded like he decided to order a custom suit out of a whim. Thankfully, Celene, who was not as dense as Akira, more or less understood what Shizuka was trying to achieve.

"…I see. Sterian is a rather high-class restaurant even among the Hunters, so it's not rare to find them dining there still in their augmented suits. But, on the other hand, it's also a place to enjoy a normal relaxing day compared to the usual harsh daily lives of a Hunter. They can even book a seat away from other Hunters who are doing business there and Hunters can even rent a normal suit to get away from their usual battle suit."

“Ohhh, so they even have that kind of service, huh…”

“I also believe that it would be a good chance to take a rest from the harsh daily life of a Hunter. It would be great if the suit that I create is able to help you achieve that. Now then, I will base my design to be suitable for that restaurant. Do tell me if you have any wishes regarding the design. I have some samples too if you would like to see them.”

Celene operated her information terminal and showed Akira some examples of custom suits. Akira could see the picture of models wearing all kinds of designs starting from a cool looking sleek suit to a flashy suit. He hummed for a bit and looked slightly troubled, he then said with a serious look.

“Is it possible to just leave the design fully up to you? I won’t complain about the result.”

“It’s not like we can’t do that, but a custom suit’s main characteristic is that, unlike normal standard clothing, you can customize it to your heart content. But once we move on to the production, it would be difficult to make any big changes afterwards. If it’s just a small change, I’ll do my best to do it, but of course, there’s a limit on how far I can go. So, are you really okay with no particular wish regarding the suit?”

Celene said so to avoid getting complaints later. Akira thought for a bit before replying back with a bit of hesitation.

“I don’t have any fashion sense, or more like, I think I’m very insensitive about fashion. That’s why I don’t want to make any demands just to end up with a weird suit. I’m even doubtful that I can recognize a weird design when I see one. But even so, back then, when I came here to refit Sheryl’s dress, I at least could recognize that it was well designed. So, if I have to make any demands, I want to get something amazing that can even make someone as insensitive as me able to recognize that it is a good design. Is that okay?”

Celene was taken aback. She was indeed happy to hear someone praise her work, but at the same time, if someone asked her to make something similar, she could not say yes right away.

“That dress was originally refitted from an old-world dress. So if I have to make something similar, I would have to use good quality fabric, and that would not be cheap…”

To be honest, Celene wished Akira would not put his hopes too high in case he complained about the result after he made such a demand, which kicked the price of the suit up. But Akira replied back casually.

“Expensive, huh? How expensive exactly? As expected, I would hesitate to pay if it goes up to 100 billion Aurum or something like that though…”

“O-Of course it won’t be that expensive. That is, as long as it’s not an armour that looks like a suit from the outside or anything like that. In the first place, our shop doesn’t handle that kind of clothing.”

“Ah, I don’t want anything like that. A normal suit that has nothing to do with fighting will do just fine.”

“C-certainly!”

It reminded Celene that she was talking with a Hunter who was earning a healthy amount of money. Even if that Hunter had to pay 100 billion Aurum, it would be difficult, but not impossible. She was dealing with that level of Hunter.

She was questioning herself if she would be able to make a suit that would satisfy such a Hunter. That fear caused Celene to waver, but making a custom suit for such a person might allow her to use as much money as she wanted to realize the design that she had envisioned. That temptation overpowered her fear and completely wiped out any hesitation from her heart.

As she made her resolve, Celene told herself that if she backed out here, it would be the end of her as a tailor.

“…Very well, but considering that you are a Hunter, it would cost about 6 million Aurum. If you could pay that much, I’ll do my best to answer your expectation.”

“Sure, uh, you do accept Hunter ID for the payment, right?”

To be honest, Celene was half-expecting Akira would say no, but he casually said so and handed over his Hunter ID. Celene received that Hunter ID and used her terminal to process the payment. The payment went through smoothly.

“Thank you very much. Let’s move on to the measurements, shall we? Come over here, please.”

She had received the payment. There was no turning back now and she had no plans to step back in the first place. Celene was smiling as her soul of a tailor was burning hot. She then guided Akira to one of the rooms inside the shop.

After Akira moved to Celene’s workroom, he removed his augmented suit and undressed to only be in his underwear. Although he was from the slum city, he had been eating better food lately and had been tempering his body to the point that some doctors suspected him of trying to become a superhuman, hence Akira had a good body build. Celene could not help but to send a meaningful glance at him.

Akira noticed her glance and found it weird. He made his own guess and asked.

“Should I remove the rest to get a better measurement?”

“Ah, no, you’re okay like this.”

Celene banished that thought from her mind as she started taking measurements. But it did not take long for that thought to come back. Akira noticed it too.

“Uhhh, does it look weird? It’s originally an old-world relic, so it might have a weird design. But I have nothing to complain about as long as it is comfortable.”

The skin-tight underwear stuck close to Akira's skin and completely followed the contour of his body build. It was made of a mysterious material that would not tear no matter how he moved, while at the same time, it was also comfortable to use. This was exactly the reason why many people would spend a lot of money to get old-world clothing articles.

Celene flusteredly replied.

"No, not at all! I just thought that you have a good body… No, I mean, that's not it."

Celene's real thoughts slipped out since she was so flustered. The moment she realized her blunder, it only made her even more flustered. But instead of finding it weird, Akira seemed to get what she said.

"Ah, I see. Well, I had some close calls recently and got hospitalized afterwards, so I believe most of my injuries and scars were removed back then. After that, I've been using some expensive medicines too, so it must have completely healed all the smaller wounds."

Akira had misunderstood, thinking that it was weird for a Hunter not to have any old scar.

"Back then, when I did not have an augmented suit, some of my wounds left scars. There was also a time when I was forced to heal my wound when a monster bit me, so it left me with a rather large scar. But now I have an augmented suit, as long as the monsters are not strong enough to break through its defence, normally, I don't get any scars anymore. Although I'm pretty sure when I face something strong enough to break through my augmented suit, forget leaving a scar, it would definitely kill me."

"I see, as expected, that kind of treatment must be pretty expensive, right?"

"Yeah, the one when I got hospitalized was 50 million Aurum, while the medicines that I'm using right now is about one to five million Aurum per box."

Akira said casually as if it was an insignificant amount. He had been earning and spending a huge amount of money on a regular basis and it had dulled his sense of money.

Celene realised it was no wonder Akira paid 6 million Aurum without any hesitation since he was earning that much.

“…As I thought, it’s pretty expensive.”

“Well, it’s indeed expensive, but there’s nothing more expensive than life, you see. And that’s true for equipment too. It would be meaningless to be frugal about it if it ends up getting myself killed.”

“You have a point there.”

There were many Hunters who splurged on momentary pleasure. After all, they could die anytime. Even for Akira, there was no guarantee that he would return back alive after placing that order for his custom suit. Celene was listening with great interest to the story of a Hunter, who was living in a completely different world than her despite being around the same age, while still continuing to take measurements.

Once she finished taking measurements, she escorted Akira back to the shop’s main hall and returned back to her room. She then took a long deep breath.

“…Alright then, let’s do this!”

She pumped herself up in order to challenge herself to make a suit that would surpass her past masterpiece and started working with a huge grin on her face.

Elena and Sara were browsing the clothes in the shop with Kashua as their guide. Even now, they were looking at the mirror with the dress that Kashua recommended to see how they looked. But then Elena sounded disappointed as she said.

“Hmmm.”

“It doesn’t really suit your fancy, I guess?”

“It’s not bad, but I actually have a similar dress and I have no plans to get another one.”

“I see, if I may, how much is your budget for today?”

“We haven’t really decided on the budget. We’re basically here just to accompany Akira. Ah, is it like you have some special articles that you only show to suitable potential customers?”

“It’s not like we’re keeping them secret, but we do have those kinds of articles. As an example, we have some old-world underwears which of course we can’t just show to all of our customers.”

Using the words ‘as an example’ was actually a calculated move from Kashua to pull up the shop’s worth. It made it sound like other similar articles had been sold in the past and there was no guarantee that she would be able to get the same clothing article again.

Kashua was about to continue by saying that she might offer them if Elena and Sara would be one of the shop’s frequent customers, but Elena then casually said.

“Ahh, in that case, I don’t really need them. Sara and I already have enough for the spares too. So we have no plans to buy more at the moment. I’m really sorry.”

“O-Of course, it’s no problem at all.”

Kashua was calculating the total money needed to achieve that in the back of her mind and was slightly taken aback.

Elena and Sara actually bought them from Shizuka when Akira brought them to her shop. Since they bought them before they were moved to other merchants, they actually did not pay that much money. But of course, Kashua did not know about it.

[…Last time, that Hunter Akira brought with him someone who had a 100 million Aurum budget too. I wonder if everyone around him is that loaded? They're completely out of my target customer range. As expected, I don't have that level of expensive clothing in this shop, I guess I'll start with recommending the most expensive dress that I have huh…]

When Kashua was thinking about what was her best option to tend to Sara and Elena as her customers, Akira, who had finished taking his measurements, returned.

"Elena-san, Sara-san, I'm sorry to make you wait."

Sala smiled to welcome Akira but noticed something bothering her.

"You're done? That was rather fast. What kind of suit did you order? I thought that you would take longer, you know."

"Ah, I basically left the design to the tailor, so I only needed to take the measurements"

Elena tilted her head.

"It's not so often that you order a custom suit, you know. Are you really okay with it? You sure you're not getting tricked?"

Elena thought that Akira was tricked into agreeing to that, then it was her time to show her skill in negotiation, but he happily replied.

"It's fine, it's more like I pushed it to her. She said that she would make an amazing suit that even someone with a bad fashion sense like me would be able to recognize its greatness. So I'm kind of looking forward to the result."

"Ohhh."

Judging from Akira's reaction, it seemed that it was something that he could really look forward to and there was no need to worry about the result. Elena and Sara always thought that he leaned more towards being one of

those more paranoid Hunters. Because of that, if he even went to say that far, it made them rather curious instead.

Kashua picked that slight change as she said with a friendly smile.

“If the premade dresses don’t suit your taste, then how about ordering a custom dress? I’m sure that our prized tailor would be able to create a satisfying result.”

Sara replied first.

“Hmm, well, since we’re already here, might as well order one, huh. Since it’s custom, I should be able to put some custom details in after all.”

With the size of her chest, Sara usually had a limited number of choices. Not to mention that the size would change depending on her nanomachine reserve, it even further narrowed her options. If she could order a custom dress that took care of that problem, she did not mind paying more than usual.

“That’s true. I might as well order one too. Since Akira even went as far as to say that too. We’re going for dinner together, it might be a good idea to get a custom dress with a similar design.”

“Oh, that’s a good idea.”

Kashua hid her smile since it went just as she had planned.

“Leaving aside whether to order a custom dress or not, how about both of you try to have a talk with our tailor first to get a good view of what you can expect? I will bring her here, so please wait for a moment.”

Kashua was excited, expecting that she would be able to get 3 custom clothing orders that day as she went to Celene’s working room.

Celene, who was putting all her focus into working on her design, frowned when Kashua told her the news.

“Onee-chan.I’m sorry but can you refuse that order? I want to focus on Akira-san’s suit.”

“Celene, didn’t I always tell you to call me manager when you’re on duty. And also, are you seriously asking me to refuse it? If it goes well, they might be our regulars, you know? I won’t let them get away, you’ve been saying that you’re bored working on refitting dresses all the time, right? So why are you saying no to a custom order now?”

“It’s not like I don’t want to do it. It’s just that the timing is bad. Not to mention, if it’s a similar design to Akira-san’s, it won’t be cheap… Onee-Manager, you do know that very well, right?”

“Of course, but it’ll be fine. I know that you’re worried since Akira is a Hunter who is earning well, so it won’t be weird for him to order an expensive suit. But don’t worry. The other two are also great Hunters. They said that they even have enough old-world clothing as reserves, you know. As I thought, successful Hunters are so different from those common Hunters.”

Seeing her excited sister, Celene then said with a serious tone.

“Manager, check the order history first. If they are really going to order a similar design, make sure to let them know that it would take some time. If they’re still okay with it, then bring them here for measurement.”

Kashua found it a little weird and checked the order history. The moment she saw the recent order, she could not hold back her surprise.

“6 million Aurum?! Celene!! What the heck were you thinking?!”

“He said that he wanted an amazing suit just like the refitted old-world dress that I did before. I need at least that much money to be able to do it. But even after I warned him, he still accepted it. So what’s left for me to do is just to give my best to answer his expectations. That’s why I want to focus on this job.”

Kashua started ruffling her hair, seeing which Celene lowered her tone.

“If you still accept that order as the manager of the shop, then as the staff of this shop, I’ll do my best to complete the order. It’s my job as the tailor to work on the custom orders after all. So similarly, I’ll leave the negotiation part to you since it is your job.”

Kashua did want her shop to flourish and she also wanted her sister to be able to use her talent with no obstruction. After calculating how much burden it would put on Celene and how much reputation of her shop was on the line, then, considering the risk of damage in case if they lost this gamble, Kashua then asked Celene for her confirmation.

“…Even if I got them to put the custom orders, you won’t make any compromise regarding the quality, right?”

“Yes, as long as you can get me enough time.”

“Alright then.”

It seemed that Celene had made her resolve as a tailor, so Kashua also made her resolve as the manager of the shop.

After that, Kashua ended up getting custom orders for 4 people. Elena had contacted Shizuka, who also ordered a custom dress with a similar design as well.

Elena and Sara were surprised when they heard that the price was 6 million Aurum. But it was nothing strange considering that it would be as good as an old-world dress. Since they did not want to look pathetic in front of Akira, and not to mention that Akira looked happy for some reason too, they did not hold back on their custom dress. They then finished taking their measurements and scheduled Shizuka to come there another day to get her measurement.

As Kashua watched Akira, Elena, and Sara leave the shop with happy faces, she mumbled.

[…In total, we got 24 million Aurum worth orders today. If we make a blunder here, it might as well be the end of this shop. Let’s make sure not to

bother Celene.]

Kashua was smiling happily as she fired herself up to face such a significant order for her shop.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 204, Group Coordination Support Augmented Suit

Index

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Akira was spending his time training in his garage inside his home. Ever since he bought a large vehicle, he had to renovate his garage to fit it in. But now that it was out for repair, the garage was large enough to use as his training ground.

But during his training, Akira was not seeing his own garage. Instead, he felt like he was inside an old-world room in the middle of an old-world ruin. And he was running through the room evading Alpha's flurry of attacks.

As Akira aimed his empty SSB rifle at Alpha and pulled the trigger, a virtual bullet shot out from the muzzle following realistic mathematical calculations. Alpha hid behind a virtual wall to take cover from those bullets, she then swung a virtual blade that cut through the virtual wall and aimed straight for Akira.

Akira leapt and rolled over to evade the incoming blade. But one of the rubble scattered on the ground tripped him over. His augmented suit

stiffened the moment his leg struck the non-existent rubble, throwing him off balance. That small opening was enough for Alpha to peek out from behind the wall and shoot him. By the end of that sequence, an image of Akira with his head blown off was lying on the ground.

Akira looked at that image and sighed. He looked slightly displeased as he said.

“…This time, I didn’t even last 10 seconds, huh. Alpha, it’s not like I’m asking you to pull back your punches, but like, can you go a little easy on me? This is just a one-sided fight, can you make some adjustments for the training?”

Alpha, who was behind a wall some distance away from him, suddenly teleported in front of him. She was using an old-world fighting suit which was exposing too much skin according to the current standard. The suit gave a clear view of her shoulder and thighs as well as a part of the valley on her chest. She had blades on both of her hands which she used to attack Akira just now, and her rifle was not only equipped to shoot bullets but also lasers from its muzzle.

Alpha then gently said to Akira with a smile.

“Nope. I’ve already placed some level of adjustment, you know? It’s your turn to do your best to put up a fight.”

“I’m already doing my best here, but like, you know, it also depends on the opponent’s weapons and positioning, and luck too. Like, that blade that can even cut through the wall, is that even necessary for this training?”

Akira said so while questioning the aforementioned weapon, but Alpha then said teasingly.

“Even if you say luck as an aspect, I think your luck is already in the correct setting though? After all, you did fight someone with a similar weapon in the past, right? Personally speaking, it would be great if you can get strong enough to fight against your bad luck as soon as possible.”

“…Well, you have a point there, but still.”

Akira could not help but frown since Alpha did give him a real example. Although he accepted that reasoning, part of him still could not accept it for a different reason. It was obvious from his face that he was feeling conflicted about it.

“Well, we already did quite a lot of damage in this place, so can you clean that up for now?”

“Sure.”

All the virtual objects from Akira’s augmented vision vanished. Including all the images of the dead Akira, the blood that was scattered on the wall and the floor, the walls that were put there to make the huge garage suitable for close-ranged fights, the holes on those walls from the bullets, the scorch marks on the floor. Everything vanished and his vision returned back to normal, to his original garage.

“But still, this is really convenient. It’s not like I’m using real bullets, so it’s not like I’m paying for the bullets that I shoot. I can shoot as many expensive bullets as I want. We could have used this kind of training sooner.”

“Unfortunately, in order to give you realistic feedback via your augmented suit, I need to be able to do fine-tuning and detailed adjustments to your augmented suit, which means that I couldn’t do it unless you were using a high-quality augmented suit. Thanks to your new augmented suit, I can finally do that to some extent. If we use an inadequate augmented suit, the feedback from the augmented suit would be far from realistic, that’s why we didn’t do it until now.”

“Ohh, I see. I’m really glad I splurged on my equipment.”

Akira was fully convinced by that answer and Alpha was smiling like usual.

Alpha was not lying there. But she did hide some fine details from her explanation. One of the main factors why they could do that training now

was because Alpha's connection through the old-world domain with Akira was stronger than before. This way, she was able to transfer a bigger load of data to his brain.

The reason why Akira leapt out to evade the incoming blade although he should not have been able to see it coming from behind the wall, was because he felt its presence and reacted accordingly. Although it was not like he completely saw through Alpha's move, he just received enough information to trigger his instinct. It was from a faint change in his surroundings, like a slight change in the ambient sound. Akira was able to experience that level close to reality during this virtual training.

This also meant that one day, Akira would be able to feel Alpha, who was nothing but virtual data through the same means. While on the other hand, Alpha, who was nothing but virtual data, would be able to choke Akira to death through the same means too, just like a ghost choking someone to death.

"Alpha, I'm tired, can we take a short break?"

"Sure, in that case, we can finish the training here for today."

"Hmmm, let's see… I'll decide later after a short break."

Akira thought that his mental fatigue was from the nervousness during the training when it actually came from the burden of the huge data transfer. Not to mention, he was keeping his time compression up throughout the training as well, so it further prevented him from noticing that.

While Akira was taking a break, a call from Sheryl came in. He was about to pick the call up when Alpha suddenly interjected.

"You don't need to use your terminal, instead just pick that call through me."

"It's fine. If I get too used to doing that, I feel like I will progressively stop using my terminal. In the worst-case scenario, it might cause me to make a blunder somewhere, so it's better if I keep using my terminal like usual."

“If you want to commit to it, you can just say that you have a thought-controlled type terminal planted inside your head, you know.”

“Hmm, for some reason, I just don’t like that idea. If we’re going down that route, I prefer the external equipment that I can control with my brain wave. But considering that brain waves can be read through several means, I feel like someone can eavesdrop on that too… I guess it’s too late for me to be worrying about that, huh? In the first place, my brain wave is already readable all the time after all.”

Akira sent a teasing glance at Alpha, who replied back with a capricious smile.

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone.”

“Well, thanks for that.”

Akira smiled back at Alpha, on one side, he reminded himself that was indeed the case.

In contrast to that, Alpha found something bothering her about Akira, but she did not show it on her face.

After some time, Akira took his bike and went to the location that Sheryl told him when she called. Alpha, who was floating next to him, was curious and asked.

“But still, there’s no need to stop your own training just to go join another training, right?”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? I’m bored of getting my ass kicked by you. It’ll be a good change of pace. Furthermore, I’m also interested in what Sheryl told me. Moreover, you did say that you don’t mind ending the training there, didn’t you?”

“But to be honest, I’m not sure that training with Erio and the others can serve as a good training for you anymore.”

“Well, that would depend on how far what Sheryl said is true.”

While Akira took a short break from the training inside his garage, he had got a call from Sheryl. Basically, she asked him to help Erio and the other children's training if he had the time. When he asked about the details of the training, something piqued his interest, so he decided to stop his own training and went to help Erio and the others.

When he arrived at the training location, which was in the middle of the wasteland, he spotted a big trailer parked there with Erio and the other children undergoing mock battle near it. Sheryl and some people in sleek suits were watching their training.

Akira stopped his bike near the trailer and met up with them. Sheryl, who was wearing a light outfit for the wasteland, happily welcomed him with a smile.

"Akira, thank you for coming although it was rather sudden."

"Don't worry, I'm also a bit interested in the training after all."

One of the men in suits politely welcomed Akira.

"Akira-sama, I presume? I'm Yodogawa from a company dealing with machines. We're really thankful that Sheryl-same is volunteering to work with us to test our Group Coordination Support Augmented Suit."

"Eh? Ah, yeah, sure."

Akira glanced at Sheryl, seeking an explanation. So Sheryl interjected.

"Yodogawa-san, I have something to talk about with Akira first, meanwhile, can you prepare Erio and the others for the training?"

"Of course!"

Yodogawa lightly excused himself and went back to the trailer.

Sheryl sat next to Akira, grabbed his hand, and stared at him.

“But still, it has been quite a while since the last time you came to see me. I’m happy to see you again.”

“Hm? Has it really been that long?”

Akira looked honestly confused, so Sheryl longingly said.

“…To be honest, I wish I can see you every day.”

“That won’t happen, I’m pretty busy myself, you see.”

Although Sheryl was acting to some extent, she was not lying. She seemed to be genuinely happy to see the person she loved after quite some time. In contrast to that, Akira replied in his usual manner. Even after she affectionately held his hand and looked at him with endearment, he only showed the bare minimum reaction to her.

Her actions, which would trick a lot of people, her words that she picked to bring Akira closer, and her expression used to pull Akira in, all of those things would only be properly conveyed between the people who loved each other. But that was not the case for Akira. Sheryl was reminded of the reality that hurt her heart.

“What’s wrong?”

“…It’s nothing. But I would be super happy even if you only come to see me to kill time.”

“Sure, I’ll do that if I have free time.”

Sheryl did her best to smile. At least Akira did not hate her. He still came even when she asked him out of the blue as long as he did not have anything else to do. She told herself that to push in the welling sadness from inside her heart.

She then went on to explain Akira about the situation.

In return for removing his rival, Inabe had offered Sheryl some support for her relic shop, which included equipment as well as firepower. These

equipment were not counted into their deal, which was only for the quality and the quantity of relics sent to her shop.

Although Akira was the backer and guardian of Sheryl's gang, it was not like he was always in Sheryl's base to defend it against attackers. He was basically like a firepower reserved for retaliation and not firepower for direct defence. With Inabe sending expensive relics to slum city, he wanted more insurance so that those relics would not be stolen or robbed.

That was why Inabe used his personal connection to seek help from an experimental technology from a certain company and get Sheryl involved with the testing of that technology. It was technology that they were thinking of offering to the city defence squad eventually. Thus, it would be meaningless if it was not even good enough to be used in the slum city.

Although Sheryl's gang was somehow able to get a deal with a big gang such as Shijima's, leaving Akira aside, the gang would only be left with Erio and the other children who could not be counted as a deterrent. Since it was basically a gang consisting of small children, it would not really help if they tried to get more members. While on the other hand, its territory had grown big enough that it had become difficult to properly guard all its territory. Sheryl's gang was actually having a crisis in terms of the ability to enforce.

That was when Inabe came with a timely offer. Since they were volunteering to test the system, it did not cost Sheryl any money.

Akira, who was listening to her explanation, found something that was bothering him.

"Won't Katsuragi complain if you use another company's product for your gang?"

"Indeed. We're in the midst of negotiation about that matter. But don't worry, Katsuragi-san is the merchant that you introduced to us and we're also in his debt too. So we won't do anything bad. Not to mention, this type of augmented suit is not something that Katsuragi-san has, so it should be alright."

“Hmmmm, well, I leave that part to you. But still, augmented suits, huh? And with coordination support too. That sounds pretty amazing.”

That was when Yodogawa returned to them. The other person that he brought with him overheard what Akira just said and excitedly interjected in Sheryl and Akira’s conversation.

“Oh, you have some interest in it?! By all means, feel free to try our product! It’s the latest product from our company and we can guarantee its quality.”

“I-I see.”

In contrast to Akira who was a bit overwhelmed by Tabata’s excitement, Tabata continued with his high enthusiasm.

“Ah, sorry, I’m Tabata. I’m the developer of the coordination support augmented suit, or to be more precise, the coordination support system King’s Mind. I’m also involved in creating the augmented suit to use in tandem with the system as well as its development. We’re aiming to create a new standard for the next generation augmented suit and…”

Seeing that it would continue indefinitely if left alone, Yodogawa immediately cut him short.

“Tabata, I’ll do the business-related stuff, so you go prepare for the test.”

“Ah, right, my bad. Akira-sama, in order to adjust for the ‘hit’ calculation, I’ll need to sync your equipment with the system. I hope that it doesn’t bother you. You just need an aiming device that will work with an information-gathering device, even a cheap one will do. In case it isn’t compatible, I need to ask you to use our equipment instead? Are you okay with that? Or do you want to use our equipment right from the start instead?”

“In that case, can you check if my rifle can work with the system?”

“Of course, over here please.”

Tabata guided Akira to the trailer. The inside was littered with strange equipment and it looked like a mix of a laboratory and a workshop.

The aiming device of Akira's SSB rifle was compatible to sync with the system. After a short adjustment to connect to the system, Akira received a short explanation about the virtual bullet used in the training, he then started shooting at a target practice to finish the finer adjustments. Akira aimed at the target and after getting some hit notifications, he then tilted his head and mumbled.

"…That last one, the system said that it was a hit but I'm pretty sure that was not a hit though."

"Is that so? The system says that it was a hit, you know."

"Can you put up a practice target at a fixed distance away? And keep it there even after I hit it."

Akira then started shooting again. This time he deliberately shifted his aim bit by bit to investigate the hit calculation of the system.

"I feel like it's not accurate though. Like from a certain range, the system calculates the hit using a random chance based on the bullet landing radius."

"…Well, this is basically the system that we use to calculate a hit."

"Alright then, by the way, I'm okay with the adjustment now."

Akira then left the room together with Tabata. The other technicians who saw him leave looked at each other with a frown.

"Say, about that just now though, do you think it's true?"

"No idea, there are a lot of people who complain that their shot should have hit when the system doesn't recognize it, but normally, no one would complain when their shot hit though. Usually, those who do that are people who just want to look cool."

“We still have the log anyway, I guess I’ll try to recalculate it with better accuracy.”

Since it was not a weapon test, the hit recognition of the system was not that advanced. After all, a more accurate recognition system would demand more calculation time. In that situation where the system was still calculating for the hit, they could not afford to stop the experiment while waiting for the result to come out. It was better to adopt a faster hit recognition during the testing since their main goal was testing the coordination support system.

The technician used his terminal to pull up the shooting data and threw it into the advanced system for calculation.

“…This is taking some time.”

“Well, it’s not like we’re using the headquarters’s computer after all. It’s to be expected that it’ll take some time since we’re using the computer in the trailer. Oh, it’s out, hmmm, well, if it’s only this much, it’s not that bad though? Though it looks like he was just shifting his aim left and right.”

While those technicians were laughing, another technician beside them restarted the calculation with a serious face.

“What are you doing here?“

“I just thought of re-doing the calculation after adding other data sets too.”

“Other data sets?”

“Like the wind, humidity, temperature, the effect from the light colourless mist. Basically, everything that I can add together.”

With more data, the calculation takes longer as well. As expected, it took more time than the last calculation, but when the result was out, it really surprised all the technicians.

“…No way.”

“…He’s right. This data, although it seems that he’s just shifting his aim left and right he was actually checking how close he needs to shoot at the target to register a hit. He deliberately made the system calculate a hit and a miss in turn.”

“Wait, no way, that’s impossible unless he knows how our system works, you know?”

“…The system is set to recognize the hit not from a random chance. He might have calculated and backtracked the hit recognition calculation with repeated shooting… No, it’s not like he actually calculated it, it’s more like he understood it instinctively…”

The technicians frowned and smiled wryly at each other.

“…That gives me goosebumps.”

“I heard that guy is a great Hunter despite being young. As I thought, people like him are just built differently, don’t you think?”

The technicians shook off the shiver that ran down their spine as they returned back to their original job.

The technicians were more or less correct. But Alpha was the one who told Akira where to shoot to check for the system’s hit recognition. And although he received some support from his augmented suit, Akira was able to execute accurate shooting following Alpha’s instruction. His skill had already exceeded the shooting skill of a common human after all.

The mock battle between Akira and Erio plus other children which also doubled as a test for the coordination support system started. Just like usual, Akira was alone versus Erio and the rest, the mock battle would stop every time one side was completely eliminated. But unlike usual, Erio and the other children were all using augmented suits and they were receiving instruction from the coordination support system in the display visor under their full-face helmets.

The coordination support system recognized the current situation and the location of all the members, it then gave instructions for all the members to work as a team. It gathered information from the individual information-gathering device carried by each person to share the information of their locations and flush out the location of the opponent. At the same time, it also prevented friendly fire. It transformed the members under its command from an uncoordinated group to a well-oiled group, increasing their effectiveness as a team.

Moreover, it also controlled individual augmented suits to some extent to provide support to its user. It included the ability to evade enemy attacks and to shoot back at the opponents.

This meant that the augmented suit would be able to move outside the user's wish. Whether it was a good thing or not, different people had different opinions on it. There were many people who did not like the feeling of their body moving without their consent. But since it was moving following the movement of its users at the moment, Erio and the other children did not feel any discomfort using it.

After a few rounds, Akira's loss rate was floating around 50 percent. Tabata was smiling happily after seeing that result. It seemed that the system that they developed was performing really well.

In the end, Erio and the other children were complete amateurs, they were nothing more than children from the slum. Although it was a single person against a huge group, they were able to maintain that winning rate against a high-ranking Hunter thanks to the coordination support system. It was a good result from the system developer's as well as from the business point of view.

After a few rounds, Tabata happily went to Erio and the other children while they were taking a rest from the mock battles.

"How was the system? With this coordination support system, if you work together, then you can even beat the hunter that you guys are relying on all this time, you know? Isn't it amazing?"

But the children looked at each other and raised their eyebrows. Then Erio spoke up to summarize what everyone was thinking there.

“It’s indeed amazing, but…”

“Hm? Is there anything that you find unpleasant? No need to hold back. We’re in the middle of development, so we’re also collecting opinions from its user to improve it.”

“No, it’s not like that. I heard that it’s difficult to move inside an augmented suit until you get used to it, but I don’t feel anything like that.”

“But of course. We have put a lot of effort to make it move as naturally as possible, you know.”

“And the voice, as well as the instructions shown in the helmet, don’t block our vision that much as well…”

“Yep yep. We made sure that it won’t block your view, the voice is soft enough to be heard but not too loud, and the instructions are concise and easy to understand. The instruction display and design are all calculated. The voice volume and the length of the instruction are adjusted to be easy to catch depending on the situation that you’re in and…”

Tabata was bragging proudly of the system that he had developed, but he suddenly stopped when he noticed Erio and the other children’s expressions.

“So, what problem exactly are you having then?”

“Nothing exactly, it’s just that…. About why our winning rate is 50 percent… Well, it’s difficult to say this nicely, but I’m pretty sure that he’s not taking this seriously, or more like, he’s pulling his punches.”

Tabata, who was jovial up until now, frowned.

“Pulling his punches? What do you mean?”

“It might be more correct to call it a handicap I guess. We actually had similar training before with Akira-san, and back then, our winning rate was also 50 percent. He said that he put in some adjustments to keep the winning rate around that number. Like, decreasing the power output of his augmented suit, or he would stop using his information-gathering device, or reducing the firing range of his rifle. I’m pretty sure he’s doing the same thing this time too.”

“…I see, excuse me for a moment.”

Tabata said so with a serious face as he left Erio and the other children and headed towards Akira.

The children looked at each other, wondering if they just said something that they should not have.

After hearing Tabata’s explanation, Akira thought for a bit before answering.

“It’s not like I’m deliberately going easy on them and it’s not like I’m putting a handicap on myself just because I want to, I’m really taking this seriously as a training. It’s true that I’m not taking this as if it’s a real fight, and if you say that is exactly the proof that I’m going easy on them, well, I can’t really deny it.”

“I see…”

Tabata frowned. Yodogawa, who was recommending some of the company’s products during the break, also smiled bitterly. He had lost his ground in recommending their products.

The reason why Sheryl’s gang was picked to test the new system was not only because of Inabe’s connection but also for Yodogawa’s sake as well, they were trying to sell their augmented suit to Akira.

Shooting down a powered suit all by himself, defeating the huge monster that half-destroyed a certain area near the outskirts of Kuzusuhara ruin, and

many other achievements as well. Akira had taken the interest of a certain group of people who were seeking high-ranking Hunters.

A normal boy from the slum, without anything special, suddenly became super strong in such a short time after using a certain augmented suit. Even if it was not the truth, letting such rumour out would be a great advertisement for the company.

Sheryl's connection with Akira and the fact that her gang was selected to test the new technology, if that information was spread together with that rumour, it would be enough to convince some people.

If that rumour went out, some people might think that Akira was actually involved in that experiment for quite some time and they were just hiding it from the public, or his augmented suit was custom built based on that new technology, or he was gathering achievement before making it public, or all that he did up until now was actually for the sake of advertisement. Some people would think that they might become as strong as him if they could get the same augmented suit as him.

The record showing that the system allowed a group of amateurs from the slum city, who were mere children, to defeat a high ranking Hunter, was basically the perfect record to advertise the system. But both Akira and the children were saying that the 50 percent winning rate was because Akira was not taking the fight seriously. Thus, that record was basically meaningless. If that information also leaked out with their rumour, it would be ineffective. Yodogawa who thought so then smiled and said to Akira.

"In that case, Akira-sama, would it be possible for you to take the fight seriously as if it is a real fight?"

"Hmm, well, even if you say so…"

Akira seemed a bit troubled there, so Yodogawa tried to give another push by provoking him.

"It's not like it is a one on one fight, so you can use that as an excuse if you lose."

Sheryl, who noticed that cheap provocation, frowned in displeasure. But Akira did not even notice that it was a provocation.

“It’s not about losing or winning. But, if I take it seriously, it means that I’ll have to use my money too. It’s not like the energy pack for my augmented suit is free, you know. Not to mention, the medicine that I need to take in case I need to push my body to execute certain maneuvers too. There are cases when I get too tired and have to take a short break from my Hunter work as well. So if you are telling me to take the fight seriously, I will have to charge you, you know? I’m just here helping with the training purely out of curiosity. So I have no wish to go that far for free, you see.”

Yodogawa was trying to see if it was just an excuse to avoid having to take that fight seriously or if Akria was being serious there. But before he could say anything, Tabata suddenly said.

“Alright, I’ll pay for it then. I’ll pay you 100,000 Aurum per round.”

“Wait, Tabata?”

“100,000 Aurum, huh? Hmmmm…”

Yodogawa started to panic since Tabata suddenly made that suggestion without consulting with him. And Akira seemed to be interested in that offer too. Seeing that, Tabata just ignored Yodogawa and gave another push.

“Let’s do this instead then, I’ll pay you 100,000 Aurum more for each round. But if you lose, I’ll have you pay instead, how about that?”

“Alright.”

Akira smiled and said so firmly. In contrast to that, Tabata made a serious look.

“Alright then, starting from the next round, we’ll take it as if it is a serious fight, right? I’ll go and readjust the settings then.”

Tabata returned back to the trailer. Yodogawa was at loss for a bit before excusing himself and went to the trailer too.

Sheryl looked at Akira.

“Akira, are you sure about this?”

“Eh? Is it something that I shouldn’t have done?”

“No, if you’re okay with it, then it’s fine.”

Sheryl was actually worried if Akira would incur consecutive losses and lose a lot of money instead. But judging from his reaction, it seemed like it should be fine as she prevented herself from saying anything further. After all, she could not afford to ask what he would do if he kept losing since it would sound as if she was doubting his strength and that might offend him.

Akira found Sheryl’s reaction a bit weird, but she immediately changed the subject and he did not pursue it any further.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 205, Real Battle Assumption

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Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

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Yodogawa looked at Tabata with a confused expression.

“Hey, are you sure you’re going to be okay after saying that?”

“I’ll pay the fee using the budget for the test. I’m the one with the authority on how to use that money, so I won’t use the marketing funds.”

“That’s not it, what are you going to do if you keep losing? Hunters are pretty persistent when it comes to money, you know?”

“I’ll change the system setting to prioritize winning. Just so you know, I too am actually holding back since it was just a test. But from here and on, no more holding back. So it should be fine.”

“But still…”

Yodogawa just could not shake off his worry. Tabata looked straight at Yodogawa with a sharp gaze.

“Are you going to say that the system that I made will have no chance of winning?”

Yodogawa flinched back from the pressure, he then lightly sighed and said.

“Alright, just do what you want. But, I’ll stop you if you lose or win too many times, okay? The biggest enemy of a merchant is the enmity of the customer, you know. Keep in mind that it’s me who will face the full brunt from the customer.”

“Okay. I’ll leave it to you when to stop. Moreover, I’ll lower the setting if I get too many consecutive wins. But do tell me if you want me to stop.”

Yodogawa and his men started changing the parameter setting for the group coordination support augmented suit. Although the technicians had a troubled look on their faces while working on the ongoing test, they still changed the setting as they were told. Yodogawa looked at his men working while fighting back the headache attacking him, thinking about what might happen.

When Tabata told Erio and the other children what was going on, it raised a small excited murmur while at the same time, they had a concerned look on their faces.

“Uhh, when you say that we’ll have a real battle after this, does that mean that we’re going to use real bullets? Or that it will be painful when we get hit?”

“Don’t worry. It’ll be the same as before. But, the order coming from the system will be under the assumption that you are in a real battle. So basically you guys will have to run and do some difficult moves, both will put your body in some level of stress. Since you’re volunteering for the test, I hope that you can understand that and bear with it.”

“Well, if it’s only that much, then…”

As the children regained some of their calm, Tabata then said with a serious expression.

“It’s just as you said, he’s been holding back up until now. But from here on out, he’ll stop holding back anymore. If you guys can win against him with

the help of the coordination support augmented suit, it'll be proof of your strength, as well as the proficiency of the system. So endure the fight, I'll give my best support as well. I'm counting on you guys."

Tabata turned around and headed back to the trailer. Erio and the other children started conversing with each other.

"Winning against serious Akira-san, huh? Do you think we can do it?"

"Don't be stupid. Akira-san went alone to Ezont Family's base during that commotion and saved boss, you know? We basically have zero winning chance against him."

"But like, this augmented suit is a new product from a huge company which originally would cost a whole lot of money, that's just how great this augmented suit is, right? I'm sure that Ezont Family also had some crazy equipment with them too, but all of us are using this amazing augmented suit right now. So like, our winning chances are not exactly zero, right?"

"Well, it's not like Akira-san will come at us with full force trying to kill us anyway… So, maybe we can win?"

"We'll do the mock battle several times, so if we can at least win a round…"

The thought of the possibility of winning against Akira. It was not a reckless abandonment, they started to believe that it was a worthwhile gamble. Akira was also a boy from the slum city, just like the rest of them. The only difference was that he rose up as a Hunter while the rest of them stayed as children of the slum. They started to think that if they could win against someone like Akira, they might be able to break the impenetrable wall that had been separating them. This might be a good chance to do that. As that thought permeated and spread among them, they started getting fired up for the next mock battle.

Erio clapped his hand once to gather everyone's attention and to calm everyone down.

“Putting aside whether we can win or not, one thing for sure we’ll have to give our best for our next battle. That’s all there is to it. Don’t get too excited and stay sharp. Let’s go.”

Erio put his helmet back on, which he had taken off during their short break and started walking to his designated position. The other children also wore their helmets and followed the orders that came up inside the helmet.

Once Erio arrived at his designated location, he repeatedly took deep breaths to calm himself down while waiting for the start signal. That was when a voice came out from the inside of the helmet.

“Detected high anxiety level, please calm down in order to keep the effectiveness high.”

“…I know.”

“Do you want to use low concentration anxiety drugs through the ventilator? Warning, no compatible drug detected, unable to dispense.”

“Just shut up then!”

Erio inadvertently raised his voice from the irritation, he then reconfirmed his situation and changed gear.

[…Calm down. This is just a test. They did tell us that they are still holding back a lot of things. If I don’t calm down, I won’t be able to win what’s originally winnable.]

In reality, Erio was as anxious as the other children. Even when Akira stopped joining their usual training, they continued doing training by themselves. The empty AAH rifle for training that they received from Akira was originally unusable without Alpha, but with the help from Sheryl and Viola, they somehow gathered enough equipment to get them usable and had Colbert to help them in their training.

All the training that they had in the past gave them a level of confidence. Colbert even went to rent a vehicle and took them to the wasteland to do

some easy subjugation requests. Their skill was more or less good enough for them to be called newbie Hunters.

[…If we can win against Akira, even if it's just purely out of luck, Sheryl would recognize our skill as well. We can get better treatment, better position… And finally, face a lower risk of getting kicked out from the gang.]

Erio and the other children felt that their positions were in danger. Although the overall power of the gang increased dramatically, it was purely from Sheryl, Viola, and Akira's contribution. On the other hand, Erio and the other children almost did not contribute to it at all, to put it simply, the gang needed them less and less.

After the clean up of that incident in the slum city, Sheryl's standing was considerably elevated among the gangs in the slum city. The gang was even able to borrow some men from Shijima's gang from time to time to patrol the area under their gang's control. Even some of the staff from the reopened relic shop came from Viola's connection. But some of the members of the gang were not completely happy with those changes.

With the boss of the gang regarded highly among the gangs in the slum city and the Hunter backing the gang being strong enough to defeat a powered suit alone, both of them were extremely strong pillars for the gang. But at the same time, they made it harder for the children to be laid back.

Even if Sheryl kicked out most of the gang members, she already had enough influence to get some men from other gangs to fill their positions. As for Akira, he was only helping out Sheryl, so strictly speaking, he was not on the same side as them. Although Sheryl and Akira had already distinguished themselves as no longer mere slum children, Erio and the others still could not escape that position.

Then before they even realized it, Sheryl had even gained a connection to someone within the City Management, and that officer was even lending them augmented suits as well as providing the gang with relics. Mere slum children had no chance of competing with that officer.

Erio and the children were always worried that they might get kicked out of the gang anytime. As they were doing their mock battle training, each of them reacted differently due to that worry. Some replaced it with admiration, some pushed themselves harder to show their worth, and some completely looked away from that matter.

Erio chose to do his best in order to show his worth. After all, he might need to use that strength to protect Alicia if something bad were to happen.

[If we can win against Akira when he's serious, that would definitely be a great achievement. Furthermore, we're not really in danger since it's just training, and even if we get to shoot Akira, it's not like he or Sheryl would get angry at us either. This is the perfect chance, let's do this!]

Erio's serious face was filled with steel-like determination.

The coordination support system started the countdown until the start of the mock battle on the helmet's display. As the number approached zero, Erio heightened his focus to its peak. As soon as the countdown reached zero, he immediately started running.

Not too far from the training ground, Alpha smiled amusedly and asked Akira, who was waiting for the signal to start the training.

"So then, how much support do you want this time?"

"Hmmm, no support please."

Alpha's smile distorted a bit.

"Oh, that's pretty brave of you. They're getting serious this time, so I'm pretty sure that they'll be coming at you without holding back to win the round though. Are you sure you can win?"

"It's not about winning or losing. They said that they'll pay for the expense, so there's no more need to hold back. Well, if I'm losing too much, I'll ask for your help to get back my win-lose ratio."

"Alright, but just to be safe, you're planning to win all the rounds, right?"

“Of course!”

“It’s all good then. But just for a bit, I’ll make a slight adjustment to your shooting. After all, I don’t want you to get too used to that imperfect hit calculation.”

“Sure, fair enough… It seems that we’re starting.”

Akira’s headgear display showed a countdown until the start of the mock battle. He calmed down his breathing and gathered his focus. He lowered his SSB rifles on both of his hands and relaxed his muscles. He soaked in the information sent to his information-gathering device to his augmented suit through his skin and probed for the opponents’ location around him.

From his headgear display, Akira could see what was behind him from his information-gathering device along with the scene captured from the aiming device from both of his SSB rifles. He distributed his focus to those information displays as well in order to expand the horizon of his consciousness.

[…Focus. Remember that feeling. Even if it’s only a portion of it, bring my consciousness closer to that time and pull off here.]

Akira asked Alpha in detail about what she did to him during his fight against the old-world automata. He felt like all his 5 senses were boosted to the point that it was as if he was transported into a completely different world. And Alpha’s explanation regarding that support surprised Akira.

The world from Akira’s point of view was based on the information coming to his brain, and due to the time needed for his brain to interpret that information, the world painted in his brain would always be late. In short, Akira was always perceiving not the current world, but a world where things had already occurred. So in order to shorten that time, he was filtering out any unneeded information from his brain. And in order to compensate for the reduced information, his brain had to fill in the hole with rough predictions. Basically, he was only perceiving a rough approximation of the world.

Furthermore, Alpha used her special private connection with Akira through the old-world domain to intercept the incoming information, analyze them, and then send the result back to Akira. Due to Alpha's powerful computation ability, it further shortened the calculation time, and with Akira skipping most of the information digesting process that he would normally have to do, his perception of the world got very very close to the real current world, to the point that it was as if he was in a completely different world.

To put it simply, it was as if, while the others were using a slow machine that could only pick blurred images, Akira was using a machine with clear images and superb reaction speed. As long as his opponents could not read the future, they had no chance to get ahead of him.

Alpha explained all of these things in detail to Akira while keeping a few things to herself. After that, Akira's training changed into getting him to be able to control the process when he was perceiving the current world.

It was actually close to impossible for Akira to do it without Alpha's support. But it was not impossible for him to try to get closer to that state. During the short exchange against his opponent, he extracted the information of where his opponent was, and his consciousness indeed was getting closer and closer to perceiving the current world, not the past world.

[I can do this! If I don't believe in myself, I won't even be able to do what's possible…!! I can do this!! Now I just need to keep trying until I can actually do it!!]

Akira renewed his resolve. He kicked the ground almost at the same time as when the signal for the start of the mock battle went off.

In order to collect information regarding the test, the area around that place was littered with small information-gathering devices. Tabata was looking at the data gathered from those devices and could not hide his surprise.

One of the technicians smiled bitterly and muttered.

"Well, this is pretty bad."

“To be honest, it’s a good data set considering it’s from a test. But still, I don’t know if there’s any point in continuing to do this. Tabata-san, are we going to continue with this pattern set?”

The technicians witnessed a small portion of Akira’s power during the aiming device adjustment. Because of that, they more or less expected that this would happen, so their reaction to the result only ended with a bitter smile.

But that was not the case for Tabata. He was staring at the ongoing mock battle with a stern face.

“…Get the data learning constant to maximum.”

“Eh? If we do that, the system will lean toward adjusting itself on how to fight that particular Hunter. It will be unusable for general use, you know? We might be able to get a win if we do that… But still…”

“Just do it!”

“…Alright.”

The technician smiled wryly and did as he was told to. Tabata still had his eyes fixed on the monitor showing the progress of the mock battle. He could see that Erio and the other children were gunned down one by one at an unbelievable speed.

Erio was running with a stern face. The augmented suit setting was changed from prioritizing in keeping the user’s burden to a minimum into prioritizing to empower its user. Thanks to that, he was able to run faster and more agile than ever before, but the burden that it put on his body was not small.

At first, Erio was delighted when he found out that he was way stronger than ever before. Although the sudden increase in the burden was nowhere pleasant, the sensation as if he suddenly became superhuman thanks to his augmented suit’s strength still made him immensely happy and motivated.

When he thought that he might be able to win with his power-up, that exact thought was completely destroyed when he glanced at the display inside his helmet which showed the current situation.

The other children were shot down one by one. And when he was still trying to cope with the surprise, the number did not stop falling. Then, before he realized it, the number had reduced to one, he was the only one still alive.

Right at the next moment, Erio caught a glimpse of Akira moving between the rubble. But the moment he noticed, it was already too late, multiple bullets already landed on his body.

The magazine that Akira was using for his SSB rifles was set to be an extended magazine. The bullets that he shot from those rifles formed a wall of bullets that crashed into Erio. Even if Erio tried to evade that, he would not be able to get away from those bullets.

That was Akira’s first win after the learning setting of the system was changed.

Due to Tabata’s request, the break until the next mock battle was longer than usual. After all, he needed time to let the system digest the data.

During the break, Sheryl came to Akira and praised him with a smile. Yodogawa also did the same although with a slightly stiffer smile.

“Well well well, Although it was against the system that our company developed, as expected of Akira-sama.”

“Well, that’s more or less what would happen when I’m not trying to keep the expense low. Ah, right, I’ll send you the payment invoice after each battle, so you can stop the next mock battle anytime when you think it’s getting too expensive.”

Akira took out his information terminal and sent an invoice to Yodogawa, who frowned when he saw the number.

“So, you want to stop now?”

“Ah, please don’t worry. We can pay this much, no problem at all. But still, it seems that it didn’t pose much challenge to you. I’ll tell Tabata to take this more seriously, so please excuse me.”

Yodogawa lightly bowed and went back to the trailer.

The moment Yodogawa entered the trailer, his smile vanished as he yelled.

“Damn it!! What the heck is with this result!? Even if we lose, can we at least try not to be this pathetic?”

Yodogawa was about to continue, but he stopped mid-way and flinched back when Tabata looked at him. Tabata had a grim expression plastered on his face as he said with a deep voice.

“… I know. I admit it was my mistake looking down on him, but this won’t happen again next time.”

“I-I see, I’ll leave it to you then.”

The other technicians only smiled bitterly at Yodogawa’s reaction. Some of them then continued with the usual reporting.

“The system is done analyzing the data. We’re ready to start again.”

“Let’s start then.”

“Starting the countdown.”

The countdown for the second mock battle started, the seconds left before the second mock battle started was shown on the main monitor. Tabata was looking at that countdown with a stern face, Yodogawa did the same anxiously with furrowed brows, while the rest of the technician team was waiting for the countdown with wry smiles. All of them were waiting for the countdown to reach zero with their respective feelings shown on their faces.

And so, the second battle started.

Akira blazed through the training ground. His speed was abnormal but he was able to decelerate and make clean sharp turns. He was able to do all of these thanks to the power of his augmented suit.

Every time he stepped off the ground to control his direction and sped up, a small forcefield was expanded under his feet, turning his footing into a hard surface. Then, with the help of the power output of the augmented suit, he was able to keep his balance while boosting the propelling power from his steps. That was also what he did when he made turns, the forcefield armour prevented him from slipping when he made sharp turns. With this, he was able to get firm footing even if he was running on muddy terrain.

In reality, with a good enough augmented suit, he would be able to do that in the air as well. But his current augmented suit was not good enough to do it although he could do the same on the walls of a building.

Of course, this manoeuvre, burned through the energy pack really quickly and increased the burden on Akira's body. So, in short, he would have to spend more money on his energy pack and medicine that he used to compensate for it. It was indeed, just as he said to Yodogawa, manoeuvres that need money.

But it was not for nought. Erio and the other children could not get a good aim at Akira who was moving too quickly from behind the rubble. Although when the coordination system preemptively aimed at where Akira would be according to its prediction, it was still not fast enough to catch him. As a matter of fact, they were on the receiving end of the bullets that Akira shot from his SSB rifles.

The surviving children grouped up and tried to use the rubble to form a defensive circle. Unfortunately for them, Akira quickly closed up on them and jumped right into the middle of the circle, and used the small opening created from the surprise to gun down the rest of the survivors.

The second mock battle also ended with Akira's victory.

Even in the third, fourth and fifth battles, Akira won all of them. But with every mock battle, Erio and the other children were able to survive longer and longer. It showed that the learning system of the coordination system was working as intended. But even so, it was still not able to reach its main objective.

Yodogawa was hanging his head low inside the trailer.

“Tabata, if you’re thinking of continuing, I’m sorry, but I’m stopping you here. Not only is the expense not small, we even have to pay for the bonus for winning the mock battle too. If you have no idea how to fix this, I’m stopping you here.”

Tabata frowned and seemed to be wrecking his brain hard. He then seemed to have decided on something as he changed the setting of the coordination support from his terminal.

When another technician saw the new setting, he frowned and asked Tabata.

“Tabata-san. Isn’t that cheating?”

“…We have different equipment than the opponent in the first place. It won’t be strange to have at least this much if we consider this as a real fight. Moreover, the corresponding equipment is also planned to be sold as an optional item together with the main product. So there should be no problem. We’ll also adjust the support pattern to suit the new setting, so get on to it.”

“Alright.”

Seeing how Tabata was still working hard on his work, Yodogawa thought that it seemed there was still a chance to win. So he did not stop the sixth mock battle. But even so, it did not erase the worried look on his face.

Right when the next round started, Erio was confused at the instruction shown by the system through their helmets. He followed that instruction to change the firing setting into grenades, aimed his rifle at a seemingly random direction, and pulled the trigger. But nothing happened even after

he waited for some time. As he looked around, he noticed that the other children also showed the same reaction.

While they were still questioning what exactly they did, the next instruction that seemed to be a more serious one came up. So they moved on to follow the instruction to surround Akira. They immediately noticed that the instruction was different compared to the ones they were receiving up until now.

Akira immediately noticed that Erio and the other children were moving differently. He frowned a bit and quickly dove behind a wall before stopping right in front of a small gap in order to confirm his guess. The moment he stopped, he could see bullets coming flying straight at him through that small gap.

Although they were nothing but virtual bullets, with the adjustment from Alpha, they looked like real bullets to Akira. He could even hear the sound of them flying and see the tracks that they left behind. Alpha did that in order to prevent him from getting too used to the setting used for the training. If he got too used to the bullet projection in that training, which had a lot of errors, it might cause him to make a mistake during a real battle when he had to be able to read the trajectories of the bullets with high precision.

Moreover, due to the low precision of the hit recognition and bullet trajectory calculations of the system, Erio and the other children appeared to be stronger than they really were. Considering the rate of fire, range of fire, size of the ammo, and the other specifications of the rifles, the rifles used by Erio and the other children were of high quality, expensive rifles.

Akira followed the trajectories of those cylindrical bullets as they flew through the air, with this, he confirmed his guess.

“As I thought, they know where I am.”

Alpha smiled and gave some extra explanation.

“During the beginning of the training, they were moving as if they had pre-installed a small number of information-gathering devices around the area beforehand. My guess is that they changed the setting so that they can gather more information from those devices. They had small information-gathering devices scattered around the area beforehand to gather information during the test.”

“…Isn’t that cheating if we assume that this is a real fight?”

“Since you’re not holding back your expenses, they are also not holding back on their expenses. If they use enough small information-gathering devices, it’s not impossible to imitate this situation. Although it’s not cheap, if that’s enough to kill you, I’m sure they believe that would be worth the expense. Spending more money to defeat a strong opponent, it’s completely normal, isn’t it?”

“That’s true. So basically they’re getting serious now after losing so many times, huh?”

“It seems that it’s going to be great training, aren’t you glad?”

“Can’t agree more to that.”

Alpha was smiling teasingly at Akira, who replied with a light smile and a short remark.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 206, Limit of Effort

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Now that Erio and the other children knew Akira's location at all times, they did not need to search for him anymore. Instead, they started the round by immediately trying to surround him. They kept their distance from Akira and slowly closed in on him while blocking his way out.

Akira stuck his back to a piece of rubble, taking cover from the incoming bullets. He sometimes peeked out and shot back in order to prevent the opponents from closing his escape routes. But that did not stop them from closing in the encirclement as their attack got more and more intense. The walls and the floors were already covered in bullet scorch marks from Alpha's improved augmented reality, he would get shot if he made even the slightest blunder.

"They just don't stop shooting, how many bullets do they have?"

"They are also using extended magazines. And since you kept defeating them before they ran out of ammo, I bet the system stopped preserving ammo. It's better to empty their magazine first before dying. Strategy-wise, it is indeed a viable option for them to throw away the possibility to conserve their fighting strength for defeating you."

“So, basically, they’re willing to sacrifice anything as long as it’s enough to defeat me, huh? It seems that they evaluate me pretty highly.”

“That’s because you keep winning the mock battles. So I don’t think they’re mistaken though. Do your best so that they don’t lower their evaluation of you.”

“Roger that!”

Akira smiled and then frowned slightly.

“But still, in a real fight, this is the moment where I would use a camouflage.”

If Akira activated the camouflaging feature of his coat, Erio and the children would lose sight of him, or at least, it would make it hard for them to ascertain his position. But he decided not to do that.

“Well, it can’t be helped, they’re using the information from the small information-gathering devices they scattered around the area to collect the data for the test. If you use your camouflage and vanish from their radar, the mock battle would lose its main purpose.”

In order to prevent that from happening, Tabata also warned Akira beforehand not to use camouflage.

“It would be great if they adjust their system to handle that too.”

“In case you lose, you can ask them to do that adjustment. But until then, just think of them as enemies that can detect you even if you use camouflage.”

“I guess I’ll just do that then.”

Right at the next moment, several people jumped above the wall behind Akira with the help of their augmented suit. But before they could aim at him while still in the air, he quickly aimed his SSB rifle above his head and released a barrage in their general direction.

Almost at the same time, another one jumped out in front of Akira and ran at him. Before Akira could shift his aim from upward to forward, that boy was faster to aim at Akira and shot straight at him. Akira dove sideways to get away from the trajectories of those bullets. Unfortunately, someone else already released a few shots at the location where he was jumping to, so Akira forced himself to spring up to evade that too. Now that Akira was in the air and had no control over his posture any longer, he had turned into an easy target. But before anyone could shoot at him, Akira quickly shot them down using the rapid-fire capability of his SSB rifle.

The moment Akira landed back, he immediately ran while suppressing fire by shooting without even looking. And just like that, he broke through the encirclement and opened some distance between him and his opponents.

"…The first ones were decoys, huh?!"

"I guess that's one way to use people who already ran out of ammo."

"If it was a real fight, those decoys are dead, you know? So they're just throwing them away? Are they really okay with that?"

Akira frowned at that thought, but Alpha then replied with her usual smile.

"Considering that they can't win using the normal methods, that was a fully acceptable strategy to increase their chance of winning."

"That might be true, but still…. You know…"

"It's better than getting completely wiped out. Being able to make such a cruel but rational decision is one of the advantages of using that support system. Having to fight it is really troublesome and having it on your side increases your survival chances, moreover, it saves you from making difficult decisions as well."

Akira understood Alpha's arguments, but that did not make him feel any better.

After Akira broke the encirclement, Erio and the other children could not recover from it and shifted to more individualistic moves.

Akira won the seventh and the eighth rounds as well. Since he now knew that his opponents were aware of his location at all times, he quickly approached them right after the round started and wiped them out before they could even surround him. Thus winning the round.

In the ninth round, the system finally decided that sacrificing the rest of the team was crucial to defeating Akira.

From the start of the round, all of them came at Akira altogether aiming for a draw. The vanguards purposefully came out in clear view in order to bait him out from his hiding so the others could shoot at him. On top of that, they formed a single file on both sides to corner Akira while shooting at him. The backline used the vanguards as a shield and approached him as well. As the whole team came at him while disregarding their chance of survival, they were able to completely shut off Akira’s escape route.

Akira understood that he had nowhere to go this time, so instead, he came charging right at them. In that intense exchange which would decide the winner and the loser, normally, luck would play a big role. But Akira refused to leave it up to luck. So he compressed his time perception as much as possible to confirm his surroundings and to decide the end result of that battle.

Akira ran straight forward and released a barrage with his SSB rifles. He then slid through the gaps between his opponents, who received the hit signals and incoming bullets, as he spread his shot to his left and right, drilling through the hit notification that wrapped the area.

Akira was already close enough to engage in a melee fight, but even so, Erio and the other children were still shooting at him as if they did not care about hitting their own. Akira gunned them one by one and jumped in between their blindspots to get away from their aims. From Akira’s point of view, the world was running at a much slower pace, he could see the storm of bullets filling the area with the help of Alpha’s support, which indiscriminately killed anything that it could find in its way.

Inside that slow-moving world, a question came up in Akira's mind.

"For some reason, I feel like their hit notification is late, or does it look late from my point of view because of my time compression?"

In contrast to Akira who was really desperate, Alpha was smiling like usual as she answered his question.

"Nope, you're indeed correct. That's just how durable the settings of the augmented suit are right now. I bet they assume that they have their forcefield armour running with maximum output power. Although it shortens the duration in which they can keep using that augmented suit, as long as they can defeat you under that duration, it should not be a problem. After all, the system is also allowed to make the decision to sacrifice the team in order to defeat its opponent."

"I see!"

Akira compressed his time perception so much to the point that he found himself moving in slow motion. He used the full power of his augmented suit to increase his aiming speed to its limit as he released shots in all directions.

Although Akira felt like the exchange took long, in reality, it only happened for a few seconds. Akira shot Erio who was the last standing survivor and won the ninth round as well.

Tabata, who was looking at the monitor in his trailer, had his jaw dropped.

"Even this is not enough to win, huh?"

A technician gave a given up smile and said.

"What can I say… This guy goes past amazing and went straight to 'are you effing kidding me' level. No wonder he was able to defeat a powered suit all by himself. Well, although, you can say that he can only do that because he was using expensive equipment and doesn't try to limit his expenses."

“Well, even though they have augmented suits with coordination support, his opponents are all just slum kids after all. So it’s nothing strange, right?”

“Just so you know, that Akira was originally from the slums as well.”

“He’s an exception. Not to mention, he’s also already doing pretty well as a Hunter. So it doesn’t matter where he originated from, right?”

“Well, that’s true.”

Yodogawa did not expect Akira to be this strong. So instead of using him to advertise the company’s product, Yodogawa started thinking of some other way to gain profit out of him.

[Although we ended up paying a lot of money to him for this test, I guess it is worth getting on his good side. After all, we are talking about having a connection with a Hunter this strong. There’s no way it would be useless. I was really worried when Tabata made that challenge, but result-wise, I guess everything is alright…]

Yodogawa shifted his gaze to Tabata.

“Tabata, as expected, I need you to stop here. Since we kept losing, if he wins the next fight, his bonus would be 1 million Aurum, you know. I know that you’re free to decide what to do with the given budget, but as expected I can’t let you continue. This is the end, okay?”

Tabata looked at Yodogawa with a desperate face without saying anything, he then returned his gaze back to his terminal.

“…Not yet, at least just one more time…”

“I can understand your feelings of wanting to win at least one match and I know that the last match was a close one. But, I can’t let you continue just because of that. If you keep thinking just a little bit more, we’ll just keep piling up more losses.”

Tabata did not reply as he was busy on his terminal. Another technician noticed what Tabata was trying to do and frowned.

“T-Tabata-san, this one is simply going too far, you know…”

“There’s not much difference between their posture and the posture of an adult. A small adjustment should be enough to compensate for the difference.”

“That might be true, but still…”

“I’ll do the adjustment in the system, you guys work on readjusting the augmented suits.”

“…Just keep in mind that I tried to stop you, alright.”

The technicians are technically working under him, so it was difficult for them to stop Tabata. The most that they could do was remind him before leaving the trailer to recalibrate the augmented suits. Seeing that, Yodogawa stopped one of the technicians and asked him what Tabata was trying to do.

When Yodogawa understood what was going on, he then asked with a troubled face.

“…Are you sure this will be alright?”

“Of course not. That’s why we tried to stop him. Although, I’m sure different people have different opinions whether you can call it trouble or not. After all, if we are talking about data analysis, information management, and the safety feature of an augmented suit, all of those are in the grey area.”

“Will it get someone killed?”

“Hmm, pretty sure it won’t go that far, chance-wise, it should be not that different from a normal product testing. So looking from that point of view, it should be okay. I’m sure that’s also why Tabata-san pushed through with this idea.”

Yodogawa still looked concerned.

“For now, try to prioritize safety as much as possible while still obeying Tabata’s order. I’m sure he’ll be satisfied after trying that once regardless of whether he wins or loses. If he tries to continue even after that, I’ll tell the higher-ups to stop him. He’s the one responsible here and it’s kind of difficult to stop him at the moment. So let’s just do what he wants for now.”

“Okay. But, I’ll leave the rest to you afterwards, alright?”

“Of course… So then, do you think we can win?”

“I can’t really say for sure. But it’s better than continuing without doing anything differently. I guess that’s basically the gist of it. Alright then, off I go.”

The technician left the trailer, leaving Tabata working alone inside. To be honest, Yodogawa also wanted him to win, that was why Yodogawa did not stop him.

During the break, Erio and the other children were talking about Akira.

“We really can’t even get a single win, huh. Or more like, we couldn’t win even after going that far. Just how much had he been holding back all this time?”

“You know, it might be that Akira-san probably cannot go full power unless he gets paid. Remember that time when he fought those maids? At first, he was losing but he got an easy win in the end, right? I heard that it was because he got paid as a request.”

“Money, huh. Well, he’s a Hunter, after all. I bet he’s pretty sensitive about that subject… But then, when you think about it again, why was he helping Boss back then? Hmmm, is it because he is going out with Boss?”

“Maybe some kind of investment? Considering how much money that we’re earning right now, it won’t be strange if it was a form of investment, no?”

“Ohh, that does make sense, so it all comes down to money, huh?”

Now that they were reminded of how strong Akira really was, none of them had the thought of winning against him any longer. They had completely abandoned the idea of trying to win and just took it lightly as they talked to each other and laughed it off.

But in contrast to the rest of them, Erio had a rather stern look on his face. He had not given up yet. He kept telling himself that if he gave up and relaxed now, he would lose even the smallest chance to win. He would end up throwing away the one in a million chance to win against Akira if it even existed in the first place.

The technicians who came from the trailer called on to them.

“Everyone who will participate in the next round, come here for a bit, we need to do some small adjustments.”

The available augmented suits were not enough for every single child to join the mock battle at the same time. Furthermore, there was a limit on how many adjustments could be made to compensate for the differences in their builds. Thus, the technicians needed to make small adjustments every time there was a swap.

Since they had decided beforehand who would participate in which round, the ones that would participate in the next round came to the technicians.

“Fuuh, that was tiring. I’ll skip the next round. Erio, you should take a rest too. You’ve been participating in all the fights, haven’t you?”

“I’m fine.”

“…I see, well, don’t push yourself too hard. It would be pointless if you hurt yourself. It’s not like we have expensive medicines like Akira-san, and the treatment from that clinic is basically experimenting with your body.”

“I know, I’ll be careful.”

In order not to allow his friends to get worried about him, Erio managed to let out a small smile.

After the small adjustments, Erio and the other children felt that there was something strange with their augmented suit. So one of them asked the technicians.

“Uhmm, it feels like the augmented suit is moving weirdly, like it’s much stiffer than before.”

“…It’s in the middle of testing after all. You might feel like that because of the new settings. Try to walk and move around until you get used to it. We’ll try to readjust the feedback as well, if you still feel weird after that, I’m sorry but you might want to get someone else to take your place instead.”

“I see… Alright then.”

They then started to move around as instructed to get used to the strange feeling. But some of them could not just get used to it and asked for replacements or to readjust their augmented suits. The technicians looked at them worriedly in the middle of that process.

It took some time until everyone could move around normally. After that long break, the next round finally started.

Right when the tenth round just started, Akira was about to come straight at them again when he realized that they were moving differently than before. So he decided to stop hunting them down and hid behind a rock instead.

The rest of the team, except for Erio, formed a support file for Erio who was out in a rather open position. Unlike last time when the system did not differentiate the individual’s strength, this time, there was a clear stratum based on it. And just like last time, they knew Akira’s location at all times.

Although it surprised Akira, he still handled it calmly. Akira first aimed at Erio which made one of them cover for him and disrupt the formation, Akira then used that small opening to shoot them down one by one. As a matter of fact, he did well in picking them out slowly, but even so, he somehow looked a bit troubled.

“Hmmm, not really sure if they’re stronger now. At the same time, it feels like they’re somehow weaker too.”

Alpha quickly followed up.

“Which one exactly?“

“Not sure. Though they do feel weird, that formation, unless they’re stronger than their opponent, I feel like it’ll only increase the number of corpses. I think they need better teamwork for the backline. Although, if they can do that properly, I’m sure that they’ll be super hard to deal with…”

“Indeed. It seems that the formation doesn’t work well for them since they don’t have the skill to support it. But in the end, this is still just a training, it’s a good chance for them to test different formations.”

“Well, you have a point there. I guess they changed their priority to testing new things since they kept losing.”

“For now, let’s just focus on defeating them. It would be meaningless if you lower your guard and get shot.”

“Roger that!”

Akira pushed that to the back of his mind and focused back on the mock battle. After they reduced the number of his opponents to the point where it was difficult for them to provide support for Erio, Akira decided that it might be time to go for the main pivot of that formation, Erio.

Akira jumped from behind the wreckage and aimed his rifle at Erio, but before he could shoot, Erio immediately shot back at him. Unfortunately, the bullets could not catch up with Akira who was moving too quickly.

Checkmate, the moment Akira thought so and was about to pull the trigger, he wavered as he saw Erio carrying rifle with one hand and following his movements. Erio was trying to aim at Akira after he evaded the first few shots which caused Erio’s arm to rotate at a rather unnatural angle.

Akira, by pure reflex, compressed his time perception to its limit and used the full power of his augmented suit to get away from the line of fire while shooting back at Erio.

Right at the next moment, a clearly painful scream echoed.

Erio was actually fully under the mercy of his augmented suit ever since the round started. It was because although his augmented suit was correcting his moves up until now, the level of accuracy of that correction was increased compared to before.

From the way he walked, ran, to the way he shot and even to other finer moves, it was as if his body was forced to follow his augmented suit. The difference between the move that his body made and the move that his augmented suit made put his body under immense stress. He felt uncomfortable since it was not him controlling the augmented suit, it was more like the augmented suit was controlling his body.

While at the same time, he was delighted that he was able to execute manoeuvres that were impossible for him to execute originally.

He thought that he might be able to reach Akira like that, so he endured the pain and continued the fight. It carried him to the point where he was able to almost get a shot on Akira.

As he thought that it was the perfect chance to defeat Akira, Erio focused his whole mind and body to gun Akira down, the gathered focus even caused him to see the world around him running at a slower pace. But when he saw Akira move quickly, he understood that he would not be able to hit Akira.

When his focus was thrown into short disarray, he remembered the pain that he was ignoring till now and that pain quickly spread through his body.

Erio screamed and dropped his gun. Seeing Erio fall down to the ground grabbing his arm, the other children forgot about the mock battle and ran towards him.

“Erio! Are you okay!? What just happened!?”

“I-It’s not like he got shot with real bullets, right? What the heck is going on here!?”

Seeing that, Akira understood that the mock battle was stopped there. So he immediately went to Erio and told the other children who were still in panic.

“Get him off the augmented suit for now, but do it slowly.”

Erio was not able to move due to the pain. So the other children were carefully removing his augmented suit off of him. Erio’s arm was swollen red and his shoulder was dislocated.

Akira took out his medicine and shoved it into Erio’s mouth.

“It’s medicine, swallow everything. And also, this is going to be a bit painful, so endure it.”

Akira only said so before he immediately grabbed Erio’s arm and forcefully fixed it. Erio flailed around because of the pain, but Akira held him down with his augmented suit.

“The painkiller will work soon, just endure it until then. And also, even if the pain dies down, it doesn’t mean that your arm is fixed. So don’t move your arm until it’s properly healed, otherwise, it’ll only slow down the healing process, you got that?”

Erio held back the pain assaulting him as he nodded multiple times. Akira was holding down Erio’s arm for some time, but only after Erio’s expression relaxed, did he let go. Even after the pain was reduced, Erio still had a stern look on his face.

Not too long after that, Sheryl, Tabata and Yodogawa also came. Sheryl went to look for an explanation from Akira, Erio, Tabata and Yodogawa in turns. After a short time to digest the information, she then sent a sharp gaze towards Yodogawa and Tabata.

“Can you explain what happened?”

Yodogawa was flusteredly trying to look for the right words to explain the situation while Tabata was pulled back to reality after someone got injured and ruffled his head.

Seeing that reaction, Sheryl understood that it was not something that was unexpected. It was something that was originally avoidable but for some reason, they did not, or at least, they did not do their work properly to avoid it.

“Is it an accident?”

Sheryl stared at them with scornful eyes. Tabata and Yodogawa were still flustered, struggling to find the right words to say, that was when Akira interjected.

“Rather than an accident, I bet it happened because the support system properly assumed it as a real fight.”

Everyone there immediately focused on Akira, who just voiced his opinion. Some of the kids looked disturbed and one of them asked Akira a question.

“Wait, how does that connect to Erio getting hurt? Even though we’re doing this assuming that this is a real fight, it’s still just training, right?”

“I bet the system is working just fine. The problem is that when the augmented suit tried to aim at me, the real body couldn’t catch up with its movements and then that happened, dislocating his shoulder.”

The system that took the battle as a real fight was unable to win the fight even after sacrificing some of the team members, that might be why the system decided to allow bigger sacrifices for the latest battle. Not only did it ignore the bullets hit, it even ignored the capability of its user as well. For Akira, it was nothing weird for the system to go that far.

“It must be that the system had decided that it was acceptable to sacrifice an arm as long as you were able to defeat me. If it was a real fight, it was not a

wrong decision. After all, an arm is a cheap sacrifice if it can save you.”

Hearing that, Erio and the other children looked completely troubled. Seeing that, Akira just smiled bitterly and continued.

“Well, there’s no need to go that far for training. Although, you can also argue that there’s a need to go that far exactly because it’s training. After all, it’s impossible for you to execute something in a real fight when you can’t execute it during training. While on the other hand, it’ll also defeat the purpose if you get injured during training and are unable to perform well when confronted with a real fight. Moreover, even when you get in a situation where you have to sacrifice your arm to survive, I’m sure you won’t be able to make that decision that swiftly. So it’s another advantage of using the support system. After all, that was a close call for me back there.”

“Eh? Is that so?”

“Yeah, I almost got shot after all.”

Erio and the other children started murmuring with conflicted faces. They always thought that it was impossible to win against Akira no matter how hard they tried. So those words which confirmed that was not true, really shocked them.

But at the same time, that also meant they would not be able to reach that point unless they went that far. It was true that the gap between them was getting closer, but that was because Akira came down from where he originally was, it felt like Akira was out of their reach even if they tried to extend their hand.

“Different people take real fights differently. So I bet it’s just a misunderstanding between both of you regarding what it means to take training as if it was a real fight.”

After Akira said so, Erio and the other children looked at each other.

“Now that you mention it, they did say that the system will assume that it’s a real fight. But still, is that what they meant when they said that? Something like our arms or legs might be in danger.”

“No no no, as expected, that’s going too far, right? It’s their fault for setting up the system like that. I heard that this is a test run, so I bet it’s because they’re having trouble in that matter. That’s why they’re making us help with this test, right? As I thought, lending expensive augmented suits to us just for a safe test is too good to be true. Am I right?”

“But Akira-san said that this is normal for Hunters, you know? Hunters often fight against monsters in ruins, so I bet a number of them do this kind of thing.”

“It’s not right to treat us like common Hunters, ah, but this augmented suit is designed for Hunters, huh…”

Sheryl listened to them before once again, glancing at Yodogawa. Meanwhile, Yodogawa, who had regained his composure, used this chance to get on what Akira just said.

“It is indeed as Akira-sama just said. But at the same time, we admit that it’s caused by our inability to properly make the correct setting for the augmented suit, which ultimately caused this accident. We apologize for this and we’ll do our best to fix this issue so that this will never happen again.”

“…Alright, I hope that you’ll get this fixed.”

Sheryl had no plans to argue against Akira’s opinion just to corner Yodogawa. But she gave a smile saying that she would withdraw from this issue to respect Akira, and that would mean they owed her a favour.

In order to shake off the bad mood, Yodogawa raised his voice.

“Unfortunately, someone got injured. In order to focus on fixing this problem, we’ll end the training here for today. Akira-sama, thank you very much for helping out with the training today, we’re really thankful for that.

We'll invite you again for the next training, so please, by all means, join us for the next training as well."

"Well, sure, if I'm free."

"Sheryl-sama, although it has been proven that there's still some fatal problem regarding the product, we'll do our best to fix this. So we hope that we can still work together. Erio-sama, we're really sorry for today's outcome. We'll give our best to adjust the system such that this would never happen again, so if you…"

"I'm fine like this."

"Excuse me?"

Yodogawa did not expect that firm reply from Erio when he was apologizing to him. Akira also did not expect such a reply at all.

"I'm fine like this. There's no need to change it. This happened because of a mistake in the setting and a misunderstanding between us, right? Then it's well under the domain of testing, so you'll properly pay for the treatment too, right?"

"Ah, well, of course, we will do that, but…"

"Then there's no need to change the setting. It's better for you like this since you can get better data, right?"

Yodogawa's business face changed to a troubled one.

"Well, it will indeed let us get better data, but… Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"I-In that case, we'll readjust the system to your preference."

"Thanks."

Everyone looked at Erio with various expressions such as surprise, exasperation, admiration and suspicion. Even under those gazes, Erio renewed his resolve.

[If I can make that kind of move on my own, I'll get close to Akira! This is the perfect chance! Like hell I would let it go!]

The gap that separated them as if Akira was standing on top of a building while the rest of them were crawling on the ground, felt like a hopeless gap for them. Even so, Erio still had not given up yet. Compared to before, it did not matter how large the gap was, Erio felt that gap was not unreachable.

Erio swore that he would become stronger as he clenched his fist.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 207, A Luxurious Bath

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After the mock battle, Sheryl invited Akira to visit the base. When Akira arrived there, he looked at the base in surprise.

“Well, what can I say… The base has really improved in the short time I haven’t visited.”

Since Sheryl kept assimilating the other buildings around the base into it, it had grown considerably in terms of size.

Sheryl smiled smugly beside Akira.

“It’s also thanks to you that we can grow this big.”

“I don’t remember doing anything in particular though.”

“That’s not true at all. We’ve received enough favour just with you supporting us from behind. Of course, there are more things too. So yes, we’re really blessed to have your help.”

“Is that so? Well, it’s fine if it’s really so.”

Akira thought of Sheryl's words as nothing more than flattery. But Sheryl was only saying what she really felt, it was the truth.

When someone built a house in the eastern district, they would have to make it strong enough to endure monster attacks. Although the level of durability changed for different areas, they were normally relatively cheap buildings. It was all thanks to analyzing and imitating the old-world buildings.

But even so, the buildings in the inner wall were still expensive. In contrast to that, the buildings down in the slum city were dirt cheap. Even if someone built a magnificent building inside the slum city, it would turn into a dilapidated ruin in no time due to the bad public order. Thanks to that, most of the price came from security.

The only reason Sheryl's gang was able to rule over such a vast area was because of the support from Akira. No one would dare to cause a ruckus in the base that a Hunter, who could even defeat a powered suit all by himself, was protecting. That information alone was enough to maintain the public order there.

Inside the base, Katsuragi set up a branch of his shop as well as a warehouse, Viola also set up her office there. Both further helped to maintain the public order in that area. And if they went one step further, both only helped Sheryl's gang because of their connections to Akira. So in the end, it was all thanks to Akira.

Akira thought that it must be because it had already been some time since he left slum city, that must be why his knowledge about the slum city was not as detailed as before. As such, he was not able to fully grasp just how much he had done for Sheryl's gang.

Akira was guided to Sheryl's private chamber. He then sat on a chair with Sheryl sitting on the opposite side of the table, sipping the coffee served on the table while talking about all kinds of stuff with her.

Compared to before, Sheryl's current room was way wider. It only had a small amount of furniture considering the size of it, but that room gave no

feeling that it was located inside the slum city. As a matter of fact, it was a room that gave off a rather high-class feeling, as if it was cut off from a luxurious mansion and brought there.

Sheryl had already changed from her wasteland outfit to something more casual. The translucent and comfortable looking dress gave off a friendly feeling, while still giving off a graceful aura.

The white coffee cup was decorated with a small accessory, even an amateur could feel an air of luxury from it. The decorated spoon accompanying it was also obviously not the same as those common spoons.

The way Sheryl picked up her cup, brought it to her mouth, slurped it, and placed it back in its place, gave off the feeling that she was born from a completely different social stratum.

Akira felt that there was something strange in that room. He thought that Sheryl would climb up on him just like usual, but that did not seem to be the case at all. Although it felt better this way, it still threw him for a loop since he did not expect it at all.

In a sense, it was one of the results of Sheryl's training. In order not to make any blunder during the feast, she was taking training to keep her graceful outlook. At first, she looked really unnatural, it was not easy at all, but thanks to her talent, she had gained that graceful aura.

The topics of their conversation moved to the renovation of the base and the new equipment. Now that the base was bigger than ever before, it was easier for the gang members to get their own room. At the moment, those who had individual rooms were limited to the officers, while those who had low positions, just slept here and there, mostly inside unused empty rooms. But even so, it was way safer than sleeping in an alley in the slum city. Thus there were many who wished to join the gang.

"Although the base itself has gotten bigger, most of the rooms are empty, we don't even use them as storage rooms. When we expanded the base, it's more to be safe in case we needed extra spaces rather than because we

urgently required them. That's why, if you want, we can get you your own room."

"No, I don't need it."

"I see, that's unfortunate."

Other than Sheryl, up until now, most of the gang members received the same treatment, but that was no longer true. Because of that, people started competing for positions with better treatments. Therefore, Sheryl had to watch over them and make sure that it would cause any problem.

Not only did they get a relic supply route from Viola, they were also receiving relics from Inabe as well. Thus, Sheryl's relic shop was doing very well. At the moment, she even allowed people that Viola brought in to manage half of the shop, while she, herself was handling the floor that showcased the expensive relics, and came out to serve the customer though only rarely.

"It might be weird for me to say this, are you sure the people that Viola brought with her are safe?"

"We did not find any problems so far. Not only do they help with the relic shop, they're also helping to teach the gang members how to read and write, and they even help with some administration work as well. So, it's true that they're helping us a lot. They said that they would take responsibility if anything bad happens, that's why I let them do their task. Moreover, it's true that we have an easier time on some occasions when we have some adults with us. After all, me included, we're all basically kids."

"I see, well, it's fine then if you say so."

Although Akira did not give much thought to it, Sheryl actually hired Viola's men while already considering the potential trouble that it might bring.

Due to the expansion of the gang, Sheryl was no longer able to manage the whole gang on her own. Although she needed more helping hands,

unfortunately, no one in the gang had the ability to help her in that matter. After all, half of the gang members were only able to read and write just recently. She would need more time to train someone on how to manage the gang.

At the moment, Sheryl was filling those holes with Viola's men. That not only caused her to rely on Viola's connection, it also made Viola's influence over the gang stronger.

Although they were told to teach some of the officers to do their job, it seemed that it would still take some time until the officers could take over these jobs from them. But as the gang only grew faster and faster, Sheryl was not able to procure enough people to manage the gang and ended up relying on Viola's men even further.

Sheryl did question if Viola deliberately pushed the gang to grow fast enough so that she would not be able to manage it any longer, and that she might be planning to take over the gang after that. But Sheryl told herself if that was really the case, then she would use that for her own profit instead and get the growing gang fully under her control.

"What's wrong?"

"Ah, no, it's nothing. By the way, about the gang, among all the new facilities that we have now, everyone seems to really like the new bath. Ever since we have gotten more members, they often caused a long waiting line to use the bath, so we made it bigger."

The base at the moment had three separate baths. One for the boys, one for the girls, and one reserved only for officers. Some of the individual rooms also had a small bath. Akira found something that bothered him when he heard that.

"Bath for officers? Do they even need it? Don't they have their own bath in their own individual rooms?"

"Not all of them have their own bath. Furthermore, those baths are pretty small as well. With the bath for officers being something special."

“What do you mean by that? Is it like it’s so big?”

“No, it’s hard to explain, but I’m sure you’ll understand it if you try it.”

Sheryl noticed that Akira was interested, so she then smiled invitingly at him and said.

“How about you try taking a dip?”

Akira thought for a bit but eventually lost to his curiosity.

The base colour of the officer bath was white, it was in order to give a more spacious and clean impression. The bath itself was large enough to allow several people to extend their legs altogether. Despite the decorations being far from elaborate, all of them gave a luxurious feeling.

But Akira did not find any of that amazing. He seemed a bit disappointed as he proceeded to clean his body before dipping himself in the warm bath. But he immediately noticed something.

“…Wait, there’s something different! I can feel it! But I can’t really explain it!”

Sheryl, who went in normally as if she was already used to it, then explained to him.

“We’re using high-quality water and the filter is on all the time to maintain its quality. Even if someone makes a mistake and gets the soap into the water, the filtration would quickly take care of that as well. That’s basically all there is to it, that’s why I can’t really explain it with words. But once you experience it, you immediately notice that there’s something special, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is. I see.”

Akira scooped up a handful of water and looked at it with interest. Seeing him like this, Sheryl’s face turned red for a bit, and it was not because of the warm water. Seeing his well-built body was too much to handle for the current Sheryl.

As Sheryl unconsciously stared at his body, Akira of course noticed it.

“Something wrong?”

“…It’s nothing. I just thought that if you find it that good, you can come here every day to use it, you know?”

“…Well, as expected, that would be impossible.”

Sheryl noticed Akira waver a little, so she then made another proposition.

“I heard that it’s good for your health and helps you recover from fatigue. Being a Hunter is a very tiring job, so even if you can’t come every day, you can just visit to take a dip on your way back after you are done with your Hunter job. I’m sure it’ll be beneficial for you. After all, although it’s a bath reserved only for officers, I’m thinking of letting others use it after a tiring day just like today’s training.”

Akira wavered even more.

“…In that case, I should get one back in my home…”

“We could get one here because of the size of the base, otherwise, I think it’s difficult to get one for a normal house. You might be able to get a smaller one, but that might not work as effectively as this bath. Likewise, if you want to get the same level of effect for a smaller bath, it might cost way more money.”

Akira started to seriously consider it, but suddenly, one of the walls turned bright and it was connected to a call from one of the gang members. In order to allow officers to give commands from the bath, one of the walls was equipped with an information terminal.

“Boss, Viola said that she wants to meet you.”

Sheryl pouted and said.

“I’m in the bath right now. If it’s nothing important, tell her to keep it for later.”

Sheryl quickly closed the call after she said that, but it did not take long for another call to come in.

“Boss, she said that it’s important and she’s heading there now.”

“Eh? But Akira is also here, you know? Tell her that and stop her.”

“Uhh, she’s already left and is heading there…”

After that, Viola and Carol came in wearing the outfit suitable for taking bath. Akira was a bit surprised and Sheryl obviously looked displeased. Viola then smiled at Sheryl and Carol at Akira.

Sheryl, who was not happy that her quality time with Akira was interrupted, could not hide her sullen expression as she sent a sharp stare at Viola who was taking a dip in front of her.

“So then, what is it?”

“You went to take a look at the coordination support augmented suit today, right? I’m here to ask you about it.”

“Is it really that important?”

“It is. Although, do excuse me for omitting the reason why it is important. It might take a few days of explanations to fully explain why it is important, you see. If you still want to know, I can tell you some other day. I’m doing my best here to bring more profits for the gang, you know? So it would be great if you can help me out. But then again, it’s not like I can force you to.”

Viola was smiling confidently, but that amused smile was giving a rather ominous aura. If she brought up ‘profits for the gang’, Sheryl could not refuse. So Sheryl just sighed and told Viola what she wanted to know.

While on the other side, Akira looked exasperatedly at Carol.

“Normally people won’t just waltz in like that, you know?”

“Sheryl is here too, so it’s fine, isn’t it? Moreover, it’s not like we showed you anything unsightly.”

Although it was for different purposes, Viola and Carol were using their bodies for their goals. For Viola, it was about smoothening the negotiation, while for Carol, it was for the sake of pulling in the opposite sex. Hence, both of them had a relatively good style that did not give any sense of discomfort.

But Akira did not show any interest in their naked bodies as he lightly sighed and completely lost interest in them. Seeing that, Carol smiled bitterly while also looking rather amused.

“Geez, you’re really cold.”

“I have no wish to get friendly with the people who interrupt my bath time.”

“We’re not interrupting though. As a matter of fact, I can help you wash your body, you know? After all, people usually miss some spots when they just do it haphazardly, it will be a good massage as well, you know?”

“No thanks, just don’t interrupt me.”

Akira only said so and returned his attention to the warm water. The new sensation coming from the bath gradually made his expression relax.

“You seem to be really enjoying it, do you like it that much?”

“Yep, it feels different than the bath back home.”

“I see. Although you look like you’re earning well, it seems that you’ve only been using a cheap bath, huh.”

Akira shifted his gaze back to Carol and slightly tilted his head.

“Yeah yeah, sorry about that. So what kind of bath do you have?”

“Me? Let’s see…”

Carol started talking about the bathing equipment she was using in her house. It was a rather big bath for one person. Just like the water used in the gang's base, it was also using high-quality water. In order to help her dry herself after the bath, there was also a wind drying device. She told him about all kinds of equipment the bath in her house used.

The water was not only good quality water but it was also adjusted for Carol's enhanced body. The nanomachine for the maintenance and healing was mixed into the water. Even though the water was not clear, it had an obvious noticeable effect on health and beauty.

Akira was surprised to hear her explanation.

"You mix medicines too? That's definitely not going to be cheap."

"Well, I can't deny it. But it's well under my budget. The main asset for a Hunter is his or her body. Even you are extremely invested in rifles and augmented suits, right? It's the same as that. The body is the main asset that can't be replaced. So, I don't see anything strange with spending money to keep it in tip-top shape at all times. Well, although, it's true that it's also for my side job as well, so I'm using more expensive stuff than a normal Hunter would usually use. This body actually takes more money than you imagine to maintain, you know?"

Carol smiled proudly and pointed at her own body. Akira was baited by that finger and looked at her body and he ended up staring at her for a few seconds. But even so, he did not show even the slightest sign of interest at all. His stare was much closer to a stare that he would give for high quality and expensive rifle or augmented suit.

Carol, of course, noticed that and sighed.

[I wonder if I should take the initiative and pay him instead… Hmmm, I have a feeling that he would refuse that as well though… He's really earnest when it comes to requests, maybe I can use that instead?]

Seeing Akira show almost no interest, she might have no other choice but to take a more active approach to capture him. As she was busy thinking about

how she would do that, Akira's focus already returned back to the warm bath as he started questioning if the bath in his house was really that cheap.

After finishing their business, Carol and Viola left the bath. Akira did think of enjoying the bath for a little bit longer, but for some reason, he was not into that idea and left not too long after Viola and Carol left. Seeing him leave, Sheryl disappointedly followed suit.

After the training, Tabata and his men took a short rest in the hall of the gang's base. At the moment, the gang had allocated that hall for Tabata and his men's use as their workspace. The inside of the room was filled with all kinds of equipment, everyone there was busy communicating and working on their respective task.

They were testing the coordination support system in the slum city as a security system for the base. This way, amateurs who could not even write or read were able to actively contribute in securing the base. It was a test to check the performance of the support system, how far it could turn them into a functional defensive squad.

As Tabata was still lamenting what had happened back in the wasteland, a colleague in the same position as him, came to him.

"Well, I heard it didn't go that well, but you can't afford to stay down like this. Isn't this a normal thing since it's a test? Although, you need to properly reflect on how emotional you got back there."

Tabata lightly sighed and frowned.

"I really have no words to refute you, but if I may make an excuse…"

"Are you going to say that it's because the opponent was way too strong? I heard that he's a strong Hunter, but you can't use that as an excuse, you know?"

"That's not it, I know that I can't use that as an excuse. The one thing that troubles me the most was that we were too confident. According to the past results, it should be able to defeat him. That was why I was so confident."

“The past result, huh? But like, isn’t this the first test with that augmented suit?”

“That’s true for the augmented suit. But we’ve done other tests too for the system. We did lend them to Drankam too. And unlike that time, this was a stable version, not an experimental one. It was a test including various equipment with Drankam, the result from back then was really positive.”

Tabata started getting excited again, but then he looked troubled.

“The performance was way better compared to the products from other companies. When they started using our system, that young ace Hunter from Drankam who had not been doing well lately, recovered from his slump. They even thanked us afterwards. It also left an extremely positive track record from when we used it during the incident in Kuzusuhara ruin. One of the reviews said that they worked together as a team better than ever before. Analysis from the logs also confirmed their claim. The results were all great…”

But the result from the latest test completely changed everything. It made all the past results look like an illusion. Tabata drooped. Seeing Tabata like this, his friend could not help but smile wryly and tried to cheer him up.

“Well, although they are more or less the same age, you can’t really compare a rising star and the main Hunter that Drankam is pushing with a bunch of children from the slum city. It’s true that the main goal of our product is to make the gap as small as possible, but there’s a limit on how far it can go. Cheer up. We obtained a good set of data, and although I don’t know the exact story, the guy who got his arm broken also said that he would still help out with the test, right? It’s not all that bad, we just need to continue slowly and carefully.”

Tabata regained some of his composure thanks to it.

“…You’re right, I guess I got too excited after getting a good result from our test runs with Drankam. I should forget about that result and check the system one more time. I have to add the adjustment from the data when that incident occurred.”

“Yep, you should do that. But still, well, I didn’t expect you to use someone else’s setting for the augmented suit. You do know well that it’s a taboo to do that, right? A lot of accidents happened because of that in the past, so make sure to be careful about it.”

“I thought that it would work since their builds were not that different, you know. But well, yeah, I’ll be more careful.”

The biggest reason why Erio got injured was because the augmented suit was set using someone else’s data, so it tried to execute something that Erio could not do. Right after they finished talking about it, Carol and Viola approached them.

“Good afternoon. There are a few things that I want to ask about the augmented suit, is it okay?”

As usual, Viola was smiling, amusedly.

After Akira returned back home, he decided to get in the bath for some reason. But this time, he felt that something was lacking. He then frowned and mumbled.

“…This is no longer good enough for me, huh?”

Alpha lightly smiled.

“I don’t think it’s a bad thing, you know.”

“Well, even if you say so…”

It was not like he could visit Sheryl’s base every day to take a dip there. While on the other hand, he did not want to upgrade the bath in his house just to be disappointed later. But getting guaranteed good bathing equipment might cost him a lot of money.

It was very rare for Akira to be troubled about something that had nothing to do with being a Hunter or Alpha’s request.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 208, Their Respective Training

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Akira was going through training with Alpha in his home. Sometimes, he would also participate in mock battles with Erio and the other children in the wasteland. He had decided to only go to the ruin again once the automaton and the other relics he brought back from Lida commercial district ruin were fully converted into money. But for some reason, it was not done yet.

Old-world automata were highly valuable relics to corporations for many reasons. Whether to improve their own technology or to fix them before reselling again, there were many companies trying to get their hands on these automata. Normally, one should have no problem selling them, it should have been easy to exchange them for money. But that was not the case this time and the reason for that was because they were brought back to the city as a team with Akira.

If it was solely Togami's team, they could just leave selling the automata to Drankam, which can use its connection. Even if there might be some problem regarding how to divide the money, it would be solved between the team selling the automata and the gang. Even if the result might not be ideal

for Togami, they could make up for that by negotiating with the gang. That way, the gang would be able to secure its share with no problem as well.

But with Akira added to the equation, it was not that simple. After all, Akira was only allowing Drankam to handle the sale of the automata to make it easier to divide the money later. If Drankam took a cut on that money, Akira would obviously complain. If it was just a common Hunter, Drankam could just crush him using their connection with City Management. But when it came to a Hunter above Rank 40, in the worst-case scenario, it might end up in a full-blown war and the damage from that war would no doubt have some form of repercussion.

Normally, Drankam would first buy the relic from the Hunter to gain full-ownership of it before selling in order to avoid this problem. But there was another problem with that approach. If the negotiation with Akira did not go well, it might significantly reduce the profit that Drankam might gain from the transaction.

Personally speaking, Akira himself said that he had no problem dividing the money evenly. But according to the report from Togami and Reina regarding Akira's contribution in securing the automata, it would not be strange if he demanded half of the reward. On the other hand, if they tried to negotiate with Akira, he might change his mind and decide to demand more shares than he had right now. And in the worst-case scenario, Viola might stick her nose into the negotiation and carry away most of the profits. Drankam already knew Akira's relation with Viola from Mizuha's report.

Drankam was stuck in a difficult position, trying not to worsen its connection with a high ranking Hunter as well as the company it was working with.

To top it off, companies were also working behind the scenes to make adjustments. The automata that Kurosawa's team had destroyed the other day already changed hands to a certain company. If there was a relic that resembled the complete form of that destroyed relic, it would speed up the investigation process of said relics. Moreover, it might shed a light on its connection with the fifth automaton that got away. If possible, the

aforementioned company also wanted to get its hand on that automaton as well. Thus it was working behind the scenes for that.

With all of these factors added into the complexity of the matter, they ended up taking more time than usual to sell the automata.

Akira already knew what was going on from a short report given by someone from Drankam, which in response, he only said that he would wait patiently if it might sell for a lot more. He already got the expense from that expedition covered by Shiori, so he had no reason to rush it. Although the smaller relics were already exchanged for money, all of them were used to cover the expenses.

Because of this, and some other things, Akira decided not to go exploring ruins for the time being and spent most of his time training inside and outside his house.

__*__*__*__

Togami and Reina's group were about to get out to the wasteland when Reina, who was sitting on the driver's assistant seat, mumbled.

"Good grief, I wonder when we are going to be allowed to do Hunter jobs again."

Togami smiled wryly.

"Calm down, if you don't like the training, you can take a break instead, you know?"

"It's not that I don't want to do it and I do still think that I need more training. But we're not even allowed to do common monster extermination requests, you know? Isn't that a bit too strict? Don't you think so too?"

"Well, you have a point there."

"Right? I really wish they would lift the restriction."

Togami's team was given a temporary restriction from Drankam so they could not do Hunter jobs. This was for the sake of preventing matters from becoming more complicated in case the rightful owners of the automata died. Although they were not exactly happy about it, they decided to obey the restriction. However, as they felt that it would take more time than usual, they decided to negotiate with the higher-ups. In the end, they were allowed to do some low-risk Hunter jobs.

"Our job today is to help out in testing a still-in-development augmented suit. Although it's just training because we're not allowed to do dangerous Hunter jobs, we are still getting paid for it. Depending on how you take it, it might actually be a good offer. By the way, where is Shiori-san?"

The only maid sitting on the back seats was Kanae.

"Ane-san has another business to attend to. Milady, Ane-san left because she thought that we're not going to leave the city. Although I'm letting you out to the wasteland, it would be a great help if you try to be careful. After all, it is still the dangerous wasteland. So make sure not to just go hunting for monsters on a whim when we spot one. I don't want to get split open by Ane-san after all."

"I know, so can you please just let it go for a bit for a change of pace."

Reina lightly sighed.

"Shiori has been bugging me about my mannerism again lately. She has also been actively making me take on that training again. To be honest, I don't think it's necessary at this point… Although mannerism is indeed important, I just don't see why she's getting stricter lately…"

Before Reina continued her thought, Kanae smiled and interjected.

"I don't know if it's because you've been working with Togami-boy a lot lately, but Milady, your word-usage is getting rough lately. So I bet Ane-san wishes to fix it before it gets worse."

"Ughk, well."

“How is that my fault?”

Reina, who knew that Kanae was not completely wrong, became flustered. Togami only smiled bitterly in response to it. Kanae deliberately chose her words such that the heart of the matter was to be taken lightly. But of course, neither Reina nor Togami noticed it.

Erio and Togami were actually helping to test the coordination support system augmented suit. Since Akira did not participate in the test that day, the team was divided between Togami and Reina versus the rest.

The mock battle was divided between the minority vs the majority. The minority referred to those who were using the augmented suit with the overloaded setting. After Erio decided to keep using the overloaded setting, some other children actually asked for the same setting. While the rest, or the majority, were children who were using the original restricted setting. Although the difference in their numbers was huge, they were able to put up a good fight which showcased the difference in their fighting prowess.

That was when Togami’s team came. After a short explanation from Tabata, they decided to set the mock battle as Togami’s team vs the rest. Since Kanae was only there as a bodyguard, she did not join the mock battle and only participated as an observer running around the battlefield.

As Erio and the other children took a short break until Togami’s team finished their preparation, they started to talk about the new addition to the test.

“Say, that maid is the one from back then, right? But where is the other one?”

“Yup, you’re probably right. But to be honest, rather than that fake-looking maid, I actually prefer the other one that looks like a proper maid.”

“Is that so? I actually like this one more though.”

“…You have a very bad taste, you know?”

“What did you just say?!”

The start of the mock battle cut their endless idle talk. As they went to their respective starting positions, they then waited for the signal to start the mock battle.

Erio nervously waited while mentally preparing himself when the support system from his helmet made a suggestion.

“Detected high anxiety level. Please keep calm to ensure effective decision making.”

“…I know.”

“It’s Yatsubayashi. Open up the air composition adjustment function! You should be able to use the modified battle stimulant that I made! Those two once worked together with Akira out in the wasteland, you know! So basically they are like 2 Akiras! If you don’t want to get a one-sided beating, just use the battle stimulant although it’s still in the clinical trial phase. You can’t get strong unless you prepare yourself to take risks, you know! Use the augmented suit, the coordination support system, and the battle stimulant, they are your shortcut to gain super strength. I know they’re still in the testing stage, but just use them! ”

Yatsubayashi’s excited voice could be heard from the support system. Although Erio was surprised by that voice, he seriously considered that offer, and eventually, his wish to get stronger trumped.

“…Alright, I’ll use it.”

“Roger that, injecting the stimulant now.”

The inside of the helmet turned slightly green from the battle stimulant. Every time Erio inhaled, he could feel his anxiety level lowered and his five senses sharpened. The pain from the previous mock battle also slowly alleviated. As he waited for the countdown, he could feel the power coursing through his limbs, even the countdown on his display felt like it was running at a slower rate.

Erio’s spirit was lifted, he thought that he might have the chance to win with his newly gained power. The moment the signal for the start of the mock battle went up, he immediately kicked the ground and started running.

It was two against many and their opponent was supported with the coordination system. Normally, it would have been hopeless, but Reina and Togami compensated for that difference with their equipment and skill. They kept moving around to cause confusion. Although they did not communicate with each other, they moved around together as a team very well. They divided the fight into smaller 2 against 1 fights as they hunted their opponents one by one. When they were about to get surrounded, they would charge to break the encirclement to get away and then maintain the upper hand.

No one was taking it easy in that battle. If they let their guard down even for a split second, the other party would immediately turn the table around. But Togami and Reina felt a sense of satisfaction as they continued to fight with a smile on their faces.

Reina shot down another one of her opponents and thought.

[These guys are strong! I heard that they are not Hunters and just amateurs though, is this the power of the coordination support system? If equipment can really make them this strong, I can imagine why Akira would splurge his money on equipment and training. I had been really ashamed of myself from back then, but…]

Reina smiled.

[I can’t let people think that I’m nothing without my equipment! I can’t let myself lose for the sake of all the training that I did with Shiori and Kanae as well.]

Togami also shot another one down as he thought.

[They are strong. So this is the power of the coordination support system, huh? If I’m not mistaken, Katsuya’s team was using a stable version if not the beta version of this system and they were using it superbly. I even heard

that some officers in the gang are thinking of getting this system for all the young Hunters in the gang. I can understand that, but…]

Togami lightly smiled.

[Just how much would it cost? No wonder why Shikarabe and the other veteran Hunters don't like the young Hunters. Well, I'm on the side of the Hunters who would receive the support, so I have no problem with it, but the veteran Hunters would basically pay for it. Well, sooner or later, I would be joining their side though. I can't really afford to lose now against people with nothing but excellent equipment, after all, I need to get stronger and earn more money. At least more than what I would need to pay in the future…]

Togami and Reina did their best in order to surpass their past selves. Because of that, they were able to annihilate their opponents and won the first hard-earned victory.

Although Erio and the other children lost the round, Yatsubayashi was satisfied with the result. He then amusedly said to Tabata.

"How was it? It has this much effect with only this price. It is pretty impressive, no? Its cost-benefit ratio is way higher than your usual battle stimulant."

"Even if that's true, it's not like I can do anything about it. It's true that our augmented suit allows them to use the battle stimulant in the middle of the fight. But it is originally for medicines. Not for battle stimulants mixed with accelerator drugs. Moreover, the available medicine is based on the other companies that the main company is working together with. So we can only use yours for testing like this."

Yatsubayashi frowned and said.

"Even with this result?"

"I don't have authority to decide which medicine to use. Well, I will at least send the data to the main company though. So just hope that they would

consider using your battle stimulant.”

Yatsubaya looked even more displeased.

“I bet for people like them, performance is number two and they will pick the medicine from some big drug company for the sake of their companies’ interest anyway. Good grief, these people keep giving vague refusals. No wonder cheap but good medicines would never reach the market.”

“Safety takes precedence and it’s important to confirm and prove it. That is why those huge corporations spent most of their money on that, no?”

“Humph, I wonder about that now.”

Tabata looked at the obviously displeased Yatsubayashi and lamented his decision.

[…Good grief, I ended up letting a weirdo join the testing. I really hate my stupidity from that time. Although he’s really a good doctor, he’s just suspicious, or more like, I feel like he’s not the usual doctor.]

Tabata allowed Yatsubayashi to attend the testing after a short negotiation with Viola. He was basically the doctor for Erio and the other children. Because Viola used the previous incident as leverage, Tabata could not refuse her demand.

Tabata then thought of something and asked Yatsubayashi.

“Say, this is just a random guess, but you are not from the Rebuild Laboratory, are you?”

“Why do you think so?”

“No reason in particular.”

Yatsubayashi smiled as if to laugh at himself as he said.

“If that is really the case, I would be working hard on my research with an unlimited amount of budget from the huge corporations by now.”

He then continued but with more spirit this time.

“If you really think that I am that good, it would be great if you would provide me with some aid money for my research. If only I can get a proper production line for mass production and finish off the rest of the testing, I’m sure it would sell like hotcakes. Wait, no, a license would be enough, so if you can offer this drug to some medicine companies connected to your company, then…”

“Haah, like I said, I have no authority to do that. So just give it a rest.”

“Really now, you guys are just insufferable.”

Tabata rejected Yatsubayashi’s offer, thus making him look more displeased than before.

When the Rebuild Laboratory was disbanded, some of the researchers went rogue since they did not like their research being controlled by the Corporate Governments. Even to this day, many were still actively pursuing their research in secret while running away from the Corporate Government. That was a common rumor which was flying around between researchers in the eastern district.

Tabata already knew about that rumour, which in that case, that would mean Yatsubayashi might have a connection with some big companies. But Tabata just shook his head and threw out that thought from his head.

Erio frowned and looked desperate. They finished some rounds after that, but they could not win against Reina and Togami at all, not even once.

They had different equipment, different talents, different accumulated experience from both training and real battles. There were many reasons why they could not win a single round. Erio knew that those reasons were reasonable. But, he just could not accept it. After all, if he accepted them, it felt like it was the same as giving up. He would be shutting himself from taking the road that the strong took. That kind of distorted thinking was what pushed him further.

As the next round started, Erio whispered to himself to be stronger.

“More…”

The system made a guess out of that incomplete sentence.

“Warning, using more battle stimulants would put the body in immense stress. Do you still want to use more battle stimulants?”

“…More.”

“Understood, injecting battle stimulant.”

“…Stronger.”

“Warning, using battle stimulants would put the body in more stress. Do you still want to use more battle stimulants?”

“…More!!!”

“Understood, injecting battle stimulant.”

Erio said so unconsciously, but the system kept injecting more and more battle stimulants. The huge dose of battle stimulant granted him immense power. When he started the next round, he felt like he had temporarily become superhuman.

Reina could not react when Erio suddenly started moving unnaturally fast. The moment she noticed, it was already too late. She could not evade the incoming bullet and the exchange ended up in a draw. As the ‘hit’ notice came up in her display, she laid down on the ground in deep frustration.

Togami did his best even after his only ally in that mock battle was shot down, but since the rest of the opponents jumped into the fray thinking that it was a good chance after Erio shot down Reina, the round ended in his loss even though he put up a good fight.

The signal to end the mock battle came up. Those who were lying down on the ground after receiving their hit notice pushed themselves up again.

Erio’s team realised that they had won the round and celebrated their victory.

Kanae went to Reina first, she then said apologetically to Togami who came a bit later.

“Sorry, it was my fault.”

“Well, it can’t be helped. They’re really strong, I got shot too.”

Kanae then said with a serious face.

“Milady, that boy who shot you down is dangerous.”

“Dangerous? Well, I indeed think I need to be more careful against him next time though.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

Kanae pointed at Erio who was still laying down on the ground. Although the rest of the team were already back up, Erio was still lying there, not moving. The other children noticed that and went to check on him, but since he did not respond even when they called his name, they started to panic and went to call Yatsubayashi.

“That boy, I bet he used a copious amount of battle stimulant. He’s unconscious from the side-effects. Both Ane-san and I are carrying a similar trump card, so I can somewhat tell.”

“Oh, I see. That explains why he suddenly moved so quickly. It’s pretty amazing that you can tell. Is he going to be alright?”

“I can’t really say for sure. It might be already too late for him. He might be not moving because he’s already dead instead of simply fainting.”

Reina and Togami frowned in response to Kanae, who said so lightly. Yatsubayashi who just arrived immediately went to check on Erio. He then asked for help to carry Erio to the trailer.

“Hmmm, looking at that, it seems like he’s going to be okay. In the worst-case scenario, he might spend a few days sleeping, but he’s not going to die.”

Reina and Togami sighed in relief. Even for them, they would feel bad if someone ended up dead during the mock battle.

“I see, thank goodness. By the way, Shiori and you have a similar drug, right? Are you going to be okay using them?”

“We are trained as not to make mistakes and use too much of the drug, so we won’t get to that point. By the way, the reason why we don’t let Milady carry such a drug is simply because we don’t wish for you to use such a drug. After all, it would be bad if Milady made a mistake and ended up killing yourself. Well, when Milady uses that drug, that would be after Ane-san and I die, so it’s not like using that drug would help Milady in any way in that situation. That’s why we don’t allow you to carry such a drug right from the start.”

There were occasions when Kane or Shiori would use a huge dosage of that drug, knowing well that it might kill them. For example, back then when they had to fight the old-world automaton that called itself Olivia, Kanae and Shiori used the drug close to its lethal dosage. Fortunately, Olivia withdrew so they could conserve their strength and they had the chance to prepare themselves to face the backlash, so they were somehow able to stay alive. Although they looked fine from the outside, it was actually a pretty dangerous situation.

Of course, Reina did not know about that, but when she remembered back then when Shiori had to push herself during that fight in the underground city of Kuzusuhara ruin. She could not help but to make a conflicted expression.

Togami, who was listening to their exchange, then threw a question.

“Now that I think about it, is it better if I prepare something similar for myself?”

“I won’t stop you, but normally, it’s important to stay under the dosage limit. If you often get too fired up during a fight, it’s kind of dangerous to carry such a drug. There are many people who end up overdosing because of that. I bet that boy is exactly one of those types of people.”

Togami looked at himself and frowned.

In the end, Erio was sent home. When he woke up five days later, he found Alicia looking at him worriedly.

Erio really regretted his action as Alicia angrily scolded him while crying.

When Reina and Togami were participating in the mock battles against Sheryl’s gang. Akira was meeting Shiori on the first floor of the Kugama building. Akira was surprised when he saw Shiori in a business suit instead of her usual maid outfit.

“So then, what is it that you want to talk with me about?”

“Before that, are you okay to talk here instead of in some restaurant on the upper floor? Please don’t worry about the expense. I was the one who called for you, so I’ll pay for the expense.”

“Well, I have plans to go there in the future. So, I’m fine with this place.”

Shiori’s face slightly stiffened.

“…I see. In that case, please let me get onto the main subject, and also, please don’t worry and order anything you like.”

Shiori explained to Akira why they took a lot of time selling the old-world automata. Although she went into a bit more detail compared to what he had heard from Togami, the main points did not change. He listened to the explanation while finishing his order.

“…Because of this, it will still take some time until we can sell the aforementioned relic. If Akira-sama wishes for it, I can also help out to make the process faster…”

“No, it’s fine. There’s no need for you to go that far. It’s not like I’m in immediate need of money right now. And also, I know that it’s just that expensive of a relic, so it’s understandable that they are having trouble negotiating about the price and that kind of stuff. As a matter of fact, I’m thankful that you paid for the expense early on. That’s why I won’t ask you to do more than that.”

“…I see, very well.”

Akira noticed that Shiori’s face slightly stiffened again and found it strange.

“Is that all?”

“No, there’s another thing. The food is here, so let’s eat first before we continue.”

Shiori tried her best to stay calm as she gently smiled.

Although it was not as delectable as the food on the upper floor, it was still good. Akira relished it since it was still much better than his usual food back home. After a few minutes, his mood got better. Shiori tried to gauge his mood before she nervously brought up the next subject.

“It is about the white card that you let us take. According to my connections, it seems that it is a highly valuable item, although, it’s not directly convertible into money.”

“Ohh, is that so? That’s pretty impressive.”

“So well, you can say that there will be further compensation for you, I’m planning to pay back the profit in some kind of form in the future. Although, as I said, it’s not directly convertible into money, thus your compensation would not be in the form of money. As such, if you have anything you want me to do, please do tell me. I would try my best to comply.”

Akira’s hand stopped from transporting food into his mouth and raised his eyebrows. He then frowned and said

“…No thanks, to be honest, I thought that this matter has already been settled.”

“Indeed, it is understandable to take that matter as something of the past after it has been settled. Please take this matter as the card being just that valuable, to the point that we feel bad for receiving so much profit without giving anything in return. Although, due to the nature of the matter, I can’t really tell you the details. But, what I have said so far is the truth.”

That remark piqued Akira’s interest. But his curiosity was in the opposite direction of what Shiori thought. Of course, Shiori did not know that as she stared at him and slowly became more anxious.

“It seems that you have a lot in mind, but please just tell me if you have anything you want at the moment. If it’s something that I can help with, I will do my best to comply… Although, as expected, I can’t help you if you want to get in relation with Milady.”

“Don’t worry, I have no such interest.”

Akira said so immediately that Shiori looked slightly offended by it. He thought that it was unreasonable to get that stare from her as he continued to think.

Personally speaking, he just wanted to get that troublesome card off his hands. As a matter of fact, he was thinking of just stating that the matter was completely over. But if he strongly refused, Shiori might get suspicious of him instead. Thus he tried to just ask what came up in his mind.

“In that case, I actually want your equipment, will that work?”

Shiori did not expect that at all and it was obvious from her reaction.

“…Akira-sama, I didn’t know that you have an interest in my maid outfit and the undergarment of my augmented suit. If you really want them, I don’t mind giving them, but…”

Akira flusteredly tried to fix her misunderstanding.

“Not that one! It’s true that they are included as your equipment, but I’m talking about your blade. I witnessed just how sharp it is numerous times in the past, not to mention, you used it to slice open that huge monster in the Seranthal building, remember? I just thought that it would be great to have that kind of blade. I’m sure that it’s not a blade that you can normally find in common shops, right?”

“I see, the blade, huh.”

“Why would you even think I would want your maid outfit and what not…”

Akira said as he ruffled his hair, in contrast to him, Shiori smiled amusedly.

“Very well, if my blade will be enough, I’ll bring one to you later.”

Akira was actually asking for the contact to buy that blade and not the blade itself, so he was surprised by her reply.

“Is that okay? I don’t know the details, but it’s not cheap, right?”

“It is a company equipment so I can’t really tell you the precise price, but it is indeed not cheap. But even so, it is still an expendable equipment. So it’s only given that I have spare blades, so don’t worry. I can just use my spare blade.”

“Hmmm, even if you say so, I don’t feel okay getting something that expensive, you see.”

“…If Akira-sama thinks that it might be overcompensation, then I have one request, please don’t tell anyone about that card. It is not like I can compel you to do that, but it is related to the secret information from big companies, so it might cause a problem if you do it. And it applies even when you’re talking with me, will that be okay?”

For Akira, who wanted to just cut all ties with that card, it was a good offer for him as well. Even more so if it was taken as a bribe to keep him from leaking some secret information. It was also a good excuse to accept such terms to obtain that expensive blade. So he immediately nodded and said.

“Alright, I won’t say anything to anyone.”

“Thank you very much!”

Both Akira and Shiori smiled thinking that they were able to get through the negotiation well.

After that, Akira and Shiori talked about some other stuff while enjoying the food before leaving the building. Shiori then left for a bit and returned back with a blade complete with its maintenance kit inside a trunk. Akira received that trunk, said their goodbyes, and left back home. While Shiori went back to the inner wall after seeing him off.

As she was looking at Akira’s back, Shiori thought.

[It’s a good thing that I was able to leave a good impression for now. I want to believe that it will not be a mistake.]

At first, Shiori was uncertain whether to completely forget about the white card or bring it up again to Akira in order to try to leave a good impression on him. In the end, she chose the latter.

With this, even if Akira discovered the truth later and realized that he mistook just how valuable that card was, the chance for him trying to inflict damage on Reina would lower. Moreover, bringing up that it was a company secret might also be a good excuse when it came to it. Shiori thought so and felt slightly relieved.

A call then came from Kanae.

“Ane-san, how is it going over there?”

“No problem at all, how about over there?”

“We’re on the way back now. Ah, by the way, Ane-san, about Milady taking the request for the mock battle training without your permission, should we talk about how we are going to handle this matter?”

“I will act as if I don’t know about it. If Milady slips up and says something about it later, I will handle it accordingly, so you don’t need to say anything.”

“Roger that!”

Shiori knew from the start that Reina and Togami were going to take on that request. As a matter of fact, it was their plan to keep her away from the city in case her negotiation with Akira did not go well.

“By the way, it seems that Milady has gotten stronger than we thought. To be honest, I think she has a good chance of living off as a Hunter, you know?”

“If Milady chooses to do so, it is my job to make sure that other doors will still be open to her.”

“Ane-san, you’re as doting as ever.”

“Humph, I don’t care what you say.”

Kanae closed the call, Shiori seemed to be thinking about a lot of things as she returned back.

Once Akira arrived back home, he slowly unsheathed the blade that he got from Shiori. He looked happy as he looked closely at the blade.

“I got a pretty good weapon, though I think it’s a little too long for me.”

Since it seemed that Akira would keep looking at that blade if left alone, Alpha warned him.

“Akira, you should stop there. Put it back into its sheath and connect it to the maintenance kit. I will readjust the control device through the information terminal.”

“Alright.”

It was long enough to cause trouble for Akira to sheathe or unsheathe but the mechanical sheath could open up on its side, thus it was easy for him to slide the blade in and out of the sheath. The blade came with a combat sheath and maintenance sheath. The maintenance sheath could fix the blade and it was using the same repair cartridge that was used for his augmented suit.

The grip and the combat sheath could be equipped with an energy pack. Moreover, if it was set to work with the augmented suit, it could use the energy from the augmented suit as well and leave the energy in the grip empty all the time. This way, it would be harmless even if the opponent picked up the blade.

Both the energy-based operation of the blade and the physical-based operation of the grip were able to synchronize with the read-type augmented suit. Combined with his time compression, Akira could use the blade to make a quick manoeuvre without any trouble.

The blade was also equipped with anti-forcefield armour. Within a certain range, the blade was better both for defence and offence compared to a gun. Then, in exchange for the blade and a huge amount of energy, it could cut a huge monster from a distance just like what Shiori did in the Seranthal building.

The blade itself was as sharp as an old-world blade, which Akira rarely found and was able to use. So basically, he had gotten himself a better blade than expected.

Akira was content that he received much better equipment than he had expected, Alpha then smiled at him and made a suggestion.

“Well, since you have a blade now, how about we train on how to use it as well? Akira, do you want to try it out now?”

“That’s a good idea.”

Akira extended his hand to reach for the blade but Alpha stopped him using his augmented suit. He did not expect it and turned to Alpha, who then

pointed her finger at two floating blades.

Akira understood what Alpha was telling him, so he grabbed the blade. Due to the augmented reality and Alpha's control over his augmented suit, it felt like there were really two blades. He took one while Alpha took the other one.

"As I thought, it is really convenient to be able to do this training. After all, it is dangerous to use the real blade in the training, I might cut my vehicle by mistake."

"The blades themselves are identical. So don't complain if my blade suddenly extends out, okay?"

"Okay."

Akira took some distance from Alpha and faced her.

"Let's start!"

Right at the next moment, Alpha threw her blade. Although they were close enough to trade blows, the blade flung and sliced Akira into two. His head rolled over and painted the floor red followed by the headless body a moment later. Akira was not able to react at all.

But of course, it was all just an image from Alpha. Akira saw the image of his head on the ground and smiled wryly.

"Isn't that cheating?"

"Nope. Like I said, the blades are the same? So I won't accept any complaints. If you don't want to get the floor covered with your heads, make sure to block the blade, okay? Let's start the next round then."

Akira used his time compression to focus on defence right from the start this time. Thanks to that, he was able to survive a bit longer compared to last time.

Since that day, he started incorporating blades in his training. Thanks to that, the floor of his garage was littered with his dead body every single day.

Silavin: We hit the goal! 3 Chapters for this week!

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Rebuild World – Chapter 209, Not Two Choices

Index

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Akira was waiting giddily in front of the Kugama building. The suitcase in his hand contained his custom suit that was finally finished. Today was the day of his triple date with Elena, Sara and Shizuka. And right now he was waiting to meet up with them.

Alpha was playing coy as she teased.

“You look pretty happy.”

“Is that so? Well, it’s fine, isn’t it?”

But Akira just ignored Alpha’s teasing. Normally, he would give more response than that, but not today. It was proof that he was in a better mood than usual. To make sure that he would not be late, he came earlier than usual, this was also another proof of that fact.

A little before the meeting time, Elena, Sara and Shizuka arrived. Just like Akira, they were also carrying their own custom dresses in suitcases.

Shizuka knew that Akira was waiting for them, she smiled at him and said.

“We were planning to come sooner than the meeting time, but it seems that we ended up making you wait instead, huh?”

“It’s no problem at all.”

“Is that so? Well, shall we get going?”

Although Akira tried to hide his glee, he was not able to trick anyone there. Seeing how happy he was to go to eat together with them, Elena, Sara and Shizuka could not hold back their giggles as they entered the building.

Akira had visited high-class restaurants located on the upper floor of the Kugama building a few times in the past, but even so, he still looked a bit nervous when he entered one. Elena then told the receptionist that they had booked dinner and went to separate changing rooms based on gender. They changed their clothes there before following one of the waitresses who guided them to their seats.

In the deeper part of the restaurant, there was a section separated by partitions. Behind those partitions, the tables were placed in rather wide intervals. All of the diners there were wearing proper suits, just like Akira. No one was using an augmented suit like he had done before. Even the cyborg diners with metallic skin were also wearing tuxedos suitable for that place. The luxurious decorations in that section gave off a high-class and elegant aura that veiled the whole section.

It gave off a feeling of a completely separate place away from the harsh world of the eastern district. Akira followed the waitress as he felt like he stepped into a completely different world.

When he arrived at their table, Elena, Sara and Shizuk, who arrived there first welcomed him with a smile. Charmed by them, he froze for a bit the moment he saw them.

Each of them was wearing a custom dress that boosted their respective unique beauty. Although each dress had a different focus, all of them gave the same sense of gracefulness and elegance, making their charm as ladies much more prominent.

The beautiful dress adorned Sara's ample body as she smiled bashfully. In contrast to that, Elena's dress capitalized on her wonderful arms and legs which gave off a feeling that it was not only simply pure beauty but they were also functional as she smiled confidently at him. While for Shizuka, in contrast to her usual working dress which covered her whole body, her dress was designed to boast that part of her as she blushed and smiled gently at Akira.

Elena led the pack by asking for Akira's opinion.

"So, what do you think?"

"…Uhhh, I think it's wonderful."

Not only was Akira lacking verbal knowledge to express himself, but he was also so flustered that it did not help him at all in that situation. He only managed to say that short sentence. But judging from his reaction, they knew that he was honestly amazed and that was enough for them as they smiled with satisfaction and bashfulness.

"Thank you. It's worth paying that much money for this dress. You also look good in that suit, you know?"

"Thank you very much!"

Akira bashfully replied.

Akira looked like a young master from some large corporation in his suit. Although he would normally look like a young boy in a suit, Celene had put all her talent into creating his suit. Thus his suit gave a strong aura of classiness and elegance, it did not even give off any weird feeling even though the one using it was Akira.

Celene did her best to fulfil their orders. Thus all of them were using dresses and a suit, which allowed even someone as clueless to fashion as Akira, to understand just how amazing they were. It even caused the waiters that guided them to look at them with sparkly eyes.

As Akira sat in his seat, the waiters immediately brought the appetizers. They had chosen their course beforehand when they placed their booking. Since Akira refused to drink alcohol, everyone decided to remove alcohol from their course. But even so, all the dishes were simply amazing. They had an amazing experience although they did not partake in any alcohol during their meal.

During dinner, Akira enjoyed exceptional food while having a light conversation with people that he regarded as his close friends. The food, the smiles from Elena, Sara and Shizuka, the subject of their conversation, the mood of the shop, all made Akira feel happy. The time passed by as he relished his time as he ate, not only for the sake of getting nutrition. The girls who watched him were happy to see that side of Akira.

Akira was completely in joy until the very end of dinner.

On the same day, Sheryl once again attended the feast in the Kugama building. After attending the same feast a few times, she had built up a level of resistance against the delicious-looking food served during the feast. So she only took a small portion onto her plate and ate it little by little. Although she thought that it was a blissful thing to be able to enjoy such amazing food, she was also having a hard time fighting back from making any exaggerated reaction to the amazing taste. Therefore, it was not like she could immerse herself in the food. Hoping to build her resistance, she took another small piece.

Inabe who saw that raised his eyebrows.

“You have quite an appetite there.”

Sheryl stopped her hand and smiled politely at Inabe.

“…I’m of that age after all.”

“I see.”

Sheryl finished the rest of the food on her plate and solemnly placed it back on the table. She then once again turned to Inabe.

“Inabe-sama, regarding the coordination support system augmented suit that you’ve been kind enough to let us borrow, how long can I expect for this kindness to last?”

“Hm? It depends on how well they are doing. To be honest, I don’t know for sure myself. Well, I know that it would be troublesome for you if you suddenly lose your fighting capabilities. I would at least tell them to let you know beforehand so as not to trouble you when they finish whatever they are doing. If you need it, I can ask them to extend the testing period, or instead, I can look for another alternative.”

“Thank you very much!”

“…Uhh, so, in exchange for that, I have one thing I want to ask though.”

“We’re really thankful for your help, if it’s something within our power, we’ll be more than happy to accept your request.”

“I want you to help me negotiate with Akira. You’re close to him, right?”

Sheryl was smiling politely up until now, but the moment Inabe said so, her expression suddenly turned sharp.

“Just to be safe, is it for an informal request that doesn’t go through the Hunter Office?”

“The answer to that is obvious, isn’t it?”

“That might be the case for common Hunters, but this is Akira that we are talking about. Personally speaking, I prefer to remove any possible discrepancy in what we are talking about to prevent unwanted outcomes in the future.”

Inabe saw Sheryl’s reaction as a warning not to cause any harm to Akira because of some unwritten convention or anything similar to that. Although that was not exactly a mistake, half of the reason why Sheryl asked that question was also because she was not that familiar with that kind of dealing.

“Very well. I’ll answer that question. Basically, it is in order not to leave any unnecessary records in the Hunter Office. After all, leaving such a record might cause a problem in the future.”

A formal request that went through the Hunter Office contained a strongly binding agreement between the requester and the Hunter who accepted that request. Both sides must strictly follow the written detail of the request. But in some cases, even for a request that was agreed by both sides, the Hunter Office could intervene using the Corporate Government’s authority to change the details of said request. The requests that had gone through such changes were simply that important.

In order to avoid this, the content of the request would be written in a vague way so that it could be interpreted in various ways, or simply did not provide the detail of the request in the written agreement. Since it was not written, normally, the Hunter Office could not do anything about it. So even if the unwritten part of the agreement contained some unfair clauses, the Hunter could not make an appeal through the Hunter Office.

On the other hand, when the requester did not want a part of the request to be known by the Hunter Office, they often have already made an agreement with the Hunter beforehand. They would have already decided things like how far the detail of the request would be written in the agreement. Of course, the bigger the job, the more difficult it would be, so it was not strange for Hunters to ask for a 3rd party to help during negotiation.

“Yanagisawa agreed to temporarily stop extending the supply route into Kuzusuhara ruin. So all the area managers, including me, have turned our focus to searching and gathering relics, that’s why we are in need of high-ranking Hunters. If I pass the request through the Hunter Office, there’s a good chance that the other area managers would try to mess with my request. Everyone from the larger corporations would also try to make a direct request to the Hunter. After all, it is well known that information about such requests does not require a high authority to be accessible. So this is just a precaution to avoid it. Will that be enough for an explanation?”

Inabe was not lying. But he also did not tell Sheryl the whole truth. Although, the thing that he was hiding from Sheryl was unlikely to cause

trouble both for himself and for Akira. Sheryl noticed that as well, so she smiled politely and replied.

“Thank you very much. I will convey that to Akira and do my best to persuade him to accept your request.”

“If you have the confidence to persuade him, I actually don’t mind if you handle everything including the negotiation part though.”

“…Thank you but I will have to refuse that offer. I’m still an amateur in terms of my negotiation skill, so I will have to refuse so as to not cause you any trouble.”

“I see, in that case, I hope you’ll at least join the negotiation as a mediator.”

Inabe made a guess based on Sheryl’s reply.

[So, she basically doesn’t want to handle the most troublesome part of the deal which is the negotiations. She wants to avoid the risk of worsening her relationship with the Hunter supporting her gang, huh. As I thought, it’s not like she has Akira completely under her control. It seems that it’ll be difficult to use her as bait during the negotiation, I’ll have to think of another way.]

As Inabe and Sheryl were exchanging words, trying to analyze their respective partner in conversation. Katsuya, who was also attending the same feast, noticed Sheryl.

“Sheryl!”

Inabe and Sheryl turned to Katsuya.

“Inabe-sama, if you’re looking for a high-ranking Hunter, wouldn’t it be a good idea to try to talk to him?”

“That one is under Drankam after all. So the one that I will have to negotiate with is Drankam, not him. Well, I’ll do that if I need to, but that’s plan B for me.”

Akira and Katsuya would be perfect if some of their personalities and situations were reversed. Both Inabe and Sheryl had that exact same thought there.

Katsuya, who attended the feast, hoped to find Sheryl here, and was looking for her.

Ever since Sheryl pulled him out from his slump, he has been performing very well. As a matter of fact, his performance as a Hunter well surpassed all his past performances. Moreover, thanks to the coordination support system augmented suit that his team was using, the team's performance was also greatly improved. Not only did he believe that his problem was solved, he also thought that his luck had turned around.

During the huge incident in Kuzusuhara ruin, they had gone through a hard battle defending the supply route. Although the battle was immensely difficult, they formed a close friendship during that battle. The number of people who looked down on Kastuya's team had also significantly decreased after that. He finally felt that all his hard work was starting to pay off.

That was when he started to think that Sheryl could help him quickly solve his problems. As long as he had her by his side, he would not need to be afraid of any issues that might crop up, and that would allow him to keep himself at optimal performance.

When he spotted Sheryl and called her name, Sheryl welcomed him with a smile. Katsuya was elated as if he just met someone that he loved as he walked to her.

As Sheryl and Katsuya were talking to each other and enjoying their conversation, Inabe, who was being considerate, left them alone.

The subject of their talk mostly focused on Katsuya's recent Hunter jobs. He was fulfilling his promise to return back alive and to share his experience. He happily spoke about the days he went out to her.

Sheryl happily listened to his story with a smile. And then, while still maintaining her smile on the outside, she thought in the back of her mind.

[…Again, huh. And like, isn't he stronger than last time?]

Sheryl had no doubt about Katsuya's strength. At least, he was strong enough for Drankam to evaluate him highly and allow him to join the feast. Even Inabe, who was an officer from City Management, was also thinking of getting Katsuya on his side. There was no doubt Katsuya was a strong young Hunter. Both the impression from meeting him and the data from investigating him pointed out to that conclusion.

However, Sheryl felt something that was bothering her. Though normal people would not find anything wrong with him.

Sheryl herself did not think that she had the ability to accurately identify someone's strength. If she had that kind of talent, she would have been able to notice how powerful Akira was right from the start and she would not have treated him the way she did in the past. But when it came to Katsuya, she felt like there was something unnatural about Katsuya's skill and talent, and that feeling somehow felt really clear to her.

Judging from the way Katsuya was talking with her, Sheryl was sure that he really liked her. But judging from his expression, there was a chance that it was a misunderstanding or it was fake. Although, her intuition told her that it was not the case and she trusted her intuition with no hesitation at all.

From her past experience, she knew that there was something affecting her evaluation of Katsuya. Although she did not know what that something was, just knowing that there was something provided her with a little resistance.

[…I feel like if I let my guard down, he'll dictate my view of him. There are some people in this world who have this strange kind of charisma. I'm still not knowledgeable nor experienced enough to handle this. I need to be careful.]

Sheryl reminded herself to be more careful dealing with Katsuya.

After a few minutes, Viola returned to Sheryl who was still talking with Katsuya.

“Boss, I’m sorry but it might be a good time to leave soon. I have another business to attend to, so I won’t be able to give you support. I have arranged for someone to pick you up on the first floor. You’ll know who when you’re there, so don’t worry.”

“Alright, Katsuya, I’m sorry but I’ll have to excuse myself for today.”

“Ah, in that case, I’ll accompany you to the first floor.”

“Thank you very much!”

Sheryl then left the feast together with Katsuya. Seeing that, Viola smiled amusedly. But it was a rather ominous smile that reflected her bad personality.

__*__*__*__

After finishing his dinner with Elena, Sara and Shizuka. Akira was back in his augmented suit, equipped with his rifles. With that short period of time which felt like a dream now in the past, he completely returned back to his usual self.

Shizuka gently smiled at Akira and asked.

“Akira, how was the dinner today? Did you enjoy it?”

“Yes, it was an amazing experience. Shizuka-san, Elena-san, Sara-san. Thank you for inviting me today.”

Akira smiled and bowed deeply. Seeing his response, Shizuka was glad that it was a meaningful time.

“I’m glad to hear that. Let’s go again if the chance comes up.”

“Of course, I’ll be more than happy to if the chance indeed presents itself… Although, as expected, it won’t be anytime soon.”

Akira’s delighted answer was followed by that remark and a bitter smile. Shizuka also replied with a bitter smile.

“Well, you’re right about that one. I too would need some time before we go again.”

Akira in the end paid his share of the food. Although it saved him from feeling bad getting treated to such an expensive meal, it also hit his money reserve. Not to mention, the custom suit was not cheap as well. Shizuka also followed suit and offered to pay her share as well. Despite the fact that they split the bill, it was still not cheap.

The day was already starting to get dark. Not only was it still a bit too soon to enjoy the nightlife, but Akira was also just an underage boy. Since it was not like there was anything they could do together after dinner, they decided to finish their date. Elena and Sara went to take Shizuka back to her shop, while Akira stayed behind because he had something else to take care of.

Before she left, Sara lightly rubbed Akira’s head.

“Well then, Akira, until next time.”

“Of course, until next time.”

Akira smiled and saw them off. As he was no longer able to see them, Alpha, who kept herself invisible up until now suddenly reappeared.

“It seems that you were having a good time while forgetting about me.”

“I’m sorry about it. I just didn’t want to look like a weird person during dinner. If I keep turning my head to empty spaces, I might get conscious of it and end up not enjoying the food.”

“But then you still made me handle your information terminal though.”

“Yeah yeah, I’m sorry, alright?”

Alpha was pouting, so Akira smiled wryly and tried to cheer her up.

“Well, it doesn’t really matter now. By the way, you need to go soon or you’ll be late.”

“Ah, right. I need to hurry up.”

Akira returned back to the Kugama building. During the dinner, he had received a message from Viola to pick Sheryl up and to take her back to the base if he was around. Akira, who was in a good mood, did not think it through and simply agreed.

He did not wait long on the first floor before Sheryl appeared. But the moment he saw her, he was a bit surprised. Sheryl was together with Katsuya, and it seemed that they were pretty close as they were talking to each other.

When Sheryl saw Akira, her smile immediately sprung up. She thought well of Viola, who had arranged this, which was rare for her. And then, of course, she had some thoughts. [I wonder if Viola deliberately did this to get on my good side.] But while she was still trying to work out what was Viola’s aim for doing this, the situation suddenly changed. Katsuya stepped up in front of Sheryl as if to protect her from Akira.

Katsuya was obviously directing animosity toward Akira. Meanwhile, Akira, who was at the receiving end of that animosity, tensed up and got himself ready for action. Of course, both Akira and Katsuya knew better than to cause a ruckus in front of the building managed by the Hunter Office. But they simply could not trust each other. They were locked in that situation as tension in the air rose up.

Sheryl was confused by the sudden change of events. Even in this situation, she did her best to try to understand what was going on as her eyes went back and forth between Akira and Katsuya. But when she looked at Akira, she remembered something that she had once imagined in the past and froze up. Akira’s slightly surprised face overlapped with an image. An image of him abandoning her without an ounce of regret or hesitation. The same image that she had imagined in the past.

Akira then showed a hint of movement, as if he was about to leave the place. When Sheryl noticed that, all the doubts and questions in her mind were immediately thrown out of the window as she ran and hugged him by pure reflex.

“Akira! You came to pick me up, huh! Thank you very much!”

Sheryl never expected that she would raise her voice that high and squeeze out a smile in order to ascertain her position. Although there was a mix of desperation in her smile, her arm was still hugging tight, as if she was clinging onto Akira for her life. Akira also did not expect that from her at all as he looked slightly troubled by it.

While on the other hand, Katsuya could not hold back his surprise. It was such a shock to him that he could not fully process what just happened.

“S-Sheryl!?”

Katsuya’s short sentence was filled with his earnest feeling. In response, Sheryl was still clinging to Akira’s arm as she turned around and replied.

“Can you please stop acting like that? Akira might misunderstand something, you know?”

The harsh words and the ice-cold gaze were so different from the Sheryl whom he knew up until now. The shock made Katsuya at loss for words.

Sheryl’s gaze returned back to Akira as she gave the best smile that she could muster. It was a desperate made-up smile to show her affection toward Akira, she then clung hard to him and earnestly pleaded.

“Let’s go back now.”

Akira was still a bit confused and uncertain of what to do there, so Sheryl forcefully pulled his arm and practically dragged him away from that place. They then left the building just like that.

Katsuya, who was left alone, was found standing exactly in the same spot when Mizuha found him. She was worried that Katsuya did not return after

some time and went to look for him.

On their way back, Akira, who still did not fully understand what just happened, tried to make his own guess and said to Sheryl.

“…I don’t really know what was going on back then, but if you need connection with other Hunters for the sake of the gang, I have no wish to get in the way. So you should not worry about it. I won’t complain at all, you know?”

Sheryl’s made up smile crumbled and turned into a rather sad expression. Akira’s words showed just how little he thought of her. Although he once jumped straight into the fray during that huge incident in the slum city the other day in order to save her, he did not even feel a shred of jealousy when he saw Sheryl was having a good time with another guy. It was just extremely unnatural.

If they were really a couple, there was a word that would immediately solve that abnormality, but Sheryl averted her consciousness from that word.

“…You can’t say that to your lover. Our setting is that we are close to each other, that is why you are willing to support my gang. A lot of things regarding the gang are based on that assumption. Although I can’t force you, if I may, I really hope that you would try to be careful so as to not do anything that might break that assumption.”

“Hm? Ah, right, you have a point there, I’ll be more careful.”

Akira was convinced by that answer, although, Sheryl wished that he would not just obediently accept her reasoning like that.

But even so, Sheryl tried to give her best smile, hoping and wishing that their relationship would turn into a real one sometime in the future.

—-*—-*—-*—

Back at base, Sheryl waited in her room for Viola to return. She had told Viola to visit the room later no matter what and she did not mind if Viola

was late. It was already late at night and the date had already changed, but Sheryl still waited silently for Viola. Since her emotion had completely overpowered her sleep, she did not feel drowsy at all.

A few knocks could be heard followed by Carol entering with Viola.

“Boss, I heard that you called for me. Do you need anything?”

Sheryl silently pointed her pistol at Viola, but Viola’s smile was not perturbed.

“Oh, that’s not friendly at all. Is there anything wrong?”

“What was that?”

“Even if you ask me, I don’t really know what is ‘that’ you’re talking about.”

“Don’t play dumb with me!”

The hand gripping the pistol reflected Sheryl’s real feeling, it was shaking with anger. She was barely able to stop her finger from pushing the trigger. Her face showed obvious animosity. In order to hold back her anger and maintain her logical mind, her expression was more of cold ruthlessness instead of anger.

But even so, Viola still had her usual smile.

“It’s not like I’m trying to play coy here. It doesn’t matter how hard you try to bait me with words, you do know well that won’t work on me, right?”

Viola kept up playing dumb as if to tease Sheryl.

In order not to accidentally shoot her and to keep her calm, Sheryl repeatedly took deep breaths while telling herself to remain calm.

“On the first floor of the Kugama building, why did you make the three of us meet there?”

“Hm? I thought that it would make you happy to have Akira escort you back though, did something happen?”

A gunshot echoed. The bullet left a hole in the wall next to Viola. Sheryl readjusted her aim at Viola. But Viola did not move at all, as a matter of fact, her smile widened.

“For the sake of the gang’s future, I just thought that you might be able to mediate between Akira and Katsuya since it seems that both of them have a rather hostile relationship. But it seems that it didn’t work out well, huh?”

“For the gang’s sake, huh? Do you really think that would work? Stop with the lies. I know that you don’t honestly think so.”

“I’m not lying. Katsuya is a very skilled Hunter and it seems that he’s interested in you. So if you can use that to make peace between him and Akira, there’s no doubt that it would greatly help the gang. I’m sure you know well yourself just how profitable it would be for the gang if that works.”

Viola made a good argument. Sheryl tried to calm herself down but as if to mock her efforts, Viola then continued.

“Well, if that was enough to break your relationship with Akira, it means that there’s less chance Akira would come for my head if I somehow get you angry. To be honest, I was hoping for that outcome as well. So basically, for me, I didn’t mind how it would turn out either way. If it was a success, it would be very profitable for the gang, and if it failed, then it would bring profit for me. Well, but unfortunately, it seems that it didn’t exactly go either way huh? That is really unfortunate.”

Viola had her evil smile on her face as she said so. Sheryl was shaking in anger as she was barely able to hold herself back. Moreover, as they locked their gazes, Viola’s eyes were challenging her to shoot if she could really afford to do so.

After a short silence, Sheryl lowered her pistol. If she killed Viola here, all the amazing ongoing progress of the gang would be thrown down the drain.

The gang was the only thing that Sheryl could hand over to Akira in order to repay her debt to him, so she could not afford to lose it. That reasoning was barely able to save Viola.

“…Get out.”

“Is that all? Alright, Boss, good night.”

Viola turned around and was about to leave the room with Carol, but before she exited the room, she left a few words for Sheryl.

“You can’t win me with violence, you know? So suit yourself. Later then, Boss.”

After Viola and Carol left the room, Sheryl threw her pistol onto the floor, but not before emptying its magazine at the door.

“…I’ll definitely win, just you see!!”

Sheryl replaced the raging emotion inside her with determination and renewed her resolve to remove Viola.

Outside of the room, Carol sighed in exasperation.

“Geez, you’re just as awful as ever. You might provoke her like that, believing that she won’t shoot. But if you keep this up, you’ll really get shot.”

“Nope, I was hoping that she would shoot.”

“Wha-!? Is that so?”

“Yep. That’s why I brought you with me. I know that you can handle such a situation when it happens, right?”

“Well, that’s true, but still.”

“I was hoping she would shoot, and you would protect me, then I can leak that information and use it to do other things. But it seems that she can

control herself well. It was pretty impressive. It seems that she has gotten tougher. To be honest, I really didn’t expect that at all.”

Viola seemed to be pretty happy there, in contrast to that, Carol smiled wryly and mumbled.

“And here I thought it was pretty rare for you to seriously help someone else, like the gang. But it turns out that you were just playing with the fire here just now, huh? You just can’t give it a break, can you?”

“Just so you know, I’m already being careful so as to not get on Akira’s bad side. Of course, I would change my mind if you would get him under control though.”

“Nah.”

“That’s really unfortunate.”

Viola and Carol exchanged jokes and lightly laughed. Both of them knew well just how horrendous each of their attitudes was.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 210, Negotiation With Inabe

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Shijima was resting in his private chamber back in his gang's base. His face had slightly lost its luster, which showed just how tired he was. This was caused by none other than his exhausting duty.

The battle between those two large gangs in the slum city had left a large vacant territory. Thankfully, the other slum gangs were able to talk it out and peacefully divide the vacant territory. The result from their discussion was that Sheryl would take half of the territory left by the Ezont Family. She would also lend all of that territory for Shijima's gang to manage. In exchange for that, the gang would share the profit from managing that territory fifty-fifty.

Of course, this would mean that Sheryl's gang would get 50% of the profit without having to manage that territory. Normally speaking, it was a very greedy deal, despite that, the other gangs still accepted it. This showed just how frightened the other gangs were of Akira and Viola, who were behind Sheryl's gang.

Having control of the territory meant that Shijima could fake the reports for the expense so that his own gang could gain more money. As a matter of

fact, they were already doing it. But since no one could tell what kind of retribution Akira might bring down on them if it were to leak out, they were being extremely careful and only did it to a tolerable limit.

Now that Sheryl had lent the territory for him to manage, Shijma was employing people from the other gangs to work under him in order to manage it. As he was the head, he was also responsible for the distribution of profits. Unfortunately, with how big the Ezont family's territory was, it produced a large amount of profit. This caused more friction between the gangs. Shijima was basically having a hard time adjusting arrangements to appease everyone. Although managing this area did significantly increase his gang's prowess and influence, it also put him under a lot of stress.

One of Shijma's men then entered the room.

"Boss, is it a good time?"

"I'm resting right now. If it's not an emergency, save it for later. If it is about some members from the other gangs fighting over a girl or something, let them settle that matter between their own gangs themself. There's no need to bring everything to me."

"No, it's just that we noticed some movement from Sheryl's gang. So just to be safe, I'm here to report to you about it."

After hearing that report, Shijima's face stiffened. It seemed that an officer from City Management visited Sheryl's base in order to meet Sheryl, himself. Normally, no one would believe it, but if it was the truth, it was not something that could be ignored.

"…Are you sure this information is correct?"

"One thing that we have confirmed is that a certain vehicle with the City Management emblem on it was spotted entering Sheryl's base, along with someone wearing an expensive-looking suit. He was escorted by a bunch of heavily armed bodyguards who came out from that vehicle. This is from our men working in Sheryl's base, that's why we know that this is definitely true."

“…I’ve heard rumours that their relic shop relies on someone from City Management, as the gang provides side income to that person. City Management also dispatched manpower to guard that relic shop. I’ve always thought that it’s just a rumour that Viola fabricated, but it seems that it’s not the case, huh?”

Shijima looked immensely confused and uncertain. If he was able to use this information wisely, he would be able to gain a lot of benefit from it, but if not, it might end up with the destruction of his gang. There was no doubt that he had to be careful on how to deal with this situation.

“Let the other gangs know about it too. If they ask for a meeting to discuss it, tell them that we’re still considering what to do regarding the same. And even if we’re going to convene a meeting, we’ll only do it after I ask Sheryl about it.”

“Roger that, Boss.”

After the guy left the room, Shijima frowned and mumbled.

“…Good grief, they were only a small gang made up of slum children not too long ago, and now it has grown significantly again.”

Thinking about what kind of disturbance it might cause and how much work that he needed to do to take care of it, Shijima heaved a huge sigh.

__*__*__*__

Inside Sheryl’s room in her base, Akira and Inabe were sitting facing each other. Behind Inabe, there was a group of heavily armed soldiers as if they were planning to go to the inner part of a ruin later. Akira was also using an augmented suit and carried his SSB rifles. Though, he left his blade behind since it was too long, and might obstruct him from sitting down on a chair.

Sheryl was not sure if it was appropriate for her to stay, but due to Inabe’s request, she decided to leave the room. So after she placed the coffee on the table, she excused herself.

Inabe started.

“Before we get into the heart of the matter, I have a few questions. Although it might be weird for me to be complaining, you’re the one who wanted to have the meeting here. If you have a reason for it, please do tell me.”

“If you rather choose to meet somewhere in the ruin, we can go there now though.”

“No, it’s not something as secretive as that. Ah, did you choose this place since you thought this would be a discussion that is meant to be kept secret?”

“It’s just that it’s more comfortable for me to talk somewhere I’m familiar with.”

“I see.”

After a short pause, Inabe stopped chasing the subject. Akira only thought that it was rather weird for Inabe to stop there, but he did not bother to think any further than that. In contrast to him, Inabe tried to read deeper into the situation.

At first, they originally planned to have the meeting in a high-class restaurant on the upper floor of the Kugama building. But Akira said that he would rather have the meeting in Sheryl’s base and so that plan was changed.

This was because Akira was being more careful than usual, considering that Inabe wanted to offer him a request without passing it through the Hunter Office. Furthermore, he knew from his conversation with Kibayashi that sometimes people invited high-ranking Hunters to some high-class restaurant that they were not familiar with to trick them into signing an unfair contract. That was why Akira chose to have the meeting in Sheryl’s base instead. Not to mention that in this case, he could use the excuse that this offer had come to him through Sheryl, so it was not strange if he wanted to have that meeting in Sheryl’s base.

From what Akira did, Inabe continued to ponder.

[He might have noticed that I was the person behind the deal he made in the deeper part of the Kuzusuhara ruin the other day. Or, it could be that Sheryl's gang is actually Akira's gang and he had chosen to meet within his territory in order to gain the upper hand during negotiation. There is also the possibility of him deliberately making me visit this base in order to show off our relationship to the other gangs and exert more influence on them…]

Inabe pondered just how much Akira was involved in everything since the day Viola visited the temporary base.

[If that is indeed the case, then Akira is not only a high-ranking Hunter, he is also a Hunter who thirsts for money and power. There are many Hunters who use slum city gangs to do covert illegal activities, after all.]

Inabe then came to a conclusion, although there was evidence that disproved his theories, it was still wise to be careful.

"Now then, before we start, I have one thing to say. Although it's not something so secretive for us to have this meeting in the inner part of a ruin, it is still a classified meeting related to the City Management. So I'll need you to keep this confidential as a proper Hunter, also remember that there are consequences if you break this promise. Are you okay with it?"

"Sure."

"Then let's begin."

Inabe was planning to do a large-scale expedition to explore the inner part of the Kuzusuhara ruin. Not only would it involve a lot of Hunters, but he was also planning to deploy the humanoid weapons that were just approved for deployment recently. Of course, it would not be a cheap operation, if the expedition fails, it would incur a huge loss for him. But even so, Inabe placed his bet on the expedition and he was in the process of gathering the manpower necessary right now.

After hearing Inabe explain, Akira frowned and looked a bit conflicted.

“…I’m sure you know about this, but I almost got killed in Kuzuusuhara ruin a few times recently, right? To be honest, I have no plans to go there anytime soon.”

“Facing danger is an occupational hazard for a Hunter. Moreover, we will leave most of the job to the humanoid soldiers. The Hunters would only be deployed once the robots finished securing the area, so you guys can focus only on gathering relics. Don’t worry, the City Management also plans to deploy powerful powered suits as well, I’m sure that you’re familiar with the type of powered suit that we’re talking about here and just how powerful they are. And unlike during the previous incident in Kuzusuhara ruin, they will not be in a testing phase, so they’re not restricted to only melee weapons anymore. We will have enough fighting power to safely conduct the expedition.”

“…Even if you say so…”

Even with that added, Akira seemed to be reluctant. But Inabe then continued.

“I heard that you’re ordering powerful equipment through a City Management staff member, Kibayashi, right? I’m actually involved in that matter as well.”

Akira’s expression immediately changed.

“What do you mean?”

Akira’s expression, stare, and voice were all projecting a level of hostility. Inabe’s bodyguards inadvertently reacted to that hostility. The mood inside the room immediately tensed up.

Although Inabe kept his calm demeanour from the outside, he was actually taken aback. The bodyguards for a City Management’s officer were in no way weak. He thought that Akira should be aware of it and he would not try

anything funny there, but Akira's stance was showing that he had no problem having a fight here and now.

Inabe thought that unnecessary intimidation might be counter-effective in this case as he changed his approach to the meeting.

"Oh, don't misunderstand me. I have no plans to get in your way of getting new equipment if you refuse this offer. As a matter of fact, it is the opposite, I can help you with your new equipments if you accept this offer."

As Akira's intimidating aura gradually receded, Inabe let out a sigh of relief in his heart before continuing.

"You're looking for powerful equipment that you can't get through normal means, right? Not to mention that you're willing to spend most of your reward on it. I'm sure that Kibayashi has some extraordinary connections that can help you with that, and I bet they will be able to answer your expectation well. But I know, there's still a limit on how far a mere staff can do. Unlike him, I can connect you with some powerful people. Just so you know, I can even get you that black powered suit. If you accept this offer and do a good job in gathering relics during the expedition, I'm willing to help you out with your equipment. So how about that?"

"I don't really want that powered suit though."

"I'm just saying that I can even get you something that powerful. When you're looking for powerful equipment, money alone is not enough. You'll also need a high Hunter Rank. After all, there are many corporations that only make deals with Hunters with a high enough ranking. You are relying on Kibayashi in order to circumvent that problem, right?"

"…Well, that's true, but…"

"Then there's no reason to hesitate here. Although it sounds suspicious for me to say this, this expedition is a rare chance even for you. At least I'll let you know about this. During the expedition, the area would be closed from public access. After all, it would be troublesome if some Hunters not from the expedition team take away the relics in that area. It is difficult to get the

chance to join this kind of expedition. Normally, Hunters would fight each other for this offer. As a matter of fact, there's an ongoing competition behind the scenes between the representatives of various Hunter gangs. You can join this expedition without the need to go through any of that. So, there's no reason for you to hesitate."

Akira himself thought that it was indeed an enticing offer, but that was exactly what made him suspicious.

"To be honest, this offer sounds too good to be true for me though. Is there any reason you are prioritizing me that much?"

Inabe took a short pause before he lightly smiled and confessed.

"Well, I can't tell you all the details, but basically, you're already well past the criteria to be included in this operation. For example, your Hunter Rank. City Management actually decided to temporarily stop the supply line expansion into Kuzusuhara ruin. During this break, all the other officers are also planning to launch a large scale expedition. But in order to do that, they need enough capable manpower. Because of that, we are actually competing for Hunters above Rank 40, you see. That's why we're offering you all of these things in order to get you to join my expedition. Although I already received answers from the other Hunters who are above Rank 40, the more Hunters I have, the better it is."

Akira was okay with that answer, but he still requested extra confirmation.

"Alpha."

"He's not lying, but he's also hiding something."

"So he's not as kind as to tell me everything, huh."

"Yep, exactly."

Just to be safe, Akira then asked Inabe a question with a serious face.

"I'm sorry if this offends you, but tell me, you have no wish to cause me any harm, right?"

“And here I thought what you would ask. Listen here, if you keep being paranoid like that, this is not how a negotiation-”

Akira’s intense serious stare stopped Inabe, who then fixed his tone and said with an equally serious expression.

“No.”

“Alpha.”

“Not lying.”

Akira lightly sighed.

“Alright then, I’ll take your offer. Sorry for being too careful. I hope you can understand if I say that I know someone by the name of Viola.”

Inabe inadvertently smiled wryly.

“That explains everything then. It seems that she has troubled you as well, huh?”

“Yeah.”

Akira smiled bitterly. Those who knew what he was talking about would understand very well, such an awkward feeling of camaraderie wafted in the air.

After Inabe finished his business with Akira, he went to see the relic shop, and after a small talk with Sheryl, he finally left the base. This time, he headed to the lower district of Kugamayama city.

Inabe replayed in his mind what just happened in the base and smiled confidently.

[Akira, Sheryl, Viola, what a gathering of dangerous people. I wonder what they are planning, to form a gang together like that. The answer to that might lie in the reason why Akira is looking for powerful equipment. Well, it doesn’t really matter, I’ll use this chance to reap some profit for myself.]

One of Inabe’s men suddenly called him.

“Inabe-sama, it’s about Drankam. The negotiator from Drankam’s side said that the Hunter we’re asking for is not doing so well. So it might be difficult to arrange a meeting with him.”

“It doesn’t matter, tell them that we’re going there as originally planned. Inform them to threaten that Hunter if he doesn’t seem interested. And if that still doesn’t work, tell them to just leave the negotiation to us, I’ll have a face to face talk with him.”

“Understood!”

After a short pause, the same subordinate called Inabe again.

“Inabe-sama, we can call Drankam’s negotiator right now if you wish.”

Inabe smiled bitterly.

[So he even refused an order from Drankam’s officer, huh. Although he’s an upcoming star, they’re basically spoiling this young Hunter. And this really is the guy that Yanagisawa has his eyes on too… Honestly speaking, I don’t like him.]

His hatred toward Yanagisawa caused Inabe’s face to stiffen.

[Well, it doesn’t really matter. I’ll just assume that’s just how strong that Hunter is, I’ll make good use of him.]

Inabe then readjusted his expression suitable for negotiation.

“Connect me.”

“…This is Mizuha. Inabe-sama, we are really sorry about this and we are really grateful for this chance, but unfortunately-”

Inabe energetically cut short Mizuha’s long apology.

“Just listen here. Katsuya-kun, was it? I don’t really know the reason, but I heard something happened to him and that he is no longer fit for duty. I bet it has caused you a lot of trouble considering that he’s a team leader, right? If you keep that up, I’m sure Yanagisawa would no longer evaluate you as highly. Man, that must be really rough.”

“Indeed, it is exactly as you say…”

“I actually might have an inkling on how to fix it.”

“You do?!”

Hearing Mizuha’s rather exaggerated response, Inabe’s smile widened.

“I won’t say anything bad. Just arrange a meeting with him. I’ll get him back on his feet and you won’t worsen your relationship with me. I’m heading there right now, so make the preparations for the meeting.”

Inabe then closed the call without even waiting for Mizuha’s reply. After all, there was no need to wait for her reply.

Katsuya was sitting with his head hung low inside his room. He did not even remember how he got back after Sheryl had left him. As a matter of fact, it was even suspicious if he remembered anything in the past few days. The half-eaten meal next to him showed that he had also lost his appetite. Although the light was on, it was because Yumina and the other girls turned them on, worried for him. There was no doubt if he was left alone, he would just continue to despair inside this dark space.

The shock from when he parted off with Sheryl still lingered in him.

Yumina and the other girls entered the room, worried for him. When they told Katsuya that Inabe came to see him, he only glanced and showed a minimal response. So Yumina and the other girls had no other choice but to grab his arm and carry him out of the room on their shoulders. He did not even resist when they did that.

Katsuya was sitting face to face with Inabe in Drankam's visitor room. Many young Hunters gathered around Katsuya and Mizuha, and all of them seemed gloomy.

Even Inabe felt a bit creeped out after seeing it.

[So basically, the mood of the whole team is determined by the mood of the main actor of the team, huh? A team heavily affected by the condition of its leader… I bet all of them are in Katsuya's team. I see now, as expected, the team is not fit for duty in this condition.]

Inabe then turned to Mizuha.

"I'll have everyone but him leave this room."

"But he's in this situation, so it's not like we can just leave him alone-"

"No. This meeting includes private information for him and other information regarding the interest of City Management. So the fewer ears around, the better. That's why I want everyone unrelated to leave the room."

Seeing that all of them were reluctant to leave, Inabe sighed and sent an intense glare as he once again ordered.

"Leave!"

Seeing that, Mizuha and the rest finally left the room. Yumina, who left last, turned around and bowed at Inabe as if pleading to him before she closed the door behind her.

[He even acted like that in front of a Drankam's officer and an officer from City Management, huh? As I thought, the gang is really spoiling him. This is simply abnormal even for Yanagisawa's influence. Honestly, these guys put too much stock in him. I just can't understand what they are thinking.]

Inabe decided to shelf that question for now. In order to start the negotiation, he then smiled and said to Katsuya.

“Now then, I’m not sure if you’re even listening or not, but before we go on to the main subject, there’s a small thing that I want to talk to you about. I heard that you got rejected by Sheryl, that must be rough.”

Inabe’s tone was obviously directed to mock Katsuya instead of cheering him up, causing Katsuya’s anger to well up. This anger turned into energy and returned the colour on his face as Katsuya who was unresponsive up until now sent a glare toward Inabe’s direction.

“…So why are you here? You have no business with a mere Hunter who has no relation to Sheryl, right?”

“That’s indeed correct, that’s why I have some business with you.”

Katsuya showed a bit of surprise. Inabe’s mocking smile shifted into a friendly one and he did that deliberately.

“W-what do you mean?”

“As a businesswoman and the leader of a gang, there are times when she has to make hard decisions, that’s all there is to it.”

Inabe’s words rejuvenated Katsuya’s hope, who had always been wishing that there was a reason why Sheryl did that. There must be some kind of misunderstanding there.

“Tell me, tell me everything.”

“If you really want to know, stop hanging your head and straighten your back. That’s not how you present yourself during a negotiation, you know?”

Katsuya flusteredly straightened his back. Seeing that, Inabe was sure that he had secured his victory.

“Sorry to start from something unpleasant, but to put it in simple terms, Sheryl has debts, or more like a loan. Well, both refer to the same thing anyway.”

“Debt…”

From that word, Katsuya immediately made a guess that Akira was trying to get Sheryl by using that debt as an excuse. So naturally, he then thought that he might be able to take that debt off from Sheryl.

“That debt, how much is it exactly?”

“I don’t know the precise number, but one thing for sure, it is not small. Let me ask you this instead, how much do you think it might be?”

Considering that it was large enough to force Sheryl to make such a hard decision, Katsuya paused for a bit before wording out his guess

“Like, 30 million… No, 50 million Aurum?”

Katsuya only guessed that it must be pretty big but not completely out of reach for him when he said that. But Inabe shook his head and replied.

“Unfortunately, it’s way more than that.”

“Way more than that? So I guess it’s not like 55 million either, so, 500 million?”

“It’s at least 5 billion. It might go as high as 10 billion or even more.”

Katsuya dropped his jaw and flusteredly exclaimed.

“A-are you serious!? That’s just way too much no matter how you slice it…”

“It’s the debt of someone who can even attend that feast, you know? 30 million Aurum? 50 million Aurum? Heh, there’s no way it’s that small. It seems that you don’t fully understand the real worth of the people who can attend that feast. People in that event can casually make deals worth billions of Aurum. Well, although, there’s a difference whether it is her debt or the debt of her organization.”

Katsuya still had not fully recovered from the shock as he listened to Inabe.

“The larger the corporation, the bigger the liability in the case that corporation goes under. And then the debt, well, investment, loan, you can call it whatever you want. It takes talent to be able to manage that much money. After all, the person loaning it out did it expecting to get something in return. That girl basically is just that talented, but then she failed. I guess that’s what happened.”

Katsuya understood that it was something out of his capabilities and frowned.

“But even so, there’s no doubt in her talent, so I bet she’s trying to get up again with the little amount of money she has. And in reality, she is doing very well considering that she’s able to attend that feast. Sheryl is actually earning money by selling relics at the moment. It is not something strange in the eastern district. I’m sure she will be able to pay back her debt soon at this rate, that’s why I’m sponsoring her relic shop as well. We did talk about business during the feast, remember? That’s exactly what we were talking about back there.”

Katsuya did not expect that Sheryl was having such a hard time, at the same time, he hated himself since he could not help her.

“Sheryl needs relics for her relic shop, that’s why she needs skilled Hunters. Fortunately, she has some connections with Akira… Now then, I bet you’re asking yourself – why would she go to Akira when you yourself are a skilled Hunter, right?”

“…Yeah.”

“You’re indeed a skilled Hunter, your Hunter Rank is pretty high as well. I myself have confirmed that you’re a skilled Hunter based on the information that I gathered about you. But, unfortunately, you’re not the kind of Hunter that Sheryl is looking for. After all, you’re a skilled monster Hunter. Most of your track records are from subjugating monsters or protecting inter-city transports. So, unfortunately, this track record can’t attest for your skill in hunting relics. But that’s not the case for Akria. He’s doing very well as a relic Hunter. He’s basically a proficient treasure Hunter.”

“If it’s only that much, not too long ago I found some old-world terminal, right…?”

“Just that one time out of coincidence, right? We can’t really expect you to keep producing that kind of result just from that one time, right?”

Katsuya could not argue back and just sat there in silence.

“Moreover, even if it’s not from coincidence but from your talent, that doesn’t change much from Sheryl’s point of view. You’re a Hunter from Drankam, the gang decides where the relics that you gathered will go, not you. I bet they won’t let you give those relics to Sheryl even if it is to get on your good side, and it won’t work even if Sheryl tries to negotiate with Drankam. The Hunters in Drankam are receiving a lot of support from the gang and it is not cheap. It’s only to be expected that the relics its members gather will go there first. They will have no relics available for Sheryl. In contrast to that, Akira is an independent Hunter, which is rare to find. So, if she can just get on his good side, she will be able to expect some relics to go to her.”

Katsuya imagined a lot of things and frowned.

“…Is he that good of a relic Hunter? Enough for Sheryl to do that?”

“I have my position to consider here, so make sure that this won’t leak outside, okay? It seems that Akria brought back old-world automata just recently. I heard that he was working as a team, so the money from that automata will be distributed to the rest of his team and Sheryl wouldn’t get anything this time. Even at this moment, there are many companies competing to get those automata. Just imagine how much it would profit Sheryl if those relics went to her instead. It won’t be strange for her to expect Akira to achieve the same thing in the future. And the more Akira likes her, the better the chance his relics will go to her. I bet that’s why she doesn’t spare any effort in order to get Akira to like her.”

Katsuya imagined even more and his frown deepened.

“She did not know that you and Akira are on bad terms. After seeing how you reacted. As a businesswoman and the leader of her gang, her options were between you and Akira, but her only choice was to side with Akira. There was no room for her own feelings, it was a hard decision. Well, it is all just my guess though. I’m not her after all, so I don’t know what exactly she was thinking at that moment. But well, I can guess that much judging from how you two were talking during the feast.”

Katsuya was hoping that there was a reason why Sheryl did that and this pretty much confirmed it for him. But what laid after was something that was out of his reach, something worse than he had expected.

“…Is there… Really nothing that I can do…?”

Seeing Katsuya hand his head low in frustration again, Inabe then said to him, as if to give him hope.

“Actually, I’m planning a large scale expedition to Kuzusuhara ruin’s inner area and I need a lot of skilled Hunters for executing this plan. So yes, I’m planning to hire a lot of skilled Hunters who specialize in hunting monsters in order to secure the area of the expedition. If we’re successful, I’m sure we can return with a lot of relics from this expedition. Of course, I will have ownership over those relics and where to send them. Normally, I will prioritize sending those relics to corporations connected to City Management, but if you perform well during the expedition, I don’t mind giving some of the relics to Sheryl. Of course, I will inform her that it was mostly thanks to your hard work. If Sheryl knows that she has other options for her sources of relics, I’m sure her evaluation of Akira would lower, and she would not have to make that kind of tough decision anymore. She will have other options besides Akira. So, What do you think?”

Inabe said so and gave Katsuya a friendly smile. But he was surprised when he looked at Katsuya’s expression, a sense of resolve was welling up from his serious face. Katsuya then lowered his head to Inabe.

“Please, let me join your expedition.”

“Of course, certainly.”

Inabe was a bit overwhelmed by the powerful determination oozing out from Katsuya that felt like physical pressure.

[So this is the real him, huh. I see. No wonder Drankam is so invested in him. I bet the people around him lost to this as well, this would explain why Drankam has broken into factions.]

In order to keep control of the conversation, Inabe deliberately let off an authoritative smile.

“We have a deal then. Don’t worry, I will keep my promise. That’s why, keep this a secret, okay? I have my position to consider here. You get it, right?”

“Ah, yes.”

“Sounds good. If they ask you what happened, just tell them that you got fired up after I offered you a highly profitable ruin expedition. To be honest, I don’t really care what excuse you make as long as you keep this a secret.”

“Okay.”

“Now then, I have nothing more I want to talk to you about. I need to go meet the original negotiator from Drankam to let her know that this matter has been settled. So, I’ll take my leave.”

Inabe stood up and walked towards the door. Katsuya also stood up, flustered, and bowed to Inabe.

“Ah, um, thank you very much!”

“You’re welcome. I’m looking forward to your work.”

As Inabe left the room, he noticed that Yumina and the others were waiting nearby. Even Mizuha was present, so he called on her to request a meeting for another time.

Inabe found Mizuha and the other’s reaction rather weird, all of them looked delighted. The gloomy mood that they had right before they left the

room was nowhere to be seen. Since Katsuya was still inside the room, there was no way they knew that Katsuya had cheered up.

[Were they eavesdropping? Good grief, these guys really have no manners.]

Inabe thought so and just pushed that matter out of his mind.

In reality, they did not eavesdrop. Considering just how much that it might hurt them in the future, there was no way a Drankam officer would do something like that to an officer from City Management. And of course, she would not let Yumina and the others do that as well.

Inside the room, Katsuya apologized to Yumina and the others for making them worry. He apologized, smiled and pumped himself up for the upcoming expedition.

Everyone present was delighted that Katsuya was able to cheer up in such a short time. Strangely enough, no one found it suspicious.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 211, Reina and Togami's Decision

Index

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Akira once again joined the coordination support augmented suit experiment, which doubled as mock battle training. Despite having to fight Erio and the other children plus Togami and Reina this time, Akira was still maintaining his usual 50% win rate. It was meaningful training, with each round improving the fighting abilities of all its participants.

His opponents were extremely surprised. They thought that Akira would have enough leeway to hold back with the difference mainly being their numbers. But in reality, Akira was having a hard time as well. The only reason why they thought so was because Akira seemed ultimately unperturbed even after he lost a round.

During a small break, Togami glanced at Akira talking to Sheryl. Sheryl was donning a relatively stylish outfit for someone out in the wasteland. She took great joy in their conversation. Her smile reflected her strong feelings toward Akira. But in contrast to that, Akira was talking like usual. Although it was not like he was completely emotionless, his reaction was rather bland for a boy of his age when talking to someone like Sheryl. But even so, Sheryl still seemed to be extremely delighted.

“According to Erio and the others, it seems that they are lovers. But still, she’s really a beauty. Seeing her talk to Akira, I bet that she’s deeply in love with him. Man, seriously, both Akira and Katsuya. I wonder if beautiful girls normally flock to you when you’re that strong. Which means that I’m still far away from being strong enough, huh? I’m so envious. I wonder if a beautiful girl will come to me, I don’t care if she just wants my money.”

Togami said so jokingly although with a slightly serious face. Reina, who heard it, felt mysteriously irritated, but she was being careful so as to not show it.

“You don’t have anyone like that, huh? You’re pretty famous as the leader of the anti-Katsuya faction, right? To be honest, I think it won’t be weird if girls try to approach you because of that.”

Togami smiled bitterly as if to mock himself.

“Nope. Not at all. I know a few people who used to say that Drankam has more girls both as Hunters and as administrators compared to the other gangs. But almost all the girls around our age are following Katsuya. So the rest of us have none left. Now that I think about it. Once you return to him, I think he’ll complete his collection.”

“Whoah, can you not treat me as a collection?”

“Sorry. But again, the reason you left his team is because you thought you were too weak and would just slow him down, right? To be honest, you’re already strong enough now though.”

“That might be true, but still…”

An awkward silence pervaded, Togami prevented himself from doing anything that might hurt his pride while Reina was uncertain on what to do, including matters regarding Katsuya’s team.

Togami then changed the subject to change the mood as well.

“By the way, Erio’s team is actually moving like Katsuya’s team, right?”

Reina deliberately followed through in order to get away from the awkwardness.

“I bet it’s some kind of imitation because the coordination system uses the battle log data from Katsuya’s team as its learning pattern. That’s why their movements are similar… By the way, how did you notice that?”

“Back then when I was training under Shikarabe, he showed me their battle log to analyze. Basically pointing out its weakness and how to face such an opponent. We did that for a whole day. It even came up in my dreams! Back then, I thought that it was impossible to fight such a big group all alone but…”

Togami smiled wryly, seeing which, Reina replied with a similar smile.

“Although it’s true that they’re weaker, we were able to do that last time. And Akira was able to do that all alone with us joining the other side…“

“At least, we know now that it’s not impossible. I guess that just shows that we’ve improved.”

As Togami and Reina lightly smiled at each other, a notice suddenly reached them. So they went to Akira to inform him that they were ordered to leave the training and return back to Drankam’s base.

Once they arrived, Togami and Reina were summoned to the meeting room by Mizuha. At the very start, they were informed that the gang had successfully sold the old-world automata, thus Reina and Togami were no longer restricted from dangerous Hunter jobs.

Although Togami was delighted, he also seemed a bit confused.

“If it’s only that much, you could’ve just informed us through Arabe-san, right? So why did you summon us here?”

“Now that both of you are not prohibited from doing dangerous Hunter jobs, I have an offer for you. There’s a huge expedition plan to explore the

inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin, so I want both of you to participate in that operation."

Togami was really interested in that offer, but he still seemed not fully convinced yet. After all, Mizuha was still the officer in the Katsuya faction, so it was weird for her to bring an offer to him, and that suspicion caused him to knit his brows.

Mizuha immediately noticed what Togami was thinking and smiled as she explained.

"Of course, you'll be working under Katsuya."

Togami and Reina did not seem surprised by it. They had seen that coming. But they both reacted differently to it. Togami showed a rather cold attitude while Reina was at loss. It was obvious that one of them took that offer as an excuse to force him to work under Katsuya while the other one thought that it might be a chance to return back to Katsuya's team.

Mizuha proceeded by explaining in detail the benefit of participating in that large-scale expedition. Togami and Reina both understood the benefit that they could obtain. So, Mizuha continued by asking a question in a friendly manner.

"So then, what do you think? I think it's a great offer for both of you."

Reina hesitated, but Togami replied firmly.

"I'll have to refuse."

Mizuha and Reina raised their eyebrows and looked at Togami. Mizuha then frowned and asked him.

"…I know that our relationship is a bit complicated, but I think this is a good opportunity to start anew. Are you sure you want to refuse?"

"Yeah."

Togami showed firm resolve in his answer, but that only caused Mizuha to get a bit emotional.

“Are you sure you’re not getting ahead of yourself with people calling you the leader of the anti-Katsuya faction? Let me tell you this. That faction is no longer functional. That’s just how great Katsuya’s track record is.”

It was indeed as Mizuha said, most of the people in Drankam were actually supporting the Katsuya faction either passively or actively. Although there were still Shikarabe and his cliques who were still taking the opposition side, it was no longer big enough to be called a faction.

“The reason why I offered you this chance is only because you returned back with old-world automata although they were already in a broken state. Otherwise, there’s no reason to invite someone who is against Katsuya. This is a very gracious offer. Do you really understand what will happen to your standing in the future if you refuse this offer?”

Mizuha’s words started getting mixed with threats. But even so, Togami did not change his mind.

“It’s true that I was getting too confident in myself and it’s true that a part of the reason why I refused is my pride. I do know well that refusing this offer will bring me a lot of trouble later on. On the contrary, if I accept this offer, I’m sure I’ll get better requests and equipment from the gang, which will make me stronger. Moreover, there’s no doubt that guy is stronger than me, so I have no plans to make excuses like I don’t want to work under someone weaker than me. As a matter of fact, he might be so strong that I might slow him down instead. When that happens, he might save me and that might be a trigger for many more good things in the future.”

Togami, who spoke as if he was talking about someone else unrelated to him, showed that he understood very well how good that offer was. That was why Mizuha was more confused than before.

“So then why won’t you accept it?”

“It’s true that I’ll get stronger if I work under him. But that will be a strength that relies on him. I want to be stronger myself. I don’t need power that won’t work without him. I don’t want to degrade myself to being just another drone under him. I know that it’s just my dumb pride. But it’s the kind of pride that I bet my life with even if you see it as foolish. That’s why I’ll have to refuse your offer. At least, I’ll thank you for offering me such a good deal.”

There was no chance for negotiation. Mizuha looked coldly at Togami and warned.

“…You’ll regret it.”

“If I do, then it’s because I’m weak. So it can’t be helped. I’ll excuse myself then.”

Togami lightly bowed toward Mizuha, made a 180-degree turn and left.

Mizuha’s gaze shifted to Reina.

“You’re going to accept, right?”

Her time to make her decision had come, so Reina made her resolve.

“I’m sorry, but I also refuse.”

Mizuha could not believe what she just heard and looked completely surprised.

“Even you too!? Why? Are you being serious here?! If you don’t take this opportunity, you might not have any chance to return back to Katsuya’s team, you know!?”

“It’s true that I do want to return back to Katsuya’s team. But, I want to stand beside him. I have no wish to return back to be someone under him. Someone that he needs to protect. I want to stand beside him as a fellow Hunter of the same standing. Although I don’t think I will ever be able to surpass him, I’m thinking of doing my best until the day I can be as good as him.”

“Do you really think that day will ever come? No matter how much you try, he’ll only drift further and further. Katsuya’s skill and talent are already good enough to attract the attention of City Management, you know? You’ll definitely regret it.”

“If I do, that will be because of my lack of talent and effort. So it can’t be helped, please excuse me.”

Reina lightly bowed and left as well. For some reason, she seemed extremely satisfied. In contrast to that, Mizuha’s anger was shown in her expression.

“Good grief… these people…”

That whisper was rather childish for someone of her age.

As Reina left the room, she saw that Shiori was already waiting outside with a surprised expression.

“What’s wrong?”

“Ah, it’s nothing. Milady, are you sure?”

Reina was not sure what Shiori was asking about, so Kanae jumped in to fill in the blank.

“Milady, it is about that offer back in the room, or more like, the offer to return back to Katsuya’s team.”

“Eh? You knew?”

“We more or less predicted it based on the information that we had gathered. Not to mention, we heard from Togami just now. So then, both Ane-san and I thought that Milady would take that offer to return back to Katsuya’s team. But it seems that did not happen, that’s why Ane-san is surprised.”

“Milady, I’m sorry for the lack of explanation.”

“Oh, I see. Don’t worry about it… By the way, is it really that easy to read my expression?”

Reina blushed a bit and mumbled. She then regained her usual composure before continuing.

“Since I refused the offer, I think it’s impossible for me to join the expedition now. But since the gang already sold the automata, I can start taking Hunter jobs again. I guess I need to discuss with Togami about what to do next.”

Shiori and Kanae looked at each other, it seemed that Reina had not noticed it yet.

“Milady, with the automata already sold, Togami-sama’s training with Shikarabe has also been completed. This means that the team has been disbanded.”

“Eh? Ah, that’s true. But, it doesn’t mean that we can’t still stay as a team, right?”

“Milady, it seems that Togami thinks Milady will return back to Katsuya’s team, that’s why he already made his next plan. As a matter of fact, he was already talking with someone regarding that matter.”

“Ehh!? Why didn’t you stop him!?”

“As we said, we didn’t expect Milady refused that offer.”

Reina pulled out her information terminal in a panic and tried to make a call. But since there was no answer, she immediately started running to where Togami might be.

Shiori and Kanae smiled wryly at each other before they went to follow their master.

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Somewhere in the inner part of the Kuzusuhara ruin, Yatsubayashi was driving his mobile clinic. Since the plan to extend the supply route was halted, there were many Hunters around the supply route hunting for relics. Yatsuyabashi did not find any lack of patients from those Hunters.

Something that looked like a Hunter came into the clinic, Yatsubyashi saw that face and pointed to the bed, telling it to lie down there. Yatsubayashi then closed the trailer's back door, which he usually keeps open even when he was treating his patients.

Not too long after that, the door opened and the thing that was lying down on the bed exited the clinic with a completely different face.

Yatsubayashi sighed.

[Although it's a deal that I made with her, this is pretty dangerous stuff. I think it's barely against City Management, but… Well, I wonder if it was a mistake? But again, I can't just give up on learning old-world technology.]

Yatsubayashi had made a deal with Tsubaki. She was the one who controlled the thing that just entered his mobile clinic. It was actually Tiol's terminal and it had kept its human form even after the incident from last time. What Yatsubayashi did was just change the appearance of that terminal. He had done that a few times already. All the terminals that started with a young boy's appearance, were transformed into humanoids of all ages and gender by Yatsubayashi. And just to be safe, he also regularly assigned them with different faces. They were then sent to mix in with the other Hunters working in the ruin, to work on their own goals.

Yatsubayashi himself had no idea what Tsubaki was trying to accomplish by using them. But he also had no wish to know. He thought that the best way to deal with Tsubaki was to fulfil his part of the promise, make sure not to get himself involved more than necessary, and most importantly, not to pick a fight with her.

As another unit came into the clinic, Yatsyubayashi once again closed the back door.

__*__*__*__

Shikarabe was drinking in the pub that he frequented with Kurosawa. They enjoyed their drinks while having the waitress serve them as they talked about recent events.

But suddenly, Kurosawa asked the waitress to let them speak in private. Seeing that, Shikarabe understood that Kurosawa was going to talk about something that was not exactly a secret but was also not for public ears and lightly sobered up.

“So then, Kurosawa, what do you want to know this time? Is it about the insider information of Drankam again? I’m sorry but I can’t tell you anything. The current Drankam is fully under the Katsuya faction. So I’m already in a pretty bad position, you see. They no longer let me know about important information regarding the gang.”

There was a trace of self-mockery in Shikarabe’s cold expression. It was clear that he had begun to give up on things.

“It’s about Katsuya.”

“Humph, I have nothing to say about that guy.”

Shikarabe was obviously repulsed by that matter. But seeing Kurosawa’s absolutely serious attitude, he then sighed and continued.

“So then, what do you want to know?”

“Actually, there are some people around me who are thinking of rejoining Drankam.”

“Are you joking? Didn’t most of them leave the gang since they didn’t like Drankam’s policies? So why are they thinking of returning back now? Just to let you know, the situation is worse than when they had left. Even I’m thinking of leaving sometime soon.”

“I totally agree with you, but it’s true that some of them are thinking of returning. Some of them are even thinking of taking it easy, even if it means

working under Katsuya. To be more precise, the people who think so are those Hunters who have worked in extending the supply route. They had some of the areas under them overlapped with Katsuya's, and after watching how he works up close, they reevaluated their opinion of him. Although it sort of makes sense, I'm still not fully convinced for some reason. Unlike them, I got too bored expanding the supply route, so I went to take other jobs like the one in Lida commercial district ruin and various other jobs as well. That's why I was not around with them for a while. I can't help but wonder what exactly had happened when I was not around. But when I asked them in detail, nothing struck me as amazing or anything. They don't seem to be hiding anything from me either. To be honest, I'm a bit creeped out by this."

Shikarabe felt that was a bit weird since Kurosawa was talking as if it was some kind of ghost story.

"Shikarabe, you hate that Katsuya, right? Why do you hate him that much?"

"Why you ask? Let me ask you this instead, what is so good about that cocky guy?"

"If it's about a cocky young Hunter, you can find them anywhere. Even that Togami was one of them. Back then, he was too confident of himself. You hated him as well, right? But that is not as bad as your hatred towards Katsuya. Although they are similar, the difference in your impression of both of them is just too big. Why do you hate Katsuya so much? Did he do something that makes you hate him greatly?"

"Why, huh, well…"

As Shikarabe was about to answer that question, he suddenly stopped midway and seemed a bit weirded out. He had a lot of reasons to simply hate Katsuya, but he could not think of any reason to explain his intense hatred.

Seeing that, Kurosawa made an equally weirded out expression.

“Whoa there, get a hang of yourself. I was just wondering if I could share with them your reasons, they might change their minds, you know? You really hate Katsuya’s guts, so there must be a reason for that, right? Even saying that you just don’t like how he looks is fine, you know?”

Shikarabe sobered up a little more and tried to look for a reason. He kept asking himself to think of a reason. It might be the accumulation of smaller grievances from back then when he was responsible for guiding Katsuya. It could be because he had become jealous of Katsuya’s talent before he knew it. But in the end, he could not find any good reason, leaving him as simply hating Katsuya without any good reason.

[…Why though?]

Shikarabe was uncertain if he couldn’t think of any good reason because he was drunk, or if his real reason would only come up if he was more intoxicated. He seemed to be deep in thought and looked slightly puzzled. Kurosawa, who was expecting an answer, could not help but make the same expression.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 212, Yanagisawa's thoughts

Index

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On the night before the large scale expedition. Yanagisawa read through the document regarding it and smiled bitterly.

Inabe no longer had any method of retreat. Since he took Viola's suggestion to fake the relics that could be found in the area under his territory, he had lost the trust of his coworkers and even his position as well. Although he somehow dragged himself out of hot water, it did not change the fact that he faked the relics and the truth was that there were no expensive relics in his area. If the expedition could not show any results, it would show that the records from his area were nothing but fake. Before it happened, he had to find another area where a ton of expensive relics were waiting to be found. Otherwise, he would have no other choice but to cover his lies with even more lies, which would eventually lead to his doom.

The plan was laced with details that clearly showed Inabe's effort. The budget was increased as much as his position allowed him to and he did not hold back from using all the connections he had to obtain investment in order to secure more firepower. He did not even hesitate to use his own money.

As Yanagisawa read through the document, he found Akira and Katsuya's name in the list of Hunters who had returned with expensive relics from that region. So Yanagisawa's mind wandered as he reminisced on a certain incident in the past.

Back then, after the huge incident in the slum city, Nergo reported to Yanagisawa that Katsuya was someone who could connect to the old-world domain. At that time, although Yanagisawa was delighted, another question came up in his mind as he asked Nergo a question with a puzzled look.

"Thank you very much for the valuable information. But, what can I say, it's not like I'm doubting you, but is it okay to ask you how you got your information? As I said, it's not like I'm doubting you. In fact, I don't doubt you. It's just to be safe."

Nergo did not show any particular reaction to that rather exaggerated attitude that obviously showed Yanagisawa's suspicion.

"I'm not going to tell you to believe me. It is nothing more than just confirmation in order to not cause any unnecessary conflict between you and me when it comes to capturing Katsuya. We don't mind being the one capturing him. All I want to hear from you is that there are no problems. You are fine with that, right?"

"Well well well well, don't say it like that. I just want to ask you some questions. It's okay, right? It's not like we're total strangers, right? So I hope that you can enlighten me. Moreover, if I don't know anything, I might misunderstand, which might cause trouble later. It would be great if we can clear up any possible misunderstanding."

Yanagisawa was signalling that he would not give his affirmation unless Nergo answered his question, and even if he did, it would only open up space for negotiation. Nergo, who understood that, lightly sighed and replied.

"…Very well. But before I explain, I'll ask you about the basics first. What are old-world connectors?"

“Simply put, it refers to the people who can connect to the old-world domain, right?”

“You might be just playing dumb there, but that’s a very narrow way to interpret it. To be precise, that answer is wrong. It’s just one of the many methods to identify old-world connectors, nothing more. This term refers to a group of people who, for some reasons that still cannot be explained with our current technology, are able to receive and send a certain signal, and this function can be built-in into their body or achieved through other methods. There were many cases where such people were either simply included in the old-world domain as a receiver node, or even as transceiver nodes. Thus, they were often used as a method to connect to the old-world domain, that’s why most people interpret that term as such. An active connection to the old-world domain is not their main feature. Next, then, you do know about telepathy, right?”

“That’s a type of communication method where information is not sent through sound waves, right? People who have communication devices implanted in their heads can talk with each other even without making a sound. So most people trying to look cool tend to call that telepathy.”

“Just like how the people of the current era have many methods to communicate with each other, that’s also true for the people who can connect to the old-world domain. That’s why this is not always true for all of them, but most of the time, they can use telepathy. Of course, they can transfer more than just sound or words.”

“Even the information terminals of the current era can be used to send videos and pictures too, you know?”

“Of course, but their telepathy can send even more than that. Although there are differences between each individual, they usually can transfer all kinds of information. The old-world technology even allows them to send something as vague as intuition which can’t be explained with words. And then, those who can send a certain type of information tend to cause a certain phenomenon. This is why we believe that Katsuya is one of them.”

“Ohhh, so, what different kind of information is that? And what kind of phenomenon are we talking about here?”

“The information is something akin to mental manipulation, like emotion or impression. These types of people are extremely rare as they can easily get along with other people. If I am to give an example, it can cause everyone around them to like what they like and hate what they hate. This is doubly true for people who wear their heart on their sleeves.”

“I see. It makes the people around them to like what they like and hate what they hate. It is the result of them unconsciously sending that information to the people around them, huh? Sometimes, straightforward words can greatly move the hearts of others. If it’s possible to convey that feeling without words, the same kind of effect becomes more prominent. I bet that would be super effective. But then again, shouldn’t only people who can connect to the old-world domain be able to receive such information?”

Yanagisawa asked once again as if he was playing dumb, so Nergo once again sighed and replied.

“…I bet you’re just pretending to not know, so I’ll answer your question. Most of the people in the eastern district can actually connect to the old-world domain. If we take an analogue with information terminals, the transceivers are only sending a low-power signal that is barely recognizable while the sensitivity of the receivers are dialled so low that they can’t receive any signals. It is as if they are information terminals on defective settings. Even if you try to dissect and analyze the brains of normal individuals and those that can connect to the old-world domain, there are no notable differences between them. This is why even with all the advanced medical tools that you have in the eastern district, people still can’t identify them correctly. So basically, normal people can’t connect to the old world domain, but if it’s just a short-range direct transmission, they are still working as terminals to various extents. Of course, there are big differences individually. As for the people in the eastern district who live on the western side near the central district, for some reason, most of them have already lost that ability. It might be because they have a lot of children between them. I wonder if that ability is connected to how much one inherited the blood of the old-world descendants.”

“I see, that is some amazing information. But still, I don’t think it’s that convincing. To identify an old-world connector just from his relationship with the people around him? After all, people like Katsuya are not that rare. I’m sure you can find a few if you search, right?”

“That decision is based on other observations as well. We have other reasons why we’re so certain. For example, there is a huge gap between the logical and concrete evaluation of that guy compared to the intuitive or emotional evaluation. That’s the result of the person in question, unconsciously sending his own evaluation of himself to the people around him. So in short, if he believes that he is powerful, others around him will be pushed toward direction as well. Comparing that to his real power, a gap has been observed, which also serves as more evidence.”

“Hmm, and that would make people think he is a powerful person even if he is not that powerful in reality, but the opinion of the people around him cemented that notion even further. But again, it’s normal for talented people to be evaluated highly by the people around them, right? And Katsuya is not that bad himself. He’s been doing well as a Hunter. If he’s really that untalented, he would have died a long time ago, right? After all, monsters don’t care about such things. They just attack everyone equally.”

“It’s not like we think that he’s weak either. He’s a skilled Hunter. The focus here is the gap and the strange dissonance that can be felt from it. I’ve been observing him from afar ever since I infiltrated Drankam, this is the conclusion that I’ve reached after observing that strange dissonant feeling. It’s a conclusion made after gathering impressions from all kinds of people included his track records, documents, the people who are in his faction as well as the people who hate him… If you accuse that I need to do more investigation, I have no words to deny it and partially agree with you.”

“Ohhh? Did something happen?”

“There was a large incident in slum city the other day and Katsuya was also involved in the battle. The reason was because I told him the whereabouts of a certain pickpocket named Alna. Judging from his personality, I was certain that he would go save her if he knew her location, and I was right. However, I also predicted that he would bring reinforcement from

Drankam. Normally, it would be impossible for Drankam to dispatch its men just to save a mere pickpocket. So I was originally planning to confirm if he is someone who can connect to the old-world domain using that event. If he is, then his ability would affect their decision. It remains to be seen just how far the people who like him or think highly of him would ignore the benefit of the gang. But… To think that he went alone, it took me completely by surprise. Because of that, it was difficult to judge if Drankam was trying to cover for him or if the gang was simply trying to erase any relation between that incident and the gang. So, it did not produce any clear evidence."

"I see, so that's the reason, huh."

Yanagisawa who was acting as if he was pretending to not know although he already knew everything right from the start, caused Nergo to be irritated as it leaked a bit in what Nergo said next.

"…As I said, the conclusion was made from various observations as well. Even if some of the evidence gathered is not that convincing, it doesn't change the conclusion. I'm sure you don't need any more explanation, right? So just answer my question already."

"Well, putting the matter with Katsuya's investigation aside, I actually have other questions, you see."

"What is it?"

"For example, do you think that there is another old-world connector in the slum city?"

"Why do you think so?"

"Well, don't be that stingy. I just wanted to ask this question to someone who is more knowledgeable about this matter than me, nothing more."

Nergo sighed and replied firmly.

"No, they're all dead."

“Ohh, that was a firm reply. It means you have evidence for that, right? If you would be so kind as to share that with me as well, then…”

Yanagisawa still maintained his half-joking attitude, that was when Nergo interjected.

“I had made a deal with a Kugamayama City Management officer from the Rebuild Laboratory in the past. Although to be more precise, I don’t know if he’s still a member or a former member. In exchange for providing him with monetary support and a research facility, he will work on a method to awaken incomplete old-world connectors. City Management accepted that deal. That is the thing that you actually want to know, right?”

Yanagisawa’s tone turned serious.

“…That facility is supposed to be a tightly guarded secret even in the upper echelons of City Management though.”

“You’re not the only person in the City Management who we are working with. There are others who support our cause, and we’re working with them even now. It is just that simple.”

“I see. I would be super thankful if you can share the list of people though.”

“No, we can’t share that kind of information with you. At least, not until you join us for the great cause. For now, my answer is I do hope from the bottom of my heart that you would eventually join our cause one day.”

“I see, hmmm…”

There was a moment of silence. It demonstrated their relationship, they were only working together because it was beneficial for both of them when in reality they were not on the same side.

“…Although I’m not sure that this is enough compensation for you, I’ll at least answer your previous question. The method used by that officer is to promote mutation with nanomachine, which is administered through an injection. So there is no need to implant some kind of device into the

subject. But even so, this method is still in the midst of development, it is still in the human testing phase to be more precise. Its accuracy is low and it still needs a lot of human test samples. But gathering a lot of testing subjects would attract attention and because this project has to be kept secret, it does not take up any actions that would put it under the spotlight. Currently, there is a lack of test subjects. Also, if information about Rebuild Laboratory working with us surfaces, it will cause a lot of trouble. That's why they mix nanomachines in the food distributed in slum city. That way, even if the nanomachine rampages and kills the test subject, or if it turns the subject into a monster, people can just chalk it up as an unfortunate accident. Furthermore, free food distribution down in the slum city was created exactly for this reason. It was originally for the sake of testing nanomachines derived from the dead monster, to test if they are lethal for human use. I do feel some pity for them."

"Well, I have to refuse to make any ethical comment about it, so then?"

"Most of the people who rely on that kind of food are weak. Even if the test successfully awakens them into old-world connectors like Katsuya, they would die in no time before we can confirm if the test is a success. That's why the experiment is seen as a failure and it will stop in due time. Hence, there won't be any old-world connectors in the slum city, since they are already dead."

"Why dead though? They might still be alive, right?"

"Slum city has atrocious public order. In order to stay alive there, weaklings need to be aware that they are weaklings. If they get too conceited and think of themselves as the strong, they'll be killed in no time. Moreover, they need to be extremely prudent, otherwise, they will just get tricked and again, killed. Now, imagine if they are broadcasting their impression of themselves using the old-world domain, that will give them a hell of a time trying to survive in the slum city. Unconsciously telling others that they are weak would result in people looking down on them and hating them. Even the paranoid attitude needed to survive in the slum city would also be transmitted, further damaging their relationship with those around them. Because of this, it would be difficult for them to stay in a group. Even if they manage to join a group, being pessimistic and ultimately paranoid will

only cause others to use them as expendables, they will just be used and abandoned later. They will end up having all the downside of being in a group without any of the benefits. They will not even be able to hold the least needed connections and communication skills to stay alive in slum city, so there is no doubt they are all dead by now."

"In that case, they can just, like, you know, try their best sending likability and trust, right?"

"That would be plainly impossible. That kind of technique is not something technical like a communication device, it's a more subtle technique like a speechcraft. The more familiar and skilled they are, the better the accuracy and the broadcast strength, and the opposite is also true. As I explained before, due to the environment in which they live, it would be difficult for them to broadcast positive emotions such as trust, self-confidence, or likability. While at the same time, it is way easier for them to broadcast negative emotions such as suspicion and hatred. And even if they can send those positive emotions, if the receivers reply with negative emotions, it would be counter-effective."

"…There's a possibility that some still survive even after that, no?"

Yanagisawa sounded as if he was not just simply asking random stupid questions. As a matter of fact, it sounded like he had some kind of particular question that he was looking for an answer to. It only caused Nergo to be puzzled.

"…Why are you so insisting on that possibility?"

"It's nothing important."

"…In order for them to survive, I bet they would have to strive to be Hunters. But they would have to be an individual Hunter unaffiliated with any groups and don't join any parties. I believe that's the only way for them to stay alive for an extended period of time. We are talking about the dangerous slum city here, it is not strange for its denizens to think that they need to be Hunters in order to survive living in slum city. But that would be a misunderstanding. The wasteland is not the same as the slum city. Green

Hunters getting killed by monsters is not a rare occurrence. Moreover, the chance of them getting killed out there is higher compared to normal Hunters. Normally, common Hunters would transmit their location to the monsters through vision, sound, vibration. But this type of information transmission method is often damped by the colourless mist. Unfortunately, this is not true for the Hunters who are connected to the old-world domain. The colourless mist can't block their information transmission, thus letting monsters identify their positions easier. As such, they have a higher monster encounter rate compared to normal Hunters. Of course, that would mean that they're more likely to be killed by those monsters as well. For old-world connectors living in the slum city, going out to the wasteland is not a wise choice in order to survive."

"…But what if they survive the wasteland as well?"

"…Just why exactly are you so insisting on this matter?"

"Like I said, there's no reason in particular. And that is my last question."

"…The slum city is a place where people won't easily recognize your power even if you are indeed powerful, this would cause their personality to distort. Thus they would stay paranoid as they would go further to the east, seeking a place where people would recognize their achievements which would get them killed eventually. But if they still survive that, I bet that they will be working in the front-most battlefield in the east. That hell is filled with people with distorted personalities and firepower. So it won't be strange for them to be mixed in with the people who live there."

"I see. That's a really interesting subject. By the way, it might be weird to call this my form of gratitude, but you can do whatever you want with Katsuya. I won't complain no matter what. But it would be difficult if you ask for my help to take him away. As you know, he's starting to stick out after that incident. It would be weird for someone from City Management like me to not give special treatment for a phenomenal Hunter like him, I hope you can understand that."

"No problem. We have no plans to take him away, we only want to introduce our beliefs to the people. So we will just use him to promote the

great cause, nothing more."

"I see, so basically you want to get Katsuya on your side and make him attract more people to support the Nationalist, huh?"

"I would prefer if you would refer to that as just spreading the truth to clear up the Corporate Government's propaganda. Well then, I shall excuse myself."

Nergo then closed the call. After that, Yanagisawa mumbled to himself.

"…I wonder just how far they are planning to go. Well, I don't really care as long as they don't get in my way."

Yanagisawa already knew that the people who could connect to the old-world domain could send emotions through telepathy, but he also knew that they could send something far worse and evil than that through telepathy.

There was a theory saying that during the old-world era where it was common for people to be connected to the old-world domain, emotions were transferred to their enemies. It would make them think that killing themselves was the best course of action. Eventually, suicide spread across nations which ended the civilization. That was why the buildings were very well preserved even after civilization had ended a long time ago. After all, this long term preservation was unexplainable solely with the self-repairing system.

Many thought that as a result of security enhancement against such a psychological attack, those who were not even able to connect to the old-world domain survived and rebuilt the world. The people of the eastern district were basically the descendants of these people, this was the reason why they could not connect to the old-world domain. So judging by this story, the people who were identified as old-world connectors in the current era, referred to those with the faulty security setting and they were actually in danger. So the plan from the Corporate Government was to increase the number of these people. Naturally, this was for the sake of their own profits.

There were also many other problems concerned with being able to connect to the old-world domain. Yanagisawa did not know how much Nergo knew. The reason why he was pretending to be clueless was to check how much Nergo knew about old-world connectors and how much information he was willing to share.

At the very least, Nergo had strong resistance against the emotion transmission from the old-world connectors. As such, it was difficult to identify an old-world connector using that method. That was why Nergo was trying to identify that by observing the effect on the other people. Yanagisawa understood that it would be counter-effective if the officer sent by the Nationalists to find an old-world connector fell victim to their thought transmission.

Although Yanagisawa was interested in Nergo's resistance, he did not say anything about that matter nor did he try to pursue that question. After all, he understood that it was not a wise thing to do. So he decided to stop worrying about that and once again reopen the information window about Akira.

"…Although it's not in a straightforward manner, he's supporting a slum gang. He also did work together with the other Hunters although very rarely. He worked in a team in the Seranthal building. He then risked his life in order to save his lover during that battle in the slum city. Although he basically works alone, he can also perform well in a team. So it doesn't really match the indicators from what Nergo had said. I guess he's really not one of them…"

Yanagisawa then lowered his guard toward Akira. After removing the information about Akira from his panel, Katsuya's information once again came up.

"As I thought, he's the one."

In contrast to Akira's case, Yanagisawa raised his guard toward Katsuya.

As Yanagisawa's mind returned to the present, he projected the information about Katsuya's team on the holographic display up in the air. Ever since

they started using the coordination support system augmented suits, they showed a rare level of teamwork and were performing really well. The note on the side listed both the praises and the complaints regarding the augmented suit as well as a small notice that Inabe had secured an investment from the city defence squad for the expedition budget.

Seeing that, Yanagisawa could not hold back his chuckle.

“I don’t know how far it is just coincidence, but if all of them are, then he’s really one lucky guy.”

According to the information that he had received from Nergo and the people under him whom he had sent to monitor Katsuya, the data extracted from the support system used by Katsuya’s team pointed out that Katsuya was a highly troublesome person.

The positive emotions, impressions and evaluations from old-world connectors affected the people around them. Their real skills and all the dangerous situations that they undergo together with their team in the wasteland would result in greater expectations from others. In others’ minds, it was as though their team would always perform well. As all of this coagulate to push their positive impression even further, it also helped to mask their ability as an old-world connector. After all, even normal Hunters would form a close bond when they go through numerous dangerous situations together. The existence of such a bond helped further hide the identities of old-world connectors.

In addition, once they broke through a certain limit of someone’s positive impression and likability, they would form a local network made up of said people. This would allow them to share more of their emotions and increase their teamwork and performance as a team.

Moreover, information tends to flow from the people in the upper hierarchical structure to the people below. Thus Katsuya’s confidence naturally flowed to the people under him, causing his team to have no fear when up against anything. The local network would then further blur the line that differentiated them individually. So even when they got killed during the battle, as long as Katsuya was still alive, they would not be able

to recognize their own death, which greatly reduced the fear of dying. As a result, formed a team with a core that did not fear death.

“Well, I bet he can only do that because he’s an amiable person though. But again, it is impossible to ignore its effect. His local network has grown as big as Drankam itself. No wonder Nergo wants to get him. If he joined the Nationalists, it would be an easy thing for them to take over the city. And then, I’m sure they will also provide support to him. And with that local network, their support will also reach his friends. The speed of how the local network is forming and their performance as a team… everything makes sense now even if he’s not doing so deliberately.”

Yanagisawa, who was usually smiling, suddenly stopped.

“Should I kill him right away?”

After a short silence, he then continued without making any change in his expression.

“No, I still don’t have irrefutable evidence. And even if it’s true, they should still not know that I’m watching Katsuya. There might be some profit I can scrap up by letting him live for now. More importantly, for tomorrow’s expedition…”

After another short silence, this time his expression turned rather serious.

“…I might be able to use this. If we continue extending the supply line, I bet they’ll start reacting differently. I need to make some preparations for that.”

Yanagisawa pulled out a black card and stared at it.

“I don’t know how far this card will go, but it should be alright. That thing also hates them after all, so there should be room for negotiation. Although it is dangerous, it’s a worthwhile bet.”

Yanagisawa placed that card back as his expression returned to his usual smile, but his frown did not completely vanish.

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Before the day of the expedition, Akira took a wonderful bath to prepare himself for the incoming operation. Since he had taken a bath in Sheryl's base a few times before, his current bath now felt somehow lacking. But since he could just go straight to bed afterwards, he still chose the bath in his house.

"If only the money from the automata came in a bit faster, I would have some time to readjust my equipment as well."

Even if he went to buy new equipment from Shizuka's shop, she would still need some time for the order to arrive, and there was not enough time for that before the expedition. So he decided to get new equipment next time. Depending on how things played out, he was thinking of adding more to the budget that he handed over to Kibayashi. Kibayashi, who knew that bank transfer through the Hunter office was not cheap, told Akira that the more money he invested, the better the equipment that Akira would get.

Alpha, who was also in the bath with Akira, just like usual, tried to cheer up a sulking Akira.

"It can't be helped. I think we already did our best preparing ourselves with the time that we had."

The APC that was sent out for repair had returned. Although it took quite a long time for the repair to finish due to the damage on the APC, it was still cheaper than buying a new one. That was why Akira decided not to buy a new vehicle.

The vehicle was also protected with expensive armour tiles. Since it was not the type of vehicle that could manoeuvre nimbly enough to avoid attacks, he splurged on the armour tiles to make sure that the vehicle would not get stopped on its way.

Akira had also bought as many bullets and energy packs as possible from Shizuka's shop. That was also the case for the medicines from Katsuragi's shop. This time, he paid all of his own expenses. In exchange, Inabe

promised to buy any relics that he found at a good price. That was a covert signal from Inabe, telling Akira to find expensive relics first before asking him to pay for the expense.

“Get to bed early and get ready for tomorrow, nothing good will come from exploring ruins while being sleep deprived.”

“I know. Well, it is a request. Although I had no plans to go near Kuzusuhara ruin, for the time being, it can’t be helped. Let’s give our best tomorrow.”

“Akira, if you think that it’s getting dangerous, withdraw immediately, okay? It seems that Elena and Sara won’t participate in this expedition, so it should be alright.”

Alpha was smiling teasingly, Akira replied that with a wry smile.

“Yeah, I know. Sorry.”

When Inabe said that he had received replies from the other Hunters with the Hunter Rank above 40, Akria’s mind went to Elena and Sara. Inabe did think of bringing out Elena and Sara’s names to manipulate Akira, but then he decided to approach the matter from another direction and only hinted at the matter. So basically, Akira lost to Inabe’s negotiation skills.

After a short usual idle talk in the bath with Alpha, Akira went to bed and slept just like usual. He did not show any particular excitement nor fear toward tomorrow’s expedition, it was business as usual for him.

The date changed, the sun climbed the sky. Katsuya, Inabe and Yanagisawa had their own respective aims during the large-scale expedition that started that day.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 213, Communication Cutoff

Index

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The robotic humanoid soldiers slowly encroached deeper into the Kuzusuhara ruin. They were the main actors in the expedition into the ruin. They had a powerful large black gun accompanied by a missile pod of a similar size. It was assorted with high-caliber portable cannon complete with forcefield armour shields.

The new weapon was dispatched as a part of the defensive squad during the expedition, it worked as an advertisement for the new powered suits. Inabe spared no effort to advertise the powered suit and the weapons to all companies that he knew. He ended up filling the expedition with an abnormal number of powered suits and weapons.

With that many powered suits roaming the area. Of course, they would clash with the monsters. All swarms of monsters went to impede their advancement, this included weapon dogs. But the squad was able to plough through them with ease, filling the area with carcasses.

“HQ, this is C501 from C5 squad. We have encountered a swarm of large monsters and defeated them.”

“How is the damage?”

“The squad is fine, we still have enough medicine and ammo to continue the operation.”

“Roger that, continue with the plan.”

“…I just have a small worry though. We are encountering monsters more often than we first predicted. I know that the unexplored deeper part of the ruin is filled with powerful monsters, but they are even stronger than we expected.”

“The unexplored areas stay unexplored because most of the Hunters who went there did not come back alive, that is exactly why we lack information regarding those areas. It can’t be helped if there are powerful monsters there. Maintain the supply route and expand out carefully… Ah, and also, there’s a directive from the upper echelon to keep the damage to a minimum since it won’t act as a good advertisement otherwise. So make sure to withdraw when it gets too dangerous.”

The powered suit operator laughed in reaction to that small joke from HQ.

“Well well well, I’m glad that we got ourselves some kind commanders this time. C501. Roger that!”

The call was closed as he then scanned the surrounding area. The ground riddled with carcasses as far as the eyes could see was the testament of the power of the squad.

“Well, we’re winning anyway, so I guess there’s nothing to worry about.”

The powered suit squad continued their objective of expanding the secured area. Although they encountered numerous monsters, to the point they questioned where those came from, their powerful equipment made quick work of them. Since that was the case, they thought that there was no problem at all.

Not too long after the squad continued, they arrived at a certain place where numerous tall buildings stuck to each other, forming a formidable wall. In front of that wall, a monster was standing as if guarding the wall.

The outer appearance of that monster was similar to a tank with multiple cannons. It was so huge that even the powered suit squad had to look up to see the entirety of the monster. The monster looked like a mobile fort. While the lower part of the monster was equipped with metallic reptilian legs, it looked like a biological monster carrying a fort on its back.

As that monster spotted the advancing squad, its guns quickly turned and aimed at them before it started shooting vigorously as if it was also trying to destroy the buildings around it.

The black powered suits quickly engaged the monster. They immediately put up their shields to take cover from the incoming barrage. They hid behind the rubble or jumped away from the enveloped direction as they quickly surrounded their target. They communicated closely with each other to ensure maximum teamwork as they quickly dispatched the monster.

Both the monster and the squad were using high caliber weapons, obviously not to be used for fighting against mere humans and were also not designed to be used by humans either as they released countless warheads at each other, enveloping the area with barrages that flattened the already ruined buildings in the area.

The blasts were so powerful that the forcefield shield could not completely block them. The powered suits that were using their shields as covers had their whole arms blown away. Those who were hiding behind the rubble and tall buildings were almost buried alive. While those who jumped up were blown away, crashing down one by one into the ground.

But the monster itself was not able to get away unscathed. Many of its cannons were sacked, huge holes were left in its armour plates, while the fleshy parts of its legs were shredded to pieces.

Rubble and wreckage rained down from the sky mixed with live warheads. The warheads bounced around and fell down in a completely different place. The warheads that landed on the rubble exploded and threw more rubble into the mix. This also helped shave the forcefield armour of the powered suits. Of course, the monster was not unharmed as well. It basically inflicted equal damage to both sides.

That was when more reinforcement arrived. The squad that was already in battle worked closely with them to adjust their aim as they performed a long-range bombardment. The already powerful warheads landed accurately in a concentrated spot, blowing the humongous monster away.

As the leader of the vanguard squad looked at the monster that was already turned into a pile of meat and scarp, he finally let out a sigh of relief.

“This is C501. Thanks for the reinforcement.”

“C801 here. I’m glad we made it on time. So then, why didn’t you wait for us?”

“It was already too late when we noticed the enemy. It might have been using some kind of camouflage. Although it might sound like a lame excuse, we did not expect an attack at all, all the monsters that we encountered up till now had no camouflage on. If we dial up the sensitivity of our information-gathering devices to detect monsters with camouflage, there is a good chance that they would be able to track our position as well. That’s why we thought that it was an unnecessary risk.”

“I see. Do you think there is a chance that those monsters that you encountered first were just decoys for this monster?”

“…No, I don’t think that’s the case, but again, I can’t really say for sure.”

The squad leader then proceeded to check the damage from the exchange and frowned. Three powered suits were down and many of them were damaged although still fit for battle. Considering that it was a squad filled with new equipment, it was costly.

“To everyone in the squad, we will take this point as the frontline, take up defensive formation and tune up your information-gathering devices to scan for hidden monsters as well. We will prioritize securing the area. For those with forcefield armour below 70%, withdraw together with the severely damaged units. We will then join up with the C8 squad and-”

While the squad leader was still giving out commands, his information-gathering device suddenly showed a signal coming from the monster that the squad just defeated. As they focused their attention in that direction, one of the buildings that was a part of the tall wall which was already on the brink of falling from the previous exchange, started to crumble. Once it was completely flat on the ground, the squad leader was able to see past the wall as he contacted the HQ in panic.

“H-HQ. This is C5 squad, we just encountered what might be an immensely powerful monster. Fortunately, we were able to defeat it with the help of the C8 squad. We will send the damaged units to the back.”

“Roger that… Is there something wrong over there?”

“We spotted something that seemed to be a completely undamaged city behind the wall that got destroyed from the previous battle. I’ll send you an image, you can go ahead and check it yourself. We ask for further orders after you finish checking the image.”

The abnormality in that call expressed what kind of amazing thing that they had just found. The squad leader waited nervously for the next order when his information-gathering device suddenly picked up another signal. As he flusteredly shifted the camera on his powered suit to the source of that signal, he saw through the gap of the fallen building, the figure of a beautiful girl.

That girl somehow seemed unhappy as she gazed coldly. And when the squad leader met her eyes through the camera, the girl seemed to be muttering something before his connection to the HQ suddenly was cut off.

Tsubaki was standing on top of the rubble on the border of the area under her jurisdiction. Normally, she would not be able to get out of her area due to her restriction. This time, she came in an old-world automaton that was already turned into a terminal. So she did not travel there as a virtual object.

Tsubaki gazed at the squad of the black powered suits and mumbled.

“…They are here. Looking at them, it’s no surprise it did not even stand for 50 years this time. Well, it doesn’t really matter. It doesn’t change that it satisfies the requirement. I hope we can negotiate peacefully again this time.”

Tsubaki walked and left the area. Multiple transparent robots followed next to her as she stepped outside the area.

The squad leader was at a loss that his call with the HQ was suddenly cut. But their information-gathering devices that were already tuned up to detect hidden monsters, now showed multiple signals. It gave them a shock as invisible objects appeared one after another from a small opening in that crumbled wall.

“Open fire!!”

All the experiences that he accumulated caused his alarm to ring danger as he barked out commands. The rest of the team did not lose a beat as they started shooting as well. Right at the same time, the monster under Tsubaki’s command also replied accordingly.

Flashes from muzzles and forcefield armours appeared out of nowhere, distorting the optical camouflage of the mechanical monsters and shedding to their true form in front of the squad. Countless tanks with multiple legs. Some of them had their legs completely folded up as they were floating without touching the ground. The walls, the grounds, even the sky were immediately encroached by monsters as they did not stop shooting at the city’s squad. The black powered suit quickly reformed their formation and released more or less the same absurd amount of warheads in the enemy’s direction.

And so, the wasteland was once again engulfed in flames.

***

Inabe looked delighted as he was on standby in the front base’s command center. The picture sent by the forward squad showed an area under

Tsubaki’s control, which indicated that this large-scale expedition was a success.

The area would be put under his jurisdiction and he would be promised a good position if he could bring in profits from that area for the sake of the city’s development. The fact that he had won this large bet of his, had sent him over the moon.

That was when something really bad happened. The picture displayed on the large monitor suddenly went blank.

“What just happened? Get it back online!!”

The other people present there scrambled in panic from Inabe’s order. But unfortunately, the connection did not return back no matter what they did.

“It’s not working. We can’t establish contact, or more like, this is…”

The staff looked grim when they noticed what was going on.

“We lost all contact with all the Hunters there!!”

“What!?”

Inabe could not hide his surprise. His voice echoed through the command center and dissipated into the air. But even so, it did not help with the situation that they were facing at all.

⎯*⎯*⎯*⎯

Right about the same time, Akira was hunting for relics in one of the old dilapidated buildings. The building itself was located inside the area secured by the powered suit squad. Most likely, no one had ever searched that building. It was simply because it was guarded by too many monsters, then there was a good chance he could still find a number of relics inside the building. But Akira’s expression said it all.

“There’s really nothing here, huh? Though I’m pretty sure we’re already deep here and it won’t be strange to find a lot of relics in this area.”

Not only was it filled with powerful monsters, but there were also no relics to be found. It was the worst possible location for Hunters. Tsubaki had used her restricted authority as much as possible to remove relics around her own area, that was why Akira found nothing here.

Alpha already knew about that fact, but she avoided saying anything to him.

“It’s exactly because Hunters normally cannot even come close to these buildings that they organized such a large-scale expedition. They are hoping to find an area rich with relics.”

“That does make sense, but again I don’t want to get anywhere close to those powered suits. Although I’m sure I can find better relics if I do that.”

Unexplored areas have a better chance of housing valuable relics. That was why although they knew that it was dangerous to stay close to the powered suits, there were Hunters who chose to do so in order to get first dibs on the unexplored buildings.

As for Akira, he chose to stay away from the front line, thus only exploring the buildings relatively later. It was the result of him prioritizing his safety. In the first place, he only accepted that request, thinking of joining up with Elena and Sara in case they also participated in the operation. Although it was not like he was taking it easy, he believed that there was no need to unnecessarily expose himself to danger.

“But, I guess it would be bad if I don’t show any result, right?”

“I think there’s no need to worry about that. The contract states that you are free to do what you want. The inner part of the ruin is still pretty dangerous although the powered suit squads already combed this area beforehand. So let’s proceed with safety in mind.”

“You’re right, I guess I’ll do that, huh… Alpha?”

Akira glanced at Alpha when he said so, but Alpha who was beside him just a moment ago suddenly vanished. He raised his eyebrows and looked

around, thinking that she just suddenly changed position, but he could not find her anywhere.

Right at the next moment, he felt a slight dizziness as his vision blurred for a second, but it quickly returned back to normal. He felt weird as if his vision was momentarily cut off before restarting.

“Alpha! Stop with the joke! At least tell me beforehand if you’re going to do something like that!”

But there was no reply. Even if he sent a strong voice through telepathy, it only dissipated without getting any response. Akira felt a different sensation compared to when Alpha left him back in the Seranthal building. Back then, it was more like there was someone there that was ignoring his call, but this time, it felt like he was completely alone, enveloped in complete silence.

This time, Akira had completely lost all of his connection to Alpha.

Akira started to feel scared, but it was immediately replaced with an intense nervousness.

[Calm down, don’t panic. Alpha did tell me that there would be occasions where I would lose my connections with her inside the inner part of a ruin. I’m not in the middle of a fight right now and it’s not like I have no route to withdraw like back in the Seranthal building. And above all, I’m not inside a monster this time. I just need to proceed carefully until I can get back my connection with Alpha, there is no problem.]

Akira took a deep breath, reorganized his thoughts, and decided to stop the relic hunt. He turned around to go back to where he came from. Since it was not a good idea to continue the hunt in this situation, he had decided to go back home.

He could just say that his equipment was not working well as an excuse. He then used the terminal that was lent to him to contact the HQ. But again, there was no reply at all. He frowned when he checked the display as it said that it was out of range. So he shifted his attention to his information terminal hoping that he could find a signal through that route. He had since

decided to use a better service provider after what had happened back in Mihazono ruin. Unfortunately, it also said that it was out of range.

Akira knitted his eyebrows, this reminded him of what happened back in the Seranthal building.

[Is this the same situation as back then in the Seranthal building?! No, judging that I can't connect with Alpha at all, it means that this is worse than that! I need to get out of here!]

As Akira started running down the hallway, he spotted another Hunter.

"I can't call the HQ from here, can you get any connection?"

The guy moved to the side as if to make way for Akira and checked his own information terminal just to shake his head at Akira.

This confirmed that Akira was not the only one having trouble, so he placed getting out of that building as his primary priority. Judging that he might get his connection with Alpha back once he got out from this place, he thought that everything would be alright as long as he got out of here. Thus, he increased the power output of his augmented suit and defensive coat. Since he had enough spare energy packs back in his vehicle, he did not try to conserve them at all even if it was a complete waste of his remaining energy packs.

As Akira passed that Hunter, he ran down the hallway and jumped down the stairs. Right at the next moment, all of Akira's senses were tuned to their highest sensitivity. He was extremely nervous after picking up a danger signal transmitted from his information terminal. He followed his instinct to take a defensive stance right before the bomb that was planted on the ground near him exploded.

The bomb was set there more to close off an escape route instead of killing someone. Moreover, since Akira raised the output power of his defensive coat to the maximum right before that happened, he was only blown back to the floor where he came from without sustaining any other damage. But of course, that shaved a lot of his energy.

Akira was utterly surprised as his body was smacked back onto the ground. Thanks to all the training that he had gone through, he was able to maintain his balance. While his mind was still trying to wrap his head around what just happened, his danger alarm flared once more. Akira followed his pure instinct as he grabbed his SSB rifle and started shooting behind him without even looking back while he jumped aside into a nearby room.

In such a short timespan, the hallway was immediately filled with flying bullets. Countless bullets scorched and drilled through the walls, floors and ceilings of the area. Enveloping the whole place with holes.

Although both of them received some shots, none was even close to fatal. The other guy that shot back at Akira was the guy that he just passed by a moment ago.

“Knew that it wouldn’t kill you!! Well, if this was enough to kill you, you would have died back then after all, huh!!”

Akira tried to digest what just happened as he hid inside a room and used some medicines. Judging from what the other guy just said, he understood that he must have fought against this guy sometime in the past, but it did not ring any bells at all. He thought that it might be someone from that battle in the Ezont family’s base, but thinking about it again, it was too much work to join the expedition just to seek revenge. After all, it would be easier to attack him when he was not fully armed.

“Aren’t you mistaking me for someone?”

“Not at all! You are Akira, right? I did all my homework and investigated everything about you after all!! Well, although, me trying to kill you here is actually just a coincidence, it’s true that I have my own personal reason to want you dead. But compared to the greater good that it might bring, it doesn’t change the fact that it’s better if you’re dead!”

Akira did not understand what exactly that guy was talking about. But he immediately pushed that unimportant question to the back of his mind since that guy who was still alive after that exchange would definitely come after

him soon. He had to fight that guy without Alpha's support, that one fact alone caused Akira to focus even more than before.

[Goddammit! This guy could have not taken any worse timing to ambush me!]

Akira spat out curses in his mind as he gripped his SSB rifle hard. He then took a deep breath, compressed his time perception and jumped out of the room.

The powered-up augmented suit propelled his body outward, it took a blink of an eye for him to land on the hallway. He used one leg to kick the wall in order to kill his momentum as he quickly raised both of his SSB rifles and released an indiscriminate barrage in the general direction of the enemy. The extended magazine compensated for the lack of aiming as the other party received multiple shots to his body.

But even so, none of the bullets left any wounds. The other guy put his hand forward and extended a forcefield armour to block the incoming bullets. Once the flashes from the converted momentum dimmed, it exposed his mocking smile.

Akira could not hide his surprise, seeing which, the other guy just shook his head and said.

"That's just too bad. I've only used a weak body back then to suit the setting, working with the thugs of slum city. But this time, I came to this expedition with a much better body."

That finally rang a bell for Akira, but his common sense was telling him that it was not possible.

"No way… You… It can't be…"

"Now that I think about it, I didn't introduce myself back then, my name is Zalmo. I won't lose this time!!"

Zalmo retracted his forcefield armour and started shooting at Akira, who kicked the wall again and plunged back to the previous room.

Zalmo stopped shooting, changed his gun's form and started shooting again. This time, he had enough firepower to pierce the wall to hunt for Akira.

Now that the walls served as only obstacles for him, Akira immediately ran toward the door on the opposite side of the room. Although he was faster than the flying rubble, he was still slowed down by them. He ducked and evaded the trajectory lines of the incoming bullets in a desperate attempt to escape the room.

Although the bullets were powerful enough to pierce the walls, they also lost most of their momentum due to it. Thanks to that, they were not able to break through the forcefield armour of Akria's coat. They were only able to give off a dim burst of light when it hit his back.

[He's the guy who attacked Sheryl's relic shop back then, huh!! How the hell is he still alive!? I basically destroyed his head, you know!? Don't tell me that his brain is actually stored in his body and that he was just pretending to be dead!? No, as I thought, that's not right…]

Akira desperately ran through the hallway while thinking so, but he was immediately interrupted by more bullets. So he quickly made a U-turn, changed the setting of his SSB rifles, and emptied the remaining bullets in the magazines using the maximum rate of fire in exchange for energy consumption to release a storm of bullets into the hallway.

Zalmo thought that it would be bad to take that head-on even for him, so he jumped to a nearby room and took cover. But he still had a confident smile on his face.

"It seems that you had gotten yourself better equipment too compared to back then! But I can tell! You're not as sharp as before! You have no support system in your augmented suit this time! Let's see just how long you can stay alive on your own!! Good luck with that, brat!!"

Akira was caught off guard by that statement and shouted back by pure reflex.

“Is this your doing too!? What the heck did you just do this time?!”

“There’s no need for you to know!! This is where you pay for getting ahead of yourself when you’re nothing without your support! Go to hell!!”

Zalmo tried to force his way to close the distance. The slight hesitation in Akira’s movement made a small opening that he used to carefully step in for a finishing blow.

Akira did try to shoot Zalmo down before he could reach him. But with his state of intense panic, his focus was thrown off. The resulting hesitation caused an opening that allowed his opponent to gain the upper hand. He might be able to do something to flip the table there, but that would warrant him to do something reckless. So he decided to limit the opponent’s movement using bullets while increasing his defenses by increasing the output power of his defensive coat. He was somehow able to stay alive by doing so but the consumption rate of his remaining energy was worrying him.

As Akira was trying to run away from there, he spotted a staircase to another floor. He thought that his connection with Alpha might return once he got out from that building, and was about to jump down the stairs. But he suddenly stopped midway when he remembered what had happened not too long ago.

He had no time to check for the bomb with his information terminal. In the worst-case scenario, the explosion might get him trapped in between the bomb and Zalmo, thus completely cutting off his remaining escape routes. He also had the option of turning up the forcefield armour output of his coat and trying to force his way through the bomb. But the current him lacked Alpha’s support and was not as reckless as his usual self, so he was not able to select that choice.

The short time in which he was comparing his options there caused him to lose his precious time. All the distance that he had opened from running

away was all in vain, now that Zalmo had closed that distance. In order to get away from the bullets coming from just the previous turn, Akira had no other choice but to jump in a different direction, throwing away the chance of going down the stairs.

Akira continued running. His expression was already filled with fear, the intense nervousness caused his body to slightly tremble. That was when he spotted a crack on the wall of the building.

That was enough to get him to make up his mind. He stopped, pulled out the blade on his back and turned it on. The blade glowed and he swung it at the wall. The powerful blade answered his wish and fluidly cut through the strong old-world wall.

Akira swung a few times and lastly delivered a kick to open a hole in the wall. That was when Zalmo finally caught up to him, so Akira made his resolve and jumped out of the building.

Since he jumped out from a high floor, he still had some time before reaching the ground although it was no more than a few seconds. Akira extended that time using his compressed time perception as he called for Alpha through telepathy.

“Alpha!!”

Again, no answer at all. If it was just like back then in the Seranthal building, he would have been able to regain his connection with Alpha if he was able to get out of the building. But this time, his first bet ended up with his loss.

Right then Akira’s second bet also ended up with his loss. He thought that Zalmo would not follow him, but on the contrary, Zalmo did not hesitate as he also jumped out from that hole.

He had lost all of his bets up until now. At this rate, he would only land on the ground and die, of course, that was assuming that Zalmo did not get him first. While on the other hand, Alpha’s support also was also not coming back at all. In that slow-moving world, reasons for his impending death

kept piling up. Akira mocked all the decisions, reasons and luck that led him to this state.

“Alright alright, I just need to do this on my own, right?! I get it, okay! I just have to do it, right?!”

Akira’s spirit rebounded and boosted his focus. The speed of the time flow around him decreased significantly. In this state, his voice that he forced out from his throat while laughing made a strange unrecognizable sound. Akira had made his decision, renewed his resolve.

If he did not fight back, only death awaited him. Then there was only one choice, to fight back and to kill. No matter who his opponent was, even if it was a human, or a monster, or his own past, or even his bad luck, it did not change what he had to do. Zalmo had to die; anyone, anything, that wanted to kill him must die. Akira finally made his resolve as he completely dropped the choice of running away, until his connection with Alpha returned.

He jammed the blade on his right hand straight into the building’s wall as he continued to slide down. He used his grip to twist the blade in order to change his direction, sliding down the wall to avoid Zalmo’s bullets. At the same time, he used the SSB rifle on his left hand to suppress Zalmo while making use of the strong recoil to dig himself into the wall, till both of his legs were inside it.

The blade continued to slide down the wall while the forcefield armour of his augmented suit protected his heel while gouging out a line on the wall. When he had slowed down considerably, he suddenly started running toward Zalmo.

Right at the same time Akira made his resolve, his vision began changing. The more he concentrated, the clearer his vision of Zalmo was, while the rest of the world started to blur. It was the proof that he was able to bend reality to his will. The strong will in him caused the reality to change closer into the world that he wished for.

With the help of Alpha's support, he was able to see this world in great detail. But this was impossible to do when he was by himself, even trying to do that might cause his brain to overload with information which might end up in his death. Akira's solution to this problem was to limit the detail that his brain would process.

With consciously filtering the information coming to his brain, he was able to increase the accuracy of his perception. With less information to process, his brain was able to produce the image of the perceived world in a shorter time. Thus the resulting perception was closer to the real world and eventually, increasing his reaction time.

While at the same time, he cut off any resource that he used to process pain and any other unimportant sensation as much as possible. He had consciously turned off his sensation for pain, which also acted as a danger warning when he was in front of death's door. Nonetheless, he fully accepted it.

Because of that, Akira's fighting prowess received a huge boost. He himself did not know how long he could maintain his current state, but one thing he knew for sure was he could not maintain it for long.

More than that, this was actually the first time Akira was able to successfully execute it. He already tried doing it during training a few times, all of which ended in failure. The reasons for those failures were mainly two things. Firstly, Alpha placed a restriction to make sure that Akira would not burn out his brain. Secondly, Akira unconsciously thought that Alpha would save him in times of emergency.

Now that Akira was freed from those chains, he once again stood face to face against a certain death all by himself for the first time after so long. And just like back then when he had to do it in the slum city as he was fighting for his survival all by himself, he faced the impending doom with a smile.

Zalmo, who was free-falling while aiming at Akira, was surprised when Akira suddenly went straight at him. But he was still calm enough to aim at Akira and release a few shots. Akira swiftly moved in a zig-zag, evading

those bullets and once again kicked the wall to take a huge leap toward Zalmo. Both of them battled with each other on the side of the wall, as if the gravity was not affecting them at all.

Zalmo was struck with amazement.

[His movements suddenly changed!! Moreover, what is with his reaction speed!? Accelerator drug, huh!? Was he only running back then just to wait until his accelerator drug takes effect!? I jumped to chase him, but don't tell me that he was actually inviting me to jump too!! But he hasn't fully regained his sharpness! I'll have to kill him before he regains his full system support!]

But Akira was also surprised there.

[This is only enough to take this fight into a stalemate!? But there's no guarantee that I can return back to this mode later on! This is my only chance to kill him! Just drop dead already!!]

The moment Zalmo was within the reach of his blade, Akira quickly heaved his blade down. The slash of the blade created a dim glow. Created using forcefield technology, this dim glow was more than enough to showcase its enhanced sharpness. Zalmo noticed this, so he raised his forcefield armour to its limit.

The moment the blade touched his forcefield armour, a blinding flash of light emitted due to the energy conversion. Zalmo's confident smile and Akira's mocking smile were swallowed by the light. Although the light was bright enough to drop visibility to zero. Both of them immediately aimed their rifles to where their respective opponents might be and simultaneously released a barrage. The shock wave and the kickback of the barrage blew each of them back as if they were colliding with each other within that blinding light.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 214, Requirements for Negotiation

Index

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There were a lot of Hunters killing time inside the cafeteria of the forward base. They were put on standby in case of an emergency. They were basically made of two kinds of Hunters, one was those who applied to join the expedition but got rejected for some reason, so now they were waiting there in case anyone requested reinforcement. While the other half was the people who were deliberately left there as a reserve in case of an emergency. The former paid to be there, while the latter were paid to be there, both of them waited there, preparing for any emergencies.

Sara and Elena were among the latter Hunters. Both of them received an invitation to participate in the expedition from Inabe's proxy. Then during negotiations, they learned that Akira was also planning to participate in the expedition as well, so they decided to join. But in the end, they were somehow assigned as reserves.

Inabe was hoping that Akira would return back from the expedition with a lot of old-world terminals, but if Elena and Sara were with him, there was a chance that Akira would decide to hold back. That was why Inabe arranged it so that Sara and Elena were assigned to the reserve team.

In the middle of their idle talk, Sara suddenly asked.

“Say, Elena, are you really okay staying only as a reserve?”

Elena tilted her head.

“Hm? Do you want to join the expedition instead? If you really want to go no matter what, I can try to negotiate with them again.”

“Hmmm, it is at least better than just sitting here, waiting for something that we don’t even know will happen or not. But it’s not like it is a must. It’s just that, although it’s great that we’re getting paid just to sit and wait, I know that you don’t really like this either, right Elena?”

Elena made a conflicted smile after her best friend pointed it out.

“…This might sound a bit ridiculous. I feel that should something happen while we participate in the expedition, Akira would try his best to look for us. He would prioritize us instead of himself. But if we don’t participate, he would have peace of mind and could just immediately withdraw.”

Sara gave out a similar wry smile.

“You have a point. It might sound ridiculous, but it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

Elena and Sara believed that Akira currently liked them. But there was that one time when Akira almost completely cut off relations with them. So if they were asked if they had regained their original trust just like back then when they explored the Mihazono ruin together, they could not give a definitive yes.

But even so, he was still willing to go to dinner together with them, so it could be said that their relationship had mended although it was only a little. Elena tried to voice that out as if she wished for it or maybe even to hang on to it. To which, Sara also reacted with an agreement.

That was when a notice reached their information terminal. Elena checked the content of the notice and frowned.

“…Well, it seems that something has happened.”

“I wonder if Akira has some kind of weird bad luck that indiscriminately gets everyone around him involved in it. I do feel bad for saying this, but I somehow saw this coming.”

“And he survived everything up till now, no wonder he’s that strong.”

Elena and Sara exchanged wry smiles, then immediately turned solemn and prepared to move out. The content of the notice included, ‘HQ has lost contact with the Hunters sent to the deeper part of the ruin. We request for an urgent dispatch of Hunters to check up on them’.

Hunters who were posted to the border, which denoted the inner part of the ruin, were assigned to stop anyone who tried to enter the area. Only those under Inabe’s jurisdiction with permission were allowed to enter.

However, their actual job was not to stop intruders by force. They were equipped with powerful information-gathering devices and were tasked to watch their surroundings. If they spotted anyone suspicious, they were instructed to warn that person and to contact HQ. Of course, they could also get rid of that intruder on their own if they could. After all, it was expected that those who tried to enter the inner part of the ruin would be fully armed. The requester did not have enough spare resources to pay the guards who could always deal with that kind of intruder.

Togami and Reina had accepted that job. Since the area that they were assigned to was vast, there was basically no one else in the area.

Although it was only a guard job, it was their first Hunter job after a while. That was why Reina was extremely pumped for this request, but since nothing was happening, she started to feel bored.

“Although we did get back to taking Hunter job, this is rather boring.”

“We’re on guard duty, so having nothing in particular happening is good news.”

“That’s true, but still… By the way, do you want to try looking for relics around here? We’re still inside the assigned area even if we look around, so we can look out for intruders while searching for relics, right?”

“Just don’t get too carried away, alright?”

Togami was basically saying that he did not mind Reina going, but he himself would stay. Reina understood that and pouted. She did not say anything back and chose to stay.

Togami found that a bit unexpected. But that was all, he did not pursue the subject any further. But Kanae was forcing her hand over her mouth, holding herself back from laughing. Seeing that, Togami started to frown. Reina, who noticed that, jabbed at her.

“What?”

“Nope, it’s nothing. I just thought that it was funny how Milady came up with a suggestion and did not go even after Togami gave his permission. Having an ulterior motive is not a bad thing at all.”

“I see.”

Reina gave a rather forceful smile and cut the conversation short. She finally realized that sometimes, showing a reaction was not a good thing.

Although Togami had a lot of thoughts running at the back of his mind after seeing Reina’s reaction, he believed that it was only him reading too much. He reminded himself that Reina was only trying to take this request seriously since she was the one who decided to do it in the first place. Therefore, he shelved any other miscellaneous thoughts away.

Shiori made a guess as to what they were talking about and interjected.

“Milady, although Togami-sama gave his permission, we basically got ourselves this request by butting into Togami-sama’s request. Thus it would be unwise to neglect our main duty.”

“I-I know. That’s why I’m not going, can’t you see?”

“Milady, it’s better to think things through first before saying anything.”

“Yeah yeah, I know, I will be careful.”

Togami thought that his guess was correct, Reina started to fluster, Kanae noticed a few other things and just smiled bitterly, while Shiori was standing there with a neutral face, playing dumb.

Feeling awkwardness wafting in the air, Reina decided to bring up a change in subject.

“By the way, when we talk about Kuzusuhara ruin, there’s an urban legend. The beguiling ghost. There are a lot of rumours floating around related to it, but I’ve been thinking that it might be one of those holograms that we saw in the Lida commercial district ruin. Something like that might be a guide that would answer honestly when asked for directions. Though, since the ruin is already filled with monsters, the Hunters who followed its direction would get killed instead. What do you think, Togami?”

“Well, that does sound plausible. Or maybe the ghost deliberately sent them to somewhere dangerous after concluding that they were suspicious individuals. Or maybe, since the holographic image doesn’t have the ability to transmit information in the form of voices, they just decided to follow a holographic image, and then they found themselves in the middle of an old-world security facility before they realized it… Reina, with that equipment you used, you can see augmented reality better than others, right? Be careful not to simply follow any augmented reality holographic image if you come across one, alright?”

“Don’t worry, I know just how dangerous this area is. But still, if I ever meet that old-world beguiling ghost, I feel like I have many questions for that ghost.”

“I can understand what you mean. It might be interesting to hear some stories about the old-world.”

“Right? To Hunters like us, that topic is what we are most curious about.”

As Reina was having a good time chatting with Togami, Shiori suddenly interjected with a serious voice.

“Milady.”

“I know, I won’t just go following that ghost if I see it.”

“That’s not it…”

Shiori hung her sentence there and seemed hesitant. Reina found it weird, but she then noticed that Kanae was smiling amusedly on the side.

“Kanae, what is it now?”

“It’s not really something big, but, let’s see… Well, Milady has been working hard lately, so I guess it’s a good idea to give a hint from time to time, hoping that Milady would be able to become an independent Hunter one day.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Milady, think carefully whether it’s a good idea to ask why Ane-san cut herself off right there. If Milady doesn’t ask Ane-san, I’m sure Ane-san would just come up with something random to hide it.”

Reina seemed a bit confused and turned toward Shiori.

“…Shiori, are you hiding something?”

“Milady, there is too much sensitive information in the world that are difficult to handle. The main problem would be whether Milady has the ability to properly deal with it. Information management is also an important skill for a Hunter. Milady, do you have the resolve to know information that might kill you? Moreover, having the resolve alone is hardly enough. After all, it is still not okay to let someone jump to his death just because he has made that resolve. It is also important to know the limitation, to keep oneself from learning about forbidden knowledge. It’s just as people say, ‘curiosity killed the cat’. There are many who ended up

on the fugitive list simply because they somehow inadvertently learned some forbidden secret of the Corporate Government.”

Kanae said with a smile. She still had her eyes on the surroundings while exerting a level of intimidation. Reina flinched back and got even more confused.

“Well then, Milady, which one is the right choice? Is it to ask? Or not to ask? This is a test of Milady’s skill as a Hunter, you know!! So go ahead and use all this free time to think about it.”

Reina looked at Kanae and Shiori in turns. Shiori let out a huge sigh and frowned.

“Kanae, what are you trying to do?”

“I’m just giving advice to Milady about information management in place of the overprotective Ane-san.”

“That’s my job.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. Which one is your job? The one about teaching Milady how to handle information, or the one about managing information in place of Milady? Either way, it would all be in vain if Ane-san dies though.”

“Don’t just kill me off like that.”

“In that case, it’s okay for me to destroy that will which Ane-san wrote in case Ane-san dies, right?”

Shiori raised her eyebrows in reaction to Kanae, who said something like that in a slightly serious manner. Meanwhile, for Reina, it came as a huge surprise.

“S-Shiori, what is this will are you talking about…”

“Ah, Milady, about that…”

As Shiori was flusteredly looking for an excuse, Kanae suddenly gave a warning with a serious look.

“Milady, both Ane-san and I already did all the preparations in case we get killed anytime. That aforementioned will is just one of our preparations. If Milady gets surprised by small things like that, it means that Milady has a long way to go. Just how many times does Milady think we almost got killed this year?”

Reina could not hide her surprise. One of the reasons was that Kanae did not say that in her usual half-joking manner. But after that, Kanae immediately returned back to her usual self.

“Well, it seems that is indeed the case here. No wonder why Ane-san can’t help but get overprotective. After all, there’s no guarantee how far Togami would volunteer to babysit you. But well, being needy from time to time might be a love strategy to get Togami, but he will hate you if you do it too much you know, Milady?”

Even before Reina could react to that, Togami choked and coughed. Reina then flusteredly denied that.

“W-what are you even talking about, Kanae!?”

“Oh? so Milady is doing that without even being conscious about it, huh? Just my opinion here. Though it was not on purpose, I think inviting such a misunderstanding is cruel, you know?”

Since Kanae returned to her usual self trying to poke fun at the whole team, the awkward tense mood from just before was completely dispelled. But Shiori did not proceed to scold Kanae since she understood what Kanae was trying to say.

Kanae was being considerate to Reina, which was actually rare for her. Her opinion of Reina was nothing more than a naive rich lady. However, she significantly softened her stance after seeing how hard Reina had been trying. The reason why she said so was because she cared, otherwise, she would refrain from saying anything and would only do the bare minimum

required for her job. She was being considerate in a different manner compared to Shiori.

If Shiori and Kanae died, then Reina would only follow afterwards. Unless she learned how to deal with such a situation herself, Reina's future was not that bright. Although she did not wish to deny Shiori's devotion, if that devotion became the reason she died, then making sure Reina learns how to handle the situation herself after that was a part of that devotion, or at least, that was what Kanae thought.

Shiori understood that as well, but at the moment, she could just handle everything herself. Therefore, it gave her a hard time on what to do. If she had the resolve to live beside Reina forever, then Kanae would not say anything about her being too overprotective. She also understood that Kanae was basically indirectly asking her 'are you sure you are alright with dying?' If that was the case, Shiori needed to put in more preparations to make sure that everything would be fine after she died, what she was doing right now was just a half-baked resolution. Nonetheless, it was a completely different matter on whether she could pull it off. The more willing she was to throw away her own life for Reina, the harder it was to make that decision.

After Kanae dispelled that awkward mood, Reina thought hard about information management that Kanae mentioned. Once she made up her mind, she then went to Shiori.

"Shiori, can you tell me what you wanted to say back then? But I won't force you if you don't want to. If you didn't tell me because you think I don't have the ability to deal with it, I have no wish to force you to tell me"

Shiori looked slightly surprised, she smiled gently at Reina and said.

"…Very well, Milady, I assume you have prepared yourself."

"Yes."

Togami, who was listening next to them, could feel that it was a conversation that should only be between them, so he felt a strange

sensation of alienation as he spoke up.

“I don’t know what you guys are going to talk about, but don’t forget that there’s a single outsider here, okay? If it’s something that I shouldn’t hear, I can leave now…”

“I don’t mind if Togami-sama wants to listen as well, but it would bring the same danger that made me hesitate to tell Milady in the first place. If Togami-sama wants to listen in even after knowing that, then you may feel free to do so.”

“I see, well, I don’t see any reason why not, so I guess I will listen too.”

Shiori lightly nodded, her expression then turned serious.

“Now then, it is about the urban legend of Kuzusuhara ruin, the beguiling ghost. There’s a good chance that the real story about that ghost has been replaced by something those in Kugamayama city came up with.”

Reina seemed a bit disappointed as she tilted her head.

“Shiori, sorry, I don’t see any reason why you would hesitate telling me that.”

“There’s a problem with the original story. The story about the beguiling ghost was originally a series of multiple stories about it. It is a collection of stories about multiple ghosts luring Hunters into the ruin. The original story has it that these ghosts are the area managers of the different areas inside the ruin.”

Originally, the Kugamayama city was an frontier base made by Sakashita Heavy Industry to explore Kuzusuhara ruin. Since it was big enough to be promoted into one of the five great corporations, it sent fully armed Hunters equipped well enough to be in the front line to hunt for relics inside Kuzusuhara ruin. But in the end, most of them did not return back alive, And that was the beginning of the beguiling ghost series.

Then one day, Sakashita Heavy Industry suddenly stopped sending Hunters to the ruin. After losing the monetary aid it once had, the frontier base that had already grown big enough to be a city, was not able to send anymore large-scale expeditions into the ruin. From that point on, the corporation was then relegated into a smaller-sized company, placed as the governor of the city and it no longer had the resources and the influence that it once had.

No one knew for sure why it stopped exploring the ruin, there were only various rumours regarding that matter. Some said that they found another ruin with more prospective relics. Some said that it was the result of an in-fighting within the corporation. Some of the rumours even made more extreme and ridiculous guesses.

The single most popular rumour among the Hunters was connected to the beguiling ghost. It was rumored that the corporation made a deal with an area manager to stop their expedition, or that they were threatened to stop, or that it had made a secret deal to only search the outskirts of the ruin.

Reina listened closely with immense interest to that story, but she still did not see any danger in knowing any of this so far.

“Well, what can I say? It’s just a rumour, so I don’t see why it’s that dangerous, or is it that simply because I can’t see where the danger is?”

“Milady, the main problem is that there are signs the city had deliberately changed the story. It means that someone in the upper echelon doesn’t want the real story to leak out. If someone somehow gets to know about the real story, they might have their eyes on that person. Although there’s no telling how much they don’t want others to know, there’s a good chance that they have enough influence to cause misfortune to anyone who gets to know about the truth. In the worst-case scenario, that person might even get killed. Shutting up someone would serve a warning to the others.”

Reina frowned. It was obvious that Shiori was not joking. The way she said it fully demonstrated that she was being serious.

“So they really don’t want anyone to know, huh? I wonder why that is the case?”

“Let’s see, among the stories in the beguiling ghost series, there’s a story about a treacherous beguiling ghost. That ghost would offer something to a party of Hunters, which caused them to fight against each other. As a matter of fact, there were Hunters who claimed to be victims of that ghost.”

“I see, so those who accepted that ghost’s offer would end up dead. With a few who survived claiming themselves as victims of a ghost. Overtime, it would slowly turn into that beguiling ghost urban legend, right? Hmmm, to be honest, I don’t see the correlation. I don’t think that is enough of a reason…”

“So, what if the Sakashita heavy Industry had made a secret agreement with the area manager to stop their expedition and used that rumour to make Hunters fight each other on purpose?”

“I-Is that really possible?”

“They needed a good reason to stop such a costly expedition. Well, in the end, this is nothing more than just my own speculation, so please don’t take it too seriously. I don’t know the real reason and I don’t think there’s any need to pursue the truth. The most important thing is knowing enough to make a guess that something malicious was behind it. Now that Milday knows this much, keep in mind that it will cause those who don’t want to know the truth to come out, to mistake Milady as someone who actually knows about the truth. So in order to avoid such a misunderstanding, it is important to handle such information with care. Since Milday already knows now, please be careful.”

Reina frowned and nodded repeatedly.

Togami hesitated, but his curiosity won as he asked Shiori a question.

“Shiori-san, is it bad if I ask you how you got this information?”

“We have an independent information network among us. And ever since Milady decided to go to Kuzusuhara ruin, we made sure to investigate that ruin as much as we could. Please accept this answer and refrain from asking any further questions.”

Togami understood what Shiori was trying to tell him as he gave a firm nod with a solemn expression.

“Understood, I won’t ask any further.”

“Thank you very much.”

Togami sighed in relief, he understood that although he made a mistake in asking, he was at least able to stop himself.

That was when a call reached them from HQ. Togami found that bit weird as he picked up that call.

“This is number 65. Nothing out of the ordinary over here. By the way, isn’t it a bit too early for the regular check up call?”

After listening to the explanation from HQ, Togami frowned and replied.

“Roger that. I’ll call again if we notice anything.”

“Togami, did something happen?”

“It’s just a warning call as well as a check-up to see if they can still contact us. It seems that HQ has lost contact with the Hunters in the expedition… Is this because of that ghost?”

Togami only added the last part as a joke, but Reina did not laugh at all.

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Yanagisawa’s squad was watching the surroundings from a tall ruined building.

“What a mess, I wonder if it’s okay to just ignore them.”

Hunters, monsters, powered suits, drones, all of them were mixed in a massive battle royal. Both drones and flying powered suits filled the sky with countless bullets and missiles and warheads. Because of that, there

were stray bullets falling haphazardly all over the places, causing more chaos in this already chaotic battlefield.

“Boss said not to do anything until further command either from him or from HQ, so it’s our job to just watch over them for now.”

There was no clear line of command, the IFF was also in a mess. Both the Hunters, the powered suits, and even the monsters, were killing each other regardless of friend or foe. It was pure chaos and their powerful weaponries did not help the situation at all.

“So then, any news from the boss?”

Yanagisawa’s men aimed their rifles upward and released a barrage. The bullets made a ricocheting sound in the air as if they pierced through something. Not too long after that, mechanical monsters with non-functioning optical camouflage started to rain down.

“Still nothing. Ever since that last order, to treat him as dead if we can not contact him for 12 hours, and that we can do anything we want afterwards, no one have heard anything from him or seen him. I bet he’s somewhere nearby doing something in secret though”

Stray bullets suddenly rained down on the building, destroying a portion of its roof.

“There is no doubt, he’s definitely scheming something. By the way, do you think this jamming is his doing too?”

The squad aimed their rifles and lightly wiped out the source of those stray bullets.

“Probably. Can’t say for sure though. Though, if it’s really his doing, it would be great if he could warn us beforehand. That jamming got our communication devices as well. Moreover, this is not the same effect from the colourless mist. Either way, it doesn’t really matter whether it is his doing or someone else’s doing, one thing for sure, something is going on right now”

There was an obvious difference in strength between the Hunters on the ground and Yanagisawa's squad. But both of them were equally clueless as to what was going on.

The battle between Tsubaki and the powered suit squad continued. The fight was entirely one-sided. Although it was multiple black powered suits against a single automaton, the ground that was riddled with destroyed powered suits and the undamaged automaton body spoke for itself.

Tsubaki just stood there in serenity as if to guard the only destroyed part of the wall protecting her territory while mocking at the utter difference in strength.

The black powered suits raised their huge rifles and shot at Tsubaki. The released bullets were even bigger than a human's arm. However, that countless hailstorm of bullets stopped in front of Tsubaki as if there was a transparent thick shielding in front of her. The bullets that came later struck those bullets that were stopped and bent them. But even so, they were not able to move the frozen bullets. All of them formed a wall of metal, and even if the following bullets were able to pierce through that wall, none of them could reach Tsubaki.

Once the shooting stopped, the bullets started falling to the ground. The same happened to the bullets that came from the top as well. Showing that the invisible wall was not from the transparent drones protecting Tsubaki.

The squad could not help but frown after seeing what just happened. A desperate voice soared through the speaker.

"Again! Dammit! What the heck is that defense!? It didn't even produce any flashes of light! All force field armours generate light from energy conversion, you know?!"

"Like hell if I know!! If it's some kind of barrier, that should at least shave away some of her energy! Just keep shooting and hope that it's not useless!! Where are the reinforcements!?"

“Long-range communication is dead!! We have no other choice but to get closer back to base to call for reinforcements! And that’s what’s taking them so long!!”

“Try to call the unit that we sent back to HQ and get it to call the city defence squad!! They should send in some reinforcement!! We need to hold out until then!!”

The powered suit switched to its rifle and shot a bullet that was bigger than Tsubaki’s body right at her.

Tsubaki’s expression did not change at all as she kicked the bullet. The shock wave from the kick made the bullet bent and exploded. But due to the way Tsubaki bent the round, the force of the explosion was directed upward, away from her. It was only enough to cause a blast of wind to blow, strong enough to sway her dress.

Right at the next moment, a gigantic chain-saw came crashing down from another direction. The glowing high-speed rotating fang bore down on Tsubaki. The powered suit abandoned the long-range advantage of its rifle and used its full strength to swing its chainsaw.

Tsubaki calmly stopped that chainsaw with one hand. Although the force was enough to bend her leg and create a crack on the ground, it did not throw off her posture. She stopped the rotating fang by force, which caused a loud cracking sound from the arm of the powered suit.

Tsubaki then swung her arm and threw the powered suit as if it was a lifeless doll, ripping off the powered suit’s arm in the process. That powered suit then took the chainsaw to the face. Its pilot was split in two and the severed body vanished into the distance.

The scene showed just how powerless the powered suits were in front of Tsubaki, which caused great shock to those in the squad.

“What the heck was that?! I know that it is an old-world automaton, but there’s a limit on just how powerful It can be, right?! Or is that the normal power of an old-world automata?!”

“…I bet it’s a military automaton or something like that. Although it looks like that, it has different specs compared to the other common drones and service automata… Spread out! Keep your distance from it!!”

Judging that they had no chance of winning, the squad leader ordered the squad to withdraw. They started moving away from Tsubaki while shooting the buildings around her to create obstacles between them.

Tsubaki looked at the falling rubble, she then cleared them with a clean single round kick. She actually just swung her leg around in the air, but the shock wave from that kick was transmitted through the colourless mist and blew away the falling rubble towards her retreating foes.

Tsubaki then mumbled.

“That should at least be enough to shoo off the incoming squad for now, then I just need to clean up the trash inside the area, where I can move freely”

She wanted to go to Kugamayama city herself if she could, but Tsubaki could not go out that far. Even being able to stand here required her to request permission first since it was outside her original allowed space. She was only able to gain permission since it was an emergency.

As Tsubaki was about to take a step, she suddenly stopped. She then looked at the pile of rubble. Right past that pile and countless ruined buildings, there was a man with a huge rifle aiming at her.

The man pulled the trigger, the bullet drilled a hole through the buildings and the rubble, absorbing their masses into the head of the round as it went right at Tsubaki. It reached Tsubaki in a blink of an eye, leaving a long clean hole that was obviously larger than the size of the bullet itself.

Right at the next moment, the bullet turned all the mass that it had absorbed in its path into pure energy, releasing a huge explosion.

The shock wave from the explosion was so large that it could blast the whole area to smithereens. Thankfully, the explosion compressed the air

around the area to its utmost limit, temporarily creating a layer of dense colourless mist. This layer served as a strong dampener, restricting the shockwave from spreading out too far and destroying the whole place.

Thanks to that, it created a strange phenomenon, the contained explosion and shock wave created a spherical cage, which seemed as if it devoured space. The area around that cage had only sustained relatively light damage compared to the scale of the explosion. But past the boundary of the cage, traces of immense destruction was apparent.

Even after being enveloped in that explosion, Tsubaki still stood there with the remaining 30% of her body. But it did not take long before her body started to crumble as well.

The one who sniped Tsubaki was Yanagisawa. He had been using a special old-world augmented suit, special annihilator bullet, and special camouflaging suit to hide while looking for a chance to strike. Then, using an annihilator bullet that he was barely able to obtain using his connections, sniped at Tsubaki.

Yanagisawa then came to ground zero and looked at the wreckage of the old-world automaton.

“Yikes, did I overdo it? I guess it’s better to be safe than sorry, but still…”

Yanagisawa squatted as a flying kick cut the air above his head, blowing away the rubble behind him. Tsubaki turned to her camouflaged backup unit after the automaton was rendered unusable and launched an ambush attack.

Tsubaki then stabbed her hand toward Yanagisawa, but Yanagisawa evaded that as well. He grabbed her wrist and stopped her hand. The shock wave from that thrust created a hole in the rubble behind Yanagisawa.

Still, with his hand holding Tsubaki’s wrist, Yanagisawa then said.

“Nice to meet you, I am Yanagisawa. You’re the manager of this area, right? If possible, I want to negotiate with you”

Tsubaki sent a cold gaze toward Yanagisawa.

“Is this the culture of yours? To attack the people you want to negotiate with? I don’t see any possibility of us forming a deal.”

“It’s just an introduction to let you know of our might. That’s all there is to it. After all, I’m sure you have no wish to negotiate with a bunch of ants that you can just squash, right? I at least want to let you know that while you might be able to kill us, it won’t be easy. Otherwise, you won’t even listen to what I have to say. That’s the most basic requirement for stepping into the negotiation phase, no?”

Yanagisawa lightly jumped back to open up some distance. Cold sweat ran down his back as he pulled out a black card from his pocket.

“Moreover, I have this. So, can we start?”

Tsubaki frowned with displeasure.

“If you think that I would listen to anything you say just because you have that card, then you’re sadly mistaken.”

Yanagisawa’s smile was mixed with false bravado, but even so, he still somehow managed to stay calm.

“Of course, but, it at least means that you would have to take our negotiation seriously, right?”

Tsubaki’s expression immediately returned back to normal, but of course, it still had a tint of coldness.

“In that case, throw your weapons down. That is, if you’re really wishing to negotiate with us.”

Yanagisawa managed to keep his smile. After a short hesitation, he made his resolve and let go of his weapons. He then smiled confidently at Tsubaki.

There was a few seconds of silence between Tsubaki and Yanagisawa. But those few seconds felt different for both of them. Right about when Yanagisawa started sweating, Tsubaki smiled amicably and guided.

“Very well, follow me then, I’ll guide you to a better place for negotiation.”

“Is this place not good enough?”

“I don’t think this place is suitable for a negotiation.”

“You have a point.”

Tsubaki smiled at Yanagisawa, who replied with a wry smile.

After that, two similar automata suddenly appeared out of nowhere. Now that there were 3 Tsubaki there, one stayed behind to guard the place, one guided Yanagisawa to the meeting place, while the last one started walking in front of them.

As Yanagisawa followed behind Tsubaki, he then thought.

[That would make it 4 automata in total, huh. I wonder just how many more she has, 10? 100? 1000? No wonder Sakashita Heavy Industry decided that exploring the Kuzusuhara ruin wasn’t worth the risk]

His expression then changed into a smile.

[But that’s because they don’t know about that thing, if they do, they would have forced their way into the ruin. But I know, and I will be the one to get that thing. If negotiations go well, we should have almost no obstruction in expanding the supply route. Though that was dangerous, I won the bet. In the first place, it’s not something that I can get unless I’m willing to risk my life for]

Yanagisawa’s smile vanished.

[Just a bit more!]

His face was now filled with resolve and determination.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 215, Battle Royal

Index

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Akira woke up and found himself lying on the ground. He slowly pushed himself up and coughed out blood. He leaned his body against a nearby wall for support. But the sharp pain was too overwhelming and he tripped over again. His reality-bending mental mode had already been turned off. Thanks to that, his head was assaulted with an excruciating headache as he pledged, not to ever use it again. Both his legs and arms were screaming in pain. His augmented suit had also spent all of its energy. He used up all of it without holding back in that battle.

Akira squeezed all the remaining strength he had to reach for his medicine. He then gulped it down together with the blood in his mouth. Immediately, his throat reacted and made him cough, flinging some blood off. He ignored the possible side effects as he just took all the medicine that he had in one go. Thankfully, the 10 million Aurum box of medicine was quick to show its effect; suitable for its price tag. The pain slowly subsided and his consciousness became clearer. As he regained enough strength to move, he once again stood firmly on both feet. He then looked around, picked up his blade, which was lying on the ground nearby, and tried to reevaluate his current situation.

[…How long was I unconscious? A few seconds? Minutes? Hours? Since I'm still alive, it means that the other guy is dead, right? I don't even remember landing on the ground. My augmented suit and the force field armour on my coat must have been off while I was unconscious, huh. Well, that means that I got pretty lucky there. I guess my luck isn't all bad…]

Akira smiled wryly and thought.

[I still can't connect to Alpha. As I thought, my luck is not the worst…]

Now that the pain in his body had subsided, it only left him with a headache.

[I was able to actually bend reality with my will back then. I'm not sure if I can ever do that again, but I was able to successfully do it once. It should be easier to do it next time… But the burden is nothing to scoff at. I might even get myself killed next time if I do that. It would be great if I can fight back the side-effects with medicine, but judging from the fact that my head is still hurting, it means that medicine doesn't help much in this case, huh? Or is it already the maximum effect of the medicine? I have no idea. Either way, it is better than getting killed. Although it isn't cheap, I guess I'll take some more.]

Akira carefully returned back to his vehicle. Since he parked the vehicle close to the building, it was not that far from him. But it took him a lot of effort to return to his vehicle. It had been quite a while since the last time he had to move his augmented suit on his own without Alpha's support. Furthermore, his heightened nervousness along the way drained his focus as well and energy.

Once he reached his vehicle, he opened the back door, got in, and closed the door before letting out a huge sigh of relief. His nervousness fell as he praised himself for splurging on strong armour plating for his vehicle,

The communication device on the vehicle was still showing that it was still being jammed. Akira found that regrettable as he set the auto-drive to head back to the temporary base. The vehicle reacted accordingly and started

moving, Akira was relieved to find that his vehicle was still working as it should, thus easing his nerves a little bit more.

He proceeded to eject the energy packs from his rifles and replaced them with high-quality energy packs, ignoring just how expensive they were. As he did that, he then thought that it would have been better if he had been using them right from the start. But at the same time, doing that would raise his expenses and that might result in a monetary loss for him, so it was out of the question. Akira got a taste of common problems plagued by many Hunters, choosing between expense and safety.

After replenishing all of his equipment, he took an extra dose of medicines to make sure that he was ready to fight anytime. He then leaned on the wall of the vehicle to relax his body While at the same time, he operated his information terminal and information gathering devices to watch out for his surroundings. That was when the vehicle suddenly slowed down and asked for further instructions.

Akira frowned. The display on his head showed the reason why the vehicle was asking for further command. The signals showed that there might be a huge ongoing battle along his route back to the base.

“What the heck is going on? Another ambush from monsters? Good grief, give me a break already…”

The vehicle was stopped, waiting for further instructions on whether to take a detour to avoid battle or to just ignore it and move forward. The auto-drive system followed its setting not to enter an active battlefield without confirmation from its user.

After taking a few seconds of thinking, Akira decided to wait instead. His priority now was to avoid fighting. After all, he had not fully recovered from his last fight. Or course, he had the choice of taking a detour to avoid the battle in front of him, but it would take too much time. The reason why he could come so deep into the ruin with his large APC was thanks to the supply route. If he took another route and got stuck in some small roads instead, it would not be funny if he got attacked by monsters in that situation. At the moment, he was inside a large vehicle, protected with

resilient armour plating with no monsters detected around him. Not to mention, that the communication line might recover if he waited long enough. That was why he decided to wait here.

Of course, Akira was also worried if the decision that he made there was the correct one. But any decisions might as well be the worst decision, as such, his only option was to recover as much as possible in preparation for anything bad that might occur. As Akira thought so, he went to the portable bed and took a rest there.

Suddenly the radar of the vehicle, which was in standby mode, picked up signals from enemies and the vehicle immediately accelerated. Akira was dropped off from the bed due to inertia, but he quickly reacted and readied himself for a fight while cursing.

“That was fast goddammit!!”

No matter which decision he took, he might have gotten more resting time if he had made up his mind sooner. Seeing from that perspective, his decision back there was indeed the worst one.

The control device of the vehicle made a rough estimation of the enemy’s position based on the damaged armour tiles, as the vehicle accelerated away from that direction. The source of that attack seemed to be coming from the general direction of a nearby ongoing battle.

When Akira looked in that direction, he could see a young boy in a Hunter augmented suit running in his direction. He was running at the same speed as Akira would if he used his augmented suit.

[He’s running away from the battle, huh? Then that means that was stray bullets from the monsters chasing after him?]

As Akira was considering helping that Hunter and to confirm the situation with him afterwards, he aimed the APC’s machine gun past that young boy and frowned. The ones chasing after that boy were multiple armed vehicles, there was no doubt that those vehicles belonged to the other Hunters.

While Akira was still thinking about what to do there, the young boy hid behind Akira's APC; thanks to that, the other Hunters aimed straight at Akira's vehicle instead. Although the APC itself was undamaged thanks to its strong armour tiles, it was only a matter of time before the armour tiles failed.

Akira had a bad feeling and opened the back door while the APC was still running. He then tried to ask what was going on to that young boy.

"Hey! What-"

But the young boy suddenly aimed his rifle at Akira and came for his life without any warning. Thanks to the ominous feeling that he got, Akira was ready and was able to react. In a blink of an eye, bullets immediately flew in and out of the APC.

Although they were shooting at each other at such a close range, since both of them prioritized not getting hit, both were uninjured in that exchange. The young boy quickly jumped on top of the vehicle, hiding away from Akira's line of sight.

Akira scowled and looked at the ceiling, that was when a voice mixed between displeasure and happiness came from the ceiling.

"So you're here too, huh!! It's great that you're here! This time I will win for sure! I'll kill you together with those Hunters!!"

Once again, it sounded like his opponent this time also knew him beforehand, and again, Akira did not remember who it might be.

"Are you another guy from the afterlife?! Who are you? Don't tell me you're Sebla!"

"Who's that Sebla? I'm Tiol!"

"The heck?! Tiol who!?"

Tiol's face twitched with hatred.

“You don’t know?! I see I see!! You won’t even remember my name, huh!? I expected that much!”

Hearing Tiol lash back like that, instead of getting confused, Akira was more irritated.

Grenades rained down on and around the vehicle. The explosion also consumed Tiol, but he protected himself using some kind of protective outer coat. The equipment that Tiol was using, was unnervingly similar to the ones that Akira used during his fight against the monster Tiol in the past.

Tiol clicked his tongue and jumped down. He then ran along Akira’s APC and said to Akira while looking straight at his face.

“I’ll get back to you later. Don’t worry, I’ll definitely be back to kill you! Both you and that guy!!”

Tiol only said so and started shooting at the Hunters who were coming at him as if he was protecting Akira’s APC. After that, he left the place using his augmented physical strength.

Akira was still a bit confused by that sudden turn of events, but the shaking coming from the barrage from the incoming Hunters pulled him back to reality.

“That bastard!! He left those Hunters for me to deal with!”

Judging from the intensity of the incoming fires, Akira understood that those Hunters were mistaking Akira as Tiol’s ally. Even if he wanted to tell the truth, they were outside his communication range.

Akira knew that not firing back would not stop the other side from firing him. He could try to get close enough for his voice or for the short-range communication to reach them. But, there was no guarantee that he would not be killed before he could do that. So the conclusion he came to was that he had no other choice but to fight back. He changed the vehicle to half-auto mode and set the machine gun to provide suppression fire. While he,

himself, peeked out from the vehicle and left the APC with an order to just immediately get away from that place.

The APC's powerful machine gun unleashed countless bullets while Akira himself released a barrage of guided armour-piercing grenades. The grenades were set to explode before reaching the Hunters for the sake of slowing them down. Although Akira only intended to suppress them, the grenades that he used were still lethal weapons, thanks to that, it was able to successfully slow down the pursuing Hunters. The Hunters coming at him switched their focus from pursuing Akira to evading the incoming grenades. Thus, lowering their rate of fire toward Akira as well.

Akira used that chance to get away as far as possible from them. Setting the acceleration to the maximum, he was able to open up some distance between them. After he got away far enough that they could not shoot at each other any longer, Akira went back inside the APC and sighed.

"For real though, what exactly is going on?"

Akira rubbed his hair in frustration, but no one was there to answer that question.

The leader of the Hunter team that was chasing Tiol made a grim face and said.

"Dammit!! He got away! To think that he has allies as well!!"

The young leader then renewed his resolve.

"I don't know who that was and what his aim was, but I won't let him disrupt the expedition!! I'll definitely make this expedition a success no matter what!! Katsuya here!! How is the damage!? As long as the connection has not recovered, don't trust anyone you meet! You'll get ambushed otherwise!!"

The team chasing Tiol was Katsuya's.

Akira was still not sure what just happened as he drove through the ruin. The situation was only getting worse, according to the radar, it seems that the ongoing battle was only spreading wider. He spotted some flying monsters fighting flying powered suits. He was only barely able to get away from those on the ground with the help from his APC's machine gun.

In this expedition, the city management sent in the powered suit squad first to secure the area. Even someone like Akira knew that plans had gone awry at this point. But that did not give any hint as to how the situation would evolve from there.

Akira smiled wryly and mumbled.

"I guess this is the rebound from relying too much on Alpha all the time"

Akira hesitated to look for another Hunter in order to group up with them. The reason was simple, he got attacked by other Hunters numerous times in the past. The line of command among Hunters was also already completely destroyed. He did find an underground parking lot on his way and thought of hiding there for the time being, but the other Hunters already taking shelter within those places suddenly started shooting at him without any warning. Of course, he did try to talk with them since they were close enough for short-range communication, but the only returning words that he received was 'don't come any closer!'. It was a messy situation where everyone could not trust those they did not know.

[I bet that Tiol guy also got himself in some fight with the other Hunters just like this. I wonder if there are other Hunters in his situation as well? I guess that's the case for that Zalmo too, huh? Or maybe they are actually friends? Can't tell… I have no idea at all…]

Akira continued driving through the wasteland while wondering about the answer to those questions. That was when a destroyed powered suit blocked his way forward. The destroyed powered suit had its lower half completely decimated and its body was severely damaged at different spots.

Akira stopped his APC. He thought that if he used the full power of his augmented suit, he might be able to move that powered suit aside, so he

then walked toward the destroyed powered suit. That was when suddenly a short-range connection call reached his information terminal.

“Long time no see. To think that we meet in this place, it must be some kind of fate. Anyway, you came at the right time, can you help me for a bit?”

“Who’s this?”

“It’s me, Nelia.”

Akira immediately looked around.

“Where are you calling me from?”

“You see a destroyed powered suit nearby, right? I’m inside it. But I can’t get out by myself, so like, can you help me?”

Akira hesitated for a bit, but then he carefully approached the blast door and grabbed the bent handle. He swiftly opened the door and switched to his rifle as he aimed inside.

Right there, Nelia was smiling amusedly at the surprised Akira. Similar to the powered suit, Nelia only had the upper half of her body. One of her arms was crushed within the bent powered suit.

“That was a rather cold reaction from you considering that we don’t get that many opportunities to see each other.”

“Well, considering the situation and the other party, I had to do at least this much.”

“Is that so? Well, it doesn’t really matter. Can you take me back to the temporary base for now?”

Akira gazed silently at Nelia with a serious face, his rifle was still poised at her. So Nelia raised her eyebrows and asked.

“Oh my, do you have some kind of interest in girls that are paralyzed?”

Akira sighed exasperatedly and lowered his rifle. It was not because he was sure that Nelia would not shoot at him in this situation. He understood that very well. Nelia was an insane Hunter, there was no doubt about it, but her madness was the thing that guaranteed her as non-hostile at this moment. This strange feeling reminded him that there were many things out there that he did not know about in this world.

“Let me at least confirm this first. You’re not hostile at the moment, right?”

“Sure, if you think so.”

“Alright, do tell me beforehand if you’re going to attack me, okay?”

“Of course, I’ll be sure to tell you beforehand.”

Akira grabbed Nelia’s remaining hand and pulled her out, but the cable connected to her crushed arm prevented him from doing so. Thus, Akira put in more power and tore that cable forcefully before carrying Nelia out.

Akira was carrying Nelia by grabbing her remaining arm and letting her body hang down. That Nelia smiled teasingly at Akira and poked fun at him.

“That was not gentle. Are you not familiar with how to treat a girl’s body? I know that some girls like it hard though, do you perhaps have a preference for them?”

“The heck are you even talking about?”

Akira only said so and carried Nelia back to his vehicle. After putting Nelia on the driver assistant’s seat, as if to vent his anger, he turned the vehicle violently and rammed it to the blocking powered suit to push it aside.

“You’re bad at driving, do you want me to drive instead?”

“How are you going to drive with your body like that?”

“The control device in this vehicle is connected to one of the terminals, right? You just need me to connect to that terminal. Although I can’t fight

with this body, I feel bad leaving everything to you without helping at all."

Akira hesitated, but he then pulled out a terminal from the APC, he then connected the terminal to a jack on Nelia's neck as she had instructed. Not too long after that, the APC suddenly started moving with her control. With this, Akira could just focus on fighting and let Nelia handle the driving.

After that, Akira and Nelia exchanged information to understand the situation. Hearing what had happened to Nelia's powered suit, Akira frowned and asked.

"Wait a sec, are you being serious? The powered suit squad got beaten? Isn't the whole squad using the same powerful powered suit that you were using before? And you still got beaten?"

The rider of the powered suit that Tsubaki cut in half was Nelia. She was lent that powered suit in order to advertise it.

"If the commander was not that stupid, we would have retreated instead. I tried to use a melee weapon since none of our ranged attacks worked, but then this happened. So yes, close-range, long-range, nothing worked. I don't think they have anything to turn the tide at this point. If they had any trump card, they would have already used it at this point."

"Which means, those invisible monsters right now are…"

"Now that the powered suit squad is gone, there is no one to stop them. I think they're roaming around the area right now. In the first place, thanks to that old-world automaton, the squad was not able to stop any monsters at all."

With that, Akira's hope that the situation would fix itself with time was completely dashed. If more and more mechanical monsters did not stop pouring out from the other side, the situation would only get worse with time.

Because of this, Akira no longer hesitated, just waiting until the situation got better was out of the question now. He heaved out a huge sigh and made

a grim face.

“Alright then, Let’s force our way back to the temporary base. Although judging by the signal, there’s a huge battle near the supply line, but that’s still better than just staying here.”

“We’re already heading there.”

“…I see.”

Akira was surprised that Nelia just decided where the APC was heading without consulting with him first. But since it was a good thing that they were already heading toward the temporary base, Akira decided not to say anything about it.

“But still, after hearing your story, this means that our chain of command has been destroyed. And then, for some reason, we’re now caught in a situation where the Hunters don’t trust others that they do not know. This is quite an issue. But to think that we would meet each other in this situation like this, I wonder if we’re connected by fate or something.”

“Well, judging that I’m here in right now, it is safe to say that my luck sucks.”

“That’s pretty harsh.”

The APC’s radar picked up some new signals. Akira noticed that and went to open the back door of the APC to clear his line of fire, in case those signals were enemies. He more or less had a grasp on how many enemies there were thanks to those signals detected. As he aimed his rifle, he suddenly spotted a powered suit flying from behind a building, still far away from him.

“Nelia, are those powered suits here to pick you up?”

“They are enemies! Shoot them down!”

Right at the instance Nelia said that, the powered suit aimed its rifle at Akira’s APC.

“Hold on if you don’t want to be thrown out of the APC!!”

Nelia made the APC do sharp turns in order to evade the incoming bullets. But even so, some of them still hit the APC’s sidewall and rooftop. Each shot was huge, fired from an equally large rifle equipped on the enemy’s powered suit.

The expensive armour plating protected the APC from those shots, but eventually, some plates had their durability worn out and fell to the ground. But even so, the barrage did not stop at all. The force from the bullets pushed the APC to the point that it almost rolled over, but Nelia was able to skillfully control the APC, preventing it from rolling over.

Akira quickly grabbed the APC by reflex in order to maintain his balance while his other hand pulled the trigger of his SSB rifle. Due to Nelia’s rough driving, his aim was far from accurate. But the homing armour-piercing frag grenades were still able to find their way toward the enemy’s powered suit. Enveloping it in a sea of flame

Now that the APC was out of the hostile powered suit’s line of sight, Akira went to his terminal to check for its signal. The signal was still moving, indicating that their enemy was still alive.

“Nelia, just a question, have you fought against that powered suit before?”

“Nope, how about you?”

“Me neither… So how were you able to immediately tell that it was hostile?”

“What are you talking about? Just look at how it moved from the signal. It’s obvious that it did not come in peace, no?”

Akira could not tell. But he thought that it was unwise to say that he did not know, so he decided to just shut up. Nelia found that silence suspicious as she then continued.

“Well, it’s true that it might just have been careful of us, moreover, it’s dangerous to try and come this close. Close enough till it can send its identification code. Even if that powered suit held no hostility, it should be aware that we might be hostile against it. Although my judgement is basically based on the end result, I don’t deny that I was not being that careful when deciding if it was hostile or not. But do you think we should let it close considering that it might suddenly spring an ambush and get us killed?”

“No, that’s fine. It’s true that it is hostile too after all.”

“Right?”

Akira just tried to end the subject as he agreed with Nelia, thus she returned back to her usual mood.

“But still, since both of us don’t remember fighting it at all, then why is it attacking us? Did the user go on a rampage after losing the rest of his team?”

“From what I see, it seemed to be obviously aiming for us though?”

Right after Nelia said that, someone suddenly connected to the vehicle’s short-range communication feature. It was because the user of that powered suit had dialled his device communication output to maximum, allowing him to only send his voice to Akira.

“Akira!! I’m not going to let you run away!! You’re going to die here! That I can guarantee!!”

Akira’s face twitched as he scowled. In contrast to that, Nelia smiled amusedly and said.

“It seems that it is chasing after you. Are you sure you don’t remember that guy?”

“…This voice, it’s Zalmo.”

“I see, so, what is your connection with that guy? It seems that guy really hates you, did you cuckold him or something?”

When Nelia jokingly said so, Akira climbed up the top of the APC through the open back door and turned on his communication device.

“He once attacked a shop owned by someone I know. I’m pretty sure I killed that guy then and there. I did blow his head off back then and there was no mistaking it, his brain was scattered all over the place after that. But, for some reason, he is still alive. Maybe it’s someone else posing as that guy.”

Nelia listened with full interest.

“That’s a pretty interesting story. If you were not lying, then either he got resurrected or he’s a ghost. There’s a story about the beguiling ghost around this area, after all. I guess it’s not that weird to find a deadman roaming around this place.”

“That story about the beguiling ghost, wasn’t it supposed to be the old-world area managers? You know, those AI managing the old-world buildings? I saw one back in Mihazono ruin when I went to Seranthal building”

“There are many different theories about that beguiling ghost. Well, putting that aside, it might be possible to resurrect someone with a destroyed brain with old-world technology. ”

“…No no no, that’s just simply impossible no matter how you look at it, right?”

“And old-world technology is such a thing that turned such absurdities into reality, right? You are a Hunter yourself. So it’s better to keep in mind that nothing is impossible for the old-world technology”

Akira indeed had gone through a lot of things that were out of the ordinary, so he found it interesting that he still had some common sense left inside him as he smiled wryly. Even after using an augmented suit that boosted his

physical strength outside the realm of common sense, the SSB rifle that could spit out an impossible amount of bullets; and had spent days living together with something as absurd as Alpha, Akira found it interesting how resilient this so-called common sense could be.

“He’s coming from above!!”

Akira aimed his SSB rifle up and pulled the trigger. One of his SSB rifles was spewing out homing armour-piercing frag grenades while the other one was spewing out anti forcefield rounds. Akira shot that barrage with such intensity, that he emptied his magazines in a blink of an eye.

Way above Akira, the hostile powered suit was flying so high that he was barely able to spot it. That powered suit aimed its guns at Akira and, just like what he had done just now, it also emptied its magazines, releasing a storm of bullets in Akira’s direction.

The bullets and explosives both rushed up and down past each other. Some of them collided and exploded in mid-air. The bullets that came from above landed and created large sinkholes in the ground. Some of them managed to hit Akira’s APC, shaking it violently, causing some of the armour tiles to fall. While the frag grenades flying upwards hit the side of nearby buildings and exploded. The shrapnel collided with the powered suit, resulting in flashes of light on the forcefield armour.

During that exchange between the two opponents with an overwhelming difference in size, both parties exchanged an uncountable number of bullets, heavily damaging the area.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 216, Deathmatch

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After Zalmo was blown away in his last exchange with Akira, he somehow landed safely and immediately scanned his surroundings. He was able to find the unconscious Akira from just a quick search.

The reason why he did not finish Akira off there and then, was simply because he was being extremely careful of the damage done to his body. Zalmo basically had lost one of his arms. The other parts of his body were also heavily damaged. Although he still could fight in that state, he could no longer fight the way he did before.

Normally, that level of exchange would not be able to cause that much damage to him. But in order to defend himself from Akira's blade, he had to focus all the energy within his cyborg body to extend a forcefield armour to act as a shield, any part of his body exposed, was basically sacrificed.

Since the eastern district was dominated by rifles capable of long-range attacks, melee weapons sold in the eastern district had to have a certain edge to them. Something that would warrant its use in spite of the already powerful rifles. Something that would guarantee death once the enemy

stepped into its reach. In order to answer this expectation, most of the melee weapons sold in the eastern district were extremely sharp.

Zalmo thought that Akira's blade was also like that, after all, he decided to challenge Zalmo in melee range combat when they were stuck in an evenly matched battle. And Zalmo was right. If he had not used all of the energy within him, he would not have been able to defend himself against that attack.

In the end, Zalmo saw that against him, who had a rifle that could pierce through walls, Akira made a simple decision. To lure him to an open space without any walls. Akira's sudden change in movement made him seem like a completely different person. That experience caused Zalmo to become overly cautious, he was suspicious of whether Akira was actually conscious or not.

It could be a scheme to lure him closer. Zalmo, who would be checking his surroundings with his information terminal before carefully approaching Akira, might get jumped on. Zalmo could easily foresee Akira suddenly springing up, taking out a concealed melee weapon to finish him after he got close enough. Otherwise, it was to lure Zalmo close enough, to ascertain Zalmo's position and rifle's condition before shooting.

Of course, with single doubt clouding his mind, Zalmo could not help but think of all kinds of possibilities. Naturally, none of which could be ignored. Back in the slum city and during their exchange just now, Akira was able to make a surprising move right when Zalmo thought that he had secured his victory. Thus, Zalmo had no wish to try his luck for the third time when his cyborg body was damaged. After deciding not to take that risk, Zalmo left that place in order to find something that could help ascertain his victory. His experience with Akira so far caused Zalmo's decision-making skills to go south. It also saved Akira's life.

And so, Zalmo was fighting Akira with a powered suit. Originally, Zalmo's powered suit was prepared in order to cause chaos by attacking the city management's squads, while also emitting friendly identification signals at the same time. But Zalmo was willing to risk being scolded by his boss later just to use it to eliminate Akira.

It might seem to be an excessive use of firepower. But to Zalmo, it was necessary. He already had seeds of fear planted within him. Seeds called Akira. He needed absolute, overwhelming firepower to kill him for certain. This time, he made sure of it. He removed any unlikely chance of Akira turning the tables on him. But now, even after using his powered suit, Akira was still alive. This further confirmed Zalmo's paranoid decision as a correct one.

Akira continued fighting back desperately. He was standing on top of his APC as it drove haphazardly through the ruin. Nelia kept driving haphazardly in order to avoid the incoming bullets. The APC swayed violently, Akira was almost thrown off the vehicle each time it made a sharp turn. Akira was somehow able to fix his footing with the help of his augmented suit, but the incoming bullets from above made him frown as he kept shooting at the enemy's powered suit.

Due to how fast the APC was going, the violent swaying, the distance to the target, and the speed of the enemy's powered suit, Akira was not able to get a proper aim. The bullets that were able to properly reach their target were only the homing armour-piercing frag grenades. The explosions from those grenades then would throw the powered suit off-balance, interrupting its aiming. While at the same time, it also slowed down the powered suit's movement. Akira then aimed for this opportunity to use his anti-forcefield armour bullets loaded SSB to snipe at that powered suit. Thus, further slowing down Zalmo and throwing off his aiming even further, allowing Akira's APC to survive a few seconds more.

Akira compressed his time perception. Although he had another method to increase the accuracy of his sniping, he could not pick that option. After all, there was no guarantee that would kill the opponent. There was also a good chance he would not be able to take on the burden and it might outright knock him unconscious. He was certain that would happen so he was even limiting the density of his time perception compression.

He aimed for the moment when the enemy's line of sight was blocked by a building before quickly returning back inside the APC. As the world ran at a slower pace, Akira wanted to quickly replace the energy packs in his rifles and coat before returning back to the top of the APC.

The swaying of the APC caused the supplies to be sent flying, but the time compression allowed Akira to follow the slowly flying objects around him. He would eject the magazines out of his rifles and would quickly take a new set of magazines floating in the air to replace them. He hardly had any leeway of returning back inside to replenish. So, he had no other choice but to get all the necessary supplies in the shortest time possible.

If Akira could not return back to the top of the APC before the opponent had a good line of sight to his vehicle, he would not be able to throw off Zalmo's suppressive fire. Any more hits would quicken the death of his APC. In a situation where he had no support from Alpha, his only lifelines were his supplies. If he lost his APC, where he kept all of his supplies, he would no longer have any hope of surviving.

The raining bullets exchanged with the soaring ones. The difference in their firepower was obvious. Thanks to the forcefield armour of the powered suit, it did not sustain much damage even after getting hit. Although the energy conversion sapped its remaining energy, Akira had no way to measure how much the powered suit had left.

While the APC was able to survive thanks to its resilient armour plating, that was not the case for Akira. Even if he increased the forcefield armour output of his coat to its maximum, he could only take 1 shot at most, the second shot would definitely kill him. Although depending on how much energy he had left**,** he might still be able to avoid instant death. Nonetheless, there was no question that it would render him unfit to continue the fight. There was also a chance the first shot might even kill him outright. Akira was desperately trying to survive this battlefield under such harsh conditions.

He understood that he had no chance of winning, the most he could do there was to delay his imminent defeat. His only chance of survival was to keep delaying until his opponent faced the same issue. Forcing Zalmo to stop. Although the scale was completely different, Akira was no stranger to such fights, he had done it numerous times before he had met Alpha. Thus, Akira just kept on squeezing every last drop of strength he had to stay alive.

In the middle of that exchange, Zalmo had a grim expression on his face, hidden inside the augmented suit.

The homing armour piercing frag grenade ammo that Akira used was significantly slower than normal bullets, not to mention, Zalmo was moving relatively fast in the sky. But even so, Akira kept on accurately hitting his grenade ammo. The explosions threw Zalmo's aiming off, thus significantly dropping his accuracy.

If Zalmo focused on aiming accurately, he would have to stop moving. This meant Akira would have a better chance of hitting him. If it came to that point, there was a good chance Akira would use an anti-forcefield round to snipe him using the small window of opportunity. Although the powered suit was strong enough to take a few anti-forcefield shots, an instantaneous barrage of a whole extended magazine would generate enough firepower to break the forcefield armour of his powered suit. Zalmo had no other choice but to keep moving in order to stay alive.

The powered suit was basically undamaged and it still had plenty of remaining energy. There was no question that Zalmo had the upper hand there. But Zalmo's expression did not express any glee. Instead, it was the opposite.

"…Are you kidding me? The heck is with that boy?! This powered suit has been designated to be used by the city defence squad as its next-generation powered suit, you know!? Why is it still not enough to kill him!?"

As Zalmo got more and more nervous, the powered suit's control device notified him that the remaining energy had already gone below 50% and it was still falling fast.

Zalmo could still continue fighting in this state, but for some reason, Zalmo's expression turned grimmer as he decided to bail out from the battle.

Zalmo thought that it was a bad idea to maintain this stalemate with little hope of immediately killing Akira. It would be horrendous if the powered suit no longer had enough remaining energy to expand its forcefield armour

to the max the moment Akira launched a counter-attack. Furthermore, if he withdrew now, he could refill his energy packs as well as get anti-personnel weapons, which would give him a better chance of killing Akira. Once came to that conclusion, he decided to retreat.

The moment Zalmo left the battle, Akira also immediately stopped firing. For a split second there, Zalmo thought that Akira might have run out of ammo and that it was a mistake to leave the battle right now, but he then immediately shook his head and mumbled with a grim face.

“I know that it’s for a large scale expedition, but that armour plating and the amount of reserve ammo he has is simply overkill no matter how you look at it. I can understand if the expedition is close to the frontline, but that’s not the case here! Judging from his equipment, there’s a good chance that he was fully expecting to fight other Hunters… Wait, no way, don’t tell me he knew all along that this would happen right from the start…”

Zalmo voiced out his thoughts as he left the battlefield, but that only led him to more questions.

Akira’s gaze followed the retreating Zalmo as he had a rather surprised look on his face.

“Did he just run away?”

Nelia answered through the communication device.

“Akira, are you still alive?”

“Yeah, somehow.”

“Oh? That was impressive. So he didn’t leave because he got you, huh? Not bad.”

The first half of Nelia’s reply contained a surprise in its tone, while the latter half was more of amusement. Akira smiled wryly and dragged himself back inside the APC.

“Don’t just assume I’m dead like that. So then, where are we right now? Are we already close to the forward base?”

“Unfortunately, we’re even further than before.”

“The heck?”

In response to that rather sharp reply from Akira, Nelia replied with a rather sullen voice.

“That’s because I had to change the direction of the vehicle a few times to get away from all the bullets that guy shot, you know. Moreover, the route got closed by debris from that battle as well, so we can no longer use it to get back. Not only was I busy evading the incoming bullets, but I also had to take care of the monsters blocking our ways as well as avoiding the smaller paths to make sure that we won’t get stuck. I know that you were busy back then, but I was equally busy here as well, you know?”

“Is that so? I see. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome!”

As Akira just honestly thanked her, Nelia replied with a jovial voice.

“Sorry, but can you keep driving for the time being? I need to take a rest.”

“Sure, by the way, are you alright?”

“No idea. If I say no, are you going to help me?”

“Hm? I just need to adjust my plan like including the case if you get killed.”

“I see, I’m fine.”

“That’s good to hear.”

Akira smiled wryly as he relaxed.

Akira started by reloading and replacing his energy packs. He then took a good amount of medicine before sitting on the collapsible bed. His mind has been dulled since he had relaxed after such an intense fight. He looked around the inside of the APC, all the supplies that were once there had significantly reduced and it was easy to see just how discouraged Akira was from his expression.

The anti-forcefield bullet was better than the ones he had used in the past. Each one cost him 1000 Aurum per thanks to the discount. The homing armour-piercing frag grenades cartridges were even more expensive than the anti-forcefield bullets. The medicines had cost him 10 million Aurum a box. The energy packs were more costly now that he had better equipment on. All of these were the price of his survival without Alpha's support. But he shook his head and banished that thought from his mind.

He had no leeway to tire himself with more things to worry about. Moreover, if he was able to survive that fight only by using this much, that in itself meant that he had become pretty strong. Akira told himself that as he lightly laughed, mocking the bad situation he was in.

The vehicle was shaking violently. Sounds of explosions could be heard outside. It was far from peaceful, but even so, it was precious resting time for Akira. He controlled his breathing to help him recover while making sure that he would not get thrown off from the bed.

But even that did not even last for 10 minutes.

"Akira, something is approaching us from behind. It is outside the shooting range of the machine gun and it's pretty fast."

"I know."

Akira already noticed that signal from the APC's sensor that was connected to his information terminal. He opened the back door and carefully checked the direction of the signal. The moment he did that, he could not hide his surprise. The signal came from 2 young female Hunters who were being thrown right into Akira's APC.

Akira was judging what to do there, whether to shoot them down, deflect them away, or receive them. In the first place, he had no idea if they were friends or foes. While he was at loss on what to do, he was already too late. The two girls went past him right into the APC and crashed into the supply boxes.

Akira pulled out his rifles and aimed at them by pure reflex. But at the next moment, he realized the state of those two girls. He understood that it was useless to shoot them. One of the girls had her neck torn off while the other one had a large hole in her torso.

“Corpses?! What the hell is going on here?!”

Although Akira was even more confused than before, he immediately shoved that out of his head as he immediately returned his aim outside the APC and pulled the trigger. The person who threw those dead Hunters into Akira’s APC jumped away using his immense strength to avoid the incoming barrage before landing on top of the APC.

Akira jumped outside of the APC and made a flip, the moment he landed, he immediately aimed his rifles on top of his APC. Since forced himself to maintain his posture using his augmented suit, there was a line dug into the ground. However, his aim was still on target and did not meander away at all.

But the next second, Akira compressed his time perception and jumped out of the way since the guy had jumped off the APC and swung down a powerful kick aimed at him. The kick landed on the ground. But, Akira avoided it. The huge force from the kick was taken in by the ground, creating a huge crack.

While both of them were still off-balance, they raced each other, fixing their postures in order to get the first dip on the next attack. Both of them then immediately stopped. They raised their guards toward each other while searching for an opening. And so, they ended up standing still, staring at each other for a few seconds.

Akira’s expression turned grim the moment he got a good look on his opponent’s face.

“You…”

Tiol laughed like a mad man.

“Sorry for the wait! I’m here to kill you now!! Both you and that guy!!”

Akira then noticed that Tiol’s equipments were eerily similar to his. They were so similar that it was impossible to differentiate between them from afar.

“That guy? Who?”

The answer to that question quickly presented itself after that. Another vehicle appeared from behind. The upper part of the vehicle could be opened to make it easier for its passengers to fight, and the person peeking out from that vehicle was Katsuya.

The dead girls that Tiol threw into Akira’s APC were from Katsuya’s team. He went to attack Katsuya’s team, killed some of them, grabbed the badly wounded, and then went to look for Akira while maintaining his distance from Katsuya. He made sure that Katsuya would not lose sight of him. After finding Akira, Tiol then threw the badly wounded Hunters to Akira.

The transmitters in their augmented suits continuously sent signals to let others know the location of its users. Katsuya thought that he might be able to save them if they were still alive, that was why he continued to chase after those signals. Even after the signals told him that they were already dead, Katsuya still kept on chasing. However, this time, it was for the sake of revenge. He did not notice that Tiol deliberately maintained the distance between them in order to lure him.

The moment Katsuya caught Tiol in his sights, he immediately roared.

“There you are!! This is revenge for them!! I’ll kill you!! I’ll definitely kill you!!”

Katsuya could not differentiate between Akira and Tiol. But Katsuya no longer cared about that anymore. He blindly believed that the other guy was Tiol's friend and that he would just need to kill them both.

Akira finally understood what was going on and sent a sharp glare at Tiol.

"You bastard…"

But Tiol did not seem shaken at all as he grinned and said.

"I'll definitely kill both of you!! So you can go ahead and kill each other!! Both of you can just go to the afterlife!"

Akira immediately ran back to his APC and Tiol followed next to him. Not too long after that, Katsuya released a barrage of grenades. In a blink of an eye, the whole area was enveloped in explosions.

Akira and Tiol jumped out of the explosions, Akira was unharmed thanks to his coat while Tiol was able to quickly regenerate thanks to his abnormal vitality as a monster.

Akira and Tiol also exchanged shots while running side by side. They released their rounds at the same time and then jumped out of its way at the same time. It was as if they had prearranged their engagement beforehand. They blazed left and right through the ruin using their enhanced physical strength to evade their opponent's bullets as well as the raining grenades. All of this was done as they kept releasing shots at each other, aiming to stop the other in their tracks. Both sides knew that the first person who stopped would be hit by the grenades and would be rendered unable to fight. So they were willing to take some hits and focused more on speed instead of evading the bullets.

But then, Tiol was able to go ahead of Akira. Tiol kept running in front of him as he aimed backwards without even looking. Although Tiol was aiming without looking while running at the same time, Akira understood that he was aiming properly at him since the internals of the muzzle of his rifle could be seen.

With Katsuya's team chasing and shooting from behind them, Akira understood if he focused more on evading instead of moving forward, the attacks from both Katsuya and Tiol would kill him. Thus, in order to survive, Akira chose to risk it. He completely ignored the pain on his head as he gathered his focus, compressed his time perception, and retried bending reality with his will.

Akira's vision once again distorted. As his perception of the world turned sharper, he charged straight toward the muzzle in front of him. The manoeuvre and increased output of his augmented suit were crushing his body. It was only thanks to the medicine that Akira took before jumping into action that helped maintain the shape of his body.

The expensive medicines had a strong healing effect and prolonged healing duration. Thus, it was able to quickly heal any small wounds. But of course, that did not make the body stronger. It was a forceful method to keep the performance of the body by relying on the healing power of the medicines through an endless cycle of breaking and healing the body on a cellular level. The moment the medicine's effects ran out, or the moment the injuries were faster than the healing, Akira would instantly die.

In that situation where Akira himself was uncertain how close to death he was, he was able to accurately predict where Tiol was aiming as he kept accelerating forward. Akira only took the least necessary movements to evade the incoming bullets as they grazed and took a piece of flesh off his face. However, that kind of wound was far from dangerous. It was not even close to enough to shave off Akira's fighting spirit. He rapidly closed the distance to Tiol with a grin, he then used the full power of his augmented suit to swing down his blade at Tiol.

Tiol did try to evade that attack but he was not able to completely get away from it either. The glowing blade completely cut off one of Tiol's arms right from the shoulder down.

As Akira saw Tiol's arm flying away slowly through the air, he thought that he had the upper hand now. He quickly changed posture in order to deliver the killing blow, but when he saw the severed arm move, he raised his

eyebrows and jumped away. The severed arm suddenly folded its elbow to aim the rifle on its hand at Akira while still in mid-air.

The severed arm pulled the trigger, the bullets in its muzzle spewed out grazing Akira. The kickback from the shots caused the rifle to flail uncontrollably in the air. While still running, Tiol quickly grabbed the flailing arm that was flying at him from the recoil of the shots. He then placed it back onto the open surface wound, which was gushing out green blood. When both arm and shoulder touched, they somehow got reconnected.

Akira, who had already jumped away and opened some distance from Tiol, saw that and was astonished. He was surprised that Tiol was able to reconnect his severed arm, but more than that, he was surprised by the blood coming out from the wound.

[Green blood… No way, can it be that…?]

Akira remembered the massive humanoid monsters that he had fought in the past. As if he knew what Akira was thinking, Tiol laughed at him.

“So that monster was you, huh!? Didn’t I kill you back then? How the heck did you return back from death? I see now! In that case, I can just kill you again and again until you’re dead!”

“That’s right!! That was me!! But this time, I will be the one who wins!! You’ll be the one dead!!”

As Akira and Tiol ran side by side while widening the distance between them, they exchanged a grin, although they did not exchange words, both sides knew what the other sides were thinking about. They stopped momentarily shooting at each other because of their surprise as well as for the sake of healing their wounds. However, it did not take long before they immediately aimed their rifles at each other and were about to start exchanging bullets again.

That was when a vehicle suddenly went in and charged at them. Nelia’s voice could be heard from the communication device.

“Akira!! I’m coming there, so hop on!”

Nelia did not understand what was going on. But she understood that she could not afford to slow down nor to stop. She accelerated the APC forward as if to run over anything and anyone that got in its way.

The vehicle went past between Tiol and Akira. Akira quickly jumped and grabbed the side of the APC and Tiol did the same on the other side.

Katsuya’s team was still shooting at them from the front. The storm of bullets was intense. It came both from the machine gun of the vehicles as well as rifles from each Hunter. But that was not enough to stop Akira’s APC with Nelia continuing to go at full speed.

Nelia kept shooting at the machine guns in order to reduce the incoming bullets while she kept accelerating the APC. Akira had one hand holding onto one side of the APC while he was using his other free hand to shoot homing armour piercing frag grenades to clear the way forward. Tiol also did the same from the other side except he was aiming specifically at Katsuya’s team.

There was a difference in their shots, Nelia and Akira focused more on clearing obstacles while Tiol was clearly aiming to kill Katsuya’s team. Because of that, most of the obstacles removed were from Akira’s side. So Nelia directed the vehicle toward that opening, causing Tiol’s side to be more exposed.

Not only did this shield Akira from the enemy’s bullets, but it also made Tiol take on most of them.

The APC used all the build-up momentum to charge into a small opening within the enemy’s formation. The smaller vehicles could not withstand the power of Akira’s large APC and were sent flying.

Akira managed to hold on from getting thrown off the APC. It was thanks to his augmented suit that the shock from the collision did not knock him off. But that was not the case for Tiol. After taking in tons of bullets, he was weakened to the point that shock threw him off the APC. The collision

shook some of the armour tiles off the APC, but with its superior horsepower and size, it successfully managed to force its way through the enemy's formation.

Akira was breathing rapidly as he climbed up the APC. His first step after that was to use more medicine to heal his body before asking Nelia.

"…Nelia, thanks for the help. But like, could you have done it better?"

Nelia replied with an amused voice.

"Nope. As a matter of fact, you should be more thankful than that. After all, I came back for you."

"Thank you very much!"

"You're welcome. We're allies for now after all. So I would at least do that much for you"

"Well, thanks."

Akira smiled wryly and just spat out that reply. That was when Nelia warned him.

"Two signals from above!!"

Akira quickly aimed his rifles up but he did not make it in time, so he instead jumped out of the way. Right at the next moment. Those two signals landed simultaneously above the APC. The shock from Katsuya and Tiol landing on top of the APC shook it and caused the armour tiles where they landed to bend.

Tiol laughed like a mad man. Although his body was covered in his green blood from the bullets before, he had already healed up all of his wounds.

"Don't think you can get away from me!!"

Katsuya's expression was filled with hatred. That hatred caused him to throw caution into the wind as he did something as reckless as jumping onto

the enemy’s APC.

“You won’t get away from me!! All of you will die here!!”

Akira frowned, but it was more because of an inconvenience rather than hatred.

“Just knock it off already, Katsuya, was it again? The object of your revenge is over there, not me.”

Akira said so and pointed at Tiol. But that did not soften the hatred from Katsuya’s eyes.

“You won’t trick me!! It’s both of you!! I’ll definitely avenge my friends’ death!!”

“I know that you’re misunderstanding this, but I’ll at least try to let you know that I’m not that guy’s friend!!”

“Like hell I would believe that!!”

“Then let’s do this instead, how about we work together until we get to kill that guy? We can try to kill each other after that.”

“You gotta be crazy to think that I would work with you!”

Akira did that knowing that it was highly unlikely for Katsuya to accept his offer, but even so, getting rejected still made him knit his eyebrows. That was when Tiol then mocked.

“In that case, Akira, how about you work with me instead?”

“Drop dead.”

Tiol laughed and shifted his gaze to Katsuya.

“How about you?”

“I’ll kill you!!”

Between the three of them, one thought that it was a huge inconvenience, one was laughing like a mad man, and one was glaring with intense hatred. All of them there already expected that no one would try to work with anyone, so after they confirmed that their guesses were correct, they then spoke as they jumped into action at the same time.

“Alright alright, then both of you can just die!”

“Get on with it already!! Kill each other!! Die!!”

“I’ll definitely kill both of you!!”

The intense three-way deathmatch started on top of the ‘narrow’ APC.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 217, Those who stepped in

Index

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Due to its relatively large size, the top of the APC was rather spacious. But of course, it was way too narrow for a gunfight. Akira, Katsuya, and Tiol saw the other as their enemies and aimed rifles, originally made to fight against monsters, at the other two.

The APC left a trail of destruction as stray bullets flew out from the top of the APC, the explosions and gunshots made by the three of them were enough to lure monsters. Some of the stray bullets would strike against buildings around the area, causing the Hunters who were hiding there to think that they were under attack. Thus as expected, they shot back at the APC. The area that was silent immediately enveloped in a hailstorm of bullets and explosions. It engulfed the whole area in fire. All three of them continued fighting each other, spreading fire and destruction in their wake.

Akira shot out anti-forcefield bullets and homing armour piercing frag grenades with his SSB rifles to get Katsuya and Tiol off his APC. The stray bullets went past their targets and hit the buildings around the APC. The explosions blew away the buildings, raising a cloud of dust, while the bullets were able to easily drill holes through those buildings. Some of them even hit the APC and peeled off its armour tiles.

The APC that was filled with supplies, was Akira's lifeline. But both Tiol and Katsuya did not have the leeway to attack the APC, and Akira himself did not have the leeway to worry about hitting his own APC in that battle.

Katsuya quickly jumped back of the APC to get away from Akira's wild shots. He then grabbed the edge of the APC and stuck to its side. He was holding the APC as a shield in one hand while using the other to spray bullets at those on top of the APC.

Akira pulled his head back to evade Katsuya's shots, he then fell backwards in that posture. Although it seemed that he was going to fall to the ground just like that, Akira used the contact surface of the boots of his augmented suit to stand straight, horizontal to the side of the APC, thus blocking Katsuya from targeting him. While he was in that position, Akira aimed both of his rifles above his head and pulled the trigger, to be more precise, he was aiming at Tiol, who had jumped and was running on a building's sidewall ever since he evaded Akira's indiscriminate shooting from before.

Akira knew the general location of Tiol from his information-gathering device. Since he had no leeway to take a proper aim at him, he instead focused more on trying to prevent Tiol from joining back. So, he spread grenades everywhere, as if to destroy everything around him.

Bullets rained down onto the building where Tiol was, but Tiol was unfazed, he kept running forward. His monstrous vitality allowed him to take bullets with no problem at all. So, Tiol just kept on chasing the APC while ignoring the incoming bullets. He then aimed his arm, already transformed into a cannon, at Akira.

Both Akira and Tiol exchanged shots. Since both of them were shooting bullets, grenades, and warheads from a difficult position, they were both unable to properly aim at the other.

The warheads hit the APC directly, throwing it off from its track. Akira ran on the side of the APC to evade the incoming warheads, he somehow managed to stay on the side of the APC it rocked violently.

Tiol used that opening to jump from the side of the building. His face was showing a blood-covered smile. Right after that, grenades came crashing onto the sidewall. Although the explosions also devoured Tiol, he could be seen to have soon jumped out from the smoke.

For the sake of knocking their opponent off, to make sure not to let them get away, and to gain the upper hand, all of them tried to get back to the top of the APC as quickly as possible. Akira ran back to the top of the APC, while Katsuya tried to climb back up, and Tiol jumped from the side of another building straight to the top of the APC. If any of them used that chance to shoot someone else, it would create an opening for the third party to shoot him. That understanding allowed the three of them to get back on top of the narrow APC.

A bullet aimed at the head. A kick to throw the opponent's off-balance. A twist and turn to evade the incoming blow. Regaining the balance after the exchange. Quickly jumping away from the line of fire. Jumping back to close the distance. Re-aiming the rifle back at their opponent. They threw bullets, kicks, and strikes to destroy the opponent's weapons or bodies. Among the flurry of the strikes, they ducked, blocked, and evaded. Even a single mistake would immediately kill any of them as they were locked in a 3-way battle royal.

That was when monsters jumped into the fray as well. A huge beast monster landed on top of the APC and tried to take a huge bite of the three. The machine guns with legs appeared on the side of a few buildings and were shooting bullets in Akira's direction. Even in such a messy situation, Akira, Tiol, and Katsuya kept on trying to kill each other while shooting down the legged machine guns and the monsters that landed on the top of the APC.

Akira kicked one of the beasts that had already lost its head in Tiol's direction. Tiol deflected its carcass to one of the nearby buildings in order to destroy the legged machine guns there. Katsuya tried to make use of that opening, but both Akira and Tiol made sure to keep him in check so that he would not be able to make any moves in this situation.

With so many factors suddenly mixed in the battle, every single decision that they make could easily decide whether they live or die. But even so, none of them was knocked off the APC. Although the APC was going pretty fast causing the scenery around them to blur, for the three of them, who were pumped full of adrenaline with heightened senses, it seemed that the scenery around them had stopped.

Akira somehow managed to keep up with the intense fight with the help of his time perception compression. The panging pain in his head caused a growing haziness to flood his mind. It was obvious that his brain could not take this burden any longer.

While at the same time, a strange feeling spread through his body as if it was being crushed and reformed. It was the sensation which came from the continuous cycle of the injuries being continuously healed, thanks to the medicines that he had used beforehand. Normally, the painkilling effects from the medicines would allow him to ignore the excruciating pain. However, he would still be able to feel enough so as not to cause any harmful effects during a fight. That feeling of discomfort came from this.

The moment the medicine lost its painkilling effect, the pain would immediately eliminate Akira’s mind and shut down his body.

Akira more or less knew how much time he had left, judging from how numbed pain felt and his abundant experience from all the battles that he had gone through. All those experiences were indicating to him that he was at his limit soon.

[These guys are strong!! Can I really keep up until I kill them!?… No, I have no other choice but to do it! I just need to kill them fast, before my body shuts down first! Even a second faster will be good enough! I have to commit myself more! I’ll kill them before I’m dead first!]

The fear of death caused Akira to frown, but then a mocking smile overwrote his fear. He then ignored the burden, increased his time compression, strengthened his reality-bending willpower, and pushed his body to move even faster.

The stalemate between the three of them started to change as Akira committed himself further into the fight. The tide of the battle started to turn toward Akira's favor. Tiol, who understood that, felt joy instead of fear.

[I can tell, you know!! You're getting desperate, right? You're pushing yourself past your limit, right? That just means you're that cornered right now!!]

Akira was also desperate when he fought against the giant Tiol. But at that time, Akira seemed to still have some leeway. That came from the fact that Akira trusted Alpha's support, even in the worst-case scenario, he believed that Alpha would do something about it. Moreover, if the opponent was too strong, then Alpha would have done something right from the start.

But this time, Akira did not give out such a feeling at all. He was simply trying his best, with each step, bringing him closer to death's door just to win the battle. Tiol could obviously feel that Akria was being cornered.

[This is not like the last time! I can kill him this time! I finally have the chance to kill him! I just need to push just a little bit more! Go to hell!!]

Tiol wished for more power. His wish stemmed from his desire to kill Akira. But because of that, his consciousness started to show bias and leaned more toward the system instead of that of a human.

The current body was not Tiol's real body. His real body was the giant which Akira had destroyed the other day. After the city management took a small sample of his body, they burnt it so other monsters would be unable to feed on that corpse. Therefore, his original body no longer existed.

The body that Tiol was using right now, was something based on the surviving terminal that Yatsubayashi had modified according to the deal that he had with Tsubaki. Originally, Tsubaki was planning to control this modified body together with some other units. But then, she found a much better automaton body to use. So, she no longer needed those units. After that, Tsubaki installed Tiol's personality into one of them and ordered him to spread chaos amongst the city defence squad.

Tsubaki, who resurrected Tiol, demanded Tiol to properly give her results this time. If he was able to do that, Tsubaki promised him that she would ask Yatsubayashi to provide him with a proper body. If not, then he would be thrown into a dumpster and be incinerated. Of course, Tiol had no choice but to accept her conditions. While at the same time, Tsubaki also told him this body was the only thing that had Tiol's data at the moment. So if that body was destroyed, Tiol would be dead for real this time.

After the expedition started, Tiol met Katsuya's team by pure coincidence, it was not like Tiol deliberately went after Katsuya's team. At that time, he only recognized Katsuya as nothing more than one of the common Hunters. But the reason why he was clearly aiming to kill Katsuya, was simply because he heard Katsuya mentioning, 'I will turn this expedition into a success in order to win Sheryl's heart.'

As if it was a prank from the god, Tiol then met Akira by coincidence as well. Moreover, he successfully caused Katsuya to mistake Akira as one of his allies. At that time, he thought it might be a good idea to make them fight against each other, and he succeeded.

At the moment luck was siding him. Tiol, who thought so, became extremely excited. The thought of killing Akira and Katsuya and then winning Sheryl's heart now felt within his reach. The excitement threw his logic off the window as he sold a part of himself for more power.

With Akira and Tiol fully committing themselves towards that battle. Katsuya, who was the last person to do that, also got riled up in response to the other two.

[T-these guys are strong!! Dammit! I didn't expect that I would fight against these people like them when I'm not in my best shape!!]

Even in this situation, Katsuya's distorted common sense was only able to recognize it as a slightly bad situation. Since up till now, he was able to fight against monsters with relative ease, he was not able to correctly recognize the severity of the situation. But that small difference caused a huge gap during that intense battle against Tiol and Akira.

Although Katsuya had gone through numerous dangerous encounters and was able to get through all of them by doing something reckless, what he was trying now was different. The domain close to death should already be familiar to him, but for some reason, this time, he felt a different kind of presence of death. As he knitted his brows, he thought about this unfamiliar presence of death.

[I've been moving slower ever since the jamming happened, why is that!? Is it because the support system is affected by that jamming!? But even without the support system, it should still function as a normal augmented suit, right!? What the heck is going on?!]

Katsuya ended up unconsciously looking for the reasons he was having difficulty. This divided his attention, which caused him to slow down even more. But that was enough to cause a fatal opening in that battle. Akira and Tiol did not let that chance slide as both of them simultaneously aimed their rifles at Katsuya.

But this was where Akira's slightly late response spared Katsuya's life. If Akira had committed to the battle a few seconds sooner and stepped closer to the death door to sharpen his senses, Katsuya would have died there.

Inside the compressed time perception, Akira aimed his rifle at Katsuya while fixing his gaze at him. He then realized that Katsuya noticed him and took a defensive stance instead of jumping out of the way. A barrage of anti-forcefield armour rounds at close-range would be able to easily break through that level of defence.

Akira knew that Katsuya would understand that as well, so right at the next moment, Akira jumped away following his instinct.

A split second later, a storm of bullets enveloped the top of the APC. Akira was barely able to evade it while Tiol, who was not able to evade, took the barrage head-on and was thrown flying before landing on the ground. He rolled over a few times, before being run over by the vehicles chasing after Akira's APC from behind.

That attack just now came from Katsuya's team. After Akira's APC broke through their formation, they immediately turned around and started chasing the APC. Then the moment they felt that Katsuya was in danger, they immediately took action to provide supporting fire to him. Both the ones that were peeking out from the vehicles as well as the ones driving the vehicles were all moving in a quick organized manner, without exchanging any information in between them. Moreover, they sprayed the bullets in such a fashion that it covered the whole top, except for where Katsuya was standing.

Of course, Katsuya also got hit by some of the bullets, but he was unscathed. Akira then thought, while hiding himself around the edge of the rooftop.

[Low powered bullets, huh? Did they use that only to provide suppressing fire? No, that's not right, if all of them were low powered bullets, it should have been impossible to send Tiol flying like that. I bet they're only using that type of bullet around the area where they might hit Katsuya and used different bullets elsewhere.]

Akira's guess was mostly correct, but the implication of his guess was something that was really worrying for him.

[The jamming is still in effect. So how were they able to execute that without speaking to each other? That level of teamwork is not normal, you know?]

Katsuya jumped backwards to join up with the rest of his team. Akira did try to shoot Katsuya down when he was up in the air, but the suppression fire from his team made that difficult.

[As I thought, their timing is just too good! Is it because of that coordination support system!? Is that thing still working even in this situation!?]

But Akira quickly realized that he was about to pursue something unimportant right now. So, he immediately stopped his thoughts there. With

both Katsuya and Tiol off the APC now, Akira went back to the back door of the APC.

“Nelia! They’re gaining on us! Can we run away from them?!”

“I’ll try my best, but to be honest, I think our chance of running away is small. This APC is already in very bad shape and there’s not much ammo left in the machine gun. While on the other hand, they are using faster and smaller vehicles with greater mobility. Not to mention, they seem hell-bent on killing a certain someone who is on this APC right now. As I thought, we won’t be able to get away from them.”

The APC was already close to its limit. Although Akira used a lot of expensive armour tiles to protect it, it had already lost more than half of them. After all those intense fights, the APC was already badly damaged. It was only thanks to Nelia’s skill that it was still barely able to somehow avoid the enemy’s attacks.

Since it was originally a transport vehicle to be used in the wasteland, it had a powerful engine. However, its capability was vastly different compared to the vehicles made for battles. With Katsuya’s team’s vehicles being specialized for combat in terms of specs, Akira’s APC had no chance of winning.

There was also a big difference in their remaining ammo. Moreover, he still had to keep using the machine gun to clear up the monsters blocking the APC. So, they were still using what little they had left.

Katsuya’s team would catch up with them at this rate. There was a good chance of death. Although Akira said so, Nelia replied back with an amused smile. She was not joking, nor was she exaggerating, she was simply enjoying the situation.

Akira knitted his eyebrows. He understood why Nelia was acting like that, but at the same time, he could not just completely ignore it nor just enjoy the situation like Nelia.

“For now, I’ll try my best to slow them down.”

“Alright.”

Endless explosions could be heard from behind. But even so, Nelia smiled and did not seem to be bothered at all. Akira could feel a strange feeling of reliability from that reply as he hurried up to finish his preparation. He immediately replenished his ammo and energy packs and did not forget to take extra medicines as well. In the middle of that, Akira spotted something inside the APC and stopped. It was his bike.

Katsuya landed on one of the moving vehicles from his team. Despite the jamming, they were able to communicate with each other since they were within close-range communication. The moment Katsuya got into communication range, he was welcomed with a scolding.

“Katsuya!! What the heck were you thinking? Jumping out all by yourself like that again!? I’ll deck you if you don’t stop doing that, okay!?”

“I-I’m sorry, alright? It just happened.”

“Just happened? That’s not something that you should do out of a whim, you know?!”

Airi’s calm voice followed afterwards.

“Katsuya. I know that you would do that since you were able to save some people in the past by doing so. But we’re a team right now. It’s better to move as a team instead of moving alone.”

“…You’re right, that was a close call as well, thanks for the help.”

“Good.”

Katsuya regained his calm after talking with Yumina and Airi. But even so, he was still relatively excited.

“Alright then! Let’s go!!”

The team increased the intensity of its attack with that command from Katsuya. The bullet storm consumed Akira’s APC while grenades and

warheads were raining down on him.

Normally, Yumina would have recommended the team to withdraw. She indeed also wanted to avenge her dead comrades. She did not believe that it was worth the risk of pursuing a goal if it meant staying in an area where no long-range communication was working. She normally would have prioritized the safety of the team and convinced them to retreat even if she had to do it forcefully.

Normally, Airi would have been suspicious of the situation. There was no evidence showing that Akira was on Tiol's side. As long as there was no evidence, there was no need to add more enemies into the mix unnecessarily. Akira was too strong to handle. A moment of doubt when against him would result in death. Even if Akira was really working with Tiol, the current Katsuya would not have a high chance of victory even if he worked together with the team. At the very least, she would have notified Katsuya of this if she was in her normal state of mind.

But both Yumina and Airi did not think about it at all. The impression sent from Katsuya had overwhelmed their rational judgment so much that they simply believed that the course of events so far as normal. In exchange for their level of teamwork, their individuality had been suppressed. Even though it was a decision made by majority votes, Katsuya's line of thinking basically always vetoed as the final decision.

After multiple long intense battles, Akira's APC finally gave out. The moment the forcefield armour on the tire ran out of energy, the whole APC immediately rolled over on the ground violently. The impact caused its already hole-riddled body to bend greatly. It was then dragged by its momentum and crashed into a building before finally stopping.

Katsuya's team surrounded the APC and emptied their magazines on it. The bullets pierced through the APC's armour and made a mess of its inside. There was no response when they were done. After making sure that the enemy had been rendered unable to fight, they blew the back door to secure the inside, that was when they found something that they did not expect at all.

“…He’s not here!? How!?”

The only thing left inside the APC was the dead girls who Tiol threw inside that APC.

Akira had a grim face as he rode his bike on the sidewall of a building.

“Goddammit… What a huge loss!”

A few relic rucksacks were dangling from the bike. Nelia was inside of one of those rucksacks. She had her head and her arm peeking out the rucksack as she smiled amusedly and commented.

“Well, nothing is more expensive than life. Aren’t you glad that you’re still alive right now?”

“And I have to pay in money in exchange for that, you know?”

Akira judged that it was impossible to get away with his APC. Thus, he decided to abandon his expensive APC. He then brought as many supplies as possible with him before trying to escape with Nelia on his bike.

Nelia was able to conceal the moment the bike leapt outside the APC thanks to her advanced driving skill. Moreover, the explosions that surrounded them threw off the accuracy of the information gathering device in that area. They used that chance to get away from the APC before setting the APC to just drive about randomly.

Although the APC was already almost empty, there were still some supplies left inside it. Of course, Akira lost all those supplies the moment he lost his APC. He knew that his life was much more valuable than that, but even so, he still regretted losing his APC and supplies. It was obvious from his frustrated expression.

“So then, why are we doing this right now?”

“We need to take a route where normal vehicles can’t follow us. Otherwise, they will only chase us again.”

Nelia then replied casually.

“I see, you have a good point there.”

Nelia had no reason to argue with Akira’s reasoning there. She also thought that it was strange how Akira would come up with the idea of driving through the sidewall of the buildings. Nelia found it amusing that Akira replied as if it was common sense to do that.

“But still, stuffing me in a rucksack like this, you really don’t know how to treat a girl, do you?”

“Just shut up and get back in! I won’t stop to pick you up if you fall, you know!”

The bike’s control device was modified by Alpha to increase its performance, thanks to that, Akira was able to drive horizontally on the sidewall of the building even when he was not that good at driving. The tires of the bike were properly stuck on the wall as Akira drove. It was as though he was normally driving on the ground.

But as expected, he could not control the bike as well as he was on the ground. His face made a strange expression as gravity pulled him not down but to his side due to his position. Therefore, he drove desperately to maintain the bike.

“Yeah yeah, I’m just a dead weight at the moment so I’ll just do as you say.”

Akira left the area in order to get away from more battles through the route that vehicles would not be able to go through. Though, even a normal bike would not be able to go through that route as well.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 218, The Worth of Life

Index

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After receiving the survey request back in the temporary forward base, Elena and Sara went to the expedition ground using the supply route. But once they arrived, they did not go any further. They started by checking the area starting from there. They were already inside the jamming area. So even if they could gather some information from there, they could not send it back to the base. They would have to return back outside the jamming area first before sending the data. In the end, thinking that it was too troublesome, they only searched the area around the already established supply route.

While Elena was in the middle of watching the information gathering device installed on her vehicle, Sara was responsible for watching the surroundings. At first, there did not seem to be anything strange around the area. There was no sign of a large expedition taking place here. It was so silent that it made them doubtful if there really was an ongoing expedition here.

“Except for the jamming, there is nothing strange here, Elena, how is it on your side?”

Elena stopped operating the terminal and shook her head. But her face did not show any sign of relief.

“Nothing at all. I just can’t get any connection no matter what. Leaving aside the main squad, I can’t even contact the reinforcement squads. The reinforcement squads should have known about the jamming, so they should be using stronger communication devices and shouldn’t be that far. That’s why I thought I should be able to at least contact them, but I’m not getting any replies at all. I can’t even get static noise…“

Sara understood the severity of the situation from her best friend and frowned.

“This is already far away from the original request, which is just to check what is going on. Elena, we can basically get the reward already. We just need to check the last place that was indicated from the powered suit’s recording. So, what do you think?”

“To be honest, I don’t like that idea at all. The jamming is already bad enough, but we did not encounter anyone on our way here, right? It’s only to be expected that the main squad would send someone to try to contact the forward base and that person would have used the supply route. But strangely enough, we didn’t encounter anyone here…”

“Those powered suits can fly, after all, they might have flown straight to the base without going through the supply route, you know.”

“Of course, that is also possible, but… Still…”

Being too careful might mean throwing away all they had done so far down the drain. Although Elena thought so, she could not shake off the bad feeling that she had. But on the other hand, if they just returned back from there, it would also mean that they wasted their time coming here. While Elena was still at loss on what to do, she expanded the radar to its maximum range. Since they had finished scanning the area with the standard information gathering device, Elena used all its available calculative power to search for enemies.

As she thought of going deeper into the ruin, in case she still did not get any signals, the radar picked something up.

“Sara. Get ready. There’s 1, no, 2 signals coming this way. The one behind seems to be moving pretty fast.”

“Roger that!”

Sara was carrying a gun that was as large as a tank’s cannon and another smaller one, which was still pretty large. Both of them were designed to be used with a powered suit. Their first priority was to get away in case it got dangerous, that was why they decided to focus more on firepower even if it meant that they could not keep using these weapons for long.

The nearer signal was approaching from behind a towering pile of rubble. Common sense was telling them that nothing could get over that pile. Despite that, the signal went charging straight toward that pile without slowing down at all.

“Elena, can you try checking their identification code in case they have those terminals lent specifically for this expedition?”

“I can’t. It might be because of the jamming or it could be that they don’t have it. Either way, be careful, I’ll try to open up some distance.”

Elena turned the vehicle to get away from that signal. There was a chance that it was a monster and it would be bad if they got ambushed. Sara also understood that as she readied herself for a fight. But the signal only came closer and closer.

Sara turned his gun toward that direction to welcome the enemy right when that signal jumped over the pile of rubble and showed itself in front of them. When Sara was close to pulling the trigger, she quickly realized who it was and inadvertently shouted.

“Akira!?”

Akira ended up jumping higher than he expected when he went over the rubble on his bike, causing his face to pull inward. But he somehow managed to land after that jump. Thanks to the advanced balancer and the control device on his bike, plus Akira using his augmented suit to prevent his bike from rolling over, he somehow was able to land without falling over. But even so, he still had a severe frown on his face.

“T-that was close.”

Unlike Akira who had his hands full trying to calm himself down, Nelia was smiling, amused.

“You do like pulling crazy stunts, don’t you?”

“It’s not like I’m doing this because I like it?”

“There’s that joke again. You won’t be able to trick me after pulling all of those stunts.”

“I’m being serious here.”

Akira finally calmed his breathing as he slowed down his bike. Meanwhile, Elena moved her vehicle to run side-by-side with Akira and smiled wryly at him.

“Oh, Akira. What a coincidence meeting you here.”

“Elena-san? Sara-san too? Why are you here? I heard that both of you didn’t participate in the expedition…”

“We’re not participating directly, we’re just reserves in case of an emergency. Since we can’t get in contact with the expedition team at all, we were asked to come down here to check up on the situation. How about you? Are you on your way back from the ruin?”

“Ah, yeah, that’s about right.”

“Is it okay if we ask what happened?”

“Well, where should I start? To be honest, I don’t really understand it myself, you see…”

Judging from what they could see, Elena at least knew that Akira was unharmed as she smiled in relief.

“For now, I’ll escort you back to base since you must have some important information regarding the situation. We can talk about the rest after that, are you okay with that?”

“Alright, I’ll be counting on you then.”

The three of them looked around and judged that the area was safe. But that did not stay for long. Elena pointed behind Akira and mentioned something strange.

“We have to tell the other guy as well. I can’t contact him because of the jamming, is it okay to just wait here? Or is it that you have a way to contact him?”

“Excuse me?”

Akira looked behind, toward where Elena was pointing. His relieved expression immediately turned solemn. A certain familiar powered suit was following him through the air. It was the other signal on Elena’s radar and it was heading straight at them.

Elena and Sara thought that the powered suit was someone from the main expedition unit that was returning back to the base with Akira. But Akira and Nelia did not think that was the case.

“…Nelia.”

“It might be as you think, it’s not exactly going in the direction of the temporary base.”

It was Zalmo chasing them, and his target was obvious. At this rate, Elena and Sara would be roped in the coming battle while they were still far away from the closest defensive point installed along the supply route. Although

they had stopped extending the supply route, they were still working on improving the supply route. Thus, there was almost no cover along this part of the supply route. It was the perfect place to launch an attack from the sky. Akira made his decision in that instant, he pulled Nelia off from his bike and threw her into Elena's vehicle.

"Elena-san! Please take her back to base!"

When Elena was still flusteredly trying to catch Nelia, Akira quickly made a U-turn and accelerated his bike toward the pile of rubble where he came from.

"Wait-!? Akira!?"

Elena quickly called to stop him, but Akira did not even spare a glance back as he climbed the rubble before vanishing behind it.

The powered suit blazing through the sky was holding a huge cannon as one of its weapons. It then released a warhead big enough to fill its muzzle toward that pile of rubble. Once the payload made contact, it produced an enormous explosion. The roar of the explosion echoed through the area as the ground violently shook. The explosion even sent some of the rubble flying toward Elena and Sara.

Elena made sharp turns to avoid the falling rubble, while some of those that she was not able to evade were kicked aside by Sara.

When the powered suit noticed Elena and Sara, it hesitated and stopped for a split second. Akira did not let that opening slide as he showered that powered suit with homing grenades. Of course, the powered suit did not just ignore that, it immediately went for Akira while ignoring Elena and Sara.

Elena and Sara were still in a state of confusion and could not react accordingly. Nelia was caught in surprise, she did not expect Akira would do that at all. But for now, she put that aside and made a suggestion to Elena.

“I don’t know exactly who you are but can you please hurry up and go back to the temporary base?”

Elena looked at Nelia with a slightly stern look.

“Who are you? Akira’s friend? What is going on? Why is a powered suit dispatched by the city attacking Akira?”

“Is answering those questions worth stopping in this place?”

“It depends on the answers, I’ll judge based on your answers.”

Elana and Sara sent sharp gazes toward Nelia, but Nelia was unfettered as she replied back casually.

“Either way, we have no means to group up with Akira, you know? He’s way too fast on his bike after all.”

That sentence was enough to push Elena to make her decision. Of course, she hated the idea of leaving Akira behind. But since it was not like they could do anything to help him in that situation, they could only pick the second-best choice that they had. Which meant, rather than going after Akira in their vehicle, it was to get out from the jamming area and report what was going on back to base.

“…Sara! We’re leaving!”

Sara had a grim expression plastered on her face as she took in Elena’s hard decision.

“…Alright!! Let’s hurry up!”

As Elena pushed down the gas pedal and turned the vehicle back to the supply route, Nelia suddenly opened her mouth.

“I’m sure you have radar installed too, can you turn its power to the max and set it to detect even camouflaged enemies around the area?”

Elena sent a doubtful look at Nelia, after all, dialing up the radar output to that level meant that monsters might be able to trace back their position.

“Any particular reason why I should do that?”

“It’s worth the risk to make sure that no cloaked enemies are near us. Akira and I went through a lot in that area, you see. I won’t tell you to believe me, but remember that Akira might have left me with both of you to give advice.”

Elena was at loss for a moment, but she then changed the radar’s setting as instructed. After she checked the result, she finally understood. The radar picked multiple cloaked flying monsters in the sky, above the road that they had passed. Even Nelia, who glanced at that screen, could not help but frown.

“So, they let us past but not to go back, huh? What a pain in the neck.”

The squads who were sent back to contact the temporary base were all intercepted by those monsters. Although their number was reduced from the fight against the powered suits that were on their way back, there were still some of them left. Since they were spread over a wide area, there were not that many on the route back to base. Nonetheless, they were made to intercept the powered suits that could fly so, they were still a considerable threat to Elena’s group.

“…Sara, we’re breaking through them, okay?”

Elena looked worriedly at Sara, Sara then replied with a smile.

“I’m leaving the decision making to you, so don’t worry and let’s get going.”

“…Thank you.”

“Don’t worry.”

Elena replied that smile with another smile as she readied herself. But her smile immediately turned cloudy after that.

“But still, I wonder if we have enough firepower. Sara, how many do you think you can take out?”

“I’ll give my best, but I can’t give you an exact number without checking how strong they are first.”

It was difficult to fight those flying monsters only with their currently available weapons. Right when Elena was thinking about what to do, Nelia suddenly interjected.

“In that case, I can help drive the vehicle.”

Seeing Elena being uncertain to take up that offer, Nelia smiled and continued.

“Akira also left the driving to me, you know?”

“…Alright then, can you use a common terminal? Or do you use a wireless connection?”

“The jamming is pretty bad after all, so can you connect me to the terminal?”

“…Good grief, just what in the world happened?”

“A lot.”

Elena was a bit bothered by how Nelia was so casual with Akira, but that was not the time for that. Elena pulled out a terminal from the vehicle’s control device and connected it to Nelia. With that, Nelia immediately took control of the vehicle.

“Wait for a sec, you can immediately control the vehicle just by connecting to the terminal? We didn’t even put in any adjustment, you know?”

“I’ll do the adjustments myself.”

Elena was surprised at how fast Nelia took control of the vehicle. It was as if she hacked straight into the control device, but at this point in time, it was

beneficial to them. She left the driving fully to Nelia as she took another large gun and stood next to Sara.

“It was a good thing that we prioritized firepower this time. But to be honest, it would have been great if we didn’t have to use them.”

Seeing Elena smile wryly next to her, Sara replied with a rather uppity tone.

“Being a Hunter is a dangerous job, it was a good thing that we are properly prepared to face danger.”

“Well, I guess I’ll leave it at that for now.”

Elena made a thin smile as she pulled herself together.

Nelia gave a warning first before accelerating the vehicle.

“We’re charging in, in 3, 2, 1, zero.”

Instead of sounding nervous, her voice was strangely detached. Elena and Sara took the initiative first as they released shots toward the invisible flying monsters. The explosions produced from the warheads were no less splendid. The anti force field rounds that they used pierced through the monster’s hard armour and they fell down one by one, crashing to the ground. Nelia also helped shoot them down by using the machine gun fixed onto the vehicle. The countless bullets striped the monsters of their camouflaging veil as they fell. Once they crashed into the ground, they made loud bangs.

The remaining monsters still up in the air did not just ignore that attack and immediately shot back. The rain of bullets drilled holes on the ground but Nelia was able to skillfully drive the vehicle away from the danger.

Although they were not that far away from the nearest defensive point, it was a considerable distance to brave this assault. As bullets and warheads were exchanged between the sky and the ground, Elena and Sara made full use of their talent and skill to destroy any that stood in their path.

Akira desperately blazed through the ruin. There was a limit on how much firepower that the bike could take so, there was no chance to defeat that powered suit.

On the other hand, it has better mobility than the APC, so Akira used that advantage to get into small roads or go through buildings where he was protected from the flying powered suit.

Right now, he was somehow able to get a small break as he was running the bike through the small hallway of a building that he broke into. He turned the optical camouflage of his coat on and lowered the power output of his bike in order to slip away from the opponent's watch. But of course, he could not keep that up for long.

"Well now, what can I do in this situation…?"

Akira looked extremely exasperated as he rubbed his head. He did not think that he had any chance to run away from the powered suit. Speed-wise, the powered suit was faster than the bike. Although he was able to somehow sneak away from the powered suit right now, it was only a matter of time before his bike ran out of energy first. Akira basically had his hands tied. It was checkmate.

For now, he focused on calming down his breathing, taking medicine bit by bit, all the while making sure to regain as much strength as possible, both physically and mentally. He had used his brain a bit too much during his fight with Katsuya earlier. Because of that, it would not be strange for him to suddenly faint anytime.

The medicine that he took contained a drug to make sure that he would not lose consciousness in the middle of a fight. There was a good chance that he would drop unconscious the moment that drug ran out of its effect, only to wake up a few days later. Akira somehow knew so, that was why he was making sure that the drug's effects would not run out. But of course, it was also a matter of time that the drug would lose its effect, it was one of the reasons why he was in checkmate.

After only a moment’s respite, the building started to shake. It was on the verge of collapsing, but thanks to its old-world durable build, it did not crumble immediately. Although, the collapse itself was an impending certainty.

“Again!?”

Akira clicked his tongue and started his bike before pushing the accelerator. He then charged straight at a part of the wall that he had marked beforehand, destroying it as he jumped out of the building and skillfully landed on the ground. The moment the wheels hugged the ground, he quickly accelerated the bike.

The crumbled building released a smokescreen, and from that smokescreen, Zalmo appeared. It was Zalmo who destroyed the building. When he lost sight of Akira and could not find him anywhere, Zalmo thought that Akira must be hiding inside the buildings nearby. Thus, he went on to indiscriminately destroy the buildings in the area in an attempt to smoke Akira out.

Zalmo quickly detected Akira, who had just come out from the building with his powerful radar. Since Akira acted as he had expected, Zalmo inadvertently smiled as he stood up from his seat and shouted.

“There you are!! Just give it up and die already!!”

The abnormally big missile pods released a series of missiles. Each of them danced in the air before seeking Akira from different angles.

Akira was still on his bike as he aimed his SSB rifle upward before releasing homing grenades. All of them were set to low speed, high homing capability in order to shoot down all the incoming missiles.

But they somehow lacked enough firepower to destroy the missiles. The force-field protected missiles forced their way through the grenades. But of course, the explosion was able to veer the missiles off their original path as they landed and exploded near Akira, causing the buildings around him to crumble down and throwing rubble up into the air.

Akira slipped through the raining rubble on his bike, he had done this before in the past. Although, this time, he had no drive support from Alpha to aid him. He continued to blaze through the road before any falling rubble could close off his way forward.

The Zalmo did not just stand idly there, it proceeded to aim its cannon at Akira. Akira who noticed that, aimed his SSB rifle back and released a barrage of anti force field bullets.

As the bullets' momentum were turned into flashes of light, Zalmo started shooting at Akira, relying on the powered suit's powerful force field armour as he ignored the incoming bullets.

The moment Akira realized that his bullets did not faze Zalmo at all, he immediately stopped shooting and shifted to focus more on evading the incoming warheads. He looked around and jumped straight into one of the buildings with his bike.

A moment later after Akira jumped into a building, a warhead followed suit and crashed into the exact same building, turning the wall into a pile of rubble and consuming the building in a fiery explosion. As a result, it left an old-world building, half-destroyed.

Akira felt a gust of wind from behind due to the shock wave as he accelerated his bike. He jumped out from the other side of the building. Although the explosion was able to partially destroy a durable old-world building, it only shaved a fraction of his coat's durability. The moment he landed on the ground, he scanned his surroundings for cover while changing the energy packs in his coat. He did this without stopping, accelerating his bike even faster.

"Dammit! Using powerful expensive bullets like that! Just how many does he have!? To think he can even pull out a powered suit like that! A mere robber from the slum should not have this many assets! Just what can he get from killing me? What is it that is worth that much money? I just don't know! How is this profitable for him? What's his goal? It surely isn't worth all the expenses!!"

Up till this point, there had already been numerous instances where others would look down at him and try to kill him. It also meant that they saw Akira's life as cheap, easily disposable with a single shot of a cheap bullet. But this was not the case this time. The opponent was even willing to bring out an expensive powered suit to hunt him down. Something much more expensive than any anti-personnel round. Zalmo did not pull any punches in his effort to kill Akira.

It reminded Akira that his life was no longer that cheap, that he was no longer just a mere boy from the slum. Although Akira knew this, he did not feel happy at all.

Akira could not help but think that it would be better if others still looked down on him. Right then, he realized that he was being meek, which made his expression become stern. A deliberate smile then rose as he overwrote such thoughts.

Someone was willing to spend all of this money in order to hunt him down but Akira just mockingly laughed at that absurd fact.

"Heh! That's not even close to enough to kill me, you know!"

[It is not worth the effort!] The one who made this mistake was not him, but his opponent. In order to cement that fact, Akira pushed the accelerator all the way down as he made a 180 degrees turn. Once the bike was in position, the tire's strong grip tore into the ground as it unleashed its full power, pushing the bike forward with explosive acceleration.

Zalmo started to get irritated. But half of that irritation was just a brave front to trick himself against the creeping fear of facing off against a mysterious powerful opponent. He had even changed the equipment on his powered suit in order to kill Akira for sure this time. But Akira was still alive and that caused Zalmo to start feeling nervous.

His new equipment focused more on firepower, enough to even take out a large-sized armoured vehicle. So even if he missed, the shock wave would have been strong enough to throw the vehicle off the ground. This should

give him plenty of time to send the finishing blow. Because of that, he also brought warheads that would compensate for accuracy with raw firepower.

But right now, Akira was still running away from him using a small bike. Zalmo's current equipment did not have the capability to finish Akira off. Akira could make sharp turns and take cover in between small alleys, causing Zalmo to have a hard time trying to shoot him down with the rest of the building around him.

Zalmo found it weird that Akira changed to his bike as if to counter against his new equipment.

"…Calm down! He can't run away from me. I still have the upper hand."

Zalmo mumbled as if he was talking to himself and released another batch of missiles. Although he was chasing after Akira, the boy was still somehow able to keep a certain distance from him. Naturally, this was Zalmo's doing. On one hand, he could keep Akira within the effective range of his weapons. On the other hand, it was also because Zalmo unconsciously did not want to get any closer to him.

Both the firepower and the weight of his equipment were immense. Thanks to that, the energy consumption was equally as immense. If he had enough energy reserve, he would have been able to stay in the air, but just to be safe, Zalmo increased the frequency of landing in order to conserve his energy.

After making a U-turn, Akira was charging straight at Zalmo. His eyes were fixed on the powered suit. It continued to shoot at him, launching missiles that would land between them. Most of the missiles drew an arc in the sky before pointing towards Akira. The rest would keep their elevation in the sky and fly straight at Akira when he came closer.

If Akira kept accelerating his bike forward, at this rate, he would crash into the missiles coming straight at him. The explosion would definitely kill him but his smile only grew wider in the face of this and he forced his bike to move even faster. He was already going too fast to make any sharp turns.

So, he could not evade the missiles. Each second ticked as the missiles moved closer.

Akira quickly aimed his SSB rifle forward and shot a couple of grenades, but the target was not the missiles. The grenades landed between him and the missiles, throwing rubble up into the air. It filled the area with smoke, and created a small storm, thus throwing the colourless mist into disarray.

The missiles immediately exploded before reaching him. Those homing missiles were made to explode when it got into a fixed range from its target, instructed by the information-gathering device installed in each missile. Normally, the powered suit could set it to detonate manually, but due to the jamming, Zalmo did not use it.

The grenades that Akira used this time were mixed with a jamming effect. It was albeit powerful and only lasted for a short time. But that small duration was enough for some missiles to miscalculate its distance from its original target and explode. A huge chunk of debris flew past Akira and he could feel the wind prickling his skin. He willingly stepped into a zone where even the slightest mistake could end him, but even so, Akira continued on with an excited expression.

A missile that had lost its homing function flew beside Akira and struck nearby wreckage. The explosion blew off a gust of wind behind him as he continued to push down the accelerator even harder. The rest of the missiles somehow managed to regain their homing function and chased after Akira from behind.

Zalmo was shocked to find Akira, who was running away from him all this time, suddenly coming straight at him. That alone was enough to momentarily stop him for a split second. On top of that, he was even more shocked when Akira still remained alive after heading straight at the missiles. At that moment, it was as if he was shockingly trying to kill himself. Yet, he came out fine. Shock after shock slowed down Zalmo even more. It came to a point where Zalmo was now at loss. He wondered if he should try and shoot Akira down with his weapons or jump to the sky. Although he only hesitated for a few seconds, that opening was more than

enough for Akira, who was coming at him with no hesitation at all, quickly closing the distance between them.

That was when Zalmo finally decided to use the full power of the powered suit to jump up. Pushing its heavy body and weaponry up into the sky. He went past a tall building, all the way up until he reached a height that the naked eyes could no longer see from the ground. Zalmo now felt a sense of safety thanks to the distance between him and Akira. Thanks to that, he was able to regain some of his composure as he used the cameras on his powered suit to look for Akira. Right when he caught Akira in his views, Zalmo could not hide his surprise. Akira was chasing him, flying into the sky on his bike with countless missiles chasing after him.

Akira maintained the acceleration of his bike as he used a hill like wreckage to spring his bike up before landing on a wall of a nearby building. He used it to scale up into the sky. At the end of the wall, once his bike had left its footing, he simply allowed the momentum to carry his bike straight to where Zalmo was.

In that split second, Zalmo realised that Akira’s goal was to crash his own missiles at him. So, he quickly took evasive maneuvers.

“Don’t look down on me!!”

The powered suit danced in the air, evading the bike and somehow, also evading the missiles. The bike that had no other choice but to be carried by momentum, straight into the air, could not evade the missiles behind. So, they struck the bike and exploded, enveloping it in a huge storm of blazing fire, shredding the bike into bits.

Zalmo’s powered suit was blown away by the shock wave as it rag dolled in the air. He somehow regained his balance and looked toward the source of the explosion. The smoke leftover in the air indicated just how big the explosion was. So, Zalmo’s face was filled with satisfaction.

“I did it!! He’s finally dead!!”

Zalmo was certain of his victory and had lowered his guard. Thanks to that, the unfolding scene in front of him shocked him even more. His satisfied face stiffened in a blink of an eye. He could see clearly from the camera on his powered suit that Akira was aiming straight at him.

The moment the bike flew past Zalmo, Akira had jumped off it. With the help of his augmented suit, he then grabbed one part of the powered suit with one hand and stuck the sole of his feet onto the same powered suit to make sure that he would not be shaken off.

Akira's other free hand was tightly gripping his SSB rifle, placing the muzzle into the powered suit. Once in place, he finally pulled the trigger. Countless anti-forcefield bullets were spewed out from the rifle. He had already set beforehand to maximize its firing rate. The sheer force from a point-blank barrage caused the area to be enveloped in a blinding light.

Zalmo, who was panicking, flew haphazardly in the sky in an attempt to shake Akira off. As the powered suit flew through clouds, Akira desperately held on while still holding down on the trigger of his SSB rifle. The powered suit flailed around, trying to grab Akira but he somehow managed to keep evading. He would jump around the powered suit, all the while injecting more bullets into it.

In a situation where both his legs did not have good footing and had only one hand to stabilize his position, he could not really aim properly. However, that did not stop him from emptying the anti-forcefield armour magazine. Those bullets pierced through the powered suit's defenses, causing Zalmo to continuously flail out of control before crashing into a nearby building.

Akira somehow managed to jump off the powered suit and into the building before it crashed. He stuck himself to the wall as he watched the powered suit fall down. However, the powered suit managed to regain its balance before touching the ground. Although it was flying unstably, wobbling left and right, it was obvious that Zalmo was still alive.

Akira's face twitched with utmost disgust.

“Even after all that, I am still not able to kill him… Just how durable is that thing?”

Akira thought that it would be better to move. So he then sighed, unsheathed his blade, and sliced through the wall to enter the building.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 219, In Too Deep

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Zalmo's powered suit's control device was shot, so he was only able to spiral down into the ground. But Zalmo somehow managed not to crash by controlling the output of the engine. Although he now could not do any high-speed air maneuver, he was still able to fly.

Zalmo landed the powered suit on top of a tall building and glanced toward the building where Akira ran into. It looked to be relatively tall and strong. He knew that it would be difficult to take down that building with only his powered suit. Meanwhile, if he were to throw everything he had at it, he would still have a chance.

However, his face turned stern as he shook his head.

"…Calm down. Don't get too emotional! I'm not a machine. Emotion is important in order to understand the righteousness of the great cause. But it would be meaningless if I let my emotions take over me. That would only mean regressing back to an animal! The great cause exists only for humanity, machines and animals cannot understand the great cause. So just calm down…"

Zalmo whispered to himself as if he was hypnotizing himself, but it was enough to help him calm down. He reassessed the situation with cold logic and thought of what to do next.

[…But still, what the heck with that boy? Was he only running away from me in order to find an opening? Or was it by pure coincidence? It's true that he might have a chance to turn the table by doing so, but isn't that just too reckless. Did he become desperate, thinking that he had no chance to run away? Or was it all calculated? Just what is it?]

Common sense was telling him that he should have won by now. But his opponent did not work with the realm of common sense. As a matter of fact, in that fight where Akira should have zero chance of winning, he managed to stage multiple offensives that almost turned the table on him. Zalmo was once again reminded that his opponent was someone who was extremely hard to deal with. It would be best to kill Akira while he had the chance. After all, no matter what they were called: the nigh improbable, the exceptions; the things that overturned impossibility, a miracle. Akira's chances of victory were not zero.

Zalmo felt that Akira was someone who could pull off such miracles. Although he did not have any proof for that, it was all his pure intuition. But he understood that sometimes intuition could be sharper than pure logic.

An exception that could easily turn the impossible into possible. Regardless of hostiles or allies, an existence brimming with trouble. In terms of planning, it was best to erase him out of existence. So, Zalmo thought that it was important to remove a variable like him for the sake of turning the great cause into reality.

[I should still have plenty of opportunities to kill him. This guy will only grow stronger. When the great cause takes control of the eastern district, there's no doubt this guy will be an obstacle and it will be difficult to kill him at that point. He's already this strong right now. I have to kill him when he's still just small, otherwise, it would be too late!]

Zalmo coldly fueled his killing intent and moved his powered suit to the building where Akira ran into. He turned up his radar to scan the inside of the building. With this, he would quickly know if Akira was still inside or not. While he was doing so, he was also thinking of his next move, but his radar suddenly showed new signals approaching his location.

Zalmo focused his attention toward that signal and made a troubled expression.

[If I'm not mistaken, that one is Tiol. He's inside the building while carrying someone… And the signals chasing them would be Katsuya and his team… They told me not to hurt both Tiol and Katsuya, I guess this means that I can't just destroy the building…]

Tiol went inside the building. Katsuya and his team stopped their vehicle nearby and followed suit. After that, the radar showed that a fight broke inside the building.

[I guess I'll just watch for the time being, they didn't tell me to help them and both of them are hostile to Akira. It would be fine if they managed to kill him. At least, they should be able to shave off some of his energy, then I can just make my move after that.]

Zalmo thought so and changed the setting of his radar to observe the situation inside that building.

After Tiol fell from the top of the APC, he was run over by Katsuya's team's vehicles. His head was crushed, his limbs were scattered, he was turned into a mere incorrigible lump of meat soaked in green liquid.

That was when a greedy crocodile appeared and approached him. When that monster was about to close its mouth to take a chomp at Tiol, its head was suddenly chomped off instead.

There was a line in Tiol's arm that reached until his shoulder. It opened up and turned into a vicious mouth filled with sharp teeth. That mouth then latched onto the greedy crocodile, took a bite off its head, and swallowed it. Tiol then continued his meal as if he was the greedy one.

The greedy crocodile flailed haphazardly, all of the guns growing out of its body were shooting out uncontrollably. But that did not faze Tiol at all, he just continued eating the greedy crocodile as if nothing happened. His mouth grew bigger with every bite, increasing its capacity with each bite. It would not take that long for Tiol to completely consume the crocodile's head and eventually kill it.

Even when Tiol was lying on the ground, the green liquid inside him was still continuously repairing his body. When more of his body had regenerated, a source of food arrived, just in time to help him regenerate his missing limbs. Thanks to that, Tiol was able to quickly heal his body.

When he had finished eating the greedy crocodile, his body regrew from a lump of meat into something more humanoid. Tiol then pushed himself up. The scaly metallic parts of the greedy crocodile had turned into something that looked like a powered suit enveloping his body. His arm that had now turned into a mouth finally closed its jaw and slowly returned back to being a normal arm.

Even after he had regained his body, Tiol was still in a daze.

"…Uhhh, what I was doing again…?"

He tilted his head and thought for a while, he then started muttering something with a rather apathetic expression.

"Ahh, that's right. I have to kill that guy! Where is that guy again?"

He then looked around as if he was still confused. There was no one else but him in the area, he could only see rubble and wreckage wherever he looked around. There was no sign of any other living being. But Tiol suddenly stopped looking around and focused his gaze in a particular direction.

"There he is."

Tiol immediately started running toward his target. His gaze was fixed on Katsuya. However, Katsuya was far away, behind numerous obstacles. It

should have been impossible for Tiol to spot him from where he was. Even if he was using a powerful information-gathering device, it would still be difficult to spot Katsuya due to the distance between them. But even so, Tiol was still able to charge straight at Katsuya, without a shred of hesitation.

Tiol had stepped in too deep and there was no way back for him now.

When Katsuya lost Akira, his team regrouped inside one of the abandoned buildings and barricaded themselves there. They took shifts to rest while maintaining a certain level of readiness so they could react the moment something happened. The team was working in perfect sync with no opening at all.

At this moment, Katsuya was thinking about what to do next. He understood that the original plan for the large scale expedition was already completely ruined. But that did not mean he could just return back empty-handed.

As a squad under Drankam, they could not simply retreat just because something unexpected happened. Furthermore, he still had that promise to fulfill. He thought, [It might be impossible to fully understand what is going on, but we should at least bring back some valuable information with us.]

If it was the past Katsuya, he would have immediately made his decision. He would have put his life on the line to let the rest of his team withdraw. He would not mind the danger and would perform reckless actions without a single second of hesitation.

Although his actions would look reckless and thoughtless, the act of risking his own life for the sake of protecting his comrades caused them to feel admiration, gratitude, and a sense of affection toward Katsuya. It made them wish to stay beside him as if they were drawn by a figure of a shining hero.

The reason why Katsuya did not decide to withdraw yet, was because the synchronized information processing caused them to feel an unusually high level of unity within the team. Therefore, Katsuya had been unconsciously

manipulating the rest of the team. He was causing them to have the same thought as him. So, just like him, they too believe that the current situation did not pose much danger to them.

Katsuya did not notice that his low self-reflective valuing of his own life would drag the rest of his team into more danger. Moreover, there was no one around him who found it strange or questioned him. Everyone around Katsuya had been completely consumed by his local network.

Katsuya's team suddenly noticed an enemy. Katsuya who knew that without even needing anyone contacting him, immediately sprung into action. He quickly left the building and helped the rest of the team that was already engaging with that monster. They did not hold back anything as they kept spewing warheads and bullets toward that enemy.

The opponent was a monster that seemed to be a half-assimilated powered suit dispatched by city management. Its form was distorted beyond recognition. It was like an amalgamation of several powered suits with their heads and limbs torn off. A lump of multiple torsos stitched together with random arms and legs sticking out. Although it was obvious that it was made by assimilating powered suits, it did not even look close to a human. Its hand was gripping a huge cannon, which originally belonged to one of the powered suits.

The monster aimed its weapon at Katsuya's team and started shooting. Due to its haphazard shooting, some of the warheads landed nearby or even hit its own arms. But it completely ignored that fact and just kept on shooting enough warheads to plummet everything around him to smithereens.

But even so, Katsuya and his team fought back valiantly without showing any fear. They hid behind covers and peeked out from behind windows, some were shooting from behind their vehicles and used all the resources that they had without trying to conserve any ammo, they did that considering the amalgamation of powered suits should have a powerful forcefield protecting it.

But in contrast to their expectation, the monster was easily shot down. This was due to the fact that all the forcefield armours were not in their perfect

state. The defensive might of these suits relied on a forcefield. However, when the energy supply is rerouted or damaged, such a feature would no longer be usable. It rendered them almost useless for defense. And with the opponent's body unprotected by a forcefield, made it easy to shoot down. Which also means that Katsuya and his team were basically wasting expensive rounds. It took only a short time for all the bullets to riddle the monster into mush.

Although she was happy that it was not as hard as she had anticipated, Yumina thought that it was strange that the enemy was this weak.

"That was easy. Was it already badly wounded after fighting someone else…?"

The answer to her question immediately showed itself. It was Tiol. That monster was something that Tiol created using powered suits that he found on his way there. Tiol deliberately sent it ahead as a decoy. Katsuya's team had showered it with warheads and the explosions caused chaos, which temporarily lowered the accuracy of their information-gathering devices. Tiol used that opportunity to grab and kidnap some of Katsuya's men.

Yumina immediately reacted to attack Tiol. But it was already too late, Tiol was already too close, He quickly aimed at Yumina with his left arm, which had turned into a cannon and released a shot.

The explosion and the momentum blew Yumina away. But Tiol then kept running toward Yumina and quickly grabbed him before withdrawing from the area.

Katsuya, who knew what just happened without even sparing a glance, immediately shouted.

"Yumina!!"

Tiol glanced at Katsuya while still running away. But, that was all that he did before vanishing into the distance.

Katsuya was shocked, an opponent that he thought he had killed suddenly appeared and kidnapped one of his companions.

“We’re chasing after that monster!”

Katsuya went to chase after Tiol, and the rest of his team immediately followed suit.

When Tiol made that shot, he had adjusted his firepower to make sure that he would not kill Yumina. So, Yumina was still alive. But since she could not move, she was unable to fight back. She was only able to leave her fate to destiny. Tiol was running extremely fast thanks to his inhuman physical capability. While he ran, he haphazardly flailed her around. It was only thanks to luck that Yumina was still alive. Though, it was unfortunately for her to be the one that Tiol picked to kidnap.

It was difficult for Yumina to even say anything in that situation, so she just sent a glare toward Tiol. That was when she heard him mutter.

“…Uhhh, was this good enough…? Ah, right, I need to get them to fight each other next, huh.”

“W-what are you talking about…!?”

Tiol kept on muttering without paying any attention to Yumina while running. Yumina thought that there was something ominous about him, as she grimaced from the pain with a tint of confusion.

***

Elena, Sara, and Nelia forced their way through the encirclement. The area around them was already littered with mechanical monsters equipped with camouflaging technology. Due to the intense exchange, some of the flying monsters had their camouflaging layers stripped off. They looked like a group of ghosts fighting against Elena’s team.

Elena’s team focused more on firepower instead of quantity. But even so, they did not hesitate to use everything in their arsenal. Thanks to that, their

reserve ammo was running dangerously low. Sara's face started to get cloudy because of that, but she quickly replaced it with a bitter smile instead.

"Good grief. If not for them paying for all this ammo, we would have gone bankrupt again, you know!? Elena! How is it? Does it seem that we're going to make it?"

"The defensive point is just ahead! No need to hold back, just keep on shooting! Nelia, is it? Can you go faster?"

"I'm already going as fast as I can, ah! Just a question though, do you have confidence in your aim?"

"Yes, more or less."

"Then shoot over there."

Nelia used her only arm that she had left to point at something. Elena followed where her finger was pointing at and saw the defensive point a bit away from them. Elena immediately understood what Nelia was thinking and frowned.

"You can just say that it was a stray bullet or that you'd misfired."

Elena hesitated for a bit, but she then aimed his gun at the defensive point. She properly took aim at the wall, made her resolve, and pulled the trigger. The bullet stayed true to its nature as it flew straight and struck the wall. Right at that moment, alarms blared, alerting everyone in the defensive point that there was an enemy attack.

No matter what the reason, deliberately shooting at an ally posed a huge problem. But still, it was worth it. The defensive point immediately noticed Elena's team and the monsters that they were fighting. The people in the defensive point immediately readied themselves to join the battle. Tanks flowed out from behind the fortification, followed by a barrage from powered suits. The storm of warheads and bullets washed around Elena's team, eradicating the swarm of monsters.

Elena’s team immediately gained the upper hand. But even so, Elena heaved a huge sigh and scratched her head. Sara smiled wryly at him while Nelia gave an honest smile and said.

“It’s fine. If they find out, you can just tell them it was because I told you to do so. I’m sure it’ll somehow help you.”

“That better be the truth, alright? Wait, will you be alright if I do that though? Just what kind of special rights do you have that would keep you safe?”

“I have a superior who is used to handling these kinds of things. Though, I really can’t tell you the details.”

Elena was sending Nelia a doubtful look, but judging from how Nelia reacted to her stare, Elena decided to push that worry aside for now.

With those from the defensive point pushing the monsters back, Elena’s team could quickly reach the defensive point. The gate opened up and they went straight inside. The leader of the defensive point came together with a number of guards.

“You’re Hunters who came back from the expedition, right? There are a few things that I want to ask.”

Elena was still trying to pick her words when Nelia suddenly jumped in.

“If it’s possible, we want to explain the situation to the forward base, can you get any connection from here?”

“No. We are hit by the jamming too.”

“You should at least have a wired connection from here, right? Can’t you use that?”

“That’s an emergency line. We can’t let an outsider use it. Even if it’s a Hunter who was sent to investigate the situation. So tell me, what’s going on and then we’ll judge whether it’s important enough to pass it along.”

“I’m working under Yanagisawa. If you’re worried about my identity, you can go ahead and check my ID number. Sorry but I’m in a hurry here. Either give us the line or open the road, and make it quick.”

The guy then curiously checked Nelia’s identification code. He immediately frowned as he used his information terminal. He soon gave Nelia the right to use the wired line and told his men to stand down.

But one of his men found it vexing as he whispered to the leader.

“Is it okay not to arrest them? Although it is an emergency, there’s a chance that they would attack us instead, you know. Even if we don’t go as far as to arrest them, it might be a good idea to at least interrogate them here first…”

The leader only shook his head, it was obvious that he also did not find the situation amusing at all.

“No. Our job is to just report the situation to the higher-ups. As to the decision to raise a complaint, we can just leave it to them. If we do something that might interrupt Yanagisawa’s job, we’ll be the ones to get burned. So just keep your hands off of them.”

It was obvious that the leader was displeased, that was why his men decided not to pursue the subject any further. Seeing that, Elena and Sara found it rather surprising.

After Nelia finished sending the data over to the forward base, she then continued heading to the forward base together with Elena and Sara.

The higher-ups in the forward base were even more confused after they received data from Nelia. All the dispatched powered suits have been destroyed, there was an old-world automaton that was way stronger than anything that City Management could throw at it. The ensuing chaos between the Hunters due to the powerful jamming, the flying monsters with camouflaging capability that were surrounding the expedition area. All of these were outside of their expectation, creating confusion between the commanding officers.

In the midst of the confusion, the command line had basically been paralyzed. Inabe felt that the trophy that was in his reach had suddenly vanished into the thin air. But he immediately regained his composure, reassessed the situation, and smiled wryly as he thought.

[So this is it, huh… But, I still have things to do…]

Inabe's expression immediately turned resolute as he ordered.

"Call the city defense squad and ask them for reinforcement!! Also, send all the Hunters that we've been keeping in reserve!! Quickly!!"

Everyone in the room looked at Inabe. Some of the men who could not recover from the confusion inadvertently rebuked.

"Y-You don't have the right to do that!! You're going way out of line!!"

"In the first place, this happened because of your plan!! How are you going to take responsibility for this mess!?"

Inabe gave out a thick intimidating aura that silenced any dissent from the officers.

"You can do that as much as you want later! With that many monsters heading here, we have to act now! Otherwise, the battle will reach the city! If you have any complaints about my rights and authorities, then you should send that piece of data to those who have said rights as soon as possible!! Now, get a move on!!"

Inabe's stern reply calmed the room. But then, that silence was immediately shattered. Although it was only temporary, the line of commands, that had been recovered to some extent, immediately started to move. Shouts of orders started to echo from each of their respective stations.

Inabe lightly sighed, the person next to Inabe smiled bitterly and said to him.

"Good work there."

“Thanks. You too… Well, you should also think carefully about how are you going to act here. This is how far my status can take me.”

“There are things that you won’t know unless you reach the end first. Moreover, this is not the time to think about it, I’ll think about it later if I really have to.”

“…I see.”

Seeing how the person next to him seemed to be content with his current situation, Inabe also smiled lightly at him. After that, another question came up in his mind.

“By the way, where is Yanagisawa? I don’t see him anywhere.”

“I don’t see him either. Or more like, I’m pretty sure no one has seen him today.”

“That guy is one of the commanders. He should be staying here. Good grief, just where the heck is he in this situation?”

As an officer from City Management, Inabe felt a level of loyalty toward the city. Although he did all kinds of things, both at the front and behind the scene in order to be victorious in the power struggle and reach a higher position, he did all of that for the sake of the city’s development.

But that was not the case for Yanagisawa. Although Yanagisawa was a highly competent person, he thought of City Management as nothing but a stepping stone in order for him to reach his own goals. Thus, Inabe saw him as a dangerous person. One of the reasons why Inabe was trying so hard to climb up the ladder, was simply to protect the city so that Yanagisawa would not crush it when stepping over it.

[Seriously… To think I wished for that guy to be here for a second. Haa… I subconsciously bet that he could solve these issues in no time… I guess I’ve become senile…]

Inabe could not completely shut out the conflicting feeling inside his chest as a bitter smile found its way to his face.

After she reached the forward base, Nelia immediately went to fix and replace some of her body parts. Since she was originally dispatched in a powered suit, some of her current body's specifications were lower than usual. So, this time, she went and exchanged for battle oriented body parts. Since the connectors were all standardized, it did not take long to finish the replacement.

"One good thing about using a standardized cyborg body is how easy it is to replace the broken parts. Everything works perfectly."

Nelia said as she moved her limbs to check the condition of her new body. The technician who heard her comment could not hide his surprise.

"They work perfectly? Are you sure? Those parts are the type that are controlled directly through the brain, right? Although standardized connectors are set to reduce the awkwardness from a new control module, it is impossible to fully erase that feeling. That awkwardness might even affect your fighting capability, you know?"

"It's fine, I'll do the adjustments myself."

"I-is that so?"

Although they were battle oriented body parts, they were still generalized body parts. It was as if Nelia replaced everything under her neck with someone else's body. Normally, a complete adjustment was necessary to match her unique settings. Those who were not used to their new bodies often ended up being unable to move for some time. Thus, the technician could not help but feel amazed. Especially since Nelia was able to do all the adjustments by herself, to the point that she was already battle-ready.

"I'm pretty sure I had placed an order for more equipment though, are they here yet?"

“There’s no one here who has enough privilege to transport those equipment here. Those guys in the warehouse won’t just let us have them if it’s only us. We also can’t bring you the extra powered suit you requested. Even if you bring out Yanagisawa’s name, we can’t just dispatch it without a formal order. Each one of them has been preassigned for the reinforcements after all. Though, you can go ahead and negotiate with the higher-ups if you insist on having them.”

“Is that so? I just need to go there then, right?”

Nelia put on a bodysuit over her naked cyborg body while thinking of how to group up with her friends.

As for Elena and Sara, after they parted with Nelia, they parked their vehicle in the parking lot and took a rest. They at least had finished resupplying and had done simple maintenance before taking a break.

They were worried about Akira but were still hesitant. They wondered if they should go deeper into the ruins once again. After all, they were only barely able to get out of that dangerous place after using everything that they had without holding back. It was obvious that the difficulty of that place was already out of their league. In the worst-case scenario, even if they went to help Akira, they might end up dragging him down instead.

Akira himself did tell them to head back ahead of him. They were still uncertain whether to just wait in the forward base or to join the reinforcement. But then again, forcing themselves to go might only serve to slow Akira down. Their conflicting emotions were in full view as they looked at each other. They somehow understood what the other was thinking just by looking at the other’s expression and this prevented both of them from making a decision.

That was when a call from Nelia reached them. Elena frowned and picked it up.

“It’s me. Are you free right now?”

“…Nelia-san, was it? Do you need anything?”

“I’m thinking of going to help Akira, will you come with me? That is if you girls are free.”

Elena and Sara looked at each other. They did not expect Nelia to make such a suggestion.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 220, The battle inside the building

Index

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After Akira ran inside the building, he started first by checking all his equipment. He pulled out energy packs and ammos from inside a small-sized rucksack and replenished his rifles, augmented suit, and defensive coat.

As he was about to put a new magazine into his rifle, he noticed that the SSB rifle he used to release a point-blank barrage at Zalmo was no longer usable. He stared at it and sighed. He thought of discarding it but chose to keep it since carrying it around still provided some level of intimidation.

After he was done, he peeked inside the rucksack. He no longer had that much ammo left. He had left most of his reserve ammo back in the APC. The reserves were to the point that he had once thought he had overdone it, but remembering that now, he could not help but smile bitterly.

“I guess the end is close, huh…. What should I do…”

Akira glanced outside the building, staring at the traces of his earlier exchange with Zalmo.

[…There are no shots being fired and the place isn't shaking. It seems that for now, he has no wish to destroy the whole building. Did he withdraw? Although I was not able to destroy him, that should at least deal significant damage to his suit. It wouldn't be strange if he had decided to withdraw for now. Or is it that he's waiting to ambush me the moment I exit this building? I no longer have my APC nor my bike, I can only walk now. He just needs to find me and shoot me from afar to kill me. Is he searching for me by scanning the building from the outside?]

After a lot of thinking, Akira decided to barricade himself inside the building. It was already impossible for him to head back to the temporary forward base all by himself. If Elena and Sara were able to safely reach the base and inform them what happened, city management might send some help later. In that case, he could just wait until the reinforcement arrives. There was also his connection with Alpha, which might return if he waited long enough. Akira placed some of his hope in that possibility as he completely believed that there was no way he could return back alive on his own.

And when he found a small room which was perfect to barricade himself in, he then decided to take a small nap. He knew fully well that it was suicidal to do so, but he still closed his eyes. He took a small dose of medicine and relaxed his mind. He told himself, [just take a shallow nap. I need to recover from my fatigue as much as possible. I just need to make sure not to go into a deep slumber.]

Both his brain and body were severely exhausted. He would not be able to keep going on unless he took a nap even if it was only for a bit. If he lost his consciousness there, he was confident that he would not be able to wake up.

[Back then in alleys of the slums, I might get killed every time I went to sleep. But I am still alive even now. It's not simply because of luck. It's because I always wake up whenever something happens. That's why I've survived. I need to remember the me from back then… I know… I can do it…]

Akira did not even bother praying that he would wake up. Rather than rely on luck, he dug through his past and placed his bet on still being able to emulate his past self as he let himself drift off to sleep.

Inside a pure white room, Alpha frowned and said.

“Nope, I don’t have any connection, how about you?”

Another Alpha shook her head.

“Same here. I even tried to take a detour but it still doesn’t work. Unlike you, my subject even has a local network. If only one of the nodes gets out from the area, I should be able to use a close-range connection to avoid the jamming, but as expected, it’s too far to do that from Kugamayama city. Either that or my connection has been closed.”

“She has really done it now.”

One Alpha seemed extremely vexed, while the other only felt it as inconvenient.

“What is the chance of yours returning back alive?”

“Pretty low. Although, to be honest, since I can’t get any information regarding the corresponding region, it’s nothing more than my guess. But without my support, the possibility of survival is unrealistically minuscule, how about yours?”

“Mine is working in a team. As long as they decide to quickly withdraw and not to conserve their resources, there’s a good chance that he would return back alive. But of course, the damage to the whole team’s fighting power will be pretty severe. It would be impossible to bring him to the commander’s room after this mess. Considering the damage in the unit, there will be a need to significantly readjust the plan.”

“That should be at least better than having to restart from zero like me though. In my case, I would need to start by looking for a candidate, you

know? Good grief, and when I got the specialized connection working well too, it's now all gone to the drain."

The other Alpha raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"By any chance, does that mean you have some kind of attachment to your subject?"

"I was just getting very irritated since everything just went to waste although it was going well up until now. Is it really that strange?"

The vexed Alpha did not give a straightforward reply there. The other Alpha noticed that too, but she did not point it out.

"I didn't expect a mere AI manager like her to have the flexibility to use a hole in the regulations like that. It was a mistake looking down on her, believing that she would be satisfied by looking after only that uninhabited city. I should keep this in mind for my next trial."

"…That's a good point. For now, let's keep looking for a way to get past the jamming."

"You're right."

Both Alphas showed just how different they handled their respective subjects as they started to try to contact their subjects again.

When Akira woke up, he immediately scanned his surroundings using the muzzle of his rifle by pure reflex. After checking that there were no hostile forces nearby, he finally sighed in relief.

"…Alright. I'm still alive…"

Although he lowered his concentration in order to rest his mind, he also kept the minimum level necessary so as to not get ambushed. That exquisite balance of concentration was what helped him survive in slum city. It was vital to help him stay alive with his malnourished body through such a harsh life. Thanks to that, although it was also a part thanks to the medicine that he took beforehand, he was able to recover a large chunk of his stamina

with his nap. His strained mind had also mostly recovered. At the very least, he had recovered from the fatigue caused by executing that reckless point blank barrage against Zalmo.

But as expected, Akira did not have the courage to take another nap. Moreover, he was certain that there was a reason as to why he woke up. He woke up his whole body, which was connected to his augmented suit and gathered his focus toward reading from his sensitivity maxed information gathering device. As soon as he did that, he could see something behind the noise in the signals and looked down with a grim face.

“They’re fighting? That’s quite a lot of them. Did another Hunter run to this building? Is he fighting against the monsters inside right now?”

Akira’s frown suddenly turned grimmer.

“They’re heading this way! Dammit!”

They might not be hostile. But Akira did not think they were friendly either. It only took a split second for Akira to make his decision as he put up his guard and moved away from that signal. However, he was not just simply running away, he was looking for an advantageous position if he needed to cross bullets with them.

However, he noticed something and knitted his eyebrows.

[It’s not just a coincidence!! They’re actually chasing after me!]

If he kept running, it was only a matter of time before he reached the top floor and had nowhere else to run. Naturally, he still had the choice of leaving the building or going up to the roof, but that was not a good idea considering Zalmo might attack him. This meant that he only had one option left, Akira stopped running and immediately readied himself to encounter the enemies.

He took his position near a door as he aimed his rifle deep into the hallway, waiting for the first signal to show itself. Considering that those signals might not be hostile and they might be Hunters who were running away

from monsters, looking for help, Akira told himself not to start shooting the moment he saw something. However, that would mean that it might slow down his reaction. Thus, he prepared his stance to take evasive maneuvers in case it was necessary.

What came next was not surprising to Akira at all. He was fully expecting that his hope would be betrayed; for the signal to be hostile instead of friendly. This allowed him to jump into the room next to him the moment he saw that they were indeed hostile. A moment later, a hail of bullets passed through where Akira was just a moment ago from deep inside the hallway. The moment those bullets hit something, they immediately exploded into fiery balls that were way too powerful to be used in an enclosed space. The shock wave caused total chaos in the area as a powerful gust of wind blew through the hallways.

“Knew it!”

Akira inadvertently shouted as he aimed his rifle toward the door that was significantly widened from the explosion.

Through the smoke, Tiol suddenly jumped out with Yumina in his hand while going straight to another door into the room.

This time Akira did not hesitate at all. He traced Tiol’s movement with his SSB rifle and released a barrage of anti-forcefield bullets. Akira sprayed his bullets over a wider area to suppress Tiol’s movement.

The bullets that did not hit Tiol though and went ahead to hit the wall. Rather than chipping away the wall, the bullets went straight, piercing through the walls. Instead of evading the bullets, Tiol focused more on forcing his way through the bullet storm. After a few seconds of showering bullets, Tiol forced his way to another door in that room.

Akira could not help but to raise his eyebrows in surprise.

[The hell!? That was not enough to kill that guy!? Forcefield armour would have to be as strong as those powered suit’s to be able to withstand those bullets, you know?!]

Akira knew that the answer to his question was included in that question itself. Tiol had found a wrecked powered suit and devoured it. Thus assimilating some of its power for himself. Of course, it was impossible to keep up that level of defensive output all the time, but it was still possible to do it for a short span of time.

[But still, he even used his body to protect the person he was carrying, just what is he planning?]

Before he could make any guesses, the answer showed itself. It was Katsuya and his team, who were chasing after Tiol.

The girls who just arrived there immediately stood on the other side of the holes-riddled wall and started shooting. Akira reacted by quickly using his SSB rifle to shoot back at them.

The girls with the impeccable teamwork against Akira with his super-human strength. The exchange happened only for a few seconds. Although both of them did the same thing, the damages on both sides were completely different.

The main factor which decided the victor was their equipment. The total cost of both sides' equipment was equal, but unlike Akira who was alone, the same amount of funds was distributed between so many people. This meant that each girl only had a limited amount of resources for their equipment. Even with the bulk discount included, the difference in quality of their equipment was obvious.

Katsuya as the team leader, Airi and Yumina as the second-in-command. All of them had better equipment due to their position and experience in battle. The three of them were pretty strong in battle as well. But the rest of the team only received standard equipment. As expected, compared to Akira who splurged 1 billion Aurum for his equipment, the difference in their performance and quality was not small.

Akira only received light injuries. Moreover, he also jumped out of the firing lines as he shot back at them. The bullets that still hit him were only

able to shave some of the energy from the energy pack powering Akira's defensive coat.

In contrast to that, all the girls caught up in the exchange were dead. The anti-forcefield bullets, which were even able to destroy a powered suit easily, pierced through the girls' forcefield armour like slicing butter. Those bullets were even able to drill holes through the resilient old-world walls, so the fragile human body did not pose as much resistance against them. Some of the girls even had their heads blown off, some had their bodies and limbs torn. Body parts that were torn off and freely flying in the air were met by more bullets and were shredded to even smaller pieces. The blood and flesh immediately painted the walls red as the destroyed equipment rolled over the pool of blood, which was made up of their original body.

Akira inadvertently frowned.

[Dammit! That was an overkill! I ended up wasting powerful bullets on them when I didn't have much left!!]

Akira was lamenting at the fact that he had gotten closer to having no bullets left. When that happens, he would have to fight with his blade. Naturally, that was his main concern and he did not show any worry nor remorse to the horrific scene in front of him.

Akira then noticed people coming from the hallway and the other directions as well, he immediately understood why Tiol was protecting the Hunter that he was carrying. Once he understood, Akira quickly started chasing after Tiol.

[So basically, these guys might stop chasing him if that Hunter gets killed, right!? That's so diligent of him!]

Akira's guess was correct. Moreover, despite knowing Akira's exact location, Tiol was running around instead of going straight at him. He was keeping a distance from Katsuya's team while trying to bait Katsuya's team into surrounding Akira.

The girls started to encircle Akira. Although the jamming prevented them from contacting each other, they were able to share thoughts through the local network, thus allowing them to maintain their teamwork even when they were spread apart. As if fueled by Katsuya's hatred, who knew that some of his team members were killed, the other girls immediately aimed their rifles into the room and started shooting.

Even when they were encircling the room and filled the room with a storm of bullets, none of their members got hit. They actually fired so much that it would not be strange if some of them hit their own team members. But with their combined teamwork and the high accuracy information-gathering devices that they were using, none of them hit each other.

The room was completely enveloped in a storm of bullets leaving no place to take cover.

But Akira was able to somehow manage to get away from the storm. It was an excellent decision on his part when he decided to chase after Tiol the moment he noticed that there were more enemies coming. He then set the forcefield armour of his coat to maximum output.

After he escaped the room, Akira kept on running while shooting homing grenades behind him. Although those grenades were not to be used in a closed space, judging from the damage caused by Tiol's cannons, the building should be able to withstand the explosions. So, it should work to temporarily stop the opponents from chasing after him as well.

The homing grenades sacrificed speed for its homing capability. It changed course on turns before randomly spreading around. Of course, the girls tried to shoot those down, but some of the grenades survived and exploded. The explosions then triggered the other grenades to explode as well, thus swallowing the girls inside the hellscape of fire and blood.

Akira felt some shaking and wind blowing from behind, he felt that he might have been too naive and the explosion might engulf him as well. But he pushed that thought to the back of his mind as he kept chasing after Tiol.

Katsuya, who arrived a moment later, could not stop himself from trembling. The crumbling down ceiling came crashing down on the girls. While some of them were blown from the explosion and collided hard into the walls before they started dropping down dead as well. Compared to that, the barrage from the anti-forcefield bullets mostly caused light wounds since some did not get hit directly. Thus, most of them were still alive even after facing that barrage. The damage from the explosions was on the whole other level compared to that.

“That bastard!!”

Katsuya’s scream echoed as he immediately went chasing after Akira. The other girls quickly followed behind Katsuya. It did not matter how bad the situation was, as long as it did not break Katsuya’s spirit, his team would still be up for more battles.

Sounds of feet kicking the floor reverberated through the building, Tiol who was still on the run, Akira who was chasing after Tiol, and finally, Katsuya and his team were chasing Akira.

Even in the middle of that chase, most exchanges happened between Katsuya’s team and Akira. Tiol himself was not trying to finish either of them off. Thus, Tiol only occasionally shot back at them to suppress their movement. His main focus was only to keep on running.

Akira found it weird.

[Why is that guy not fighting back? Is he only baiting Katsuya’s team to keep on fighting against me? No, if that’s really the case, he would have run away after Katsuya’s team started fighting against me… So why?]

Akira’s line of thinking was cut short by a barrage of bullets from Katsuya’s team, so he immediately shelved that question and started shooting back.

[I guess it’s meaningless to think about that for now, huh!? Dammit! These guys just won’t leave me alone! They won’t give up as long as their friend is still alive, huh?! Goddammit! These guys are too damn loyal!]

In the middle of the fight, a few grenades came flying toward Akira, who quickly noticed them and shot them down. The explosions set off smoke which quickly filled the area and lowered the sensitivity of the information-gathering devices.

[Jamming smokes, huh!? I bet they already had their information-gathering devices adjusted to cancel the effect from this jamming smoke! Which means that they would still be able to detect me!]

Akira quickly unsheathed his blade and cut open a nearby wall. The glowing blade cut out a square block of the wall in a blink of an eye. He then pushed the wall and ran straight in, in order to escape the jamming smoke's effect.

But on the other side of the wall, a group of girls had been lying in wait for him. They opened fire the moment Akira showed himself. The bullets could shred the wall that he was using as a cover into pieces. The moment he lost his cover, he would have to face those bullets with his body.

But Akira already expected them. As time was compressed into a slow crawl, as the wall that he just cut was about to fall, he kicked it and sent it flying towards those girls and jumping forward. He used the wall that he had sent flying as a shield as he quickly closed the distance between them. The moment they were inside his range, Akira quickly swung his blade to cut the wall in front of him as well as the girls behind it.

The wall crashed into the girls, sending the bodies that were cut horizontally into two flying as they spread entrails and organs all over the place.

But even so, that did not kill them right away. If they could receive immediate treatment, it would still be considered as only heavy injuries. Although the girls that were still flying in the air were cut clean into two, they still had the opportunity to aim their rifles at Akira before they lost consciousness. Without the support of their lower half, they could not take a proper stance for shooting, but even so, they were still able to point their muzzles at him.

As the room was filled with flying bullets, Akira did his best to evade them while trying to get away from that place. After he opened some distance from Katsuya's team, Akira smiled bitterly and mumbled.

"I knew they would be there. My horrendous intuition was correct. For some reason, I've been really good when it comes to sensing something bad…"

The ability to sense something bad allowed him to survive the alley of slum city. This intuition only accurately predicted the ominous. Ever since he received Alpha's support, that part of him had been growing dull. But the ability to accurately predict and evade the deadly bullets with a hair-breadth margin, the skill to detect dangers, standing right in front of the death door once again sharpened his intuition to its original state.

Moreover, his ability to sense danger was also maintained by mock battles that he had with Erio and the other children. The coordination support system that they used during their mock battles were based on the data from Katsuya's team. Because of that, their movement was similar to Katsuya's team.

Of course, there were still differences including the battleground that they were using. But even so, the habits and the tendencies were properly conserved. Their skill was slowly getting better from the multiple mock battles and since Erio was willing to push his body to its utmost limit, their collective movement was even more similar to Katsuya's team. Akira, who has always been facing that whole group all by himself, already learned how to deal with the Katsuya's team.

By observing the opponent's movements and teamwork, Akira was able to predict their line of thought and maneuvers. This unexplainable feeling that he had as if he knew what was going on was registered in Akira's mind as intuition.

Even after that, Akira and Katsuya's team had small clashes. Normally, the difference in their fighting strength was so big that it would have been hopeless. However, inside a building like the one they were in, it was easy to break the group into smaller ones, allowing Akira to deal with them one

by one. Furthermore, the mock battles that Akira had were similar to training, especially against Katsuya’s team. It could be said that Akira was fully used to fighting against Katsuya’s team. Those facts closed the gap between them and slightly tilted the battle in Akira’s favour.

The girls fell one by one, their number was slowly but surely reduced. Eventually, it had become difficult for the team to protect the leader, Katsuya, and it had become difficult to keep on chasing Akira. Akira also noticed that the pressure from the other side was getting weaker, so he quickly spread homing grenades to stop Katsuya’s team on their tracks before quickly breaking through the encirclement. Although he could hear echoes of Katsuya’s scream from behind, it did not bother Akira at all.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 221, Negotiation For The Prerequisite For Cooperation

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Yumina somehow managed to stay awake. But that was all that she could do. She had no method to better her situation. Her augmented suit was turned off and her body was close to its limit. Since there was literally nothing that she could do, she was at Tiol's mercy.

But even so, in the unlikely case that her chance came, she kept her eyes on Tiol. She tried to talk to him or provoke him, trying to get any information from his reaction. But Tiol completely ignored her. The only thing that Yumina could do in this situation was to make guesses, but even the result from that was no good.

[…Just who is he? Wait, is he a person in the first place? He might be that humanoid monster from back then. But in that case, then why is he kidnapping me and making our team fight that guy? I'm basically just a bait, he doesn't even use me as a hostage to threaten Katsuya, I just don't understand him at all…]

As a Hunter, Yumina had fully resolved herself to getting killed in action, but the prospect of death still scared her just like any other normal human being. But this time, she was more confused than scared.

That was when Akira appeared. When Akira left Katsuya's team because he had no wish to fight them, Tiol made sure to keep his distance relatively close so that Akira would be able to easily reach him. Moreover, he kept his speed low to make sure that he would not kill Yumina by mistake. Because of that, Akira was easily able to reach him after he got away from Katsuya's team.

Akira quickly aimed his rifle at Tiol, and again, Tiol turned around to cover Yumina. Akira who noticed that immediately shifted his aim to slow Tiol down instead of killing him which immediately closed the distance between them. Once Tiol was in range, Akira pulled out his blade and swung the glowing blade in one fluid motion.

Tiol himself had no wish to get killed just to protect Yumina. So he jumped away to evade the incoming blade. But in the end, he failed to notice what Akira was actually aiming for.

The blade that reached Tiol released a blinding flash of light from the forcefield armour energy conversion, and with that, Tiol lost one of his arms. Akira did not cut down the arm that was turned into a cannon, he cut the arm that was carrying Yumina. Akira's aim from the start was to take Yumina away from Tiol.

Of course, Akira did not stop there. Tiol made another long jump in order to evade the second slash and this time, he completely escaped the blade's reach. However, the flowing blade suddenly released a sharp wave of light that slashed open Tiol's flesh. Although it was far from enough to fully slice through his body, it was enough to leave an open wound.

While Tiol was jumping away, he once again aimed his cannon at Akira. The released warhead went straight towards Akira, but Akira released a slash that sliced apart the warhead. The moment the slash hit the warhead, it exploded and enveloped the area with smoke.

When the smoke had subsided, Tiol was already nowhere to be found. Akira relaxed his body and lightly sighed.

[He got away. Or did he go look for another bait? Either way, it seems that he's no longer around.]

Akira's gaze then shifted to the floor where Yumina was lying down there as if she was dead.

[…And this girl… Is still alive, hmm? She's still conscious as well.]

Akira hesitated for a bit, but he eventually decided to pick Yumina up with one arm and woke her up. After that, Akira then forced medicines into Yumina's mouth. Yumina frowned the moment she felt something known was getting forced into her mouth.

"It's medicine. Just shut up and swallow it, that is if you don't want me to force it down your throat."

Even Yumina did not expect that at all. But it did not seem that Akira was lying at all, but even if he did, she had no means to fight back. After she swallowed it, she could feel that the medicine was immediately taking effect, she had recovered enough to stand up on her own. She still had a confused look plastered on her face as she sent a dubious look at Akira.

"…What are you trying to do here? Why did you save me?"

"Negotiation."

"Negotiation?"

That answer only confused Yumina even more. Akira then continued with a serious expression.

"First of all, I'll let you know this. I bet you're thinking that I'm working with that thing that kidnapped you, but that's a misunderstanding. That guy is trying to make us fight each other. Secondly, I have no wish to fight any of you. You guys were the ones who came at me first so I was just trying to

protect myself. If you guys had left me alone, I won't have attacked any of you. As a matter of fact, I don't mind if we form a temporary alliance."

"Do you really think that I would beli-"

"Shut up!"

Akira prodded the muzzle of his rifle at Yumina. The muzzle of his rifle was telling Yumina that he would just kill her if she kept running her mouth. Yumina's face turned stern as she immediately closed her mouth.

After a short silence, Akira had confirmed Yumina's cooperation for the time being and eventually lowered his rifle before continuing.

"Well, in the first place, I don't believe for a second that you trust me. Naturally, not to the point that you would work with me. But that's also true for me to all of you. That's why I want to negotiate about what we can compromise on. I want us to stop fighting and I want to keep our distance. I want you to go back and tell that to your leader. Though, I bet that you'll ask for proof or whatnot. In that case, tell them these two things. First, the fact that you are able to return back alive. I've even cut that guy to save you, you know? That should serve enough as proof that I have no wish to fight against your team. Also, one more thing, I'll kill that guy and I'll do it alone. If your leader agrees, I'll go fight that guy along the roof. You and your team should either stay on the lower floor of the building or just exit the building altogether. If they have come here in order to save you, then I have already helped them accomplish their goal. But if saving you is their secondary objective and their main goal is to kill me, then I have no other choice, I don't want to die after all."

Akira's next sentence was filled with killing intent.

"I'll kill every single one of you."

Even Yumina could not help but shudder in front of such an intense killing intent. But she could not give a straight answer due to her position as well as her feelings.

“…Even if I accept your offer, do you think that the others would accept it too?”

“They really want to save you. Even going so far as to lose some of their people. So I expect that your voice holds some weight to it. Of course, that is if they only came here to save you.”

“…And if I refuse?”

“My deal with you extends until the part where you try to convince them. As to whether they would accept a truce or not, it’s another thing. A separate deal between me and all of you. So, if you refuse to convince them, I will just kill you here. Returning you back alive to them would only mean giving them more fighting power after all. And if your group refuses the truce, just like I said before, I’ll kill every single one of you. If the team can’t reach an agreement on a conclusion, then tell those who don’t want to die, to retreat.”

Akira once again raised his rifle and aimed it at Yumina.

“So, what’s your answer? Sorry but I don’t have time to waste. If you’re not sure, the more time you take to decide, the more I’ll question whether you’ll properly do your part of the deal. I won’t even give you a count down or anything.”

Akira stared at Yumina with his rifle still pointing at her. Akira’s eyes were obviously indicating that if Yumina only said yes to save herself, he would kill her here and now.

Yumina finally made her decision.

“…Okay.”

Akira still stared at Yumina, he still had not lowered his rifle. Although he believed that she was not lying, he still had not lowered his rifle. Akira then signalled into the hallway with his chin.

“It would be a pain in the neck if you get kidnapped again. I’ll at least escort you for a bit, so go ahead and walk in front of me. The moment you look back, I’ll take it as you changing your mind and I’ll immediately shoot you down.”

Yumina raised both of her hands and started walking. Akira followed behind her. After confirming that Yumina was no longer able to see him at all, Akira finally lowered his rifle and heaved a big sigh.

[Now then, I wonder how this will turn out. If Alpha was here, she would have been able to tell if this girl was telling the truth or not. I alone can’t tell at all, after all.]

Naturally, it was only given that he did not believe that girl. To be more precise, he did not believe that Yumina believed him. That line of thought only caused Akira to be suspicious of Yumina and that suspicion only grew with time. As such, his thoughts leaned more and more toward something ominous.

But even so, his line of thinking had actually gotten better ever since he started working as a Hunter. The fact that Akira even thought of making a deal with Yumina was proof of that.

[It would be best if they just pretended to be listening and accepted the deal, then wait for me to kill Tiol or the other way around before going to kill whoever left after the fight. But I wonder just how far things will go as I hope it will.]

Before Akira placed his bet in his rather optimistic guess, he knitted his eyebrows as he focused more on the most realistic possibility.

Tiol was wandering inside the building when he suddenly thought.

“Uhh, what am I doing again…?”

Although he tried his best to remember the plan that he had while mumbling like a delirious person, no precise idea came up in his mind. He just kept on wandering inside the building without any precise destination.

In the middle of that, he did not encounter Katsuya's team, but he did encounter the dead bodies of Katsuya's team. The corpses of the dead girls that Akira had killed just a moment ago were scattered on the ground together with their rifles and their other equipment.

Tiol stared at that scene and tilted his head.

"Renewing weapons…? No? But I guess I'll need them, huh…"

He picked a rifle and pulled the trigger, but for some reason the trigger was frozen in place. It was the security feature where only those who had the authority to use the rifle could use it. If someone tried to forcefully pull down the trigger using the might of an augmented suit, it would only break the trigger.

"Useless… What should I do…?"

After a short pause, Tiol suddenly raised his eyebrows as if he just realized something that he should have realized from the start.

"Ah, right. I can just eat them."

Tiol threw away the rifle. His arm then cracked open, showing a huge mouth with a distorted shape. He used that arm to start consuming the dead corpses scattered on the ground. Although he had a lot of aversion to eating machines when he was turned into a monster, he did not have much of an issue with corpses.

Tiol's current body has indeed been modified by Yatsubayashi. It has increased fighting ability, and it was a remote body that was controlled from afar. Because of that, when Tiol's personality was installed, it no longer had any open memory left.

When Tiol stepped too close to the system's side. The system went to override a part of his personality, causing him to lose a large chunk of his consciousness. In that state of a severely weakened sense of self, his consciousness was entirely focused on keeping his mind straight. Thus, Tiol could not even remember his own name at all.

Tiol continued his meal. As the number of corpses in the ground was approaching zero, more and more arms grew out from the shoulder with the severed arm. The growing arms were extremely long and obviously not of a human's. Each arm had multiple elbows. These arms then grabbed the rifles on the ground. Confirming that the holder was its master's hands, the rifles unlocked their safety lock.

When Tiol had finished his meal, there was no longer any corpse left on the ground, only a pool of thick blood. Only functional rifles were picked up by Tiol's new arms, those that were already broken were eaten together with the augmented suits, used as materials for Tiol's weapons.

"Not enough, huh?"

Tiol immediately started running again since he had had a new goal, after all, there were still dead corpses of the girls that Akira had killed.

__*__*__*__

Katsuya carefully proceeded into the building with his team as they immediately noticed Yumina's signal slowly approaching them. Although they were surprised, they still immediately went toward where the signal came from, eventually, they reached a long hallway and saw Yumina slowly walking toward them from the other end of the hallway.

"Yumina!"

Katsuya smiled and inadvertently raised his voice. But the moment he noticed Akira was behind Yumina with his rifle ready, Katsuya's expression immediately turned stern.

Katsuya quickly aimed his rifle at Akira who was behind Yumina and Akira did the same as well. But as expected, no one released a shot. After Yumina got close enough to Katsuya, Akira quickly retreated and vanished into the darkness, so Katsuya went straight running to Yumina.

"Yuimina! Are you okay!?"

Judging from Katsuya's reaction there, Yumina thought that it was safe to look back and turn around. Akira was nowhere to be seen, but she somehow felt that Akira was still somewhere as she knitted her brows.

"I'm still alive, but I'm not fully okay either. I'm sorry but I don't think I can help in a fight anymore"

"Don't worry, it's fine as long as you're okay"

Airi still had her focus towards where Akira came from as she opened her mouth.

"Katsuya, we should retreat. It's reckless to continue with Yumina in this state."

"Y-you're right. Let's go back, Yumina, do you need a shoulder?"

"I'm fine, I can walk on my own."

"Alright, I'll guard the rear. Airi, you take the front. Everyone, let's carefully head back."

Everyone started moving, spurred by Katsuya's order. Yumina once again turned around with a conflicted expression before sighing and went to follow the rest of the team. The fatigue and the worry of how to bring up her deal with Akira to the team caused her to make a pained expression.

Katsuya noticed that and sympathized with her, but at the same time, he also smiled in relief.

[As expected, she's not in a good shape at all. But she's safe and I'm really glad.]

After that, Katsuya's team returned to a large hall on the first floor where they barricaded themselves. Those who were still uninjured were assigned to stand watch and ensure the safety of the area while the injured were recovering. They unloaded their vehicles and prepared themselves for combat.

While the rest of the team were doing that, Katsuya as the team leader, Yumina and Airi as the vice-captains, discussed the next plan of action. After hearing Akira's offer from Yumina, Katsuya frowned and asked.

"…Are you telling me to trust him?"

"At least, I don't think that he was lying. He did save me and did not use me as a hostage after all."

"Even if you say so… He already killed so many of our team, you know."

"That's true, but still…"

Yumina could not tell Katsuya to believe Akira. But Katsuya also could not say that it was an empty offer. Both of them had mixed feelings regarding the matter, they could not force the matter to any direction. It did not seem that they would be able to make a decision anytime soon.

As for Airi, she had nothing to complain about, no matter what might happen as long as Katsuya made the decision. Her only thought was that she would simply follow Katsuya's order. But even so, she thought that it was a bad idea to waste time like this, so she interjected.

"Either way, for now, letting both of them battle it out is beneficial to us. It's better to use the time to watch how the situation will evolve while recovering the team members. I want to bring them back even if they're already dead. Moreover, we might still be able to save some of them and the situation might change while we're doing so, there's no need to make a decision right away."

Some of Katsuya's team members were already placed under emergency life support system. Some, but not all, due to the restraint on their budget, priority and what not.

Many were so badly wounded that they would have died if they were common people.

Although they were not cyborgs, who could live with only their heads like Nelia, their lives were still somehow maintained.

With Airi's reminder that there might still be members who were still alive and savable, Katsuya could not refuse her advice.

"You're right, okay then, I'll take some people up with me. Airi and Yumina, both of you stay here."

But Yumina stopped Katsuya.

"No, you stay here. Airi, I'm sorry but you should go instead, I won't force you if you don't want to. And please return back immediately if things get dangerous. So, please."

"Okay, Yumina and Katsuya should stay here then."

"I'm counting on you."

Katsuya was rather shocked as he was watching that exchange between Airi and Yumina which was so casual as if it was completely normal.

"Eh? I can't go too?"

"No. If you go, I bet you will get ahead of yourself like always, right? So no, you absolutely can't go."

"Yeah. You stay and take command from here."

"No no no, it'll be fine. Both of you really don't trust me, do you?"

"Absolutely!"

"That's correct!"

"Ah, I see."

Katsuya was pushed back by Yumina and Airi's pressure. He was completely overwhelmed as he nodded obediently at them.

Airi took some of the team members to search the inside of the building. Carrying back the injured team members that were left behind while retrieving those who were already killed.

Some of them might look dead when they were still savable, some might only look unconscious when actually already dead. There was also the problem of whether the emergency life support system could properly sustain their life. With so many uncertainties in place, Airi and her team mostly placed the bodies that they found in body bags. After that, they took the bags back before going out again.

In the middle of that, Airi found something strange. Although there was a pool of blood on the floor, the source of that blood was nowhere to be found.

[Judging from the amount of blood, this should be about four people's worth. But there are no bodies around. It's highly unlikely that the bodies moved somewhere on their own. Is the cleaning drone of this building still active, and it has cleaned away their bodies? Or is it that there is a flesh-eating monster inside the building? Although I don't know what happened, I know for sure that something has happened here…]

Airi frowned and said to the rest of the team.

"We'll be heading back. Stay alert."

Although the order ultimately lacked any extra explanation, the rest of the team understood the meaning behind her words thanks to the local network. They had the same thought, that they had to inform Katsuya and the others. That there might be other enemies inside the building besides Akira and Tiol, and that enemies might be lurking somewhere nearby even now. None of them doubted that possibility as they proceeded with caution with the assumption that the enemy was nearby.

Airi's team carefully retreated just like that and returned downstairs toward where the rest of the team was.

While in another location inside the building, Tiol was aiming at Airi and her team while they were in the midst of their work. As the multiple rifles on the end of his multiple arms were aimed at them, Tiol finally pulled the trigger.

But surprisingly enough, the trigger did not budge. The aiming devices recognized Airi and her team as friendly entities, thus the trigger was locked as a part of the anti-friendly-fire safety function.

“The trigger won’t move… Why…?”

Tiol tilted his head and lowered his rifles, thus the trigger locks were immediately disengaged.

“I can’t use these, huh… Then how about from over there…?”

Tiol processed his current situation. Attacking Airi’s team to get extra weapons. But his current rifles could not be used on them. So he changed his plan as he had no other target nearby other than Akira.

After Tiol’s brain reached that conclusion, he hesitated to make his decision. After all, it was not what he wanted. If he allowed the system to decide his course of action, he would attack Akira in order to get more weapons. However, his original goal was to kill Akira. Not to get more weapons. The course of action dictated by the system did not have the goal to kill Akira. As long as Akira no longer had his weapons, he might be left alone. How could Tiol possibly accept such an outcome?

“…That’s right, I have to kill that guy.”

Tio, who has been rather emotionless up until now, finally showed some emotions and it only grew stronger. His consciousness that had been leaning toward the system regained its sense of self and managed to wrestle control over his own mind from the system.

“If only I kill that guy!!!”

Now that Tiol had regained his sense of self, he quickly acted following his pure emotions. At the moment, his emotions were the only thing that was controlling his action. Without even realizing that he had lost a huge chunk of his individualism since the system had overwritten them, Tiol went straight towards Akira.

Tiol believed that everything would be alright as long as he could kill Akira. He believed that and devoted himself to turning that into reality despite the fact that he no longer remembered what he was ultimately pursuing by killing Akira.

__*__*__*__

While in a room close to the roof of the building, Akira let out a sigh. After reloading new magazines and energy packs into his equipment, the rucksack that Akira had been using to carry his supply reserve has been finally emptied. Seeing the now empty rucksack, Akira just smiled bitterly and threw it away.

According to the deal with Yumina, Akira would kill Tiol. But he had no wish to look for Tiol. So he just waited there while taking a rest in a room.

[It would have been great if they kill each other, but as I thought, that’s highly unlikely, huh.]

Akira had a bad feeling that even after he distanced himself from Katsuya’s team to avoid fighting them, Tiol would still come to him instead of Katsuya’s team. That was why he did not place any hope in that possibility.

The reason why Akira told Yumina that he would be the one to go to kill Tiol was simply to avoid having to fight Katsuya’s team while he was engaging with Tiol. Regardless of whether he was able to make a deal with Katsuya’s team or not, he had decided to kill Tiol right from the start.

Akira already understood that Tiol did not come to this building simply by pure coincidence, Tiol came to that building knowing for certain that Akira was there and he lured Katsuya’s team here. So unless Akira killed Tiol, Tiol would keep doing the same thing again and again. Thus, Akira

concluded that it would have been dangerous if he tried to escape the building in this kind of situation.

Akira's plan was to kill Tiol and then Katsuya's team after that. And if it was possible, he wanted to only kill Tiol this time and push back on killing Katsuya's team to another day. Although he hoped so, he knew that would not happen.

[They just come at me at the same time no matter what for some reason. I really hope they would come at me at different times.]

Normally, Alpha retrieved information from the information-gathering device via Akira. So although Akira had lost Alpha's support, information was still sent to him. He processed that unprocessed data, which was closer to a meaningless information noise, using his intuition, which had regained its original sharpness. In short, he was detecting hostile force only by relying on his intuition.

And that intuition was working perfectly fine. Akira looked downward, to where his opponent was.

"He's finally here…"

According to Akira's intuition, it was not a group of people. So it might be just Tiol alone. Akira frowned and made a rather conflicted expression, but he immediately raised his eyebrows and leapt away.

A moment later, a huge hole was blown open under the floor where Akira was standing just a moment ago and Tiol jumped out from that hole. He had opened a huge hole from the lower floor using his large cannon.

[Why the heck do you have to come from there?! Can't you at least use the stairs for God's sake!?]

Akira, who had opened up a large distance between himself and Tiol, quickly turned around and shot out a few homing grenades toward Tiol's direction using the SSB rifle. Seeing the grenades flying toward him, Tiol

used the multiple rifles that he had with his multiple arms to shoot them down, along with Akira.

Although Tiol was able to shoot down the grenades, Akira was too quick. The grenades were already too close to him. When the grenades exploded in an enclosed space, the shock wave from the explosions had nowhere to escape but to funnel outward, thus releasing a raging storm which rampaged on, as if trying to blow the whole room apart.

Although Akira had already evacuated from the room, he still could not escape the shock wave that leaked through the open door. He was blown by the wind which smacked his back straight into the wall.

The wall was bent outwards and cracks ran across it from the force of the collision, but Akira did not allow his blood filled vomit to spill out and just swallowed it back into his system. After all, that blood still contained the nanomachines from the medicines that he had consumed beforehand, which he could not afford to just vomit out in this situation.

The shock wave alone was that strong. So Tiol who took that at point-blank range should not be able to get out unscathed. As Akira hoped that would finish Tiol off, he fixed his gaze toward the direction of the hallway through the smoke and the dust.

[Did I do it?]

Right at the next moment, the answer showed itself. Akira quickly jumped sideways, evading the hail of bullets and warheads that destroyed the wall which was behind him a moment ago.

“The heck is his vitality?! Is he really as strong as a powered suit?! Give me a break already!”

Akira inadvertently grimaced and spit out complaints as he took cover in the hallway’s intersection.

Of course, as expected, Tiol did not get away from that explosion unscathed. As a matter of fact, that did deal quite a lot of damage to him.

His face was covered with blood and multiple arms were torn off. He had also lost one of his legs. His inner organ was in a mess from facing that explosion at such a close range.

But even so, his will to kill Akira did not waver at all. Tiol quickly used the arms that were still functioning to shoot down Akira. Although he ended up losing those arms as well from the kickback, he just ignored it and kept on shooting.

As Akira jumped out of his line of fire, the shooting ceased. Tiol then used the new uninjured arm that just grew out from his shoulder to pick up his arms that were torn off. He started to consume them, using the mouth on both his head and his arm. More arms grew out from his shoulder. Strange sounds came from inside his body as if gears were forced into places, it was the sound of his inner organ fixing itself. And a leg that looked more like a rifle replaced the one he had lost.

When he had finished fixing his injuries, Tiol immediately went to chase after Akira again.

Akira kept on running while always positioning himself strategically, maintaining an advantage against Tiol. He used corners in the hallway as a cover and quickly moved to the next point the moment he felt that his position was compromised.

While on the other hand, in contrast to that, Tiol was charging recklessly toward Akira. He ignored the bullets that were coming at him as if to say that they were nothing against his limitless restorative capability. He then released a storm of bullets and warheads that could even destroy the corner that Akira was using as a cover.

The fierce exchange between Akira and Tiol blew walls into smithereens, riddling them with holes, destroying the walls that separated rooms and the hallway. In the midst of battle, Akira, who was overwhelmed by Tiol’s firepower, had a grim look on his face and noticed something strange.

[That guy is fighting rather crudely this time. I don’t know what exactly happened but he has multiple arms now, is that the reason why? Is he too

preoccupied with controlling all the arms that he can't properly strategize?]

Tiol's movement right now was like a completely different person when Akira compared him to the person that he fought against on top of his APC with Katsuya. That courage to charge straight at the bullet barrage and that vitality to take that barrage face on were both splendid, but as a strategy, it was the worst kind of strategy.

This was the price that Tiol had paid from forcibly taking over the system's control. As the system could not coexist with the sense of self as Tiol, the system could not properly give support to him.

Akira realized that he could win by continuing to open fire at Tiol while maintaining his distance. However, that strategy would require him to have sufficient ammo.

[If I use everything here, will that be enough to kill him?]

Akira thought so for a split second but he immediately shot that idea down since there was another thing that he had to worry about later as he knitted his brows.

[No, I can't do that. Even if it's enough to kill him, I still have to fight those guys who will come after him. If I use all my ammo here, I would have to fight them without using my rifles. Or more like, in the first place, there's no guarantee that I can kill him even if I use all of my remaining ammo.]

At the moment, Akira was being pushed back by Tiol. He needed to find a way to turn the table around. So he banished that thought from his mind and focused on a way to turn the situation around.

An idea quickly popped up in his mind, but that idea only made Akira frown even more.

"…I guess I have no other choice but to do it, huh…"

Akira finally made his resolve.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 222, The Longed Hero

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Tiol came at Akira with even greater ferocity. Although Akira stopped shooting and the area suddenly fell into total silence, the thought that it might have been a trap did not even cross Tiol's mind. Straight-forward, fool-hardy and fiercely, Tiol charged straight toward Akira, crushing any obstacles along his way.

Akira waited in a rather large room. The ceiling in that room was cut into pieces and the resulting rubble pile was gathered in the center of the room. Akira had that pile behind him as he stood with the blade in his right hand and the SSB rifle in his left hand. He gathered all his focus to end the battle here.

The moment Tiol jumped into the room, he quickly fixed his gaze on Akira, who was hiding behind the pile of rubble. He used all the rifles he had to release a barrage of bullets. Moreover, Tiol did not just stop there. He still kept on running toward Akira without ceasing his barrage.

Tiol's firepower was over what the old-world ceiling and the wall could withstand. However, the pile of rubble served as a thicker version of the old-world walls. Even with his firepower, it was difficult for Tiol to

decimate that rubble in a short time. Though, it means that the rubble could survive for long either. If Akira made a mistake in his calculation, he would have to face the brunt of Tiol's barrage.

The bullets and warheads stripped off the multi-layered walls of rubble piece by piece, the thick rubble slowly grew thinner. The barrage eventually reached deep inside the rubble and it would not be that long before they reached Akira. Akira's information gathering device and intuition kept informing him of the current situation with minute precision. In order to lure Tiol as close as possible, Akira compressed his time perception and slowed down the flow of time. As time began to come to a crawl, he crushed the fear creeping into him.

[Not yet! I need to lure him as close as possible!!]

Tiol was already considerably close. The reason why Tiol did not even try to take a detour around the rubble was simply because his emotions were rampaging. Besides, the rubble was already close to being destroyed. There was no need to take a detour.

As the situation slowly reached the turning point, Akira quickly jumped into action.

[Now!!]

Akira gathered his focus, compressed his time perception even more, to its utmost limit, and used his willpower to distort reality. While at the same time, he used the full might of his augmented suit to kick the rubble in front of him. The pile of rubble, on the brink of collapse, was blown to pieces. The rubble went flying toward Tiol and Akira ran through it, towards Tiol.

Akira's focus was completely immersed in his battle against Tiol, He used the full power of his mind to wrestle and control reality. The color of the space between him and Tiol started to distort. Meanwhile, the space outside that area lost all its colours. As the flying rubbles exited the area between him and Tiol, they were moving towards a white space. They slowly vanished as if they were disintegrated.

As the world ran at such a frustratingly slow pace, Akira used the debris in front of him as a shield while closing his distance to Tiol. The non-stop barrage from Tiol destroyed the debris piece by piece, and the momentum that was imparted from the bullets pushed the debris back.

Right at the next moment, Akira sliced the debris in front of him using the blade in his right hand, releasing a glowing wave of light with the power to cut anything in its tracks. Although the wave hit Tiol's army of arms, it was not enough to completely cut them off.

Akira did not think that one slash just now had hurt Tiol. But at least, it completed its intended goal. With that attack, Tiol's arms were thrown into disarray. The aim of those rifles were thrown off. The goal of that slash was to open up a path towards Tiol, a path not in his line of fire.

Akira turned on the stick contact function to strengthen his foothold, preventing himself from losing balance as he used the full power of his enhanced physical strength to place an enormous force on his leg. This force was enough to even crush the floor beneath him. By Newton's third law, Akira's body accelerated straight ahead. He used the opening he forcefully made and quickly executed a powerful leap. Finally managing to close the distance between the two of them.

Akira and Tiol's eyes met. Both their pupils reflected their utmost desire to kill the other. Although the killing intent radiating from their eyes would have frozen any normal people, both sides did not falter at all. Even so, they reacted differently to the events that were unfolding, which became the factor that decided the victor and the loser.

Tiol's rage was enhanced and he allowed it to dictate his course of action. Tiol reacted with pure emotion as he sent his arms toward Akira like a madman. All those hands tried to ferociously reach for Akira. It was as if they were crazed animals. Because of that, they crashed into each other, which dulled their movement.

Up until this point, everything was as Akira had planned. He put all his concentration to increase the sharpness of his movement, increasing his agility to its utmost possible state.

That difference allowed Akira to take the first strike. He ducked and waved through the ravenous arms as he got even closer to Tiol, into the reach of melee weapons. He then thrust the SSB rifle on his left hand as hard as he could to the base of Tiol's multiple arms.

Tiol's newly grown arms still mostly consisted of raw flesh. It was without the protection of forcefield armour. Akira forced his rifle deep into that weak point, allowing the tip of his SSB rifle to reach Tiol's innards. The rifle was loaded with the rest of Akira's remaining homing grenades.

Akira thought of a way to kill Tiol in his current state. While at the same time, he also had to keep in mind that he needed to conserve some ammo for the upcoming fight as well. Using anti-forcefield ammos from afar did not seem to have much effect on Tiol. Even if Akira used that special ammunition to release a point-blank barrage, it would not do much. After all, Tiol had forcefield armour that was as strong as those of a powered suit's. Thus, Akria could not pin his hope on such action. As a matter of fact, said action would not be enough to defeat Zalmo in his powered suit.

Of course, he could use his blade when he was close, but Akira did not think that slicing Tiol in two would be enough to kill him. Tiol's body had changed so much in such a short span of time since Akira last saw him, and judging from the fact that he had the vitality and regenerative ability to brave a barrage without any fear, it was not strange for Akira to think that Tiol was a monster with immense vitality.

Moreover, if Tiol was really that giant monster that Akira killed the other day, he should have been dead after Akira blew his head off. There was also the fact that Tiol could easily reconnect the arms that Akira had cut off from him. So Akira did not think that slicing Tiol would be enough to kill him. However, Akira believed that he might be able to kill Tiol if he sliced him into small enough pieces. Unfortunately, during the course of swinging his blade, Akira was certain that Tiol would shoot back at him. At the end of that, Akira would be the first to die.

Against an opponent with such powerful regenerative ability, Akira needed to find a method to thoroughly kill him. At least, rendered him unable to attack back. He had to do it with one strike while also saving as much

ammo as possible. If he failed, he would be dead. Akira racked his brain and found an answer. He made his resolve, executed his plan, and won the gamble.

Akira pulled down the trigger of his SSB rifle, which he had set to automatic beforehand. The rifle quickly emptied its magazine and unloaded all the homing grenades inside Tiol's body. The grenades then exploded a moment later.

Tiol's consciousness suddenly returned.

[Wait? Now that I think about it, why am I fighting right now?]

The explosions coming from inside his body blew his body into pieces.

[Ah… That's right… Sheryl…]

In his last moment, Tiol remembered the person that he loved instead of his own name, and with that, his life had come to an end.

Akira's body was also thrown off together with pieces from Tiol's body. Although most of the force from the explosion was absorbed by Tiol's body, it still violently threw Akira's body away as well. His body was smacked to the floor. He then bounced and rolled until he hit the wall. Somehow, Akira managed to stay awake while going through all that.

Akira's head was assaulted by pain as he scanned his surroundings. Tiol's leftovers were scattered all over the place, so Akira thought that should have been enough to kill Tiol for good.

"If that guy is still alive even after this, then there's really nothing that can kill him… Just stay dead you bastard. If you're going to rise up again and come at me, at least do it some other time."

Akira had already disengaged his time perception compression and his reality-bending mind-power. As his senses returned to normal, he felt a strange sensation from his left arm. When he looked at his left arm, it was no longer there.

Although he increased his forcefield armour output to the maximum before he executed that attack, as expected, it was not enough to protect his left arm that was holding the rifle at the time. But the fact that he did not sustain any other major injury showed just how powerful his forcefield armour was.

The huge dose of medicine that Akira took immediately went to heal his lost arm. The bleeding immediately stopped. The pain immediately subsided and the exposed part was slowly covered in a strange liquid that came from the medicine.

“These expensive medicines are really worth the money…. Though, it’s not good enough to fully regrow my lost arm…”

There exist medicines that could heal lost limbs. Compared to that, it could be said that the medicine that Akira used were still considered cheap. As Akira thought so, he lightly chuckled and thought.

[One SSB rifle, the rest of my homing grenades, and an arm. That is the price that the current me has to pay to kill that guy, huh. To be honest, I want to believe that it is worth it, but… I guess I’m being too spoiled if I think that it would have been way easier if only I had Alpha’s support…]

Alpha’s support was gone and that was it. Akira said so to himself as he pushed that subject out of his mind and moved on to his next course of action.

[Just one SSB rifle left and a few bullets. If those guys attack me now, it might be a good idea to kill at least one person with my blade, that way they would be careful of me even after I run out of ammo… Wait, where’s my blade?!]

Akira finally noticed that he had let go of his blade when he was blown away as he flusteredly searched around him. When he spotted his blade lying not too far from him, he let go a sigh of relief as he pushed himself up, walked to his blade, and picked it up.

That was when Akira suddenly stopped and looked to the side with a grim face, Katsuya was standing there.

__*__*__*__

After hearing Airi's report, Katsuya frowned with worry. The possibility that there was another hostile entity roaming the building other than Akira and Tiol was too serious of a problem to him.

"Airi, sorry, it's not like I'm doubting you, but are you sure? There was no sign of any other hostile forces when we were chasing both of them, you know."

"It's true that it's just a guess. But it's true that the bodies and their equipment are all gone. If it's only the weapons, it might be because the other guys took them, but there is no need to take the bodies too, right?"

"I see… You have a point."

Katsuya's expression turned cloudy as he sighed. With this, it would be difficult to save those who were still savable, and there was still the matter of how to deal with Akira as well.

Seeing Katsuya who was at a loss, Yumina voiced her opinion with a pained expression.

"Katsuya, it might be shameless of me to say this since I'm the only one spared, but I'll say it straight, let's just leave them alone. We can just let them duke it out as we retreat from here."

"Are you saying that we should accept his offer?"

Katsuya took that opinion as a suggestion to run away and that did not sit well with him. But Yumina then shook her head and said with a pained expression.

"I don't care about that deal, I just don't want to let anyone else die… In the first place, you could have cut your losses had you just abandoned me. That's why this is also my fault. But he saved me and now I'm nothing

more than dead weight. You can go ahead and admonish me as much as you like but listen to me."

Katsuya could not say anything back. Normally, it was his duty to make such a difficult decision, but he could not make it.

It was true that he wanted to save Yumina. However, it was not the case that he was blinded by his emotions. He was not forced to save Yumina at the cost of his friends' lives. In fact, the thought of getting his other friends killed never crossed his mind.

But Yumina's harsh words gave him a wake-up call. Katsuya was shocked and hesitated because of a feeling that he did not fully understand was welling in him. Seeing that, Yumina thought that she just needed one more push to make him decide to retreat. So she brought up the safety of everyone and Katsuya himself in particular to give that last push.

"You want to save them, you don't want to abandon them. When you couldn't do that, when you couldn't make it, you believe you should at least avenge them. That's how it has been up till now. But, that vengeance, is it something that you should do no matter what even if it means that you'll get more of your friends killed?"

Yumina was implying that they should give up here and retreat. That thought reached deep into Katsuya's heart and brought a change of heart that Yumina did not expect.

"…Katsuya?"

Katsuya did not reply to Yumina's call at all, his expression turned pale as if all colour was drowned from his face.

Katsuya was at his core, a good person. He was nice enough to extend his hand even when a stranger that he had met for the first time asked for his help. Moreover, he had the talent and ability to save a lot of people. That was the case in the past.

That kind of person then formed a party to work as a Hunter. That kind of predisposition and his talent had more opportunities to stick out as he did his best trying to save the members of his team. Because of that, many of his friends were saved and grateful to him. Those that he saved, due to the feeling that Katsuya had been broadcasting unconsciously, also felt the wish to save others and that brought about a huge change in their hearts.

There were many who liked Katsuya. That feeling was conveyed as it was straight to Katsuya, which inflated Katsuya's wish to save everyone even more.

But it was not like all of them were unconditionally thankful to Katsuya. There were also people who were jealous, envious, covetous of Katsuya's skill and talent. Naturally, those feelings were also transferred to Katsuya as well. If the ones being saved were being awful, then the one who did the saving would feel unmotivated. That caused Katsuya to unconsciously prioritize who he saved. And once there was a bias, it only grew larger with time.

Soon, those that had started from positive feelings like gratefulness towards him, started to change. They started to think Katsuya would save them again next time, he would turn the table when the situation got dicey, he would lead the team to the victory. Being a Hunter meant that they might die anytime, but in order to get away from the fear of getting killed, in order to reach for splendid results, they pin their hopes on Katsuya, they leaned on him. They hoped that he would bring the fate that they longed for to them. That expectation, wish, and feelings were directed and sent to Katsuya.

Katsuya himself answered that expectation although unconsciously. After all, he was just that talented. It caused others to admire and applaud him even more, while also making them expect even more from him.

They wanted him to save even more people, to help even a slum city child when they asked for his help. He wanted other powerful people to recognize his strength. For his strength to be acknowledged even when faced with a situation where he was often mocked as a young Hunter. He wanted to

perform so amazingly that it would help those who mock him recognize his skill. He wanted other Hunters, organizations and companies to seek him.

Katsuya had affected a lot of people with his ability as someone who was connected to the old-world domain. But at the same time, many had expectations and wishes for him, which affected him even more than he affected them.

He wanted to exceed the expectations of those people who recognized his skill. That wish, that silent wish of his was difficult for him to admit since he never put it into words. Thus, it started to pile up on him.

And then, there were people on the battlefield that Katsuya could not save. Those who could not do anything except stare at the inevitable death creeping in. They all had a single loud and strong wish in their hearts. The wish to be saved. In contrast, there was also blame as to why he would not save them. Both thoughts were transmitted to Katsuya. It manifested as guilt inside him, which pushed him to get even stronger.

Both the dead and the survivors placed their expectations on Katsuya and those expectations further polished him. Because of that, Katsuya grew stronger with time. Just as he kept polishing himself to fulfil the ever-growing expectation, he had also become distorted.

With the local network up, the effect grew with the scale. On the other hand, with more and more people under his lead, there were also more casualties. As for Katsuya, the fact that they recognised themselves as being the same being, acting as one entity, was a saving grace for him. After all, if the situation was bad enough to mentally hurt him, it also allowed him to share that pain.

But just now, Yumina’s words caused Katsuya’s perception and belief to waver. Up until now, he recognized both himself and the rest of the team as one entity, but now, he differentiated it as him and the rest of his important team members. Right at that moment, his perception was completely crushed and he noticed something. His wish to save his friends even if it meant risking his own life caused him to drag his friends to a battlefield which resulted in even more casualties.

The voices of the dead once again resurfaced. They were begging to be saved, they were blaming him for not saving them, telling him to avenge them.

Katsuya was able to suppress them after discussing it with Sheryl. But at the moment when he was rejected by Sheryl, he did not have the means to repel these voices again.

Seeing Katsuya like that, Yumina completely forgot their current situation as she asked him.

“Katsuya!? what’s wrong?”

It immediately pulled Katsuya back to reality. His expression was filled with painful determination.

“…Yumina, Airi, both of you take the command and order everyone to retreat.”

“How about you?”

“…I’ll buy you some time. It would be bad if that hostile entity attacks us while we’re in the middle of preparing to retreat.”

“No!”

Airi grabbed Katsuya’s arm. Yumina looked at Katsuya with a pained expression as she shook her head.

Katsuya smiled wryly. After that, his face was filled with determination as he shouted.

“We’re retreating! Everyone, get moving!! I’ll leave the command to Yumina and Airi! Immediately retreat once you finish all preparation! There’s no need to carry those who are not here right now!! Quickly!!”

Katsuya only said that before he shrugged Airi’s hand and ran into the distance. Everyone was confused by that sudden order from Katsuya. It indicated something serious was about to happen. However, because

Katsuya was completely determined when he gave that order, although they were still confused, they started to prepare for a retreat.

The preparation was done in a hurry. Yumina and Airi were busy giving orders as the vice-captains. But in the middle of that, they could not help but to worry about Katsuya. Moreover, with Katsuya recognizing that they were no longer a single entity, the feeling of having to obey his order unconditionally was lessened.

Furthermore, Yumina and Airi were both against Katsuya's wish to let everyone get away except himself.

Airi was the first one to make her decision.

"…Yumina, can I leave the lead to you here?"

Yumina wanted to let Airi go and save Katsuya, but at the same time, she did not want to let Airi go just to get killed. Her conflicting feeling was fully reflected on her face and it took her some time before she could give a reply.

"…I won't let you go unless your only goal is to bring back Katsuya."

Airi desire to not lie to Yumina caused her to pause for a bit before she gave her reply.

"…I'll do my best."

The difference between Yumina and Airi if they caught up with Katsuya was that one would only be a dead weight while the other would not. Airi immediately went to chase after Katsuya while Yumina stayed behind.

Yumina exasperatedly hung her head.

[I've always thought that even if Katsuya chose someone, I want to at least stay beside him. But it seems that I'm no longer even able to stay beside him, huh…]

Airi made her resolve and started running.

[I’ve always been the one being helped! But this time, I’ll save him!!]

And that was when the road of the two girls who had always stayed beside Katsuya, forked.

Katsuya was at the top of his local network. The local network was built such that it was not the one who stood on top of the local network that had a great effect on the whole network. Those who were close to Katsuya also had a great effect on the rest of the network. Unfortunately, with the effect of Katsuya being greatly diminished in this situation, the ones who practically led the network were Yumina and Airi.

Those who were influenced by Yumina stayed behind while those who were influenced by Airi went to follow Airi.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 223, It’s Fine Either Way

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Akira immediately tensed up the moment he noticed Katsuya, but the shock prevented him from immediately shooting at him.

[Since when did he get there!? How did I not notice him there!? For how long was I open for an attack?! Why hasn’t he still attacked me yet!? Is he alone!? Where are the rest of his team!?]

Currently, Katsuya did not have enough reason to start a fight. At the moment, rather than hatred and animosity, his current feeling toward Akira was more of remorse and shame, and those feelings were not feelings that would cause him to open fire the moment he saw Akira.

There was an awkward silence between the two of them. After a short awkward pause, Katsuya was the first to open his mouth.

“…I’ve heard about your offer.”

“So, are you here to check if I really killed that guy? He’s dead, the flesh scattered around is his.”

“…I see. At least I’ll thank you for saving Yumina from him.”

Akira inadvertently raised his eyebrows. He expected that it would turn out well judging from this mood.

“We have a deal then?”

“Everyone is in the process of retreating. They’ll leave the building soon.”

Akira looked happy for a split second, thinking that his deal was accepted, but his expression immediately turned grim.

“I see, then what about you?”

Katsuya did not answer back, but that silence was enough of an answer for him. Akira heaved a heavy sigh and said.

“…Well, I did kill quite a lot of you. So I guess this is nothing surprising.”

Ominous killing intent slowly exuded from Akira. It was obvious that he was planning to strike the moment Katsuya showed an opening.

“Is it that you want to kill me no matter what? Or are you simply trying to buy more time for the rest of your team? If it’s the latter, don’t worry, I have no plan to attack you from behind, so you can turn back and go in peace. Or at least that’s what I want to say, but… As I thought, you won’t believe me, huh. The same for me too.”

“The same for you too? What do you mean?”

“Don’t worry, it’s nothing for you to worry about.”

Akira himself did not believe that Katsuya would just return back in peace after all that had happened. Now that Katsuya had seen him in a badly wounded state. Even if he retreated now, considering that wound, he could just bring the rest of his team later to safely kill Akira. And even if Katsuya was really thinking of going back in peace, considering how many people Akira had killed, the rest of the team would most likely convince him to go back to kill Akira later. Akira could not help but think so.

It was exactly because Katsuya was not a battle-crazed person like Nelia. He was still a normal human who would hesitate, doubt, get suspicious, and might have a change of heart like the other normal humans. This was exactly why Akira could not trust Katsuya and his team. Thus, he unconsciously thought that Katsuya and his team also could not trust Akira.

There were no more words to exchange, what was left was to exchange bullets. As both sides understood this, they immediately sprung to action almost at the same time.

Akira swung his blade that was hanging down up until now upward. The blade released a wave of light particles that cut through the ceiling and floor as it flew toward Katsuya.

Although Katsuya saw Akira swing his blade way outside its range, he understood that it would reach him based on Akira's intense killing intent. He immediately jumped to the side to evade the incoming wave while shooting at.

The moment Akira swung his blade, he immediately went charging toward Katsuya. Due to Katsuya shooting while he was in midair, he could not properly aim at Akira. This allowed Akira to slip through the incoming bullets. As the bullets went past him, he could hear the buzzing sound produced by them. He could feel the wind blow from the shock wave of the bullets. One of the bullets grazed his cheek as he continued closing the distance between them until Katsuya finally entered the reach of his blade.

Most who learned swordsmanship in the eastern district have the habit of using a vertical slash. After all, some opponents like cyborgs would not die even after a beheading or disembowelment and this was true too to an extent against opponents with a biological body. People with emergency life support systems planted on their heads could still survive even after a beheading. They then could use a wireless connection to their augmented suits. Thus, allowing them to continue to fight even if their heads and bodies were no longer physically connected. An ambush during an opening when one just executed a slash could prove to be fatal.

On the other hand, a vertical slash was fatal to most of the enemies, cyborgs or not. Even if the opponents were using long-range control devices, a vertical cut had a good chance to destroy their control devices on top of making it difficult for them to launch a counter-attack, even if the attack did not destroy their control devices. It was not like the current technique disregarded horizontal strikes, it just placed more emphasis on vertical strikes. This was also true for Akira. Although, the reason for this habit for him was because Alpha could easily fend him off every time he used a horizontal slash.

Akira raised his blade crudely telegraphing the kind of strike that he would use next, and as expected, he then swung the blade down. Katsuya jumped side to side to evade them as the blade released a wave of light in a zig-zag style.

Katsuya kept trying to shoot Akira even in that state. But Akira was able to skillfully evade the bullets. The stray bullets were flying all over the room with Akira and Katsuya at the centre of it.

Akira and Katsuya continued exchanging attack and defence, one with the swing of a blade while the other with bullets from a rifle. Although there was a huge gap between their skill, the quality of their equipment, and their level of fatigue both mentally and physically, made the fight continue evenly.

Akira intentionally released a light kick as he swung down to where Katsuya moved to evade his kick. Although the kick was not as powerful as the blade, it was still a kick with the enhanced strength of an augmented suit, receiving that kick would no doubt be dangerous.

But even so, Katsuya chose to receive that kick. The kick that was more of a stab instead of a smash, broke through his augmented suit’s defences and the damage propagated into his body. Katsuya gritted his teeth from the pain of the kick. He used the impact from that kick to jump back while shooting at Akira.

Akira did not even have the leeway to lower his leg after that kick. Thus, he used the contact stick function of his other leg to lean forward and lunged

straight toward Katsuya to chase after him. Countless bullets went past him, some hit his hair and some grazed his ears, but even so, he still pressed forward and eventually closed the distance to Katsuya, who was still in the air from the jump.

Once again Akira forced the fight into melee combat. While in the middle of exchanging blows, Akira thought regretfully about his failed attempt.

[Dammit! He's still okay even after receiving that kick! I guess that's just how good his augmented suit is, either that or my augmented suit has already lost most of its power, either way, I don't think I have a chance to win in an unarmed fight! I have to kill him while I still have the chance or this would turn ugly really fast!]

The blade itself was actively consuming energy in order to maintain its sharpness. Every time Akira swung it, it consumed energy and also placed more burden on it. If Akira misjudged the durability of the blade, he might end up destroying the blade. While on the other hand, he no longer had that much ammo left. Akira had to finish the fight while he still had both resources, otherwise, this would be the end for him.

In contrast to that, Katsuya was slowly gaining confidence. The powerful opponent in front of him did not give him the leeway to think about anything else, it helped Katsuya regain his scattered focus. Thus increasing the sharpness of his movement. The fight that was evenly matched up until now slightly tilted toward Katsuya's favour and the leeway originated from that caused Katsuya to notice something.

[He has stopped throwing that long-range slashes. Moreover, the cut on the floor is also shallower than before…]

Katsuya had been making big leaps to evade Akira's slashes up until now since it felt like the blade would still reach him even if he was outside the blade's physical reach.

Akira still tried to slash at Katsuya even when he did not have proper footing, thanks to that, his blade would oversweep and hit the floor repeatedly. But even so, due to its sharpness, the blade would be able to

smoothly cut through the floor. One thing that was obvious, was that the cut left on the floor should have been deeper if Akira was still releasing the sharp light wave.

[He should not have the leeway to stop doing that just because I'm evading his attacks! Which would mean that it's because he can't do that any longer!]

Katsuya jumped backwards to open up some distance between them. Akira lunged forward to close up that distance. The smile on Katsuya's face and the pressured look on Akira's face signalled the one who had the upper hand in their exchange.

As Katsuya was able to invest less effort in dodging, he could focus more on the offensive. In order to face that, Akira compressed his time perception even further. The burden caused a sharp stinging pain on his head, he kept himself from fainting while desperately looking for an opening to win the fight.

But even with all that effort, it did not make their battle even. Time was on Katsuya's side. Even if they were fighting evenly, Akira's augmented suit would run out of energy first before Katsuya's. Katsuya also knew that from Akira's expression. As Katsuya understood that he would win as long as he could defend himself, he chose not to try any risky move and focus more on his defence.

Unfortunately, that decision caused his downfall. Katsuya reacted to Akira's huge swing by jumping backwards, since he wasted to be sure to get away from the blade, he ended up jumping too high.

But that downward swing was actually an attack that Akira did in order to take away Katsuya's mobility. He had no plan to cut Katsuya with that swing at all, it was only bait to make Katsuya jump. Akira quickly changed the trajectory of his blade and returned it back to its sheath dangling on his side as he switched to his SSB rifle. Akira used that opening to switch his weapon, which would have been fatal in a normal situation.

Akira and Katsuya aimed their rifles at each other. But the odds were not even. Akira had his legs firmly on the ground while Katsuya was in the air. This would greatly affect their ability to evade bullets. Akira's gaze was clearly shining with his victory while Katsuya's expression was filled with defeat as both sides pulled down their trigger. This caused gunshots to echo through the room.

Katsuya was sure that the anti-forcefield bullets would deal fatal damage to him, but for some reason, he only got hit by a few bullets. Akira completely threw away his chance for victory as he leapt sideways to evade the barrage from Airi and the other girls.

Airi and the other girls arrive at a very critical moment as they immediately decide to attack Akira. Akira, who had no plan to end the fight with a mutual death, jumped away the moment he noticed Airi. He then continued running away from that place while shooting back in their general direction to keep them occupied.

Airi and the girls then ran to Katsuya who was just saved from certain death.

"Katsuya, are you okay?"

"A-Airi, why are you here…?"

"To bring you back."

Katsuya had a pained look on his face when Airi replied back almost instantly.

"I'm sure I've given you my order to retreat!"

Airi's gaze turned sharp.

"I have no need to listen to an order from a commander who left his own post. Yumina should have told you not to go alone too."

Katsuya understood that Airi and the other girls came there knowing fully that they might get killed. After all, even after all those fights with Akira,

which only resulted in piling up dead count on their side, they still were not able to kill him. Judging from that fact alone, there was no way they could kill Akira with only that many people.

[I ended up dragging others to a dangerous situation again…]

Katsuya's mind once again succumbed to self-loathing, but that was when Airi's harsh but gentle words reached him.

"We die together. If you don't want to get us killed, then you should survive as well."

Katsuya was shocked, he then faintly smiled.

"…Alright, let's head back then."

Katsuya remembered his past self as he pulled himself together. He was working extremely hard as a Hunter, taking on dangerous tasks, placing himself in great danger in order to save his friends.

"Good. Also, one more thing, I have no plans to cover for you if Yumina gives you a good smacking later."

"Uh oh, can you please do something about that?"

"No can do. I think it's time to let Yumina give you a good punching, but I'll at least help you tend to your wounds after that."

"I-I see."

Airi smiled lightly while Katsuya smiled bitterly at that light exchange. Now that Katsuya had regained his calm, he once again returned back to his team that he had left once before.

Katsuya changed gear and then said with a serious face.

"Now then, the problem is whether he would let us go back in peace or not."

“Is it unlikely?”

“…I don’t know, I completely rejected his offer after all. If he’s really planning to kill all of us just like he said, it would be bad to regroup with Yumina while that guy is still around. Airi, do you think Yumina and the rest would retreat ahead without waiting for us?”

“I told her that I’ll try to bring you back, so she might be waiting.”

“…I see. If only we’re not being jammed, we could have contacted them so that they could leave the moment we group up, but…”

Most of the injured Hunters who were not fit for battle were left behind in Yumina’s group. If Akira appeared, it would be a bloodbath.

“It can’t be helped then, sorry, but can you send someone ahead to Yumina’s group? We’ll retreat as fast as we can 5 minutes after that. Tell them to get themselves ready to leave the building immediately the moment we group up.”

Airi sent a glance to one of the girls, who quickly ran to Yumina’s group although she seemed to be a bit reluctant to leave. The rest of the team who stayed behind then prepared themselves to face Akira.

“…Please just give us 5 minutes, will you?”

Katsuya mumbled as if he was praying.

Not too far from where they were, Akira was watching their movement through his information-gathering device. For Akira, Katsuya and his team who were just standing there without making any moves looked as though they were waiting for more reinforcements. He could not help but think that Katsuya arrived first, ahead of the rest. Airi and the rest who arrived on the brink of time were only able to reach this place because they went to help Katsuya without thinking about their own safety. Meanwhile, the rest must have stayed behind in fear of Tiol and it was only a matter of time before they too would arrive there.

If Akira could kill the head of the team, the rest might disengage. That was his original plan and he had come close to achieving that, only to be foiled. Not to mention, he even ended up using his ammo. There was not enough left to get away from them. Akira could not help but lament the situation that he got himself into.

[What should I do? Is there anything that I can do to turn the table here?]

Katsuya himself was too much for Akira to handle alone, it would be too much for him if the reinforcements came too. He was already almost out of ammo. Although he tried to calmly think of a way to win the fight, his rational side kept telling him that he did not have any chance of victory.

In order to shake off that pessimistic voice from his mind, Akira shook his head.

[No, let's change how we look at this. Try to think that I have the upper hand at the moment. Depending on how I look at it, is it possible to interpret this situation as advantageous for me?]

Akira forced his mind to see his current situation with optimism. It caused him to accept things that were only in the realm of maybes and other convenient assumptions as he thought of his next move. Once he found a way to fix his situation, he also realized that it was a completely reckless move, but he could not think of anything else.

"…I guess I have no other choice…"

Akira renewed his resolve. Of course, he had the choice to just wait there until Katsuya's team left. But Akira did not even notice that option, and even if he did, he did not trust such an option.

Katsuya and his team were watching Akira through their information gathering devices without leaving the room that Akira had just left. Since they used their respective information gathering devices to work in tandem while scanning different areas, they were able to watch over a wide range. This was also one of the advantages of using their coordination support system augmented suit.

Normally, they would have sent the data to the support system, which would analyze the data for them and increase the accuracy of their data. This would allow them to better support each other. But under the current jamming, it was impossible to do that. Even so, it was still possible to do a limited one through the close-range communication line. Thanks to that, they were able to more or less track Akira's general position.

Katsuya was watching the hallway where Akira ran to. Akira was not further away down that hallway.

[That guy is not moving at all from there. It doesn't seem like he's planning to escape either. But he's not in a position to attack us anytime. Is he waiting to see if we're going to leave first? Or is it that he's afraid we're going to attack him the moment he tries to escape? It's not like I'm going to do that even if he does anyway, we'll just leave too, but…]

Katsuya smiled bitterly.

[…We don't trust each other, huh.]

They would have been able to save themselves from the unnecessary fight had they trusted each other. Although both sides knew that very well, they still could not trust the other side. That one point was the only thing that Katsuya and Akira completely agreed on and that fact really made Katsuya feel weird inside.

Akira's signal suddenly showed some movements. Katsuya and the rest of the team immediately tensed up as they aimed their rifles at the hallway.

Akira leapt out from his hiding spot, Katsuya was able to follow him with his eyes, but there was something strange. Akira had his SSB rifle in his hand, but he was not holding it by its handle.

Akira then threw his SSB rifle at Katsuya as hard as he could. The rifle flew and spun in the air. A moment later, it suddenly started spewing bullets indiscriminately.

The SSB rifle could even be used as an autonomous mounted weapon. It could be fixed on the extra arm commonly found on a wasteland's bike and set to shoot automatically. Because of that, the rifle had many extra settings to help with that method of usage.

Akira set his SSB rifle to empty its magazine after 10 seconds. He then waited just before that 10 seconds ran out before he jumped out and threw his rifle at Katsuya. The rifle spun and flew almost horizontally as it released a raging bullet storm that did not differentiate between foe or ally. The kickback from the shots threw the barrel off its original trajectory, it was near impossible to predict where it would shoot next.

Although the SSB rifle spewed out countless bullets, none of them were properly aimed. Katsuya and his team had the equipment to take some shots, but not multiple consecutive hits. It was doubly true for the team members who did not have equipment as good as Katsuya's. So instead of focusing on Akira, Katsuya inadvertently gave orders to prioritize protecting the rest of the team.

While on the other hand, Akira completely ignored the flying bullets, he recklessly pushed through the barrage to close the distance between them. He set the output of his defensive coat to maximum and compressed his time perception to almost stop time. Je only had his eyes on the small space in between him and Katsuya as he forced his way forward.

Although the SSB rifle was only shooting for a few seconds, it felt like an eternity from Akira's point of view. After it emptied its magazine, it just went forward with its momentum before crashing into the wall. Katsuya and his team quickly peeked out to shoot at Akira, but before they could pull the triggers, Akira threw his other SSB rifle.

Inside the slow-moving world, Akira had his eyes fixed on Katsuya.

[You'll prioritize the safety of your friends now that they're here!]

The SSB rifle flew toward Katsuya's team, although it was already broken, Katsuya and his team had no means to know that.

[In this situation, you'll have no other choice but tell your men to stay back and put yourself in the front!]

Akira pulled his blade out of his sheath with the full power of his augmented suit.

[And to save your men, you'll focus on shooting down the rifle first instead of me!]

That assumption came from Akira's experience fighting Erio's team. There was no guarantee that Katsuya would also do the same as well, but even so, Akira decided to put down everything on this bet.

If it was purely about talent, Katsuya had the upper hand. If they were equally talented, Akira, who had received training from Alpha and had better equipment, would have demolished Katsuya.

Although Katsuya was very talented and had sharpened said talent, he was receiving support without even knowing it. This caused him to have a rather crooked evaluation of himself. But in this situation where the jamming caused him to lose that support, the sharpness of his movements was reduced, his ability to fight was greatly diminished.

But even so, the ongoing battle up until now together with his talent quickly made an adjustment to that. Katsuya who had slowly regained his original strength quickly shot down the SSB rifle and shifted his aim toward Akira, who had been exuding a killing intent that gave him chills. Katsuya was only able to fight back that sense of terror due to his strong conviction to protect his friends.

Right before the deciding moment, Akira and Katsuya exchanged gazes. Then in the next second, blood was scattered all over the floor, the winner and the loser had been decided. A body cleaved clean into two fell on the ground.

Katsuya was killed on the spot.

Katsuya moved exactly just like what Akira had predicted. He pulled his men back, stepped forward, and shot down the SSB rifle. If he had changed priority even for a bit, if he had chosen to shoot Akira first, or to abandon his men, Akira would have been the one to die there.

Akira understood that even if Katsuya was dead, it did not mean the fight was over. His next move would be to use the chaos to get away from that place or to clean up the rest of his enemies. But neither happened, the moment Katsuya was killed, suddenly, Akira felt multiple presences appearing out of nowhere around him.

[What!? There should have been no one else here!?]

Akira reflexively swung his blade. But even with the full power of his swing, it was easily stopped. Akira froze in shock as well as because his opponent held his blade.

“Long time no see!”

Tsubaki had Akira’s blade in between her middle finger and index finger as she threw a gentle smile at him.

＿*＿*＿*＿

A small transport aircraft went over Kuzusuhara ruin. It came from the forward base and was now already deep inside the expedition area. It was flying slightly above the tall buildings in the area. It then opened both the left and the right sides of its chassis.

Sara and Shikarabe stood in front of the left door while Valga and Yamanobe were on the right one. They had large rifles in their hands, aimed below them. Meanwhile, Elena was sending them the location of the enemies that she had detected using her information gathering device.

Sara used that information to fix her aim. Deafening explosions followed suit. A rain of warheads obliterated the monsters below. Shikarabe and the rest were also doing the same. They made short work of the monsters that were trying to attack the transport aircraft.

Shikarabe once again showed his amazement at the rifle that he was lent.

“Elena. How the heck did you get this thing? It’s not some kind of illegal weapon, right?”

The guns and the aircraft were both from Nelia. The aircraft was the one parked in the forward base, while the guns came from Yanagisawa’s team’s reserve armoury. Since she was given permission, Nelia went and lent them to Elena’s team.

“I’m sure I did give you a short explanation about it before. I don’t know anything more than what I’ve already said. If you don’t feel safe using it, you can use your own instead.”

Shikarabe still had some questions in mind but decided to stop questioning. Judging from Elena’s tone, it seemed that Elena had the exact same questions as he did. However, she also decided to just leave it unanswered. Thus, Shikarabe saved those questions for later and focused on the monsters in front of him.

Valga smiled wryly and spoke, full of suspicion.

“Shikarabe. Rather than where these guns come from, I think it’s more important to question who the heck is that girl.”

Valga was looking at Nelia, who was running in the air as if she had some kind of footing under her feet. She danced between the flying monsters, slicing them one by one with blades on both of her hands. The monsters that she sliced obeyed gravity and fell down to the ground. It was a surreal scene.

“I know that theoretically, you can use forcefield armour fixed under you to make footing while you’re in the air, but I’ve never seen someone actually do that before. She’s not right in the head, normally you’ll never go that far no matter how much you prefer close-range weapons, right?”

Yamanobe, who was looking at the same thing, also smiled wryly and said.

“I heard that those who specialize in close-range combat are crazy. Well, as far as I can see, those words must be true. She’s a beauty, but I would rather have her at least 3 meters away from me at all times. Well, if it’s about her face, cyborgs can have any kind of face they want. Although they have different preferences, most of them have beautiful faces.”

Right about then, Nelia finished taking care of the monsters around the aircraft, so she returned back to the aircraft and stood beside Yamanobe. She then smiled at him and said.

“Just to let you know, this is actually my original face.”

“I-I see.”

Nelia was only stating a fact. She had no intention to scare Yamanobe. Nonetheless, he could not help but frown, his back drenched with cold sweat.

Nelia continued walking through the aircraft, exchanged the energy packs in her blades, and was about to jump out from the other side of the aircraft when Sara stopped her.

“By the way, although it might be too late to ask this, and we’re grateful that you lent us these powerful weapons as well as this aircraft, why would you go that far to save Akira? Are you that close?”

“Hm? It’s simply because there’s no unused powered suit left.”

Nelia only said so and jumped out of the aircraft. Sara could not understand that reply at all.

“Elena, what does that mean?”

“No idea.”

Elena had the same confused look as Sara.

If there was still an unused powered suit back in the forward base, Nelia would have opted to use that instead. But due to Inabe’s order, all the

powered suits were distributed to the powered suit squads that were dispatched with the reinforcement Hunters to take control of the ensuing chaos in the expedition area.

Not to mention, at the moment, Nelia prioritized Akira more than the powered suit squad where she was originally assigned to.

Shikarabe then said.

“So then, Elena, where is Akira? You still can’t find him? We don’t know his exact location, right? I hope we’re not just flying around randomly hoping to spot him somewhere.”

“We’ll be doing this until that girl decides to go back. It’s not like we don’t have any hints at all. I’m using the powerful radar installed on this aircraft to look for the signal from the information terminal lent to Akira. It can use both long-range and short-range communication frequency. But, if only this jamming could go away… I would be able to quickly detect his whereabouts…”

Elena knitted her eyebrows. Seeing that, Shikarabe also frowned but for a completely different reason.

[So basically, we’ll keep going on as long as we have the ammo and enough energy for the aircraft, huh… I guess it was a mistake accepting this request.]

Due to his job from Drankam, Shikarabe could not join the expedition, but he was still posted as a reserve Hunter at the base. Although he was then sent to join the reinforcement team under City Management, he felt like he would be sent to save Katsuya. He was going to be tasked to save a boy who made rash decisions like it was his bread and butter. Thus, he did not like that post at all.

That was when Elena called him, Shikarabe did not think much and quickly accepted the request to save Akira. He wanted to get out there without waiting for the rest of the reinforcement team, he rather chose to go to look for Akira instead of helping take control of the expedition area. That was

why he did not expect to be loaned such powerful guns and a transport aircraft. The furthest he could have expected was this mysterious girl that accompanied him.

Shikarabe already heard from Elena and Sara about the invisible flying drones encircling the expedition area. They allowed people in but not out. However, either it was because the flying aircraft was out of their expectation or that they did not allow anyone who once got out to get in again, those monsters immediately attacked the aircraft when they got close.

He had no wish to blame it on Elena or anything, but it still caught him off-guard. The battles that would have been difficult without the powerful guns continued on.

[…No matter how much I hate Katsuya, this isn't worth it at all! I guess it has started to cause trouble for me as well, huh?]

Shikarabe regretted his decision as he continued shooting at the incoming monsters.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 224, Life and Duty

Index

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Although he had lost one arm, Akira did swing his blade with all his might. But even so, it amounted to nothing to Tsubaki as she was able to stop it with no effort at all.

Akira was confused. After all, Tsubaki just suddenly appeared out of thin air. There was also the fear from how Tsubaki was able to stop his blade so effortlessly, the suspicion as to why she was here, and the fact that he ended up attacking someone connected to Alpha.

In contrast to his confusion, Tsubaki was smiling gently at him.

“Don’t worry, I have no wish to fight you. So please sheath your blade.”

Akira could not do that since he was still in the middle of a battle. He suddenly remembered about Airi and the rest of the girls and quickly glanced around to check on them. That was when he was surprised. Other than him, everyone was unconscious.

Akira’s confusion only got deeper as he looked back at Tsubaki. His guesses only served to give more questions than answers.

“…Why did you save me?”

“I didn’t do anything.”

“Then why are they unconscious?”

“Probably because their local network connection had been suddenly cut-off, which placed them under an immense burden. They relied too much on the head of the node to process data. Losing the head caused a big amount of data to stream to their individual nodes. I bet they couldn’t withstand the stream of data and fainted.”

Her answer only caused Akira to be even more confused as he did not understand what she mean at all. Nonetheless, Tsubaki smiled and continued.

“It wasn’t me, and that’s the most important part.”

Tsubaki let go of his blade. Akira was still not sure what the heck was going on but he sheathed his blade. If Tsubaki had no wish to fight him, it was a good thing for him as well, after all, he did not have any hope of winning in the first place. He understood at least that much.

“…So then, what do you need from me?”

“Just some small talk, if I may.”

Akira thought that it might be bad to have a conversation with Tsubaki without Alpha around. But at the same time, he also thought that it would be a bad idea to tell Tsubaki that he had lost connection to Alpha. So he deliberately stiffened his expression and gave a vague reply.

“Sorry but I’m busy right now, can you save it for later? Like, you know, with all these fighting around the area…”

“In that case, I can guarantee your safety while you’re having a conversation with me, how about that?”

“…Uhhh, I’m basically so close to fainting already. I don’t think I can talk for long…”

“Don’t worry, you can have this to help you.”

Tsubaki offered a capsule to Akira.

“This is?”

“Some kind of medicine.”

Akira could not help but frown.

“…Some kind? So it’s not exactly medicine?”

“It depends on your definition. For example, let’s say that there’s a treatment to fully grow a prosthetic arm, with the same effect the form of a pill, which applies to normal people with biological bodies. Will you still call that medicine? I guarantee that it has no bad side effects. Well, that was only an example though, this one won’t let you regrow your lost arm, my apologies.”

Akira hesitated, but he decided to take that capsule and swallow it. Medicines were indispensable especially when he was already in such a bad state. So he could not refuse it just because it was a suspicious capsule.

The moment Akira swallowed the capsule, he could feel it immediately take effect. The stinging pain in his head quickly retreated together with the pain all over his body. It also greatly helped him recover from his fatigue. The medicine was extremely effective as always, although he found that weird, he decided to put that question for later thinking that it might be normal for old-world medicines.

“This place is rather dirty for a friendly chat, shall we change location?”

Tsubaki just ignored the atrocities on the floor and started walking casually. Akira glanced at the unconscious girls and thought that it might be a good idea to finish them while he still had the chance. But since it did not seem

Tsubaki would wait for him to do that, he decided to just leave and followed Tsubaki with a conflicted face.

After Akira and Tsubaki left the place, someone else appeared in the room. That person went to what was left of Katsuya. As he stepped closer and closer, he left footprints on top of the pool of blood. The image on top of those footprints distorted and showed a cyborg in a black coat. That cyborg had just disengaged its optical camouflage.

The cyborg was a guy with a head completely made of metal. He peered at the dead Katsuya and lightly sighed.

“I guess even the emergency life support system will not save him. It might be too late but I guess I’ll still clean this up. In the worst-case scenario, it can at least be a good material to use.”

The guy took out his blade and cut Katsuya, who was already cut into two, horizontally into 4 different pieces.

Tsubaki took Akira to the roof of the building. There, she looked at what was going on around the building and said with a rather pained voice.

“It’s such an awful view, don’t you think? In the absence of the caretaker AI, or an AI that has decided to abandon their area, most of such areas end up like this. It is really lamentable. Do you still remember the area under my care? It’s like heaven compared to this place, isn’t it? That’s because I’m faithfully fulfilling my duties.”

“Ah, right, I see.”

Akira was a Hunter. Basically, he was on the side of those who helped to cause the awful state of the ruin. He ended up interpreting Tsubaki’s words as a roundabout way to sarcastically reproach him. The awkwardness caused him to only be able to give an equally awkward reply.

“So then, what do you want to talk about…?”

Akira tried to get into the main subject in order to run away from the awkwardness. Tsubaki just smiled and stared at Akira, who stiffened his expression and stared back at her while fighting back the urge to look away.

“To be perfectly honest with you, I didn’t expect you to be the one to survive. Ah, please don’t take this wrongly. I do evaluate you highly. Although, I can’t deny if you say that I don’t care whichever one survived. But please keep in mind that I didn’t do anything to make the result agree with my original prediction.”

“I-Is that so?”

“Yes.”

Although when Akira looked back at this exchange later, there would most likely be a lot of questions spawning from that statement. But he did not have the leeway to think about it at the moment. And since he did not ask anything, Tsubaki also did not explain anything further.

“…So then, let’s get into the main subject. I’ve come to you with an offer.”

“An offer?”

“Yes. As I mentioned before, working as a caretaker AI is not easy. So I want you to help me do exactly that. Of course, I’m planning to give any kind of payment that you want as long as it’s under my capability. Even the trash from my area should fetch a good sum of money outside. If you want it, I can also give you other things as well. I can also pay you with something else, for example, a right to live inside my area. If it’s possible, I want to get down into the details right now, would that be okay with you?”

“Wait just for a sec there!”

“Yes. Please calm down and ask me any questions you have. If it’s something that I can answer, I’ll gladly answer them for you. I promise I won’t lie. So calm down, and think carefully of what you can get from this deal.”

Akira looked so confused. He was overwhelmed by all the questions that suddenly popped out of his mind. And since Tsubaki just stood calmly and gracefully next to him, it made his expression stick out even more.

Akira managed to gather his focus and reminded himself to calm down. He repeatedly took deep breaths. Every time his mind wandered to pursue one of the questions that popped up in his mind, he shook his head to get his mind back on track. He did so while still controlling his breathing. Thanks to that, he was able to force himself to calm down.

Akira heaved a final big sigh. With this, he had fully returned back to his usual self. After using his calm mind to think of his options, Akira then gave his answer.

“I’m sorry but I have to refuse.”

Tsubaki raised her eyebrows.

“May I ask why?”

“Well, as I said before, I’m in the middle of a request from Alpha, so I would have to get your offer through Alpha first. And actually, at the moment, I can’t connect to Alpha at all. So it’s rather problematic for me if you bring me that offer right now, you see…”

“I already know that you can’t connect to Alpha. That’s exactly why I approached you with my offer right now so that she won’t get in the way.”

“Like I said, I hope that you would get that offer passed through Alpha first though…”

“I did say that I will answer any of your questions as long as I can answer them and I did promise not to lie, this includes questions about her as well, you know. After all, this is important to guarantee a smooth negotiation. At the moment, you can ask me anything without her getting in your way of knowing what you ask from me. Isn’t this a good chance for you as well? Don’t worry. You might be worried that she would know of this conversation, but I can guarantee you that won’t happen.”

Tsubaki said so and smiled gently at Akira. But in contrast to that, he noticed something suspicious.

“In that case, let me ask you why you can say that with 100 per cent certainty?”

“It’s because she will never be able to get through the current jamming.”

“The jamming might fade away in the middle of our conversation though?”

“That won’t happen.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m the source of that jamming.”

Akira’s gaze turned sharp, while Tsubaki still maintained her gentle smile.

“…I’m sure you’re doing it for a reason, but can you turn it off already?”

“I’m afraid I have to refuse.”

Akira’s expression turned sterner. But that was all there was to it, there was nothing more he could do than that.

“It has been quite a long time since you are not under her watch, right? So I recommend you take this chance the best you can.”

“Yeah sure, and this is the price I have to pay for that. My APC is gone, my bike is also gone, both my rifles are broken, and I only have one arm left now. I had more than enough of this.”

“No need to worry, I guarantee your safety at the moment.”

Akira sighed and rubbed his hair with his remaining hand. He went silent to think of a way to fix his situation, but nothing came up in his mind.

“…Let me at least ask you this. It’s not like you’ll kill me if I refuse your offer, right?”

“Of course, I won’t do that. I’ll just leave you here. Although, it’s not like I will do anything more than that even if you consider that the same as me abandoning you here to die. But if you accept the offer, I’ll at least escort you back to Kugamayama city. I’m really sorry but I’m under strict policy as well, so I can’t just leave the area under my care without a good reason. I hope you can understand.”

“I see.”

Akira once again was at loss on what to do next. He was hoping to rely on Alpha’s support to get back to the city, but in order to do that, he would have to make Tsubaki turn off the jamming. Even if he wanted to postpone the negotiation indefinitely, he did not have anything to offer in exchange. It would have been easy if he just accepted that offer, but that would defeat the purpose of contacting Alpha in the first place.

Seeing Akira could not make up his mind, Tsubaki smiled gently at him and suggested.

“If you’re afraid that my request would disrupt your request with her, you can ask me to make sure that won’t happen as one of your rewards and I’ll comply the best I can.”

Akira did not expect it at all. Seeing that, Tsubaki thought that she finally got a reaction from him and deeply smiled.

But after a short pause, Akira then said with a serious face.

“I’ll say this again, but I can’t accept your offer. I have no wish to abandon Alpha’s request. With that being said, if it’s a request that has gone through Alpha, I might consider accepting it. I’m sorry but I have no wish to change my mind about that part.”

Tsubaki raised her eyebrows in surprise.

“Forgive me for saying this, but you don’t know anything about her. For you, she’s nothing but an existence who calls itself Alpha. If you’re afraid of her for having such power with an unknown origin, you may ask things

about her from me, I will answer as much as I can. Humans are naturally scared of the unknown and the remedy of that is knowledge. So, is there anything you want to know?”

“…About Alpha, huh? To be honest, I do want to know, but I have no confidence to act as if I don’t know even when I know, so I thank you for your offer but I have to refuse.”

Tsubaki tilted her head.

“I can’t understand you. I don’t see any reason why you would prioritize her request to the point that you would completely refuse my offer.”

“It’s some kind of pride for me. I have no wish for you to understand it either, so no need to think too deeply about it.”

“If you’re okay with it, may I ask for further explanation?”

“I have a huge debt to Alpha. That’s why I want to prioritize her request in order to repay that debt. That’s all… Well, although, to be honest, I don’t think it’s at the top of my priority list though and Alpha tends to complain about that as well. But, you know, that part is not as simple.”

Akira smiled bitterly and deliberately gave a vague answer in the end. Tsubaki did not return that gesture of politeness with gentle politeness, instead, she then asked with a serious face.

“Debt, huh? Is it really something that important to you? She did all of that for her own benefit and goal. That debt is nothing more than a by-product of using you. To be honest, aren’t there times when you had to go through more trouble for her?”

“Well, of course, there are. Those weapon dogs that I encountered after I met her, I bet that dog was there because Alpha was the one who guided that monster to me. After all, it seems that some of the monsters can see her. I bet she did that to confirm whether or not I would really follow her instructions. And it’s the same in Seranthal as well. It was not easy when Alpha suddenly left, but I bet she did that to confirm whether I can face that

predicament myself as well as to teach me how difficult it would be without her support. I'm sure she was only gone for a few seconds and then she hid from me afterwards for the next few minutes. After all, she returned right after I got over the situation. It's completely different compared to now."

"So why?"

"Even if what she did sort of makes us even, I still feel like my debt to her is bigger. As I said, I have a huge debt to her that I need to repay."

Tsubkia did not seem to be fully satisfied by that answer, Akira who noticed that smiled bitterly and continued.

"Before I met Alpha, I was only a mere slum kid. Then, I went to the ruins hoping that I would be able to change my life working as a Hunter. Naturally, I would only need to encounter a monster to be killed. That was how much I was worth back then. But after I met Alpha and received her support, thanks to that, I've grown strong enough to even catch your eyes. I've become strong, she gave me power, that's just how big my debt is to her. Maybe it's even bigger than that, you know? Even you only gave me an offer because I've become this strong, right? I'm sure you won't even bother to try contacting me if it was the past me."

"I won't deny that, But, that strength is mostly the result of your effort to survive through the hardship and obstacles that you have faced. Of course, she helped as well, but that is because it is beneficial to her. I don't believe there's any need to feel that indebted to her."

"You might be right. But that's just how meaningful her support is to me. It's something that I experienced for myself, so I have no wish for others to understand that."

"Even if it's something that concerns your life?"

"If that's what you're worried about, I already had my life on the line from the start. If I had not met Alpha back then, I would have been dead by now. Not only have I received so much support from her as upfront payment for her request, but the current me is also still far away from being able to

accomplish her request. I'm not working as much as I should for the payment that I've received. It's a completely different matter if Alpha says that I don't have to repay her. But as long as she doesn't say that, I have no wish to just abandon that debt. That's all there is to it."

Akira said so as if to reconfirm his own line of thinking as he smiled lightly.

Tsubaki was caught by surprise. But it seemed that she could understand his argument. Her face softened as she commented.

"You're a very dutiful person."

"For a slum kid with no money or power, loyalty and life are the only things that I can offer."

"Just because you have nothing else to offer, not that many people can do the same, you know. Although, you can always find people who would throw those two things away meaninglessly."

Tsubaki suddenly seemed delighted and it was obvious from her smile. But Akira found that sudden change of attitude rather strange.

"Very well. I will not prolong the negotiation any longer. After all, I have no wish to sour your mood. It is indeed very regrettable, but I shall back off."

Right at the next moment, Alpha suddenly appeared next to Akira. Tsubaki had disengaged the jamming.

"Akira! Are you okay!?"

"Alpha?"

Akira was surprised by her sudden appearance, but his gaze shifted to Tsubaki instead of Alpha and Tsubaki returned his gaze with an amicable smile. But that was not the case for Alpha, she immediately glared toward Tsubaki. Tsubaki did not show any particular reaction to that except for her usual gentle smile. As Alpha and Tsubaki were locking gaze, Akira was the only one getting flustered.

“Well then. I shall take my leave now. Akira-san, please do tell me when you change your mind. I’ll be waiting for you.”

Tsubaki gracefully made a 180-degree turn and was about to leave, but she suddenly stopped and turned around to throw a rather capricious smile at Akira.

“Ah, that’s right, I believe I did say this to you before as well. Since you didn’t accept my offer, I’m under no obligation to help you. So I won’t help you regarding the things that I did not say such that she won’t get in the way of our future negotiation.”

Akira tilted his head since he could not understand what Tsubaki was talking about. Tsubaki was still smiling at Akira as she reactivated her camouflage and vanished.

Right after that, the scenes around Akira suddenly shattered. The scene that he saw turned out to be nothing more than images. Soon, a powered suit was revealed behind the shattered images, it was Zalmo.

Akira and Zalmo were both equally surprised. Zalmo’s surprise could be heard from the powered suit’s speaker.

“Akira!? What a coincidence!”

The powerful radar of his powered suit did not detect any signals, that was also the case for Akira as well – he was not able to detect Zalmo at all. It was thanks to the powerful camouflage that Tsubaki used to encapsulate him.

Akira compressed his time perception by pure reaction. During that time, he exchanged words with Alpha through telepathy.

“Alpha! Can you do something about that thing for now?”

Alpha, who was next to Akira, smiled and casually said.

“Of course, no problem. But, both your body and equipment are in a pretty bad shape, so you might have to do something a bit reckless.”

“Just a bit, okay? I’ve done more than enough crazy things for today.”

Akria smiled bitterly and allowed Alpha to take over his augmented suit, allowing him to completely regain his superhuman physical ability. Moreover, he dumped all the remaining energy he had to increase the power output of his augmented suit way past the safety limit. It was bordering close to getting himself killed. Then, Akira leapt forward like a master to close the distance.

The powered suit immediately tried to open some distance between them while trying to shoot Akira down. But Akira was too fast. Zalmo could already see him ready with a blade in hand from the powered suit’s camera. Akira swung the blade down when Zalmo was still out of the blade’s range.

Right at the next moment, the blade could no longer maintain its form and started to crumble. It turned into dust and was carried away by the wind. Due to Alpha’s support, Akira was able to execute a masterful swing with that blade.

The light extended out from the blade reached the powered suit, splitting it into two. The blade cut so smoothly across the powered suit as if either the blade or the powered suit, or maybe both, were just illusions.

The limiter of the blade was already rewritten by Alpha. With its safety feature off, the blade had to be handled with utmost precision in exchange for its overcharged power. Even a small misstep would release a sharp wave of light that would have killed its user. With such a dangerous weapon in hand, Akira executed a quick powerful slice. Alpha was able to accomplish such an act with such a volatile blade and such heavily damaged augmented suit.

Zalmo’s powered suit was split in half as each piece fell down. Due to its weight, the ground shook and Akira was barely able to maintain his balance.

[I had so much trouble fighting that thing. But with Alpha’s support, it ended in a blink of an eye, huh? And here I thought I’d gotten pretty strong… I guess I still have a long way to go…]

Akira returned the bladeless handle back to its sheath. He then looked at Alpha with a frown.

“Alpha, with this, I have no weapons left. Are we going to be okay?”

“Yes, probably.”

“Probably?”

Akira could not help but make a conflicted expression in reaction to that vague answer, Alpha pursed her lips and commented.

“I was able to get back my connection with you just now, so I still don’t fully understand the current situation. That’s why I can’t say for sure. If you have any complaints, you can send that to Tsubaki. She’s the one responsible for the jamming.”

“Yeah, I heard that too.”

Alpha raised her eyebrows.

“You knew?”

“She told me.”

“I see.”

Just like Akira who answered indifferently, Alpha also gave an apathetic reply. But deep inside, she felt a strong suspicion.

As usual, although Alpha was smiling from the outside, she was digesting and calculating information while smiling. Due to the jamming, Akira lost his connection to her and he must have gone through a lot of crazy things when that happened. Moreover, he had lost an arm. There would have been no surprise if he looked at Tsubaki with hostility. But Akira did not seem to have any grudge against her. If the loss of his arm was because of something that happened while they lost contact, there was a need for Alpha to know what had transpired.

“Akira, it would be great if you can tell me what happened while we weren’t connected.”

Akira heaved a huge sigh with an exasperated look on his face.

“…A lot, really a lot of things happened. I’m super tired right now, so I’ll tell you later.”

“Alright, later then, okay?”

Suddenly there was a loud banging sound as if a metallic object just fell over. It was from Zalmo who crawled out from the powered suit. His body was also cut along with his powered suit. He had lost half of his body, so it was difficult for him to stand up only with one arm and leg. He was only able to drag his body across the floor, but of course, Akira noticed it.

Zalmo had a grim look on his face. But there was not a shred of fear on his face. He was looking at Akira with amazement instead of animosity. It was as if he was looking at an unknown object, he then finally worded out the question inside him.

“Just what the heck are you?”

“I can ask you exactly the same thing. I’m pretty sure I crushed your head, so how are you still alive?”

“I’m one with the great cause. I will only die when the great cause dies. As long as the great cause is alive, then I will never die.”

“The heck are you talking about?”

Akira rubbed his head, he did not have a single idea as to what Zalmo was saying. But he immediately threw that out of his mind and declared.

“Well, in that case, you can go ahead and die a thousand times!”

Akira only said so and crushed Zalmo under his feet. Just to be safe, he stomped more until Zalmo did not look like a human anymore. A part of Akira was venting as his face was distorted from rage.

“Alpha, do you remember the eight people who attacked Sheryl’s base the other day and there was one of them who was particularly strong? I’m pretty sure I killed that guy but it seems that this guy is the same guy from back then. Wait, he did say that but that doesn’t mean that it is true, right? Do you think he’s telling the truth?”

“I don’t have enough data to confirm if he’s really the same person, so I can only say that I don’t know.”

“I see. And also, we did fight a huge humanoid monster before, remember? That monster returned back from death and I fought him as well.”

Alpha could not help but tilt her head.

“Akira, just what exactly happened when I was not around?”

“A lot of things… Well, I’ll tell you everything later.”

“I see, in that case, can you let me know first if she’s friendly or not.”

Alpha said so and pointed her finger to the sky. Akira looked in the direction that Alpha was pointing at and saw Nelia running in the sky. Even Akira did not expect that at all.

“Just what in the world is she doing there?”

“She’s using forcefield armour as a footing to be able to run in the air. So then, is she hostile? Or not?”

“She’s not hostile… I hope.”

Seeing how Nelia was running at him with blades on both of her hands, Akira could not say for certain that she was there to help him. But in the midst of running, Nelia sheathed her blades, giving Akira confirmation that she was friendly; for now.

Nelia landed next to him, she glanced at the split powered suit first before smiling amusedly at Akira.

“I’m here to help you, or so I want to say, but it doesn’t seem you need it, hmm?”

“No, I’m really grateful. And also, why were you running in the sky?”

“Hm? I was fighting the flying monsters when I saw you, that’s why I came down here.”

It was a very weird answer, but considering that Nelia was a battle maniac, Akira thought that it was completely normal for her.

Not too long after that, a transport aircraft also arrived. Elena’s team who boarded off the aircraft scanned the area and looked worriedly at him.

“…Akira, are you okay?”

“Yeah. Although, I don’t think I can say I’m okay in this state. I’m sorry but I don’t think I can handle any more fights. And also, sorry but can you share some of your medicine? I’ve exhausted mine. I’ll pay for it later.”

Sara gave Akira a whole box of capsules.

“There’s no need to pay, just take all of it.”

“Thank you very much!”

Akira paused, he was not sure how to open the closed lid with one arm. Seeing that, Elena took the box, opened the lid and spilled the contents on top of Akira’s palm. Akira then carried that to his mouth and swallowed all of them in one go. Elena and Sara saw that with a pained expression on their faces.

With this, Elena and Sara thought that there was no danger to Akira’s life. So they then brought him back to the aircraft and let him lie down. Akira was finally able to relax now that he was able to safely meet up with Elena and Sara again. Because of that, all the fatigue that he held back, all the adrenaline he had, flooded his body in one go, causing his consciousness to drift away.

Elena noticed that and smiled gently at Akira.

“We’ll take you back safely, so you can rest easy.”

“I’m sorry… And thank you…”

Akira could only say so much before he blacked out.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 225, The Caretaker AI

Index

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Yanagisawa somehow managed to make a deal with Tsubaki. After escorting him out of her area, Yanagisawa suddenly asked Tsubaki something in a rather good mood.

“Before I leave, may I ask just one thing. Are you sure it’s okay not to clean up after Katsuya? His speed in creating a local network is not normal. There’s a good chance, or more like, it’s obvious that another AI is helping him. It’s not safe to leave someone like him wandering around your area, right? I’m pretty sure he will cause you some trouble. If you ask me, I would gladly take him out. That way, you will have fewer problems to deal with compared to if you were to do it yourself.”

Yanagisawa put up a lot of extra offers during his negotiation with Tsubaki in order for Tsubaki to accept a deal that would profit him more. One of them was the information about Katsuya as well as an offer to clean him up. But Tsubaki did not accept that offer.

“That isn’t something that I need to ask of you.”

“Is it because asking me would violate some kind of rules between the caretaker AI?”

“I’m not obliged to answer that question.”

Tsubaki replied with a rather apathetic attitude. Yanagisawa found that weird, but it would be bad if he pursued that question any further and caused his relationship with Tsubaki to sour.

“I see, well, it doesn’t really matter. Just contact me if you need me. I’ll try my best to comply.”

“Of course, I hope you’ll fulfil your part of the deal, your promise.”

“Don’t worry, just leave it to me. I’m a guy who never abandons his promises. In the first place, there’s no way I would abandon a promise that I made with a ruin’s caretaker. It isn’t worth the trouble later on.”

Yanagisawa was deliberately taking a rather casual attitude just like usual. But even so, it did not seem that he was lying at all.

Tsubaki then smiled deeply and asked him a question.

“In that case, to make sure that you’re not going to break your promise, may I ask you one question?”

“Sure, you can ask me anything. I don’t want you to cancel the deal midway after all. So I’m willing to answer just about anything, you know?”

Yanagisawa was talking casually just like usual. Tsubaki reacted with her usual smile as well. She then asked her question with an equally casual tone.

“Very well, I shall gladly take you up on your offer then. Please tell me why you broke your promise with that caretaker AI? You broke your promise with them, so I don’t see why you won’t do the same to me. So, please tell me the reason.”

Yanagisawa’s smile turned stiff.

“…Uhhh, I don’t understand what you’re talking about though?”

“You did meet me once in the past when you were brought to me by one of those AI, right? Although, at that time, you didn’t call yourself Yanagisawa.”

Yanagisawa’s expression immediately turned stern.

“…How can you tell? I’m sure I’ve erased all of my past footprints. Even the other ruins couldn’t recognize my ID. I was sure the ruins would identify me as a completely different person!”

“The facilities inside ruins identify someone through various different methods. For example, people who can connect to the old-world domain would be assigned different identification the moment they access the old-world domain. So if their connection to the old-world domain is jammed, the system won’t be able to recognize their identity correctly. In that case, they would be given a temporary identification and identified as a different person.”

Tsubaki’s smile widened.

“Isn’t that exactly why you don’t bother fixing your old-world connection?”

Yanagisawa smiled bitterly, Tsubaki’s guess was correct.

“As for how I was able to identify you, in my case, I don’t need to connect to the old-world domain. As long as I’m connected to my own area, I can identify you. After all, we locally record any past visitors. That’s why I took you back to my own area during our negotiation.”

Yanagisawa lightly rubbed his head and sighed. He then slightly regained his usual expression.

“I see. Well, it might be way too late to say this, but I guess I should restart from ‘long time no see’, huh?”

“In that case, I shall also reply with ‘long time no see’. Now then, if you may answer my previous question.”

Tsubaki’s gentle smile was not a guarantee for Yanagisawa’s life. If he made a wrong move there, he would be dead. He knew that very well as he replied.

[It’s for the sake of humanity’s happiness and to save them. For that sake, there is a need for me to get that thing! If I have to add anything, it’s true that I accepted their request to subjugate a certain ruin and I had no wish to break that promise. There were just different interpretations between us on what it means to subjugate a ruin. I believe it was their mistake for not explaining it properly to me beforehand, or was it my mistake?]

“I see. It would be too much trouble if I have to readjust the minute details regarding our deal. So let me warn you, if you break your promise, I’ll give the data about you to them, okay?”

“Alright.”

After Yanagisawa said so with his uncharacteristically serious demeanour, he returned back to his usual attitude as he lightly smiled and continued.

“I won’t break my promise. You didn’t need to do that, you know. Geez, you just can’t trust me, can you? I’m the one who stands to lose if this deal breaks down, you know?”

“That would mean you would happily break your promise if it’s more profitable. Which means, you would cause some kind of damage to me if it is profitable for you. The moment I have to do something to make sure you won’t break your promise, I would no longer have any trust in you.”

“Geez, that’s so strict. Do you really hate me that much?”

Yanagisawa smiled wryly which Tsubaki then replied with a straight smile.

“Yes, I really hate your guts.”

Yanagisawa deliberately made an exaggerated reaction and said.

“Seriously though, why are caretaker AIs so… You know, hard-headed? They just can’t make any compromise. The business AIs are way easier to

deal with, you know?”

“That’s because ever since we no longer get a proper visitor, we don’t need the ability to make deals. There is also the fact that, to us, there is never a need to make deals with robbers.”

“Even if you say that, wouldn’t it be wonderful if we have a chance to understand each other?”

Yanagisawa smiled bitterly at his hard-headed negotiation partner that he was facing. Half of it was only an act while the other half was his real feeling. But Tsubaki replied with a wondrous smile.

“Of course there is. Although, the subject of that treatment won’t be you. For example, if it’s someone with a strong sense of duty. I would be more than happy to get connected with that kind of person.”

Yanagisawa got shocked inside, but he kept up his joking demeanour.

“Oh, you like that type, huh? I can introduce you to some people that you might like if you want, you know?”

“Thank you but no thank you.”

Tsubaki replied back almost instantly, Yanagisawa let out a fake sigh in response.

“I see. Well then, I’m heading back to base. Ah, by the way, I need to contact someone in order to do my best to keep my promise and I can’t do that with this jamming.”

“Very well. I’ll remove it in due time. I’ll excuse myself then.”

Tsubaki turned around and returned back to her area. In the middle of that, she activated her optical camouflage and vanished.

Not too long after Tsubaki had left the place, Yanagisawa’s smile crumbled. He heaved out a huge sigh of relief as beads of cold sweat were running down his forehead.

[…That was dangerous. But it was within my expectation. Tsubaki hates them, that's why she won't tell them even after she noticed that it is me. And since she has insurance to make sure that I'll properly keep my promise, she's more likely to accept the deal… That's right, it's all still within my expectation, there's no problem… Though the matter with Katsuya is outside my expectation, well, it's a completely different matter.]

A call suddenly reached his information terminal. It seemed that the jamming had been turned off. Yanagisawa smiled and picked that call, it was from someone in the forward base.

"Commander Yanagisawa! Where are you right now!? Get back here and take command! The expedition armies have been crushed-"

"I know. And I've solved that too."

"Haah!? What are you talking about…!?"

"I'll take command through the long-term planning division from here. Tell the rest to obey the orders coming from that division."

"Wait for a sec! Just what-"

Yanagisawa closed the call there and made another call to Kugamayama city.

"It's me. Tell them to open the emergency officers meeting right away… Yeah, I know. I've handled the mess in Kuzusuhara ruin. Put all the chain of command under the long-term planning division and start the cleaning up process. Give me another call when the officers are ready. Get on it."

He then closed that call and was about to call another person when a different call reached his information terminal first.

"Yes yes, Yanagisawa speaking here."

"You bastard!! Where are you right now!? And what do you mean that you have the situation under control!? Just what in the world are you doing!?"

“I’ll tell you about the details through the long-term planning division, I’m pretty sure I just gave that order, or is it that you haven’t received it?”

“Just answer me now!”

“Geez. Give me a break already. I just made a deal with the caretaker AI that you angered.”

Yanagisawa could hear a gasp from the other side of the call as he smiled amusedly.

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After breaking up with Elena’s team, Shikarabe’s team went to search the inside of the building. Shikarabe seemed immensely vexed. Seeing him like that, Valga chuckled and said to him.

“If you really hate it, you don’t have to do this, you know.”

Shikarabe sighed.

“It’s not that simple… We’re still in Drankam and it’s an SOS signal from

a Drankam Hunter. We can’t just simply ignore it… Even if it comes from those

guys.”

“You’re really dutiful, you know?”

“Oh is it! Let’s go.”

In reality, Elena’s team was not able to find Akira. The information terminal lent to him for the expedition was destroyed in the middle of the fight, so it was impossible to track the signal from that information terminal. But after the jamming was disengaged, Shikarabe received an SOS signal from Katsuya’s team, and after learning from Nelia that Akira was fighting Katsuya, they went to check the signal and found Akira there.

Unlike Elena, Sara and Akira who immediately headed back after that, although Shikarabe, Yamanobe and Valga wanted to return with them as well, they had to stay behind to search the building. This was despite the fact that they really did not want to. At that time, they hoped that the leader of the team, Nelia, would order them to return back as well. Along with her order, they had no reason to stay behind a dangerous area just to search a building. Furthermore, in order to not get left behind, they had no other choice but to return back together with Elena's team. That would at least be enough to convince people from Drankam as to why they ignored the SOS signal.

But Nelia instead suggested they stay. Now that they had rescued Akira and sent him back with Elena and Sara, it was enough to prove that they were allies. Thus, she thought that it was better to stay there and wait for the next order instead of having to return back to the forward base just to be sent out again.

Elena's team knew that the forward base was organizing reinforcements to send to the expedition area. With the jamming gone, it was easier for them to communicate with each other. Although Shikarabe's team did not like it, they still accepted the order.

Unfortunately for the group of men, Nelia and the rest had no wish to stay behind to help Shikarabe's team search the building. Considering Akira's state as well, they decided to leave.

With that, Shikarabe had no other choice but to go down the building with the other Drankam Hunters present. That was until they found a chopped up corpse of a Drankam Hunter.

"This gun owner code… Katsuya? This is Katsuya?"

Shikabare was so shocked, but he then immediately made a conflicted expression.

"…And here I thought he was someone who wouldn't die no matter what happened. I guess my intuition has really dulled, huh?"

Yamanobe laughed bitterly.

“He’s also a Hunter. So he will die when his time comes, just like any other Hunter. But still, this body… He was cut into 4 pieces, huh? This is not from a monster. Moreover, his head is not around, just where did his head go? Was it crushed or something? Was it mixed with all those blood splatters around?”

Valga returned after he looked around.

“The other Hunters are unconscious but still alive. They’re all fainted from exhaustion and it doesn’t seem like any of them are going to wake up anytime soon. The rest of their team is on the ground floor. Shikarabe, what’s the plan here? Should we carry all of them back?”

Suddenly an emergency notice reached everyone’s information terminal. They all made conflicted expressions when they heard the content of that voice notification.

“This is the long-term planning division of Kugamayama city! We’ve formed a truce with the caretaker AI protecting the large-scale expedition area! All the Hunters, follow the commands from the long-term planning division and send your location right away! Fighting between Hunters is strictly prohibited! The drones under the AI are already retreating! Don’t attack the monsters that don’t attack you! You may only fight the monsters that are not under the caretaker AI! Repeat! This is-”

Shikarabe, Yamanobe, and Valga looked at each other, confused.

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Inside a world that was filled with empty whiteness, Tsubaki was standing face to face with two Alphas. The Alpha who had lost Katsuya was staring dagger at Tsubaki but Tsubaki just ignored her. The conversation had reached a block.

“Just give it up already. I won’t say anything else. The subjects under both of you fought each other on their own. It’s not like I can do anything even if

you ask me to take responsibility. The jamming was done to throw the invading army into chaos, I didn't do that precisely to make the subjects under both of you fight each other."

"But I lost my subject because of it. Do you really think that I will let it slide just with that?"

"It's not my fault. It's their fault to be present when the jamming was activated. I have neither obligation nor reason to lower the defence of the area under my care just for the sake of the two of you."

Tsubaki's usual flat expression turned rather curt.

"As I said before, if you look down on us thinking that we should sacrifice the area under our jurisdiction just for your circumstances, then we also have our own thoughts on how to deal with the likes of you. The fault lies with you."

Tsubaki and the two Alpha were staring intensely at each other, the Alpha from Akira's side sighed and said.

"Alright then, let's take that as an unfortunate accident."

"Thank you for your understanding."

Tsubaki smiled amicably. The other Alpha seemed not entirely happy with that solution but still did not say anything further.

"Putting that matter aside, I want you to hand over the data of everything that happened during the jamming though."

"I believe that I have already done that."

"There's no data about your conversation with Akira."

Alpha's gaze turned sharp, but Tsubaki replied casually.

"That's my private negotiation data. I have neither obligation nor reason to share it with you. Ahh, but it's not like I'm hiding anything, you can ask

Akira himself, right?”

“Is that so?”

“It is so.”

Alpha’s gaze turned even sharper, but Tsubaki continued ignoring it.

The reason why Tsubaki did not tell that particular detail to Alpha was simply to sow suspicion. She was trying to make Alpha doubt someone who would even sacrifice his own life for the sake of protecting his duties and promises. Someone who had absolutely no reason to be doubted. Basically, depending on how one was to look at it, it was Tsubaki harassing Alpha.

“If that’s all, I will excuse myself then.”

Tsubaki threw a deep smile at Alpha before vanishing.

Both Alpha understood that the parting words from Tsubaki were also a warning. It was some kind of demonstration that it was a mistake to look down on her. If Akira and Katsuya were killed, the Alphas would have no other choice but to make their move, and it was true even if Tsubaki only killed one of them.

Tsubaki’s main goal was to show that she could manipulate the situation to the point that the subjects under the two Alphas would kill each other. That she could do it indirectly to the point that she could be exempted from having to take the responsibility. It was a statement saying that she was willing to pick a fight with the Alphas, to the point that she would kill their subjects when the push came to shove.

“Well, it doesn’t really matter, this is an experiment anyway. Let’s just move on. But, there’s another thing that bothers me. My subject survived while your subject died. This is outside of our prediction. Outside of our prediction means it’s outside of our control, is that really okay?”

The other Alpha knitted her eyebrows in response to the other Alpha’s worry.

“Dealing with the aftermath is the only thing that we can do. Well, it’s an experiment after all, so there’s no need to worry about it. That aside, how about you? If your experiment has ended because you have lost your subject, I want to use your computation resources. If you’re just going to look for another subject, you don’t need all of your current computation resources, right?”

“No, I’m planning to change the subject and continue with the experiment. If that change fails, then I’ll stop the experiment there.”

“Is that so? Alright then.”

The other Alpha sulked.

“But still, why did all of this have to happen when it was going so well.”

“No idea, collecting data is also one of the goals for these experiments though.”

“You have a point.”

The Alpha smiled bitterly before vanishing from the white world.

A few days after the large scale expedition, Akira once again woke up in a hospital room. As he was about to push his body up, he inadvertently fell again. He was once again reminded that he had lost his arm and he smiled wryly.

“Waking up in a hospital room, this pattern again,…”

“This also means that you’re still alive, so I don’t think there’s any reason for you to hate it that much.”

Alpha who was next to him smiled gently at him.

“Good morning, Akira. Did you sleep well?”

“Morning, Alpha. Yeah, except for my arm, I’m good as new.”

“Don’t worry, you can just get your arm healed later. Although it might be a bit too late to say this, I’m glad that you’re fine. Now then, you’re already up, so I hope you can now tell me what had happened. It’s a good way to kill time as well.”

“Sure sure.”

The doctor who was responsible for Akira came. He gave Akira the document that listed the total cost of the treatment that Akira had received when he was unconscious. The doctor was also there to ask Akira about what to do with his lost arm. They could have healed the arm while he was still unconscious, but since he was a high-rank Hunter, there was a need to get his approval first.

Although there were few who would cut off their own arms in exchange for prosthetics, many replaced their lost limbs with prosthetics. They might do so even disregarding the treatment cost. After all, not a small number of Hunters lose their limbs fighting against monsters. Considering the chances that they would lose their limbs again, they chose to replace their lost limbs with prosthetics. This was instead of having to pay the heavy price of recovering their limbs every single time.

After Akira listened to the doctor’s explanation, Alpha then gleefully said to him.

“Akira, how about trying prosthetic arms? You can equip a gun, blade, or forcefield armour inside such an arm. With the help of my support, you’ll have no trouble controlling such a complicated battle-oriented prosthetic arm.”

Akira imagined himself sticking a magazine into his arm and shooting with it. The hand part of his arm was turned into a muzzle and returned back to his usual hand after that.

“…Nah, I’ll get a normal arm.”

“Oh, why is that?”

“I feel like it will not be very comfortable eating or going into a bath with such an arm.”

“If it’s about the look, you can buy an expensive prosthetic that looks exactly like a normal arm from the outside, you know?”

“No, no. it’s more of a matter of feeling.”

It was indeed an attractive offer considering its function for battles, but Akira did not like the idea of having to go through his daily life with it. Especially when he had an image of accidentally pulling out a rifle or a blade by mistake in the middle of a meal or in the bath.

The doctor noticed Akira’s weird behaviour.

“Is there something wrong?”

“No, it’s nothing. I’ll take the regeneration treatment.”

“Very well. To put it simply, you basically have two options, either grow an arm from the place where your arm was cut-off, or grow another arm and connect it to your body after.”

The doctor then explained the other details regarding the two options such as their prices, benefits and disadvantages. In the end, Akira chose the latter. After that, the doctor put a prosthetic that looked like an arm-only augmented suit on Akira. It then readjusted its shape according to the data from his measurement until it had the shape of his original arm.

That data would be used to grow another arm later so that it would not give any strange feeling after it was connected. The doctor then left after giving a detailed explanation as to how much it would cost and how long Akira would have to stay in the hospital.

Akira looked at the white prosthetic arm with great interest as he moved it around. He felt nothing strange with that arm as if it was his original arm. He could clearly feel the sensation when he grabbed an object with that prosthetic arm.

“What can I say… It feels so natural like my own arm.”

“It’s a medical prosthetic after all. It is extremely sensitive in order to get an accurate reading of your nerves for the new arm. Akira, try extending your hand forward.”

Akira just did as he was told and extended his arm. Alpha was smiling mischievously, his prosthetic arm reached to her chest and buried in between her valley. He could suddenly feel the warmth and the softness of a human’s skin as Alpha’s chest moved forward and buried Akira’s arm up until its wrist.

“Whoah!?”

Akira was so surprised that he pulled his arm in reaction. Alpha smiled smugly at him and said.

“I used the data from your augmented suit and tried to apply it to the prosthetic arm, how was it? It felt pretty real, didn’t it?”

Akira had not recovered from the shock.

“…Don’t surprise me like that.”

“How about trying touching other places as well while you have the chance?”

“…No thanks!”

“Is that so? There’s no need to hold back, you know? You can tell me anytime you change your mind.”

Akira’s face turned slightly reddish, he then turned away as if he was sulking. But Alpha found that very satisfying and smiled at him.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 226, Hospital Visits

Index

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Akira had to stay in the hospital until the treatment for his lost arm was done. It took about three days to grow his new arm. On the first day, Kibayashi came to visit him with Arabe.

Seeing Akira cock his head the moment he came in, Kibayashi could not hold back his amused smile.

“Geez, that was cold. Although I’m here to give you a hospital visit, there’s no need to be that prickly, you know.”

“Then why are you smiling like that?”

“Well, that’s because you’re as reckless as always.”

“It’s not like I’m doing it because I want to. Are you here just to ask me about that?”

“That’s right, or so I want to say, but before that, business comes first. Let me introduce you, this is Arabe from Drankam.”

Arabe politely bowed to Akira.

“I am Arabe. I’m sorry to come here so suddenly, I asked Kibayashi to introduce me to you because there’s something I want to discuss with you regarding the recent incident. Nice to meet you.”

Akira was rather wary since he thought that he would get an earful of complaints after killing Katsuya. But seeing that Arabe did the opposite, Akira was at loss on what to do. That was when Kibayashi suddenly interjected.

“Before you guys start talking about your business with Drankam, I’ll give you a short explanation of what is going on. What happened during the large scale expedition, and what happened while you were out cold. After all, it won’t make any sense unless we let you know all about that first.”

Although Akira was still struggling to follow the unexpected turn of events, it was also true that he wanted to know more. So he decided to just listen quietly to Kibayashi’s explanation.

The Hunters in the expedition were thrown into chaos when Tsubaki suddenly jammed most forms of communication. But fortunately, the Hunters who joined the expedition were skilled. Although not all of them were that skilled, they were still at least able to work smoothly within their respective team. As such, normally, communication jamming would not cause such chaos.

But Tsubaki prepared something else to stir the pot. She had some Hunters paid to attack other Hunters, a team to attack another team, Hunters betraying their own team. And as the cherry on top, she also prepared Tiol to attack the Hunters. With all of these going off in one go, the situation was quickly thrown into utter chaos.

Among that chaos, Hunters were attacked by their teammates when in reality, those teammates were just look-alikes. They were old-world monsters modified with familiar faces thanks to Yatsubayashi.

When Hunters managed to establish a communication line with them through the close-range connection, what they would hear was filled with screams and gunshots. Tsubaki also lured monsters to clash with City

Management’s powered suits. Of course, the line of command that was already established immediately went down under that situation.

Of course, there were also some Hunters who pretended to be working with Tsubaki only to leak that information to those on City Management’s side. Unfortunately, that information was completely useless. The long-term planning division already knew that some people made deals with the caretaker AI, so they did not pay much attention to them. Moreover, the information these Hunters gave was mostly useless and had questionable sources. Those who were betrayed also noticed that through their information terminal right before the jamming.

Some of the Hunters tried to send that information to HQ the moment they noticed it. However before they could do it, long-range communication to HQ was already down. Furthermore, these people were the first targets to be killed under Tsubaki’s orders.

With all the ensuing chaos, it was difficult to deal with the situation using teamwork. Thus, Hunters began to drop like flies and the death count reflected it. The beguiling ghost that tempted Hunters to betray each other, it was big enough of a tragedy for such an urban legend to be born.

After all these deaths, Yanagisawa managed to form a truce with Tsubaki. Moreover, City Management released an order that prohibited any form of retaliation, which would most likely stem from grudges. This applied between Hunters, to City Management, and to the ruin’s caretaker as well.

There were Hunters who betrayed their own team, there were also some Hunters who got killed because of misunderstandings. If they seek revenge, either targeting their other fellow Hunters, or going to the ruin once again to exact their revenge on Tsubaki, both would only serve to increase the body count. So in order to prevent that, City Management dispatched a squad to put the expedition area under a tight lock-down.

Kibayashi gave a short explanation to Akira. Although, since it was not like Kibayashi knew everything and was only able to give a quick overview of the situation, it was enough to make Akira frown.

Akira then noticed something that piqued his interest.

“You did say that City Management dispatched the squad to guard the expedition area in order to prevent more unnecessary deaths, right? But isn’t it because they have another reason behind that?”

“Hm? Well, it’s not 100% a lie, but well, basically, they can use that to mask their other reason. Of course, it’s all just my guess though, so don’t take it too seriously if you still want to hear more.”

Akira understood that Kibayashi was actually baiting him to say yes there, but even so, Akira still decided to take that bait.

“…Yes, please.”

“In that case, can you promise me to take Arabe’s business in a positive way?”

“Even if I haven’t heard what this business might be?”

In contrast to how Akira negatively reacted to what he just said, Kibayashi just chuckled and casually said.

“It’s not like I’m telling you to throw yourself into more danger without any reason. I just want you to take it positively in exchange for telling you my guess. It’s fine if you don’t want to do that as well. It’s nothing that serious.”

“Well, if it’s only that much.”

“Alright then.”

By acting as if it was nothing serious, Kibayashi was able to pressure a high ranking Hunter to accept a talk that he had not known yet. Arabe who realized that could not help but feel a bit of fear.

“Let me preface it with this, it’s all just my guess. City Management went as far as dispatching soldiers to guard the place, so one thing for sure, it’s something huge. They must have struck a deal with the ruin’s side.”

“Ah, I see, so that’s what it is, huh. So they’re planning to gather Chrome next, right?”

Akira was able to come up with such a guess thanks to all the things that he had learned. But his guess said with confidence was quickly shot down.

“No. It’s just my guess, but the deal might have been done in Aurum.”

“Aurum? But the ruin’s caretaker doesn’t have Aurum, right?”

“Correct. That’s why the payment is done through selling trash and other unnecessary relics from the ruin to City Management by putting a price on them. And then the caretaker AI would use that Aurum to pay for the expense of guarding the lockdown. So basically the caretaker AI is paying for the defence of their area. While on the other hand, City Management would be able to earn money from this as well. So, to put it simply, this means that Kugamayama city managed to strike a deal so that it can buy old-world relics with Aurum which is a corporation-issued currency instead of using Chrome.”

Kibayashi’s expression turned serious.

“Do you understand just how big this is? It’s extremely ecstatic news for Sakashita Heavy Industry that issues Aurum. It ushers a new wave of support for the corporation and it’ll gather everyone around Kugamayama city who is seeking old-world relics. Obviously, it’ll bring a huge influx of money. It’s unimaginable just how much profit this will bring. And at the centre of this development is that deal with the caretaker AI. Meanwhile, the main player who acts as the bridge between City Management and that ruin is Commander Yanagisawa. I bet no one in Kugamayama city can go against him now. Although I have to admit, it’s weird why someone of such calibre is in this city in the first place.”

Akira raised his eyebrows and was obviously surprised.

“Is that really amazing? Being able to negotiate with a ruin’s AI.”

“Yeah, it’s way more amazing than you can even imagine. Though it also depends on how well that person handles the negotiation. It’s amazing enough for the Corporate Government to scout them and place them as executives in one of the 5 top corporations’ main HQ. Ah, by the way, there are many AI in the ruins. Business AIs are easier to handle. They’re more open to deals, well, they’re made for business after all. Many of them are willing to make deals with just anyone as long as they have the funds to pay it. Some of them are even willing to barter in case their negotiation partner does not carry currency with them. But the caretaker AIs work under completely different principles. Many of them focused more on killing intruders, thanks to that, it’s almost impossible to make a deal with any of them. But that just means how precious it is to be able to make a deal with one of them. After all, if you’re lucky, you can get yourself involved in the old-world government.”

Akira gave a light nod, it seems that he was able to understand just how amazing it was. Seeing that, Kibayashi gave a satisfied smile and cut his talk short.

“That’s all from me for now. Well then, Arabe-san will take over from here.”

“Alright.”

Arabe nervously started with an opening.

“Let me introduce myself once again, I’m Arabe from Drankam. I’m here today to discuss a peace treaty with Akira-san.”

Akira pulled his head back out of surprise.

“P-Peace treaty, aren’t you exaggerating this too much?”

“There’s no need to be that surprised. Drankam has no wish to be hostile against you. Just think of it as Drankam’s way to convey the same.”

Arabe tried his best to maintain his best amicable smile.

“It is as Kibayashi-san just explained, we’ve also received a notice to stop any infighting between Hunters because of the mess that happened during the expedition. Although we’re still investigating the details, we’ve confirmed that a misunderstanding between the Hunters under our gang had caused you immense trouble. So in order to avoid letting that spark turn into more conflict, we’ve prepared a peace treaty document through the Hunter Office. Please carefully read through the document and sign it if you’re okay with it.”

Akira took the document that Arabe offered. But just like usual, it was filled with small dense letters as if it was not written for reading. So he took his usual move which was to rely on Alpha.

“Although it contains even the tiniest details, it’s basically just a normal peace treaty.”

“Are you sure it doesn’t have any difficult hidden clause or something that stipulates me having to pay a huge fine if I broke the treaty? Or maybe other weird clauses?”

“I don’t find anything like that.”

“I see.”

With this, Akira confirmed that it was a proper peace treaty. But he still found it a bit too much.

“Arabe-san, as I said, there’s no need to go this far, you know. Or more like, with the notice from City Management not to fight, I don’t see there being any need to make this peace treaty…”

Akira did kill Katsuya and a lot of his teammates, so it would not be weird if someone from Drankam attempted to kill him. Because of that, he thought that Arabe’s offer was too good to be true. He just could not help but to get suspicious that there were strings attached to it.

Arabe replied with a smile, but behind that smile, he was thinking hard about what to say. The silence continued since he could not think of any

good argument, which only served to increase Akira's suspicion. Kibayashi, who noticed it, finally decided to intervene.

"To put it simply, Drankam is gathering documents to shut particular people up."

"Documents?"

"Drankam received quite a large loan from the city. That's why they receive a lot of complaints when something goes wrong. Something like 'if only they had properly followed the words of their sponsors', and that's also the case this time. After getting into conflict with a high ranking Hunter which ended up with so many deaths, the sponsors are questioning if they can believe a simple unwritten promise or even a treaty written on a single leaf of paper by City Management. That's why Drankam had to even go to the Hunter Office to prepare this peace treaty. That way, those people from City Management won't have any complaints."

Akira nodded in understanding.

"I see, so that's the reason, huh."

"If I may add something, it's actually a good offer for you too. Drankam has no wish to pick a fight with you, but of course, it's not like everyone in the gang is happy with that. You did kill quite a lot of them after all. So then, if any of them come after you, you can use that peace treaty and send a complaint to Drankam. I'm sure Drankam would get desperate and deal with it swiftly. As a Hunter gang, if news spreads of it ignoring a peace treaty made through the Hunter Office, it will cause damage that endangers the integrity of the whole organization. To top it off, they'll recognize you as someone who could deal with problems calmly and rationally. There are many people who think of Hunters as nothing but thugs, so it's important to build a good reputation. Your reputation will get better especially when it has a case to use for reference."

Kibayashi then took a short pause as his expression turned even more serious.

“And also, one more thing, Akira. It’s about time you stop looking down on yourself. I know it’s something left over from your days back in the slums where everyone looked down on you. But you should throw away that view already. No matter what your past is, no one questions the fact that you’re a high-ranking Hunter right now. I bet you’re thinking why someone would come to you with such a document, but from a normal person’s point of view, they don’t want to get into a fight with you even if it means they have to go through all the trouble preparing a document like this. It’s not like I’m telling you to make a 180-degree change, but at least stop looking down on yourself. It brings nothing but trouble both for you and the people around you. It will only give them more reason to misunderstand you, you know.”

Akira sent a serious gaze to Kibayashi, then to Arabe, before finally to the document on his hand. As he gained new self-confidence, he put his name on the treaty and returned it back to Arabe.

“Thank you very much. Now then, I need to return back and take care of the administration regarding this matter. So please allow me to excuse myself.”

“Akira, I’m heading back too. It’s really unfortunate that I don’t have the time to listen to your reckless story, but I’m pretty busy, you see. Until we meet again.”

Arabe politely bowed to Akira while Kibayashi lightly waved his hand as both left the room.

Akira looked at a copy of the treaty for his safe-keeping with a deep thought as he mumbled.

“…I guess I’ve become pretty strong, huh?”

Alpha smiled proudly and stated.

“It’s nothing to be surprised about since I train you myself. But still, don’t get satisfied yet, okay?”

“I know.”

Akira gave a light smile, it was the smile of someone who had recognized and accepted his strength.

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Arabe was walking down the hospital hallway as he sighed in relief.

“Kibayashi. I really owe you one.”

“Just so you know, it’s not for free. As a matter of fact, it is not a cheap favour, okay?”

“I know. We did not have to pay for the damages and were able to sign a peace treaty even after that much fighting. It’s a really huge help.”

Arabe did say that Drankam was still investigating the details of the incident, but in reality, there were points and facts that Drankam had already confirmed.

City Management gathered all the Hunters from the expedition area regardless if they were alive or not and took the data from their information-gathering devices in order to help the investigation. Moreover, they also received data regarding the incident from Tsubaki via Yanagisawa. With all of this data, they were able to get a precise and accurate picture of what had happened.

Drankam received a piece of that investigation result and understood what had happened during the conflict between Akira and Katsuya’s team. Arabe could not help but sigh when he remembered those details.

“Although there is a lot of restricted information, it’s confirmed that Katsuya’s team attacked Akira due to a misunderstanding. We won’t have any argument to fight back if he demands compensation. In the worst-case scenario, Viola might get her hands on this matter as well. It won’t end up well for the gang. But now, we got him to sign a peace treaty recognized by the Hunter office before that happened. With this, we’ll be able to suppress the damage to a minimum. This alone is a huge help for us… It was a huge

surprise that Akira did not ask for any compensation. I wonder if he's one of those Hunters who don't really care about money."

Kibayashi's lips curled up in a rather menacing smile.

"He's my favourite Hunter, after all, a reckless Hunter. He might prefer to exchange favours using life instead of money."

"Good grief, give me a break…"

It was not rare for failed negotiation with a Hunter to break into a fight. In the end, power was everything in the eastern district. Although the negotiation took place outside the wasteland, that line of thinking holds true as long as it was outside the city wall. Not a small number of corporations were brought to the brink of bankruptcy after making a huge mistake during a negotiation with a high ranking Hunter. Of course, they were able to repel that Hunter, but the sacrifice was not small.

Arabe could not help but to rub his temples when he imagined just how much death it would cause if Akira decided to attack Drankam. Seeing that, Kibayashi was happy since it seemed that Arabe understood just how big he owed him. Thus, Kibayashi decided to change the subject.

"So then, how is Drankam right now? With that huge debt to me, it would be such a waste if the gang crumbles and can't pay it back."

"To be honest, it's a huge mess. The effect of Katsuya's death is huge. Although this might sound weird, most of the officers including me, never thought that he would die like that. Some of them even got long-term contracts under the assumption that Katsuya would not die. And with his death, all of those turned into dust. He's a Hunter, it was not strange for him to die anytime. Although it was so obvious, I wonder why no one expected it at all…"

Getting ahead of themselves, getting too optimistic, was completely normal for Hunters. Even so, planning for the worst was a given as well, Arabe thought it was weird how no one was prepared for the worst-case scenario. Kibayashi smiled wryly at Arabe and said.

“He even caused Drankam to break into factions, it means that he must have been that talented. I did want to have a good chat with him at least once, but that chance never came until the very end.”

“It would be bad if your reckless loving fetish infects him after all. I bet the officers, especially the people around Mizuha, were actively keeping him away from you. Now that I think about it, it might have been better to let him meet you and get him through some dangerous situations. That way, we wouldn’t have placed that much expectation on him. But I guess it’s all too late now.”

“Well, you should make sure to learn from your mistake for the sake of those who are still alive. Katsuya was loved by many, right? It’s not rare for those who are unhappy with the situation to still pursue revenge. They might even do so with the peace treaty and Hunters notice from City Management in place. Be extremely careful with this, in the worst-case scenario, the peace treaty might be rendered meaningless, you know?”

“Yeah, I know. We went to get Akira’s approval first, so we’re going to use that as a reason to get Katsuya’s team to sign a separate peace treaty through the Hunter office. We’ll kick out any of them who refuse. Their equipment is all provided by the gang. I’m sure they’re not stupid enough to go and attack Akira bare-handed. Some of them are still unconscious from exhaustion, so we’re planning to deal with them one by one.”

Arabe imagined all the work that he had to do from here on and sighed. Kibayashi only smiled, watching how great an effect a Hunter could bring during his life and after his death. It was indeed one of many fascinating things related to Hunters.

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On the second day, the doctor who was responsible for Akira’s treatment visited him with a large tube in hand. A single arm could be seen floating in the middle of that tube, it was Akira’s new arm.

The doctor then changed the setting of Akira’s prosthetic to connect his arm stump to the new arm and asked Akira to test how it felt.

Akira was surprised when the sensation from his new arm was sent to his prosthetic. He then proceeded to try to move his arm as he was told to. Although he could feel a time lag between his mind and the new arm, he could more or less move it like normal. He felt a strange sensation seeing an arm that was not connected to his body moving under his will. He tried closing and stretching out his palm, and moving his fingers one by one.

After trying a few things, Akira suddenly thought of trying something. He tried to move different fingers of his detached arm and his prosthetic arm. Although it was difficult at first, he quickly got used to it in no time.

The doctor watched that with fascination. But he quickly returned back to reality and stopped Akira.

“Ah, don’t do that! Stop doing something like that! It would cause confusion in your brain once we attach your arm back!”

“S-sorry.”

Akira flusteredly mentally synced back his detached arm with his prosthetic arm. The doctor lightly sighed and stated.

“But still, you’re pretty skilled. Normally, it’s impossible to do that, you know…”

“It had the same feeling as when I’m using my augmented suit, so I thought of trying it and somehow actually did it.”

“I see… If you’re that skilled, how about you try adding an extra arm? Like 2 normal arms plus 2 extra arms that are attached to your augmented suit. We can get you something like that if you want, you know? Normally, it would be extremely difficult to learn to control the new arms, but seeing what you did there, I bet it won’t be that difficult for you. I actually have an acquaintance who works on that kind of thing, I would be happy to introduce you if you want.”

“Thank you, but no thanks.”

“I see.”

The doctor looked rather disappointed. After returning the prosthetic arm setting, he then left the room together with Akira’s new arm.

Akira sighed in relief. Seeing that, Alpha smiled amusedly and asked.

“That was an interesting offer though. Why didn’t you like it? Don’t you think it would be convenient to get 2 more arms?”

“Well, it does sound convenient, but if I get too used to four arms with an augmented suit, I feel like it would be bad. I might just start feeling that my original two arms are not enough. In the worst-case scenario, I might end up wishing for more and more arms. I have no complaints with my current two so I have no plans to get more arms anytime soon.”

“Is that so? Well, I won’t force you though, it’s a matter of preference after all.”

“Preference, huh. How about you, Alpha? You have only 2 arms yourself, right?”

“Should I add more?”

“No, don’t.”

Akira knew that he would definitely be teased if he said yes. He would most likely have to live with a 4 armed girl every day, so Akira made Alpha seriously stop.

After that, a group of people came to visit Akira. There were people from Sheryl’s gang, along with Inabe, Viola, Yodogawa, Erio and Shijima. Of course, the only one who came there to check if Akira was okay was Sheryl. While the rest were only there to check if the Hunter supporting Sheryl was still alive or not.

Their visit started with some normal talks, but after that, they let Akira meet each individual in private to talk about business. The first one was Inabe.

Akira joined the large-scale expedition under his request. Regardless of the reason, Akira was not able to finish the request. So he thought that Inabe was here to talk about that. However, contrary to his expectation, Inabe was there to give Akira his connection as a reward for successfully finishing his request.

Akira was extremely surprised by that.

“Well, uh, I’m really thankful for the information, but are you sure you’re okay with that?”

“Yeah, in the first place, these connections will no longer be available to me after such a large-scale expedition failed under my watch. And right now, regardless of the situation, I was saved from that. Although it was completely unexpected, I did send you to danger for my own profit, so you can think of it as an apology from me.”

“That’s quite a large sum for an apology, you know.”

“…Well, it’s complicated, but I have reasons to be generous to you.”

Inabe sighed and smiled wryly before continuing.

“About the expedition, putting aside who deserves the credit, it actually ended up being a huge success despite all the sacrifices. Do you need more explanation on it?”

“No, there’s no need. I heard that City Management managed to strike a deal with the ruin’s caretaker AI to trade with Aurum through someone by the name of Commander Yanagisawa. And I heard that it would no doubt bring in huge profit for the city.”

Inabe raised his eyebrows.

“You even know that too, huh. It seems that you have some other connection to City Management besides me. In that case, you don’t need any more explanation, right? Basically, the area that is under lockdown by the soldiers dispatched by City Management is under my control. Although

Yanagisawa basically has control over the deal made, I also gained a considerable amount of influence as well. That's why it did not end in a failure. As a matter of fact, it's okay to say it was a success. Though I don't like the fact that I'm basically working under Yanagisawa now."

Inabe rubbed his hand on his forehead as if to relax his face that had slowly turned stern. He then sighed as his expression completely returned back to normal.

"Well, so that's what happened. If you say you don't need it, although it's not like I'm forcing you to take it, you still can keep it. If you still can't accept this form of payment because you feel like you have not completed your request. Well, it might be weird, but there's one thing that you can do for me. Tell Sheryl that you're not angry. After all, I did end up sending you to the hospital. I want to get along well with her as well, so it would be great if you can, you know, pacify her."

"If it's only that, then sure."

Akira was surprised that Inabe actually thought that much of his connection with Sheryl. But thinking of Sheryl's current position, Akira thought that it was nothing strange and just lightly chuckled.

But in reality, Inabe actually did that to keep his connection with Akira. Inabe knew about Akira's battle with Katsuya's team in more detail compared to most people. Having a connection with a Hunter who could crush Drankam's rising star alone was a good thing. Moreover, he already noticed that Sheryl could not go against Akira. Considering his plan to gain money through Sheryl's gang, he needed to keep an amicable relationship with Akira.

"That's good to hear, well then, that's all I have for today. I will also tell Kibayashi about the connection I passed to you. I hope that we can keep working together from here and on out."

Inabe was satisfied with Akira's reply as he left the room after speaking his piece.

Yodogawa was the next one to enter the room. He was there fully for the sake of business.

Akira's badly damaged powered suit was hung inside his hospital room. He was planning to bring that to Shizuka for repair once he was discharged.

But Yodogawa strongly recommended he buy a new augmented suit instead. He was enthusiastically recommending Akira trade his currently broken augmented suit with a new augmented suit from Yodogawa's company. He brought up the company's connection with Sheryl's gang, a special discount for a high ranking Hunter, and a limited-time campaign to offer an extremely expensive high-quality product of his own company to Akira at an abnormally low price. Yodogawa's vigour greatly surprised Akira.

Of course, Yodogawa had a reason for this. To be more precise, it was because of competition. It would be bad for his company's reputation if Akira loved the products of another company; especially when he was the Hunter who demolished an entire team that was using their equipment.

Yodogawa's company already knew that Akira crushed Katsuya's team. Although connections were being jammed, which caused the coordination support system to be unable to utilise its full potential, it did not change the fact that Akira, alone, was able to crush them. To top it off, Akira did that while using an augmented suit from a different company.

The recent expedition was filled with a lot of important information. Those with keen insight already knew about Akira's battle against Katsuya's team. Although equipment did not exactly dictate the end result of a battle, it would still play a big role in deciding the victor.

If Akira used equipment from another company and made a deal with said company, then if he said that the coordination support system was nothing special, it would deal a crippling blow to Yodogawa's company. On the other hand, if Akira decided to change to his company after that battle, it would be a huge boon for his company.

In order to get over this crisis, Yodogawa did not care about profit or loss as he was trying to get Akira to change his equipment to products from his company no matter what the cost.

Regardless of the reason, Akira only stood to profit from being able to get an expensive product at such a low price. But that was exactly why Yodogawa panicked when Akira refused. With reason simply being that he wanted to buy equipment from the shop that he was familiar with, which caused Yodogawa to panic even more.

“I-in that case, how about ordering via that shop?”

“Hmmm, well, to be honest, I want to discuss with Shizuka-san first before deciding which to buy though.”

Akira was insisting on discussing with Shizuka first before ordering any equipment from her shop. Basically, he only bought equipment from the shops that he had a good experience with. The only exceptions would be the equipment that he got through his connection with Kibayashi and Inabe. At the moment, he had no plans to add Yodogawa to that exception.

Yodogawa already knew that trying to bait a Hunter like this would be futile. After all, many of the Hunters decided not to use helmets due to their intuition. Though, it was certainly safer to use one. Against those kinds of Hunters who risk their lives out in the wasteland, money would not be able to overcome their preference.

So Yodogawa decided to withdraw.

“Very well. It’s indeed unfortunate, but I’ll excuse myself here for today. Do tell me if you change your mind.”

“Ah, sure, thanks, and sorry.”

“Please don’t be, it’s perfectly alright.”

Akira felt that it was rather anti-climatic, but he did not say anything as he watched Yodogawa leave the room. The moment Yodogawa stepped out,

the next visitor entered in a rush.

It was Viola and Sheryl. But when Viola brought up the suggestion about asking for compensation from Drankam, Akira told her that he had signed a peace treaty with them already. Hearing that, Viola was so surprised as she said curtly.

“To think that they made their move first, it seems that they have someone pretty skilled with them. Can you tell me the name of the negotiator that Drankam sent?”

“No.”

Akira’s answer was short and showed no chance for negotiation. But Viola then gave her usual smile and commented.

“Oh my, you’re so cold.”

“Only say that to me again when you mean it. The first thing that you said when you came here was suggesting that I demand compensation.”

“Oh, isn’t that exactly because I care for your well-being? If you just leave it to me, I can still deal with it somehow, you know?”

“There’s no one as desperate to rush to their death as to ask for a favour from you, and if there’s one, I’m sure they’ll kill themselves first before asking for your help.”

In contrast to Akira, who obviously seemed to be in a bad mood, Viola was smiling amusedly.

“Is that so? Well, feel free to come to me if you change your mind. I’ll do it for cheap. Well then, since it seems that there’s nothing more I can do here, I’ll excuse myself.”

Viola turned around and walked with a rather uppity stride. Akira saw her leaving the room while thinking, [Does she have another prey to go to?]

This was when Akira noticed that Sheryl was sitting next to him while staring at him.

There was a short silence. If they were real lovers, they would have embraced each other or leaned on each other. But Akira did not make any move at all and Sheryl did not have the courage to go any further.

“…It might be a little late, but I’m glad that you’re okay. Well, I guess you’re not really okay, huh?”

“Is that so? To be honest, I think this is still considered to be ‘ok’.”

“But, that arm, it’s prosthetic, right?

“Well, it is, but I asked for the regenerative treatment and I should get my new arm tomorrow. The arm is still in its growing phase and I’m going to go through surgery tomorrow to attach it back. Today, they brought the new arm and I tried to move it around by connecting it to the prosthetic. It was pretty interesting.”

“So, it’ll get back to normal? That’s great to hear.”

“Yeah, that’s why I think this isn’t that bad.”

“But it’s weird for you to be sent to the hospital if you’re really okay.”

“Is that so? Hmmm, well, other than losing my arm, I was in a way worse condition the last time I was sent to the hospital though. So judging from that comparison, this is not that bad.”

Akira was not trying to look strong, he only said so casually. But Sheryl saw that as how distorted Akira’s way of thinking was. He went to face death and many close calls. This normally led to the tragic end of those who saw the thin line between life and death too many times. They got too used to dangers, they stood calmly on top of the cliff that separated life and death. They had no problem peeking down the cliff, knowing that falling down would be fatal. As humans, they were already broken, and Sheryl caught a glimpse of that from watching how Akira responded.

The person who she loved and was the pillar that supported her, continued to stand next to death even now and it was unlikely that would change anytime soon. Moreover, she had no means to stop him. Sheryl had to learn to live with the fear of losing the one that she loved anytime from here on out. She could not handle that anxiety as she inadvertently hugged Akira.

“…Please don’t die.”

“Yeah, I don’t want to die either after all.”

“…Please don’t die.”

“It’s fine, don’t worry.”

“…Please don’t die.”

Sheryl’s voice was thin as if she was crying. Akira was not sure what to do there but he eventually slowly coiled his arm around her.

Although Sheryl knew that Akira only did it to calm her down, the warmth still soothed her heart.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 227, The Aftermaths

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On the third day of his stay in the hospital, Akira finally went through the surgery, to stick his new arm to his body. Akira's body was already fixed on the operating table, ready for the surgery. The doctor took the new arm out of the liquid tank and placed it on the operating table, he then cut the overgrown part and readjust the stump. After that, he proceeded to shave the stump on Akira's shoulder before sticking both stumps together.

The surgery was done while Akira was conscious. When the doctor finished connecting some of the nerves, he then asked Akira to try to move it. Akira looked away from the cross-section of the cut as he tried to move his new arm.

"How is it? Do you feel any discomfort?"

"It's okay."

Due to the painkiller, Akira did not feel any pain at all. The still detached new arm also only had a numb sensation due to the drug. The surgery continued to connect the bone, the nerves, and then the flesh. Akira had to try to move his arms a few times in the middle of the surgery to check on

the connection. In the end, the doctor wrapped it in a medical tape, and with that, the surgery was finished.

Akira tried to move around his new arm to give a final check. As expected of an expensive treatment, there was no discomfort, it was as if it was his original arm right from the start.

“Try not to do any heavy-lifting for the next 3 days. If it’s possible, I recommend using an augmented suit.”

“Okay, thank you.”

“By the way, about the multiple arms, in case you’re interested…”

“T-thank you for the offer, but no thanks.”

“I see…”

Akira felt a shiver down his spine from the disappointed doctor, so he quickly put on his augmented suit and left the hospital.

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As Shizuka was waiting in her shop, she noticed Akira frightfully entering it. The moment their eyes met, Akira gave a rather stiff smile, so Shizuka simply smiled and waved at him to come over.

“It’s not like I’m angry, so you can just enter the shop normally.”

“Ah, yes.”

Shizuka left the counter and went to Akira, she then hugged Akira tightly and gently patted his head.

“…I don’t know what happened, but it seems that it was a rough one. I’m glad that you’re okay and that’s the most important thing. You’re okay, right?”

“Yes, I’m alright.”

“It’s all good then. I’m happy as long as you return and visit me in good health.”

Shizuka gave another squeeze before letting Akira go and returned back to the counter. She then returned to her usual business smile and asked.

“So then, I guess I should return back to my job as this shop’s manager. Akira, what can I do for you today?”

“Right, I actually want to order another set of equipment…”

Akira lost his bike, vehicle, and rifles, not to mention that his augmented suit was close to being unusable. So he needed to buy replacements for them. Shizuka was not that surprised. Especially when Akira was back in the same situation again. She could not help but smile bitterly.

“Well, that’s just so like you, or more like, it must have been rough.”

“It’s not like I’m doing this intentionally. Well, I’ve already partially given up on how things always end up like this. Fortunately, I have the money to buy good equipment, so I’ll at least buy my safety with money.”

Shizuka smiled mischievously.

“A lot of funds, frequent orders, and only buying expensive products. It seems that you’re turning into an excellent customer for me. Considering that I’m reaping profits as well, as a part of the special treatment for a loyal customer, I’ll prioritize your order.”

“Thank you very much!”

Seeing Akira smiling happily, Shizuka replied with a big smile.

“Ah, by the way, Akira, are you interested in augmented suits from Kiryou?”

“Kiryou?”

“Someone from that company came to my shop yesterday saying that they want to put their augmented suit in my shop. Since my shop doesn’t usually sell that kind of augmented suit, I refused. But they were so desperate that they even offered some special deals which make it actually sound suspicious instead, so I decided to just keep it for now. Although I can’t really tell you the details, basically Hunters that satisfy certain prerequisites should be able to buy this augmented suit with a special discount. You might be able to get that discount as well, so, what do you think?”

Shizuka only said so casually, but seeing Akira gave a rather weird response there, she then inquired.

“Oh, are you familiar with that name?”

“Uhh, well, actually…”

After listening to Akira’s story about Yodogawa, Shizuka nodded, looking convinced and a bit amazed.

“So that’s why. Basically, they’re hunting for a potential customer. Well, it’s true when a high ranking Hunter is using their product, they can use it as advertisement. I can understand wanting to secure a customer who often destroys their equipment and keeps coming back to buy expensive products.”

In reality, her intuition was telling that was not everything. But since it did not cause any inconvenience for both Akira and her, she decided not to inquire any further.

“So then, what are you going to do? If you don’t have anything against it, I’m thinking of accepting their offer. Of course, as long as it doesn’t have any strings attached. It’s a good offer both for you and me. If there’s anything to worry about, it might be that your equipment will lean toward what they manufacture from here on out. But as long as that discount applies and other companies don’t give you any discount, the cost-performance ratio of their product is great.”

“If it’s really a good offer for me and Shizuka-san, then please accept their offer.”

“Alright, I’ll discuss the details with them, so can you at least tell me your budget for now?”

“I’m thinking about 2 billion Aurum.”

Among the ammo and other expendables he had used up in that expedition, the hospitalization fee, the regeneration treatment, and the budget for his new equipment, Akira’s account, which was brimming with cash from selling the old-world automata, turned pitiful once more. He still had enough to get by, although the digits were reduced significantly.

Shizuka smiled amusedly and commented.

“Good grief, Akira, you’ve really grown up to be a great Hunter. No wonder even companies try to get you on their side.”

Akira smiled bitterly and replied.

“That seems to be indeed the case, huh?”

Shizuka raised her eyebrows. That reply just now showed no self-depreciation that Akira always had up until now. But she did think that this was a good change and was happy for him.

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Yanagisawa was waiting inside a hideout in the lower district of Kugamayama city. It was a highly secretive place suitable for dangerous conversations and conspiracies. For example, a meeting with one of the nationalists. Although he had another hideout in the inner wall, smuggling a nationalist inside the wall was too much of a task even for Yanagisawa.

Yanagisawa was thinking inside that hideout as he mumbled.

“But still, to think Katsuya died.”

After making that deal with Tsubaki, Yanagisawa returned back to the city to deal with the clean-up and the aftermath. Once he was done, he then ordered one of his men to check up on Katsuya. That was when he received a report that Katsuya was already dead. Since that was completely unexpected, Yanagisawa ordered for a closer investigation. But the report regarding Katsuya's death did not change much.

[So the reason why she didn't ask for my help to deal with Katsuya was not because it violated their rules, but because she already knew Katsuya was dead…? No, I believe it's the former. She needed to get him killed through a method that didn't violate their rules. She basically used the jamming to cut off his support and then made use of the chaos. If Hunters fight each other, accidents are very likely to happen. I'm sure that's the gist of it.]

It did not matter how many times Yanagisawa tried to rethink it, he could not differentiate if everything was all according to Tsubaki's plan, or that everything lined up due to coincidence. But since he would be dealing with Tsubaki in the future, Yanagisawa assumed that the first guess was the correct one as he tried to rethink the whole incident.

[If I assume that this was all Tsubaki's plan, then just how far does her scheme go? Was the large-scale expedition also part of her plan too? No, what about that attack on the forward base? Wait, no, is it from that huge humanoid monster's attack? Can it be even earlier than that?]

Yanagisawa went through all the recent incidents in chronological order to pull out all possibilities.

[…Now that I think about it, there was a small commotion about old-world terminals. Was it from that time? Tsubaki might have transported those terminals here. I've already confirmed that she did something similar in the past to bait Hunters. That's why City Management was able to quickly determine where those terminals came from. After all, the same thing happened in the past. She might have deliberately released those terminals out to encourage City Management to organize an expedition. Then all the incidents preceding the expedition, such as the attack on the forward base, were for the sake of thinning out City Management's resources. Once that happened, City Management would send out a bigger army to ensure the

success of the expedition. In such a manner, she would have basically manipulated the army. Taking that opportunity, she crushed the oncoming army, which resulted in plenty of deaths. To eliminate more people, the bigger the army, the more chaotic it was, the greater the death count…]

Yanagisawa's smile turned sharp. Everything was nothing but his guess, he had no proof that it was the real truth. But he also did not have any argument to deny that guess as well.

[Well, it doesn't really matter. It seems that we can get along well from here on out. I just need to always keep my guard up, that's all there is to it.]

Although they were not allies, they were no longer enemies as well. Furthermore, they had the same objective as well. Excessive suspicion would only cause problems. Thus, Yanagisawa decided not to delve any further into this matter.

The security system of the hideout suddenly issued Yanagisawa a warning. There was a guest. Yanagisawa did grant passage for certain individuals to his hideout, but since some of them often changed their faces or bodies, the system could not account for them.

Because of that, Yanagisawa was no longer surprised when he met an entirely different person with the same name as his guest. But this time, he was surprised when he saw his guest's face.

He was surprised to meet someone he recognised though, he knew that this person wearing that face was not one and the same.

"You're… Katsuya? Shouldn't you be dead? No, more than that, how did you get in here?"

The boy with Katsuya's face replied cryptically.

"I've given up my name for the great cause, or so I want to say, but… You can just call me with my previous name."

Yanagisawa came up with many guesses from that quick reply, his face then turned stern as he said.

“I know that followers of the great cause can change any of their body parts excluding the brain, but you, you even changed your brain, didn’t you?”

“Although it’s way more important than any other body part, the brain is nothing more than another part of our body that can be freely replaced.”

That young boy was Nergo. That head was gathered straight from its dead owner. There was still a mark leftover from where Akira split the head to two.

Yanagisawa tilted his head.

“What happened to Katsuya’s mind?”

“He’s already dead for good. Or at least, there’s no leftover of his personality in the brain. So, he no longer exists.”

“Is he really dead?”

“What is death? It is a difficult question to answer. Technology developments continue to blur the line between life and death. People can’t return back to life. If someone returns back to life, it means that they’re still alive right from the start. To put it differently, they’re not dead yet. Although it’s theoretically possible to resurrect someone, it’s still open to interpretation whether life after resurrection is still considered as dead or not.”

“I’m not talking about that.”

“You might already know about this. We had a separate deal with Tsubaki to help her cause more chaos during the expedition. At that time, she told us not to cause any harm to him. Even after I took the head off from his corpse, I did not receive any complaint from Tsubaki. So basically, according to the current standard, our standard, and the old-world standard, Katsuya is already dead.”

Yanagisawa was convinced by that argument, Katsuya was really dead for good.

“Hmmm, is that so? So then, How does it feel using Katsuya’s brain? Does it feel good?”

Nergo made an expression that was unlike Katsuya as he shook his head and explained.

“Unfortunately, it didn’t work out as I had hoped. I bet his death also cut off any of his connection to the old-world domain. Either that or we made a mistake while handling his brain, which caused some kind of incompatibility to the hardware. The reason doesn’t matter, in the end, I wasn’t able to recover his ability to connect to the old-world domain.”

“I see, that’s indeed unfortunate.”

Yanagisawa returned to his usual joking attitude as he smiled and said.

“So then, what do you need from me today? Ah, in case you want information about Katsuya in order to slip into Drankam, just to let you know, I don’t mind if you want to do that but everyone already knows that Katsuya is dead. I’m pretty sure it’s too late for you to do that now. But, do you still want to try?”

“No, there are too many people over there who were under his local network. They won’t recognize me as Katsuya even if I use his brain and face. I bet their personal identification system would identify me as a different person. Just to be safe, I won’t be going there as Nergo either. I’m planning to change face and work as a different person after this.”

“Hmmm, so, why are you here?”

“I just want to check something.”

“Check on something? If you want to ask me something, you could have just sent it to me through the usual line though.”

“No, there’s something that I want to confirm, and I was able to do so.”

“So then?”

“The reason why you’re looking for us is not for safe-keeping, but for eradication. I’ve confirmed that with absolute proof.”

Yanagisawa’s joking attitude vanished. His smile vanished. Only silent pressure and a pair of eyes that could pierce through one’s soul remained.

“So, now that you know, what are you going to do?”

Yanagisawa said that but he knew Nergo was not someone he could easily deal with.

“Nothing in particular. Unknown factors are a source of disruptions. If I really have to say it, then my objective is to remove these factors.”

“I see.”

After that, a short silence wafted between them. Both of them were trying to figure out what their opponent was thinking. Nergo was the first one to open his mouth.

“It’s completely unrelated, but isn’t it about time for you to tell us about your real plan? I do believe that both of us are moving for the sake of humanity. And I think that you share some of the same principles with us. After all, we were able to work together although only for a limited capacity. I think we can work together to realize our ideals.”

Yanagisawa seemed to hesitate for a bit, he then carefully said.

“…I have to refuse. I can’t tell you, or at least, not now. Although, if it’s after I have everything I need to reach my goal, I do think that we can be allies.”

“I see, that’s indeed regrettable. Now then, we shall wait patiently for the day that you have everything you need to reach your goal.”

Nergo only said so and left.

Yanagisawa relaxed his tense body and sighed.

“Give me a break already.”

Nergo did not fear death. But it was not because he could not die. It was because of the way he saw the worth of his life and his soul. It was for the sake of the great cause that he lived, murdered, and ultimately died for.

But that was exactly why Yanagisawa thought that he was a pain to deal with. If it was because of his immortality, Yanagisawa could still corner him by taking away his immortality. Even if it was only temporarily, he would be able to convince him that he had already lost. That would have been enough to scare him. But against those who laugh in the face of certain death, that method would be meaningless.

“What a huge pain in the neck.”

Inside the room where there was no one else but him, Yanagisawa started complaining and cursing.

After Nergo left Yanagisawa’s hideout, he then frowned and muttered.

“It doesn’t look like it would go well, huh?”

The reason why Yanagisawa refused the offer and decided to still stay in Kugamayama city, was for the sake of getting what he needed for his goal. The thing he needed most probably lay somewhere deep inside Kuzusuhara ruin, in the direction where the supply line was being pushed. The existence of an old-world connector that he could not control was an obstacle for him to reach the thing that he sought after.

Nergo noticed that from his last exchange with Yanagisawa. Yanagisawa himself might have deliberately done that as a form of compromise as well as a warning: ‘I would fight back if you get in my way’.

“As I thought, this isn’t going to be easy.”

Nergo understood well that it was a compromise as well as a warning. But even after knowing that, he was still trying to think of a way to get

Yanagisawa on their side, unfortunately, no good idea came up.

__*__*__*__

Yumina was standing in the middle of a white room. Her consciousness was hazy, but she could recognize Katsuya, who was standing not too far away from her. She did not think much and immediately went toward Katsuya. But she suddenly stopped in front of him.

She was staring at that person that was obviously Katsuya from the outside. She then tilted her head and said.

“…You are not Katsuya. Who are you?”

“As I thought, you can tell, huh?”

That Katsuya vanished, and in its place, a girl appeared. She was an extraordinarily beautiful girl with a friendly smile. However, Yumina looked at her as if was a threat.

“I’m here with an offer, I hope you will hear me out.”

“An offer?”

“That’s right. It’s a very good offer for you and the rest who have lost Katsuya.”

The girl started explaining her offer with an amicable smile on her face.

Yumina woke up on the infirmary bed. Her consciousness was still hazy as she pushed herself up and looked around, confused. She felt like she just had a dream but she could not remember what it was. She could not remember who she was talking to and what she refused. As her hazy consciousness retreated, it also carried away that thought and vanished altogether.

“What was that…?”

Yumina looked confused for a few seconds. When she regained her calm, she then went through her memories. She remembered that she was busy preparing to retreat when she was inside the ruin, but nothing past that.

After that, Arabe came in and explained what had happened to Yumina.

“I see… So Katsuya is already…”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

Yumina was very saddened by the news, but for some reason, she was not surprised. Although she did not know the reason why, she somehow already knew that Katsuya was dead.

“I know that you haven’t fully recovered yet and you might need time to reorganize your feelings. You can just take it easy for the time being.”

“…Yes, thank you very much.”

Arabe felt a slight pang of guilt seeing Yumina politely bow at him, but he then shook that feeling off and returned back to business.

“Ah, and also, I know that I should bring this after you have fully recovered, but it’s my job, you see. I have something that I need to talk to you about, so please just listen to it calmly, okay?”

Arabe awkwardly took out a peace treaty and gave it to Yumina as he started explaining its content. Yumina only listened silently, and when Arabe finished, she signed her name on the treaty and returned it back to Arabe.

Arabe was a bit surprised by that as he looked at Yumina with eyes full of questions. His biggest worry was that Yumina only accepted that in appearance while was scheming for revenge inside.

“Uhh, well, it might be weird for me to say this since I’m the one who came to you with this subject, but, are you really okay with this?”

Yumina still had a saddened expression on her face as she forced a smile.

“Yes, I honestly don’t want this conflict to escalate any further. Moreover, I think Katsuya wouldn’t want us to hold on to this grudge and cause even more deaths.”

Arabe sighed in relief, it seemed that there was nothing for him to worry about.

“Thanks, actually, there are quite a lot of people who have refused, you see. Although I’m sure that it’s not like they will try to kill Akira, considering our relationship with City Management, we need to do this properly. I’m sure that they will change their mind once they calm down after a few days. At that time, I plan to try and convince them as well. If they still insist on not signing the peace treaty, we have no other choice but to strip them of their equipment and kick them out of Drankam. To be honest, I’m really troubled by this.”

“Can you tell me who refused? I’ll try to convince them.”

“Really? Thank you.”

Arabe, who seemed exhausted, thanked Yumina with a serious expression.

“By the way, did Airi also refuse?”

Yumina actually asked that question purely out of curiosity. But seeing Arabe make a conflicted expression, she felt that something did not go well as her expression turned cloudy.

“Uhh, Airi is still alive, right? I heard that from someone else before…”

“…Yeah, we were able to save her, but… I guess I’ll tell you. You will get to know eventually. We did save her and treat her, her life was in no immediate danger. She woke up not too long before you. Once I received that report from the hospital, I came to her room with the peace treaty too, but… She was no longer there.”

“She’s gone?”

“Yeah, it seems like she had sneaked out of the hospital. We dispatched some of our guys to look for her, but we have not found her so far. I think she’s currently confused and panicking but…”

The worry in Yumina’s chest turned worse. The shock even caused her to feel dizzy. But right now, she remembered a portion of her dream.

[So only you alone refuse, huh?]

The girl inside Yumina’s dream said so, it meant that someone else accepted her offer.

Airi was traversing through the wasteland on a vehicle. She was well-armed. Both the vehicle and her equipments were not from Drankam. She had them ready beforehand just to be safe in case she got kicked out of Drankam. She had been slowly gathering these equipment in secret.

Not too long after she left the city, she found some monsters. Airi jumped off the vehicle and directed her rifle at them, she closed her eyes and did not even try to take aim as she pulled the trigger. After holding down the trigger for a few seconds, she opened her eyes. All her shots hit and all the monsters in front of her were already dead.

A voice came out from her information terminal. Airi looked at the display, there was the girl that Yumina saw in her dream.

“How was it?”

“…Yes, I’ve confirmed it, we have a deal… What should I call you?”

“You can call me anything.”

“…I can’t think of a name.”

“In that case, you can call me Alias. We’re just like the embodiment of that word after all.”

“Alright, Alias. I’ll be in your care.”

“Likewise.”

Airi returned back to her vehicle and set out into the wasteland. As she left Kugamayama city behind, her face was filled with determination.

Silavin: Hmm… so, will she try to hunt Akira down?

From the start I liked Yumina more and always saw Airi as backup number 2 for Katsuya.

I think Yumina can side with Akira. The difference in their personality kinda seems complimentary. But well, I doubt Airi will be able to do much to Akira anyways.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 228, Akira and Hikaru

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Not too long after the large-scale expedition incident, Akira called Kibayashi to meet up in a certain restaurant on the first floor of Kugama building. Kibayashi was browsing the menu in a good mood.

“You’re the one who invited me, so you’ll pay for it this time, right?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s great to hear. By the way, why don’t we go to the higher floors?”

“I don’t have that kind of money. This place is already expensive for me.”

Seeing Akira frowning, Kibayashi smiled bitterly and remarked.

“No one would have expected that coming from a ranking 50 Hunter. Whether it’s for treating someone else or for treating yourself, a high-ranking Hunter like you needs to use the appropriate corresponding restaurant, you know?”

Although there were many deaths after that incident, many of the Hunters did not receive enough to make the job they took worthwhile. It was mainly

because most of the Hunters participating in the expedition had their reward decided based on the relics that they brought back. Even for those in the extermination team, their contract did not award payment for the number of monsters that they defeated, but instead, the worth of relics found in the area that they secured. Based on those two criteria, most Hunters did not receive much at all.

Naturally, City Management could not use that excuse to not pay the Hunters. Nonetheless, these Hunters could not really be rewarded considering the fact that most of them were fighting and killing each other. None to mention City Management did not have that funds to spare in the first place. The cost of the powered suit used during the expedition was by no means small. There were many individuals and corporations that bet on the success of the expedition. Despite all of that, aside from Yanagisawa's deal with Tsubaki, the expedition ended up in a total failure. Thus, many investors could not reap the reward of their investment. In the worst-case scenario, it might even shake the city's economy. Therefore, City Management was working hard to find a way to stabilize the situation.

In order to do that, City Management offered rewards to the Hunters in the form of rank promotion. Rewards were normally a sum of money plus a Hunter Rank promotion. However, it had now turned purely into Hunter Rank promotion.

Naturally, there were Hunters who insisted on getting paid. To pacify them, City Management paid them based on their Hunter Rank after their promotion using loans. The loans came from selling bonds to several corporations and other cities. Although Kugamayama city was in a financial pinch, since there was a prospect of massive sums of revenue soon, City Management managed to amass more than sufficient funding.

The low-interest loan City Management provided was a huge help for the Hunters who had to pay for treatment, equipment, and repairs. It was just enough to prevent the Hunters from rioting.

With this, Akira received a huge boost in his Hunter Rank. It was thanks to the feat of crushing an entire team of Hunters alone. He also shot down a powered suit that was piloted by someone suspected to be a nationalist. If

they considered all his achievement, potential payments and converted it into Hunter Rank, the increase would obviously not be small.

And so, with someone as skilled and as powerful as him, Akira's actions and words came off unbefitting of his position.

"If you want to change it to Shuteriana, you'll be the one paying, okay? If you don't want to, then you need to be someone that would give me a good enough reason to treat you there first."

"Geez, that's so stingy. Just so you know, I'm actually a big shot, you know?"

"So why is this so-called big shot driving a patrol truck in the middle of the wasteland."

"That's my hobby."

"Yeah yeah."

In contrast to Kibayashi who was smiling amusedly, Akira looked obviously exasperated.

Once they finished placing their order, the meal came not too long after. It was only once the dishes were on the table that Kibayashi started talking about the main subject.

"So then, what do you want to ask me today? After all, you were the one who called me here, it must be a pretty serious subject, right?"

"I want to hear the details of the equipment that I ordered back then. It's already been almost 6 months since then. I know that it's not that simple, but at least tell me what's the progress right now and estimate how long I can get them."

"Oh, about that, huh. It's still nowhere close to completion, I can't even give you the time estimation."

"Hah?"

Against Akira’s obviously disapproving reaction, Kibayashi frowned and rebuked.

“Just to let you know, it’s your fault that I put in the order late, you know?”

“How did that end up as my fault?”

“It’s your fault for adding Inabe’s connections in the middle of it. Thanks to that, the prearranged deal was thrown into the rubbish can. Moreover, since the situation had changed, when we asked you one more time about your order including the ones through Inabe’s connections, you yourself said to use all the connections available to get the best equipment instead of focusing on speed, remember? It’s given that only a handful of places sell such exquisitely high-quality equipment. To be precise, everything is from the east end of the eastern district. It is the closest you can get to the front line, where the best of the best equipment is sold. It’s really difficult to get your order through them on that side, you know?”

Kibayashi was fully expressing his exasperation with his body language as well. Seeing him like that, Akira faltered for a bit.

“I-I see.”

“What’s more, after Inabe got control over the supply line, he has become a pretty influential person. Thanks to that, many want to use that route as well. Although, I bet most of them are aiming for Yanagisawa instead. So he’s having a hard time over there dealing with the adjustment. I’ve been really busy, you know. Preparing negotiation materials directly not related to the order to smooth out the deal, getting myself involved in their negotiations, making offers, creating openings. It’s not easy, you know?”

“O-okay.”

“Even after getting the equipment that you asked for, we still have to figure out how to transport it here. I had to ask the city transports to bring it over so many times. They finally agreed when they had spare capacity. However, that is only for a single item. Even after they agreed, they are still scouting the networks and figuring out which route to take. That is not to mention

the deals that I have to make to other parties involved as well. There are still a lot of things to do”

“Y-yes, of course.”

As Akira was overwhelmed by Kibayashi’s flurry of explanation that sounded more like an attack, he suddenly thought of something.

“If it’s about the transport, I can help out by paying to get it sent here in its own separate transport vehicle though. That way, everything should arrive faster.”

“Like hell it would, if you really want to do it, make sure to at least prepare 10 billion Aurum, alright?”

“I-It’s that expensive?”

Akira was utterly surprised. Kibayashi sighed exasperatedly and explained.

“Listen here. The front line is filled with monsters that are normally designated as bounty monsters around here. Now imagine paying the Hunters who spend their time fighting such monsters just to escort your equipment here. It will obviously not be cheap, right? Corporations dealing with transportation in between cities have to do a lot of ways to lower the cost. Things like building infrastructure along the safe routes, or carrying multiple cargoes in one go, or getting into long-term contracts with such Hunters. If you want to pay to transport your equipment separately, there’s no doubt that it’ll at least be that expensive.”

Now that Kibayashi explained it, it did make sense for Akira. So Akira just sighed and replied.

“…I see. That does make sense. I have an acquaintance who once transported equipment from the front line, so I must have gotten a wrong impression from there.”

“Well, there are some safe areas too, even in the front line. Moreover, there are people who love to boast about being in the front line. It’s impossible to

trust them without any proof. You can test them with stories that they won't know unless they actually visited the front line or stuff that can be found only in the front line."

"That's true, I can't say for sure that he's not lying, but I got to see something that I heard only exists in the front line. It was a gun called Ragnarok. Elena-san and Sara-san were there too, so I'm pretty sure it was really a Ragnarok."

Kibayashi raised his eyebrows and smiled amusedly.

"Ohhh, in that case, he must really have a safe route to the front line at the very least. So, what happened to him? People who bet on the transportation of such stuff usually either end up with a huge profit or a huge loss"

Stories of people who reached for success through one enormous bet was Kibayashi's favourite. Even if their bet failed, he would still relish it. However, though he showed his interest, in contrast to that, Akira paused for a bit before replying.

"…I think it's neither. It seems that he's working as a normal merchant right now."

"Ohh, that's unexpected. Hmmm… Can you introduce me to him? Don't worry, you can just tell me his contact number. There's no need to reserve your time to introduce him directly to me."

"Sure, I don't mind, but he's not a Hunter, you know?"

"It doesn't matter, as long as they're daredevil reckless people, their occupation doesn't matter."

"Yeah yeah."

After Kibayashi received Katsuragi's contact from the obviously exasperated Akira, he then returned to the main subject.

"So, the equipment will still take some time to arrive. Well, I'm sure it's not fun to just listen to my excuses as to why it'll still take some time. So, I'll at

least let you know this. For the transport, it seems that it’s going better than I thought, as long as we can get the product, it might reach here sooner than expected. We’re in the resupplying season right now, and this time, Kugamayama city is joining the distribution network.”

The Corporate Government had a regular large-scale transportation season. During that time, they took in requests to transport money, cargo, and even people all over the eastern district in order to proactively encourage economic circulation throughout the eastern district.

Due to the support from the Corporate Government, transporting between cities that would have normally cost a large sum, could be done at a small price or even for free. It also helped transport people, who could not travel due to the price, and distribute them to locations that needed them. Thus, stimulating the development of the eastern district.

Of course, there was also another secret reason. It was also useful to transport people from overpopulated cities to the slums of other cities.

Even if the Corporate Government stopped the free food distribution in the slums of certain cities and told them that there was a surplus in the other cities, people with no money nor power would still not move to the other cities. To be precise, they could not afford to go. However, if transport was free, then it was a completely different matter. People from the slums would actively participate in the transport season, believing that they had a better chance of surviving somewhere else. It was a more ethical way to control the population density of the slums in the cities instead of just killing them. Thus, the reason why cities tolerated such a practice.

While at the same time, it also worked as a way to transport Hunters who started to run out of work in the cities they were in. They could go to a better place with more Hunter jobs before they turn into thugs and bandits out of desperation. After all, penniless but armed Hunters would not be able to live elsewhere other than the slums.

Moreover, plans for constructing new cities or a base way past the front line would be often done during this season. After all, they needed to transport a lot of resources to execute such a plan.

With all of these reasons intertwined, trucks and other transport vehicles filled the wasteland during this season. Of course, it greatly roused the monsters. However, with the monetary support from the Corporate Government, each transport vehicle was guarded with enough escorts. It was a good opportunity to show the power of the Corporate Government as well as to thin out the monsters roaming the wasteland. Due to this large-scale movement, the eastern district was able to build infrastructure to travel through the wasteland.

Akira tried to remember when was the last transport season, but considering that he could not even tell what was the date back when he was in the slums, he could not really identify when was the last transport season.

“The transport season, huh. I feel like it’s been quite a while since the last season.”

“The transport season itself is always done at least once per year, but it has indeed been quite a while since the last time Kugamayama city joined in on it. Although each city is recommended to join, it’s still up to each City Management’s discretion to join or not. Basically, we have no say in such a decision, but well, it’s kind of easy to guess the reason why Kugamayama city decided to join this season.”

“Oh, what reason is that?”

Kibayashi pulled back his head and raised his eyebrows. He then gave a bitter smile as he stated the reason.

“It’s for replenishing Hunters.”

Kugamayama city had several ruins around it and each ruin offered different levels of challenge. Some of them were completely explore-able even to new Hunters while some even required veteran Hunters with proper preparation.

Moreover, the regular patrol request made by City Management was basically training for newer Hunters to get themselves ready to face real ruins. At the same time, it also helped these amateur Hunters to earn enough

money to get by. This way, they would not be forced into robbery and other crimes.

Working together like this encourages the Hunters to form teams. Thus, effectively reducing the number of Hunters who challenged the ruins alone only to end up dead. Although it had many downsides, the benefits were also equally as many if not more.

Due to this, Kugamayama city was a relatively good city for Hunters to chase after success. This was the reason why Hunters from nearby cities were attracted to here. Many Hunters stayed in this city for a long time to polish their skills before heading out east for more profitable ventures.

With such a background, Kugamayama city had become well known even among the Corporate Government as the city of Hunters. But unfortunately, that title was obsolete.

“Well, with a lot of things happening, we lost quite a lot of Hunters after all. Even if we talk only about the incidents connected to ruins, there were 3 in Kuzusuhara ruin and 1 in Mihazono residence ruin. Basically, there were 4 major incidents recently and each incident took many lives. There was that huge battle in the slums the other day as well. This is on top of all the common deaths from the Hunters as well. That’s why it would be bad for City Management unless we manage to bring in more Hunters from the other cities”

“…Is it really that bad?”

“It definitely is. Ah, right, you are used to working alone so it doesn’t affect you much, huh? Well, some people might indeed think we didn’t lose that much if we only look at the total percentage of fallen Hunters. But the effect is clearly palpable. There are quite a lot of Hunters who take a short hiatus or even decide to outright completely stop working after losing their partner, you know. There was a short time when we had a crisis. There were a considerable number of relics brought to the exchange centres and the number of Hunters who signed up for the patrol request skyrocketed. Oh, wait, this is a secret, okay? After all, everything I just said is insider information.”

“Ah, right.”

“We were able to regain some of our spirit and managed to gather quite a number of Hunters thanks to news of Yanagisawa’s successful deal with the ruin’s A.I. It would have been really bad if that did not happen. I bet Kugamayama city would have been forced into a recession if it was not for that.”

Although Kibayashi said so in his usual casual joking manner, he was telling the truth. The city was indeed on the brink of an economic crisis. But that’s exactly why Yanagisawa’s recent achievement gave him immense power and influence.

But Kibayashi suddenly gasped as if he just noticed something.

“Wait, now that I think about it, you were also involved in all of those incidents, right?”

Akira inadvertently looked away.

“…Well, I restarted my Hunter activity around that time after all.”

“You’ve gone through all of those incidents and came back alive, no wonder you’re doing great as a Hunter, as I thought, I can identify an exceptional Hunter when I see one”

In contrast to Kibayashi, who was laughing cheerfully, Akira only gave an awkward bitter smile. Although Akira thought that those incidents were not really his fault, his face still stiffened when Kibayashi brought them up.

They then had a short idle talk afterwards before Kibayashi asked Akira’s plan from here on out.

“By the way, you got promoted to Rank 50. Are you planning to go to the other cities?”

“No, I don’t have that kind of plan at all.”

“That’s great to hear. It seems that I’ll still be able to enjoy more of your crazy stories for a bit longer.”

Akira knitted his eyebrows.

“Is there any connection between my Hunter Rank and going to the other cities?”

“Well, it’s just a rather common thing for the Hunters around Rank 40 to leave Kugamayama city and go to the other cities. And it’s also very common that they’ll leave right before they reach Rank 50. Because of this, people basically recognize Kugamayama city as a city for Hunters below Rank 50.”

“Oh? I didn’t know there is that kind of upper limit.”

Seeing Akira so surprised, Kibayashi added to his explanation.

“Oh, please don’t misunderstand. It’s not like the Hunter Office sets an upper limit for the Hunters to stay in this city. It’s basically just a matter of risk and reward. Convenience, and supply and demand. Since most of the Hunters leave the city before they reach Rank 50, as expected, no shop suitable for Hunters of Rank 50 and above can be found in this city. So, there is the trouble that they would have to go through for their equipment. It’s also hard to find suitable party members as well. And to top it off, there are not many ruins around that match their skills. Because of that, it’s extremely difficult to raise their Rank even higher if they stay in this city. So for those Hunters who are aiming for Rank 50 and above, this city is only suitable for them at most till Rank 50.”

Akira was listening closely to Kibayashi’s explanation. After he gave a nod indicating that he could understand that reasoning, he then tilted his head.

“I see… Wait, you just said that there are not that many ruins that match their skill, right? In that case, how about the inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin? They can just go there, right?”

Kibayashi could not hold back his smile in response to that naive question.

“If you think so, you’re more than welcome to try.”

Akira frowned.

“… Is it that bad?”

“We’re talking about the area past the supply line that City Management built by splurging a huge amount of money here, you know? We are only able to slowly push deeper only after dispatching powered suits. A Rank 50 Hunter would die in no time. Those Rank 60 or 70 Hunters might have a chance if they go with their own powered suit. However, there isn’t a shop or a place for them to get their equipment properly maintained around here. Of course, City Management itself does have a place for that, but it’s usually fully utilized by the city defence squad. So, they don’t have the spare time nor capacity for Hunters. Ah, by the way, just to warn you. Although people were using powered suits during that incident in the slums, it’s unwise to think of them as the same kind of power suit I’m talking about here, okay? What I’m talking about are proper powered suits, properly maintained and piloted by real, skilled Hunters.”

“I see, that does make sense.”

That argument was enough to fully convince Akira. But as if they were exchanging positions, this time, it was Kibayashi who suddenly went deep in thought.

“…But well, the situation might change from now on. Not only has Yanagisawa restarted pushing the supply line deeper into Kuzusuhara ruin, it seems that he’s also gathering high-ranking Hunters to explore the inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin. Other plans that involve large funding to construct infrastructure inside the ruin are also in progress. Some of the Hunters who had gone east are returning back. Don’t you notice any of this?”

“…Now that you mention it, I feel like I’ve been seeing more and more Hunters with outfits that look like swimsuits under their coats. Are you talking about those people?”

“Judging from their fashion sense, there’s no mistaking it. Those are the Hunters who used to live in the eastern front line. Akira, be careful. As I said before, Kugamayama city is participating in the transport season which means that there will be an influx of Hunters. This includes those Hunters that I’ve just mentioned. Some of these Hunters will need some time to adapt to the common sense of this city. They might act meek just because Hunters who can destroy a vehicle with their bare hands are considered weak from where they come from. If you get in a fight with any of them, you might get yourself killed.”

“Alright, I’ll be careful.”

In response to Kibayashi who gave that warning in his uncharacteristically serious tone, Akira could feel the danger in his words and gave a firm reply.

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On the next day, this time, it was Kibayashi who called Akira to come to a meeting. As Akira was waiting for Kibayashi on the first floor of the Kugama building, just before it was time for the meeting, a girl appeared from the inner wall.

Akira looked suspiciously at that girl who was walking toward him. She was donning a City Management staff’s uniform and looked rather mature, compared to the current Akira, who had gone through a growth spurt and fixed his physical condition lately, that girl seemed to be around Akira’s age. Basically, she was a tad bit too young to be called a full-grown adult but a little bit too old to be called a little girl as well. In short, she was rather too young to be from City Management, which was filled with adults.

The girl smiled nervously at Akira and gracefully bowed.

“Akira-san, correct? I’m Hikaru, I’m working from the same bureau as Kibayashi. Nice to meet you.”

“Eh, ah, right, uhhh, where is Kibayashi?”

“I’ll be responsible for you for today. Well then, shall we go somewhere else to discuss the main matter for today?”

“Whoah, wait, wait.”

Akira took out his information terminal and called Kibayashi.

“It’s me, what is it?”

“Don’t give me that crap. Where are you now? If you have someone else to come because some sudden business came up, at least leave me a message, will you?”

Akira then proceeded to explain the situation to Kibayashi. Of course, he was planning to give Kibayashi an earful at the start, but his plan changed after Kibayashi replied with something that he did not expect.

“So basically, someone else came to the meeting place right on our agreed-upon scheduled time and she gave my name, right? Let me tell you that it was a good move to contact me first instead of just going with her without saying anything.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m saying that she might be trying to trick you.”

Akira shot a sharp gaze to Hikaru. Although Hikaru did not understand why he did that, it still sent a shiver to her spine.

“Whoah, don’t get me wrong though. I’m just saying it as a possibility. Hikaru is indeed someone I know. I can at least guarantee that. But I won’t guarantee anything past that point.”

Akira frowned even more.

“What kind of game are you playing here? I’ll just leave if you won’t properly tell me what’s going on.”

“That in itself is also an option for you. Kicking the deal down the drain because there’s no one that you can trust during the negotiation, without receiving any explanation regarding the matter. That is indeed a good move. Although, I won’t say that’s the correct move in all cases.”

Akira sighed. Kibayashi, who could hear that sigh from the other side, smiled amusedly.

“As I warned you in the past, being a Hunter who is only good at fighting but not at negotiating will bring you into a lot of trouble. So just use this chance as practice. Let me remind you again, I can only guarantee you that she’s someone that I know. You do the rest yourself to confirm her identity, her position, her goals, if she’s someone that you can trust or not and if she’s someone capable or not. Of course, you can ask me later to try to check your answers, but you should do it yourself first. Later then.”

Kibayashi ended the call. Alpha smiled at the troubled Akira.

“So, what’s the plan? Are we going to just leave?”

“…Well, this is also a kind of training, so I’ll at least hear what she has to say.”

Akira’s gaze returned to Hikaru. Although there was no trace of suspicion in that gaze, Hikaru could not help but get nervous.

Akira then decided to bring Hikaru to one of the restaurants on the first floor. Hikaru, who was sitting face to face with Akira, politely lowered her head.

“I’ve confirmed this matter with Kiabayshi beforehand, but I apologize if I made a mistake.”

“Ah, don’t worry. Well, it’s true that I haven’t heard about this before, but I don’t think it’s your fault, Hikaru-san.”

“Thank you very much. Also, there’s no need for honorifics, you can just call me Hikaru and please just talk with me casually. It’s in order to build

trust which is important during negotiations. Being polite and rigid instead of prioritizing the flow of information might cause distrust and miscommunication, which would defeat the main purpose of negotiating. So please, just talk to me casually… Well, although, I do think that Kibayashi's attitude is way too casual."

Hikaru smiled wryly which Akira replied with a light smile.

"Alright then, in that case, you can just call me Akira and you can talk to me casually as well."

Hikaru looked a bit troubled, in reality, she was actually really troubled. But after a short pause, she decided to take up the offer.

"Alright. Now then, casually, right? It seems that you haven't heard anything from Kibayashi, so, well, where should I start…"

Hikaru was watching Akira closely to make sure that she did not sour his mood while she kept her casual attitude on the outside.

"In that case, is it okay if I ask you some questions first? I'm sorry that it might sound a bit too offensive."

"Of course. You can ask me anything. But just to let you know, I'll just say that it's a secret if you ask me about my three sizes or if I have a boyfriend."

"Well, it's not about that. Hmmm, yeah, let's start with, are you really from City Management?"

"Oh, that's a bit surprising. The answer is of course a yes. I'm indeed a staff member from City Management. To be more precise, I'm from the general division, in fact, I'm the youngest one in that division."

"What if I ask you for proof?"

Hikaru's smile immediately turned troubled. But behind that brave front, she was actually squeezing her brain for an answer.

Akira was dealing with Hikaru as a training partner. The reason why he could ask such a rude question was simply because he thought of this meeting as training. But Hikaru did not know that at all. Because of that, she took that question as a form of distrust and suspicion from Akira.

“Will it be enough if I say that Kibayashi was the one who told me to come here?”

“It’s because that Kibayashi only testified that he knows you and nothing more, so I have to do the rest myself and try to identify you.”

Hikaru’s smile stiffened, she spat a curse in her mind.

[That bastard… So basically this is another test or something? That damn sly old-man.]

Hikaru’s job that day was to negotiate with Akira and make him accept the deal. It was a kind of test so that Kibayashi could recognize her skill.

Negotiating with a high-ranking Hunter was an important job for City Management’s staff. Whether it was about gathering relics or participating in the protection of infrastructure, both depended deeply on the result of the negotiation. Of course, negotiation would go smoother the more the negotiator had the trust of those high-ranking Hunters.

Kibayashi himself gained his position of power by identifying competent Hunters, giving them a chance to shoot for success, and maintaining relations with those who had survived their gambit. Although most of those successful Hunters had left Kugamayama city to head east, they were still in a contract with him to send invaluable relics or return back to the city in case Kugamayama city was in danger. As such, he had quite the grip on the city even right now. The reason why he could move freely was because not that many people could challenge him due to his connection with those Hunters.

Naturally, Kibayashi was a busy person. He could not afford to deal with every single Hunter by himself. That was why he often had someone under him take over the negotiation in his stead. These negotiators then formed a

connection with these Hunters as well and gained influence and power the same way Kibayashi did.

Hikaru was recognized as a competent staff even though she was the youngest in her current division. She was proud of that fact as well. So, she thought that it would be no trouble for her when she asked for some Kibayashi's work. However, against her expectation, Kibayashi casually rejected that idea saying that she would not be able to handle it.

After that, fueled by her ambition and to take revenge on Kibayashi, she took it personally and went around to lay the groundwork. In the end, she managed to force Kibayashi to give her a task with a certain condition attached.

Nonetheless, it had to be said that being able to force Kibayashi like this was a testament to how talented she was. Though, that was also the root of the situation that she was facing right now.

Hikaru was trying to find out what Kibayashi's real plan was by looking closely at Akira's reaction.

[So basically he's telling me that I'm not ready for this job if I can't even convince my negotiation opponent about my identity, huh? Fine then, I'll do it then!]

Hikaru pulled her information terminal on the table and placed her ID card on top of it. The information terminal then showed her full information as a staff member from City Management.

"This is an identification document used by City Management's staff to show their identity. It also contains staff information controlled by City Management. This uniform is only designated for official staff, anyone else who uses this will get a severe punishment. Will this be enough?"

Hikaru was satisfied with Akira's reaction, seeing him nod as if he was fully convinced. However, Akira thought that since it was a good chance to train himself in case someone was trying to deliberately trick him, he decided to question her further.

“What if I say that you can fake that document and no one would get suspicious if you use that uniform with confidence?”

“That’s a totally valid question, well. In that case, we can go to the Hunter Office together where I can prove my identity.”

Akira nodded again, but he did not stop there.

“What if I say that you’re working with someone inside the Hunter Office?

“Eeeh… I think that’s going a bit too far. It’s impossibly difficult to do that, you know?”

“Well, if it’s about an isolated Hunter Office with not that many visitors, I don’t think it’s that difficult to do that though?”

Akira then told Hikaru what happened back then when he registered as a Hunter for the first time. Since Hikaru was not that familiar with the situation outside the wall, she was pretty surprised to hear his story.

“…I see, so there’s a problem with the quality of the Hunter Office’s staff outside the wall, huh? But we’re talking about the past here, right? Ah, but then again, if we’re talking about how far someone would go to trick a Rank 50 Hunter, I can’t really say that it’s not possible, hmm…”

Hikaru already noticed that Akira was not trying to harass her by asking her these difficult questions, that was why she answered rather casually.

“I heard that a lot of good Hunters tend to prefer to get the evidence themselves. So how about you, Akira? What will you do in order to convince yourself?”

Hikaru thought that if Akira only had half-baked methods to do that, she would use it to corner Akira instead as she leaned forward as if to peer into him and unravel his thoughts.

“In that case…”

If someone was suspicious of others just for the sake of suspecting them, then there would be no end to it. They would always find a reason to suspect the other party. The real question would be at what point they would no longer be suspicious of each other. Akira understood that very well, that was why his thought leaned toward what kind of compromise he could take in case he indeed got tricked.

Seeing that, Alpha smiled smugly at him and asked.

“How about asking me?”

“That was my first thought, but if I do that and the other party asks me for proof, I can only say that it’s from my intuition. So I don’t think that’s the correct answer in this kind of situation. But if I can’t do that myself, then my only choice is to ask someone else who can tell…”

Akira smiled wryly and finally answered Hikaru’s question.

“I guess I’ll ask someone who can do that for me.”

“I see, then, how about you try that now?”

Hikaru opened her palm forward toward Akira as if she was challenging him to do just that. He thought to himself that he might have gone too far questioning her as he decided to actually try that in order to at least satisfy Hikaru as well. Excluding Kibayashi, there were two candidates that he thought to call. So he opened up his information terminal to call one of those two candidates. The call immediately connected and picked up.

“It’s you, huh. That’s rather rare for you to call me. What is it?”

“Someone is claiming to be from City Management in front of me right now. If you know a method to quickly discern if she’s telling the truth or not, can you tell me?”

“…You called me just for that?”

It was Inabe, the other candidate that Akira thought of was Viola.

But after hearing that exasperated reply followed by a sigh, Akira thought that it might have been a bad choice calling Inabe. But Inabe did not close the call although he sounded really annoyed.

“Wait for a sec then… This one will work, huh… Alright, I’ve temporarily connected your information terminal and the identification machine over here. Now put her ID card on top of your information terminal.”

Akira asked Hikaru to do it and the result immediately came out.

“The result is out. Sakuyama Hikaru from the general affair, that’s her. Is that good enough?”

“Is it okay if I ask you how you confirmed it?”

“It’s based on secret technology, I can only tell you that it’s a technology used in order to prevent people from falsifying their Hunter ID.”

“I see, that’s good enough for me. Thanks!”

“You owe me one, alright? So I’ll have you return this favour now. Let’s see, go visit Sheryl to cheer her up, and tell her that I helped you.”

“Alright.”

“Also, face the information terminal at her.”

Akira did just as he was asked, the information terminal display quickly switched to Inabe’s face that was glaring daggers at Hikaru.

“I don’t know who you are, but stop giving me trouble.”

Hikaru knew Inabe very well. Although she was surprised, she did not miss a beat to apologize.

“I-I am really sorry!!”

But before Hikaru started apologizing, Inabe already closed the call. What was left behind was an awkward silence.

Akira was the first one to break the silence as he was awkwardly said.

“…Uhh, sorry.”

“I-It’s fine, don’t worry about it.”

Hikaru tried her best to don a friendly smile, but as expected, it was impossible.

__*__*__*__

After finishing her business with Akira, Hikaru stayed behind in the restaurant, eating a parfait. Akira already left the place, so she did not have any reason to put up appearances anymore. She took her sugary replenishment with a tired face and sighed. It was difficult to tell if it was because of the sweets or because of how exhausted she was.

“…I’m beat… But, it at least went well… Right?”

She was saying that to herself as if to tell herself that although there were unexpected hurdles, her original goal has been achieved. The reason why she had a question mark in the end, was because the incident with Inabe was outside her expectation. Thus, she was not sure if she was able to handle everything perfectly.

[He must have thought that I was trying to do something bad there… But it was good that Akira was taking the offer positively after that. But still, I didn’t expect Akira to have direct contact with someone like Inabe. That Kibayashi! to think that he gave me such a Hunter to handle, is he planning to ridicule me if I wasn’t able to deal with him well enough? If that’s really the case, I’ll make him regret it!]

Akira was a Rank 50 Hunter who had direct contact with a City Management officer. If Hikaru was able to gain his trust and take him away from Kibayashi, it would greatly boost her position. It might serve as a stepping stone for her to soar higher.

[I’ll definitely handle this well.]

Hikaru carried another spoonful of parfait to her mouth as she got herself pumped up, the burning spirit and the sweets caused her to show a smile that was suitable for a girl of her age.

But that excited Hikaru to forget about one thing. Kibayashi loved reckless people and he enjoyed the end of those people, regardless of whether it was death or success.

Kibayashi gave Hikaru a chance to gamble, and now, he was looking forward to the results.

Silavin: Holy shit! This chapter is long! This is the usual chapter x 1.5!

Please thank Athena-sama for this and p4553r-sama.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 229, Pruning Request

Index

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Akira was traversing the wasteland on a vehicle with Sara and Elena. The vehicle itself was large with a removable top. At the moment it had its top open. Elena was driving in the front while Akira was sitting in the back with Sara.

“Elena-san, I’m the one getting helped here with this vehicle, so the least I can do is drive it, you know?”

Akira sounded rather apologetic, but Elena replied with a smile.

“Don’t worry, it’s fine. We’re the ones handling the transport. Since we’re doing our duty the best we can, I hope that you’ll do yours as well; as our main firepower that is.”

But Sara interjected there.

“Elena, I’m also responsible for that too though?”

“Oh, in that case, I hope you perform at least as well as Akira.”

“Whoah, that sounds tough.”

“Good luck!”

Seeing that friendly exchange between Sara and Elena, Akira decided not to let himself be bothered by his worries any further.

The job that Akira accepted from Hikaru was a request that was connected to the transport season. According to the contract, Akira had to do Hunter jobs in his designated area. And this time, that job was to prune the monsters around the transport route.

Of course, the large-sized transport vehicles used by the cities were accompanied by powerful escorts, but the bigger the vehicle, the more it would rouse the monsters in the area. Each assault from monster swarms meant accumulating delays to the delivery. In order to ensure the transport took the shortest time possible, there was a need to thin out the monster density along the route beforehand.

Akira came to do it with his new equipment, but as expected, it was impossible for him to move around all by himself. After all, his new equipment did not include a new vehicle nor a new bike.

The offers that came to Shizuka’s shop was not limited to Yodogawa’s Kiryou corporation only. Another offer came from a long-established corporation that was trying to expand its business throughout the eastern district, TOSON. As a matter of fact, TOSON was the manufacturer of the SSB multi-rifle. TOSON found it weird that a small shop that should have been only visited by third-rate Hunters was ordering expensive products from the corporation repeatedly. Thus, eventually, TOSON decided to send an inspector from the branch office responsible for the area where Shizuka’s shop was.

As a weapon manufacturing corporation, Yodogawa’s company was standing on the same level as TOSON. It was not rare for an augmented suit to be sold in a bundle together with guns. So if TOSON offers a huge discount for such a bundle, Kiryou would have to find a way to counter that offer. Thus, it created an intense price war between the two.

Because of that, thanks to the ‘generous’ discount that both companies were offering, Akira ended up deciding to spend all of his money to buy from both TOSON and Kiryou. Unfortunately, neither of them had vehicles to sell. Of course, if Akira had asked them to, they would use their connection to the other corporation that dealt with vehicles. However, as expected, they could not promise any discount for that purchase. Despite the large discount and the excellent cost-performance ratio of his new rifles and augmented suit, it was still a bad move for Akira to even spend his reserved fund, originally meant for purchasing vehicles.

Akira knew that it was a bad idea to not have any means of transportation, but he thought that it would be fine since he could ask Sara and Elena for help. After all, they did tell him to rely on them, or he could just rent a vehicle. So he pushed through with his decision and prioritized his equipment.

Unfortunately, at the moment, it was difficult to get a rental vehicle. Among the people who were related to the rental business for Hunters, Akira was already widely known as the vehicle destroying Hunter. Thanks to that, the rental fee was extremely high for him. After knowing the cost of renting a single vehicle, Akira thought that it was better to buy one himself and decided to seek help from Elena and Sara until he could buy his own.

Hikaru was giving a direct request to Akira. And that request did not put any constraints on how he would accomplish it, there was no need for Akira to give any explanation before the request, all he needed to do was to give his final report once it was done.

In order to guarantee the success of the request, many requesters tend to ask for detailed explanations and make a lot of suggestions as a form of support for the Hunters. Of course, in the end, it depended on the Hunters whether they would take that support or not. If the final report was not mandatory, it could be taken as the requester abandoning their responsibility. Which in turn would cause distrust between the Hunters and the requester. In conclusion, the requestor would need to be skilled in offering support, gaining the Hunter’s trust in order to increase the chance of success.

After thinking it through, Hikaru decided to just let Akira do what he wanted to do in the end. Of course, she would have to take responsibility if the request ended up in failure. She did want to meddle, but she did not think that a Hunter who was working with Kibayashi would like that. In order to gather likability points from Akira, she decided to hold herself back.

Thus, when he was told that he had free reign, Akira took that literally. He was basically doing everything based on his mood. The only thing that bothered him was that Elena and Sara were basically working under him due to the request.

“It might be weird for me to say this, although it’s because of the request contract, Elena-san and Sara-san are working under me though, are you really okay with that?”

Elena chuckled.

“Why won’t we be? It’s not just because of the request contract, in truth, you’re already above us. So there’s no need to worry, you can just take the lead, you know?”

“U-Uhh, even if you tell me so, to be honest, I still want to learn from both of you though…”

Sara smiled and joined in.

“In that case, you can tell us to track the situation and report it to you with a suggestion on how to deal with it, you know? You’re basically our employer this time, so let us do our job to the best of our abilities.”

Sara then smiled as if to hide her loneliness and continued as if she was trying to convince herself.

“…Although you have surpassed us in many aspects, if you think that we can still help you, there’s no need to hold back. You can rely on us.”

“…Okay, thank you very much.”

Akira questioned himself if he was being a bit too considerate and decided to just put that behind for now. He smiled and thanked them. Elena and Sara responded back with the same cheerful smiles.

That was when Elena noticed that they were closing in on their destination.

“Akira. It’s time. It might be a good idea to let them know as well.”

“Ah, you’re right.”

Akira operated his headgear to contact someone else.

“It’s me, we’ll arrive soon. Get yourself ready.”

“Roger that!”

The one who answered that order was Erio.

A large-sized truck was running not too far from Akira’s team. It was also a vehicle designed for use in the wasteland. It was well equipped for battle as well. The backside of that truck had an operable cover as if it was designed to carry a powered suit. But the cargo that the truck carried was Erio’s team, who were armed with coordination-support powered suits.

The children reacted differently toward the current request. Some of them were joking and laughing while some were waiting nervously. Some were utterly scared and some were completely calm.

“I wonder if we’re going to be alright. This place is already quite far to the east, right? I heard that the monsters around there are so different compared to the ones around the city, you know?”

Though there were some anxious children, there were also those who took it completely fine.

“Don’t worry, Akira-san is here too after all. If boss thought that we were useless, she would not have sent us out in the first place, you know. If we’re only going to slow Akira-san’s down, boss would have stopped us instead.”

“Y-you have a point.”

The anxious boy nodded repeatedly as if he was trying to convince himself. Meanwhile, the calm boy was telling herself that repeatedly as well for the exact same reason. Considering that there was Kiryou’s staff were not in the trailer, it gave another reason for them to feel more anxious when they were looking for reasons to be calm.

Erio’s team followed Akira during this request as helpers. Both Viola and Kiryou received information regarding Akira’s request separately, but both of them then came to Sheryl to suggest she join that request. Sheryl wanted to be useful to Akira. Kiryou wanted to get a good track record for their support system. While Viola wanted to get profit from that request as well as to enjoy some other things as well. With all of these reasons lined up, Sheryl’s gang also joined in the pruning request. They took it in the form of a reinforcement request from Akira.

“Don’t worry, I heard that Akira-san is Rank 50 while the other two are already past Rank 40. They’ll be the vanguards. We’re not the main firepower this time. We can just fight safely while looking for chances to help out and get some money. In the case of an emergency, we can withdraw further and focus on providing support. Our role only amounts that much this time.”

“You’re right, yeah.”

As they calmed down, their conversation started to steer toward idle talk. It showed that they were already feeling safe as they talked about the things around them instead.

“But still, the other two that Akira brought with him today are both really beautiful. Sara has impressive boing boing, while Elena has an excellent body line… I thought that he’s not interested in that kind of thing since he’s going out with boss, but I guess that’s not exactly the case, huh?”

“Isn’t it the opposite? It’s because he doesn’t care about such a thing that he’s okay with any sizes, it must be nice to be in his position.”

Laughter started to spread, it just went to show how many agreed with that statement. Naturally, some of them took it as a joke while some were extremely envious of Akira.

“By the way, just a thought though, I wonder if boss knows that Akira is bringing those two with him on this job?”

“…Maybe not, I guess? Well, either way, even if boss doesn’t know, it’s not like we can just tell her. It’ll only sour her mood, you know?”

“Yeah, you can say that again.”

The others around them smiled bitterly and nodded in agreement, this time, all of them had the exact same thought.

In the middle of their idle chat, Erio suddenly lightly clapped his hands to gather their attention.

“Akira-san just called me. We’re already close, so get yourself ready. Make sure to check that the coordination support system is active after you turn on your augmented suit. Make sure to double-check, it’s basically our lifeline out here.”

Everyone started their preparation accordingly since they already decided beforehand who would be the leaders during the request. Thanks to all the training that they had done beforehand, their preparation proceeded smoothly and ended up without any trouble. Their moves there were no longer that of children from the slums.

But the fact that they still had the chance to have such silly conversation to calm themselves down showed that they were still amateurs. This time, their silly banter was directed at Erio.

“But still. Even with boss, those maids, Viola-san and Carol-san, along with those two Hunters that are with him right now, even with all of these girls, it doesn’t seem that Akira-san has any trouble dealing with them. Even you, Erio. You stick out among us and have something similar as well. As I thought, when you have a girl, it really pushes you to become stronger,

right? Or is it because you get stronger that girls are attracted to you? Which one do you think it is?”

“Just so you know, I’m devoted only to Alicia.”

“It’s not really that different, I know that some girls are trying to approach you, you know?”

The boy was smiling mischievously when he said that, but Erio glared at that boy and warned.

“Stop it. I’m not the same. I properly turned them down… It might be because of those rumors that Alicia is getting worried lately. It was tough calming her down, you know?”

“Unfortunately, we can’t understand the hardship of a popular guy.”

As that boy looked around, the other kids nodded in agreement. Although some of them also had a girlfriend like Erio, they were not that popular so they had the right to agree with that statement.

In reality, Erio really did not have the luxury to brag about his situation, so instead, he replied with a rather snarky remark.

“Humph, if you’re really in a hurry, you can just ask Carol, you know?”

Suddenly everyone fell into silence, Erio immediately realized that he said something that he should not have and froze for a second.

“…I take that back, uhh, what can I say, never do that, okay?”

Carol was a beautiful girl with an excellent body. Most of her outfits were tailored to men’s preferences. She was someone who was easy to get along with and she knew how to get a conversation exciting. She listens when someone looks for advice and would give great advice. To top it off, for her side-job, she would even take little to nothing as long as it was the money that her clients got from risking their lives. Though, this offer mostly extended to first-timers.

Naturally, there were some who could not hold themselves back. They got too close to Carol during their joint activities in the gang and ignored Colbert's warning.

Although the first go was cheap, the price quickly climbed up for the next time and subsequent times after as well. But even so, they could not forget that so-called heaven on earth and continued. Eventually, they started going out hunting for relics all by themselves. They worked hard past their limits to earn enough to somehow manage to continue. But of course, it was only a matter of time before everything spiralled out of control. Eventually, they could no longer earn enough money. If they were able to hold themselves back because they did not have enough money, then Colbert's warning would have been unnecessary. Unfortunately, that was not the case.

Victims started to pile up as they got themselves killed out in the ruins. Some even went as far as to steal money from the gang, which Viola quickly noticed and gave their names to the gang. Even after hearing that, Carol did not change her attitude at all.

Sheryl herself was troubled that more and more boys were falling for Carol just to meet their demise. She did make a contract with Carol though. It was so that she would not take the initiative and would not accept those who already had a girlfriend. But that was the furthest she could do. This was mainly because Carol threatened that if Sheryl put even stricter rules, then she would go for Akira instead. Thus, Sheryl had no other choice but to back off.

After all that happened, Carol was well known to be a dangerous honey trap inside Sheryl's gang.

"…You don't have to tell us that. We know well what happened to those who ignored Colbert-san's warning, right guys?"

He tried to mix a joke in his reply to lighten the mood and looked around to see if the others agreed. Of course, the other kids agreed with him. But among them, there were some who had a stiff awkward smile when they nodded.

Erio noticed a message from the coordination support system, so he changed gear and shouted.

“We’ve arrived!! Let’s go! Get to your post!!”

The trailer’s side door opened up. Everyone pulled themselves together to get ready for work as they followed the command from the coordination-support system. They got to their post and readied their grenade launchers.

Not too far from the trailer, there were 2 other vehicles. One of them was Colbert and his team. They also participated in the current request. But their employer was not Akira, it was Sheryl instead in a form of a proxy contract with Akira.

Bosshu, who was there thanks to Colbert’s invitation, chuckled and said.

“But still, to think that lone Hunter we met back then would turn into a Rank 50 Hunter. And now, we get to participate in the great transport season through him. Colbert, I bet your real aim in helping that gang is to make a connection with that boy.”

“Nah, it’s totally a coincidence.”

“Is that so? We’re talking about you here. Considering your connection with that witch, I thought that this was your real goal. But that aside, it’s pretty amazing how you can get along with her. Although Viola and Carol are not the same, both often lead Hunters to their demise, you know? Don’t you think you should keep your distance from them?”

“You just need to be extra careful with them. Both can bring you profit if you’re smart enough, you know? Well, although, I’m basically just trying to get by while taking a break from my original Hunter job. But just because I can do so doesn’t mean that you should do it too. It won’t be pretty if you make a mistake.”

Colbert said so while smiling bitterly. He thought of someone he knew who made a mistake dealing with those two women.

Peppa was also there from Colbert's invitation, just like Bosshu, he laughed mockingly and spoke to Colbert.

"The one having it hard is you who is taking a hiatus, you know? It's good that you're slowly returning back to your origins as a Hunter, but isn't it too much for your rusty skills to face the monsters around this area?"

Colbert gave a smug smile and replied.

"Oh, what was that? Don't tell me that you're too scared and want to go back home now? Don't worry, you can use the excuse that I got too scared so you have no other choice but to retreat when the push comes to shove. Also, even if my skill got rusty after only taking easy jobs since I'm on a break, I'll do something about it. Just like how the past me used to save your asses."

"Hah! It's funny how you can still run your mouth like that!!"

Seeing Colbert and Peppa exchanging jokes like that, Bosshu could not help but smile remembering their past.

In contrast to his casual attitude, Colbert actually understood that he could not take it easy. He knew that the difficulty of the request was already well above what he could handle. As expected, he could not fight side by side evenly with a Rank 50 Hunter. If the request from Sheryl did not specify that he would only need to provide support fire, he would never have accepted the request.

But even so, that request was a good chance for him to rehabilitate himself so that he could slowly return back to working as a Hunter. Up until now, he pushed himself to fight back against his trauma to get out to the wasteland. He would often use the excuse 'I was just doing this to accompany Erio and the other children'. During that time, he encountered multiple monsters that looked like the one that took his limbs and almost killed him. Even so, he still forced himself to fight against those monsters and slowly treated his trauma. When today's request came, he decided that it was his time to fully let go of his past and move forward.

If he could keep his calm even when fighting against monsters that were way above what he could handle alone, then there would be no longer any need to get scared of that weak monster which had almost killed him in the past. He stepped out into the wasteland with that thought in mind that day.

He used all the money that he had been slowly saving up when this day came. He got the best equipment that he could get, thanks to that, he would not even be able to return back to his past lifestyle if he could not earn enough from today's request. Even so, he did not regret his decision at all. Talking with his past teammates like this helped him to regain his past sense of self, calming himself down for the incoming challenge, as well as pumping him up.

While the other vehicle was Levin and Hazawa. In contrast to Colbert's team that was filled with light-hearted exchanges, the mood in Levin's team was heavy. After all, they were heading east where the monsters were stronger and scarier than usual.

The source of the heavy mood was Levin. He kept sighing even as of right now. Hazawa, who had been listening to him this whole time, eventually had enough and spoke up.

"Levin. I know it's my fault for reminding you, but you should shake that off right now. Otherwise, you won't be able to fight properly."

"…I know."

Although Levin felt slightly angry, he knew that Hazawa was right. Of course, it was not enough to get his mind out of its predicament, but it was enough to help him try to shift his focus off from that thought.

"Regardless of the reason, it doesn't change the fact that you manage to get yourself good equipment. Heck. it's good enough that it would have been difficult to get through normal means. So just focus on earning more with those weapons of yours. It would be stupid to keep dragging yourself down and miss this chance to earn money, you know?"

"…I know, alright!!"

The moment he tried to calm himself down, he was reminded of how bad his situation actually was. Thus, Levin could not help but inadvertently roar out.

After working long and hard under Katsuragi to pay back his debt, he finally was able to get out of that life. Though, his debts have not been fully paid off yet.

He had to go to the ruins and return back with relics. He had to return back alive from these dangerous ruins and to do that, he would need to use up expendables. Each use cost him and when it was not enough, he knew had to get better equipment to safeguard his life and get better relics next time. Nonetheless, his cost usually exceeded what he could gain from the relics. Due to this, each time he was sent out, instead of reducing his debt, it was only piling up.

But even so, his rank was increasing. Thanks to the debt, he did not have the money to spend on drinks, or women, or gambling. So the time that he used to use for leisure in the past shifted to work instead. With each expedition that he survived through, he returned back with better relics, which also slowly increased his Hunter Rank.

That was when Katsuragi recommended him a set of equipment to match Levin's Hunter Rank. This was when he had just a little of his debt left (in proportion to what he earns from a single expedition). It would have been all for nought if he died after raising his rank that high. Moreover, he should be able to pay it back considering his earnings at the moment. In the first place, it would be stupid to die just because he did not have decent enough equipment after all that he had gone through. Levin's cautious nature pushed him to take up the offer even if he had to increase his debt even for a bit and hoped that he would earn enough to clear away his debt.

If Levin were to be frugal with his expendables for the sake of repaying his debt, he would take more time to fight against monsters. This would lead to a higher chance of getting injured, which in turn would mean he would have to rely on expensive medicines. So in the end, it would only end up increasing his debt instead. While on the other hand, splurging money on ammo for the sake of safety would be directly translated to more debt. He

also could not go to a safe ruin. This was due to his contract with Katsuragi, which stated that the ruins he could go to were under the discretion of Katsuragi.

Levin himself knew that he had grown as a Hunter. But he also understood that his debt was only growing bigger. If he does not do anything fast, it would be really bad for him. As he was agonizing over his choices, he went for some cheap drinks, got into some fights, and by pure chance, he met and consulted Viola, who was nearby at that time.

Viola happily suggested a way out for him. It was to join all the debts from various companies into one place, moreover, they were concentrated on a single legitimate loan company. The interest was close to zero, which made the company seem like it was Levin's sponsor. Thus, Levin was no longer controlled by Katsuragi and was able to get better equipment through the connections owned by that company.

And then, finally, Levin's debt went past 300 million! It was the culmination of Viola's payment and the more debt from his new equipment. That sponsor corporation was Kiryou and the new equipment was actually experimental products. Basically, he was participating in the pruning request for the sake of weapon testing.

[…My debt with Kiryou doesn't have that strange rule like the one with Katsuragi. If the amount of debt passes a fixed limit, they will also give me some compromise to make sure that I would be able to repay all my debt. Kiryou itself will also cooperate in order to get good advertisement material for their products. If they can leave a good track record during the weapon testing, it should also increase my worth as a Hunter and increase my Hunter Rank. Considering all of these benefits, that 300 million Aurum is not really that bad. Or more like, it can be taken as some kind of investment from Kiryou to me… I know that, I know that but…]

Levin was once again reminded. Viola never lies in order to manipulate someone, but after a few days, he started to feel anxious. And finally, that day, after Hazawa asked him where he got all of his high-quality equipment from, Levin was reminded that Viola's help never came for free, it always had some kind of string attached.

Kiryou itself was a decent and honest company, compared to other individual lenders such as Katsuragi, it was obviously a better choice to borrow money from them. Levin had no complaint regarding the matter.

But still, 300 million Aurum was not a small amount. Each corporation had different ways to collect their loans depending on their size. Or at least, they would always have a connection to certain debt collectors. If it was a debt collector sent by individual lenders like Katsuragi, he at least would have a chance to fight back. However, that was not the case when it was against a large corporation like Kiryou.

At the moment, he was given special treatment since he was helping out with the weapon testing. However if he could not deliver good results during the testing or if the corporation decided that he was useless during the testing, he would lose that special treatment. That would be the moment when Kiryou's debt collector would come for him. That would also mark his end. What awaited him after that was the same thing that happened to those that attacked Sheryl's base the other day. He would have preferred death instead of having to go through that fate.

After Hazawa pointed that out, Levin finally realized just how dire his situation actually was. If he could not perform well in today's weapon testing, it would end up really bad for him and that possibility sent a shiver down his spine.

Hazawa tried to calm Levin down for the sake of his own safety as well.

"Your new equipment has that coordination support system, right? It's a support system that includes augmented suit's manoeuvring support. It's the same system that those brats are using. Right?"

"Yeah. I heard it's a version of that system with some extra adjustments. After all, unlike those who are working in a huge team, I'm working alone. I think it's to create a system where you can join the other already working network under the same system when it's needed. Considering that there are Hunters further to the east who prefer to work solo. They developed this new option to attract them, and they also mentioned many other features as well."

“It’s good enough to turn those brats who were moving like amateurs not too long ago to be decent enough to bring out for this request. I’m sure it’ll work like magic for an experienced Hunter like you. Especially since you have gotten a lot stronger as a Hunter recently. So I’m looking forward to your performance.”

“…Yeah, you have a point. I paid a lot of money for this, so it must be at least be that good.”

Levin knew that Hazawa was trying to calm him down by saying that, but since it did help him lessen his anxiety, he decided to just accept it and use it to get himself more fired up.

“But still, I didn’t expect someone as cautious as you to come as well. No, wait, it might be because I’m too anxious that I assume it’s more dangerous than it actually is, huh?”

“Well, it’s up to you how you want to take it.”

Seeing how casually Hazawa responded, helped Levin to calm down as well.

But Hazawa was only trying to look calm. Moreover, remembering his first time meeting with the source of the main true requestor, Akira, really made him feel conflicted.

[Although we were riding in the same truck not too long ago, to think that we’re already this different in such a short span of time. It’s a matter of talent, huh… Or maybe it’s a matter of how many times we challenge dangerous situations? Though, I don’t think that’s all there is to it…]

It was a mix of envy and jealousy toward someone who overtook everything that he had worked hard to achieve. Constant victories over the life-betting gambles was an obvious route to reach glory. Although he had given up in the past, it seemed that he still had some admiration, or even hope, to reach that glory.

Being cautious was nothing more than an excuse to be a coward. He had fallen from grace compared to his past self. He thought that he did well dragging himself out of that hole. Although he was able to reduce the times when he hid behind the word ‘caution’, he still could not return back to those Hunter’s activities that proactively chase for greater glory.

But as of late, there were way too many big incidents around Kugamayama city. Many Hunters died in those incidents. Half-baked caution would only lead to death. Being overly cautious would mean that he would not even be able to go out of the city. When he was agonizing about what he should do, Colbert suddenly came to him with today’s request.

[…I’ve started to change ever since I met him, this must be some kind of fate, I just have to keep moving forward.]

He could not afford to get back to his past self that had nothing to chase after. Hazawa decided so as he took a step forward.

When they noticed that Erio and the other children started to move out, they changed gear and said with a big smile.

“Levin, here we go!!”

“Yeah!! Let’s do this!”

Levin tried to fire himself up by saying so as he pulled out the large-sized gun that he saved for that day. If he could not earn enough today, then there would be no tomorrow for him. That thought filled his mind as he had a grim look on his face and fought with the ferocity of a cornered man.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 230, Change in Akira

Index

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Old-world cities were spread across the wide wasteland. Most of them were not dilapidated enough to be called ruins, so Hunters tend not to visit those places when they hunt for relics. Thanks to that, monsters could freely multiply in those places.

Usually, even if they were not close to the transport route, people still take the safer approach. They would keep their distance away from these places in order to avoid getting detected by the monsters there. In the first place, the infrastructure for the transport routes was made to avoid them. However, issues arise during the transport season. The ruckus that the large transport vehicles made would attract swarms of monsters from these Old-world cities.

Once they arrived at their destination, from the opened door of the trailer, Erio and the other children started throwing out devices to attract the monsters' attention. They needed at least that many decoy devices to imitate the signals that those large transport vehicles would produce.

The decoy devices would produce noise and vibration as well as scents and fake signals to lure the monsters. Some of them were stuck in the ground

while some floated above as they were spread throughout the area.

Not too long after, Elena's radar detected uncountable monster signals. It was then followed by a large trail of dust and shaking that even the Hunters from afar could feel.

"Akira, here they come."

"Alright. Elena-san. Get closer first and try to keep your distance from them. As for the rest, I'll leave the smaller details to you."

"Roger that!"

Elena pushed the gas and turned the vehicle toward the direction of the incoming monsters. Akira in the back seat had both of his hands armed with rifles as he measured the distance between them.

"Sara-san. I'll focus on the smaller ones, so please focus on the bigger ones. But that's only for the opening, as for the rest, you're free to move at your own discretion."

"Okay. Now then, since we both are the main firepower here, let's do our best."

"Of course."

Sara smiled excitedly at Akira and he responded with the same smile. They then aimed their rifles toward the monsters and pulled the trigger. Explosions rang out from the raining warheads. This signalled the start of the battle as well as a slaughterfest of monsters, turned into minced meat.

It was Akira's debut fight with his new equipment. This time. he was using a CA31R augmented suit made by Kiryou. Its official name was Cerberus. It had many extension ports over its jet black body due to the multi-purpose function of its design.

Although the headpiece of the augmented suit seems flimsy, it was actually equipped with forcefield armour, thus as a defensive piece of equipment, it was stronger than the usual full-face helmet. It was even further equipped

with many other functions such as displays and other extensions as well. It could also be connected to particular types of gun so that both armor and weapon could work together when Akira took his aim. Meanwhile, there was display technology in place which could display information in 3D if needed.

It even allows Akira to float in the air. Though, he did not have it on at the moment. Instead, Akira had a balance-support device installed to help him move around even on soft ground. And if he wanted to, it could even help him move above water surfaces in exchange for exorbitant amounts of energy.

Even as a pure augmented suit whose main objective was to augment the physical power of its user, it performs extremely well. With the powerful full-body forcefield armour, he could even flip over a powered suit if he pushed the output of the augmented suit. To top it off, it was also equipped with a camouflage function.

The guns on both of his hands were LEO multi-rifle. They were basically stronger versions of the SSB multi-rifle. Akira made sure to put extended magazines and energy packs to his two large-sized rifles. The bullets he was using were designed to absorb energy from the surroundings and turn them into kinetic energy, as such, the more energy used to shoot, the stronger the shot got.

Akira aimed both of his LEO rifles at the swarming monsters. His vision was greatly enhanced with the help of information-gathering devices. It even added a bulls-eye indicator of where his LEO rifles were aimed.

He kept the trigger pulled down as he made a sweeping motion as if to sweep through the swarm. Although it looked like an indiscriminate shooting from the outside, the bullets were actually only released when the hit probability was above a certain threshold. With each shot guaranteed to a certain level of accuracy, they accurately ploughed through the incoming monsters. Moreover, any missed shot was quickly accounted for. The data was then used to readjust the aim for the next shot, thus slowly increasing or maintaining Akira’s accuracy.

Moreover, Akira actively checked the dead monsters. He would readjust the output power of the bullets using his headgear to get it barely strong enough to kill the monsters.

This way, his shots would guarantee a kill while making sure that he was not wasting any unnecessary energy. Coupled with the high accuracy shots, the bullets tore through the swarm like ravenous locusts, leaving only a field of dead monsters behind.

Both his augmented suit and rifles were already well past what was considered normal for Hunters in Kugamayama city. Elena and Sara too had updated their arsenals compared to before.

Unlike Akira, who did not earn a single Aurum from the large-scale expedition, Elena and Sara were properly paid. They were paid as emergency reinforcement, the data that they gathered afterwards during the chaos, plus the reward for escorting Nelia back to the base. And of course, they did not go with Nelia afterwards to look for Akira for free. The combinations of all these rewards resulted in a good sum of money.

Furthermore, they managed to get a good discount through the deal that Akira made with TOSON and Kiryou. Considering that if Akira's close friends were loyal customers of a certain company, then it would be easier to get Akira himself to buy from that particular company, plus by making a contract that their next set of equipment would be also from the same company, they managed to get discounts from those two companies although not as much as Akira. They then decided to splurge half of the money that they received from the expedition to upgrade their equipment. Thanks to that, they were able to get powerful augmented suits complete with so-called old-world design. Although the design was a bit too much, they decided to put up with it considering the quality of the equipment.

In contrast to that, Akira, who was carrying Nelia half the time, did not get paid at all for that. It was something that he did voluntarily when he was busy with Inabe's request, it could even be said that he abandoned Inabe's request to help out Nelia. Thus, it was not easy for Inabe and City Management's side to reward him for that. But as a compromise, it seemed that Inabe helped Akira to procure equipment through his connections.

Akira’s firepower with his new equipment was no joke. The swarm was obliterated one by one. Although the common monsters around Kugamayama city would not even stand a chance against them, in front of Akira, they were nothing but small fries. Both the colossal beasts and the armour covered robots were indiscriminately devoured by the explosions and shredded to pieces.

Although they had the upper hand, Akira’s team still could not call it an easy fight. The decoys lured in a continuous flow of monsters leagues above those that they were used to fighting against around Kugamayama city. As expected, they could not face all of them on their own.

The monsters that Akira’s team missed fell to Erio’s team and Colbert’s team to deal with. Of course, these monsters were extremely powerful from their point of view. They were desperately trying their best to fight back.

The monsters, which took a detour from the annihilation circle with Akira’s team at the centre, were rained down with explosives by Erio’s team from the trailer.

“Don’t stop shooting!! And don’t mistake your target! Keep following the order of priority! Just because Akira-san’s team prioritizes taking out monsters with a long-range weapon, that doesn’t mean that we can take it easy!! Focus first on the monsters indicated in the coordination support system!!”

The coordination support system focused the firepower on the monsters with guns and cannons. Although shooting from a moving vehicle lowered their accuracy, they dealt with that by praying over the whole monsters instead of aiming for their individual cannons or rifles.

The trailer was protected by portable walls equipped with forcefield armour, the portable wall was made of plastic-like transparent material which did not impede vision. Erio’s team were shooting through the gap of these forcefield walls.

Some of the monsters that slipped through the barrage shot back at the trailer. The bullets hit the forcefield armour, their kinetic energy was

converted to a blinding light that soaked the area. Although no one was injured, the forcefield provided no defence against the terror and the shock they felt.

“Replace the wall quickly!! They won’t be able to take another shot! Hurry up!”

They quickly went to grab another portable wall, placed them behind the hit wall and pushed them forward. The old portable wall slid over and fell off the trailer.

Seeing that, another boy bitterly smiled and shouted to hide his fear.

“We’re doing something crazy, aren’t we? This thing costs 1 million Aurum each, right!? And we’re just throwing them out like this, you know!!”

The other boy shouted back excitedly.

“I heard that these are from Kiryou and it was cheaper since we bought them in bulk! But if you say so, even the bullets that we’re using actually cost 1 or 2 million Aurum per shot if we buy them ourselves, you know!?”

“That’s wicked! It’s as if we’re throwing away money.”

“The bullets are cheaper since Akira-san has a special discount only for high ranking Hunters, or so I heard! Even that 5 million Aurum per shot anti-forcefield armour bullet only costs 500 Aurum for him!”

“The heck? That’s even crazier! I feel like we can get a lot of money if we hide just a single bullet and sell it ourselves later!”

“Pretty sure Akira-san would slaughter you if you do that! Do you seriously still want to do that?”

“Like hell if I would! That’s basically a death sentence you know!”

The reason they could just laugh it off was because both of them were just joking and had no wish to try that at all. It was not about being an honest person. Stealing anything would mean mocking Akira and Sheryl. One

thing for sure, it would not end pretty. That was why none of them even thought of trying to do that.

“They said that we’ll get paid based on how many monsters that we kill, so let’s just focus on them and earn more! It’s not like we can get an opportunity like this every day! Let’s earn as much as we can while we still have the chance!!”

“You’re right!! Let’s go back home with more than we can swim in!!”

They were fighting the fear of the incoming swarm through their fighting spirit and greed. That was the only way they could let go of their anxiety.

“By the way, Colbert-san and the others don’t have this support system too, right?”

“Yep. The reason why Kiryou is sponsoring us is simply because it would leave a bad track record if we get killed here.”

“But still, they have killed more monsters than us, right? Although we have more people here and our equipment are not that different in term of quality.”

“Well, I bet it’s a matter of skill… It’s true that we’re stronger than before but just look at Akira-san. There’s always a bigger fish.”

The Hunter world was not that naive, equipment would not be able to compensate for everything. But at least it would give them enough of a chance to fight back and survive. The children were reminded of the harsh world of Hunters, the gap between them and the other proper Hunters as they fought desperately.

As for Colbert’s team, they brought in equipment that would be enough to hunt bounty monsters. But it was difficult to use such powerful weapons at such close range.

But it still did not change the fact that they could be used to kill monsters. Seeing Colbert shooting the monsters with such excitement, Bosshu and

Peppa could not help but smile happily. Although he was facing monsters that were clearly more ferocious than the one that almost killed him.

“Well well well, you’re doing pretty well for someone who just recovered from his trauma! There’s no need to be that desperate, right?”

Colbert replied to that light jab from Peppa with another light jab.

“That doesn’t sound convincing at all coming from someone with a lesser kill count than me. Ah, don’t worry, as I said, I will do something about it even if your skills get rusty, yeah?”

“Yeah yeah, just let the dog bark. Just watch, I’ll overtake your number in no time!!”

That was when Bosshu interjected.

“By the way, Colbert. Levin has quite a powerful rifle. At the moment, he has killed the most. If I’m not mistaken, he has a huge debt, right? So how did he get that weapon? I’m seriously getting interested in all your connections, you know…”

Colbert smiled bitterly.

“I don’t really recommend doing the same thing he did. He basically mishandled Viola. I don’t know all the details, but it seems like he has ended up 300 million Aurum in debt. That is in exchange for his equipment.”

Peppa who was listening closely could not help but to raise his eyebrows.

“300 million…”

“The lender is Kiryou. I heard that he’s doing a job for that company, you see. After all, there are many ways to collect debt from a Hunter who can’t pay it back with money. It’s 300 million we’re talking about here. Whatever fate awaits him if he can’t pay back, it won’t be pretty. Peppa, if you’re interested, I can still go ask Viola, you know?”

Colbert smiled provokingly. But as expected, Peppa would never dare take up that challenge.

“Uhh, no thanks.”

“Thought so. Well, although I said 300 million, I’m sure someone as strong as Akira would not have any trouble paying that back.”

Colbert glanced at the radar. Although monsters were flowing endlessly from the edge of the radar, half of them vanished the moment they entered Akira’s range of fire, creating a circle sterile of any monsters with Akira’s team in the centre.

“This is the power of Rank 50 and 40 Hunters, huh. They are no joke at all.”

Colbert could only swallow his pride, there was not even a shred of envy. He then returned his focus back to his own battlefield as he fought together with his team against the incoming swarm.

Elena continuously scanned for the location of the monsters while driving. Thanks to that, she was able to reposition the vehicle to advantageous locations while evading barrages from the enemies. Explosions shook the ground and threw the vehicle off-balance. The shaking was too intense even for the advanced balancer attached to a wasteland vehicle. Forget shooting back, normally, it would have been impossible to stand in that kind of situation.

But even so, Sara was accurately shooting back with long-range weapons using her large and heavy gun. The bullets pierced through rows of monsters as they sought their main target, leaving behind carcasses that were blasted to small pieces. It was a feat that would have been impossible without adequate skill and equipment.

Of course, it was not something that someone as strong as Sara alone could do, it was thanks to the perfect synchronized teamwork between her and Elena. Elena’s skilled driving always put Sara in an advantageous position while Sara always kept the route that Elena would take clean of any

monsters. This made it easier for Elena to reposition the vehicle. They did not even need to exchange words, the experience that they had from working together for years allowed them to understand each other without saying anything, allowing them to work efficiently as if a single cohesive unit.

Elena and Sara understood that very well, that was why they were amazed that Akira could adapt to their teamwork with no problem at all. Sara smiled as she glanced at Akira and complimented.

“Akira, as I thought, you’ve really become strong.”

“Well, I splurged all my money for my new equipment, after all. It would be all in vain if I only stayed as strong as before.”

Akira’s augmented suit was equipped with extensions to keep his feet on the ground as well as to keep his balance. These two extensions were no doubt helping him tremendously in taking aim, even when the vehicle was shaking intensely. Not to mention, both his rifles and the ammo that he was using were stronger than before. All of these factors helped him annihilate the monsters in front of him. Naturally, it still required a skilled user to pull off what he did.

“It’s already amazing enough that you’ve mastered using your new equipment, you know. Since you’re that strong, it’s okay to say that you’re amazing yourself from time to time, you know?”

As Sara said that, she remembered the past Akira, who always looked down on his own strength. She thought she might have said something that she should not have. But against her expectation, Akira did not seem offended at all, he instead replied with a smile.

“Considering that I still want to get stronger, I would have to say that I still have a long way to go.”

Although Sara did not expect him to reply in such a manner, she thought that it was a good change and countered with her banter.

“Elena! Akira is saying that we lack ambition to get stronger!”

“Eh!? No no no! I didn’t mean that at all!?”

Seeing Akira flusteredly tried to deny it but Elena smiled mischievously and continued.

“He said that? Well, it can’t be helped then! I guess we should work harder to satisfy this Rank 50 Hunter! Sara! I’ll go faster!!”

“Roger that!”

Elena accelerated the vehicle even more. She started aiming to take down the monsters that she originally planned to leave to the other teams. Their position changed from holding back the incoming swarm to actively chasing after the swarm. She dialled up the machine gun that she was set to be on low, believing that they could just leave the small fries to Akira. Sara also responded accordingly by increasing her firing rate.

Akira glanced at Sara and Elena, who seemed to be having a good time there and smiled wryly. Nonetheless, he then also started firing more intensely as if not to lose to them. Although it seems like he was randomly sweeping around with the 2 LEO rifles in hand, he was actually trying to aim as accurately as possible. More than half of the bullets accurately hit their targets due to the aim adjustment function of his augmented suit and aiming device as well as Akira’s own compressed time perception.

“Akira. Although you are only doing it slightly, you’re basically maintaining your time compression at all times, are you okay?”

“I’m fine. For some reason, I don’t feel much burden from doing time compressions ever since that expedition. I wonder if I got used to it after I forced myself to use it for an extended period of time back then.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s one of the reasons.”

“One of the reasons? Are there other reasons as well? It’s not like you’re doing something with your support to lighten my burden without me

knowing, right?”

“Yep, there are multiple reasons for that. Of course, your body is getting used to it after using it so many times both for real fights and in training, you might have figured out the ropes. But with that being said, it’s not okay to think that you can get even stronger by doing reckless things when you lose my support, okay?”

“I know. It’s not like I want to go into a fight without your support. Having you around is a huge help, you know?”

“Is that so? Thanks. But still, since you have me around, how about I change my outfit to something more extravagant, with more exposure that will make a more refreshing impression.”

“Thanks but no thanks!”

“Good grief, you won’t even pay attention to my beauty, huh? That part of you doesn’t change at all.”

Alpha then smiled at him, who even had the leeway to indulge her in silly banter even when he was in the middle of a battle.

In reality, the main reason why Akira’s time compression did not place much burden on him ever since the large-scale expedition laid elsewhere. It was the drug that Tsubaki gave him. Akira, who took that drug, was healed back under the old-world standard, which meant that it also fixed something in his brain.

The prolonged use of time compression would strain Akira’s brain, which eventually resulted in damages. The drug that he took healed that damage as well as assimilated into the damaged part and strengthened it so that it would be able to withstand more strain.

Moreover, the drug even healed Akira’s imperfection as someone who could connect to the old-world domain. Due to this, the security portion of Akira’s brain was rewritten and upgraded, but as a side-effect, it limited Alpha’s connection to Akira. Since the drug basically cut-off Alpha’s

complete one-sided control on Akira’s bandwidth, it left a noticeable effect on Akira.

Even if the subject gave permission to use all of his connections, rules placed constraints that made it impossible to do that in one go. When Alpha met Akira for the first time, she used excuses such as, that he was too weak and such an act was necessary for the sake of preserving his life. Therefore, she was able to gain permission to establish a strong connection with Akira. She then used that as a way to wrestle more and more rights over time. This was the reason why she was able to monopolize Akira’s bandwidth.

But with the repaired security feature and how Akira was able to perform extremely well even without her support, Alpha no longer had those rights anymore. This was not a complete coincidence. Half of it was due to Tsubaki’s scheme. She originally planned to prepare Akira, such that she could connect to him if he had accepted her offer back then.

While the other half was simply Tsubaki harassing Alpha. With this, Alpha had to readjust her plan. She had to wait until she recovered her monopoly on Akira’s bandwidth before she could bring him to a certain ruin.

Alpha was especially worried that there would be more unexpected turn of events regarding Akira. After all, unexpected meant that she could not control it. So in order to regain her control over Akira, she was observing Akira closely.

After that, the fired-up Akira team made short work of the remaining swarm.

Once they finished pruning the monsters around the area, Erio’s team and Colbert’s team moved on to their other job. They scourged the ruin for relics.

Although there were still some valuable relics left in that ruin, most Hunters thought that it was not worth the trouble gathering them due to the powerful monsters living in the area. But after the pruning, the monster density in the area was greatly reduced though only for a short time. With more than half of the monsters in the area dead, they were free to gather relics left in the

ruin. It was ingrained in the Hunter's blood to monopolize such a sweet opportunity. Thanks to that, Erio's team and Colbert's team were in high spirits.

While the others were doing that, Akira, Elena, and Sara were taking a break in their vehicle. That was when Elena threw a question to Akira.

"Akira, you're not going to look for relics?"

"I'm here to prune monsters, so I have no plan to hunt for relics. I'm also already spent too. Ah, it's okay if Elena-san and Sara-san want to go hunting for relics, you know? I can watch the radar for enemies while you two go look for relics."

"Hmmm, if you're not going, then I won't go too. We're here as your hires today after all, so we have to respect your opinion."

Akira looked a bit surprised and sent a questioning glance to Sara. Which, she responded with a light smile.

"If we're talking about duties, our job here is to be your support. That's why our job at the moment is to stay near you. I don't think it's a good thing to criticize someone when they're taking their job seriously, you know?"

"I see, that's true. Alright, in that case, I guess we'll be taking a break here then."

Seeing the happy Akira, Elena and Sara also smiled happily.

As they were wasting time talking to each other, the radar suddenly picked up some signals. When Elena checked it, she frowned.

"Judging from the signal, it's a monster, although it's alone, it seems to be a rather big one."

"Is it here because of the decoy device?"

"Not sure. But I think it came pretty late if that is really the case."

When they were discussing how to handle that monster, Alpha suddenly interjected.

“Akira, it would be a pain in the neck if it gets any closer. So let’s take it out while we have the chance using that thing on your back.”

“Is that so? Alright then.”

Akira then told Elena and Sara his plan and took some distance from the vehicle before expanding the fold-able large-sized gun that Akira was carrying on his back. As the cannon unfolded, it peeked out from Akira’s back, past his shoulder. Akira used both of his hands to hold the cannon and aligned his aim with his target.

After Akira fixed his aim with the support of Alpha, he then let Alpha take control of both his cannon and augmented suit. Its aiming device worked together with Akira’s information-gathering device, allowing Akira to zoom in on his target in his headgear’s display which showed the range, trajectory, and lock-on notices.

The target was an abnormally huge mechanical monster, it was about 10 metres tall and its body was enveloped with resilient-looking armour. Countless legs were fixed on the huge cannon that grew out from its body. Although it was classified as a multi-legged tank, its shape was closer to that of a mollusc. Its outer appearance was far from the tanks that the Hunters used as well as the security drones of the old-world ruins.

Seeing that monster slowly crawling towards him, Akira frowned and said.

“That thing… it looks like a squid, or an octopus, no?”

“It’s true that its shape indeed imitates that kind of animal.”

“That kind of monster basically comes from old-world factories right? Just like those insect cannons, right? I wonder why they make monsters in that shape.”

“I have no idea. Someone might have sent in faulty designs in order to render them useless. If someone sends in a huge amount of unrelated data while the system is updating its blueprint, it might corrupt the blueprint. Once they accomplish their goal, operational systems might use its advanced self-repairing function to fix the blueprint based on data it compiled. Since everything is a variable at that point, it might cause this kind of design to be produced. Leaving its appearance aside, they’re still functional.”

“Wait, if their auto-repair is that advanced, then can’t they just delete the unrelated data? That’s the source of the problem after all.”

“Although it can fix the method, it doesn’t have the privilege to fix the goal. So a system with only that level of privilege would not be able to completely fix it no matter how advanced its auto-repair is. Or more like, it doesn’t even consider fixing that part.”

“I see, so basically, because it can’t change the basic shape, it instead forcibly add other parts with its old-world technology, right?”

“Well, there’s also a chance that the factory AI was too bored, having nothing to do and decided to make a weird design just to kill time though. And also, Akira, shouldn’t you shoot it soon? There’s no need to use time compression just to prolong this conservation, right?”

“Whoops!”

Akira refocused back to his target. Since he had already compressed his time perception unconsciously, that exchange with Alpha did not take that much time in the real world. The lock-on notice was still there as well. Akira made sure that his aim was properly locked on that monster as he pulled the trigger, the cannon released a thick blinding light that produced a shockwave.

The pillar of light grew larger and larger as it travelled, when it hit the monster, the pillar of light that had grown bigger than the monster and entirely swallowed it.

It then dispersed into smaller light threads before vanishing. The portion of the monster enveloped by the pillar of light also vanished together with that pillar. There were only the legs left behind as if its upper half was sliced through with an extremely hot object.

The weapon that Akira just used was an AD anti-material cannon. It was one of the extension parts of his CA31R augmented suit and it was made to be used in tandem with that augmented suit. After his experience fighting Zalmo during the large-scale expedition, Akira was looking for a weapon with enough firepower and accuracy to take out a powerful opponent while still small enough to be carried around. Thus, he ended up with this cannon which was also his trump card at the moment. Normally, it would only be used by the Hunters who work in the far eastern part of the eastern district, it was produced with a limited supply. Kiryou would not sell such equipment to Hunters below Rank 50. Of course, the ammo was equally expensive as well.

When Akira realized that he just shot an ammo with the firepower that matched its price, he was surprised by how powerful it was.

“As expected, it’s really powerful. I guess that Laser Cannon name is not just for show, huh?”

“To be more precise, it just looks like a laser because of the leftover warhead turned into particles of light. So, it’s technically not correct to call it a laser. After all, it’s not like it is shooting out plasma.”

“We’re Hunters, after all, we don’t really care about the details as long as it’s strong enough to kill monsters. Aside from the price of the ammo, my only worry is probably how dazzling it will be if I use it during the night. Since it will also annihilate everything around me, I can’t use it while I hide.”

The moment Akira released his grip on the AF anti-material cannon, it retracted and returned to its folded state on Akira’s back.

“So the Hunters in the far east shoot this kind of thing around as if it’s normal, huh? No wonder they’re treated like a walking powered suit or a

tank. I can’t understand how Hunters would want to go to such a place on their own volition just because they have a high enough Hunter Rank.”

“Oh my, to be honest, I hope that you would aspire to be one of those Hunters though?”

“Yeah, I know. I’m doing my best here to satisfy your expectation, so it would be great if you would wait patiently.”

Alpha smiled at Akira because of his growth. In contrast, Akira returned back with a bitter smile.

That was when Hikaru suddenly called him.

“This is Hikaru. It seems that a large-sized Ocpalos monster is heading in your direction, it came from area E1173 which is 3 areas away from the area assigned to you. I just got a report from the Hunters responsible for that area. It seems that there were too many monsters for them to handle so some monsters ended up escaping to other areas. It’s far stronger than the other monsters in that area, so I think it’s better if you get away from there. The other Hunters responsible for the other areas also avoided that monster. Hurry up and retreat, I can send reinforcements to help you run away if you need assistance, do you need me to do that?”

“How many? Is it in a big swarm?”

“Just one. But it originated from the area further to the east, so it’s abnormally stronger compared to the other monsters around your area. In the worst-case scenario, it might even be more formidable than a swarm of monsters in your area.”

“I actually just shot down a monster that looks like an octopus, or a squid, Are you talking about that one?”

“Eh?”

Akira replied so casually that Hikaru needed a few seconds to process what she just heard.

“You killed it…? Uhh… Can you send me the data?”

Akira proceeded to send the data, Hikaru went silent again for a while before replying in a rather surprised tone.

“Ah, yes. That is the monster from the report. They mentioned that only one got away and they have confirmed that as well, so it should be okay now. They actually sent a few Hunters to hunt for that monster, but I’ve already informed them that the monster has been slain.”

There was another pause before Hikaru continued, this time, she sounded apologetic.

“…And also, uh, I’m sorry. I underestimated you. To be honest, after hearing that your payment for the large-scale expedition was all converted into Hunter Rank, I thought you were not that strong.”

“Well, you’re not mistaken, so don’t worry about it. Although I did say I killed it, I had to use my expensive trump card to do that after all. Well, if you still feel sorry for that, I hope you’ll help me to get a better reward so I don’t end up in red after using that expensive trump card.”

Since Akira sounded like he was not offended at all, Hikaru’s voice returned back to her usual tone.

“Sure. I’ll do my best, so you can look forward to it. Later then.”

Hikaru then closed the call there. After that, Akira frowned and mumbled.

“…So Hikaru also did not expect that monster to be here… hmm… I guess that’s just how strong that monster was. For some reason, I always get stuck in this kind of situation, don’t I?”

Alpha smiled amusedly and answered him.

“Well, it’s business as usual for you. So it’s no problem at all as long as you’re well prepared. Aren’t you glad that you are?”

Akira chuckled. Although he could agree with that statement, he still felt conflicted to just brush that aside and accept it as his normal.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 231, Re-evaluation

Index

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Further to the east from where Akira's team was, a guy by the name of Tatsukawa was talking through his information terminal. He was the leader of the Hunter team that was responsible for area E1173.

"…In that case, we don't need to send our men, right? Very well, understood… No… Yes, I'm sorry to trouble you… No no no, it's our fault, so please don't be sorry. Thank you once again."

After he closed the call, he immediately made a stern face.

"Melshia! There's no need to send anyone to hunt that Okpalos! Get everyone to look for those bastards!"

Melshia, who was Tatsukawa's partner as well as the vice-captain of the team, frowned.

"Eh? What gives? We're just about to go, you know?"

"The target for that hunt is no more. The team from area 1168 took care of it."

Melshia walked toward Tatsukawa and tilted her head.

“If I’m not mistaken, that area is handled by the Hunters from Kugamayama city, right? There’s no way they can take care of that Okpalos.”

“Well, they’ve been gathering high ranking Hunters with more rewards ever since that incident in Kuzusuhara ruin. Even I was called by Kibayashi. So, I bet one of those Hunters got assigned to that area.”

“Well, that would explain everything. Are you going too?”

“I’m still considering it… But that doesn’t matter right now! Just get the men to look for those bastards!”

“Yeah yeah.”

Melshia proceeded to convey that order to the rest of the team. Although they were complaining at first, Melshia, who was good with people, knew what they were thinking and told them that Tatsukawa was not in a good mood, thus shutting them up.

“Just to let you know, bringing a few extra people won’t help much. I don’t think we can find them, you know?”

“…It’s still better than not even trying. It’s not like I’m going to get angry at them if we get to find them.”

In order to expel his horrendous mood, Tatsukawa heaved a big sigh.

“So then, what do you know about them? I know you did some investigation beforehand, right?”

“Well, I did confirm that their available record is fake. With this, it’s obvious that they’re weak Hunters who changed their track record to take on their current job and they seem to be already used to this kind of thing. Although, I still don’t know their affiliation. They might be from City Management, or from the corporate government, or from the nationalists, or maybe even from somewhere else.”

“I still don’t understand, what’s their plan? Luring the Okpalos to the west just to let it get away. And also, why would they use falsify their track record to join us?”

“I have no guess either. It might just be harassment. Or maybe they’re one of those who get pushed aside from the fierce job competition during the transport season. Or they’re just trying to add something meaningful to their track record. There are many possibilities. By the way, they chased Okpalos toward the direction of Kuzusuhara ruin, right? So, they might have something to do with that ruin as well.”

“Why would they do that?”

“The A.I in that ruin can communicate normally with humans, right? Although Kugamayama city is monopolizing that A.I, it must want to contact other cities as well. But with the soldiers from Kugamayama city surrounding the area, it’s difficult to send people there. So maybe they’re trying to open a hole in that blockade by sending powerful monsters there and to use that opening to sneak in? Normally, intentionally sending monsters to a ruin guarded by a city is the same as picking a fight with that city, that’s why they’re falsifying their background information to cover their tracks. It could be maybe something like that?”

After working together for a long time, Tatsukawa knew that rejecting Melshia’s guess, even if it was a paranoid one, would only give her more trouble to deal with, so she just ignored it.

“…Well, it doesn’t really matter. Whoever they are and whatever their goal is, it doesn’t change the fact that they gave us a bad name. So, we have to make them pay for that. Melshia, place a bounty on their head based on the information you have on them. Set it to 100 billion per person, wait, no, make it 200 billion.”

“Roger that. I’ll do that later, Ah, you’ll be the one paying, okay?”

“Ehhh, it’s related to our reputation, so shouldn’t that money be paid by the whole team?”

“No no no, we don’t have that much money, you know?”

Tatsukawa clicked his tongue.

“Make it 2 billion each then.”

“Alright, I’ll take care of the administration, but it doesn’t change the fact that you’ll be the one paying, okay?”

“…Yeah yeah, I’ll pay for it, so just get the bounty up.”

“Honestly though, I don’t see any need to go that far, you know?”

“There’s no compromise for this one.”

“You and your hard head.”

Melshia smiled wryly seeing that childish side of her partner.

It was due to pure coincidence that Akira shot down that Okpalos. But the reason why that happened was not because of pure coincidence.

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Erio stood frozen in the cafeteria back in the base. There was a pile of money in front of him, 3 million Aurum in total. It was his payment after his last job.

The pruning job that he took last time was already done. Akira himself already went to take another pruning and extermination request from Hikaru. As for the relics that Erio and the other children brought back from the last request, they were all basically bought by Sheryl’s gang and turned into money. After subtracting from the expense, the leftover was then divided equally among Akira, Elena, Sara, and Sheryl.

Then the money that Sheryl received was used to pay for Viola and Colbert’s reward as well as to Kiryou. The remaining amount went to the gang’s collective deposit. After all, they could never have enough funds stored up considering the price of the coordination-support system that was

lent to them for monitoring as well as the augmented suits and other equipment. Because of that, the sum paid to Erio and the other children were actually relatively small.

But even so, it was large enough to cause Erio to start shaking when he received it. Other than Erio, the rest of the team received 1 million Aurum each. Although all of them had their bank account made when they registered themselves in the Hunter office as Hunters and were able to receive the payment from direct transfer, in order to maximize the shock effect, Sheryl gathered everyone in the cafeteria and handed over their payments one by one. Thanks to that, most of them looked like nervous suspicious individuals with that large pile of money in hand.

Alicia sat down next to a flustered Erio. Alicia, who was one of the officers on the managerial side of the gang, had to deal with money on many occasions. Thanks to that, she had built up a level of resistance against something like this. In contrast to Erio who was greatly flustered, Alicia was sitting next to him, completely calm.

Erio kept looking around, alternating between the money in front of him and Alicia.

“…A-Alicia, is there anything you want?”

“…Your safety, I guess.”

Erio did not expect that answer from his girlfriend and was taken aback a bit by it. After he managed to somehow calm down, he looked at Alicia once more with confusion still etched on his face. Alicia then whispered.

“Even if we use it to buy medicine, this much will only get us 3 boxes, right?”

“W-well, that might be true… But, it’s still a huge amount of money, you know? At least that is the case for us.”

After Erio said so, he could feel the worth of the 3 million Aurum in front of him drop. No matter how many times he looked at the pile in front of

him, it would not shock him again the same way it did the first time.

Seeing that, Alicia knew that she had successfully changed Erio's view of money. She then stared at Erio and said.

"Yes, it is. But it's still not enough to endanger your life. So please don't think of joining Akira-san's job again just for this amount, okay? I know that you couldn't refuse because it was the boss' order, but please do your utmost effort to return alive. Not for money."

"Of course!"

Erio gave an honest smile, Alicia responded with a similar one.

"That aside, it's money that you get from your hard work, so I think you should use it for yourself, but if I may, I want you to use it for your safety. Everyone used to ignore us in the past, but ever since the transport season began, there are many new people coming to the slum. I'm sure I don't even need to tell what might happen to a slum kid carrying 3 million Aurum around."

"You have a point. Well, I do think that it should be okay during my guard duty as long as I have that augmented suit on."

"We cannot use that augmented suit unless it's for gang-related work. It's the gang's augmented suit after all. They might kick you out if you use it without permission. I think you can use this amount to buy other equipment from Katsuragi or use it to get a rental augmented suit. You can also add it to the gang's collective budget. Boss will be happy to hear it and she might allow you to borrow some of the gang's equipment, I can put in some good words too if needed. I can also use my money too in case she says that the gang doesn't have enough budget."

"Hmmm, that's also a good idea, what should I do…"

Seeing that Erio was starting to think about how to use the sum he received, Alicia was relieved in many ways.

Her boyfriend, Erio, was able to return alive after going out on a Hunter job with someone who she considered a madman. Moreover, he had calmed down from the initial shock so there should be no need to worry about the danger of suddenly getting that much money. To top it off, although it might be just a selfish wish of hers, it seems that Erio did not have any plan to use that money for other girls. Though she felt a bit guilty about it, she was still relieved.

Due to her contract with Sheryl, Carol was at least banned from messing with any gang members who already had a girlfriend. But there was a loophole in that deal. If the other party insisted that he did not have a girlfriend or had broken up with his girlfriend, then Carol had free reign.

Girls in the gang were afraid of that. They were trying to find a way, through trial and error, to prevent Carol from getting her hands on their boyfriend or the boy that they liked.

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Akira placed a one week gap between each pruning job, which always take place with Elena and Sara. As long as Akira himself was not badly wounded, he actually had no problem doing it every day. However, afterwards, he had to replenish his supplies through Shizuka's shop. Although he did pay them upfront before he made the order, he still could not get all the supplies right away. Moreover, considering the time that Elena and Sara needed to recover from their fatigue, he could not afford to shorten the gap any further.

In reality, one of the reasons for the gap was because Shizuka, as well as Elena and Sara, thought that it was extremely likely that Akira would decide to go to the wasteland every time he had some free time. Thus, they were using those excuses to force Akira to take regular breaks. Even when Hikaru suggested shortening that time gap, Akira just ignored her pleas.

On one of those rest days, when Akira was training with Alpha in the garage of his house, he received a call from Shiakarabe. The content of the call was a simple wish to meet if Akira had some free time. Although Shikarabe asked in a casual manner, Akira could feel that there was

something serious he wanted to talk about. Akira did find it weird, but he still decided to go and meet him.

Night in the entertainment district was still as busy as usual. Many Hunters were enjoying their drinks or the girls of the red-light districts. Meanwhile, there were some of them who were only passing through on their way back from the wasteland.

Akira waved between those crowds as he walked toward the bar where he was meeting Shikarabe at. But it did not take long for him to notice that there was something strange, and the source of that feeling became obvious after he took a few more steps.

“Alpha, people are avoiding me, are they not?”

“Well, it can’t be helped, you’re basically flashing your expensive equipment out in public after all.”

Akira was using his CA31R augmented suit and carrying 2 LEO multi rifles, it was understandable for people to take him as one of those Hunters who were originally from the east. Even if they did not understand the exact cost and value of Akira’s equipment, they knew that what he had on, were on a completely different level compared to the common equipment in Kugamayama city. It was not a big mystery that Akira was a high-ranking Hunter based on his appearance alone.

Many Hunters in the entertainment district were drunk. Among them, high-ranking Hunters tend to look down on the Hunters of Kugamayama city. Therefore, those who did not want to get in trouble with those high-ranking Hunters were keeping their distance from Akira.

“…I guess I should buy a coat next time. If I’m not mistaken, one of the options that came with this augmented suit was a defensive coat… Wait, no, I guess it’s useless if I use that coat, huh…”

“It’s better than using a cheap coat, making you seem weak and getting others to pick a fight with you, right? Although it’s thanks to your

equipment, isn’t it great that people finally stopped looking down on you? I think it’s better for you to just get used to this kind of thing.”

“I see, yeah. You’re right. This is better than having them coming at me. I’m also planning to get better equipment as well, so it’s true that it’s better to get used to it from now.”

Akira also thought that he would rather have people actively avoiding him instead of going at him. Thus, he just shook that off from his mind and moved on. Because of that, he did not notice the other reason why the Hunters were avoiding him.

Ever since Akira accepted the fact that he was no longer a weak slum boy, strange changes have been happening to him. Others around him started perceiving him differently. He turned from a hidden landmine into an unearthed landmine. So, it was given that those who did not want to step on a landmine even by pure coincidence, would keep their distance from Akira.

Akira eventually reached his destination. It was the same bar that he visited the last time he had gone to meet Shikarabe. But this time, the master did not tell him to leave, instead, he took him to where Shikarabe was. Shikarabe then sent a glance to the master of the bar and he just left.

There was more than one person in the room Akira just entered. Those inside did not seem like they were in a bad mood, and they were not as rowdy as the others in the bar. It did not feel like they were in deep trouble as well. However, it was obvious that they had something preoccupying their minds. Shikarabe was exuding that kind of feeling.

“You’re here, huh? I’m sorry for asking you to come here, we can talk later, so can you finish your talk with Arabe first?”

“Long time no see, please, take a seat.”

“Sure, okay.”

Akira was a bit bewildered, but he still took a seat. Shikarabe took a sip of his glass and glanced at Akira.

“Do you want… Ah, right, you don’t drink, right? Well, they have non-alcoholic drinks as well. We’ll be the ones paying, so you can go ahead and pick anything you want. I know this is not the kind of place to request a meeting with a Rank 50 Hunter, but Drankam is not really doing well with money, you see. Due to that, unfortunately, we can’t really invite you to the upper floors of the Kugama building, am I right, Arabe?”

“Eh? Ah, yes, it’s as Shikarabe just said.”

“I don’t really mind though, so…”

Akira was a bit thrown-off by Shikarabe’s unusual attitude, but as they agreed on, he first listened to Arabe’s business with him. But after listening to the content, Akira was a bit surprised. Basically, Arabe was requesting to let Drankam join in the pruning job that Akira had been receiving from Hikaru.

Seeing Akira who was frowning at him, Arabe felt the awkward mood start to drift in, so he flusteredly added in an explanation.

“Ah, please don’t misunderstand, Drankam itself finds this request a bit awkward. But it came from the higher up, or more like, it came from City Management so we can’t really ignore it, you see. It’s true that we have signed an official peace treaty, unfortunately, it doesn’t mean that we can guarantee that there won’t be any trouble… We thought that City Management had already informed you about this, but it does not seem to be the case.”

“I this is the first time I heard about this thought… So, give me a second.”

Akira quickly called the person that might know about this. Hikaru immediately picked up the call and after a short explanation of what was going on from Akira, Hikaru also replied saying that such a proposition did reach her as well.

“Back when we were talking about the gap between each request, you did say that you need someone else to handle the vehicle and wait for your supplies to arrive, and these two things become a bottleneck for you, remember? You also said that otherwise, you would have gone every day, right? And that was when you ask me if I have a solution for that, right?”

“…I did? I feel like I did, but… I feel like I just said it because I just wanted to complain. It was not like I was looking for a solution… Either way, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to actually ask for your help back then…”

“But you did say that, remember? Although, I might have received it differently than what you have intended. But putting that aside, because of that, I went around looking for something to help you out, you see.”

“And that included Drankam too?”

“Not directly. I did ask the other staff, so someone with a connection to Drankam might have gone and asked them. Ah, I’m sorry if I’m troubling you instead. I have no wish at all to pressure you to accept it. So, if you think that it’s too troublesome, please feel free to just reject it. Tell them that there’s no penalty even if you don’t take up their offer. And also, if it’s too much work for you, you can just leave that to me if you want. I will happily do it for you.”

“Alright, ahh, don’t worry, it’s not like I’m angry or anything, I just didn’t expect it, that’s all.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Please call me again if you need anything else.”

After he finished that call, Akira gave a short explanation to Arabe about what he just heard from Hikaru.

“…So that’s basically what happened, it seems that it’s not like City Management is forcing Drankam to do it either. So, uhhh, can we just drop this subject?”

“Ahhh, I see. Honestly speaking, if you’re not bothered by it, we from Drankam wish that you would accept our offer. The transport season brings

in many jobs and all of them are good for building one's reputation. Of course, we promise that we'll be careful with the team composition."

"I-I see, hmmm."

Akira started to look troubled. He had signed a peace treaty through the Hunter office with Drankam, so it might look suspicious if he insisted on not working with them. It's true that bringing more people would mean that Elena and Sara would have less burden and he himself would not have to resupply as often as before and put Shizuka in trouble. It was not a bad offer at all.

But making a deal with an organization was a huge pain in the neck, or at least, that was the case for Akira. Unlike with Elena and Sara, who he could trust, or Sheryl, who would just accept any amount that Akira decided to give her, dealing with an organization was different. He would have to wrestle with all the trouble that came with dealing with an organization, not to mention, he had to think about commanding the team as well as some kind of insurance for each person. All in all, it was extremely troublesome.

After taking his time to consider his options, Akira decided to take on Hikaru's offer. He then recalled Hikaru, gave her a quick overview, and left the rest of the negotiation with Drankam to Hikaru. Hikaru happily accepted the job, she quickly called Arabe after that and completely took over the negotiation in place of Akira.

With Arabe's negotiation opponent being shifted to Hikaru, Akira decided that he had no more business with Arabe, so he moved on to Shikarabe.

"So then, what do you want to talk about with me?"

"Well, about that… It has more or less already been taken care of, so…"

"The heck? It's done? But I haven't said anything yet. You can't just say that when you're the one who called me here. So, what is it?"

Seeing Akira was still curious, Shikarabe took a rather aggressive chug of the drink in his hand.

“…Let’s see. Well, you did come here, so I guess it’s only fair if I tell you. What can I say… It’s some kind of adjustment for my intuition, wait, no, it’s more like a check for my intuition…”

“What in the world are you even talking about?”

“It would be a long story if I have to tell you everything, but I will tell you the bare minimum since you did come here after I called you. If you’re interested, you’re welcome to listen, but if you’re not, feel free to finish your meal and leave anytime you want.”

Akira frowned and took a posture saying that he was interested. Shikarabe took one big gulp of the newly filled beer cup before he started talking.

After Katsuya’s death, Drankam went through dramatic changes. It basically eradicated Katsuya’s faction and it sent a shockwave through the inner management of the gang. Everyone, including the officers as well as the ordinary members, were all busy dealing with the aftermath. Thanks to that, there was no struggle for power at all.

With the excessive prioritization toward the young Hunters gone, Kurosawa and the other veteran Hunters, who had left the gang because of that policy, returned to Drankam. It was all thanks to them that the gang was able to finish the other deals that should have been handled by Katsuya. Although they were able to fill in the hole that Katsuya’s left, they still could not do anything about the long-term contracts involving Katsuya as an individual. Due to the violation of the contract from Drankam’s side, Drankam had to pay a huge fine. With no more support from Yanagisawa, Drankam was quickly thrown into a financial crisis.

“It’s all because those in the managerial side accepted those reckless long-term contracts. Those who took on such risks are now in deep trouble. But still, it’s not like I can just say that they got what they deserved and be happy about it. It’s also our fault for not stopping them before they signed those contracts. I know all of them are now blaming themselves, but that’s the same for me too. Just like them, I’ve believed that Kastsuya would never die, that he would only keep growing bigger.”

Shikarabe pour another beer into his empty cup and heaved a huge sigh as if he just let out something heavy that was latching onto him. He brought the beer to his mouth as if to fill in the hole that was left from his huge sigh.

“He was basically just that good. Whether it was hatred or the opposite, he had power that not all Hunters have, and his power threw us off. But with all being said, he still died in the end. People die when their time comes, it was obvious and even doubly true for Hunters. His death allowed us to come to our senses and sober up.”

Shikarabe then looked up as if he was digging through his past.

“I always hated his guts. No, I still hate him even now. Although it’s not as bad as how the me from the past would have felt. I hate him just like how I hate the other brats that get too cocky. I still don’t know, even now, why I hated him that much. Well, it might be actually just jealousy for his talent and that jealousy is now gone now that he is dead.”

No matter how far he dug through his past, Shikarabe could not recover the hatred that he once had. He somehow looked even more irritated than before.

“Let me return to the real subject, so, basically, my intuition is telling me that he’s someone who would not die and grow big. In contrast to that, I’m sorry to offend you, but you’re not that amazing and I’ve always felt that you’ll die sooner or later. But then, the result was the opposite, he’s dead and you survived, you even got to Rank 50. So, I just want to know just how wrong my intuition is.”

As a Hunter who placed his very own life on his intuition, for Shikarabe, questioning his intuition was like questioning the most basic principle of his identity. That was the reason why he called Akira to meet him. Even though it was important for him, it did not show at all on his face.

“And so, after I calmed down and threw away all my preconceptions. I once again asked my intuition, whether you’re an amazing Hunter. If even after that, I still can’t see you as an amazing Hunter, then it only means that my

intuition is not to be trusted. That's why I called you here and I'm already done with that as well. So basically, that's all there is it."

"I see, so, what is your intuition saying now?"

To Akira who was asking while showing his honest interest in the answer, Shikarabe just smiled at him.

"We are not so close that I would just tell you that. Well, at least, I'll tell you that there's no need to completely throw it off the window for the time being."

"I see."

Shikarabe's reply already served as half an answer, so Akira just slightly smiled at him.

They continued talking while Shikarabe was enjoying his beer and Akira, enjoying his meal. As the alcohol started to take effect on Shikarabe, he suddenly asked a rather rude question to Akira.

"But still, that's pretty impressive of you to kill Katsuya. Oh, it's not like I'm looking down on you. It's just that you were alone when you were facing Katsuya and his whole team, right? Considering the difference in fighting prowess, it should have been impossible, no? So how did you kill him? Did he make a mistake somewhere? Or did you catch him off-guard or something?"

"…Both, I guess. I'll omit the details, but in the end, he died protecting his teammate. That's why I won. If he had abandoned his teammate, I would have been the one dead."

Shikarabe gave a lonely bitter smile and mumbled.

"…I see, so in the end, he thought too highly of himself and brought his friends closer to death again, huh? But I guess he did hold on to his belief to the very end. Well, that's just like him to die like that."

"He was always like that?"

“Well, yeah… Now that I think about it, back then, when he was the leader of a small team, he remained like that. He should have continued to lead a small group of people that he could save with his hard work. That way, others would not have died. Well, it’s Drankam who pushed him to lead a bigger team, so it would be wrong to blame him on that one, huh? He has always…”

Akira listened to Shikarabe’s recollection of Katsuya for a while before leaving.

__*__*__*__

On their way back, Arabe glanced at Shikarabe and threw a question to him.

“By the way, what is your intuition saying about Akira now?”

“Whoah there, are you seriously asking me that?”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? It’s not like we’re strangers anyway, right?”

Arabe asked that question in a casual manner. But Shikarabe replied with a rather serious tone.

“Let’s see. Before you think of anything weird, I’ll tell you this first. He’s crazy, that’s what I think about him right now.”

“That‘s rather harsh, but it’s not like he’s weak or anything, right?”

“Overall, including his equipment, there’s no doubt he’s stronger than me. And even if we’re using the same equipment, it would still be a close fight. But rather than strength, his craziness sticks out more. In order for that crazy talent to bloom, it needs to be accompanied by someone crazy enough to do crazy things. You’ve heard about Kibayashi, right? I heard that Akira is just the kind Kibayashi loves. A reckless Hunter. So, basically, he gambles on his life on a daily basis and survives through all the risks he takes. There’s no doubt that someone who has gone through all those things would become that strong. So, it just makes me wonder… Why did I only see him as a common Hunter in the past…”

Seeing Shikarabe starting to admonish himself, Arabe decided to stop his original plan of trying to recruit Akira to Drankam. Shikarabe, who had been close to Arabe for so many years noticed that.

“I think you’ve made a good choice there. If you got Akira into Drankam, I bet he would drag the whole gang to his crazy stunts. So just forget about it, he would never be able to replace Katsuya.”

“You’re right, I’ll tell the others that too.”

“…Whoah there, so there are others who consider that too?”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

Shikarabe sighed exasperatedly, seeing that Arabe could only smile wryly.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 232, Middle district

Index

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After finishing business with Shikarabe and Arabe, Drankam started to join Akira in his pruning job. After a fierce negotiation between Sheryl, Drankam, and Hikaru, they decided to keep the 1-week gap while still increasing the area coverage based on the new size of the team.

Due to Kurosawa's return to Drankam, the command chain quickly stabilized. The team worked very well under Kurosawa's command which was great for Akira. While at the same time, hunters kept encountering powerful monsters around the city, that should have been further to the east from Kugamayama city.

With the appearance of these monsters, hunters started to feel the pressure. Some of the hunters backed out from their job, some demanded more money to make it worth the preparation and the risk. One of the reasons why Hikaru asked Akira to shorten the gap was to help tip over the balance.

But Akira himself was not that powerful yet, he ended up having to use his trump card, the AF anti-material cannon, every day. It reminded him just how scary the wasteland of the eastern district was.

During noon, Akira was having a meeting with Hikaru in a restaurant on the first floor of the Kugama building.

“But still, just how long is this pruning request going to continue for? It has been a month since the transport season started, you know? Hasn’t it already ended a long time ago?”

“Although it started together with the transport season, it doesn’t stop together with it. It will continue as long as there’s demand for it. Especially this time. There are many people coming to this city because of the last incident in the Kuzusuhara ruin. These people of course include higher-ups as well. It’s not like we can stuff these people to a safebox and send them away without escorts, you see, but at the same time, there are not enough inter-city transports to ferry them since their schedule is already fully booked. I even heard that even someone from Sakashita Heavy Industry is sending their officers in secret too.”

“I see, that’s pretty amazing.”

Hikaru smiled bitterly. For the cities under the corporate government, getting an officer guest from the Sakashita Heavy Industry was a huge thing, but even so, unlike what Hikaru was looking forward to, Akira only showed the bare minimum interest in the matter. She felt that it was a mistake to leak insider information in hopes that it would surprise Akira.

“Yep, that’s really amazing. This is pretty valuable information, you know? So don’t leak it outside, okay?”

“Okay.”

Hikaru felt a bit disappointed that Akira reacted to something so important so casually, but she just shook it off for now and continued.

“So then, it’s about today’s main subject. I want you to escort one of the inter-city transports. I know it’s a bit sudden, but it’ll be tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow? That’s just way too sudden, I have to make sure that Elena-san and Sara-san are ready too, so…”

“I’m sorry, but the transport only has limited capacity, so you’ll be going alone. That’s why I’ve only finished the paperwork for you thinking that if it’s you alone, it should be fine. You should already have your supplies and seem ready to go anytime. So, that should be okay, right?”

“Well, if it’s only me, then yeah. But still, this is pretty sudden.”

“Yeah, it came to us out of the blue as well. Although I can’t tell you all the details, there’s this strange thing going on where abnormally strong monsters are appearing around the area. So, the original hunters assigned for this got injured fighting against those monsters or something like that. But with that being said, it’s not like they can just postpone the dispatch, you see. So, can you go? If you insist on refusing, I will have no other choice but to back off, but if you can, it would be great if you would do it.”

Akira thought while looking at Hikaru who was smiling at him while still giving off a serious aura.

“Alright.”

“Thank you!! Really really thank you!”

Hikaru said so and gave an honest ‘thank you’ to Akira.

After listening to a short briefing about that request, Akira left the restaurant and went back home. Hikaru, who was left behind, stayed in the restaurant, working through the paperwork while enjoying her parfait. Since Akira had accepted, she had to take care of the administration work as soon as possible. Since she was basically trying to insert Akira into the request using the opening created by the suddenly vacant escort slots, she had to hurry up or someone else would take that spot.

“…Alright! I made it! Although it’s a little bit too close for comfort, it’s all good as long as it gets through, yep!”

Judging from his performance in the pruning requests, Akira obviously had the skill to handle this escort request. He would have no trouble fighting in the wasteland further into the east. So, if Akira could contribute well during

this escort mission, it would no doubt pull up Hikaru's reputation as well. Hikaru could not hold back her smile as she was looking forward to the result.

"Akira, good luck out there, I'm rooting for you, you know?"

Akira unexpectedly took the request without much need of convincing. So, it seems that she could expect more from him in the future. As Hikaru was thinking about that future, a call suddenly reached her. It was from Kibayashi.

"Hello, it's Hikaru, what is it?"

"It's me. There's something I want to talk to you about the escort request."

"Is there a problem? Don't worry, I was able to get Akira to take on the request."

Hikaru thought that Kibayashi was calling her, worried that he might lose his connection to Akira, that was why she replied with a rather haughty tone there. But unexpectedly, Kibayashi replied with a rather amused voice.

"Oh, not bad at all. To be honest, I didn't expect you would be able to pull that off. Well well, I guess it was a good thing I introduced you to Akira."

Hikaru was taken aback by that unexpected reaction.

"I-I see. Thank you very much."

"I heard that you pushed the joint work with Drankam in order to cement the peace treaty as well as to win some trust from Akira, right? That peace treaty, it's actually made by me, you see."

"Is that so? Thank you."

"No no no, I'm just happy to find that my work is useful to others. But still, it's pretty impressive using that peace treaty to push for that joint operation."

Hikaru was not sure how to react to Kibayashi, who was praising her.

“Anyway, I’m sorry for imposing on you by bringing this matter up, but returning back to the main subject, there’s something I want you to do for me when you meet Akira tomorrow.”

“What is it?”

After hearing Kibayashi’s request, Hikaru replied with a confused tone.

“Is that all?”

“Yes, that’s all, that’s all from me. Call me again if something comes up.”

Kibayashi then closed the call. Hikaru tried to understand the meaning behind Kibayashi’s request for a bit, but nothing came to mind. Thus, she just stopped there and left it as something that must have some kind of deeper meaning to it.

On the morning of the next day, Akira was waiting for Hikaru in front of the Kugama building. He was carrying one spare AF anti-material cannon and 4 LEO rifles that were hidden under his newly bought coat. The large-sized rucksack on his back was filled with extended magazines and energy packs. Each one of these energy packs were focused more on capacity instead of price, so both were by no means cheap.

The transport truck was also filled to the brim with ammunition, so if needed, Akira could just buy them right there. But Akira wanted to buy from Shizuka’s shop as much as possible. Of course, the quality of the product from the transport truck was guaranteed to be great, and he could use his position as the escort to get a small discount. In comparison, the ammo that he bought from Shizuka was slightly more expensive, but even so, he still prioritized Shizuka’s shop. It was basically one of those occult things among hunters.

Hikaru, who came right on time, looked puzzled at Akira’s luggage.

“That’s quite a lot of luggage for a 3 days, 2 nights journey.”

“Regardless of the estimated time, the journey between cities is always going to be long. So, it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

“Well, you’re the one who will be escorting that journey after all. Now then, let’s go.”

Hikaru then happily took Akira through the Kugama building and into the inner wall. In the middle of that, Hikaru gave Akira a bracelet-type information terminal.

“Always keep this on during the request, okay? It doubles as evidence that you have permission to enter the middle district as well as permission to bring your weapons in. So, make sure not to lose it. The area where you’re going has the same security system as the middle district. In the case where you break that bracelet, don’t move and contact me right away. In the worst-case scenario, the system might recognize you as a treat and deal with you.”

“Alright. Can I just put this on top of my augmented suit?”

“It’s pretty durable since it’s designed for hunters, so it should be okay. You can also change the size; you should have no trouble putting it on… Do you need my help to put it on? Thought that would be on your neck.”

Hikaru smiled mischievously, Akira only lightly chuckled and replied.

“No thanks.”

“That’s unfortunate.”

Akira put that bracelet on his left arm. He then showed it to the guard on the gate before he could proceed into the inner wall. The moment he stepped into the inner wall, Hikaru twirled around and spread her arm as she looked at Akira with a huge smile.

“Akira, welcome to the middle district!!”

The huge wall divided Kugamayama city into the inner and outer sections. The thick tall wall represented the gap of public order, economy, and

environment between the inner wall and the outer wall, and Akira finally stepped into the inner section.

Of course, there was no shortage of land considering all the unused lands out in the wasteland, but once walls were erected, it created a limited supply of safe areas. In order to make the best use of that limited resource, tall buildings were erected inside the inner wall. But even so, it did not feel crowded. In fact, the urban landscape was designed to give off a sense of freedom. The well-cleaned road boasted the difference between the inner and the outer section of the wall to Akira.

An unmanned vehicle stopped in front of Akira and Hikaru. She was the one who summoned that vehicle. It was the common way to move around inside the middle district. The inside of the vehicle was relatively wide for its size thanks to the fact that it did not have a driver seat, Akira did not have any trouble at all stuffing his luggage in. After he boarded in as well, Hikaru set the destination, and the vehicle started to silently move without making any noticeable shaking, but even so, it was coursing at a rather high speed through the middle district.

Akira was gazing at the cityscape through the car's window with great interest. However, Hikaru found something strange looking at Akira's expression.

"You don't seem to be that excited. Is the middle district not as great as you thought it would be?"

"Ah, no, it's indeed really amazing, I guess it's as expected of the middle district, but because of that, I kind of expected this so it doesn't really surprise me."

"Is that so? Many who enter the middle district for the first time from the outer wall seem to feel overwhelmed and found it absolutely amazing though."

The area around the gate of the Kugama building that connected the inner and the outer part of the wall was deliberately built to give an impactful impression to those who entered for the first time. It was the way the middle

district showed its glory and greatness to those from outside the wall as well as the way to encourage the people who live inside the wall to be proud of where they lived and worked.

Hikaru also thought highly of the middle district, and she was planning to move on to the upper district one day. This was the reason why she was working so hard right now. But that was also the reason why she wanted Akira to be happier after she took him from the lower district to the middle district. Unfortunately, Akira was as apathetic as usual with his reaction and Hikaru found it regrettable.

“Ahhh, it might be because you’re a hunter that you’ve found something more amazing somewhere in the ruins, right? Well, it’s true that no matter how amazing the buildings in the middle district are, they’re all still just buildings made in the current era. There’s no way they can stand a chance against the old-world buildings, huh?”

“Is that so? Hmmm, that might be the case…”

That was when Hikaru remembered what she heard from Kibayashi yesterday. She thought that it was a good time to bring it up and smiled.

“But still, this place is not the same as the outer wall, you know? And it’s not limited only in terms of the outlook. Hear this and be amazed! In the middle district!! If someone gets killed in the middle of the road! The murderer will be properly caught, sent to the court, investigated, before finally punished based on the available evidence! Isn’t that amazing?!”

“Ohh!! That’s amazing! As expected of the inner wall!!”

Both Hikaru and Akira were surprised, but the reason for it was completely different. Akira was simply being honest that he was surprised at how public safety was enforced in the inner wall. Meanwhile, Hikaru was taken aback that Akira was so surprised. The difference in their common sense regarding public safety was in full view.

Hikaru was suspicious if Akira was only trying to match her excitement instead of being honestly surprised. But judging from Akira’s reaction, it

was obvious that he was truly surprised. When she remembered what Kibayashi said yesterday, it caused her to start feeling anxious.

Kibayashi asked Hikaru to do 2 things. The first one was to tell Akira just how safe the inner wall was, which she had done just now. The other one was something that she thought was not that big of a deal. However, after seeing Akira's reaction, she conveyed this last bit to Akira carefully.

"…By the way, Akira, how many people have you killed till now? It might be rude for me to ask this, but it has something to do with submitting your permission, you see."

Akira pulled back his head and thought for a bit, but eventually, he shook his head and said.

"Sorry, I have no idea, it's not like I'm counting it in the first place…"

"There's no need for a precise number, an estimation like how many digits should be enough."

"In that case… 3 digits… I guess? I'm sure it doesn't go as far as 4 digits or does it? Hmm… It's just my guess though."

"I-I see… Is that the number from the ones you killed directly? Or does it include those who are killed indirectly as well?"

Leaders often counted the people that the team killed due to their orders. Hikaru thought that Akira might be one of those when she asked that question, but he interpreted that question differently.

"Does indirect include something like I shot them, but they did not die right away only to die later because of the wound too?"

"That would be direct."

"In that case, that number is from the direct ones."

"I-I see."

Akira answered Hikaru’s questions as if it was a casual conversation. Like what he just had for lunch a few days ago. Hikaru was only barely able to maintain her smile thanks to her greatly polished negotiation talent. She then reached for the information terminal and stopped the car.

“Sorry, I forgot to report something to Kibayashi, can you please wait here for a bit? I’ll go out and make a quick call.”

“Sure.”

Akira replied with a short affirmation, so Hiraku smiled at him and left the car. She unconsciously walked away from the car where Akira was, half-running. After she opened some distance from the car, she repeatedly took some deep breathes to calm down her throbbing heart. She tried to calm down as much as possible before calling Kibayashi.

“Oh, did something happen?”

Kibayashi’s casual voice incited an explosion of emotion from Hikaru.

“Don’t give me that!? Just what the heck is wrong with him!?”

“Even if you yell at me like that, I have no idea unless you tell me what happened, you know?”

Kibayashi was chuckling since it turned out exactly as he expected as he listened to Hikaru’s explanation. After that, he then innocently asked Hikaru.

“I see, so, is there any problem?”

“Are you-!? Of course, it’s a huge problem!? Why did you let someone who killed that many people into the middle district?!”

“Why, you ask? What are you even talking about? Isn’t that because you asked me to?”

“It doesn’t take a genius to refuse that request, you know!? Don’t tell me that you did something behind the curtain to get permission for him.”

“I didn’t do anything. Well, if you ask me if he’s a dangerous person, I’ll give you a straight yes. Even I would hesitate to let him into the middle district. So, I’m really amazed by your negotiation skill, you really managed to get him into the middle district. I’m being serious here, I’m honestly impressed that you actually did it, didn’t I tell you yesterday as well, remember?”

In contrast to Hikaru, who was barking complaints, Kibayashi replied with an amused tone.

“It seems that you’re suspicious why your request got through, the final decision for the permission is made based on many considerations. For example, even if it’s true that Akira killed hundreds of people, that happened outside the wall. In short, that happened out there in the wasteland. So, I bet the higher-ups are not really concerned about it. But with that being said, if he was a murderer who killed people he saw no matter where he went, the permission would not have been granted. As a matter of fact, he would have been put on a bounty. Even if he has killed hundreds of people, it happened outside the wall, and considering that the public safety outside the wall is virtually non-existent along with his hunter rank being 50, I bet his permission was only barely managed to get approved.”

“T-that’s… Aren’t you going a bit too far with that guess of yours?”

“But that’s completely possible, you know? Didn’t you work so hard to close that gap? That peaceful resolution with Drankam through the hunter office, and with that as a basis, you get them to join operations with him. That should be enough to prove that Akira is a professional hunter who obeys his contracts closely. Basically, what you have done so far is guarantee that he’s safe. Man, that’s really impressive. If it was me, I wouldn’t be able to do that. After all, that guy went in alone and crushed a huge gang in the slums just to kill someone who stole his money, you know? He did kill quite a lot of people during that incident, after all, so there’s no way his kill count only stopped at dozens, you know.”

“S-so that was not because he somehow got roped into the conflict…?”

“Hm? The record didn’t go into that detail, huh? Did the record mostly omit that part because of its connection with that powered suit? Hmm? I see. It’s under the information restriction, huh? Well, I guess things like this do happen from time to time, ah, right, make sure not to leak this info, okay?”

Hikaru’s face turned paler and paler.

“I’m sure you’ll be deemed responsible if he causes some sort of issue there. Though it won’t go as far as firing you, I bet you won’t be able to live inside the inner wall anymore. But again, I bet you know this very well before you brought him into the middle district, right? By the way, I went to call you in person yesterday because I just wanted to confirm if you’re sure with what you were doing, just to be safe, you know?”

Hikaru then thought that she should have noticed it the moment Kibayashi said something suspicious to her yesterday, but all that she could do for now was just to wallow in her regrets.

“Well, basically, everything will be fine as long as he doesn’t do anything bad and it’s your job to make sure that nothing bad happens. Be careful, yeah? If a random thug in the inner wall said to him that they would kill him, there’s no doubt that he’ll go ahead and kill them instead, that’s just the kind of person Akira is. Even with the fact that he’s a ranking 50 hunter with a connection to city management’s officer and a strong letter of recommendation from city management staff, he only managed to get temporary permission to enter the middle district, you see. So, I’m sure you understand the meaning behind it without any further explanation.”

Hikaru always thought that high ranking hunters with connection to city management’s officers would always be proper hunters, but that did not seem to be the case.

“He might be able to accomplish whatever crazy plan you have, you know? So, just give it your best shot, I’ll be waiting for the result.”

Even after Kibayashi closed the call, Hikaru still stood there without doing anything for a few minutes. When she returned to herself, she finally

understood that Kibayashi was using her to do something crazy and she had no inkling of how to get away from that.

Sending Akira as the escort for the inter-city transport was supposed to be a low-risk high-return gamble, but now, it has completely changed into a life-staking high-risk high-return gamble. Unfortunately, she had gone too far to back out now. Not only did she forcefully get Akira into a job related to another city, if she suddenly decided to back out of it at the very last minute, her reputation would be crushed to nothing. In the worst-case scenario, they might blame her and banish her from the inner wall.

In the first place, it was highly unlikely that Akira would be okay with quitting at this point. For the hunters, the request to escort inter-city transport was a fortuitous request. If Hikaru told him to back out although she was the one who strongly pushed that request to him, it would definitely buy her a lot of grudges. She did not even want to imagine what would happen to her after that.

“Okay okay! I just have to do this, right?!”

Her route of retreat had already been destroyed. Which meant, her only choice was to push forward and reach for the win. She clapped both of her hands on her face and expelled the fear inside of her.

“Let’s do this!”

Hikaru declared so to help herself get fired up as she gave off a strong smile.

The transport terminal inside the wall was built like a harbor to handle large cargoes. The huge trucks carrying countless containers were going back and forth between the transport trucks and the warehouses. The size of the tires of those large trucks was even bigger than Akira. The transport truck was large enough to make those large trucks that hunters used look like cute tiny baby trucks. The scene laid out here really threw off the sense of the size for everyone there.

Akira was looking closely at one of those vehicles and was completely overwhelmed by the size of it. Although he encountered them a few times in the wasteland, he never looked at them up close. Their sizes really felt different when he was this close to it.

“I know that this thing is designed to be used in the wasteland, but still, it’s really something. If a vehicle this huge is going through the wasteland. It’s no wonder it would attract monsters. That would explain why there were so many pruning requests. Well then, I’ll be going now.”

“Of course, good luck.”

Akira walked through the ramp and boarded the vehicle, Hikaru saw him off with a smile. But after Akira vanished into the vehicle, her smile quickly turned wry. She only stood there while running her brain at full power, and then when the ramp was about to be removed, she finally made her decision and ran into the vehicle as well.

Akira went to the room that he was assigned to and took a short rest there. Since the inside of the transport vehicle was considered as a part of the middle district, it was well equipped to welcome the guests suitable for those who would visit the middle district, the individual rooms were relatively large and equipped with all kinds of facilities. And to match its size, the bath in the bathroom was also equally big. The wall was equipped with holographic displays and projected the scene from the outside of the vehicle, it gave off a sense of grandiose. Hunters could also pay extra to get better rooms with more facilities, but Akira did not think that it was a wise thing to spend his reward for that.

Akira’s job was to watch the outside and to follow command when a battle broke out. Since the escorts’ groups and posts were already decided beforehand, they were free to do anything until they were called upon. Akira was thinking of going to the cafeteria or perusing the merchant quarters to waste time. As he left the room, that was right when Hikaru, who was running toward his room, arrived at his door.

Hikaru was still panting when she asked Akira.

“A-Akira… Where… Are you going?”

“I’m just thinking of checking the cafeteria or the stands…”

“I-I see… W-well… Can you please stay in your room… For now? P-Please…”

Hikaru was still panting as she meekly pushed Akira back into his room. Akira was weirded out by it but still decided to get back to his room.

Hikaru was trying to calm her breath while giving off a rather anxious look, Akira frowned at Hikaru and threw a question at her.

“The truck will be going soon, is it okay for you to be here? Weren’t you planning to give me support from the city?”

“That was the plan, but there’s a small change in that plan. I’ll be going with you too. It’s faster to give you support from closer by after all. Although I can’t help you during the fight, we don’t need to worry much about lag and interference when we’re close. I’ll be with you for the full 3 days, so, I’ll be in your care.”

“I see, in that case, I’ll be in your care as well. Now then, I’ll be going out for a bit-”

“Wait!”

Akira stepped back and was really weirded out by Hikaru, who stopped him so suddenly and desperately. But Hikaru then gave a polite smile and said.

“Please just stay in the room. If you want to do something outside, please tell me first. If it’s something I can do, then I’ll do it for you. So don’t leave this room, okay?”

“…Why don’t you want me to go out that much?”

As expected, Akira started to find it suspicious. Hikaru tried to keep calm as she looked for an excuse.

“Although you received permission to go to the middle district, we actually kind of forced it so that the permission got approved on time. Because of that, some data is still being processed. I’m worried that the security system might not correctly recognize the permissions supposed to be granted to you. So, if it’s possible, I want you to just stay in this room. I’m sorry, this is all my fault.”

“Is that so? Ah, that’s why you suddenly have to change your plan, huh?”

“Y-Yes, exactly! I’m really sorry.”

“Well, it can’t be helped then. Fine, I’ll refrain from going out from this room as much as I can.”

“Thank you, and again, sorry.”

Hikaru sighed in relief, Akira sent a glance at Alpha who was floating next to Hikaru.

“Alpha.”

“She’s not lying, but I bet it’s just an excuse.”

“Thought so. Well, I’m sure she has her reasons too. She has been acting weird ever since she left the car to call Kibayashi, I wonder if Kibayashi said something to her.”

Since it was basically an order from his requester and it was not something that hard to do, Akira thought that there was no need to unnecessarily refuse that order and did not dwell any further on it.

For the time being, Hikaru’s plan was to reduce Akira’s contact with others. This was in order to reduce the possibility of him causing any form of trouble as much as possible and that plan was going well for now.

The displays on the wall suddenly turned on, showing the views outside the vehicle. It seemed that the vehicle finally started moving. The large transport vehicle approached the high walls. The wall then started to move and opened a passage into the wasteland. The transport vehicle passed

through that opening and immediately accelerated the moment it entered the wasteland. With this, Akira’s request to escort the transport had begun.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 233, Eastern Area

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Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

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The transport that Akira was boarding lined up with the other transport trucks and formed a long line in the middle of the wasteland. Their huge size left behind a trail of dust storms; it was an easy thing to spot the convoy from afar. They marched forward mercilessly, pushing aside and crushing anything in their way. Rubble meters in length and large carcasses were no match to the size of the transport truck. None of them could even pose a challenge to the vehicle.

The transport vehicles were equipped with powerful forcefield armour that could easily deflect cannon warheads. The cannon perching on top of it had enough firepower to shoot down flying monsters. It had enough space to carry the population of a small town, with all its members armed to the teeth. It was so well equipped that it could be called a moving fortress. That was the transport vehicle that Akira and the other Hunters were boarding.

Akira was there as the escort to Gigant 3. He already had his position decided beforehand, so he was currently waiting for the hourly guard exchange while talking and studying with Alpha to kill the time.

During that time, he glanced at Hikaru, who was moving her mouth as if she was quipping. She was not making any sound and smiling while facing toward an empty space. She would only make a sound when she was using a mini AR device to negotiate with someone from afar. To Akira, who already knew what he was doing, this scene seemed completely normal. However, for those who had no idea, she looked like a madwoman talking to herself.

“Alpha. Do I look like that too when I’m talking to you?”

“Only when we’re alone. But I’ve always made sure that you won’t look like that when there’s someone else, so it’s fine, at least, it’s fine right now.”

“So basically, I was completely hopeless back when I just met you, huh? Bet I stuck out a lot.”

Akira smiled wryly next to Alpha who was smiling amusedly.

Hikaru lightly bowed and sighed. It seemed that she had finished negotiations. Hikaru then turned to Akira. Judging from her smile, it seemed that it went well.

As Akira thought about why she was looking at him, sudden order to dispatch reached him. Akira was about to pick it up, but Hikaru stopped him with her hand signal. Thus, he paused for a bit before finally picking it up. He was a bit surprised to see the person shown in the display of his augmented vision. Although the notification said that he was connected to someone in command, the person displayed was Hikaru.

Akira immediately glanced at Hikaru and saw her smile mischievously at him.

“It seems that it went well, I’m a part of the escort unit’s commander now. I’m glad that I made it on time. Akira, I’m joining the escort unit as your operator.”

Akira raised his eyebrows. He was obviously surprised, Hikaru noticed that too as she smiled wryly and explained.

“Well, although I’m an operator, it’s not like I’m going to bother you with my orders. Basically, I’ll just convey the orders that I receive from the higher-ups to you. In exchange, if you want to be allowed to ignore said order. Oh. It could be either because it was a bad order or because you are not in a position to obey it. Regardless of the reason, I can negotiate in your place. So instead of being an operator that gives you detailed support, I’ll focus more on supporting you so that you can move freely.”

“Ah, I see, alright then. I’ll be counting on you.”

“Just leave it to me, well then, as my first job as your operator, Akira, get ready. I’ll guide you as close as possible to your post once you’re ready.”

Hikaru said so to Akira with a smile, although there were lies mixed in her words, Akira could not notice them thanks to how skilled she was.

Once Akira was done with his preparation, they left the room and walked through the transport’s hallway guided by Hikaru. She was walking next to Akira while vigilantly watching her surroundings as if she was carefully walking through the dangerous ruin.

As expected, Akira found that very weird, but he then caught Alpha smiling amusedly next to him.

“What?”

“Hm? Well, it’s just that she basically doesn’t allow you to get out of your room, and when you do, she’ll always be close by. That bracelet also allowed her to track your location all the time. It’s as if you’re a prisoner.”

“Just what did I do to deserve this treatment?”

“Killing many people outside the wall, although it doesn’t really matter to me, it seems that is not the case for City Management.”

Akira somehow was able to make a guess as to the reason why Hikaru was treating him like that.

“…It’s not like I’m involved in all those things because I wanted to, though…”

“Of course, but it’s a completely different story whether they’ll trust you or not, right?”

“Yeah, you’re right…”

Akira threw a bitter smile, which Hikaru could not have noticed.

The top of the transport vehicle was basically flat. It was designed to maximize the efficiency of the forcefield armour. Because of that, the only thing that could serve as a shield from the wind was the huge cannons perched on top of the transport vehicle. With the vehicle travelling at high speed, the atmosphere on the roof was constantly turbulent.

Akira’s post was on the rooftop. Thus, he was standing straight in the middle of the raging storm, which would have blown any normal human away. It was only thanks to his augmented suit that he could stand straight. The enemy detection was done through the powerful radar installed on the vehicle. So, Akira’s current job was to wait there until he received an order that allowed him to start shooting.

Akira stood on one edge of the rooftop and scanned over the wasteland. The fast-moving transport vehicle had already entered the eastern area of the eastern district. Although he was still far away from the front line, the area was already filled with monsters that were way stronger and smarter than the monsters around Kugamayama city. Even the view there left Akira the impression that he was looking at something high-tech.

“Alpha. There’s something that looks like a huge bird in the sky over there with a column-like building hanging under it, you’re not playing with my vision, right?”

“Nope.”

“Then, I guess it’s a real monster, huh?”

Akira glanced at Alpha, aside from her unrealistic beauty coupled with the too exposed dress and the fact that she sometimes floated in the air, she looked like a real person. People could feel her if they touched her through their prosthetic body or augmented suit, but in reality, she was not there. Meanwhile, the fantasy-like bird that was flying far away was not virtual, it was a real monster.

“I feel like I am starting to not be able to trust my own eyes…”

“There are things in this world that are real although you can see them, you know?”

“I know the real meaning of that saying is different from what you’re implying.”

“But it’s true. The connection between you and me is not something that eyes can see, right?”

“That’s true, but still…”

Deals, contracts, trust, debts, favors, schemes, compromises, obligations, evaluations, toleration. Alpha built a complicated connection through the old-world domain based on all these factors. As for whether this link was weak or strong, Alpha herself was not certain.

Nonetheless, Alpha wished to create a stronger connection with Akira when she smiled at him. However, Akira just thought that Alpha was being cryptic as usual and just ignored her smile.

Hikaru’s voice suddenly could be heard from the comms and her image quickly appeared in his augmented vision.

“Akira, the monsters are coming, A swarm of flying monsters are approaching. The transport’s cannon will take care of the bigger ones, so you only need to focus on the smaller ones when they are closing in on you. There’s no need to fight the ones outside your range even if you have the leeway to. As long as there’s no order to do so, the other Hunters might mistake it as you trying to snatch their prey and reward, so it might cause

some issues. I'll send you their locations, you can make your own decision based on that data."

Another display showing the enemy's locations appeared in Akira's augmented vision. Akira could see a swarm of monsters coming from the front of the transport convoy, the display also showed that none of them were currently Akira's targets.

"Just tell me if you're having a hard time over there, I'll send help."

"Roger that, well, I'll do the best I can first before asking for help. Is that everything?"

"Yes, if I may add something, I'm basically monitoring you as an operator, so you can show me your cool side, or so I want to say, but…"

Hikaru's smile which was brimming with confidence up until that point suddenly turned cloudy.

"Just because I said so, there's no need for you to do anything reckless like what Kibayashi wants."

Akar smiled bitterly and replied.

"It's not like I did them because I wanted to."

"Is that so? That kind of thing depends on the individual, I guess. Well, I'll be watching as the operator so we can compare our impressions later. Now then, good luck, Akira."

Hikaru's image vanished from Akira's display. He then changed gear to get ready for the fight.

The monsters approaching the convoy had come close enough to be seen with naked eyes. When Akira locked his gaze at those monsters, Akira's information-gathering device recognized the enemy as it augmented Akira's vision to be able to clearly see them. The swarm looked like a group of flying insects. The display also added the information of their distance as well as their location.

But when Akira glanced at the distance, he found it rather surprising.

“…Oh, wait? Are they still that far away? Are these numbers correct?”

“They’re so big that they already looked that big although they’re still so far away. And since there’s nothing to compare to when they’re flying in the sky, it’s so difficult to grasp how far away they are with just your eyes.”

“Is that so? But I still feel like the number is a little bit too big, though…”

“In that case, let’s add something to help you compare.”

Alpha suddenly vanished and reappeared next to the monsters. As Akira compared the size of the monster and Alpha, he could not help but frown.

The oval-like monster had a relatively small head with small round eyes. That eye alone was already bigger than Alpha. Although the initial impression made it seem like a small insect that Akira could easily scoop with the tip of his finger, its true size was comparable to that of a small island. Worse, these humongous monsters were all flying toward the convoy.

“Isn’t that just way too big? So, the eastern region is filled with these kinds of monsters, huh? No wonder Hunters there bring their tanks and powered suits with them.”

Alpha reappeared next to Akira again and smiled at him.

“Oh my, are you scared now?”

“To be honest, yeah, a bit. But being big doesn’t mean that I can’t defeat them. I fought something that big before too and compared to that time, I have better equipment now. So, I’ll just do what I usually do. And it’s not like I have to fight all of them in the first place. But still, give me full support this time.”

“Just leave it to me. They’re coming, Akira.”

Alpha pointed her finger to the direction where the convoy was heading, the other vehicles in front of the one they were on had already started firing their cannons.

Multiple cannons fixed their aim at the incoming swarm. Then they released a loud explosion, followed by a lance of light that pierced the swarm. Although the light lance looked similar to the AF anti-material cannon, its speed, accuracy, firepower, and size were completely different. As these lances cut through the swarm, they drilled a hole through the monsters' resilient-looking armor, evaporated and melted their organs, and ended them.

As the monsters fell to the ground one by one, due to their size and their distance, they seemed to be falling in slow motion from Akira's point of view.

At the same time, the cannons started shooting, the transport vehicles ahead also started deploying drones to fight the monsters. Each of them was equipped with powerful rifles with extended magazines, which they used to release a barrage. The convoy also did not hold back releasing all of their missiles toward the swarm. The bullet storm and explosions made easy work of the smaller monsters.

Among the deployed robots and drones, there were also some infantry which also participated in the battle. Since they were equipped with weapons used in the eastern district, they were able to mow down the smaller monsters without any issue at all.

The intense battle continued. Akira was watching it in amazement.

"They're really not holding anything back. So, this is how the Hunters in the east fight. Err, what can I say? It's like we're living in different worlds."

"I don't think your impression is wrong. The further east you go, the more sophisticated the technology. And the civilization created with such technology is an abnormality in itself."

“Well, we’re talking about an area filled with those flying things after all. So, it’s obvious that it’s not normal. And there are Hunters who work and live there, so it’s only to be expected that they’re also not normal either. And here I thought that I’ve grown pretty strong, but I guess there’s always a bigger fish, huh?”

Stronger escorts were assigned to the front of the convoy and Akira right now was assigned to somewhere near the end of the convoy. So compared to the other Hunters, he was relatively on the weaker side.

Akira imagined just how big the world was and sighed. He was making a rather conflicted expression mixed with a tint of both admiration and self-mockery.

But Alpha was smiling as usual at Akira and said to him.

“If you keep looking up at the sky while you’re climbing a mountain, you won’t notice how far you’re from the top, but there’s no mistaking it. You’re getting closer to the tip. So don’t worry, there’s no need to rush. Let’s climb it at our own pace.”

“…You’re right.”

Akira pulled himself together and managed to give a smile to Alpha, who replied with a confident smile.

“Now then, let’s do what we usually do. Akira, let’s take them down and add them to your track record for the sake of reaching the top.”

Alpha pointed at the monsters that broke through the front and started shooting at the transport vehicles at the back of the convoy. They were the smaller monsters that the vanguards let go through since they were relatively harmless and would not be able to deal much damage to the transport vehicles. But even so, they were still huge compared to a single human. Some of them stuck themselves on the side or on the top of the transport vehicle and started biting off its armor. While the other small group continued forward toward where Akira and the rest were.

The display indicating the enemies started changing color to let Akira know that they were his responsibility now.

“Roger that!”

Akira smiled and aimed his rifle. With LEO multi-rifle in both hands, he aimed the muzzles toward the incoming monsters and started shooting.

Hikaru was observing the situation of the battle from inside the transport vehicle. She was checking the information sent from Akira’s information terminal and the sensors of the transport vehicle to look for enemies. She was watching closely at the flow of the battle from that information she was receiving and was planning to send a help request without asking Akira first in case the situation got worse.

But it seemed that there was no need to do so. Akira already turned everything that entered his area into minced meat and the number of the dead carcasses scattered in his area only kept increasing. He was holding the line against the swarming monsters using countless bullets and warheads. Despite being at a great disadvantage in terms of numbers, Akira was pushing back the swarm just fine.

The camera fixed on Akira’s headgear swayed left and right, up and down, following Akira’s movement. But it was not as bad as how fast Akira shifted his aim around. Of course, Akira did not have a problem following that movement, but that was not the case for Hikaru.

“Ah, nope, I’m out, this is going to make me puke.”

Thinking that it would help her judge the situation better, Hikaru tried to follow Akira’s movement. But she knew that it would be impossible to keep doing that any longer and dialed down the setting on her augmented vision. As she zoomed out the display of Akira’s vision, she expanded the data feed from the transport’s sensor.

The information display showed the blips around Akira vanishing one by one. Although the swarm was far from eradicated, judging at how fast the

blips were vanishing, it seemed that the monsters could not overwhelm Akira.

[…This is amazing. No wonder Kibayashi likes him.]

Although she evaluated Akira's skills highly, she was still making a stern expression. In the worst-case scenario, someone of this level of strength might rampage inside the middle district. And when that happened, the perpetrator and the one who allowed him inside would have to take responsibility for the damage, basically, it was Akira and her.

Those who had successfully handled dangerous articles for a long time were given special privileges to match their achievement. As such, those who were able to handle them skillfully and produce profits were rewarded with special rights.

This was exactly why Kibayashi had a lot of special privileges, this was also true for the relationship between Hunters and the Hunter Office. The Corporate Government was still having a hard time making sure that their power, which was enough to pose a threat to the whole eastern district, was to be used for the sake of good and for the development of the eastern district. At the very least, for now, they were managing themselves well.

Hikaru herself was yearning to join them, or at least, up until now.

"Haa… This is a mistake… No, I'll do it!! Like hell I will lose here!!"

She shook her head and tried to banish that weak thought that she just worded out as she renewed her resolve.

Akira was moving around the rooftop of the transport vehicle while shooting the monsters down. The muzzles in front of his eyes were moving extremely fast. He no longer had the leeway to leisurely take aim, all of his focus was assigned to confirm the situation in front of his eyes.

He was receiving the data straight from his expensive information terminal through his connection to the old-world domain. He unconsciously took that flow of information as a normal thing and his brain used that information to

perceive the world. Thanks to that, Akira was able to *feel* where the monsters were and quickly aimed his rifles in their general direction. He then used the aiming device connected to his headgear display to make the smaller adjustment to his aim. Then to top it off, Alpha also made a finer readjustment on his aim as well.

The bullets that Akira was using for his LEO multi-rifles were fuelled by forcefield reactants. Instead of using physical force, their firepower came from compressed energy, this type of bullet was known as Charge Bullet. Although, theoretically, there was no limit in how much energy it consumed, the available technology became the limiter of its firepower since stuffing too much-compressed energy would cause the bullet to explode instead of flying forward. Furthermore, the energy to power conversion became highly inefficient quickly past a certain level. Thus, further limiting the firepower of the Charge Bullet.

The Charge Bullet drew energy from the energy pack and compressed it to increase the firepower of the bullet, Alpha made an adjustment in that process as such, the bullets only consumed the right amount of energy needed to kill the monsters that Akira was fighting. While at the same time, Akira made sure to use the expensive extended magazine for his LEO multi-rifles so that he would not run out of ammo.

Due to these factors, the firepower, accuracy, and shooting speed of the LEO multi rifles that Akira was using were abnormally high, and this was true for both the left and the right ones. Akira was constantly swinging them around, spreading death and destruction to everything around him. Even with the overwhelming number of monsters in the swarm, the dead carcasses that were piling up around him made it obvious which one was overwhelming the other.

From Hikaru’s point of view, it seemed that Akira was having an easy time dealing with the monsters, but in reality, Akira could not take that fight easy.

“They’re just too many of them!!! What the heck with this number!?”

Akira already killed several monsters and the carcasses scattered around him were in no way scarce. But the monsters just kept coming at him. Although Alpha, who was smiling next to him, let him know that the situation was still far from dangerous, Akira still could not help but spit out some complaints.

“Akira, if it’s so hard on you, you can ask Hikaru for some help, you know?”

“If it’s way more than I can handle with your support, then I don’t mind asking her now.”

“In that case, there’s no need to then.”

Alpha and Akira exchanged a smile which let both of them know that they were doing fine, but Akira then frowned.

“Alpha, just how many more do I need to kill?”

“You’re doing very well, these smaller monsters are all coming from the bigger monsters that were shot down. It’s just like those smaller spiders from that Tank Tarantula, you remember that one, right? So, it’s the same as that monster.”

“I see. With their size, it’s not strange for there to be so many monsters. There doesn’t seem to be an end to them.”

“Well, there is also the fact that they are swarming all the transport vehicles, so even if you clean up the ones around you, it won’t take much time for the monsters surrounding the area to fill in the vacuum.”

To be more precise, although Akira was assigned somewhere in the back, it was still originally an area assigned for a whole team. It was only because Hikaru somehow forced her way to get Akira in, that he was able to accept this escort job. Furthermore, in order to avoid any possible trouble in the chain of command, there was quite a distance between each team. This was to lower the chance of them getting into a fight. Due to that, Akira had to do the job that was originally meant for multiple people, alone.

Hikaru knew that this would happen and so she had prepared accordingly. But it seemed that it was unnecessary seeing how Akira was able to handle that job alone just fine.

Akira had no plan to call for help but fighting an unending flow of monsters was still hitting his motivation hard. Since it was not like there was anything else he could do there, Akira decided to use that chance to get a better track record.

“Alright then! Let’s use this chance to get a good achievement!! Alpha! Let’s get a little bit more serious!”

“Roger that!”

Alpha understood what Akira was talking about through telepathy, she then smiled and changed her instruction that she had been holding back to increase Akria’s destructive power.

Of course, the monsters did not just stand there waiting for Akira to destroy them. Although with their relatively large size, these monsters were flying agilely like small insects and had the power to lift multiple times their body weight. Their speed and strength were just as great as their size. The armour scales that enveloped their bodies could easily deflect normal bullets while their legs, arms, and jaws could easily crush metals and rubble. Although the transport vehicles were protected by forcefield armour, they still could not withstand this assault forever.

Not to mention, many of the monsters also had long-range weapons. They were spitting out fluid produced from an organ that grew out from their bodies. The fluid itself also varied. Some of them hardened and turned into bullets in mid-air, some of them had an abnormally sticky property, while some were highly acidic and melted everything they touched. Either way, it would be fatal if Akira got hit by any of them. The hardened fluid would crush his body, while the sticky fluid would stop his movement and he would drown in them, and the acidic fluid would melt his body. These fluids started dotting the rooftop, thus limiting the area where Akira could safely set foot on.

Akira quickly jumped between the safe areas, although they were not that many and not that wide to give Akira a place to plant himself, he was still able to jump between them without slowing down at all. He understood and followed the visual instructions that Alpha placed in his augmented vision. Moreover, the forcefield armour on his augmented suit also served some level of protection from the acidic fluid. He moved around swiftly to evade the incoming attacks while shooting down the enemies so that it would give him more places to step on. While at the same time, he was also herding the monsters.

Due to his herding, the monsters around Akira were concentrated into one location and it only grew more concentrated with time. Although Akira was surrounded just a moment ago, he now was fighting the monsters in one general direction. Right when he reached that point, Akira pulled back his LEO multi-rifles and turned on the AF anti-material cannon on his back. As the AF anti-material cannon unfolded in front of him, Akira gripped it with both of his hands and changed its setting to maximize the shooting area. After he pulled down the trigger, he also swung the cannon in an arc.

The light lance shot out from the AF anti-material cannon’s muzzle swallowed the monsters in front of it.

Once the light went off and vanished to the distance, due to the lowered firepower in exchange for the area covered, none of the monsters disintegrated. But that did not mean that it did not have any effect on them, the monsters that were swallowed by the light started falling to the ground one by one. While those that were still flying had lost their original mobility due to the damage, although they still could fly, they would not be able to catch up with the transport vehicle anymore and were left behind just like that.

Akira lightly sighed. Although he was satisfied with the result, he was still frowning.

“That took out most of them, but am I in the red with that one?”

“I wonder. It depends on how they calculate the reward, but if I have to say, it might be in the red.”

The ammunition for the AF anti-material cannon was extremely expensive. Although it was a trump card to kill huge monsters, it was not designed to clean up small fries. If that shot did not take out enough small fries, it would definitely mean his total revenue would be in the red. Akira knew that very well, but he told himself that it was for the sake of building up his career as a Hunter and decided to use it. At least, that was what he thought before he pulled the trigger.

"…It's fine. I don't want to spend time chipping on a swarm that big. I'll leave it to Hikaru so that it will end up in black. Yep, let's do that."

"You're right, let's put our hope in her negotiation skill."

Alpha was smiling mischievously as if she was teasing Akira and he just returned with a bitter smile.

After Akira eliminated his area from monsters, the other monsters near the area quickly filled in that vacuum.

"Akira, we have reinforcements."

"Alright! One more time."

Akira returned LEO multi-rifles to both of his hands and started shooting at the incoming monsters, hoping that the reward from that would balance out shooting his AF anti-material cannon.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 234, The Difference of What Is Normal

Index

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Editor: Silavin

Proofreader: p4553r

Akira got too fired up fighting the monsters and ended up using AF anti-material cannon 3 times, that was when he noticed a change.

“…? They stopped coming, didn’t they?”

As he said so, he scanned the area and saw the other Hunters were still locked in an intense fight with the swarm. So, it was not like the swarm retreated, but even so, none of them was trying to come near Akira. Akira knitted his eyebrows.

“Akira, don’t relax yet, let’s use this opening to reload.”

“You’re right.”

As Alpha ordered, Akira checked his equipment. He took some medicines, exchanged the energy packs and magazines for new ones. And while he was at it, he also walked around and kicked the dead monsters off the rooftop to give him more space to move around. But even after finishing all that, there were still no monsters trying to approach him. This sudden free time really weirded Akira out, but when he looked around, the others were still locked in intense battles.

The reason why no more monsters coming at him was simply because he had already killed too many. The dead monsters were releasing a pheromone that would normally attract other monsters, but when it got too thick and reached above a certain level, it instead repelled monsters. That thick pheromone let the other monsters know that there was a power gap in that area so the weak monsters with no winning chance would avoid getting closer.

While at the same time, the thick pheromone would also attract bigger and stronger monsters to come. But in this situation, those stronger ones were already killed first by the vanguards, so none of the bigger monsters was able to reach where Akira was. The vanguards knew that it would be disastrous to let any of the bigger monsters pass through them, that was why they made sure that none could pass.

Thanks to that, no more monsters approached Akira, who was stationed a little bit too far to the back that no monsters would try to attack him.

“Seems like I have nothing to do now.”

“In that case, how about going to the other transport vehicles to help the other team? Or so I want to say but I’m sure Hikaru would stop you from doing it.”

“Yep, that sounds just about right.”

Akira would go if he was called, but he had no plans to go around uninvited to the other areas and snatch the rewards from the other Hunters. So, for now, he thought of at least telling Hikaru that he was free and could lend other areas help if needed, but before he could call her, Hikaru called him first.

“Akira, just in case you are curious, there are help requests that you can take up.”

“Sure, where?”

Hikaru was lightly shocked by that sudden and casual answer from Akira.

“You don’t have to push yourself too hard, you know? Just because there are help requests, it doesn’t mean that you have to take them. You’ve fought quite a lot already, aren’t you tired? You can take a break, refresh your supply, and only take on the requests if you really want to. It would be bad if they start forcing help requests to you, you know?”

“I already took a short break and I still have some leeway in my medicine and ammo reserve. I would also be sticking out if the rest are still fighting while I’m just taking it easy here. Well, of course, I won’t help them just for free, but I’ll leave that part to you. If they won’t pay me for taking on their help requests, I’ll be more than happy to just stand by.”

Akira chuckled as he said so, Hikaru replied with a smile.

“Alright then. I got it. Just leave that part to me. For starters, I’ll send the help request details to you. Good luck, Akira!”

The help request’s detail was added into Akira’s augmented vision, and it identified the extra area that was assigned to him.

“Now then, let’s keep this up for a little bit longer.”

Alpha smiled teasingly and spoke.

“Yeah, let’s do that, after all, we need to make sure that you actually earn instead of lose right?”

“…Don’t worry, it will be okay, right?”

According to the contract, he was to pay for his ammo on his own. Although it was unlikely that he would end up in the red, it did not mean that the possibility was zero. In order to shake off that creeping anxiety, Akira took up his LEO multi-rifles and went to answer the help request.

__*__*__*__

Hunters were fighting desperately on the back of the convoy. They were the Hunter group consisting of Hunters around Rank 40. It was obvious from their movements and teamwork that they were already used to working in a team. So, they were completely a different unit compared to a simple gathering of Hunters who worked together for the first time.

The inside of the vehicle was equipped with portable walls, especially around the entrance. They were using the energy from the forcefield armour on the rooftop to increase their durability, of course, they did that with proper permission. The Hunters used these walls as covers as they fought against the monsters. The bullets slowly tore off the armour plating from the huge insects and eventually killed them. The rooftop was already riddled with dead monsters as they fell over to the ground one by one.

But the situation was far from good, the monsters were too numerous.

“We can’t keep this up forever, you know!! What’s going on with the help request?!”

“We’ve already sent them, you know!! Multiple times as a matter of fact!! But since no one is coming, it only means that the other sides are facing the same problem as well!!”

“They can at least send us the reserve force, you know!?”

“Yeah, they did! But they were already sent to the transport vehicles that sent the help requests first, you see!! I knew it, we should have sent the help request sooner!!”

“It can’t be helped, you know! Melshia-san warned us that she would crush us if we sent a help request so lightly!!”

“I’m pretty sure what she meant by that is that we should handle the situation better so that we don’t get crushed, you know? It’s true that we made a mistake and handled the situation wrongly. What we can do now is nothing more than buy time. We’ll lose at this rate, but it’s not like it would happen right away. If the people in the front finish off those larger monsters, the situation will turn around. So, we just need to survive until then.”

“I know I know!! Goddammit!!”

Everyone there understood that what they were doing was simply buying time in a losing battle. But even so, they were still able to maintain their teamwork and fought relatively well. That was the biggest reason why they were able to postpone their defeat for that long.

As the losing battle continued, the Hunters were pushed back, monsters kept coming nonstop and the density of monsters surrounding the Hunters kept slowly increasing. Some of the Hunters already lost their arms from the acid fluid, some were enveloped in the sticky fluid and could not move, so they ended up having to cut off their limbs to stay alive. Some were badly wounded from the hardened fluid. The wounded were sent to the rear, which meant that they could only produce less pressure to hold back the monsters. As such, the faster they were pushed back and the faster the monsters mobbed them. Everyone in the team understood that their time was slowly coming, and a heavy mood befell them.

But right on the next moment, the area was enveloped in a blinding light. The blinding light temporarily devoured the monsters and disintegrated them in an instant. The Hunters were taken aback as that light went off and was gone. Once their vision returned, they could see some of the stronger monsters rise back up with some of their body parts scorched black.

“…So that wasn’t enough to kill all of them, huh?”

The Hunters there had their jaws hanging, there was also another emotion mixed in their expression.

Alpha was smiling wryly next to Akira who just used his AF anti-material cannon to help out the Hunters.

“Some of them survived. Well, we’re shooting from this far and there are a lot of them. You need to also note that we were focused on the area of

effect, so the firepower got lowered. One more time then."

"Dammit!"

Akira noticed that the monsters were outside his LEO multi-rifle's effective range, so he decided to use AF anti-material cannon instead. Although that decision was not a mistake, it did not alleviate the ammo expense. He could not help but frown, imagining how much money he just used to fire that shot.

"Let's clear the leftovers and hope that the reward is worth the expense."

"You're right."

Akira immediately started running to close the distance, this time, he used his LEO multi-rifles to mow down the surviving monsters. As half of the monsters surrounding the Hunters were eradicated, they quickly bounced back and joined the battle. The situation was turned over, Akira and the Hunters had the upper hand now.

As they cleaned up the monsters in the area, reinforcement slowed down and shrunk in size. It was not like the monsters were limitless as well. With the Hunters working hard, it was a matter of time before the swarm was eradicated.

As Akira thought that should take care of the monsters for the time being, another notice came from the security, which showed the enemy's location in the area. Although there were no more monsters around them, there was a huge swarm coming from outside the area under their watch. They immediately glanced toward the direction of the signal and found another swarm of insect-like monsters coming at them. But this time, they were bigger than the ones that they just fought.

"…Wait for a sec, aren't there a bit too many? And a bit too big as well?"

"Among the monsters that came out from the mother ship-like monsters that were defeated by the vanguard, the smaller ones reached us first and basically the rest, which are mostly the medium-sized monsters, finally caught up with the transport vehicle."

"Give me a break already, it's not funny at all!!"

Akira frowned thinking that as expected, this was out of what he could handle, the other Hunters there thought the same and had the same expression as him.

But Alpha was smiling as usual, Akira noticed that and was about to ask if he had a winning chance against that swarm when the answer revealed itself.

A barrage composed of energy bullets and physical bullets blazed straight toward the swarm and shot the monsters down one by one. The energy

bullet extended like a lance that cut open the swarm while the physical bullets dyed the sky in fiery explosions, devouring the monsters in it.

Akira quickly traced back the source of those bullets. A powered suit from the frontline flew to the back of the convoy. All the five fingers of its each arm turned into cannon muzzles. The right hand was shooting out physical bullets while the left was shooting energy bullets. A heavily armed woman was standing on the shoulder of that powered suit.

That woman was the leader of the Hunters in that area, Melshia. She was wearing an old-world augmented suit, and as usual, the old-world design was very daring. The extra arms that were coming out from her shoulders and back were carrying huge rifles that did not suit the size of those arms. While a flying device that was equipped on her back extended to her lower half.

Melshia noticed her men cheering on her, after sending a glance at them, she also noticed Akira and obviously raised her guard. She then jumped from the powered suit's shoulder and landed next to Akira.

Akira was a little surprised when Melshia landed next to him. She then threw a friendly smile with a tint of suspicion at him.

"I'm pretty sure this area is assigned to my team though. You're not a new member of the team either. So, who are you?"

"I'm here because of the help request, I…"

Before Akira said his name, he suddenly stopped there and smiled wryly.

“Sorry, I’m under a strict prohibition from my operator so I can’t speak any further.”

Melshia also received a flustered call from Hikaru through the security team’s shared network. Melshia was being extra careful of Akira since they just got through a bad experience with a stranger infiltrating her team not too long ago. But after seeing how flustered Hikaru was, she lowered her guard and smiled wryly.

“I see. You must be having it hard too, huh? I’m Melshia, thank you for saving my men. I’ll take care of the rest, so it’s okay now. You can go ahead and take a break first. Later then.”

Melshia then returned to the shoulder of the powered suit and went charging toward the swarm. The weapons fixed on her augmented suit had more or less the same firepower even when compared to the firepower of the powered suit she was on, and she was showing that power in full view in front of her men as well as her opponents.

As the vanguards finished taking care of the larger monsters, they slowly joined the battle at the back of the convoy. The tanks and the powered suits coursed back; past transport vehicles one by one. While the Hunters used the flying device equipped on their augmented suits to jump to the transport vehicles behind them, some of them had air bikes. With the vanguard

joining the fight, they had the upper hand to quickly disperse the remaining monsters.

Akira was watching that battle and thought that there was nothing left for him to do.

“Hikaru, can I get back inside now? Or should I just stand by at my post?”

“Just return back to your post for now. I’ll get permission from the security team first and pick you up after that.”

“Alright.”

“Good work out there… But still, it’s obvious even from my point of view that those Hunters are abnormally strong.”

“Couldn’t agree more to that.”

It was as the saying goes, there would always be someone else better. Akira could really appreciate that saying now.

After that, it did not take long for the escort team to clean up the rest of the swarm.

Although it was still a bit too early to end their shift, Akira and the rest of the Hunters were allowed to leave their post. They still could fight if the need arises, but many of them were injured. All of them needed rest and to resupply. It was an important thing to maintain their fighting strength, that was why they were allowed to get back inside the transport vehicles.

As Akira returned back in, Hikaru welcomed him with a smile. She then stuck close to Akira and escorted him back to his room. Taking it positively, it looked like they were lovers, but taking it negatively, it looked like Akira was being treated like a prisoner. Other Hunters who saw that had two different impressions. The first one was that it was a Hunter trying to look cool during his escort duty and brought a girl with him. While the other was that Akira was a Hunter with restricted permission and had to be kept under supervision all the time. Although each Hunter had slightly different impressions, most of them leaned toward the latter.

After returning to his room, Akira was recommended by Hikaru to take a good rest. She would be watching the radar and take care of anything else. So, Akira took off his augmented suit and threw it together with the exclusive inner that came with the augmented suit to the laundry machine, while he himself went to the bath. It was so luxurious that it made him feel a bit conflicted as he unconsciously compared that to the bath back home. The high-tech laundry finished laundering and drying the augmented suit and the inner in no time. Akira felt that it was a bit regrettable as he dragged himself out of the bath, put on the inner and returned to his room.

Akira then started stretching his body, which was a daily routine for him. He made sure to stretch every part of his body to slowly increase the flexibility of his body. One of the stretches that he did was standing on one foot while having his other foot pointing up, making almost a straight line

while maintaining the balance. That was when he caught Hikaru watching him.

“What?”

“…Ah, uhh, i-it’s just that you’re pretty flexible, aren’t you?”

The inner that Akira was wearing was designed to be durable enough to prevent inflammation when his skin rubbed the augmented suit as he moved around inside it, while at the same time, it was also thin and tight enough to allow sensation to flow through the augmented suit and convey it to his skin. Because of that, it stuck close to his well-trained and pronounced body.

Although it was a little too stimulating for a girl around her age, Hikaru thought that it would be a bad move to get flustered there since Akira seemed to be completely fine with it. So, Hikaru tried to come up with something else, but he misunderstood it and replied with a confident smile.

“My body was really stiff before and I am only able to do this just recently. Thanks to it, I feel I can move way better in my augmented suit.”

“Is it really that different?”

“Yeah, I know someone who could not follow the movement of his augmented suit and ended up having his arm torn off, you see. I’m pretty sure that something like that is completely avoidable with a body that is flexible enough.”

Hikaru could not help but imagine the tragic bloody scene and turned pale.

“T-torn off…”

“Well, it might be an exaggeration to say it was torn off. But it’s true that the joint was torn, and he was in a lot of pain. It would have been fatal if he had been in the middle of a fight. It would be impossible to perform normally even if he tried to force fix it with medicines. So, it’s better to stretch my body like this beforehand to reduce the strain on it when I’m using an augmented suit, you see.”

“I-I see, that must be tough.”

As an officer from City Management, Hikaru knew that Akira frequently visited the hospital. She already knew that he had once received a full-body treatment and had his arm regrown after losing it. She knew the details of why and how Akira got those injuries. But all of them only ended up in mere knowledge, she still did not fully understand the real weight of that information.

But after seeing how Akira fought and listened to his talk, and finally saw his body, the realization finally sunk in. A boy of around her age, sent to the

hospital a few times after medicine overuse, was injured so badly to the point that he had to go through cell regenerative treatment. In short, his experience was filled with such a cruel life. Although she was only able to get a glance of it, that understanding caused her to stop having the awkward expression that she had and change into a serious one.

“It must have been really hard.”

“I can’t deny that, but still, I’ve already gotten used to it.”

[Just how many cruel experiences did he have to go through to get used to it?] Hikaru tried to think of an answer but she could not come up with anything.

Even after the changing shift, Akira continued resting in his room. The security team changed the shift composition. The one who took Akira’s place was someone who was forced to retreat during the previous battle, which caused the transport vehicle to take on more damage.

After the previous battle, there were no more major confrontations with monsters, so the escort team mostly worked on cleaning the rooftop. They pushed the dead monsters off the rooftop, cleaned up the dangerous fluids, and made sure that no monsters were still alive. Although the payment was not as much, they were still paid for doing it.

The reward for the Hunters were usually calculated on a team-by-team basis. But Akira not only was able to do his job well protecting his area

which was originally a job for a team, he even went to help another team as well, as such, he was earning way too much money as a single Hunter. Since there was a case where paying too much of a reward to a certain Hunter caused dissatisfaction among the other Hunters, as long as there was no emergency, Akira was thus placed on the reserve force.

Meanwhile, Hunters who went out to the field when they were not ordered to would be fined instead. Thus, it was not worth losing money because of something as silly as that. In order to balance out their rewards, the rest of the Hunters were working their asses off while Akira was resting in his room.

Akira and Hikaru were looking back at that battle on the rooftop. Hikaru was playing a slow-motion replay of what she saw on the room's display, Akira was beside her explaining what he was doing in the clip. After listening to his explanation, Hikaru could not help but frown.

"Akira, that. Over there. You obviously shot at the monster when it was completely outside your field of vision, you know? And you hit it accurately on top of that, it's not like it happened out of luck, right? How exactly did you do it?"

"Basically, I got the general direction from the information-gathering device and then locked my aim using the video feed from the aiming device."

"While running?"

“Yeah, while running.”

Akira replied so casually, Hikaru tilted her head and asked.

“Akira, do you know just how crazy you sound?”

“Huh? C-crazy…?”

Seeing Hikaru looking at him like she was looking at a crazy person, Akira retraced back what he just said. He tried to put himself in a normal person’s shoes, using his past self before he met Alpha as the starting line. He imagined how he would have reacted if he heard someone say the same thing to him. And as expected, he would have reacted the same way as Hikaru.

“I-it’s true that it’s not something everyone can do. It’s not like I could do that right from the start, you know? I only started being able to do that after getting expensive equipment and rigorous training, you see.”

“You’re basically saying that everyone can do that with good enough equipment and enough training?”

“Uhh… Well…”

Akira was about to say ‘of course’, but he noticed Alpha smiled amusedly while shaking her head.

“…It depends, I guess?”

Hikaru looked at Akira as if she was looking at an immensely problematic child and sighed.

“If you know that, I think you ought to rethink your actions, you know?”

Akira, who did not know that until now, could only smile wryly without saying anything back.

“Let’s return back to the point you mentioned. You did say that you get the general direction from the information-gathering device, right? To be honest, I can’t really understand that part. How did you do that? Wait, I understand that it was the information-gathering device that picked up the monsters’ locations, my question is how did you get that information? Judging from the recording, it doesn’t seem that it’s displayed in your augmented vision, you know? And I don’t think you get that from sound as well…”

“Well, uhhh, about that, you see… What can I say…”

Of course, Akira could not say to Hikaru that he accessed that data using his connection to the old-world domain. As Akira was trying to find a plausible answer, he ended up making vague excuses instead. But with that answer, Hikaru looked at him as if she was looking at a strange person and nodded convincingly as if she just remembered something.

“Oh, I see, So, you’ve gone through sixth sense training too, huh? Well, in that case, it’s not strange for you to be able to understand the information from your information-gathering device without using any display.”

“Ah, yeah, that’s right.”

Akira was acting as if he understood what Hikaru was talking about while asking Alpha for help.

“Alpha, what is this sixth sense thingy?”

“It’s an artificial sixth sense which is outside the normal five senses that people usually have.”

The sixth sense was rather popular among high ranking Hunters. It started from the cyborgs who directly connected their brains with their information-gathering devices. It then evolved to a word referring to an artificial means to perceive information and to expand it outside 5 normal human senses. Basically, it referred to an extra sense outside the 5 normal senses.

Kinetic sense to detect movement, thermal sense to detect heat, dynamic sense to understand 3D objects. There existed many kinds of sixth sense, it included abilities to perceive light with a wavelength outside the normal range or the ability to see 360 degrees.

Of course, it was not something that one could easily gain by installing an extra device in one's brain. It was much more difficult to achieve compared to prosthetic arms or extension limbs. It relied deeply on the compatibility of the person. In the worst-case scenario, the brain might not be able to process that sense correctly, which would cause chaos in the brain. So, in order to get used to that difficulty and danger, Hunters often would have to go through particular training.

And then, the words 'I can just tell' became an expression often used by those who had gone through such training and attained sixth sense. Normally, this expression was often used by those who received a sixth sense just recently.

Although the word sixth sense was not an unfamiliar expression among the high ranking Hunters, more often than not, those high ranking Hunters had dozens of senses including their original 5 normal senses. So, judging from how Akira fought, Hikaru thought that it would not be strange for Akira to have more than 5 normal senses.

After that, they continued discussing the record from the last fight with Akira asking for Alpha's help from time to time. Due to them going through the record in slow motion, when they finished reviewing the battle that

should have only taken minutes, it was already night outside. Hikaru had a stern look on her face as she told Akira her thoughts.

“I’ll now tell you my thoughts after seeing that recording. As someone from City Management that has worked with many other Hunters, I can say that I’m not exactly an amateur in this but I can’t claim that I’m an expert in this either. I can’t really judge what is normal and what is not normal for Hunters. But with that being said, I want you to take my words positively as praise for your fighting skill. In one word, you’re not right in the head. If what you’re doing there is not reckless or crazy, I don’t know what is. It’s no wonder why Kibayashi is really invested in you… That is what I think.”

“I-I see.”

For some reason that he did not really understand himself, Akira felt a bit discouraged. For two people to talk about what was normal when one of them lived in the inner wall while the other one in the outer wall. When one was a normal person while the other was a high ranking Hunter. The difference in what was normal was, as expected, unsurprisingly large. After all, it was as if they came from two different worlds.

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Hikaru was taking a warm dip to heal the fatigue that she accumulated that day. She looked back into her memories of what happened and sighed, half of that sigh was from her enjoying the bath.

“…Today was really full of surprises… And I still have 2 more days to go, huh?”

Working with Akira was filled with way more surprises than she had thought, it was especially hard on her mental stamina.

“That Kibayashi… He is basically working with multiple Hunters who are like Akira, huh? It might even be in the dozens too. It’s no wonder why he’s so influential.”

The high-ranking Hunters were way more skilled than the normal Hunters, while at the same time, they were harder to handle as well, that realization hit Hikaru hard.

She did not doubt her skill, but that did not mean everything went well for her. As she told herself that this was nothing more than a bump, she pulled herself together and renewed her resolve.

“Alright then, only 2 days left, let’s do this! But for that, I will need my important rest… This bath is even better than the one back home, so I might as well enjoy it while I have the chance… As expected, equipment for high ranking Hunters is really special. I wonder if this is normal for Akira? Seriously though, the world that we live in is really so different.”

Hikaru started to feel a tint of jealousy toward high ranking Hunters, it was normal for those Hunters to earn billions of Aurum. The thought of Akira only using cheap baths daily never crossed her mind.

After she finished her bath and changed into rental pyjamas, she returned back to the room to find Akira already sleeping. He was even wearing his augmented suit’s inners when sleeping.

Hikaru took a peek at Akira’s sleeping face. He was sleeping so soundly without a shred of anxiety. It was completely unlike how he usually was when he slept back in the slum’s back alley.

“When I look at him like this, he looks completely normal. Well then, good night, Akira.”

Hikaru smiled and went to sleep in the bed as well, since the bed itself was pretty big, it did not cause any inconvenience to her.

Silavin: Hmm… Hikaru Wifu?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 235, Zegelt City

Index

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In the morning of the next day, Akira went up to the rooftop. It was not for watching the area, but to have a look at the sunrise.

Powerful gust of turbulent wind was roaring on the rooftop, like usual. But it did not give much trouble to Akira and his augmented suit. But that was not the case for Hikaru, who came up there together with him.

“Don’t let me go, okay!? Don’t ever let me go, alright!?”

“I know, I know.”

Akira was holding Hikaru close. Hikaru was also holding Akira close. They looked like a couple from the other’s point of view. But unlike Akira, who was having an exasperated expression, Hikaru looked scared. So, it was obvious that they were not in that kind of relationship.

“I took you with me because otherwise, I wouldn’t be allowed to come here, but, if you’re really that scared, isn’t it better if you go back inside?”

“It’s fine, right? I want to get the sunlight too, you know!!”

At first, Akira was planning to go to the rooftop alone, but Hikaru, who wanted to keep Akira away from any possible conflict, wanted to keep Akira inside the room as much as possible. However, she did not want to worsen Akira's mood by rejecting his wish to go out.

That was when she put a condition that she would have to accompany him. Saying wanting to get the sunlight was only an excuse to not leave Akira alone, while at the same time, it was also half-true that she wanted to get some fresh air outside. With the transport convoy already entering the secured area near the destination city, there was close to zero danger from fighting, and that gave Hikaru an extra push to have a peek outside.

But once she actually got onto the rooftop, the shaking from the transport vehicle and the strong wind alone were enough to scare her. That was the reason why she was clinging so closely and shamelessly onto Akira. But even so, she did not return back inside, half of it was because of pride while the other half was because of the safety that she felt from Akira holding her tightly with his augmented suit. If one of them was lacking, she would have returned back inside.

Seeing Hikaru acting like that, Akira was a bit weirded out. He questioned why she would go that far just to bathe in sunlight, but after getting to soak in the warmth of the sunlight, he could somewhat understand where she was coming from and decided not to pursue the matter any further.

Eventually, the sun showed itself from under the horizon line, the peeking sun banished the darkness of the night and unveiled the landscape of the desolate wasteland. This scene still attracted the curiosity of the people, even back during the old-world era.

Akira looked over that scene and was glad that he went up to the rooftop. He noticed that Hikaru also stopped getting scared. As if she had completely forgotten that she was on the rooftop. Her shaking ceased and her eyes were fixated on the view unveiled by the morning sunlight. Akira found this change surprising, but he also knew that it was rude to interrupt her. Thus, he just silently held Hikaru in his arms to make sure she would not fall off.

As the sun continued climbing up and finally left the horizon, the beautiful scene showed itself. It was the start of a new day. Hikaru, who was getting drowned by the breath-taking view, finally returned back to reality and noticed that Akira was looking at her with surprise in his eyes. She immediately blushed and spoke.

“T-the view is very nice, isn’t it? No wonder you wanted to wake up early and go to the rooftop to have a peek at this.”

“Yeah.”

“D-do you usually look at the rising sun like this? I’m sure you often go out to the ruins as a Hunter, right?”

“No. Not that often. I won’t go out so early in the morning to the wasteland just to see the rising sun. I mostly only go to the wasteland during the day, so I guess I only get to watch the sunrise when I have to go out to the wasteland early in the morning.”

“I-I see.”

“How about you, Hikaru?”

“M-me?”

“You really enjoyed that view, so I just thought that you must not have that much of a chance to watch the sunrise. But now that I think about it, I guess it’s impossible to watch the sun rising from the horizon from inside the wall, huh?”

“I won’t say it’s impossible, but it’s extremely difficult. Tall buildings in the middle section like the Kugama building where you can look over the wasteland outside the wall are mostly reserved for individuals in high positions. So, it’s impossible for someone like me to get a room in those kinds of building, you see.”

“Is that so? I guess it’s not all that easy living inside the wall, huh?”

Although Hikaru slowly regained her calm after idly conversing with Akira, she could not just ignore the fact that she was clinging close to a boy around her age.

Her eyes battered around as she was looking for an excuse to change that situation. She quickly found a good excuse. Away in front of the convoy, a huge dome that looked like a hill showed itself.

“Akira, since we already got to see the rising sun, how about we return back? Zegelt city is finally visible. Once we enter the city, the rooftop, as well as the inside of the transport vehicle, would be considered as a part of their middle district. It would be problematic if we get caught in some kind of trouble while we’re out. So, let’s get back into your room.”

Hikaru urged Akira to hurry up and they returned back together. She was still clinging close to Akira until they returned back inside the vehicle. Even if she was slowly getting used to the fear of being on the rooftop, she needed some time to fully return back to her usual self.

Zegetl city was fully enclosed in a dome. It had a wall that surrounded it just like Kugamayama city, but that wall extended further up and formed a semi-sphere on top of the city. The dome was made of a completely clear and transparent material. Thus, light from the outside could pass through it without any distortion at all. Thanks to that, the inside of the dome still felt liberating although it was completely encased. Even the tallest building inside the dome was still far from touching the dome, which help give it an impression of an open space.

Hikaru took a small self-driving vehicle and headed to Zegelt city. She was alone, Akira stayed behind in his room, inside the transport vehicle.

The transport vehicle was to resupply in that city and head back to Kugamayama city the next day. In short, the Hunters had one free day inside the city. Most Hunters used their free time to explore the city to kill time, but Akira was still confined inside his room, as per usual.

Although Akira had the permission to step into the middle district, that permission was only for Kugamayama city, moreover, it was a temporary

one. As such, it was not okay for Akira to go to the middle district of Zegelt city with his current permission. Although Hikaru could most likely find a way to solve that issue, Hikaru did not want to increase the possibility of Akira bumping into trouble. Thus, she used it as an excuse to keep Akira inside his room.

But Akira did not just accept it that easily. He asked Hikaru if she could do something about it. Hikaru did not want to sour his mood and she still wanted him to stay in his room. As such, they were looking for a place to compromise.

Akira mentioned that he wanted to take a look at what kind of vehicles the Hunters in this city were using since it was not that often he could visit a city in the east.

Thus, it concluded with Akira not going out of his room, and in exchange, she would go to the vehicle shop in his place.

Zegelt city was located in the eastern part of the eastern district, although it was also still far away from the front line. As one of the general area management division's staff, Hikaru sometimes had to talk with people from this city. It was all done online and she herself barely ever went to the city. When she had to go visit another city, most of the time, it would be a city somewhere to the west of Kugamayama city. She had not visited that many eastern cities such as the Zegelt city.

As she was looking around the city, which was completely different from Kugamayama city with great interest, Akira's voice could be heard from the comm. He was even more interested in the sights than her. Back when Akira was on the rooftop of the transport vehicle, Hikaru used his view to look at the situation on the rooftop. So, this time, the roles were reversed. Akira was now looking at the scene using Hikaru's view. The image of the surrounding area was sent to Akira using a glasses-type device that Hikaru was using, and that image was enough to attract Akira's interest.

When she heard his compliments for this city, Hikaru felt slightly irritated. After all, Akira did not sound that interested back in the middle district of Kugamayama city.

“Akira, do you now see these kinds of things often?”

“Hmm, rather than rare, I guess the better way to put it is that it just catches my interest, I guess?”

“Is that so? To be honest, I don’t think it’s that much different from the middle district of Kugamayama city though.”

“Hmm? Well, I guess that’s the case since you’re living in the inner wall, huh? But look over there. Unlike Kugamayama city, there are many air bike and self-driving cars buzzing around, right?”

“That’s just because this city is encased in a dome, that’s why people are allowed to use flying vehicles. There are some facilities inside the Kugamayama district with a huge open space as well. Over there, people are allowed to ride similar things inside those facilities.”

“I wonder if it’s really okay for so many of them to fly around like that. Won’t they sometimes collide with each other?”

“Most of them are either fully auto-piloted or at least semi auto-piloted. They’re obeying the instructions sent out by the city. So as long as nothing goes terribly wrong, they won’t collide with each other. The auto-driving vehicles that we used back in the middle district of Kugamayama city worked using a similar system, you know?”

“As I thought. The thing that left the biggest impression on me is the dome. That thing is continuously expending energy to fuel a powerful forcefield armour right? Well, those huge insects are flying around in the area so I guess they’ll at least do this much to protect this city.”

“Even Kugamayama city has-”

Hikaru suddenly stopped herself from saying any further. But a moment later, Akira guessed what Hiarku was about to say.

“What? Kugamayama city also has that kind of dome?”

Hikaru paused for a bit before answering his question.

“…We have something similar installed in case of an emergency. But it’s only used during an emergency since the energy consumption is negligible. That’s why we hardly use it.”

“I see. That’s pretty impressive.”

Hearing Akira was honestly impressed by that, Hikaru smiled, satisfied and thought.

[…It should be okay, there are already a few people who know about it. It should not be an issue telling someone with a high ranking like Akira… It should not violate the information secrecy…]

Although she thought so, she still added a warning to her words.

“…Well, not that many people know about that, but it’s not like we’re keeping it a secret either. Some might focus more on the potential danger that might occur since City Management took the effort to install such a thing, So, instead of feeling calmer with that device installed, they might panic instead. So, just keep this a secret, okay?”

“Sure.”

Hikaru was relieved hearing that answer and changed the topic to something unrelated to forcefield devices.

The Hunters in Zegelt city were high ranking Hunters, thus, the shops here were catered specifically to those Hunters. The vehicle shop that Hikaru visited was a large shop that refused any Hunters below Rank 50. Even so, the Hunters in that area did not have any problem with that rule. This rule worked well for both sides, the shop would not have to deal with Hunters who were only there to browse. At the same time, Hunters who did not have the skill or the fund to buy expensive vehicles were not allowed to enter. Naturally, this rule did not apply to those who came into the shop with someone that met the conditions.

Hikaru, who entered the shop as Akira’s proxy, was able to get into it thanks to Akira’s Hunter Rank. There was also the fact that she was a city

official. When the autonomous vehicle stopped in front of the shop, a staff member welcomed Hikaru and guided her in.

The shop was so big and wide that it looked more like an exhibition hall. Inside it, there were tanks, wasteland bikes, and even powered suits lined up. The staff gave Hikaru a guide through these products while giving a short explanation of each product to Hikaru. He had been informed beforehand that the real customer, Akira, was listening in and watching through the glass that Hikaru was using. Since Hikaru came here as Akira's proxy, that staff gave Hikaru the same treatment he would for the customer visiting the store. After the staff took down what Akira was looking for, he started to think about how to deal with Akira.

"Hikaru-sama, regarding the bike that Akira-sama is looking for, does he already have a certain budget in his mind?"

"Wait for a second… I see, alright. He said that he would decide after seeing how much he would need to pay for it. So, he wishes to get your recommendation first if possible."

"Very well. In that case, I'll give a quick overview of our lineup in order while asking what the features that Akira-sama is looking for."

The staff smiled politely but in the back of his mind, he was wondering whether Akira just wanted to keep his budget a secret or he actually did not have enough money to buy anything.

After introducing several bikes, Akira started asking detailed questions regarding the bikes through Hikaru. Thus, the staff stood in front of a white bike and said.

"In that case, how about this one here? The Sylphid A3. Both of its wheels are using forcefield armour, which allows it to race through the air. To be more specific, it's not flying, the forcefield armour can be used to create a footing under the wheels, so it can literally race through the air. Because of that, it's not as expensive as the ones with a flying device installed. Furthermore, it doesn't consume as much energy as well. Although, it's true that it's harder to control in the air compared to the ones with a flying

device installed, considering that it can race in the air and on the ground, it is very versatile. The ability to race in the air can also bring about unique benefits, especially when mastered."

The staff patted the surface of the bike before continuing.

"The chassis is protected by a powerful but energy-hungry forcefield armour. It is also possible to expand its forcefield outward. This is optional but, you can also purchase an extended arm to go with it. With the extended arm, it can handle anti-personnel weapons to weapons meant for tanks. From what I understand, I believe this is what Akira-sama is looking for. Personally speaking, I recommend using the extended arm to hold rifles instead of holding them on your own while driving the bike. Other than that, we have other options as well. Here are the specs."

The staff sent a document regarding the product to Akira through Hikaru, he then waited for the response while pondering.

[Hunters with no funds usually opt out of the recommended option for the cheaper ones. Well, he's a Hunter who can enter this place, so I guess I should just treat him as someone who's only here to browse. I should just pin my hopes on him coming again next time…]

As the staff was waiting with a low expectation, Hikaru finally asked him about the customization that Akira was hoping for and how much it would cost. That staff raised his eyebrows when he read through the customization list. No starter weapon, only taking an extended arm for anti-personnel weapons, these two customizations did lower the price, but besides that, Akira asked for a better sensor and energy tank. Thus, in the end, the price actually went up instead of down.

"…With all of these customizations and the wish to send the product over as soon as possible, I have to add in the delivery fee as well… Rounding the price up, it will be around 3 billion Aurum."

"T-three billion!?"

Hikaru gasped and could not help but to word out the surprisingly high price, seeing that reaction, the staff smiled wryly and thought.

[That reaction only for 3 billion, huh? You won't get far in this city like that, you know? But well, if I'm going to judge based on that reaction, I guess this city official from Kugamayama city is an amateur. Well, It can't be helped, now then, I wonder how about the Hunter?]

Hikaru went to ask Akira while the staff was making a more detailed approximation of the total price. Hikaru once again looked surprised and returned to the staff.

"Uhm, he'll take the offer."

"Thank you for the patronage. Now then, we'll immediately start the customization once we finish discussing the details of the payment. As for the negotiation regarding the details of the payment, would it be okay to continue the discussion with Hikaru-sama as the proxy for Akira-sama?"

"Ah, no, he said that he's going to pay it in full right away."

The staff retracted his head and raised his eyebrows.

"Pay in full in one go right away? Did I get it correct? Of course, we're more than happy to accept payment like that, but is Akira-sama really okay with that?"

Hunters could die anytime, so installments and loans were not available for them. One-time payment was the only thing that was available to them and that was indeed how most Hunters paid for their stuff. However, that was only for most. This did not apply to high ranking Hunters. High ranking Hunters were expected to stay alive for long, so installment plans were available to them.

The fact that large corporations, strict with money, recognized their skill and judged that they would live long enough to fully pay their dues, was a testament to the trust these high ranking Hunters had as well as their skill. Thanks to that, some high ranking Hunters opted to use payment methods

that were similar to that of a loan. There were even Hunters who got angry if the shop did not offer that method of payment.

That being said, paying 3 billion Aurum in one go was something that was difficult to do unless the Hunter had more than enough funds in their account. Hunters would always set aside emergency funds. So, before finalizing any purchase, they must make sure that their account would not be emptied out.

Based on that common sense, Akira's decision surprised the staff. Although, he did not show it on his face thanks to the training he had.

The staff asked for confirmation, so Hikaru conveyed that to Akira.

"Akira, are you sure? It's 3 billion Aurum, you know? Not 30 or 300 million… No, I was also already informed how much you earn from your recent rewards, but this and that are two different things, you know…? Are you really sure? Alright then, just to remind you that you fully agree to this okay? No backing out okay? Yes, yes, that's right. Okay then."

Now that Hikaru received his seal of approval, the rest was up to her. So, she pulled herself together and became solemn.

"Yes, it's not a mistake. I'll take care of the paperwork in Akira's stead from here on out. Let's proceed with the payment."

"Understood."

The staff also changed his attitude and proceeded to process the paperwork. The process went through quickly and without any trouble, Once the 3 billion Aurum was taken out from Akira's account, they quickly began working on the customization.

"We'll work on the customization right away so that we can send you the bike as soon as possible. Please wait for a bit while we finish the customization. Meanwhile, I would need to inquire on how would Akira-sama like to receive the bike? Is it okay to just give it to Hikaru-sama?"

“Ahh, about that, I actually want to discuss that matter.”

Hikaru requested the staff to send some escorts together with the bike while it was carried to the transport vehicle. The staff understood what Hikaru was implying when she made this request. Basically, Hikaru wanted to be spared from the responsibility of sending that bike to Akira as much as possible. After all, it was a 3 billion Aurum bike. If something was to happen, a simple apology would not be enough to solve it. On the other hand, it was a request made after making the 3 billion Aurum was paid, so doing that much was included as an after-service for the shop.

“Very well. We shall send escorts together with the bike until we can hand the bike over to Akira-sama.”

“Thank you very much!”

“Likewise. This must be some kind of fate. We look forward to your visit in the future.”

Seeing Hikaru obviously sigh in relief, the staff smiled wryly.

After that, the staff asked Hikaru for the details of Akira’s equipment. He was using the adjustment for the general extension arm to fit Akira’s equipment as an excuse. Moreover, he also pulled up information about Akira based on his Hunter code that the shop received when processing the purchase.

Although they could not inquire about Hunter-specific data from the Hunter office, they were still able to use that code to investigate Akira’s purchase history. After all, a high ranking Hunter was still a potential customer. Of course, companies did not give away all the information about their customers. They would want to keep their customer’s vital data private to make sure they had a monopoly over their customer. Outside of that, companies would share as much information they could. Thus, those in the business shared a lot among themselves.

[His equipment is basically from TOSON and Kiryou, huh? Does he have some kind of contract with those two companies? It seems that he opted to

buy equipment solely manufactured by these two. Well, purchasing from another manufacturer might violate the contract. So, there might really be a contract. But since he is buying his bike from us, it might be a good idea to let the higher-ups know that TOSON or Kiryou's contract does not include vehicles, huh…]

Without Akira knowing it, his information started to spread. Although, it was a completely different matter whether the people who received that information could make good use of it or not.

"Now then, Hikaru-sama. It will still take some time until the preparations are done. If I may, I would be more than happy to introduce other options as well."

A Hunter who was interested in such a unique product might be interested in the other unique products. That was why the staff started recommending other products to Akira, which was half out of business while the other half was out of pure curiosity. And as expected, Akira was indeed interested and ended up buying a few things. Thus, the staff remembered Akira, his name and mentally noted him down as an interesting customer.

After that, Hikaru stayed inside the shop until the bike was ready. In order to kill time, she continued her conversation with Akira this morning. After telling Akira that she was not allowed to leak particular information regarding the city, she then told Akira to feel free to call her again if something came up and closed the call. However, it did not take long for Akira to call her.

"Akira, is there something wrong?"

"The interphone is ringing, is it okay if I pick it up?"

Hikaru, who was waiting calmly, immediately replied. It was obvious from her voice that she was flustered.

"No! Don't pick it up! I'll pick up the call! I can connect from here, so don't pick it up, okay?"

“A-Alright, I’ll leave it to you then.”

Akira bitterly smiled and was a bit overwhelmed by Hikaru’s attitude. Since he understood that Hikaru did not want him to meet anyone, he believed that it was best to ask her so he could just leave the rest to her.

Hikaru immediately stopped doing whatever she was doing and connected her information terminal to Akira’s room’s interphone in a hurry. Akira had no acquaintances inside that transport vehicle and if it was from the escort team, then she should have received a notification beforehand. Thus, no matter who it was, as she felt the presence of trouble, she checked the interphone camera, and the visitor was Melshia.

[It’s her? Why is she visiting Akira?]

Hikaru thought that it was weird and sent a data request to the escort team regarding Melshia.

Melshia hummed in front of Akira’s room.

[No answer, huh? The record says that he’s not outside the transport vehicle though. Is he not in the room, right now? Hmmm, what should I do…]

While she was in the middle of thinking about what to do next, she suddenly received a call from Hikaru. When she picked it up, Hikaru’s image appeared in her augmented vision.

“Nice to meet you, I’m the operator for the Hunter in this room, my name is Hikaru.”

“Ahhh, you’re the operator from back then, right? Nice to meet you, I am Melshia. I heard that the men under me were saved thanks to you, so I came to give my gratitude.”

“I see. Thank you very much, I shall convey that gratitude.”

“Hm? I can convey it myself, you know? He’s inside, right? You won’t open the door?”

“Ah, please don’t worry about it.”

“…To be honest, I think it’s only right for me to give my thanks directly to him.”

“I’m really sorry, Due to certain circumstances, it is impossible to meet him directly at the moment, I hope you can understand.”

In contrast to Melshia, who was acting casually, Hikaru politely bowed her head. After that, there was silence as they were staring at each other. It seemed that neither of them were going to break the silence.

Melshia’s smile deepened and she decided to take the first move.

“…I don’t really like doing this, but you do know my Hunter Rank, right?”

Melshia’s Hunter Rank was 75. In short, she was someone that was to be given exceptions. Although Hikaru was indeed a talented young staff member, she was still an amateur in the grand scheme of things. So Melshia was basically out of Hikaru’s league.

“Yes. But this Hunter is under contract with the general area management division of Kugamayama city and he’s in the middle of his job. So, I’m afraid it is not right to interrupt. This is even for someone as highly regarded as Melshia-sama.”

Hikaru knew all of that and still refused Melshia. Hikaru did not want to let Melshia meet Akira considering the possible trouble if they got into a fight. Thus, even if it meant that Melshia, a Rank 75 Hunter, would have a bad impression on her, that did not change her stance.

Hikaru refused Melshia with a smile that was filled with anxiety. Melshia was a bit surprised by that, but she then lowered her shoulders and said.

“I see, if that’s the case, then it can’t be helped, alright then, I’m sorry for saying something unpleasant. Please let him know that I’m thankful to him for saving my men.”

“Thank you for your understanding, I’ll definitely convey that message to him.”

“Okay, thanks.”

Hikaru politely bowed and vanished from Melshia’s vision, after that, Melshia left the place and called Tatsukawa.

“It’s me, how’s the situation over there?”

“Nothing in particular. We did tell the escort team to wait until you return.”

“Roger that. I’m heading back now.”

“Alright, so, how is he?”

“I couldn’t meet him.”

Tatsukawa was a bit surprised that Melshia casually replied in such a manner.

“…Oh? that’s pretty rare for you to obediently retreat like this, is there a problem?”

“I’ll tell you the details later, I’ll see you soon.”

Melshia cut the call and teasingly smiled.

After Melshia cut the call, Hikaru heaved a big sigh.

“Why would a Rank 75 Hunter even come to meet him…? This is not normal, you know… I guess his gift to attract unexpected things is one of the reasons why Kibayashi really likes him, huh… Seriously! Give me a break already!”

After spending her time lamenting how hard it was to handle a high ranking Hunter, Hikaru pulled herself together. She called Akira and conveyed Melshia’s gratitude. After that, she pulled out excuses to satisfy Akira, who

was curious why someone would come to meet him just to convey something like that.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 236, Shirou

Index

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The inner part of Kuzusuhara ruin, the area under Tsubaki was surrounded by a wall that was disguised as a common mix of random rubble and wreckage. After Tsubaki made a deal with Yanagisawa, a part of that wall was renovated into a warehouse, in which she received and sent cargoes to and from Kugamayama city.

The area around that warehouse was mostly unmanned. Old-world drones were assigned to carry old-world relics to that warehouse, then an automatic transport vehicle would take those relics back to the city. So, there was no need for anyone to be there.

Further away from that wall, soldiers dispatched by Kugamayama city were guarding the area to prevent any intruders. Those who were caught sneaking in would be dealt swiftly and without mercy. Instead of putting up a half-baked identification system and risking a full-scale invasion or an infiltration, they opted for security that would ensure total annihilation against any possible intruders. The investigation could be conducted later after collecting what remained of the intruder. And finally, the usual security, which included the confirmation of those who were allowed to come in, was spread to the soldiers.

To further ensure security, many guards were equipped with powerful information gathering devices. Some of them even brought out powerful powered suits. Of course, they were not cheap, but after city management sold the relics transported from that area, they were still in the green. As matter of fact, due to their contract with Tsubaki, the better the security, the better the relics that she would give. Thus, city management continued its effort to further strengthen security. Because of that, the area around Tsubaki's management was surrounded by abnormally strict and powerful security.

But that day, there was someone inside that unmanned region. It was Yanagisawa and a negotiation team under Sakashita Heavy Industry, Matsubara along with a few extra escorts. Yanagisawa was using his own equipment while the escorts were using equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry. Only Matsubara, who was not armed at all, was wearing a formal suit.

The escorts were fully wrapped in armour. Even their faces were not shown. Judging from the fact that they were proceeding very cautiously and by how they spoke to Matsubara, it was easy to tell that they were all high-strung.

"Matsubara-san. It's time… Though we might not be the best ones to say this, we do sincerely hope you can finish the negotiation peacefully."

Matsubara was not as anxious as the escorts, but he still had a sharp and solemn look on his face. He understood the danger and how difficult the negotiation he was going to face.

"I know. We're talking about the caretaker AI of Kuzusuhara ruin here. She is the beguiling ghost as well. It's only right to be extra careful with her."

Matsubara then glanced at Yanagisawa.

"To be honest, I would like to hear from you. Do you have any hints as to what I should be careful about?"

Yanagisawa exasperatedly replied, unlike Matsubara and the escorts, there was no trace of anxiety in his voice.

“What else is there for me to warn you? I did tell you that it’s very dangerous to meet her and I do not recommend you to do so but you ignored my warning which is why we are here now, right?”

“So, you’re saying that you can’t guarantee our safety, huh?”

“Even if you say so, if I could really fight against Tsubaki, my negotiation with her would have gone better, you know.”

“Well, you have a point there.”

“The only thing that I can guarantee is your safety until you meet her. After that, it’s completely out of my power. It all depends on her mood and your negotiation skill. But, if you still want me to give you a piece of advice to increase your chance of survival, then how about we turn around and go back home? Don’t worry! I’ll tell Tsubaki that we suddenly had a stomach ache or something!”

In contrast to Yanagisawa, who was joking around, Matsubara was still calm and serious.

“I’ll at least keep that in mind.”

“Is that so? It’s okay to take it, you know?”

Yanagisawa was still joking around, which did not suit the situation at all.

A few minutes before the meeting time, Tsubaki was still nowhere to be seen. The person who was responsible for watching the radar among the escorts scanned the area, but there was nothing

“1 minute left. In case Tsubaki doesn’t show up, I’ll judge that an unexpected situation has happened and we ask you to retreat with us… 30 seconds more… 10 seconds… 5, 4…”

Other than Yanagisawa, everyone there was expecting Tsubaki would not show up as the countdown continued.

“…3, 2, 1, 0.”

Right at that moment, Tsubaki appeared in front of Matsubara. She did not arrive at a high speed; she was there right from the start. It was just that no one was able to detect her. The person handling the information-gathering device was taken aback by the sudden change in his radar.

[…Camouflage!? No way!? How the hell did she not raise even the slightest signal when she's this close!? Is it only a hologram!? No, this signal, it's a real body! Just how in the world…]

The surprised escorts did not miss a beat and quickly stood between Matsubara and Tsubaki. The fact that they had not aimed their rifles at her was also proof that they were very well trained.

Tsubaki then calmly asked.

"Which one of you is the negotiator?"

Matsubara shifted around the escort and stood in front of Tsubaki.

"It's me. I'm Matsubara from Sakashita Heavy Industry. First of all, let me thank you for coming here for this ne-"

"I see, so the rest are unnecessary, right?"

Tsubaki completely ignored Matsubara and wafted her hand. Yanagisawa noticed that and moved slightly faster than the rest. He jumped away with the full might of his augmented suit.

Yanagisawa was barely able to get out of the range as Tsubaki completely annihilated the escorts. Their heavy full-body armor as well as their soft inner body were all crushed with no discrimination. The area was quickly painted red from the entrails and the blood.

Other than Yanagisawa, Matsubara alone was completely uninjured. Although he was standing in the front and could not see what had happened behind him, he knew that something was squashed behind him. It was easy to imagine what just happened behind. Thus, cold sweat started forming on his forehead.

“…They are my escorts though.”

Tsubaki completely ignored his comment.

“State your business and please make it quick.”

Matsubara understood those short words also meant that if he kept silent here, then he would also be deemed unnecessary.

“…Very well. Sakashita Heavy Industry wishes to renew our contract with you, as for what we found unsatisfying regarding the last contract…”

Matsubara started his explanation calmly, Tsubaki locked her gaze toward Matsubara without saying anything. Eventually, Matsubara finished his explanation.

“…Including the negotiation for the compensation for the damages, we hope we can decide on a suitable place and time to negotiate about the new contract as well.”

“Is that all? Then, you’re unnecessary as well.”

“Wait!?”

Tsubaki did not wait and swung her hand. Just like with the escorts, everything from Matsubara’s neck and below was turned into mush. A second later, his head fell down and rolled over the ground.

That was when Yanagisawa finally returned and looked over the area, he then sighed and said.

“No no no, it’s true that I only asked you to at least listen to them. But like, can you, you know, be more merciful?”

Tsubaki ignored his jovial attitude and coldly replied.

“I warn you, never bring anyone that would worsen my mood again, otherwise, you’ll face the same fate as them.”

But as usual, Yanagisawa was still acting flippant.

“Well, I have my responsibilities too, you see. But just so you know, I did try to stop them.”

“It’s not my problem. As far as I know, it’s your problem.”

“Right, right, I’ll be careful.”

“I recommend you to seriously reflect and put effort to get better.”

Tsubaki then vanished. After that, the pool of blood on the ground started shaking. It was as if something just passed through but there was nothing at all.

Yanagisawa sighed.

“Good grief, she really won’t listen at all, or more like, she doesn’t have any tolerance at all. This is why I don’t want to mess with caretaker AIs… Geez, I guess I’ll just head back home.”

Yanagisawa picked up Matsubara’s head and headed back to the city.

The upper district of Kugamayama city was reserved for high ranking officials and the higher-ups from the Corporate Government. As such, it was also very strictly guarded. Currently, inside the area in the upper district where it was allowed to bring private escorts, Sugadome, a staff from Sakashita Heavy Industry was waiting.

Yanagisawa then entered the room to explain the situation. He was carrying a cylindrical case. He then took a seat across the table and put the case on the table.

“We do plan to give our full report in time, but I heard that you want to hear it from the person on the scene, so here I am. Would it be okay to ask for some of your time?”

“We’re the ones who asked you to come. Even if we were not the ones who requested for his meeting, such a question should not be brought out this

late. Go ahead and start."

"Very well then."

Yanagisawa took the top side of the case and pulled it up. The cover slid and revealed what was inside the cylinder, it was Matsubara's head, his eyes were closed and showed no movements.

Sugadome tapped his finger on the table. When he did that, Matsubara immediately opened his eyes, he then saw Sugadome and sighed.

"…I know that you're in a hurry, but to think that you would drag me here only by connecting my head on a life support system, are you in that much of a hurry?"

"Yes, we are."

"I see."

Thanks to the life support system hooked onto his head, Matsubara was spared from death. He then sighed again to his superior who was demanding his report as soon as he recovered his consciousness. But in the end, he still gave his report.

"…So, that is what happened. Unfortunately, I was unable to even start the negotiation at all. I believe it will be difficult to ask for the contract to be renewed…"

"I see, it seems that it was a mistake sending you with the escorts, huh?"

"No, I believe that she killed the escorts just to show her position. I'm sure that she also deliberately let me live. Without the escorts, I'm sure that she would have killed me in order to make the same point. To be honest, I think the escorts served their duty well."

Sugadome turned to Yanagisawa.

"But still, the more I hear it, the more I'm amazed that you were able to make a deal with her. As I thought, you should join Sakashita Heavy

Industry and work for the Corporate Government.”

Yanagisawa gave a friendly smile and replied.

“I’m really happy that you think so, but I’m sorry, I have to refuse your generous offer.”

“I see, did you get a similar offer from Tatsumori, or Tsukisada, or maybe Senba too?”

“No no no, I haven’t gotten such an offer from those corporations.”

Then there was a short pause, Sugadome and Yanagisawa were trying to pry into what the other person was thinking. Sugadome was the first one to break the silence.

“…Well, I won’t force you. Let’s return back to the main subject then, it’s about the thing that you want to borrow. It is true that you’ll be able to negotiate with her smoothly as long as you can have that thing?”

“Of course. I can guarantee that you’ll profit from this too.”

“Very well then, I will give you the authorization.”

Yanagisawa seemed honestly delighted, which was rare for him. But his face quickly turned serious.

“Should I interpret it as I can hold on to that as a promise?”

“Yes. We have prepared all the necessary groundwork with the related companies, including the dispatchment for that powered suit as well. Moreover, we’ve already concluded the contract to purchase several drones to guard her area. If it ends up bringing in more from that area, I’ll have enough influence to grant you the authorization you seek. Of course, this is all assuming we can get more shares on your deal with her.”

“Don’t worry about that, just leave that part to me, and thank you.”

It was difficult for Yanagisawa to hide his happiness. Some of his real feelings leaked to his usual flippant smile.

“Although it might be too soon to ask you this, when exactly I might be able to get it? After all, I need to prepare my stuff to receive it.”

“In the best-case scenario, tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow!?”

Even Yanagisawa could not hide his surprise, Sugadome then calmly continued.

“We already made plans to transport it here unrelated to this matter about loaning it to you, you see. It should be in Zegelt city at the moment, and it’ll arrive here tomorrow with the inter-city transport convoy.”

“I see. In that case, please allow me to excuse myself as I need to hurry up with my own preparation.”

Yanagisawa politely bowed and left the room, after that, he frowned and thought.

[…Those people were planning to bypass me and use it to directly negotiate with Tsubaki depending on the result of today’s negotiation, huh? I just can’t drop my guard against these people. I guess that is only to be expected from Sakashita Heavy Industry. Well, thanks to them, it seems that I can fast forward my plan though, so I guess I’ll let it slide this time.]

Yanagisawa could not hold back his delight as his usually calm face was completely ruined.

Inside the room, Matsubara tilted his floating head and asked.

“Are you sure about that? That guy is dangerous, you know?”

Sugadome still had his calm demeanour just like before.

“I’ve never met an abnormally competent but safe people in my life, you know. It’s the same with old-world knowledge. Our only choice is to understand that danger and handle them carefully. If there’s no other way to use them, the only other choice is complete destruction.”

“Complete destruction, huh?”

Sugadome slanted his eyes, a heavy aura was exuding out from him.

“That’s right. If we hesitate to move forward, the old-world will eventually crush us as well and we’ll join the ranks of old-world eras. That’s why our only choice is to gain old-world knowledge and use it to wrestle for victory. The old-world will be crushed by its own might. In order to do that, sacrifices are necessary. This is the exact reason why Corporate Governments exist in the first place. It has always been, and will always be.”

Seeing Sugadome reconfirm the reason why they exist, Matsubara felt his admiration toward his superior grow stronger.

“I see. If you already know, then it was my mistake for saying something so unnecessary.”

Sugadome’s heavy aura immediately dissipated.

“It’s fine, I don’t mind. It’s great that you are competent enough to point it out. Feel free to tell me if you have any concerns.”

“In that case, I shall take that offer immediately.”

“Oh, what is it?”

“Now that I’ve finished my report, it would be great if I can get back the rest of my body as soon as possible.”

“Whoops, my apologies.”

Sugadome quickly called one of his men and told him to get the preparations ready.

__*__*__*__

Inside the transport convoy in Zegelt city, the commanders of the escort team were having a meeting inside the officer room, which also doubled as a meeting room.

“Fortunately, there is zero death in the ambush on the route A of Kugamayama to Zegelt city… Though many were sent to the hospital.”

Most of the hunters who joined the escort team were veteran hunters. As such, many of them had emergency life support systems installed on them, so they could even survive wounds that would have been normally fatal. Some of them were sent to the hospital with nothing but their heads, of course, the treatment cost was not cheap, but at least they would survive.

“That attack was not normal. Normally, it is impossible to encounter giant bugs in that area. Those monsters should only be found further to the east. Are you telling me that they changed their habitat? There’s a limit on how much bad luck that we can get, you know?”

“Then, are you saying that it was intentional?”

“Well, I won’t go that far, but…”

Those in the eastern district would actively track the movements of the problematic monsters, but unfortunately, it did not give much meaningful result. Monetary-wise, it was cheaper and more reassuring to choose to eradicate them instead. There was also a choice to attack their nest and lure them out, but it was almost guaranteed to end with death. That was why people usually chose not to do that.

“There’s no point talking about that now. We have no other choice but to blame that on bad luck. Fortunately, we have enough firepower to deal with them. If those from Sakashita Heavy Industry were not onboard, we would have turned around and ran away.”

“They’re a part of the escorts sent by Kugamayama city to escort a certain executive back to the city, right? If those insects were actually lured by the

Nationalists to attack that executive, they would have done so on our way back to Kugamayama city instead. So, it is most likely just bad luck."

"Probably. Rather than talking about what has already happened, I think it's better to talk about what we plan to do. We need to replenish our forces. Many of the escorts have been sent to the hospital. Does anyone have any idea where we can get more people? Personally speaking, I want to delay the journey back until we can get enough hunters."

Many of the officers there nodded and concurred, but another person then said.

"Those from management request us to continue as originally planned."

"Like hell if I care, just let them bark as much as they want. There's no way I am going to force the passengers into a suicidal journey just because they told us to. We can't go back unless we have enough manpower."

Most of the attendees there agreed, but it did not stop there.

"About that, it seems that Sakashita will handle that part. They say that we can use the escort team already in the transport as much as we want. They will also pay for hiring more hunters from Zegelt city."

Whispers spread across the meeting room. it was rare for something like that to happen.

"We are more than happy to accept that, but why are they willing to go that far…?"

"No idea, it might have something to do with their profit, or maybe their reputation. After all, it will leave a bad name if they can't handle an ambush, even if it was completely unexpected, you know?"

"I see, that sounds plausible…"

Although Sakashita Heavy was one of the five great corporations, if they did not show off their power from time to time, other corporations would prey on them. Considering this as a cost of maintaining their authority as

well as the Corporate Government's authority, it was obvious that they would be willing to spend that much money. The people in that meeting thought so and did not pursue the matter any further.

"If we can get enough manpower, then our only choice is to go as planned. Now then, onto the next subject, we can't go back using the same route. Since we just crushed a colony-scale giant bug swarm in that area, I bet another colony has already made that area into their own home. I don't care if the city sends its soldiers to eliminate that colony or puts a bounty on those monsters. Either way, we can't take that route right now. Route B also passes through a colony, so it would be wise not to use that route as well. This means we'll only use either route C or D, but…"

The meeting continued to discuss what to do to maximize the passengers' safety.

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Hikaru eventually returned to the transport vehicle with Akira's new bike. After taking the bike to the cargo manager department and getting it on board the transport vehicle, the responsibility was fully transferred to the transport vehicle.

That meant the escorts were no longer responsible for the bike. Nonetheless, their duty extended until Hikaru returned back to Akira. Once Hikaru saw Akira, she thanked the escorts and politely bowed. With this, their job was complete.

Akira was happily trying out his new bike. He sat on it to get a feel of it. Meanwhile, Alpha was also getting a feel of the bike through his information terminal, which was connected to the bike's control device.

He then placed his LEO multi-rifle onto the bike's multi-purpose arm and set it so that he could control it as if it was a prosthetic arm connected to him. This way, he was able to get accurate aim with the arm. The arm could also carry Akira's AF anti-material cannon. By connecting the cannon to the bike's extended energy tank and radar, he could increase the firepower and the accuracy of the cannon.

When he activated the forcefield armour projection, Akira was enveloped in a thin semi-sphere forcefield armour. Although it was not that powerful, it was enough to protect him from the wind. So, it was usable to reduce the drag force that usually pushed back against his body during high-speed maneuvers and stabilize his aim. Of course, it could even deflect bullets by increasing its output, but it would consume a lot of energy if he did that. So it was not recommended since it might exhaust the bike's energy tank.

Akira wanted to try diving around the warehouse, but Hikaru stopped him. So, he regrettably stepped off the bike.

"Hikaru, can I use this bike for tomorrow's job?"

"Eh? Are you planning to drive it around on the rooftop?"

"If it's needed, yes."

"I-I see. I'll submit the permission request."

"Thanks, I'll leave it to you."

The warehouse that also doubled as a hangar housed several powered suits. Even now, there were powered suits moving into the hangar. There were people getting in and out of their powered suits. Some tried to get in the hangar with their heavy augmented suits, but unfortunately, their equipment was too big for the normal-sized entrances.

Hikaru felt someone's gaze and traced it back to a young boy next to a heavily armoured guy who was watching the surroundings. That young boy was looking straight at her and Akira. He was around the same age as Akira and her, but he was not armed at all. He seemed to be just a normal young boy.

As Hikaru thought that they might have garnered too much attention she urged Akira to return back.

"Akira, let's go back to your room. Now that you have your bike, it's your turn to keep your promise to stay in your room."

“Hm? Yeah yeah, I know.”

Akira and Hikaru then left the room. The young boy still had his eyes fixed on them when another man in a business suit by the name of Hammerz called him.

“Shirou, what’s wrong?”

“…Hm? It’s just that I found someone in Kugamayama city staff’s uniform. This Kugamayama city is where I’ll be staying next, right? So I thought that she was here to welcome us or to pick me up. She’s pretty cute after all, so I would be really happy if that is the case.”

“I haven’t heard anything about that. I’ll try confirming it, so you don’t need to look around. We’ll attract too much attention if you do, you know?”

Even after that harsh warning from Hammerz, Shirou did not seem to be bothered and just laughed it off.

“Don’t say that. It has been quite a while since the last time I could get out like this. Not to mention that it’s been a long inter-city journey too. I can’t help but get excited. I’m just a young boy, so it’s to be expected that I will get excited to do some sightseeing. So like, can you just let this one slide?”

“It’s only to be expected for you to be not allowed to freely go out considering your job. But as compensation, they gave you a high-end VR device, right? If you want to just look around, you can use that.”

There were many such high-tech venues in the eastern district created during the old-world era. But because of the monsters, people could not enjoy those venues without hiring expensive escorts. Thus, only a limited number of people could go there. That was why the people who went there before, created a VR environment to experience them, it was a popular form of entertainment among the rich.

But as if he did not understand, Shirou shook his head and said.

“No no no, that thing is nothing more than a simple picture to me. The amount of information is just too small. It’s not like I’m mocking them but actual pictures are better since you can actually feel the paper with your hand. My point is that it is as boring as a dry raw image data sent to me.”

“If that’s the problem, you can just dial up the feedback effect on the VR device to be able to touch the scene, right?”

“I can, but it won’t come close to the real thing. Moreover, what I’m talking about is that it’s not enough for me. Cyborgs might be able to get back that realistic feeling by connecting their senses to VR, but there’s still a limit on how realistic that sensation can be.”

“Is that so? I heard that even the current era’s lower-end VR is already pretty good, you know…?”

“No no no, they’re still far from the real thing. Well, this might be unique only to me though. Well, doing something like that is dangerous, you know? It’s basically like allowing the VR to directly latch on your five senses. Ah, don’t tell me that you prefer VR devices with that kind of function for erotic use? I don’t recommend it. There have been accidents even when using everything from legal routes. Even if you use those from illegal routes, there are cases where people got paralyzed after just one use. If you really want to get something safe while equally satisfying your five senses, it’s better to get a copy of your five senses and use those five extra senses to enjoy it. Though, you have to be a weirdo to go that far…”

“Ahh, just shut up already!!”

Hammerz clicked his tongue and barked, somehow flustered.

Shirou just chuckled and did not say anything more. And just like that, the fact that he was closely watching Hikaru and Akira was forgotten.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 237, Multiple Mistakes

Index

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After returning back to his room, Akira decided to turn in early. He wanted to be at his peak performance tomorrow.

Hikaru also did the same and laid down. Although she was not as tired as yesterday, she woke earlier than usual today to go to see the sunrise with Akira, so she was already pretty sleepy.

[…Just one more day. Because of what happened yesterday, I heard that they got more reinforcements. Since we're heading to the west this time, the monsters should be not as dangerous as yesterday. And if I'm lucky, Akira won't even get dispatched…. Just one more day… Let's give it my best…]

As Akira and Hikaru slept, the convoy finished its preparation and left for Kugamayama city.

The next day, Akira once again went to the rooftop early in the morning to watch the sunrise. Just like last time, Hikaru was with him, clinging close to him. Akira did suggest using the forcefield armour of the bike to shield them from the wind, that was when Hikaru asked him how he would get the bike to the rooftop. Akira casually said by climbing on the outer walls of the transport vehicle. Naturally, Hikaru rejected him immediately. Because

of that, just like yesterday, Hikaru was clinging to Akira like they were lovers.

Hikaru had more or less gotten used to the situation on the rooftop so she was not as scared as before. But that was not the case to the fact that she was clinging close to a boy around her age. She still feels embarrassed because of that. She reminded herself that it would be over soon while watching the sun rising from the horizon.

In the midst of that, trouble approached. Just like Akira, they came up to the rooftop. It was a young boy accompanied by a man, they were the two who were watching Hikaru and Akira back in the hangar, Shirou and Hammerz.

Shirou was donning casual clothes, while Hammers was in a sleek business suit. Judging from their outfits, they must be there for sightseeing. But even so, they were walking casually amid this turbulent wind. Either those casual clothes were actually augmented suits, or they were people with enhanced bodies.

Hikaru noticed Shirou, who lightly smiled and waved at her. He then approached her.

“Hello there, are you out here to enjoy the sunrise as well?”

“…Pretty much, yes. Do you need anything from us?”

Hikaru, who wanted to keep Akira away from any potential conflict, ended up giving a rather brusque and unfriendly reply. But Shirou was not bothered by it.

“Not at all, I’m also here to enjoy the sunrise. I just thought of saying hello after finding someone that seems to share the same interest as me. As expected, it’s only right to see it directly with my own eyes. The flow of information is just different, you know? The flow of information. You think so too, right?”

Shirou said so and glanced at Akira. Akira paused for a bit before replying.

“I’m sorry, but I was told not to talk with anyone in the middle of my job.”

Shirou was happy that Akira did not just ignore him. While at the same time, he was also a bit surprised. But Hammerz suddenly interjected.

“We’re bothering them, Shirou. This should be enough, right? Let’s return, it’s not wise to keep bothering them.”

Shirou exasperatedly replied.

“Good grief, you people just don’t understand. Listen to him, this guy here said that something like sunrise can be enjoyed just the same through the room’s monitor, you know? Can you believe that?”

Shirou looked at Hikaru, hoping that she would agree. But in reality, she actually agreed with Hammerz. Meanwhile, it was Akira who took the initiative and sided with Shirou.

“You can say that again. It’s pointless watching it from a monitor.”

“Right? I know you would agree with me!”

Shirou smiled triumphantly, he then looked mockingly at Hammerz. To which, Hammerz twitched and snapped.

“Seriously, give it a rest already! We’re returning right now! In the first place, you should not have interrupted a couple who are enjoying the sunrise! Or do you take that not being able to read the mood as a virtue?”

“Whoops, you are on a date?”

Shirou sent a half-cold gaze toward Hikaru. She thought that if that misunderstanding would send him away, decided not to deny it. It even made her self-conscious and blush. Meanwhile, Akira was completely apathetic.

Shirou shrugged.

“I see, I see. I’m sorry for bothering your date in the middle of your job. I’ll leave right now. I just have to leave, right? Okay, okay.”

Shirou smiled at Hikaru and Akira, lightly waved, and then left. Hammerz sighed and followed behind him.

Akira looked at the leaving Shirou and tilted his head.

“What was that?”

“No idea, probably just tourists who got excited to the point that they would even go up to the rooftop to see the sunrise?”

“Tourist, huh? He mentioned something about the flow of information, so I don’t think they’re mere tourists that would go out to the wasteland just for sightseeing.”

Akira muttered to himself and did not bother to think any further. As for Hikaru, she finally realized that she might be blushing at the moment and tried her best to keep calm as she said.

“…Ah, uhmm, should we return back too?”

“Hmmm, I guess. Let’s return inside too.”

The sun was already high in the sky, so Akira and Hikaru also decided to get back inside the transport vehicle as well.

Shirou, who returned back before Akira and Hikaru, was walking through the hallway to a luxurious special room. It was his private room during the journey. During that time, Hammerz was still spouting complaints, which Shirou completely ignored. As a matter of fact, he had something else on his mind.

[That faint reaction when we were in the hangar was not a mistake. I thought one of them is the same as me and tried to approach them, but I can’t really tell which one it is when they’re sticking that close to each other. Just who is it? As I thought, it can’t be the both of them. Is it the guy? Or the girl? That girl might have gone to the rooftop and that guy

accompanied her as her escort. Or it's the other way around. The guy wanted to go to the rooftop and the girl was only following him… No, that's unlikely. The guy seems to be someone skilled while the girl is just an amateur. Of course, there is a chance that it's just a disguise as well, but it is highly unlikely. Judging from their reaction, it is most likely the girl…]

Even after he went to his room and was no longer with Hammerz, he continued to ponder on this subject.

[Hmm… Well, I'm not even sure just by judging from their reaction… What if they are just dummies made to fool me? But if that's the case, why she is wearing Kugamayama city staff's uniform? And why were they on the rooftop…? I heard that Yanagisawa is a pretty sharp guy. He even managed to get a deal with a caretaker AI from Kuzusuhara ruin. It won't be strange for him to use some kind of old-world technology to mimic that signal in dummies. He might have made her wear a city official's uniform, sent her along with the inter-city transport, and made them go to the rooftop before me… But for what? Is it to understand my behaviour or is it for conveying some kind of hidden message? Something like it's futile even if I try to run away?]

He unconsciously made a stern expression while in the middle of his breakfast. He was so deep in his thought to the point that he stopped scooping food into his mouth. But he eventually shook his head.

[…No. I must be overthinking this. All of this might just be a simple coincidence. Even if she's just a dummy, I'm sure that she didn't go to those places intentionally to meet me. They are only distractions so that I'll be safe if someone tries to ambush us… It's a good thing to think of the worst-case scenario and prepare myself. But it is a bad idea to overdo it. It'll be all for nought if that causes me to miss an important opportunity instead.]

Shirou started eating again. Although it was a luxurious meal, he did not show any reaction at all. He had gotten too used to it already. He understood that he was treated special and was given such a luxurious room. Not to mention that he had some level of freedom as well. He fully knew that he was living a good life.

But he had something he wanted to accomplish even if it meant that he would have to sacrifice everything he had.

“…Just wait, I’ll definitely do something about this. So just please wait for me.”

Shirou mumbled so with a serious expression. And in order to bring his plan to fruition, he knew that he could not miss such a perfect opportunity where he was allowed to be outside Sakashita Heavy Industry’s facility.

Akira and Hikaru were also boarding Gigantes 3 on their way back to Kugamayam city. Although, the route it took differed greatly from before.

Due to its massive size, Gigantes 3 was also called a moving fortress or a land battleship. It could easily bulldoze its way through mountains of rubble. But even so, other than flying through the sky, there was only a limited area that it could traverse through. Adding the conditions that it was used as inter-city transport, there was a

limited number of routes that it could take. And when considering safety as well, 4 routes were mapped out for Gigantes 3.

The supposed safest routes, route A and B, were infested with colony-size giant bugs, it was not possible to go through those routes anymore. With that, it left the convoy with only 2 routes available, and the general public knew about this as well.

If something happened that caused that number of routes to fall down to 1, the transportation activity would come to a full halt considering the safety of the transport convoys. Or at least, that possibility would go up greatly. This was common sense among the people who were involved in inter-city transportation.

As his shift was coming close, Akira went to the storage facility together with Hikaru. After finishing their preparation, Akira hopped on his bike and awaited the time.

“Hikaru, it’s about time.”

“Ah, yes, right…”

Hikaru looked troubled as she contacted the storage guard to open the door. Normally, that door was to be used for the powered suits to shoot down monsters from inside the transport vehicle.

“Akira, you’ll be fine, right?”

Judging from what they could see from the open door, the transport vehicle was travelling at high speed. Only death awaited anyone who fell off it. If Akira’s bike was a hoverbike with completely no tires, Hikaru would not have been worried about him. But the bike that Akira was using had 2 tires fixed under it. From the perspective of those who did not know its full capabilities, what Akira was planning to do there was nothing short of a suicide jump.

Of course, Akira thought that it was fine, but even so, when someone was worriedly asking him, he could not help but to get worried as well.

“Alpha, it’s going to be fine, right?”

“Of course. Don’t worry.”

Alpha was smiling as usual, that was enough to put Akira at ease.

“It’ll be fine, I’m going out now.”

“Good luck, I’ll be watching closely.”

As Hikaru said so, Akira turned on the bike and rode it through the storage facility, he then just jumped out through the door with his current momentum. He leaned the bike over in mid-air as if he was making a sharp turn. At the same time, he activated the bike’s forcefield armour to create an invisible floating platform. The moment the bike’s wheels touched the platform, the energy conversion turned the force from the wheels into a flash of light. This caused the bike to leave a trail made of light as it raced over the platform.

Akira executed a drift with his bike, and it spun toward the transport side of the vehicle. He then used more strength to turn the accelerator handle. After flying through the air for a while, the bike eventually landed on one of the walls of the transport vehicle and started climbing straight up. The momentum threw the bike up into the air after it reached the top. Akira then tilted his bike forward and landed on the rooftop with its front wheel, after driving it forward for a bit, he finally landed

the rear wheel as well. With this, he had safely landed on the rooftop.

Hikaru saw what Akira just did there through the camera on Akira's headgear. After seeing such crazy manoeuvres through from start till end, she was glad she had rejected Akira's idea of taking the bike to the rooftop this morning when they wanted to watch the sunrise.

Akira's shift eventually ended without much accident. He only encountered two monsters during that time. One of them tried to charge and stick itself on the transport vehicle but failed and then fell beneath it and got crushed under the transport vehicle's massive weight. Meanwhile, the other one did manage to stick on one of the walls of the transport vehicle, but Akira easily shot it down and it went through the same thing as the first monster.

Thanks to the bike's powerful balancer, it was able to stay stable without any support. So Akira could just spend his time leisurely sitting on top of it.

There were people who saw Akira from afar. It was Tatsukawa's team that was posted further ahead. Tatsukawa boarded his own powered suit and watched Akira in action in that short battle which could not even be called a battle.

"I heard that he's pretty strong based on what the men said, but he doesn't seem that strong to me though."

Melshia, who was sitting on the powered suit's shoulder, casually replied.

"He doesn't seem that strong to you?"

“Not exactly, well, I do think he’s pretty strong, you know? Even though he’s posted around the back of the convoy, he’s basically assigned to a post that’s normally handled by a whole team. To top it off, he even had the leeway to help those in the other post as well. Although he’s not as strong as me, there’s no doubt that he’s a strong Hunter. But, what can I say… He doesn’t seem to have the strength that would make Kibayashi act like he did yesterday. Don’t you think so?”

After he heard that Melshia was rejected by Hikaru yesterday, Tatsukawa went and called Kibayashi to explain what just happened. He wanted to request Kibayashi to force Hikaru and allow Melshia to meet Akira.

***

Now he once again remembered the conversation they had yesterday.

“Well, we’re not strangers. So, I don’t mind putting in some extra pressure if you want, but it won’t be for free, you know? And it won’t be cheap as well.”

“Oh, how expensive exactly?”

“Let’s see. How about one year’s worth of your usual daily spending?”

“…Whoah, why would it even be that big of a favour?”

“I have my reasons, you see. Let me at least tell you this. I’m actually selling you this favour for cheap, you know? I’m considering us as acquaintances after all. If it’s just some random person, I would have only laughed at you and left it as it is. Well, if you think that it isn’t worth it, I wholeheartedly agree with you. As long as you don’t have a strong reason to do it, I don’t recommend you take up this offer. But if you still insist on it, I don’t mind doing it. Though to be honest, I can’t imagine what kind of reason you might have to want to meet him that badly.”

***

Tatsukawa already had a rough guess of what was going on from his call with Kibayashi.

Kibayashi was not lying. Both Hikaru and Akira were under contract with the inter-city transport, thus it was not easy to try to meddle with them. But from Kibayashi's point of view, if he put on pressure on Hikaru, she might use that as an excuse to transfer the responsibility to him. It was easy to imagine how troublesome that would be. So, in order to prevent that, he ended up giving a rather exaggerated answer.

Melshia had also heard about Tatsukawa's conversation with Kibayashi.

"Ahhh, actually, that also piqued my interest, so I did some digging on my own. That boy, he might be an agent from Kugamayama."

"Eh? Is that so?"

"I'll send you the result from my investigation, you can decide for yourself after that."

Tatsukawa checked the document that he received. He then sighed exasperatedly, the document listed Akira's track record.

The track record was nothing sort of believable. He had started as a Rank 1 Hunter with no ID from the slum city, then climbed up to Rank 10 in a short time and went hard on his Hunter job since then. He was involved in most of the incidents in Kuzusuhara ruin and once accepted a request from City Management to boost his Hunter Rank. That request did give his rank a quick boost and the person who was handling his request was Kibayashi himself.

Moreover, he was also deeply involved in the gang dynamic inside slum city. He was involved in eradicating a certain large gang that was causing trouble for the city. While the gang that he was sponsoring had connections with one of the city officials. The relic shop that the gang was running has been pretty popular lately with some of the relics harvested from the Kuzusuhara ruin official's managed area found there.

Considering the relationship between Hunters and City Management, it was easy for people to guess that he was an agent from Kugamayama city.

“…Welp, this isn’t even funny, it’s so suspicious to the point that it’s not even strange. Not to mention that his operator, Hikaru, she’s also a staff from Kugamayama city, right? I guess there’s no doubt anymore, right?”

“If I may add one thing, it seems that Hikaru was also the one who got him this escort job.”

“So, basically, those two are in some kind of special mission, huh? Well, if that’s the case, there’s no wonder why Kibayashi acted like that yesterday.”

Tatsukawa lightly sighed. Seeing that, Melshia more or less understood what Tatsukawa was thinking.

“It seems that had satisfied your curiosity.”

“Yeah, I’m originally also from Kugamayama city after all. I was pretty happy to hear that someone from the same city as me reached this level of success. But… It turns out that he’s an agent… so, it’s actually pretty disappointing…”

“Is that so? Want to stop trying to get him to join our team?”

“I’ll leave that to you. It’s your speciality. You’re best at calculating the risk and reward in taking someone in. We already know that he is an agent from the city, right? So, I have no interest in asking him to join at all.”

“Alright, I’ll think about it then.”

“Yeah, I trust your decision on this one.”

Tatsukawa switched the display inside his powered suit that was showing the image from a camera that was watching Akira to another image to help him waste time. Basically, it contained some sexual content. Melshia who noticed that quickly complained.

“What? You’re going to watch that when I’m right here?”

“It’s fine, right? It’s not like we have anything else to do anyway, or is it that you want to get in too?”

“We’re in the middle of a job, you know?”

“My instinct is saying that we won’t be busy.”

“Is that so? Well, I guess it’s fine then.”

The cockpit of the powered suit opened up and after Melshia entered the cockpit, it then closed up. Although Tatsukawa’s men were around, they knew that it was the usual thing and completely ignored it.

After his shift ended, Akira called Hikaru to reopen the door to the storage facility. He then rode his bike down the side of the transport vehicle and returned inside. Hikaru, who was already waiting there, sighed and said to him.

“You know… I don’t think that’s not how you ride a bike.”

“I do think so too, but it’s nice that I can do that.”

“Well, that’s true. Either way, good work out there.”

They left the bike back in the hangar and returned back to Akira’s room. In the midst of walking, Hikaru was curious about something and asked Akira a question.

“By the way, that’s pretty amazing you can do that although you only bought it yesterday. You did not even ride it beforehand. Weren’t you worried? It’ll be dangerous if you fall, you know? Or is it that you’ve done it multiple times before so you’re already used to doing that kind of thing?”

“Both, I guess? If you think that is dangerous… Well, going out into the wasteland is already dangerous enough, so the danger I face doesn’t really change by much. That might be why it doesn’t really bother me.”

“You have a point, but still…”

“And also, I once scaled a building with a cheaper bike before, so I thought that it should be fine if I’m using something this expensive.”

“I-I see. By the way, what happened to that other bike? Did you buy a more expensive one because you thought it was time to get a better bike?”

“It took a bunch of missiles and exploded to pieces.”

“I-I see… So, basically, you needed a new bike, huh?”

Hikaru did question how did he survive that, but she decided not to ask anything unnecessary.

Akira returned back to his room, took a break, went out again when his shift came. He then returned to his room again when his shift ended. Even after a couple of cycles, nothing worth noting happened. Both Hikaru and Akira were content with the situation. They thought that the ambush from the giant bugs on their way to Zegelt city was nothing more than bad luck, so something like that would not happen again.

This also meant that they had lowered their guards. Because of that, when Akira noticed that the sky got a little cloudy, he just thought that it was natural clouds and did not think anything more than that.

Even if he had noticed what was going on at that time, he did not have the power or the luck to change anything.

A thick grey cloud was hanging over the transport convoy that was blazing through the wasteland. There were occasions where the clouds in the eastern district were mixed with colourless mist, which caused disruptions in detecting enemies. The weather forecast had predicted a rather cloudy day with a small chance of rain.

The powerful sensor of the transport vehicle would be able to easily pinpoint an incoming swarm from far away. But that was limited only to the monsters below the clouds.

Above the thick clouds, at a height that the transport vehicle would easily detect if it was a clear day, a few white powered suits were flying. All of them were damaged although the extent of the damage was not the same. One of them had already lost all its limbs and was only able to move around thanks to the flying device being still intact.

Suddenly a white light lance pierced one of them, it formed a pillar that was thick enough to devour 10 per cent of its huge frame. It just went straight through the powered suit as if the defensive mechanisms of the suit were non-existent. That single shot easily took out the powered suit that could withstand a battle against a colony-sized giant bug swarm. The white powered suit crumbled into pieces and was

consumed by the cloud.

Meanwhile, another powered suit took a hit from a dish-shaped weapon. The diameter of that weapon was about half the size of the powered suit. It rotated so rapidly that it easily sliced through the powered suit. Sparks flew around accompanying the screeching sound of metal cutting through another. It eventually made a clean cut through the powered suit and flew away. The cut powered suit was separated into two as it fell down.

Another powered suit was stuck with multiple black disks. The other power suits saw that and quickly focused their fire to destroy the black disks while also sacrificing those powered suits caught by those black disks. Thus, another powered suit fell from the sky.

With the time and the distance that was bought by sacrificing their teammate, the rest of the white powered suits quickly dove down into the cloud. Of course, their opponents did not let them get away, the source of the light lance and the user of the huge disk weapon as well as the user of the multiple black disks quickly pursued them into the cloud.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 238, Flying Monsters

Index

Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

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Akira once again went up to the rooftop for his usual escort routine when Hikaru suddenly called him.

“Akira, this is from the HQ. It seems that something just fell over ahead of you, so you should be careful.”

“Roger that… Is it normal for things to be falling out from the sky around here? That’s pretty dangerous.”

The sky of the eastern district was inhabited by monsters, so it was pretty normal for stuff to be falling from the sky. Although they were sometimes valuable relics, they were still a danger to those on the ground. Thus, transport routes tend to avoid such dangerous areas. Hikaru, who knew that, found it a little bit strange, but she did not dwell on it any further.

“Inter-city routes usually don’t go through dangerous areas, but… Considering the giant bugs’ nests around the original route, I guess they chose this rouse since this is much safer than trying to break through that area.”

“I see.”

Judging from Hikaru's attitude, it did not seem to be that dangerous, so Akira did not worry about it too much.

But that was not the case for Alpha. Her usual smile suddenly turned serious. It was as if the current situation was worse than that battle against the giant bug swarm.

"Akira, get ready for a fight."

"…Alright, Alpha. Is it something bad?"

"Most likely."

The radar picked up a signal and when Akira turned in the direction of that signal, he could see a white powered suit fall through the thick cloud, plummeting to the ground.

Since it was trying to soften the crash by pointing its booster toward the ground, it blew away all the smaller rubble right under it.

Akira immediately pointed his rifle toward the powered suit. He thought that white powered suit was the reason why Alpha seemed so solemn. Immediately he pumped the C bullet loaded in his LEO multi-rifle with energy. The most important thing for him right now was to get the first shot. If the power used was overkill, he could just reduce it later.

But before Akira finished charging the bullet and pulled the trigger, suddenly, something else attacked that powered suit. A black disk-shaped object split open the thick cloud and charged straight toward the white powered suit. Although the white powered suit tried to shoot it down, it could not stop the black object. The suit received a close-range attack that ended up smashing it to pieces.

After the black disk destroyed its target, it immediately went up to the sky to chase after its next target. It was another white powered suit close to it. White powered suits fell to the ground one by one around the transport convoy. Some crashed into the ground, some that could still fly, flew around

the convoy and others landed on top of the transport vehicles. No matter how battered, all of them were fighting back against the black disk.

Akira was still confused by the sudden change of event when suddenly more were coming. The greyish cloud on top of the convoy turned even darker. When Akira looked up into the cloud, he could see something solid. It was similar to a floating ceiling, which kept on ejecting out more black disks from its mouth-like gate.

Akira made a quick guess as to the identity of that thing and wished someone would rebuke him as he mumbled.

“…Don’t tell that thing is a monster.”

“That’s one of the monsters living high in the sky. Akira, Let’s get to work. We need to repel that thing.”

Akira quickly returned back to himself the moment he heard something that he did not want to hear. But it did not erase his shock as he immediately turned to Alpha. Of course, normally that was a very strange reaction for others, but he had completely forgotten about that thanks to how taken back he was.

“Wait. Fighting that thing!? Are you serious!? It’s not something that I can defeat just by trying harder, you know?”

Every single one of the monsters up in the sky was even bigger than the inter-transport vehicle. The transport convoy was fully covered beneath their shadows.

Alpha lightly smiled at Akira who looked at her with surprise rather than worry.

“Don’t worry. We’re not fighting those.”

Seeing that smile, Akira regained most of his calm. Suddenly, there was an order coming from the HQ.

“To all personnel!! Shoot down all the powered suits!! Or at least get them away from the convoy!! They’re the reason why those monsters came down here! So, destroy them as fast as you can!”

“Yep, so there, you have it. Akira, let’s get to work.”

Akira’s bike started moving, it was Alpha who was controlling it. Akira immediately understood what she meant as he banished all the questions in his mind and focused on the incoming fight. He took aim toward the white powered suit using the rifle on both of his hands as the bike ran through the rooftop. Meanwhile, the rifle fixed on the bike’s arm was also taking its aim toward the same target.

Due to his time compression and Alpha’s advanced calculation ability. All the 4 LEO multi-rifle were aimed at the exact same point. They then released the C bullets that they had charged to their limit.

With the accuracy that was raised to its utmost physical limit, countless bullets hit the exact same point at the same time. The combined firepower tore off the leg of the durable-looking powered suit.

“Oh? They’re weaker than they look, huh?”

“I bet that’s because they’re already damaged from their fight against those monsters. Their energy reserve must be really low.”

“Is that so? I guess that’s mean that I’ll at least have a chance against them.”

The powered suit that just lost its one leg turned and aimed its rifle at Akira. However, with one leg gone, the rough, turbulent wind, and its exhausted energy reserve, it could hardly maintain balance. This was way outside of what its auto-balancer could handle. Moreover, Akira was also keeping it in check with his shots as well. The energy bullets, more like lasers that it shot from its cannon, veered away from where Akira was.

Akira used that opening to jump off the rooftop and landed on the ground. The forcefield armour projected a rail-like platform the moment the tires

left the rooftop. This allowed it to land smoothly on the ground without much loss in momentum. After he landed, Akira used the transports as cover as he quickly closed the distance to his target.

“Akira, we’ll use the blade next. So, let’s get a good feeling of the blade while we have the chance.”

Akira frowned.

“Sure, but are we going to test it now?”

Alpha smiled and replied.

“Well, will you normally try to get close to another enemy just to use it?”

Akira smiled bitterly. He then exchanged the rifle in his right hand with a blade handle. There was no blade extending out from that handle.

The lower part of that handle was connected to the bike’s terminal through a wire. Akira flipped the handle on his hand and jammed it into a box that was fixed on the bike’s extension arm, when he pulled that out, liquid metal was extended out from the blade’s handle.

The box was a container for liquid metal, which produced liquid metal blades. The thin powerful blade was exceptionally sharp, it could even cut through forcefield armour. Because of that, it was a time-limited trump card. Time-limited because it could not maintain its sharpness without keeping it connected to an energy pack large enough to power a vehicle. It was a powerful weapon when properly mastered, but most people would instead choose to learn other weapons if they had the time to master something.

Akira knew that but still bought the blade, mostly because Alpha recommended him to. Moreover, he did carry blades before only to get them broken in a short time, so he thought that it was a better idea to use an expendable blade with the assumption that it would be broken after one use right from the start.

Akira held the blade that was slightly longer than his own height horizontally as he drove his bike on the outer wall of the transport vehicle. The route that was formed using forcefield allowed him to scale up the wall to the rooftop without losing much momentum, and just like that, he launched the bike toward the white powered suit.

His strange maneuver, which did not resemble the usual movement of any normal bike, or any flying bike caught the white powered suit off-guard. Akira used that chance to fly past next to the powered suit while he swung his blade. Meanwhile, mid-swing, Alpha controlled the blade to increase its sharpness to its utmost limit.

The blade that was glowing blue dim light, was slowly being consumed as the liquid metal went through the white powered suit's leg and dissipated into nothingness a few seconds later. All that remained was a sliced leg crashing to the ground. It showcased an amazing level of sharpness for a blade that was used as a single-use expendable weapon.

"Akira, AF cannon next."

The AF anti-material cannon on Akira's back unfolded on its own thanks to Alpha and it extended out in front of Akira. He quickly grabbed the cannon, aimed at the white powered suit's torso, and pulled the trigger.

Although it was an AF cannon point-blank shot, that was not enough to completely destroy the white powered suit. But even so, that shot was enough to blow the white powered suit away from the transport convoy and into the wasteland.

"Even that was not enough, huh!?"

Alpha glanced at the shocked Akira and reminded him.

"Our objective is not to destroy them but to drive them away from the convoy, that's why I set it to focus on spread rather than firepower."

"Why would you do that?"

“I’m not sure if it’s a good idea to destroy the target that the monster up there is trying to kill in this situation, you see. So, let’s just leave that powered suit for that monster.”

Akira then saw the white powered suit that had lost both of its legs, only with a damaged booster on its back, trying to get back to the convoy just to get shredded to pieces by the black discs. He then gave a slight nod.

“Well, it’s true that it sounds like too much work trying to destroy every single one of them.”

“If I have to add, we aimed for its leg first since it would have been difficult to push it away from the convoy while it has its sticky contact leg fixed on the vehicle, you see. Well then, let’s hurry up, otherwise, the other transport vehicles would get destroyed first.”

Alpha controlled the bike to quickly accelerate it to drop down. Right after that, the black disks that had finished destroying their original target flew toward the part of the rooftop they were on and just flew past by it, leaving deep cuts on the transport vehicle. Seeing those deep gashes, Akira could not help but frown.

“Isn’t that monster now actively attacking us too?”

“Nope, judging from its attack pattern, I believe that it’s still chasing for the rest of the white powered suits.”

“Those black disks left the transport vehicle badly damaged like this, had I still stayed there, I would have died, wouldn’t I?”

“Akira, do you seriously think that monsters are nice enough not to damage anything other than its main target?”

“You have a point…”

Akira quickly turned toward his next target. He returned to his dual LEO multi-rifles and rode straight up. Although the walls of the transport vehicle

were badly damaged because of the black disks, the bike was still able to nimbly scale up thanks to Alpha's superior driving skill.

"So, basically, if we can drive those white powered suits away, that huge mechanical monster up there would leave us, right?"

"My guess is that that monster is only chasing after those white powered suits because it received an order to do so. It should just leave once it accomplishes its order. Maybe."

"Maybe!? It's just a guess!?"

In contrast to Akira, who looked slightly surprised while showing his anxiety there, Alpha had a rather serious face as she replied.

"It's not like I know exactly its behavioural logic, so I can't make any promises. After all, in the end, it's not up to me to decide when it should leave. What I can tell you is that there's a good chance it'll leave us alone once it has destroyed all the white powered suits."

"I see. In that case, there's only one thing to do."

Akira recollected his focus and got himself ready for the next fight. Alpha who saw that seemed satisfied.

"Well, if you don't like taking your chance like this, we can try to go up there with this bike, go pass through that mouth, and destroy it from the inside, you know? Although, it's unlikely that you'll survive. Do you prefer that instead?"

"No thanks!"

Akira frowned; it was obvious that he really hated that idea. But thanks to that, his motivation toward destroying the white powered suits received a boost and Alpha was happy with that result.

As Akira rode toward his next target, he closed the distance while evading the incoming barrage of bullets. Using the 4 LEO multi-rifle simultaneously, he shot down another white powered suit's arm. While the

targeted white powered suit was teetering, trying to keep its balance which made it difficult to handle the huge weapon that it had, Akira closed their distance and once again took out his blade. He then accelerated the bike even more and passed under the white powered suit.

The glowing blade consumed all of its liquid metal in one swing to extend the height of the blade and cut the white powered suit cleanly into two. After Akira passed under it, the powered suit tumbled over, split into two distinct sides.

“Alpha, was that okay? We did not cut its legs first.”

“It was tumbling over, so I believe that it no longer has enough energy to maintain forceful contact to the ground, that’s why…”

“Ah, I see. I was just only a bit curious, there’s no need to tell me about all the detail.”

“Are you sure?”

The sliced open powered suit was then ripped to pieces by the black disks. Akira who saw that frowned and thought.

“So, even after being bisection, it is not enough to recognize them as already destroyed? I guess that monster just wants to be extra sure, right?”

“Or it might want to destroy all its target by its own attack.”

“Basically, it just wants to be the one that finishes off all of its targets.”

“That kind of quirk also shows the special characteristic of its manufacturer, you see.”

Akira and Alpha were having this kind of conversation to extend the gap between each fight in order to relieve Akira’s fatigue. Unlike Akira who did it unconsciously, Alpha did it deliberately.

While in the midst of their conversation, a white pillar of light suddenly came crashing down on another powered suit. It was on top of a different

transport vehicle. That white light devoured 60% of the white powered suit, leaving a big gaping hole through the transport vehicle. That pillar of light pierced through the thick forcefield armour protecting the rooftop of the vehicle and went deep inside the transport vehicle, leaving it badly damaged.

Akira who saw that, frowned. He looked up to find a huge cylindrical cannon-like object floating near the monster.

"…It seems that I really need to hurry up. For now, let's stop chatting. It would be bad if that thing shoots down from the sky and evaporate me as well."

"That's true."

Akira once again put back his blade and returned to his dual LEO multi rifle.

__*__*__*__

A shout from the HQ could be heard from the communication devices.

"Number 4 is badly damaged!! It has lost its mobility!!"

"Tow it and evacuate the crew and the cargo!! Once the evacuation is done, depending on the situation, we might have to abandon number 4! Turn up the forcefield armour on the other transport vehicles to the max! Just forget about the coursing speed and the armour repair!! We can't get away from those white powered suits with our coursing speed anyway! And those armour tiles serve no defensive value at all! Use all the energy reserve to get through the current situation!!"

"Number 6 is gone as well! Injury count is climbing in numbers 8 and 9!!"

"Turn off all the cannons affected by the aiming system!! Don't shoot up! That monster will blow up the transport vehicle the moment it recognizes one of us as an obstacle!! What's going on with the activation code for the powered suits in the hangar!?"

“We already sent a request but still no response!”

The guy who was acting as the commander frowned.

“Dammit! Are they working on regenerating a new code or they’re hesitating to send the code…? Just tell them to hurry up!”

Although the hangar was filled with powered suits, all of them were merchandise, so the escort team did not have the right to use them. They might be able to use them right away if they paid for them, but the paperwork prevented the escort team from doing that, hence the guy was irritated.

Shirou and his escorts were also inside the hangar at the moment. Hammerz, who was together with him, rubbed his head.

“Shirou, are you sure we’re doing this? Although it’s an emergency, this is borderline criminal, you know?”

Shirou just chuckled and said.

“It can’t be helped, it’s an emergency after all.”

“If you think that everything is allowed just because it is an emergency, it’ll definitely destroy public order, it’s exactly because we’re in an emergency that we can’t resort to crimes, you know?”

Shirou chuckled bitterly, seeing that reaction, Hammerz got a little bit irritated.

“What?”

“Well, to be honest, I’m not sure that it’s the right thing to say considering that we’re in a perpetual state of emergency in this eastern district. After all, the Corporate Government is robbing the old-world ruins exactly because of that we’re in the middle of an emergency, right? And that’s the exact reason why the caretaker AIs are not happy with us, right?”

“Are you seriously criticizing the system in this situation?”

“Of course not. Even I think that it is necessary in order to survive this monster-filled eastern district, you know? We have no other choice after all. So, what I’m saying is, compared to that, modifying Sakashita Heavy Industry’s merchandise for a bit here is not that much of a crime, right? We can just give our best effort to explain to the corporation later.”

Hammerz sighed. He knew that it was nothing but an excuse, but it was also completely understandable considering the current dire situation.

“Ah, just to let you know. If you’re saying that you’ll go out there and destroy them, then there won’t even be a need for me to do this, you know?”

“…I know, just do it already.”

“Alright, I have your approval then.”

Shirou smirked and used the full extent of his power.

After a short time, there seemed to be nothing happening. Or at least, that was the case from an amateurs’ point of view. But in reality, there was a huge change in the security system in that area. Because of that, something finally started to happen.

The powered suits inside the hangar that should only be able to turn on with the correct activation code, suddenly started turning on. They then grabbed the weapon closest to them and those who were done arming themselves stood in front of the gate. Right after that, the gate that should only be able to open with approval from the escort team, also started to crack open.

The officer responsible for watching over the hangar was shocked, but before he could give an order, Hammerz suddenly called him.

“This is Hammerz from Sakashita Heavy Industry. We’ll handle the abnormality inside the hangar on our own, so please forgive us for the trouble.”

The officer quickly understood what might have been going on and held himself back from making any complaints. Though he was obviously displeased.

“…No, it’s fine. We’re thankful for your help in this situation.”

“Thank you and sorry. You can forward any complaints later to Sakashita Heavy Industry. After all, even if you send that complaint to me, it’s not like I can do anything about it, you see.”

Hammerz then closed the call. Although what Shirou did there was in violation of many security rules, the officer decided to grant him some leeway and planned to pin the responsibility onto Sakashita Heavy Industry.

Hammerz could sympathize and felt sorry for that officer since both of them were bound by their position and their affiliation. He then turned his gaze toward a boy who completely interpreted that compromise in a bad way. He felt conflicted as he saw the power that caused such a security compromise to be possible.

[…He’s as good as ever. Even the security system of the powered suits in the frontline is basically non-existent in front of this guy.]

Shirou was an old-world connector affiliated with Sakashita Heavy Industry. Due to the rigorous training from Sakashita Heavy Industry, he was able to do all kinds of tricks including hacking.

Many of the security systems in the eastern district were made based on old-world technology that was not even fully cracked yet by the current technology. Most of them provided very low resistance toward hacking by those who could connect to the old-world domain. The authentication system that was considered to be nigh impossible to crack in this era was close to non-existent to those who could connect directly to the old-world domain.

Moreover, Shirou was trained by Sakashita Heavy Industry using the information harvested from many different old-world ruins. Normally,

Sakshita Heavy Industry would never let such a person out, but this was a special case.

Hammerz shifted his gaze toward the unmanned powered suits.

“…If I’m not mistaken, the original autopilot system can only mimic amateurs, right?”

“Even if they are, the quality and the ability of the powered suits would do the hard lifting. Well, either way, it’s better that they get out there and get destroyed in the battle instead of being sitting ducks inside the hangar just waiting to be destroyed together with the whole transport vehicle, no?”

“I don’t really care. To be honest, let’s just return back to the room.”

“Yeah yeah.”

Shirou then returned back to his room. But before that, he glanced at the powered suits that were flying out the hangar and hoped that they would at least be useful out there.

—*—*—*—

The transport convoy was quickly enveloped in an intense battle. The cannons on top of the transport vehicles that could even make quick work of a colony-sized giant bug swarm were used to shoot down the white powered suits. Black disks flew around, ripping everything in their way including the transport vehicles. The Hunters were doing their best to destroy the white powered suits and naturally, the white powered suits fought back. White pillars of light came down from time to time, evaporating the white powered suits as well as the transport vehicles that were hit by that ray.

The unmanned powered suits activated by Shirou were then thrown into the mix as well. Although they were able to recognize the Hunters and did not shoot them, they could not differentiate between the white powered suits and the black disks. Thus, they attacked them both. The black disks soon

recognized the unmanned powered suits as hostile and started ripping them to pieces.

The area was filled with cannon shells and explosions, the sound of gunshots and explosions were echoing without end. Of course, that much ruckus only caused other monsters to get attracted to the area. Even the sudden route change of the convoy lost its original purpose, all the nearby monster swarms quickly converged onto the convoy.

Originally, the escort crews would have no problem dealing with the swarms of monsters. But their hands were full at the moment. Worse, the transport vehicles had allocated most of their energy for their forcefield armour, which lowered their coursing speed. So those monsters that were normally too slow to catch up with the convoy were slowly closing in on it.

Massive wolves that were approaching the convoy while evading the hailstorm of bullets were beheaded by the black discs. The octopalos looked up and started shooting toward the flying monster, so the flying monsters reacted by evaporating them with a single swing of its ray cannon. Smaller monsters were trying to climb up the transport vehicles, so the unmanned powered suits and the Hunters were repelling them off.

In the midst of all this chaos, the transport vehicle was able to survive thanks to their maximized forcefield armour, they were also able to buy the needed time to destroy the white powered suits. But the thick forcefield armour caused communication between transport vehicles to jam up. The head of the convoy noticed that, but he prioritized on keeping the transport vehicles intact and told them to keep the forcefield up.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 239, Diversion

Index

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Akira rode his bike on the wall of the transport vehicle while approaching his next target. He chose to do so since unlike on the rooftop, the walls of the vehicle had no large cannons. With nothing in the way, he could pace his bike even faster.

But there was something that blocked his way. It was a cannon warhead from one of the monsters. He nimbly evaded it and shot back toward the monster with his dual LEO multi-rifle.

He was shooting horizontally as if the gravity was working at a 90-degree angle just for him. He was able to accomplish it skilfully thanks to the quality of the bike, Alpha's support, and his own skill. It also helped that he became very familiar with that technique. The barrage flew toward the large multi-legged insects and the walking cannons with multiple legs. They pierced through both the metallic armour and biological carapace to destroy the internal organs of those monsters.

Even after killing those monsters, the swarm behind them would just take their place right away. Akira frowned after noticing what was going on.

“There’s just no end to them!! Why are there so many of them when the others are also in the front line, fighting them!? I bet those guys that easily fought off that huge bug swarm are taking it easy right now!!”

“Well, those guys are focused on fighting off those white powered suits. So, they don’t have the leeway to fend off the monsters.”

“But those white powered suits are not that strong, even I was able to shoot a couple of them down, no? Those guys had no problem against that huge horde of gigantic flying bugs, you know? Are they really having that much trouble?”

“Not all of them are the same. It’s not like they are equally damaged. The ones that you destroyed are those that were sticking on the transport vehicles, right? They probably did that because they couldn’t fly on their own to catch up with the convoy with the energy reserve that they had left.”

Alpha then pointed toward the direction of the wasteland. Akira glanced over and saw the white powered suits fighting multiple unmanned drones while flying around freely in the sky. They were flying around way more agilely than the ones sticking on the transport vehicles.

“I see. So that’s why.”

Akira was still on his bike when he pulled out his AF anti-material cannon. The bike’s extra arm was connected to the backside of the AF cannon. This way, the AF anti-material cannon could source energy from the bike’s energy tank.

Akira was aiming at the irregularly moving target from a fast-moving bike. In order to accomplish such a feat, he increased his focus to its utmost limit to the point that the world seemed to be close to a standstill from his point of view. To top it off, Alpha helped the aiming algorithm of the cannon even before it could finish its calculation and added that information in Akira’s vision. As Akira pulled the trigger, the cannon shot out a highly focused ray of light with staggering accuracy. This shot was focused more on a high intensity instead of spread.

The cannon drew a strand of intense light through multiple things. Monsters, the force field armour of the white powered suit and its control device. None of them stopped it as it flew straight into the wasteland.

But even so, that was not enough to destroy the white powered suit. The hole drilled by the light ray was so small that it did not seem to leave any damage from afar. But with the force field armour pierced and the control device destroyed, the white powered suit was only able to move sluggishly. It did not show much resistance as the cannons of the unmanned drones as well as the black disks ripped it apart. It only took a few seconds to turn it into scrap metal.

“Alpha, how many more?”

“Twenty-two.”

“Good grief, there are still that many of them?!”

“If I may add something, those that were badly damaged have already been destroyed, so only those that were relatively intact are still up.”

Alpha was smiling mischievously toward Akira, who was even more worried than before.

In reality, the situation was favourable to the convoy’s side. Thanks to the energy allocation, which was mostly focused on their force field armour. The transport vehicles were well defended. Meanwhile, the escort team was working hard. Likewise, the pillars of light from the sky were actively hunting down white powered suits, whittling down their number.

It was only a matter of time before the rest of the white powered suits got shot down. If their original aim was to attack the transport convoy, they have already failed. Nonetheless, there was no sign of them retreating.

In the middle of the chaos, Akira was fighting another white powered suit. It was standing on top of one of the transport vehicles as it swung around its claw.

Akira charged the C bullets in all of his 4 LEO multi-rifles, two on his hands while the other two were on the extended arms of the bike. He pumped the bullets full of energy to raise their firepower to their limit before releasing them toward the white powered suit. Flashes of blinding light shot out as if it was a firework.

Normally, the rooftop was not big enough for Akira's bike to keep evading the claw, but he was able to forcibly avoid the attacks thanks to his bike. He used the force field armour of the bike as well as the force field projected by the transport vehicle as footings in the middle of the air. Thus, he was able to move around as if there were invisible tiles extending out from the rooftop.

Akira kept evading the incoming attacks using those invisible platforms. Every time he made a quick turn, inertia assaulted his body. He was fighting that back with the bike's safety feature, his augmented suit, and the medicine that he took beforehand. He kept making sharp turns to stay on white powered suit's blind spot.

Akira evaded the huge bullets coming from the white powered suit's rifle as well as the hot rays shot out from other places. He evaded while shooting back at it with relatively small bullets compared to what was speeding towards him. Eventually, he emptied the magazine of his 4 LEO rifles, and even after that, it was not enough to destroy the opponent.

Akira reloaded new magazines to his rifles with a stern face.

"That thing is just too tough… It's not only taking bullets from me but also taking damage from the black discs, right? Alpha, can't we just leave them to the vanguards? They're too much for me to handle, you know?"

"They're not that dangerous, so to be honest, even if they can take on that much damage, we can just take our time shooting them down one by one."

"No no no. The fact that I'm only maintaining this with medicine already says that this isn't good."

"Is that so? Well, if you say so, let's change our target then."

Alpha smiled and yielded to Akira's wish. His stern face relaxed for a bit. They then drove away from that battle just like that.

At that time, a huge pillar of light engulfed the battlefield. The light blinded everything in the area. The convoy could feel the heatwave coming from that beam. Akira, who also noticed that, stopped the bike and looked behind.

"…In the end, that thing still takes all of them out, huh? There's no need for us to fight them, right… Wha-!?"

The unexpected turn of events shocked Akira. Although the white pillar of light was able to evaporate all the white powered suits that it devoured, that was not the case this time. The white powered suits looked completely unharmed.

"Wait for a sec, they're just way too durable, aren't they? Alpha, there's no way we can win against that thing, let's get away from this place before that thing can catch up with us."

Akira tried to accelerate the bike away from that place, but Alpha prevented that from happening. The bike suddenly made a sharp U-turn and the wheel turned so fast to the point that it was bursting fire sparks as it accelerated as fast as it could right back toward the white powered suit.

Akira was so surprised by what Alpha did there and activated his time perception compression by pure reflex.

"Alpha!? What are you doing!?"

"Akira, we have a change of plans! We need to destroy that as soon as possible!!"

"What? Why!?"

Although he said that, Akira's mind and body were already in full battle-mode. He already knew that it would be too late to do that if he waited for Alpha to tell him the reason before acting. The dual LEO multi-rifles on his

hands were aimed toward the different target indicators in his augmented visual.

“To simply put it, it’s because that thing survived that beam of light.”

“Wait, didn’t we decide not to fight that thing exactly because it’s simply too durable?”

“The objective of the monster up there is to destroy that powered suit. So, if it knows that its earlier attack was not enough, I’m sure it will increase its firepower the next time. Judging from its size, that monster must have originated from somewhere up really high. Even a small increase in firepower by the standard of the monsters living high up there means a huge increase by our standard here, you see. Furthermore, its target doesn’t seem damaged at all, so I’m sure that it won’t just attack with a small increase.”

“So, basically, the next shot will be way more powerful, huh? In that case, wouldn’t it be better if we get away so that we won’t get hit as well?”

“Akira, what if the next shot is big enough to take out the whole convoy? And what if it only takes 10 seconds to recharge its next shot? Do you think you’ll be able to get away from that?”

Akira seemed to be doubtful of that, so Alpha explained to him the reason for her guess.

“By analysing the forcefield armour of the transport vehicles, the white powered suit was able to integrate that system into its own force field system. That gave it enough power to withstand that attack. It is a similar form of defensive system to that snail monster that you fought back in the old-world ruin, so as long as it is connected to the system, it cannot move too far away from the convoy.”

“If the flying monster also notices that, there was a chance that it would adjust its firepower to overwhelm the force field armour of the transport vehicles. If it further increases its firepower to make sure its next attack will be enough to destroy its target, it will not be strange for it to have enough firepower to destroy the transport vehicle as well. In the worst-case

scenario, it might even consider the transport convoy as a nuisance and decide to destroy the whole convoy as well.”

“That is why it is better to destroy its target first to let it know that there is no need to go that far before it can release its next attack. It might very well be already charging at this very moment.”

After hearing that explanation, Akira tensed up.

“…Alpha, what’s the chance that it’s just you overthinking this?”

“It’s true that it might be a rather pessimistic guess in this situation, and you might not even need to do that at all. But do you think that you’re that lucky to not need to do anything and leave it up to fate?”

Akira thought about how true her statement was and could not help but to make a bitter smile. But his smile then slightly changed as if he had made his resolve for the upcoming battle.

“…You’re right. In that case, let’s get that thing destroyed and change this really bad luck of mine to something that I can handle if I put in my best effort! I’m sure I at least have enough luck to do that, right!? Yeah, maybe! Well, even if I don’t, you’ll do something about that, right?”

Alpha replied with a confident smile.

“Of course! Just leave it to me! It’s my responsibility after all! This will be pretty reckless, so get yourself ready!”

“I know. That part is my responsibility after all!!”

Akira made his resolve and accelerated his bike even more straight toward his target.

Ever since he heard the reason why he was going to fight instead of run, he already had his mind working on what would be his next move. He used all the charged bullets of his 4 LEO multi-rifles to release a barrage of bullets. However, he was not aiming at the powered suit. It was the black discs flying around the powered suit. Due to the fine adjustment from Alpha, they

were not enough to destroy their targets, but at least they were enough to disrupt their mobility. It was an attack just to bait the discs' attention.

The discs reacted accordingly and immediately went for Akira. A couple of dozens of flying discs with sharp blades poking out from their chassis ripped through everything in their way, including the monsters as well as the unmanned powered suits. Although some of them changed targets to the other white powered suits closer to them, the rest were still going for Akira.

Akira increases the intensity of his time perception compression. Everything around him immediately slowed down and proceeded in slow motion. In the middle of that, Akira looked at his radar, confirmed the direction, position, and movement of all the black discs. Although he knew he had nowhere to run and only death was awaiting him, he did not show a single ounce of fear.

"Akira, this will be dangerous, are you ready?"

Toward Alpha, who said that as if she was challenging or maybe teasing him, Akira firmly replied.

"Ready when you are!"

A stinging pain assaulted Akira's head, but at the same time, the resolution of his vision suddenly went up to the point that Akira could clearly trace the tip of the spinning blades of the black discs. It was as if the world was completely rewritten with unbelievable clarity. It was thanks to the full real-world resolution support from Alpha as well as the drug that Akira received from Tsubaki.

Akira started shooting around him in that state. Although he was spinning as if he was shooting indiscriminately, each of his shots was properly aimed. Due to his sharpened world perception, he skipped the steps where he had to adjust his aim at his target before pulling the trigger. He was simply moving his rifle to the position where he knew that its shot would hit before releasing the shot, this allowed him to maintain high-speed consecutive shooting.

Although he still left the decision on which monster he had to shoot first to Alpha. In terms of aiming, it was mostly all Akira.

Akira used the consecutive shooting ability of his LEO multi rifle to its maximum ability, shooting the black discs that were surrounding him. Each and every one of his shots was extremely accurate thanks to Alpha's advanced calculation ability. But even so, it was not enough to destroy even a single disk. After the disks changed their target to Akira, who was deemed to be getting in the way of destroying the white powered suit, they managed to maintain their momentum and velocity.

Akira did not shoot them in order to destroy them. His main aim was to throw them slightly off course and away from hitting his body. The direction he pushed them towards was also not random. He adjusted the power of the bullets and their angle so that the black discs that were thrown off course would hit the white powered suits.

But even so, it was an easy thing for Akira to keep up. He could see a black disk flash past his eyes even in his slowed-down time perception as he shot the other black discs. Even the slightest hesitation or fear would slow him down for a split second, and that split second would have been more than enough to turn him into shredded meat.

Thanks to that, many of the white powered suits were destroyed due to the black discs. Although some of the black discs only ricocheted off their armour, most of the white powered suits were destroyed by thousands of slices over their whole bodies. But even so, that was enough to destroy the ones that had integrated its force field armour with the transport vehicle. Although, it was enough to keep it from moving around. With all the high speed rotating blades of the black discs, they were not able to make any careless move.

Right at that moment, Akira switched to his bladeless handle and pulled out a liquid metal blade just like last time. The blade was so thin that it was almost see-through. It was so long and seemed so fragile that it might break anytime. Due to the force field armour that bound the liquid metal together, it was far more durable than steel and with that thickness, it would be able

to easily cut through steel. To top it off, it was also enveloped with a layer of anti-forcefield.

But even that blade was not enough to break through the powered suit's defence. If that was enough to cut it down, it would have been dead after being hit by the white pillar of light from the monster above or the black discs' rotating blades. Even Akira's LEO and AF anti-material cannon would not be enough to damage it as well. At the moment, Akira had no means to destroy it.

But even so, Akira still went and charged at it. After he got as close as possible, he made a sharp U-turn with his bike, and at the same time, he increased his augmented suit output to the max and swung his blade.

With the help of Alpha's support, the blade was swung with utmost precision. It went almost perfectly parallel with the transport vehicle's rooftop and cleanly sliced its target, or more like, released its contact point.

Akira's main aim was not the powered suit, but the contact point between it and the transport vehicle. By passing his blade in between them, Akira got the powered suit off the transport vehicle and prevented it from leeching the forcefield armour of the transport vehicle, thus weakening the powered suit's forcefield armour. The moment the powered suit was off the transport vehicle, it was immediately ripped to pieces by the black discs.

After making that U-turn, Akira quickly accelerated away from that place. The black discs that just destroyed the white powered suits tried to chase for him as well. But in the next moment, both the black discs and Akira were blown away by an explosion.

The source of that explosion was another laser strike from the monster above. Since its original target was destroyed, that laser strike was aimed at another white powered suit. Thankfully, that powered suit was away from the convoy. It was engulfed in that melting ray and was annihilated. The moment that beam of light touched the ground, it released a powerful shockwave that blew away the surrounding monsters and wreckages. It even pushed the transport vehicles to the point that they almost turned over.

Thanks to Alpha's help, Akira was fine. Although the explosion did throw his bike into the sky, Alpha increased the projected force field armour that was originally only for protecting Akira from wind past its limit to protect Akira from the explosion. Akira then landed safely on top of the transport vehicle.

Akira glanced at the source of the explosion and could not help but knit his eyebrows. It completely annihilated everything near where it touched the ground.

"…Yikes, that was dangerous. I was so close to taking that up close, huh?"

Alpha smiled bitterly.

"It seems that it turned out as I had explained to you. Though, according to my calculation, the possibility was rather small."

"Is that so?"

"Yep, as I thought, your luck is as bad as ever. I'm glad that my support is still enough to handle it."

Akira chuckled.

"You have a point. Thanks!"

"You are welcome!"

Alpha smiled confidently.

"It seems that it's finally over. Akira, look up."

Akira looked up and saw the flying monster return back to above the cloud and slowly vanish from his views. While the black discs that were surrounding the convoy suddenly stopped and just fell to the ground.

"It's retreating… Is it because we destroyed all the white powered suits? And, why did all the black discs suddenly just stop moving ?"

“The white powered suits have all been destroyed together with everything around them with that laser. Those black discs are all just expendable weapons.”

“They’re expendable? All of them? Though they are that strong?”

Akira heaved a huge sigh.

“The sky monsters, huh… They’re simply way out of what I can handle. I see now. No wonder why no one ever thinks of flying around with those things roaming the sky.”

“But it’s not like they roam over every inch of the sky above the eastern district, you know? Those white powered suits might be just that strong or they brought that monster here from further to the east.”

“…Why would they do that?”

“No idea. Well, either way, it’s done now, good work out there.”

The monsters that were swarming the convoy were already mostly gone. The unmanned powered suits went to take care of the remaining smaller monsters.

Seeing Alpha smile at him to appreciate his hard work, Akira finally lowered his shoulder and sighed in relief.

“…Man, I’m beat. Hikaru. The battle is over now. Can I return back to the transport vehicle and check on my equipment?… Hikaru?”

There was no answer from Hikaru. Akira found that weird. But Alpha then told him that the strengthened forcefield armour of the transport vehicle also jammed his communication. Since he needed Hikaru to open the gate so that he could return back inside the transport vehicle, he had no other choice but to take a break there.

After Akira took some medicine and replenished his magazine and energy pack, the convoy started to slowly accelerate as well, that was when Alpha tilted her head and said.

“This is strange, the forcefield armour already returned back to normal, but I can’t still reach Hikaru.”

“Haaah, Alpha, can you do something?”

Akira asked so with a tired look, Alpha smiled teasingly and replied.

“I don’t mind, but are you sure?”

“…Let me ask this first then, is it a bad idea to do that?”

“Most of this kind of connection line is utilizing a certain spectrum so that it’ll still be usable even when there are others using it. After all, it’s a reserved line for the HQ to distribute information, you see. There are traces that someone has infiltrated into that line, basically, someone used it for unauthorized access. We can basically use that route. Ah, but don’t worry, it won’t leave a single trace that you used that route as well.”

Although Akira did wonder how in the world Alpha could infiltrate such a secured line, on second thought, it now seemed normal. After all, it was Alpha. It would be way too late for him to question that right now, so he just pushed aside that question in his mind. He then thought that she was basically saying that it was possible for her but it would be unethical. Or it was her way to avoid saying that she could not do that.

“Well, there’s no need to go that far… I guess I’ll just wait for a bit more then.”

“If I may add something, I can find traces that Hikaru is trying to connect to any device that she could reach, she might be in some kind of hurry.”

After hearing that, Akira was not so sure if he could just sit here and wait. He then finally thought that it should be fine to go that far if it was to connect to Hikaru, who was basically his employer at the moment.

“Come on, connect to her.”

“Ah! It finally got connected!! Akira!! Help me!!”

Akira was taken aback. The moment it connected, he could hear Hikaru desperately asking for help.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 240, The Assault

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After Hikaru lost connection to Akira due to the increased output of the transport vehicle's forcefield armour, she proceeded to make arrangements to use the temporary connection line. After she received confirmation and it automatically adjusted the line, she sighed.

"…Good grief, what is it now? Wasn't that giant bug swarm more than enough? Just what is it this time?"

The last message that she received was a warning from the HQ that the increased forcefield armour output might cause some jamming on the communication line.

But even so, Hikaru still perceived the situation as not too bad. She knew well how strong Akira was from yesterday's battle record. She also had heard that the escort team added more men to its rooster. So, she was just calmly gathering information about the current situation from inside the room.

Not too long after that, the interphone suddenly rang. Although she tried to answer it through the information terminal, it could not properly connect to the interphone. As she thought that she did not have any other choice, she

went and stood right in front of the door to answer it. She first used the information terminal to check who was standing on the other side of the door. It was 3 men in security attire.

“Who is it?”

The man who led that team replied.

“We’re from the escort team. There’s an order from HQ to evacuate the transport. Will you please cooperate with us?”

“…Evacuation? Is it that bad?”

Hikaru unconsciously raised her voice. The men replied calmly as if to calm Hikaru down, but his smile somehow deepened.

“Unfortunately, transport vehicle number 4 got hit by the flying monster and can no longer move. So, we’re helping with the evacuation of the crews at the moment. Just to be safe, we were directed to evacuate the other transport vehicles.”

Hikaru was so surprised and tried to open the door. But before she reached for the door’s panel, her hand suddenly stopped. She then tilted her head.

[…Flying monster?]

She suddenly had a bad feeling and pondered. It all made perfect sense that after the flying monster destroyed one of the transport vehicles, the rest of the surviving transport vehicles suddenly increased their forcefield armour output while the crew urged everyone to evacuate.

But during the communication with HQ, she did not hear anything about the flying monster. Thus, in short, HQ decided not to inform her of this. After all, spreading such information might cause a panic instead. So, the problem now was why the people on the other side of the door told her that piece of information? Was it because they were lax people who could not answer as long as not asked about the information restriction, or was it

because they were suspicious people, or might the reason lie somewhere else?

“I’m really sorry, but can you please hurry up? We will guide you to evacuate.”

Hikaru hesitated, but she decided to lightly lock the door.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know what’s going on, but the panel is not responding. Can you open it from that side? I’m sure you have a master key with you during this emergency situation, right?”

The guy lightly bowed.

“We’re really sorry, it would cause trouble for us to open our customer’s room with our master key even in this situation. We do have one-time use emergency code, but if possible, we want to keep it for those who need them more. So, can’t you do something from inside?”

“I’m trying here, but it seems that nothing is working… Well, you can go ahead and evacuate the other people and come back here later.”

“But if we do that then, your safety would be compromised…”

“It’s fine. I’m a city management staff, so I already prepared myself for all possibilities the moment I stepped out into the wasteland. You should prioritize evacuating the other passengers. Ah, just tell me where I should evacuate, I will go there myself if I somehow manage to open this thing before you come back.”

“The evacuation point might change depending on the situation. The security inside the vehicle might also change during the emergency, so there is a good chance that you might get locked in if we’re not around.”

The guy’s tone suddenly slightly changed.

“…I’m sorry. We’re really in a hurry here, can’t you really do something from your side?”

Hikaru was with a guy by the name of Erde who was the leader of that team. Erde seemed to be slightly irritated, and he became rather impatient. It was understandable for someone from the escort team, who was evacuating the passengers, to have that expression.

Hikaru who saw that hesitated, but she still refused to touch the panel.

“I’m still trying here. Ah, is it because I’m the last person here so you can’t close the bulkhead before I evacuate?”

“Yes, with the forcefield armour has been set to its maximum output and we need to close the bulkheads. It’ll be difficult to reopen it later, that’s why we need to evacuate everyone right now.”

“I-is that so!? Wait for a sec!! I’ll open it!!… It still won’t open!! What’s going on here? Can’t you please try using the master key? It just won’t open from here!!”

Hikaru still had not touched the panel. She thought that she might have overdone it there, but her heart was telling her to still wait. She was planning to open the door later after Erde and his men left that place.

Erde’s face which already had a stern expression slightly changed.

“…Can’t you open it no matter what?”

“I’m already trying to open it here right now!”

In response to Hikaru’s voice that sounded as if she was panicking, Erde’s face turned cold for a split second, but it was immediately replaced by an ominous smile.

“I understand, we’ll open it with our master key.”

His smile was gone from his face.

“It’ll be dangerous, so please step back from the door.”

Erde looked at the other men to tell them to start working. Hikaru, who was noticed that, frowned. On the other side of the transparent door from her side, he could see them putting explosives on the door.

Erde and his men then opened up some distance, Hikaru also got away from the door in a hurry. In the next moment, the explosives finally exploded.

The boom travelled through the hallway together with a strong gust of wind. After both died down, Erde went to check the door and frowned. The door was so strong that it was left mostly undamaged.

"…Next!"

Erde's men started putting the next explosive behind them, Erde thought.

[…Is she suspicious of us right from the start…? No, there was no trouble in the beginning. Which meant that the problem is the way I spoke…? I really have no idea though… I'm sure I made a blunder somewhere. Well, it doesn't matter, I can just ask her directly later.]

Erde then shouted toward the room.

[Get away from the door if you don't want to die!]

They then placed the explosives and activated them. Erde returned to check the door again, this time, it was enough to bend the door.

"…Next one!"

After 3 explosives, the bent grew bigger on the door.

Hikaru was a bit panicking, although her ominous feeling was on the mark, she did not understand what was going on.

The escort crew of the transport convoy were using explosives to open the door. Especially in this situation where the inside of the transport vehicle, and the whole transport convoy, were considered as a part of the inner city area. It was blatant disrespect toward Sakashita Heavy Industry, which was

maintaining the area. In the worst-case scenario, it could even be considered as picking a fight against the whole Corporate Government.

The people who were doing that without showing any hesitation seemed to be aiming for her, who was nothing special but a normal city staff. Hikaru really did not understand the reason why.

She tried to contact HQ in a panic to report the situation to them, but she could not reach them. Thus, her choice quickly shifted to Akira. Unfortunately, the result was the same even after she increased the comm output to maximum. Hikaru then inadvertently screamed.

“What in the world is going on here!??”

But her voice was drowned by the explosion that echoed into the room. Hikaru flinched back and checked the door, it was doing its job very well. But even so, it was only a matter of time before it broke.

Hikaru frowned and scrambled over to try to contact anyone, she used her quick wits to look for a loophole in the communication line.

While back in the hallway, Erde looked at the bent door and frowned.

[…That’s one hell of a door. I guess it’s to be expected for an isolation room, huh?]

Each transport vehicle had a number of strongly built rooms called isolation rooms. They were made to withstand powerful attacks from the outside. It did sound like a very safe room, but at the same time, it also protects the area outside from whatever happened inside. Thus, it was often used to transport criminals or dangerous people. This included the superhuman with enhanced physical strength. Because of this bad impression, many isolation rooms were unoccupied although they could be filled with expensive facilities for transporting VIPs.

Akira was assigned to one of those isolation rooms. It was because Hikaru managed to get Akira into that escort request at the very last moment. She thought that it should be fine as long as she did not tell Akira about it. After

hearing about Akira from Kibayashi, she then realized that the isolation room could be used to minimize the damage in case something happened. It was also one of the reasons why she did not cancel that escort request.

Although that was the real reason, Erde interpreted that situation differently.

[Did they send the escort outside because they think it would be fine as long as they have this isolated room? They are pretending to be a Hunter and his operator. I guess it would be suspicious unless they don't do that much, huh? Which means this one is the jackpot, right?]

Erde, who read too much into the situation, frowned and said.

"Put the next one up! Add more explosives this time!"

"But we might damage the room or even the transport vehicle if we do that."

"It doesn't matter! Just do it!"

Erde's men just did what they were told to and installed more explosives on the door.

They kept trying to break the door after that and they used more explosives for each try, causing the room to shake harder with every explosion. Although the explosions also shook the vehicle, it was minor compared to what was going on outside. The violent shaking filled Hikaru with desperation and terror. Even after it was badly bent, the door was still devoting itself to its duty. Nonetheless, the bend eventually created small holes that air could get through. Each explosion would start to send a strong gust of wind into the room.

"Whoah!? This is an isolation room, you know!? And it's not like I'm an officer from Sakashita Heavy Industry! Then why are they even going that far?!"

"Get the next one!! Hurry up!!"

Hikaru, who heard that, panicked even more. But at the same time, she realized something. Whoever was on the other side of the door was in a hurry. Basically, they did not have much time. That reason might be because they only had a short time before the escort team noticed them. So, things might turn for the better if she could buy some time. As she thought so, Hikaru looked around the room for whatever might help her buy more time. After a short span of time, she came up with a small plan. She went to hide somewhere hard to find while she kept trying to contact someone.

The door finally gave up. The explosion and the banging sound that followed it let Hikaru know and made her freeze. That was when her connection to Akira recovered.

“Ah! It finally got connected!! Akira!! Help me!!”

That was right when Erde and his men stormed the room.

__*__*__*__

After hearing that plea from Hikaru, Akira returned back inside as soon as he could. He went to the gate on the rooftop, parked his bike beside the gate, and ran inside. Since he already knew that the inside of the vehicle was no longer safe, he did not hesitate as he stepped in carefully with his rifles ready. When he reached the hallway, he looked slightly confused, the hallway seemed to be slightly bent.

“Alpha, is that colourless mist?”

Alpha had a slightly stern look on her face as she replied.

“No, it’s some kind of enhanced particles that imitate the effect of the colourless mist.”

“Enhanced particles?”

“They’re basically dust particles that have the special characteristic of enhancing the basic properties of air. For now, just think of it as colourless

mist. It also carries a jamming effect as well. My bet is that it has already spread all over the inside of the transport vehicle."

Akira raised his guard. But he had no plan to retreat, he already resolved himself to charge forward as he asked Alpha.

"Basically, I just need to think of it as a thick colourless mist, right?"

"Yes, let's do that while we move forward. I'll try my best to help you if something happens."

"Alright then."

Akira ran straight through the hallway. With the help of his augmented suit, he was able to run so fast that he could feel a strong drag from the air. This phenomenon was not new to him, and it was exactly because he was used to it, that he noticed the air was slightly heavier than usual. It felt like he was moving his body inside a body of water but on a much lower level. But since it did not cause any noticeable effect on his speed, Akira decided to push forward and into his room.

Akira could see traces of explosions inside the hallway. They were from when Erde and his men broke through the isolation room. The force that leaked from the directional explosion left the ceiling, wall, and floor cracked. It showed just how powerful the isolation room was. Seeing that, Akira could not help but frown.

"I heard that the inside of the transport vehicle is very well guarded just like the area in the inner wall, but it seems that doesn't mean it's exactly peaceful, huh? Was I too late?"

He already lost contact with Hikaru. Although the line was still connected, he did not get any reply even when he tried to call her. Either she was not in a situation where she could say anything, or she was taken by whoever came for her after that last call. In the worst-case scenario, she might already be dead. Either way, Akira did not know which one was the case.

"Let's check the room first."

“You’re right.”

As he was running toward his room, suddenly two guys jumped out from the destroyed door and into the hallway.

Akira who saw that knitted his eyebrows. Thanks to the size of the transport vehicle, the hallway was pretty wide. But even so, it was not wide enough that it was possible to get away from a barrage of bullets. Even so, both of them were running fully open in the hallway with knives in hand as they closed the distance to Akira.

Akira was slightly confused, but he understood that they were enemies as he started shooting at them without any hesitation. The LEO multi-rifles in both of his hands filled the hallway, leaving no space for them to hide. With no place to take cover, those bullets hit those two men, or so it should have been.

Right in the next moment, Akira was so surprised that he froze up for a split second. All the bullets that he shot could not fly far enough to reach those men. Not even a single bullet hit them. The bullets flew a few metres forward while leaving a visible track behind them before they created a small shockwave as if they just hit an invisible wall and greatly slowed down. Some of the following bullets then hit the bullets in front of them and ricocheted inside the hallway.

Knowing that shooting was futile, Alpha stopped forcibly stopped Akira’s rifles. While still confused about what just happened, Akira recollected himself.

“Alpha, what did they do there just now?”

“Save it for later! They’re coming!!”

The two men closed the distance with their inhuman physical capability. But they were still far away from Akira. At least, they still could not reach Akira with their knives as the man on the right swung the knife with both of his hands. Akira saw that and the blade that was made of light extending out from that knife. He knew that it would reach him, so Akira took evasive

action. Right at the next moment, a cross-shaped blade made of light passed right beside Akira.

At the same time Akira moved his body to evade that attack, he also activated his time perception compression and reality manipulation. Inside that distorted world, Akira ducked low to evade the incoming slash and charged forward to close their distance. Seeing what the man on the left was trying to do, Akira aimed both of his rifles toward that man.

Just like last time, the bullets did not even reach that man. But as those bullets lost their momentum and started slowly falling down to the ground, the barrage created a wall of bullets between Akira and that man. The man on the left used more than half of the power of his blade to get through that wall.

The weakened light blade touched Akira’s forcefield armour and Akira just forced his way forward. A blinding light flashed from where the light blade touched Akira’s augmented suit.

Akira then used the power of his augmented suit to launch himself forward as if he was a bullet to close the distance. The moment his enemies entered the distance that his bullets would suddenly slow down, Akira aimed his rifles at them and pulled the trigger.

Those two men nimbly evaded the bullets. Since they were already close enough to exchange blows, the bullets could not form a wall, so there was no need for them to make a big move to evade them. It was easier to evade them compared to the bullets that were shot from afar. Moreover, in order to break Akira’s stance, they launched a coordinated attack on Akira. Blade extended out from their knives. This time, it was not as long as a sword but slightly longer than a knife, thus maintaining their mobility and accuracy in that range.

One of them forced Akira’s attention by attacking him, while the other one jumped from the floor and bounced off the ceiling to find Akira’s back. They then both attacked Akira from 2 sides simultaneously. The blade of their knives drew an arc through the space that extended endlessly.

Akira also evaded that as he aimed his rifle at both of them. Although he no longer had the leeway to glance at them, Akira knew very well where they were and what they were doing. He quickly evaded and countered. He swung both of his rifles accurately and used the rapid-fire function to draw a line.

All of them were no longer only using the floor as their footings, they used walls and ceilings as well to exchange and evade attacks. They kicked whatever they were using as footings to suddenly stop and launch their body around. They jumped around inside the hallway as if gravity did not affect them. Meanwhile, they were swinging around blades and rifles to the point that the hallway was the first one to admit defeat.

Even the slightest delay would result in death. Even the slightest hesitation would turn into a game over. One wrong move and everything would end. Akira pushed his mind and body to survive such a situation. The medicines that he took beforehand kept repairing the unending damages on his body since he was constantly pushing it past its limit, preventing the bones inside his augmented suit from turning into ground dust. He had no leeway to worry about what was going on inside his augmented suit. All of his attention was focused on evading the incoming attack. Otherwise, he would be dead in no time.

During that fight, his augmented suit was burning through its energy reserve rapidly. Unless he pushed the speed of his augmented suit to its limit, he would not be able to catch up with the opponents' moves. But due to that, the time that Akira had left until he ran out of energy was greatly shortened. That anxiety caused him to get impatient and impatience might lead to mistakes which would then lead to death.

Akira narrowly passed by multiple borders to death each second, and those seconds eventually turned into minutes. Akira desperately used all that he had to keep his life.

Then, in the next second, finally one of them made a mistake. The area was becoming more and more fragile during the fight. Both Akira and his opponents were tiptoeing their foothold so that their balance would not break. They even used forcefield armour to reinforce their footing in order

to do that. However, there was a limit to how much it could help. Basically, there were only a limited number of spots where they could step on in the midst of that high-speed fight, and one of Akira's opponents stepped on the wrong spot.

That blunder originally would only lightly throw him off balance. But in front of Alpha, it was turned into a fatal mistake. Even during the battle, Alpha was recording the situation of the hallway, she knew the spots that took too much damage. As such, she knew the spots that were dangerous to step on. She conveyed that information to Akira. Thus, even before his opponent made that opening because he was thrown off-balance due to footing, Akira already launched an attack to strike him.

The moment the guy touched the ground, he slightly slipped, which threw him off balance. The moment it disrupted his movement, Akira's powerful kick was thrust into him. He did not have the chance to evade due to his broken posture and took that kick head-on. It sent his body flying powerlessly and planted his body into the wall, leaving a huge crack on the wall.

But even after receiving such an intense attack, his augmented suit saved him from any fatal injury. Unfortunately, that was all there was to it. Akira landed right next to him with one rifle aimed at his head while the other at his torso. Akira quickly released an intense short barrage. The point-blank shots allowed Akira's bullets to hit their target without losing any momentum, turning the guy's head and body into minced meat.

The other guy used that opening to slash toward Akira. But the sudden turn of events slowed him, albeit only slightly. On the other hand, Akira, who already knew what was going to happen, had the advantage. It allowed him to evade that slash. A cross-shaped slice was graved on the wall, but Akira ducked under the slash. Since Akira was able to fight even when it was 2 against 1, it was an easy thing for Akira to corner his opponent when it was one on one.

The bullets that Akira shot from his 2 LEO multi-rifles suddenly lost momentum as if they hit an invisible wall and fell to the ground, but that only happened after they pierced through his remaining opponent. The

shockwave, which was focused on the enemy's head and body, threw the remaining opponent off the ground with his half-destroyed corpse.

Even after that, Akira still had a stern look on his face. He quickly released his rifles off his grip as he reached for his medicine and his left hand to reload a new energy tank. The LEO rifles that he had left on the air ejected their magazines. Akira grabbed 2 new magazines, threw them in the air, and grabbed his rifles, and with one smooth sweep, reloaded the new magazines into his rifles before quickly aiming them at the door leading into his room.

If there was another opponent that came before Akira could finish tending to his injuries and equipment, he would have been dead. But fortunately, no one came. Akira inadvertently let out a sigh.

"…That was close! Alpha, was that already everyone?"

"No idea. The jamming is too strong, I can't search the inside of the room. So be careful."

"Roger that!"

Akira glanced at the already dead opponents.

"…Are these guys the people that Hikaru told me about? So why are they trying to get Hikaru? These guys are more troublesome than those white powered suits out there, you know?"

"Let's ask that question straight to Hikaru. That is as long as she's not already kidnapped or killed. But before that, if you have no plan to retreat, let's take a 30-second break here. One thing for sure is that you won't be able to keep going without rest at the moment. Also, if you decided to take a break here, take in some more medicine."

Akira put back one of his rifles and took a large dose of medicine. His face was saying that he was in utter pain.

"…My head hurts so bad. That thing that allows me to see the world with better precision… It's better if I don't do that twice in one day."

“If you’re not retreating, you might want to prepare yourself to do that three times today. Just to let you know, retreating is a viable option.”

“Uhh, well, I don’t think that’s the right thing to do. But if it’s way out of what I can handle, I have no problem retreating right away. Is your support not enough this time?”

“Not at all.”

“Well, it’s decided then.”

Akira smiled wryly and started adjusting his breathing. Seeing that, Alpha also smiled wryly.

Akira had his attention to the front of him while repeatedly taking a deep breath. Slowly taking off the pressure from his tensed body. During that short break, Akira thought of something.

“By the way, how did they block my bullets? That thing is not forcefield armour, right?”

“That is a speed filter effect from the enhanced dust particle.”

The analysis of the colourless mist produced many kinds of results. One of them was its effect on high-speed objects. Certain particles would expand and create a stronger drag force proportional to the speed of the object going through them. So, people would use this effect to create an anti-bullet defence gas. It was often used by the escort team to protect important targets. The only downside was that the effect would only be realized when it was dense enough, so it was only usable inside an enclosed space.

After hearing that explanation, Akira pursed his lips.

“Which means that it could have stopped bullets the moment they left the barrel, no?”

“It would be bad for them as well if it gets that dense, so I bet they only spread enough particles so the effect would only come out when the bullets travel fast enough to form a dense enough barrier of air in front of them.”

“But they were throwing light blades too though?”

“Those were nothing more than light waves with cutting edge sharpness. They were not physical objects. Moreover, they were not as fast as the bullets, right?”

“…So, basically, they had no problem with that effect, huh?”

“I bet they’re the ones who spread the enhanced dust, so of course, they set it up to give them an advantage.”

Using something like that was basically meaningless when it was used out in the open. They would be only effective for a very short period of time. Not to mention, the amount of enhanced dust particles that they had to use, as a method to counter the opponent’s bullets, was quite inefficient.

But even so, attackers still sometimes chose this method when their aim was to capture rather than to kill their target. It was to reduce the chance of killing their target by mistake while at the same time, it also protected them from the escorts’ bullets. Basically, most of the people who use this method were skilled close-range fighters.

Since this method was often used by skilled close-range fighters in the eastern district that was ruled by guns, it must have been not easy to gather enough people who could fight effectively under such conditions. This meant that their target must be important enough for them to spare that effort and cost. This meant that their target was most likely either a top researcher or officer from the Corporate Government.

After listening to that explanation, Akira tilted his head.

“So why is Hikaru being targeted by these people? If I’m not mistaken, Hikaru is not someone that important, right?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. If she’s still around, we can just ask her later. Akira, it’s time to move again soon, this is your last chance to retreat, you know?”

Alpha was smiling challenging at Akira, He threw a sidelong glance and broke out a smile before he changed gear and went straight into his room.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 241, Reunion

Index

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Erde flung open the door of the locker inside Akira's room. Because the door was only as tough as a cheap safe box, it did not stand a chance against his abnormal strength. Erde forced it open with brute force, bending it out of shape. It was no longer recognizable. His action seems to mock its electrical lock. Unfortunately for him, the inside was empty.

[…Another miss? Which one is the jackpot? Don't tell me that they leave this many lockers inside this big room just for this game of hide-and-seek?]

He inadvertently knitted his eyebrows and reached for the door of the next locker. When he used his might to open it, he was only greeted by disappointment. He slammed the bent door shut and kicked it, completely breaking the door. If there was someone inside that locker, they would have died. That was why Erde tried to be careful. He was afraid there was someone inside.

Their mission was to kidnap their target, if it was to kill, they would have blown the whole room together when they were blowing down its door. The reason why they spread the enhanced dust particle with a speed filter effect, was exactly so they would not kill their target by mistake.

When they entered the room, they saw the door of a large locker suddenly closed on its own. It was obvious that the door was closed remotely. But they spotted a skirt caught on the door and thought that their target must be hiding inside it, so they immediately forced it open.

If it was only for opening the locker, they could have just used the light blade, which could even easily slash through the thick armour of a powered suit. But it was a different matter when the goal was to keep their target alive. They had no other choice but to slowly open the locker door with a powered-down blade and their enchanted physical strength. That was why they took quite a long time to open the locker.

But strangely enough, there was no one inside. Instead, there was only a hanger with Hikaru's uniform dangling on it, it was put there deliberately so that a part of her skirt would get caught by the door.

It was a trick to buy time. Erde who understood that tore the uniform and frowned. The group then proceeded to search the room, but they quickly noticed that Akira was coming, so Erde told his men to welcome him while he would stay behind and search the room alone.

Erde broke the door to the bath and reached under the coloured water of the warm bath to check the water. Nothing. He proceeded to the toilet, still nothing. Pulled off the bed's bedding to see a pile of shredded pillows that was set such that it looked like someone hiding under the bedding. Still nothing. He spotted another locker with a gown peeking out. Initially, he thought that was another cheap trick to buy time. However, another thought sprang into mind. It might have deliberately been done to trick him into not checking that locker instead. Thus, he had no other choice but to check that locker. He cautiously broke open the door and checked the inside, again, nothing. The bed, the toilet, the bed, the locker, he kicked all of them after checking them.

Normally, they would have been able to use sensitive information gathering devices to scan the room. But they had focused more on jamming instead of searching. With the high jamming power of the enhanced particle dust, they could not differentiate the signals inside the room using their information-gathering device.

Even so, it should be easier to find their target when they just opened the door. But by the time he opened that large locker, the enhanced dust particles that they spread in the hallway had already seeped into the inside of the room.

[This is not good. We have spent too much time here. How long do I have until the battle outside ends and the other escorts notice us?]

And of course, the fact that he was searching alone meant that they could not search multiple places at the same time.

[…They still have not come back yet. It only means that they're facing a pretty strong opponent. The enhanced dust particles should limit the use of rifles, so even a small squad should give them no problem at all, but even so, they're taking a bit too long…]

Going out together with the three of them was not a good idea since the hallway was narrow. He knew that his men were not weak, that was why Erde thought that if he also went out, he would only get in their way. Moreover, his original plan was to let his men take care of the escort while he left the scene after he secured their target. Thinking that staying behind was better, Erde told his men to welcome Akira, but now, he believed that decision might have been a mistake.

Erde was not sure if it was a good idea to continue searching. But his trust in his men and his pride made him continue the search. After all, he was the one who left Akira to his men. Although, the search result was as futile as usual.

But even so, he continued searching with a stern look on his face. There were not many places left to search where his target might be hiding, but in the middle of his search, Erde suddenly stopped. He then looked at the large locker that he had first opened. Its door was broken and was still hanging half-open.

To mark the lockers that he had searched, Erde made sure to kick them and destroy them. But the large locker was stronger than the other lockers, so it was not completely broken.

Erde felt something was wrong with the door. He was pretty sure that he did not leave it like that.

“…Wait a second.”

Erde once again went to the large locker and pulled open the door. Finally, he found Hikaru only in her underwear, smiling sacredly at him.

Hikaru was hiding somewhere else at the beginning and went to hide in this large locker later, thinking that it was unlikely for Erde and his men to search the places that they had searched before. That line of thinking was not wrong, and it allowed her to buy a lot of time.

Erde politely smiled.

“So you’re here. We’ve been looking for you. Now, we need to evacuate. I’ll take you to a safe place.”

Hikaru replied, still with her scared smile.

“I-I’m sure I’m in an already quite safe place at the moment.”

“Please don’t worry, we have even a safer place ready. Let’s go. Come with me.”

Erde’s smile vanished, his hand extended and reached for Hikaru’s neck.

“Stop fighting back. I want to bring you back unharmed if it’s possible. That being said, I don’t mind breaking your neck if it’s needed. But don’t worry, we’ll connect you to a life support system, so you won’t die. Got it?”

“O-Okay.”

Erde still had his hand on Hikaru’s neck as he turned toward the hallway and shouted.

“The target is secured! We’re leaving now!!”

Now he just needed to regroup with his men and leave the premises. If his men were in no position to regroup, he was planning to run away alone. In order to confirm that, Erde scanned the hallway. That was when he noticed a signal blazing in the room's direction. He thought that it was from his men, so he decided to just wait. Someone then jumped into the room.

But that was not his men, it was Akira.

Akira had the rifles on both his hands fixed in Erder's direction. Erde reacted by putting Hikaru in front of him. In a split second that was extended into eternity from the adrenaline, Akira and Erde were locking gazes, trying to probe how the other would react. Erde was the first to make a move.

[This guy! He's going to shoot for real!!]

Erde quickly stepped in front of Hikaru and released a kick toward Akira. Although Akira was obviously outside that kick's reach, Alpha still controlled his augmented suit to evade that kick.

After Erde released his kick, there was a short pause, Akira was then blown back as if he had received an invisible attack. However, since he had enough time to reposition himself, the damage was suppressed. Though, it still threw him off balance.

Erde used that opening to push Hikaru back into the large locker, closed the door, and kicked it. This caused Hikaru to be locked inside the locker. Because of that kick, the door was severely bent and stuck, closed. Hikaru alone did not have the power to open it from the inside. The large locker that she had used to hide herself had turned into a cell to trap her in.

Akira stood back up and Erde once again turned toward Akira. Both of them had a stern look on their faces.

"Alpha, what was that? It was from that guy's kick, right?"

It was still understandable for the knife that was extending out a light blade back in the hallway. But that kick just now completely left no traceable

method of reaching him. He was certain that kick did not make physical contact with him. It was clear that he received a shock wave a moment after Erde finished executing his kick.

“Yep, it was from his kick, he used the speed filter effect to propagate that shock wave.”

“The heck is that?”

“He kicked in such a way that created a dense layer of air, which activated the speed filter effect. He then directed that dense layer of air and increased its drag force even further to send a shock wave.”

“Seriously, just what the heck was that attack? Is it normal to do this further to the east? There was a huge flying monster that looked like a floating island. Cannon that was as large as a building sticking down towards us, huge-monster swarms. I have two rifles with me and I’m still having trouble against people with knives. Now, a guy that can kick from afar shows up. Just because we’re further to the east, isn’t all this just a bit too crazy? If it’s already this bad here, I can’t imagine how bad it is in the east’s frontline.”

“Well, one thing that I can say, it’s just out of this world. We’re talking about an area that’s filled with old-world technology after all.”

“Alright then. Let’s never go any further to the east of Kugamayama city ever again.”

“It’s fine for me too, but first, we need to survive this place, right?”

“I know.”

That exchange happened in a split second since it happened through telepathy, but even in the middle of that, Akira was eyeing an opening from Erde. Erde tried to guess what Akira was thinking since he was only standing in silence. Although it was only for a few seconds, both of them understood that even the slightest opening would be fatal.

Erde’s gaze turned sharp, there was a clear rage behind it.

“You’re that girl’s escort, right? Are you seriously thinking that it’s better to get her killed rather than letting me abduct her? That’s so typical of someone from the Corporate Government. Don’t you think there’s anything wrong with that line of thinking?”

Akira did not reply, Erde interpreted that silence as an answer as his expression turned to disgust.

“Humph, no response, huh? I guess it’s thanks to your education as an agent. Reborn to a loyal dog and used like an object under your corporate overlords just to die like an expendable article. Without any complaint at all. You guys are really messed up in the head.”

Although Akira already noticed that Erde was having a huge misunderstanding, he still did not reply.

“Since you’re here, it means that you defeated my men, huh? I’m Erde, what’s your name?”

Akira still did not answer, Erde’s disgust toward Akira grew stronger.

“Humph, still nothing, huh? Or is it that you don’t have a name? I guess the most that an object can have to identify itself is its product code, huh? Born as a human, educated to live like an object under the Corporate Government, and then die like an expendable item. How pitiful.”

Even after that, Akira still did not say anything. Erde finally stopped trying to have a conversation with him.

“My men died under my command. So I was planning to at least present your name to avenge their death, but no name, huh? Well, at least I’ll balance their bad luck with your death.”

Erde’s expression turned solemn, he had completely changed gears. But before he made a move, Akira suddenly said.

“Akira.”

Erde raised his eyebrows, but Akira did not say anything any further.

“…I see, those two are Torpa and Salza. Feel free to carry those names to the afterlife.”

In a time-constrained mission, to use a precious second to ask the name of his opponent was unnecessary. Nonetheless, Erde still chose to spend that much time because of his respect toward his men. Thus, Akira gave the least-needed respect toward a man who showed respect to his deceased comrades.

In the next instant, both their expressions turned solemn. There was no longer even a trace of disgust or hatred on their faces, what was left was only the wish to accomplish their respective mission. In short, the death of their respective opponent. Instead of keeping distance, both of them leapt forward, challenging the other to a close-range fight with a mix of rifles and fists. Both wanted to end the fight in the shortest time possible. For Erde, it was for the sake of his mission, while for Akira, it was because of the limited energy in his augmented suit and the narrowing time where he could continue to compress his time perception.

Bullets filled the room in the next instant, just like usual. The speed filter caused them to suddenly lose momentum and fall down to the ground. That speed filter became a medium to propagate shock waves from Erde’s kicks. They were jumping around inside the room during the high-speed fight while destroying the places where they could safely step. Just under a few seconds, floor, ceiling, wall, furniture, everything inside the room was wrecked as if they were devoured by a storm.

⎯⎯*⎯⎯*⎯⎯*⎯⎯

Inside the command centre of the transport convoy, everyone finally breathed a sigh of relief since the battle outside had finally calmed down. So, they proceeded to assess the damage on each transport vehicle. But after the death report for the Hunters reached them, their calmed faces turned cloudy.

The commander sighed.

“…To be honest, I want to celebrate since we’ve survived that ordeal, but there’s nothing to be happy about with this situation. Continue the emergency alert and keep the SOS signal up. There’s no report from numbers 6 and 8, what’s going on there?”

“We still can’t reach them. We are still working on it.”

“Send someone to directly check on them, we at least can do that much, right?”

“We’ve already sent someone. But they haven’t come back yet. I believe that it’s because the transport vehicle went into lockdown, so we might need some time to reopen it.”

“I see. Either way, tell them to hurry up. Ask the other Hunters to help as well. I’m sure they can at least go to check those two transport vehicles.”

“Roger that!”

They quickly broadcast the order and collected all the information that they could get, but even so, they still had no report coming from transport vehicles 6 and 8. The commander frowned.

“What’s the progress with numbers 6 and 8? It’s taking too long. Tell them there’s no need for a detailed report, an overview is enough.”

The staff conveyed that to the Hunters. After hearing the reply, the commander tensed up. The report basically said that the Hunters who went to check had not returned. Even after sending several people a few times, no one returned. Even the Hunters started to notice something fishy was going on, that was right when they asked what was their next plan.

The commander made his decision, he had a worried look as he gave his order.

“Tell the Hunters to secure transport numbers 6 and 8!”

“S-secure?”

“Yes! Tell them that it’s okay to even damage the transport vehicle! But make sure to keep the damages within the limit! Get numbers 6 and 8 under our control immediately!!”

“Do you mean that someone took control of those two transport vehicles?!!”

“Yes!! Tell them to make their move with that assumption in mind!! It’s fine even if it’s an unnecessary worry! Get them to move out as soon as possible!!”

In that situation where it was just a guess, worry started to ripple inside the command centre. Everyone wanted that guess to be wrong, but unfortunately, they were not mistaken.

—*—*—*—

Erde’s kick landed on the ceiling. The decorative layer of the ceiling cracked to pieces and peeled off, exposing the inner part of the ceiling. Akira who was there a moment ago jumped backwards with his head still pointing at the floor, both of his rifles aimed at Erde. His distance to Erde was closer to when the speed filter would take effect. Thus, getting shot from this distance was fatal.

But no bullets touched Erde. All of them flew past beside him. The shock wave from the kick threw Akira’s aim off target.

Erde quickly closed the gap, Akira kicked the ceiling and returned back to the floor. The moment he landed, he kicked straight up and was met by Erde’s kick straight down.

As their kicks made contact, the shock wave shook the room. Due to his augmented suit, Akira’s footing was reinforced with forcefield armour, but even so, it still left a huge crack and completely shattered the floor.

Akira immediately retracted his leg and exchanged it with rifle muzzles. Erde did the same but exchanged his leg with fists. The shockwave from the fist hit the muzzles. Although it did no damage due to the muzzles being

protected by forcefield armour, it was enough to throw Akira off target again.

Erde slightly shook Akira's aim, causing an opening in his barrage of bullets. While at the same time, he created a forcefield armour platform in the air to propel himself to the side, using the opening on the barrage to get away from Akira.

After that, neither of them tried for a second attack. Akira and Erde just stood facing each other in silence.

Akira had an extremely stern look on his face. He had his rifles pointing downward, although that was purely by chance, he did not point them to the Erde because he had no wish to escalate the situation at the moment.

"…Alpha, how's my leg?"

"The augmented suit is still okay. It is still fully functional. But that kick shaved quite a lot of energy since I had to increase the forcefield armour output past its limit."

"…How about my body?"

"Aren't you glad that you took quite a lot of medicine beforehand?"

Although Akira could not see it, he knew that the inside of his legs was badly damaged. The expensive medicines that he took helped him to fix those injuries as fast as possible. But even so, he did not want to even make a move immediately if it was possible. The backlash from the third reality manipulation was severe, the fatigue assaulted his brain in the form of an excruciating headache. At the moment, he tried to lighten the effect by focusing it only around where Erde was.

"This is harder than fighting those two. Seriously! Why are these guys aiming for Hikaru?"

"If he was in that fight, you would have been dead by now. It's at least one good thing among all the bad things that you faced today, right?"

“Just why in the world does my luck only give me the least to survive situations like this…? It won’t be strange if I at least have some more, no?”

“How about retreating to buy some extra time? If you still have some luck, you might still be able to return back safely.”

Akira smiled wryly in reaction to that suggestion. The moment he opened his mouth, his opponent might take that chance to attack him. But even so, he still said something to Erde.

“Say, what is the chance of you letting me go?”

Erde’s stern face coloured with a tinge of confusion.

“That was out of the blue, why be sheepish now?”

“It’s not like I have any personal grudge against you. When I accepted my mission, no one told me that I would be fighting someone this strong. So, I just thought that running away from you won’t mean that I’m breaking my mission so it should be alright.”

“…Thank you for the very tempting suggestion, but I’m afraid I cannot accept that. You already killed two of my men, it’s too late to retreat now.”

“Well, it can’t be helped then.”

“Yeah, indeed.”

After a short pause, it was Erde’s turn to make a suggestion.

“Let me make an offer this time, won’t you leave? If this fight is not in your job description and you think it isn’t worth the trouble, you can just retreat. Though it might violate your mission, I think it’s better to just accept that loss, isn’t that just how Corporate Government works?”

“Hmm, unfortunately, that’s not a choice for me…”

“Why? Judging from your reply, you don’t think this is worth the trouble, no?”

“I’m here because she asked me to help, I would hate myself if I retreat just because I found out the opponent is too strong.”

He felt that doing something like that would exhaust whatever little luck that he had left. Akira of course could not say that. So Erde, who took that as a simple matter of feeling, tilted his head, showing that he could not understand Akira.

“But you were just about to shoot her, no?”

“I did, but I would make sure to miss my shots, even if they hit, they would not be fatal. I also still have some medicine left. The moment you used her as a shield, she’s equivalent to being dead already. It’s the negotiator’s job to find a way to save her in that situation and I’m not a negotiator.”

“I see. So basically, although you’re strict in deciding that it was too late, it was not like you did not have the wish to save her, huh?”

After another pause, Akira broke the silence.

“So then, why are you guys targeting Hikaru? Although it might be weird to hear this from me, I think she’s not that important of a person for you to go this far.”

“Let me ask you this instead. If she’s not that important, then why are you escorting her?”

“My job is not to escort her, it’s to escort the transport convoy. I’m just helping her on the side of my job.”

“Do you really think I would believe that?”

“Even if you say that. In that case, what makes you so sure that she’s that important?”

“Simple, it’s because she’s an old-world connector from Sakashita Heavy Industry.”

Akira raised his eyebrows in surprise. Because he himself was someone who could connect to the old-world domain, there was a tint of another emotion mixed in his surprised face. Erde who saw that was sure that his guess was correct.

“So it was correct, huh? I’m glad that we did break the group into smaller teams.”

Akira raised his voice so that it reached Hikaru that was locked inside the huge locker.

“Hikaru! I don’t know what’s going on here, but it seems that this is a huge misunderstanding! Do you have any idea how to clear up this misunderstanding?! Or is it that you’re actually an old-world connector from Sakashita Heavy Industry!?”

Hikaru, who heard that from inside the locker, was greatly surprised. She then shouted back from inside the locker.

“How the heck did they end up thinking I’m an old-world connector!?”

“Like hell if I know! That guy is telling me so!”

Hikaru was so confused, but she finally understood what was going on. If they were here to kidnap an old-world connector from Sakashita Heavy Industry, then it was not strange for them to cause such chaos. At the same time, she got even more panicked. She had no idea how to convince the attackers that it was a huge misunderstanding.

On the other hand, it might be counter-effective if she ended up convincing Erde that it was a misunderstanding. Up until now, the attackers were holding back in order to kidnap her. If she was able to convince them, then they would not have any more reasons to hold back. When that happens, they might as well blow up this whole transport vehicle. Hikaru was stuck in between a rock and a hard place.

“A-Akira! I don’t know what’s going on but do your best! I’m counting on you!”

“Good grief, don’t be crazy…”

Akira smiled wryly. Judging from that reply, one thing that Akira could catch was that trying to convince Erde was not an option. Erde chuckled and said.

“There’s no need to stay behind if you can’t get along with your superior’s crazy antics, you know? Like I said before, you can just retreat. If you really didn’t know that she’s an old-world connector, then this mission is way too dangerous for you. I’m sure you won’t get penalized.”

Hikaru, who was listening from the locker, shivered.

“Wait! Don’t leave me! Please! Help me! I’ll do anything!”

“…You better make sure I get a suitable reward, alright?”

“O-Of course!”

Akira then lightly smiled at Erde.

“Well, it seems that this will be worth the trouble.”

Erde lightly chuckled.

“Is that so? As far as I know, as long as you can’t take that reward to the afterlife, it won’t be worth the trouble though.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll make sure to spend it in this world.”

“Hm, that would be impossible for you, unfortunately.”

Both of them smiled confidently at each other as both sides thought that the time for talk was coming to a close.

That exchange of words was nothing more than for buying time for Akira’s leg to heal up and his brain to recover. Erde also used that time to rest his body for a bit. That clash of their kicks was equally damaging to both. If the opponent did not move, they would prefer to wait until their body healed

up. As both of them mutually agreed on this, they took their time for silly banter. After all, it was equally a preferable move for both of them to heal up their legs.

But as the more time they wasted, the scale was slowly tipping toward Akira's side. The enhanced dust particle was slowly dispersing with time, lowering the effect of the speed filter, which increased the range of Akira's bullets. At the same time, it also made it more difficult for Erde to execute his long-range kick.

To top it off, Erde's mission had a time limit. He had to kidnap his target before the escort team could find him. If the escort team also joined the fight, Akira would undoubtedly win the fight. So, the longer he waited, the better Akira's chance would get.

Before the time was stretched too thin, Erde decided to make the first move. Akira knew that would happen. His smile vanished; his gaze turned sharp. He had to finish the fight as soon as possible in the next confrontation, and he resolved himself to end it with the death of his opponent. His intense focus made time feel like it was expanded.

In the middle of that, Alpha then said with a stern face.

"Akira. It seems that he's planning to use his trump card."

"Yeah. I bet so."

"According to my calculation, you'll lose the next exchange."

"It's not like I can do anything about it even if you tell me that now."

Akira lightly smiled, Alpha then put her face close to Akira.

"That's not the point. But it's also true that you'll be dead at this rate. That's why, with that information, is it okay to do an equally dangerous thing to get out of this predicament? I need your permission here."

Akira was a bit confused.

“You know what? You should have told me that sooner.”

But Alpha replied with a serious tone.

“Just like last time, I didn’t have the permission to ask for your permission before. I can only do that because we’re in this situation right now.”

“I see, it’s about that pain-in-the-neck permission thingy, huh.”

“Let me remind you that my position is that of your requester. My support is upfront payment for your reward, that’s why I won’t deliberately put you in unnecessary danger. That’s why I want you to trust me and give me your permission.”

Akira replied instantly.

“Come on now, isn’t that a little bit too late for that? I don’t know what you’re planning to do, but I don’t want to die. So just do it.”

Alpha smiled happily, then her expression turned neutral.

“Due to the emergency situation, in order to give better support for the subject Akira, requesting permission to per-recognition information processing as well as thought intervene-”

“I allow it.”

With the permission already formally given, Alpha’s expression returned to normal. She was smiling happily with confidence toward Akira.

“Thank you. As long as you have my support, everything will be fine.”

“I’m really counting on you for this one. A guy that strong is coming at me so desperately, please do something about it.”

“Just leave it to me. But this will put your body under immense stress, so make sure you’re ready.”

“Alright, taking care of that part is my job after all.”

Akira and Alpha exchanged a smile. That smile also represented the re-establishment of their connection, which was once cut by the jamming back in Kuzusuhara ruin.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 242, Super Human

Index

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Both Erde and Akira noticed that something had changed inside their respective opponent. The aura seeping off from the other person gave a sense of an unknown. It was as if everything that they had learned during their last exchange was all meaningless. It was as if they were challenging each other, two skilled fighters, into melee combat without any prior information. Even so, they were not as sheepish enough to show hesitation. As a matter of fact, both thought that they might use that situation for their benefit.

In the next moment, Erde made his move. With the speed that was way above what he showed up till now, he closed his distance to Akira as if he was a bullet. The force from propelling his body cracked the floor, but even before the cracked pieces that he sent flying by his sprint could reach the wall and ceiling, he had closed his distance to Akira. They were now within arm's reach. Using the forward momentum, he threw out a straight at the same time.

Due to his speed, the fist activated the speed filter effect. If it was a bullet, it would have lost its momentum and fallen to the ground. But unlike a bullet, that fist was backed by superhuman strength. As that fist broke through the

invisible walls with pure brute force, it sent shock waves in all directions as if it was a warhead shot by a powered suit.

Receiving that fist would be fatal, even the shock waves alone could easily crush rubble. Akira barely evaded that fist and used the forcefield armour of his augmented suit. It was concentrated to the side of that fist. This was done by Alpha to dampen the shock wave. At the same time, the output of Akira's augmented suit was increased to its utmost limit to launch a counterattack.

Akira's fist connected with Erde. Even for Erde, evading a quick counter right after his own attack while leaping forward with that speed was impossible. However, evading was not a choice. He could only defend against that attack. Erde received that fist with his arm in order to avoid the full brunt of that fist. The damage was minimal, and he was not blown back. As a matter of fact, the kickback from that punch created a huge crack on the floor under Akira's foot. It showed the difference in their physical strength.

That was when Erde noticed something strange.

[…Fist?]

Akira's LEO multi-rifles were nowhere to be found although they were on his hands in the last exchange and before this confrontation. Akira had pulled out his fist and moved to throw another punch. Seeing that, Erde instantly knew that his attack would reach Akira first, but the moment he shifted his stance to strike Akira, an ominous feeling assaulted him, he immediately jumped back.

At the same time Erde retreated, Akira threw both of his rifles upward. The 2 LEO multi-rifles rotated freely in the air. With the help of their advanced kickback compensator system and aiming system, they stabilized themselves in mid-air even without anyone holding onto them. Right after that, both released the C bullets that have been charged full of energy during the idle conversation from before.

But Erde perfectly avoided the hailstorm of bullets from above him. The bullets flew straight to the floor and sent pieces of it flying around. Eventually, the rifles hit the limit and were unable to stabilize themselves as they started shooting indiscriminately. Since that move was done due to a pre-set setting instead of long-range control, Akira had to reach for them again in order to stop them. And that was exactly what Akira did.

Before Akira could reach for his rifles, Erde released two punches from afar. The shock wave propagated through the air. But Akira quickly jumped sideways. Since he was not able to retrieve his rifles before that, only the rifles were blown away from the long-range punches.

Erde immediately released a series of punches. The punches ignored their physical reach and propagated through the air. But Akira who was running through the room evaded all of them. The distance between Erde and Akira grew further.

[He even evaded this too, huh!? Wait, no, I guess it's only to be expected if it's against an escort for an old-world connector from Sakashita Heavy Industry? That augmented suit is either a custom-tuned augmented suit or a completely different augmented suit but with a fake appearance. I've seen that augmented suit in the catalogue before, it should not be able to produce that much output with its spec. And a normal human body would not be able to withstand that kickback as well. In the first place, what he did was not something even a Rank 50 Hunter could do. As I thought. He must be an agent from the city disguising as a normal Hunter so that no one would notice that he is escorting an old-world connector.]

Erde's guess was partially correct. Akira's equipment was further enhanced due to Alpha's upgrades. Moreover, its original software which prioritized safety had also been rewritten. The LEO rifles' firepower was increased to its breaking point. The augmented suit was moving so fast that it was breaking down Akira's body. With the safety feature tossed aside in exchange for power, even the slightest mistake would kill its user.

Akira's augmented suit was not moving along with his will. Instead, he was trying his best to match its movement so that his limbs would not be torn off. Since the augmented suit was originally performant, with its safety

restriction off, Akira was not able to keep up with it. Normally, his limbs should have already torn off by now.

It was the same for the attacks from Erde. Under normal circumstances, Akira would not have been able to evade them. Although the shock waves from the punches were slower than bullets, they were far more difficult to evade. Bullets only flew in the direction of the muzzle. Akira could get a rough estimation of where that muzzle was pointing at and that helped him in determining the projectile of the bullets. However, that was not the case for Erde's punches. Furthermore, there was no guarantee that the shock wave would propagate in a straight line. The shock wave propagated depending on the way he launched his attack. He could manipulate such a phenomenon thanks to his superior skill. If Akira had not granted permission to Alpha, he would have been hit by those shockwaves.

The exchange between attacks and evasions inside his compressed time perception was extremely intense. One small misstep guaranteed death. It was completely out of what Akira could handle, so he asked for Alpha's help. But the backlash was in no way light.

Akira wafted in between the shock waves from Erde's punches, trying to survive against Erde, who had superhuman physical strength and skill. The only reason why Akira could withstand the assault was thanks to Alpha.

At the moment, Alpha was not only controlling Akira's augmented suit but also his body. She inserted herself in Akira's mind to do the detailed adjustments to his movements. Thanks to that, his augmented suit could move around as if it was trying to kill its user.

Akira had gone through harsh training before. Training so harsh that it made others misunderstand him, believing he was trying to be superhuman. Now that Alpha was actively adjusting his movements as well, he had become even stronger. Strong enough to fight against an actual superhuman.

Akira noticed that his body was moving much better than before. He was not surprised by that, as a matter of fact, he was more surprised by the fact that Erde was still fending off his attacks.

“This guy is really strong! This is just crazy!”

“I bet it’s from some kind of trump card. Personally speaking, I didn’t expect his trump card to boost his fighting power by this much.”

“You didn’t expect that?! Alpha, are we really going to be okay?”

“Of course. Akira, if you have the time to complain, it’s better to use that leeway to focus on the fight, you know? You still have a long way to go, seeing that things make you waver when you know that it doesn’t work right away.”

“I know, I know!”

Exchanging words like that in the middle of an intense battle helped Akira to regain some calmness. That helped boost his chance of winning. His mental state was built from a world where life and death battles were normal. It had turned into strength to help him survive. While he was dodging the shock waves, Akira readied his AF anti-material cannon.

Akira understood that it was not a weapon to be used in a closed space. In the worst-case scenario, it might even destroy the transport vehicle, which he would have to pay for later. Even so, he did not hesitate as he pulled the trigger.

A blinding ray of light engulfed the room and struck Erde. However, that pillar of light was deflected by his right hand. It drilled a hole through the ceiling. This outcome was something Akira did not expect at all.

“You got to be kidding me!? He even blocked that too!? Even the white powered suits outside could not block that, you know!?”

“Unfortunately, the enhanced dust particle significantly lowered its firepower. If it was under normal circumstances, that would have killed him.”

“Give me a break already. Alpha, what’s the plan? I have nothing stronger than this cannon.”

“Don’t worry. It’s not like he was able to fully block it. Although it was not enough to kill him right away, it did damage his arm. Look. He hasn’t moved from that place, right?”

Akira knitted his eyebrows and looked at Erde. It was true that Erde’s stance had not changed. He remained unmoving from when he blocked the annihilating light with his right hand. He had a stern look on his face, but he did not seem to be wavering and his right hand seemed completely undamaged.

“To be honest, it’s not all that great to hear that I was finally able to stop him in place for just a moment with that attack, you know? Also, he doesn’t seem injured at all!”

“That’s not true. Anyways, here he comes.”

Erde shifted his stance, his right hand fell limply down. He then started throwing punches again but this time, only with his left arm.

Akira jumped sideways to avoid the incoming shock wave. Moreover, this time, it was Akira who took the initiative to close the distance. He slipped through the repeating shock wave from the only arm swinging. In the meantime, he used his dual LEO multi-rifles to shoot at Erde. The bullets and the shockwave collided and ricocheted inside the room.

Erde’s face twitched.

[We’re evenly matched even in this situation!? Sakashita Heavy Industry has an excellent escort!]

Erde was an enhanced human. Although he did not replace his body parts with mechanical parts like cyborgs, he used nanomachines to enhance his cells to the level of those cyborgs. His physical strength is already well within the realm of beings considered to be superhuman. And with the help of forcefield armour technology, he could easily rip through powered suits and tanks with only just his body. That was also the reason why he was able to block Akira’s AF anti-material cannon.

To top it off, he used all of his trump cards. By sacrificing the cells that were assimilated with the nanomachines, he was able to boost his physical strength even further past his limit. In exchange for that boost, he was only able to keep that up for at most 5 minutes. In short, after that, he would have completely sacrificed his own body and died.

Using this even for 10 seconds was enough to put his body under intense stress. His physical strength would diminish greatly afterwards. The reason why he used his trump card even knowing the risks involved was because he recognised Akira's skill. At the same time, it was also because he thought that it would be enough to kill Akira right away.

His guess was wrong. Erde was surprised at how powerful Akira was since he thought that Akira had run out of trump cards. Akira suddenly moved like a completely different person. If Akira fought like how he did during their initial exchange, he would not even have had the chance to use his AF anti-material cannon.

[Dammit! I misjudged the time to use my trump card! But I can't afford to lose here!]

In such a short span of time, both sides rampaged around with their superhuman strength. The room could not contain their rampage and was turned into a mess. The decorations on the floor and on the ceiling were all destroyed and the frames of the transport vehicle were in full view.

A part of the room was filled with the holes from Akira's C bullets. To top it off, Erde's kicks and punches left craters within the room. The transport vehicle was already greatly damaged because of their battle. A battle between these 2 people started to cause the chassis of the transport vehicle to bend outwards.

The overwhelming forcefrom Erde's attacks was enough to bend the isolation room out of its original shape. Akira managed to survive that battle using technical skills.

Erde's technical skill was in no way inferior. He was a skilled close-range fighter with superhuman strength. The combination of his power and skill

was enough to ensure victory against multiple powered suits in close combat. The only thing one could criticize him for his skill was that he was more used to fighting in his normal state rather than his current enhanced state.

Naturally, Alpha did not let that side, she used the opening caused by that unfamiliarity and allowed Akira to withstand the battle despite his disadvantage.

The expensive medicine that Akira had been excessively using ever since he started working as a Hunter, was pumped full of old-world healing technology. Especially the one that he had taken from the Kuzusuhara ruin. It was medicine made by old-world doctors. That caused all his injuries up until now to heal under old-world standards. Compared to the current world's standard that was filled with holes, the old-world standard could be considered as a full-body renovation. Thanks to that, Akira was turned into a superhuman, bit by bit.

That was also the reason why Alpha did not recommend Akira sell those medicines to get better equipment during the beginning of his career. She decided that using them was more beneficial in the long run compared to just selling them for equipment.

Moreover, even after obtaining a strengthened body, he also spent his days under gruelling training. The augmented suits that he used were always set to ignore the safety limit. They were always pushed to the point where it was just enough not to get him killed, allowing its output to be increased to its utmost limit. This further pushed Akira's strength into the area of the superhuman.

But even so, that alone was still not enough against Erde. It was only with the conscious intervention permission that Akira gave to Alpha, that he was able to execute techniques that no normal human could do. It allowed Akira to acquire superhuman skills on top of his superhuman strength. He barely managed to hold out against Erde using the power that he was not used to.

Unfortunately, even after going that far, it was still not enough. Erde, who was getting more familiar with his enhanced strength bit by bit during the

battle, tilted the scale little by little. Eventually, his chance came. Erde's intense kick threw Akira's rifles off his hands.

Erde saw that as an opportunity, and he quickly closed the distance between them. The 2 LEO rifles that were thrown out of Akira's hand spun and went behind him. But they suddenly stopped and fixed their aims toward Erde's back.

Erde had fully expected that to happen.

[Knew it! He did that deliberately! He's trying to force me to evade the shots!]

Erde believed that Akira was planning to use his AF anti-material cannon once he attempted to evade it. This time, Akira would be shooting from a closer distance. Even so, Erde made his resolve and pushed forward.

As he predicted, the LEO rifles behind him released shots. Erde blocked the bullets using the projecting forcefield armour on his back. Meanwhile, from the front, he could see Akira preparing his AF anti-material cannon. However, Erde did not show any signs of evading. Instead, he leapt forward, not giving Akira enough time to fix his aim.

Out of his expectation, even before Akira was able to lock his aim, he had already pulled down the trigger. He released a ray of light from his AF anti-material cannon. Although it was unable to get a straight hit, it was still better than nothing. Moreover, it should be enough to stop his opponent in their tracks. In the middle of a high-speed battle where even blinking was fatal, in a situation when it was possible to see the opponent's rifle, veterans tend to get away from the muzzle by pure reflex.

But Erde had also expected that as well. He focused his forcefield armour to his left hand, completely identified where the AF anti-material cannon was aiming and released a punch that blocked that beam of annihilation and aimed at Akira at the same time.

The punch was packed with the power of a superhuman. It deflected the beam and pushed forward with enough power that could easily destroy even

powered suits.

In the middle of that do-or-die intense exchange, Erde was surprised. That beam felt abnormally light. In order to break through the AF anti-material cannon's attack and deal a killing blow to Akira, Erde continued to push his fist with everything he had. However, because the resistance was far lighter than he had assumed, he got a little off balance.

Right at the next moment, Erde's attack completely destroyed Akira's AF anti-material cannon. Rather than breaking through the forcefield armour protecting the barrel of the cannon, the shock wave threw the cannon off Akira's hand, peeled it off from his augmented suit, and blew it back.

At the same time, Akira evaded Erde's punch and stepped forward. He readied his stance and drove a straight punch toward Erde. It was a beautifully executed punch thanks to Alpha's support. At that moment, Akira did not have a strike stronger than this.

Even so, that attack should not have been enough to break through Erde's defences. Unfortunately for Erde, the forcefield armour that he projected behind his back to defend himself from the bullets and his left hand to deflect the AF anti-material cannon caused the forcefield armour in other places to be thinner than usual. To top it off, he was still moving forward thanks to momentum. His momentum would have been lost if the shot that he deflected back then was the normal AF anti-material cannon's output.

In truth, Akira had already run out of AF anti-material ammo. That ray of light was nothing more than dense light created using leftover energy.

But that was the key that granted Akira victory, allowing him to slip through Erde's attack and hit him with a counter punch.

Akira was the first to fall, he had squeezed everything he had. The backlash caused his knees to buckle. He first leaned forward, kneeled, and then fell forward.

As Akira was lying on the ground, his eyes were fixed on Erde, who was still standing there. Finally, Erde smiled and congratulated him.

“…Well done.”

Akira could see from his back that there was a large hole that went through Erde’s chest. It was a hole created by Akira’s punch. Erde’s smile was one that was filled with appreciation toward Akira, which also had a tinge of remorse.

“…Torpa… Salza…Forgive me, I lost…”

Erde could only use his final words to plead for forgiveness before he crashed onto the ground and remained motionless.

Akira was still vigilant. He managed to push himself up and checked on Erde. That was when Alpha spoke to him.

“Akira, it’s okay. We won.”

“…With only that injury?”

Even after he was declared victorious, Akira still had a stern look on his face. Although Erde had a hole in his body, he still had his head and four limbs. So, it did not feel like he had won.

After all, there were people who could still laugh only with a head left. There were also people who still could fight without a head. Akira had already experienced both situations, so he was still doubtful that he had won.

Alpha once again said.

“Don’t worry, he’s dead. Or at least, he’s in no condition to continue fighting.”

“…Is that so?”

Akira understood that at least Erde no longer posed any threat to him. But he still looked tense. He tried to stand up but tripped over. Therefore, he decided to crawl to pick up his LEO multi rifles.

“…Alpha, how’s the situation?”

“There is no enemy signal in the area.”

“…I guess that’s it for now, huh…”

After that, Akira managed to return to where Hikaru was locked and lightly knocked on the door.

“Hikaru, are you still alive?”

Even Hikaru, who was locked inside the large strong locker, could feel the room tremble, and hear the sound of the intense battle outside. It was easy to imagine just how damaged the room was. It greatly frightened her but she then somehow managed to return a reply.

“Y-Yeah, somehow. H-how is it over there?”

“Well…”

Akira looked around the room. It looked as if a swarm of monsters just rampaged here.

“…Anyway, those 3 guys that were trying to kidnap you are already dead. Though, I don’t know if there are more out there or not. I’m sorry, but I’m already at my limit. If another one comes, I don’t think I can fight anymore.”

Alpha suddenly interjected.

“Akira, don’t move, it’s dangerous.”

“More enemies?”

“No, but it’s still dangerous.”

Alpha pointed toward the ceiling. Right at that moment, a huge finger broke through the ceiling followed by another finger, they grabbed the ceiling and tore it off. Akira squinted his eyes on the scene of the sky that was laid in

front of him. At the same time, the powered suit that owned those fingers showed itself. It was Tatsukawa.

An amused voice could be heard from the powered suit's speaker.

"Oh, it's already over, huh… Hm? You're… Akira, right? So, it was you, huh?"

Akira was really surprised.

"Whoah there, what the heck are you doing?"

"I detected someone fighting intensely inside the room, so I decided to check it. The escort team said that it was fine to damage the transport vehicle if it's only little and since I thought that it was too much work to walk around, I was thinking of joining the fight with my powered suit."

"I-I see."

Akira's surprised face was mixed with exasperation.

The ripped-off ceiling allowed the enhanced dust particle to quickly disperse, lowering its density in a short time. Thanks to that, the jamming also weakened. Hikaru, who noticed that, immediately contacted the escort team and shouted.

"Akira! The connection is back! We need to call for help…"

"Ah, yes, it's already here."

"Eh?"

Tatsukawa's voice echoed.

"Is there someone inside that locker? If you can't open the door, I can help you."

"Ah, yes, please."

Akira knew that he had exhausted the energy pack for his augmented suit, so he just stepped aside so as to not get in the way. The powered suit then reached for the locker's door and ripped it off.

Hikaru, who was only in her underwear, was finally let out. She stood frozen from the scene in front of her, but Tatsukawa's apologetic voice pulled her back to reality.

"Whoops, sorry."

Hikaru turned to Akira. Akira did not say anything and just turned around.

Inside the half-destroyed room, Hikaru shrieked and tried to find something to hide her skin.

The battle between Akira and Erde plus Tatsukawa, who ripped off a part of the room, caused considerable damage to the transport vehicle. However, considering that it was because there were some people who were aiming to kidnap an old-world connector from Sakashta Heavy Industry, the damage was considered to only be superficial. That was because the squad sent to kidnap Hikaru was a relatively small squad.

In reality, Erde and his team thought that Hikaru was only a decoy. But they did not expect Akira to be that strong, because of that, they thought that Hikaru was really an old-world connector. They originally planned to just kidnap her and check if she was really an old-world connector before bringing her to the main squad.

Meanwhile, the main squad was aiming for the one that they thought to be the real one. Shirou was in the transport truck number 8. Just like Akira, Shirou's room was also an isolation room, as matter of fact, his room was built to be even sturdier. That room was also located deep in the middle of the transport vehicle. At the moment, the area around that isolation room was completely destroyed, leaving only the isolation room intact. It was as if the isolation room was thrown from the sky to the top of a pile of rubble.

Hammerz, who just finished his job, was standing in the middle of that rubble and sighed.

“…Good grief. In the end, I’m the only one who had to work hard, huh?”

The area was littered with dead corpses. It was the main squad from Erde’s team. Many of them were enhanced superhumans like Erde. Some of them were even armed with heavy armour. But Hammerz, Shirou’s only bodyguard, took all of them out all by himself.

Superhuman — Hammerz demonstrated the true meaning behind that word.

Although the special armour on his back was badly damaged, Hammerz himself had only light injuries, he could just replace his armour later. He did not seem like someone who was responsible for that carnage. Although he looked tired, he was still standing straight. There also was no sign of fatigue from an intense battle.

Hammerz banged the door to the isolation room and Shirou replied from inside.

“Oh, are you done?”

Shirou said so casually, due to the fatigue, it really annoyed Hammerz.

“Don’t give me that! Didn’t I tell you to call for help!? Why did you not do so?!”

“I did call for help, but the jamming prevent me from making a connection.”

“Jamming? Like hell jamming would work on an old-world connector like you!”

In contrast to Hammerz’s irritated voice, Shirou replied with a mix of exasperation.

“I’ll remind you here, just because I’m an old-world connector, that doesn’t mean I can do everything. The help request just wouldn’t get through. It’s not like I can do anything about that, you know? Ah, by the way, since I couldn’t send the help request to the escort team’s HQ, I sent one to Sakashita Heavy Industry.”

“Just how did you connect to a facility that is so far away from here when you can’t contact the escort team’s HQ which is nearby?”

“That’s because I was using an old-world line connect to the facility while I can only use a normal line to contact HQ. So, the effect of the jamming particle is different.”

Hammerz accepted that excuse and sighed to help himself calm down.

“…I see, so then, how’s the jamming right now?”

“I’m still trying. Maybe it will work after we wait for a while. But still, as expected, the escort team should have noticed it after making this much ruckus, no?”

“Probably. I don’t know who these people are and where they came from, but since the escort team doesn’t seem to have noticed them even after they made this much of a mess, I bet they did something. In the worst-case scenario, they might never notice unless we inform them first. So, hurry up with the connection.”

“I’m on it already. Oh! It’s back.”

Hammerz frowned.

“Why did it return at this time?”

“That’s just how the world works. Just like how you never find the thing that you’re looking for but can easily find it when you’re not looking for it.”

In reaction to Shirou’s casual excuse, Hammerz heaved a heavy sigh.

Silavin: Patreon drops back down the 2 chapters a week.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 243, Escape

Index

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Editor: Silavin

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In the commander room of the escort team's HQ, the staff finally sighed in relief now that they had finally overcome the predicament. They then immediately moved on to their next job. One of the officers had a rather irritated expression instead of an exhausted one as he said.

"To think that an old-world connector from Sakashita Heavy Industry is in the lost transport vehicles… As well as those people trying to kidnap them. Good grief. I know that it's not like we can refuse, but it would be great if they told us beforehand, you know?"

Another officer chuckled and replied.

"In the end, the old-world connector is fine and we were able to quickly take control of the situation since we immediately gave that order to recapture the lost transport vehicles. We did our job. At least we can use that as cover."

"Though, they could make a complaint, saying that we should have given that order sooner."

They already knew that the Hunters sent to check transport 6 and 8 did not come back because Erde's team had ambushed them. It seemed that they followed the standard checking protocol and got ambushed inside the hallway of the transport vehicle.

Akira was able to reach his room without encountering one of those ambushes, but it was partially due to luck. One of the main factors was because his room was located outside the hallways, along patrol routes. Thus, he could head straight to his room without taking any detour. This meant that he would not have encountered those hallway ambushes that were set to buy time.

The Hunters that were sent to do something as trivial as checking on the situation were of course no match against the team sent to kidnap an old-world connector from Sakashita Heavy Industry. They were quickly silenced in order to buy time.

The decision to immediately tell the rest of the Hunters to secure the transport vehicles was correct albeit rather late.

The escort team officer tried to cheer up the other officer.

"No one told us that we're transporting an old-world connector, so I bet they can't criticize us just because of that."

"I hope you're right."

Although they would not be held responsible, it did not change the fact that there was still a mountain of problems that they had to go through later. That was why that 'cheer up' attempt only ended as an attempt.

Another staff member then reported in with a rather confused expression.

"It's about that old-world connector. We've received a message from Sakashita Heavy Industry. It seems to be a very important message pertaining to the security for that old-world connector."

The officer sighed exasperatedly before replying.

“So basically, they’re saying to prioritize that old-world connector now that we know we have one here, huh? The gull of these people. So, what is it?”

After listening to the content, the officer frowned.

“So… They’re basically telling us to do that on our own, huh?”

“Well, it’s our job to manage the Hunters in the convoy after all. So, it’s understandable. What’s the plan now?”

“…We can’t refuse. So, tell them that we’ll do our best.”

“Roger that!”

The officer heaved a huge sigh now that a problem immediately appeared, which he had expected.

Melshia returned to her guard post, she was surveying the surrounding for an ambush from the rooftop.

“That was pretty rough. Tatsukawa, didn’t your intuition say that we won’t face anything big?”

Tatsukawa replied casually.

“What are you talking about? My intuition was on point. I said that we’ll be mostly free, I didn’t say that nothing would happen. not to mention that we were able to take our time after repelling those bugs.”

Melshia chuckled.

“Is that so? Well, it might be better if I say it was fast, huh?”

“Yikes, that was uncalled for.”

As they were talking while laughing, suddenly, the escort team contacted Melshia. After listening to the message, Melshia frowned and replied.

“Do you know that you’re basically looking down on us by saying that?”

The officer who called Melshia understood that it soured her mood. But even so, he still pushed forward his request albeit while sounding a bit apologetic.

“I know, but it’s a request from Sakashita. We don’t have any other choice but to cooperate. Of course, they’re saying that they’ll be paying a suitable reward for it. Moreover, it’s not compulsory. With that being said, I’m sure there’s no need for me to even tell you how problematic it is to leave a track record saying that you’ve refused a request from Sakashita. I believe that it’s not a bad offer, so would you please cooperate?”

Both Melshia and the officer had their position to consider. Because of that, both of them could not simply back off. But since the request was coming from Sakashita, the escort team basically has the upper hand.

Both sides understood that. The escort team tried to push the request using rewards instead of threats. Nonetheless, they still needed to make a threat. Because of that, Melshia decided to fold.

“At least give us some time to consider it. After all, it’s not like I want to force my men as well. Is that fine?”

“Very well, sorry, and thank you.”

The call ended. Melshia sighed. Tatsukawa lightly smiled and said to her.

“Did they dump something problematic on you? What is it?”

“They said they want some Hunters to escort an old-world connector.”

“Hm? That would give a good track record and a good reward, right? What’s the problem?”

“The requirement for the escort is just not right. Basically, they’re asking for a cyborg and to give some level of control to that cyborg’s body.”

Tatsukawa smiled bitterly, he finally understood why Melshia gave that reaction.

“Oh, that’s rather haughty for them.”

Under normal circumstances, the full right of a cyborg’s body was in the hand of its respectful owner. Any abnormal circumstances mostly appeared when they exchanged parts in a clinic. For those who replaced their entire body with mechanical parts excluding their brains, giving control right to someone else was not a small matter.

Sakashita’s demand was equivalent to asking a cyborg for its life, it was a very arrogant and selfish demand with zero regard for the other side. It would not be strange to take that as a declaration of war. Although, of course, Sakashita would be the one to win. The only choices were either to die or to comply and give barely enough control to satisfy them.

Of course, Sakashita had no wish to act in such a manner that bought the grudge of many. It would only lead to more expenses after all. But that also meant if there was a need or profit in it, they would not shy away from doing so. An escort mission for an old-world connector affiliated with a large corporation satisfied that prerequisite,

Melshia then said to Tatsukawa with a serious expression.

“So, what’s the plan? Although it’s from Sakashita, it doesn’t change the fact that they’re treating us disrespectfully. What do you think?”

“Even if you ask me so, it’s not like we have the choice to say no, right? It’s a good thing that both you and I don’t satisfy that prerequisite. I’ll ask the men who want to take it and send them away, if no one volunteered, then we have no other choice but to say sorry and refuse.”

“Are you okay with that?”

Tatsukawa was a bit confused seeing Melshia asking him with such a serious expression.

“Do you find anything you don’t like with that?”

“If it was the past you, you would have immediately refused that offer just from how they’re treating us.”

“Well, if I do that, this team would not be able to survive for long. It would be a huge waste since it has become this big.”

“In that case, we can just rebuild a new team, no?”

Melshia kept pushing questions with a serious look.

Tatsukawa smiled wryly and embraced Melshia.

“Although I said our team, it’s mostly thanks to you that it became this big. Don’t throw it away just because I don’t like how Sakashita is treating us. That would be a huge waste, you know? Though, if you say that you don’t care, it will be completely up to you. You can toss aside this team.”

“…Is that so? Well, in that case, let’s keep it.”

Melshia smiled happily and embraced Tatsukawa back.

“You’ve really calmed down.”

“Well, we’ve grown up since then. So, there’s no need to take on those reckless actions like what we did in the past.”

“Yeah.”

Seeing the blushing Tatsukawa, Melshia smiled mischievously.

fight, he was actually quite tired and had received some damage as well. Therefore, to be able to perform at his absolute best, he had to leave the room to rest and heal.

In place of Hammerz, a few Hunters were posted in Shirou's room. They were guarding Shirou while Hammerz was not there. All of them were cyborgs and part of their control rights were given to Hammerz. In the worst-case scenario, Hammerz could take control of their bodies to buy some time until he returns.

All the Hunters there understood their position, that was why they were not amused at all with the situation.

Shirou sounded rather apologetic. Though, he still had his usual smile as he welcomed those Hunters.

"Welcome welcome! I'll be in your care! You can go ahead and relax!"

The Hunters looked annoyedly at Shirou. They understood that he was someone important from Sakashita Heavy Industry and souring his mood would result in nothing good. Normally, they would be careful so as not to offend him. Although they knew that, they still gave Shirou stinky eyes.

Shirou acted surprised.

"Whoah, don't give me that look. I know that it's not fun giving the control rights of your cyborg's body to someone else, even I think that it's not pleasant, you know? But you see, it's a command from the top, I can't really refuse it"

One of the guys annoyedly said.

"Humph, we're in this situation basically because of you."

"Come one now, don't say that. Calm down. Although you guys will be guarding me, it's not like you guys have any work to do. So, you can just eat and drink until we reach the city. If you put aside your grudge against

me, it’s basically a very easy job with a huge reward, you know? Come in and just relax.”

Shirou sat on a nearby sofa and invited the others to take a seat too. He then took a bite of the meal on the table and made a blissful expression.

“Are you not going to try it? It’s really delicious, you know? Though it might be weird for me to say this, it’s a meal prepared by Sakashita to keep me in a good mood. I bet you’ll never taste something like this before, you know?”

Shirou smiled and invited the others to take a few bites as well.

The Hunters there knew that it would be bad if no one volunteered for that request from Sakashita Heavy Industry, so they were akin to a bunch of sacrifices that were sent here. That was why they did not find their situation amusing at all. Even so, after some time, the feeling of repulsion got worn down and some people started to take a seat and had a taste of the meal, the others followed suit not too long after that.

The taste of the dish quickly blew away their grudge as one of them inadvertently exclaimed.

“Woah, this is really good!”

“Told you.”

Shirou smugly smiled. He then once again invited the others to join. The rest looked at each other before eventually joining the Hunters that were already eating there.

But one of them did not bulge, Shirou looked confusedly at him and asked.

“You’re not going to join? It’s not poisoned, you know?”

That man answered back half shouting.

“I can’t eat food, you know?!”

That guy had a cyborg body that did not allow him to digest food. Shirou, who noticed that, was exaggeratedly surprised, but his surprised face quickly changed to a smile.

“Ohh, I see, I have an idea! Wait for a bit!”

Shirou left his seat and returned back later with a large box with a device inside it.

“In that case, you can borrow this. It’s a special VR device. Although it might not fill your stomach, it can at least let you enjoy the taste. Though in the end, it’s just a VR food, so it might be not that satisfying.”

“Do you really think this will be enough for me…?”

“Well, you can also use it for something else, this is just a secret between us, but you can enjoy erotic stuff too with this VR too.”

The guy suddenly stopped, Shirou’s smile widened as he continued.

“It’s amazing, amazingly erotic.”

There were many cyborgs who had to sacrifice their lust, desire for food, and desire for sleep in order to get a body fully specialized for battle. Due to the limitation of the current world’s technology, high-quality bodies demanded expensive body parts. Even so, there were still people who claim that it just did not feel the same. That was why this was a very tempting offer.

“…Is it that amazing?”

“But of course, after all, it’s prepared by Sakashita to keep me in a good mood. Well, though, if it’s me, I might be able to get a real one if I just ask. But let me tell you this. It’s pretty amazing even for me too, yep, amazingly erotic.”

“B-But how about the safety…”

“Sakashita prepared it for me, so I bet it’s totally safe”

“But, how about the connection with the cyborg body? It’s not that simple, right?”

That was when finally Shirou frowned and apologetically said.

“Well, about that, it’s true that normally it won’t work, but since I have limited control of your cyborg body, we might be able to use it.”

“Ah, I see…”

The guy then frowned, normally, he would never let others take control of his body for something like this, but since he had already done that, he might as well use it for his own advantage.

Shirou then continued.

“Although you can take back any of the food you want, I’m afraid that’s not the case for this VR device. If you want to try, this is your only chance. I do feel sorry for making you do this, that’s why I’m making this an exception. So, do you want to have a try? Well, I won’t force you though. It would be weird to force people to try this when they don’t want to after all.”

The guy hesitated, another guy suddenly interjected.

“Can I try then?”

“Sure, go ahead.”

Shirou replied with a smile.

After that, Shirou connected the VR to the other guy and turned it on. From others’ point of view, that guy only seemed to be sitting without doing anything. But with his 5 senses connected to the VR, although he only sat there without moving, he was actually moving around inside the VR.

After 10 minutes of using the VR, he then opened his eyes. The guy next to him asked him, piqued.

“So, how was it?”

“…That was really something.”

That short impression left much to be questioned, but it was clear from his reaction that it was indeed something amazing.

The other guys looked at Shirou.

“Can we try it too?”

“Sure sure, feel free to use it. Though there’s a limit on how many people can use it at the same time, so you guys can only use it in turns.”

The guys that hesitated at the start finally joined in too after hearing the impression from the others. It did not take long for them to start using it in turns.

__*__*__*__

As Hammerz was getting his injuries treated in the infirmary. He was also watching Shirou through the shared vision of the cyborgs that he had a shared control over. Hammerz frowned as the Hunters were looking at naked girls, which he could watch as well.

“What the heck are they doing over there?”

He quickly called Shirou, and Shirou then waved at him through the Hunter’s vision.

“What is it? I’m still here and not doing anything you know?”

“Some of the Hunters over there have weird things in their sights, you know? What did you do to them?”

“Oh, about that, I basically lend them the VR device, so I bet it’s from the VR.”

After hearing Shirous’s explanation, Hammerz sighed.

“Listen here. They are bodyguards, okay? Just what do you think you’re doing?”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? Just let them play for a bit. I believe things should calm down after that incident. Moreover, we have some control over their bodies and are basically forcing them to guard me. It’s scary for me to be here surrounded by angry people you know? So, at least let them enjoy this.”

“I didn’t know you were that much of a coward.”

“That’s because I always have a reassuring bodyguard next to me.”

In response to Shirou’s rather empty compliment that he said in his usual casual tone, Hammerz gave up and thought to himself. [Well, this should at least not bring me any trouble.]

“Anyway, only send video feedback from the real world, don’t allow anything else in.”

“Yes yes.”

Shirou then closed the call and the video feedback sent from the Hunters were immediately cleaned up. Some of them seem to be closing their eyes, so what was shown only reflected endless darkness, while some had their eyes fixed on the same point as if they were stationary cameras. From there, Hammerz could see Shirou sharing laughs with the Hunters.

Seeing that, Hammerz thought that it should be fine and returned to treat his injuries.

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As for Akira, after he received some treatments to make sure that his life was not in danger, he went and lay on a bed. He had already been removed from the escort team roster because of the damage to both his body and equipment. He just had to wait until the convoy reached the city.

Hikaru was sitting next to him. After giving her report to the escort team and Kugamayama city, she was released and finally could relax.

Hikaru glanced at Akira’s sleeping face and thought.

[Judging from the condition of the isolation room, it is easy to imagine how intense the battle was and how powerful Akira is. Although his might still instilled fear within, it still gives me a sense of reassurance. I guess the only thing that draws the line between both is whether his power is directed at me or not…]

Akira had killed hundreds of people outside the walls. In that situation where it would not be strange if he abandoned her, he still chose to save her even if it meant that he almost got killed because of it. Hikaru just could not understand this person called Akira.

[It might be his loyalty toward his contract, but that doesn’t sound right. After all, it’s just as he said, not saving me does not violate his contract…]

With that strange feeling welling, she looked at the sleeping Akira and mumbled.

“Say, why did you save me?”

“And here I went out of my way to save you because you asked me to, isn’t that question a little bit too insensitive?”

Hikaru was surprised, she did not expect Akira would answer her. Akira then pushed his body up.

“Y-You were awake?”

“I just woke up.”

After an awkward pause, knowing that Akira had heard her, Hikaru thought that she should rephrase the question.

“I’ll say this again, thank you for saving me. So, basically, considering the situation back there, I thought that it would be normal to abandon me instead. That’s why I thought it was weird that you didn’t. That’s all there is to it. So, can you tell me? Why did you save me?”

Akira casually replied.

“If someone asks me for help, as long as helping them doesn’t put me in trouble, I don’t see why not. Though it depends on the situation as well.”

“Although it might get you killed?”

“Dying is a normal thing for Hunters. It’s nothing out of the ordinary. Ahh, now that you mention it, that might sound weird for you since you live in the inner wall, huh?”

Hikaru’s face turned serious.

“…Uhm, it might be weird to hear this from me, but you already killed quite a lot of people outside the wall, right? Didn’t they beg for their lives?”

“Well, it usually happens when we are shooting at each other. So, it mostly ends with an instant kill. Actually, I don’t recall them having the chance to beg for their lives. There’s also no reason why I have to listen to their plea right after we were trying to kill each other, right?”

Hikaru raised her eyebrows.

“Uhhh, Akira, do you get attacked that often? Although you’re this strong? It’s really hard to believe.”

“It’s not like I was this strong right from the start. The slum is a place where it’s expected for you to get robbed when you’re just a child with 300 Aurum in your pocket. The longer you survive in such a place, the more people you would kill. That’s just how it is. After all, I don’t want to die.”

Akira said so casually, allowing Hikaru to have a glimpse of how cruel his past was and it helped her understand his line of thinking.

“…I see, it must have been hard.”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

That was when Akira suddenly pressed Hikaru.

“Ah, by the way, since you asked me the reason why I helped you, it reminds me of what you said. You mentioned that you’ll do anything, right?”

“Y-yeah I did.”

Although she did say that in a spur of the moment and that it was nothing but a verbal promise, it was still a rather reckless statement made to a powerful Hunter. Hikaru was a bit scared of what he might ask her.

Akira then said to her with a serious face.

“As you promised, I’ll have you get me a good enough reward. Wait. No. At least enough to pay for my expenses. I ended up using a lot of expensive bullets and medicines, I also broke most of my equipment too. Especially the one that I got with a huge discount thanks to my connection, I heard that they were originally very expensive. I would hate to end up in red after going through all of that. So please help me with that one.”

This request completely caught Hikaru off-guard. It was a completely understandable request though. After that, she smiled confidently and swore.

“Just leave it to me. Negotiation is my speciality after all. I’m also indebted to you for saving me as well, so I’ll be sure to do my best to get your reward.”

Akira sighed in relief and pressed once more just to be safe.

“I’m really counting on you for this one, okay? You understand that, right?”

“Don’t worry. You’re pretty famous as a new rising star in my department. Even Kibayashi-san also describes you as an amazing person, you know?”

Seeing that Akira finally seemed to be relieved, Hikaru leaked a bitter smile.

…

The convoy finally received extra reinforcement for the escort. They were the squad sent from Kugamayama city by Sakashita. It included several powered suits and a few people with heavy augmented suits, all of them went to their respective transport vehicles.

Yanagisawa joined the convoy as well. He received an emergency report and went to collect Shirou himself. Hammerz finished his treatment and went to the waiting room.

Yanagisawa was smiling happily as he started the conversation.

“I heard that you went through quite an ordeal, I’m glad that everyone is okay.”

In contrast to Yanagisawa, Hammerz showed caution toward him.

“The escort duty should be given to us until we reach Kugamayama city. If you want us to hand him over, we will have to go through Director Sugadome first, though?”

“But of course. Since I’m already here, I was only thinking of at least introducing myself. Nothing more.”

The door to the isolation room opened, Yanagisawa and his men entered. As expected, the escorts stopped playing with the VR and stood ready.

Yanagisawa scanned the room, but Shirou was nowhere to be found.

“Where is him?”

Hammerz had a bad feeling and asked the Hunter escorts.

“Where’s Shirou? Is he in the bathroom?”

The Hunters frowned and pointed to the sofa.

“Eh? What are you talking about? He’s right over there.”

There was no one sitting on the sofa. Hammerz frowned and checked the image from the sofa with the Hunters' visions instead of his own eyes. And indeed, there he was, Shirou looked apologetically while waving at Hammerz.

Hammerz quickly understood what was going on and inadvertently roared.

"That damn brat!!!"

Shirou controlled the Hunters' five senses and showed them an illusion. In short, he had escaped the room.

Hammerz angrily went to his comm to give a report, but he immediately stopped that and took some distance from Yanagisawa by pure reflex.

As expected, Yanagisawa also understood what was going on. Right at that moment, his usual smile immediately vanished, and his face turned emotionless. His expression was devoid of everything except for one thing, a sense of pressure that radiated terror.

It was a good thing that the Hunters had control of their bodies hijacked. If they were free to move, they would have tried to shoot Yanagisawa. Most likely resulting in Yanagisawa killing all of them.

The Hunters were overwhelmed by Yanagisawa's presence. If they could not control their emotions, they would have fallen to a state of dread. Hammerz was also showing a strong sense of caution toward Yanagisawa, the mood inside the room turned intense in a blink of an eye.

Yanagisawa then returned back to his usual self. He immediately retracted the terror that he was unconsciously radiating. The dreadful terror that blanketed the room immediately vanished.

Yanagisawa took a deep breath to help him calm down. He smiled politely at Hammerz and said to him.

"…My apologies. It seems that Shirou-kun has been lost somewhere, huh? Let's ask for help to find him."

“You’re right…”

Although Hammerz was being very cautious of Yanagisawa, since he had regained his calm, he also immediately shifted his focus to solve the current dilemma.

At that point in time, Shirou was already outside the transport vehicle. He went to the hangar with a group of his Hunter escorts, which he had hacked. He then hopped on a powered suit that he had prepared beforehand and left, using a patrol mission as a disguise.

None of his escorts was suspicious of him as they were moving around the transport vehicle. When someone got suspicious, Shirou would reconnect them to display that they were still inside of his room together with the other Hunters.

After the Hunters tried the VR and had their turn, they did not realize that their senses never left the VR world. This caused them not to realize that they had gone out of the room with Shirou.

As unmanned powered suits were patrolling around, outside the transport vehicle, Shirou used fighting an incoming monster as an excuse and left the convoy. Inside that powered suit, Shirou lightly laughed and said.

“I’m sorry, Hammerz, it’s just a small detour. Don’t worry, I won’t cause you any trouble. Just so you know, I’m being considerate of you here.”

His expression then turned serious.

“I’ll be able to move around freely for the time being. So just wait for me.”

His goal for escaping the convoy was not to regain his freedom. It was just a means to do something, and in order to accomplish that, Shirou took a long detour to head to Kugamayama city.

After that, rumours that an old-world connector from Sakashita Heavy Industry had infiltrated Kugamayama city started to appear.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 244, Akira's Treatment

Index

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Sterian was one of the top-class restaurants inside Kugamayama city. All the meals served here was among the best of the best, as such, they were also priced way higher than any high-class restaurant in the lower district of Kugamayama city. Even so, the taste of the food they made never made anyone who ate it regret their decision. The decorations and the furniture here were also first-class, boosting the dining experience as well as giving off a glamorous and luxurious atmosphere.

Naturally, it was not cheap to be able to dine here. Customers who went to the restaurant were only the rich. They were the kind of people who could casually pay out a sum that would make anyone in the outer wall crazy.

The private rooms in Sterian were even more expensive and getting a reservation for a room was not easy. It was often used as a negotiation venue for high-ranking officers from various corporations. The success rate of negotiations in these private rooms bolstered its popularity and was extremely helpful to the negotiators of those large corporations.

Akira was invited to one of these rooms. The slightly spacious room was filled with glamorous decorations. A large table was fixed there, covered by

a white luxurious table cloth. Meals that were suitable for the scene were lined up on top of the table.

On the other side of the table, Kibayashi was already sitting in wait, looking extremely happy.

“Well well well, you really never cease to amaze me.”

Thanks to the delicious meal, Akira was in a good mood, but Kibayashi’s smile still rubbed him the wrong way.

“It’s not like I did that because I wanted to.”

“I know, that’s why I really like you.”

Watching Kibayashi laughing merrily, Akira could not help but sigh.

After the transport convoy reached Kugamayama city, Akira was transported to the hospital inside the inner wall together with the rest of the badly injured people. He was then placed under partial house arrest under Sakashita Heavy Industry and was interrogated about what had happened before he was released.

Akira said what was on his mind during the interrogation—‘It’s not like I could do anything about it since I had to fight against those who were there to kidnap Sakashita Heavy Industry’s old-world connector.’ After questioning the others, they did not find anything suspicious and released him.

Although the main subject of the investigation was Shirou’s escape, it was not like Sakashita could simply leak such information out to the public. Because of that, the questioning was much stricter toward those who already knew of the situation.

Kibayashi could not hold back his laughter after listening to Akira’s story, which only irritated him even more.

Akira somehow managed to maintain his mood thanks to the delicious food as he pushed the conversation toward the main topic.

“It’s fine already, isn’t it? Just get into the main subject, why did you invite me here?”

Kibayashi had to finish laughing first before he changed the subject. Even so, he was still trying to calm down his breathing after so much laughter.

“You’re right. You’ve really entertained me. So, I guess it’s only fair to get to the main subject soon. Akira, I have bad news and good news for you.”

Akira frowned.

“Don’t tell me that is actually one bad news and worse news. Something like when I ask you ‘so what is the good news?’ and you’ll say, ‘that one was the good news’ or something like that, right?”

Kibayashi chuckled toward the very paranoid Akira and said to him.

“Don’t worry, it’s really one good news and one bad news. Let’s start with the good news first. We’ve secured the equipment that you’ve ordered.”

Akira raised his eyebrows, while at the same time, he could not help but smile after hearing the news.

“Oh? Is that so?!”

“Yeah. Those are very powerful pieces of equipment. The weapons and the augmented suit that you ordered from the front-line are ones that normally only Hunters with a Hunter Rank of 100 or above can get.”

Akira was ecstatic since it turned out to be even better than he had hoped. But he then frowned and asked Kibayashi a question.

“That’s great!!! Wait? Doesn’t that mean that I can’t buy them then?”

“Normally, yes. But it was possible with the help from Sakashita Heavy Industry, as a reward for your job. Well, I guess it’s more accurate to call them compensation for the trouble that you’ve gone through? They talked to you when you were hospitalized, remember? It’s for that time.”

The work done to fight back Erde's team was treated separately from the escort job. To be more precise, while Akira was in the middle of his job to escort the transport convoy, he had left his post because of the request from Hikaru. According to that, it could be taken as a violation of his contract, which means he could have not received any reward.

But of course, Sakashita Heavy Industry could not afford to do that. After all, that would mean that they were not paying someone who had worked for them. Not to mention, even if a clause was appended to his request after the fact that he had violated his contract, the one who was responsible for Akira, Hikaru, was also under house arrest. Thus a proposal to deal with the reward was sent to Kibayashi instead.

While Akira was hospitalized, Kibayashi contacted him and finished the negotiation regarding that. Because of that, the reward for repelling Erde's team was given in the form of the equipment that Akira had been looking for. They were finally able to secure the already expensive equipment with the equally expensive delivery cost of the front-line equipment.

Akira went through his memory of that time and nodded.

"I see. That wasn't easy but it was worth the trouble. So then, when will they arrive?"

Akira was brimming with expectation, but Kibayashi's expression turned cloudy.

"As I said, I have good news and bad news. That was the end of the good news, it was really good news, right? The next one is the bad news."

Akira reeled back.

"W-what is it?"

"Although it has already been decided that they will transport your equipment from the front-line to here, we still have no estimation of when it will arrive."

“…Well, it is from the front-line of the eastern district after all, so it’s only to be expected that they’ll take quite a lot of time.”

Akira already knew the trouble of transporting stuff from further east. He was a bit relieved since he thought that it was something worse, but it turned out to be something fully understandable. However, as though intending to betray his expectations, Kibayashi then continued.

“Even with that considered, we really have no fixed schedule as to when it will arrive. It can be tomorrow, or maybe next month, or maybe half-a-year later, or even next year. We don’t even have an approximation.”

As expected, Akira did not find the bad news amusing at all.

“Ehhh, what the heck is with that?”

“Well, it’s complicated. Like the transport permit for example. It’s also not that simple when we have to entrust such powerful weaponry to a third-party transport service. With just this troublesome stuff accounted for, it becomes even more difficult than before, you see.”

“…Since we got it from Sakashita Heavy Industry, can’t they do something about that too?”

“That is for them to decide. It’s not like I can do anything about it. Well, I can understand that providing support to purchase these items is much easier than handling its transport. After all, it’s not like Sakashita can just send a long-range inter-city transport vehicle just to ferry your weapons here, right?”

“Hmmm, that’s true.”

The route between Kugamayama and Zegelt was already difficult. It was only to be expected that transport from the front-line would be even more difficult. Although he knew that it would take quite a lot of money, Akira could not even imagine how much that would be. Since he understood that it was unreasonable for Sakashita and Kibayashi to have all the solutions for this, he felt that the whole thing was rather unfortunate.

“I see, so what are the other troublesome stuff?”

“I’m sorry but I can’t say.”

“Haaa.”

Akira could not help but show displeasure. Watching him like that, Kibayashi smiled amusedly and said.

“Well, I don’t think you’ll be happy with the answer either. That’s why, in case you want to know no matter what, I can lend you a hand, you know? But for that, we’ll need a formal Hunter office issued confidentiality contract. The one that Hunters would definitely regret if they breached it. So, do you still want to know? If you still want to know, I can arrange to get the information you want, it’s not like we’re strangers after all.”

“…Is it really that bad?”

“Well, yeah. By the way, it’s a very strictly guarded secret that would be impossible to talk about unless we use this kind of room. That’s why, putting aside whether you accept it or not, don’t leak it outside, okay?”

Akira frowned and shook his head.

“Alright, thanks for the offer but I’ll have to refuse. It seems that it’s better if I don’t know.”

“Is that so? You don’t need to hold back, you know?”

“Yeah. It’s still a no. I bet that it’s something that’s better not to touch.”

“Well, it’s true that if you found out about it, the upper echelons will have you monitored.”

“Give me a break already…”

Suddenly Akira showed suspicion.

“I’ll at least ask you this. You didn’t invite me to this room just so that you can say that to me, right?”

Kibayashi deliberately looked away with his usual joking attitude.

“What are you talking about? It’s a standard treatment for a high-ranking Hunter from the city official so that we can convey the needed information right away when asked.”

“Humph, is that so?”

Kibayashi returned his gaze toward Akira who was looking at him with great suspicion, smiled and spoke.

“I have no plan to try and use cheap tricks on you, you know? After all, you keep entertaining me even without me doing anything. That’s why I’m interested in you, you see. I can’t wait to hear your next adventure.”

Akira twitched, he looked extremely displeased.

“Good grief. Either way, my equipment will be here as long as I wait, so I won’t be doing anything reckless while waiting for it. So, I don’t think there will be anything to amuse you for the time being.”

Even after Akira said that, Kibayashi just smiled and shook his head.

“Well, good luck with that, though, I do think that it is futile. You’ll definitely come up with something to amuse me. Whether you get roped into something or even be the source of that something. Either way, you’ll do something interesting soon enough. That’s just how it is up until now after all. That includes this time as well. You’re just that kind of guy, or am I wrong?”

Akira did not reply and just returned to his meal. Kibayashi also followed suit after that.

The meal left on the table was able to help Akira uplift his mood. But the amount needed to be more than what was available to completely restore his mood.

After Akira cheered up for a bit, he then threw a question to Kibayashi.

“Say, you said that there’s no exact date when the equipment will arrive, right? I know that you can’t exactly get a promised delivery date to a Hunter, but can you at least give me a rough estimation? It’s fine even if you don’t have any evidence to support your estimation.”

“My guess, huh? I’m sorry but that will be difficult. It’s not like I know all the detail. Although I know about the general rules and regulations for the transportations between the cities, I don’t know it well enough. A new rule has just been enacted. I don’t know why it was enacted upon. Though, I have my own guess. However, asking me when this new rule will be revoked and when your transportation can resume, is something impossible for me to say.”

“Is that so? Can you at least tell me the rules?”

“Let’s see…”

Kibayashi hummed for a bit, he then shook his head with a serious look.

“…Sorry, but I can’t. If my guess is correct, people might get suspicious as to why I can come up with such a guess. Though, you’re free to make your own guess as well. Though, I recommend you don’t tell anyone about your own thoughts on the matter. I think that’s all I can say.”

“I see…”

Akira actually found something weird.

“Alpha, it’s about what Kibayashi said…”

Alpha went ahead and warned Akira first.

“I don’t mind telling you my hypothesis, but if you can’t pretend that you don’t know, it’s better if you actually not know it in the first place.”

“I see, it’s fine then.”

“Yep, that’s a good decision.”

After that, Akira continued enjoying the meal, while on the other hand, Kibayashi was curious about something after that exchange and thought.

[…Judging from that rule, I bet that old-world connector or something from Sakashita Heavy Industry has escaped. After all, that rule is way too lax if he was kidnapped. So where did they go? Did that old-world connector just run away from the observer under Sakashita? Could that old-world connector be somewhere around Kugamayama city at the moment? Does Sakashita already know if that is the case? There are many Hunters with unknown origins here, it is the perfect place for people with questionable origins to conceal themselves.]

Kibayashi looked at Akira, Akira frowned and said to him.

“What?”

“Nope, it’s nothing.”

Thinking that something interesting would happen if Akira got in contact with that old-world connector, Kibayashi could not help but to look forward to the next incident and smiled.

__*__*__*__

Around the time Akira was having a meal with Kibayashi. Hikaru was also sitting inside the same restaurant, Sterian. Shizuka was sitting next to her and someone from Kiryou and TOSON were sitting on the other side of the table.

Although she was put under partial house arrest just like Akira after they arrived, Hikaru was still doing her job. After finishing the negotiation with the transport convoy’s side, she was able to secure the reward that Akira asked from her. But they were still discussing how much of his reward would be paid in Aurum, and how much would be paid in the form of an increase in Hunter Rank.

Akira was looking for powerful equipment. But there many of them had Hunter Rank restrictions. Except for one certain exception. Since the restrictions mostly came from the distributors, if the distributor allowed it, the Hunters could purchase those equipment regardless of their Hunter Rank.

Akira did ask Hikaru to be paid in form of better equipment instead of Hunter Rank. That was why she decided to contact Kiryou and TOSON directly. To rope them into the matter. As for the corporation's side, they were also looking to establish strong connections with high ranking Hunters since they tend to purchase high-quality, expensive products. Hikaru thought that it was possible to obtain equipment from the corporations directly despite the Hunter Rank restriction and her guess was right.

The only thing that Hikaru did not expect was that both TOSON and Kiryou asked Shizuka to be present during the negotiation as well.

Personally speaking, Hikaru did not see any reason why a small-time owner of an independent weapon shop had to attend too. But since TOSON and Kiryou expressed that demand rather strongly, she decided to contact Akira. That was when Akira replied with a rather imposing warning telling them not to do anything rude with the assumption that Shizuka would accept the invitation. It came out of the left field for Hikaru as she proceeded with the paperwork and had Shizuka attend the negotiation as well.

During the negotiation, it was obvious that Kiryou and TOSON were being very careful toward Shizuka. Since Hikaru knew that Akira's trust toward Shizuka was strong and that Shizuka's advice had a lot of effect on how Akira would spend his money on equipment, Hikaru was not surprised by how things played out. Though, the way Akira responded was still something that she would have never expected from him.

When Hikaru was asked about what had happened during the escort mission, she explained that she was under a confidentiality contract and only answered what she was allowed to. After hearing what Akira did, Shizuka seemed extremely worried. Kiryou and TOSON thought if it was possible to use that to advertise their products as they asked Hikaru to share the data she had as Akira's operator. The difference in their reaction made

Hikaru a little curious. After all, this was the kind of reaction one would receive from a corporation toward a Hunter working with them.

After that, they eventually closed their negotiation and felt that it was a fruitful one. Both the representatives from TOSON and Kiryou left first since they wanted to work on the equipment order that they had just received, while Shizuka and Hikaru were left behind, chatting about Akira.

After hearing what he was like when Akira first came to Shizuka's shop, Hikaru raised her eyebrows and asked.

"He was that weak? Or more like, he looked just like a normal boy at that time?"

Shizuka remembered back from that time and smiled bitterly with a tint of nostalgia.

"Yep, though it might be weird to hear this, but he did not seem to have that much chance as a Hunter back then. It was as if he would die anytime. That was all that I could see from him back then. To be honest, I have a pretty good intuition, and that is the first time my first impression is wrong."

Hikaru hummed and nodded. She initially thought that Akira might actually be a city agent and that it was just that Shizuka did not know it. But judging from Shizuka's story, Hikaru was surprised to find out that Akira was really a boy who originated from the slums.

[So, he was telling the truth when he said that he was weak in the past, huh? Hmmm, that was a bit unexpected…]

That was when Shizuka suddenly said with a serious face.

"I have a question though, as a city official, what do you think of Akira?

"As a city official, huh?"

"Yes."

Hikaru also turned rather serious.

“I’m really sorry, but if I have to be honest, from the point of view of the city officials, he’s someone really dangerous. Even the permission for him to enter the middle district as well as getting into the transport vehicle were all nothing but temporary permissions. I know it’s not right for me to say this since he saved me, but I can’t use that fact to guarantee that he’s a good Hunter based on the standards within the inner wall. That is my answer from my position.”

Although Hikaru felt that was rather harsh considering that Akira saved her, she still properly answered that question as a city official with a rather apologetic tone. She glanced at Shizuka, wondering if she angered her.

But in contrast to her expectation, Shizuka seemed relieved as she said.

“It’s fine that way.”

Hikaru raised her eyebrows.

“You’re not angry? I’m sure I said some pretty harsh things, you know?”

“It seems that you don’t have a bad impression of him.”

“…Well, he did save me… And almost got killed because of that, so…”

Shizuka looked warmly at Hikaru, she then continued as if to warn Hikaru.

“Unfortunately, Akira often does a lot of dangerous things. At least, even for me who has known him for longer, I can’t honestly say that he’s not a bad kid. Ah, it’s not like I’m saying that he has a bad personality or anything like that. It’s just that he’s not exactly normal. It’s like… the way he thinks is not right, or more like, he’s quite reckless. There’s that side of him, you see.”

“Ahh, I can completely understand that.”

“It seems that Akira had a rough time in the slums, maybe that is the reason why he ended up like he is. His way of processing things tends to get him more enemies. That’s why I can understand why you see him as someone who is dangerous. It’s a good thing that there’s a city official who can

handle him well… If I have to be honest, if it's possible, I hope he would learn to make compromises with others though."

After saying that, Shizuka smiled bitterly, Hikaru also replied with the same bitter smile.

"Even for me who only known him recently, it's obvious to see that he's bad at dealing with people. Just to be safe, I'll add a note on the evaluation report to be careful dealing with him. If the other staff members see that note, I'm sure they will be careful so as not to pick a fight with him. Yeah. I'll be sure to add that note."

Shizuka giggled and said.

"Isn't it better for you to handle since something might happen?"

Hikaru reeled back. Putting aside her feeling toward Akira, she would not want to go through anything like that again if it could be helped. To be more precise, she had no wish to be involved with Akira anymore.

"Ahh, well, I'm actually a part of a management department that deals with many different things, so this request might be the last request I have with Akira."

"Is that so? That's rather unfortunate."

Shizuka said that with a smile that did not match what she just said as she kept her intuition to herself.

After they were done, Hikaru and Shizuka returned to the first-floor lobby of the Kugama building, Akira then grouped up with them a bit later.

That was when Shizuka gave a strict scolding to Akira.

"Akira, I heard from Hikaru-san that you did something reckless."

Akira winced back and laughed awkwardly.

“Well, uhh, that was not my fault, you see. It’s true that it was rough, but there’s no way I could have seen it coming.”

“I see that you lost all of your equipment again. This time, the only thing that is left unharmed is that new bike of yours, right? So, what is with that?

“Well, I bought the bike from further east. So, as expected, it really is stronger than my usual equipment. I’m glad I decided to buy my safety with money since I had the chance to back then.”

“So, in short, if it was not that durable, you would have even lost the bike as well, huh?”

Akira awkwardly laughed it off and glanced at Hikaru as if he was seeking help. Hikaru smiled wryly and then chimed in.

“Shizuka-san, it’s also partly my fault for asking him to save me. So I believe that’s enough of scolding for Akira.”

“Is that so? Well, I’ll leave it at that then.”

Once Shizuka stopped, Akira smiled in relief. Hikaru was watching how Akira acts with great interest. Although he was being scolded, there was also a trace of happiness, knowing that someone was worried for him. He looked like a little boy who had a great lack of care and affection while growing up. At the very least, he did not seem like someone who had killed hundreds of people.

But it did not change the fact that Akira did kill that many people before. Even back during the incident in the transport convoy, Akira quickly abandoned her and aimed his rifle at Erde, who was using her as a meat shield without showing even a shred of hesitation. Hikaru understood that very well.

[Both in the good and bad way, I can understand why Shizuka-san wants someone who understands Akira to handle him… But with that being said, I hope that doesn’t have to be me.]

Hikaru replaced the bitter smile that she had unconsciously displayed with a polite one as she stood in front of Akira and said to him.

“Akira. Since the negotiation for your reward is done, it means that this request had officially concluded. Thank you for the hard work.”

“I see, likewise. Thank you for the hard work.”

“I don’t think I have any other request left for you, but let’s meet up again if the occasion comes. I pray for your success in the future, but I believe that it’s better if you hold back on doing reckless stuff.”

“I know… Honestly, I already know that best myself though…”

Akira smiled wryly and Hikaru gave the same wry smile back.

He then left with Shizuka to escort her back to her shop. Hikaru saw them off and sighed, after that, Kibayashi came to her with his usual smile of great delight.

“Well, Hikaru, good work on that escort job. You did amazingly well.”

Seeing how Kibayashi was merrily complimenting her, Hikaru was more anxious than happy.

“T-thank you very much!”

“I guess this means that I have to apologize for misjudging your skill. I’m sorry. Though it might be weird to say this as compensation, I will use my full power to get what you asked from me back then approved. So please forgive me with that.”

Hikaru frowned, she did not understand what Kibayashi was talking about. However, thanks to her adept skills at reading in between the lines, she quickly understood what Kibayashi was referring to and started to panic.

In the past, Hikaru asked Kibayashi to let her handle Akira, who was a high-rank Hunter. The escort request this time was basically a test, to show

Kibayashi that she had the skills to handle Akira. And judging from that point of view, it could be said that Hikaru passed with flying colours.

That also meant she would be dealing with a more dangerous high-rank Hunter, exactly just what she wanted before.

Hikaru flusteredly tried to retract her request.

“No no no, he’s way more than I can handle! I understood that very well with the last request! So, I take back everything that I have asked for!”

Kibayashi already knew that of course, but he still continued with his usual flippant attitude.

“No no no. There is no need to hold back. To be perfectly honest, you did extremely well, you know? I will put in my recommendation letter as well. After all, having a rising star like you rise will eventually bring benefits to the whole team. Even those officers who doubted you will have no arguments left once they see the report from the last request of yours, you know? You’re basically on a fast track to success, congratulations!”

Hikaru’s face turned pale as she shouted.

“Please stop! Seriously! Just stop it already! I’m being serious here! I’m begging you!”

“Geez, don’t say that. It’s fine, I’m sure you’ll do alright.”

“That’s not the problem here!”

After that, Hikaru used her negotiation skill to convince Kibayashi not to do that. Seeing Hikaru sigh in relief afterwards, Kibayashi smiled with a tint of regret, but deep inside, he still found it very amusing.

Silavin: Kibayashi. The incarnation of trolling.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 245, Shirou's Sight-Seeing

Index

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Inside the upper district of Kugamayama city, there was an area that was rented specifically for Sakashita Heavy Industry. Sugadome's office was located there, and in that office, Hammerz was lowering his head after giving his report regarding Shirou's escape.

"I have no excuse to give for my failure."

It was obvious from his expression that he was extremely vexed by his blunder. In contrast to that, Sugadome seemed relatively calm.

Sugadome did not seem that angry from that mistake as he told Hammerz to raise his head. After that, he then said.

"It was indeed very regrettable, but I have no wish to blame you for what happened. He escaped when you were not around him and it was us who told you to leave his side to get your injuries treated. If I must blame someone, that would be the person who ordered you to do that. Otherwise, you would have seen through Shirou's lie."

"Lie, huh?"

Hammerz seemed confused there, Matsubara who was standing by next to Sugadome then explained to him.

Shirou sent a help request to Sakashita heavy Industry using the old-world connection, he mentioned that Hammerz was badly injured. So, in the request, he asked to allow Hammerz to treat his wounds and also asked for an escort replacement. Moreover, he stated that he did not feel safe having people not from Sakashita guard him, so he had requested the escorts to be cyborgs and he be given control over their bodies.

On the other hand, Hammerz reported that he was mostly fine. But Shirou told the staff beforehand that the battle both inside and outside the transport vehicle was so bad that they even destroyed a portion of the transport vehicle. Thus, that staff thought that Hammerz's report was him trying to sound tough due to his loyalty toward his duty.

After hearing how things played out, Hammerz could not help but frown as he mumbled.

"That damn brat…"

Hammerz unconsciously leaked out his rage, when he realized it, he flusteredly calm himself down. Matsubara shed a few cold sweats due to that intense anger. But Sugadome was completely fine as he lightly smiled and tried to calm Hammerz down.

"As I'm also a part of the commanding team, I'll have to apologize as we will handle this on our own. Shirou's report was difficult to discern if it was truthful or not and the risk was too high if we were to make the wrong decision. As such, I believe that the correct decision was made under the limited information we had. Now that I've informed you about it, can you please take it as our blunder as the commanding team?"

Hammerz flusteredly shook his head.

"N-No, I didn't mean to blame you at all…"

"I see, thank you."

Sugadome then changed the subject.

“Now then, about the current incident, it was indeed a blunder on the Sakashita’s side. For the sake of Sakashita’s reputation, we must rectify this. I’m sure you have your own thought regarding the matter. If anyone is blaming you for it, you can just tell me. I’ll take care of it. As I said before, we’re not blaming you at all. But if you feel responsible for it, I hope you can help us. Do you have anything you wish from us?”

Hammerz replied with a serious face.

“If it’s possible, rather than assigning me to guard another old-world connector, I want to be assigned to look for Shirou.”

Sugadome’s smile widened.

“Very well, you can go ahead and do your own investigation, you may also join the search team if you want. You know Shirou very well, so I bet it’s better if you act separately without the limitation of a team. You have the freedom to do what you want.”

“Thank you very much, I’ll definitely answer your expectation.”

“In that case, I shall look forward to the results. You can go now.”

Hammerz bowed deeply and left the room with a face full of determination.

Matsubara frowned and said after Hammerz left.

“That seems to be a rather lax decision, are you really okay with that?”

Sugadome replied casually.

“Being strict is not the only method when dealing with others, that is doubly true when someone strongly wishes to rectify their mistake.”

“That might be true, but…”

“Did you find it inadequate?”

“Not at all. I was just curious. I don’t find it wrong at all…”

Matsubara then changed the subject as if to escape from the topic.

“Talking about curiosity, there’s also that matter with the transport convoy’s ambush. If that ambush was really for the sake of kidnapping our corporation’s old-world connector, that ambush has many questionable points.”

“Which points are you talking about exactly?”

“The ambush was way too sloppy. It would not be strange for their target to be killed with how they executed their plan. It also damaged many of the transport vehicles. Even if their aim was not to kidnap, but to kill, it was way too half-hearted. Well, they’re not like our military, so it might as well have been because their men were too amateurish and lacked the necessary skills…”

“I bet they actually didn’t care about Shirou-kun.”

Matsubara raised his eyebrows; he did not understand why Sugadome said that.

“Excuse me, but I couldn’t understand what you just said… It’s hard to believe that they didn’t care about Shirou considering they caused that much ruckus for the sake of searching for him…”

“Well, saying they don’t care was indeed an exaggeration. But I bet their real goal was something else. That incident must be not that important for their real goal. Something like: it would be great if they could kidnap Shirou-kun alive. However, it was fine if he dies as well. As a matter of fact, it doesn’t really matter if that operation succeeded.”

Matsubara was even more confused, so Sugadome proceeded to explain his hypothesis to Matsubara.

Based on the scale and teamwork of the enemies during that ambush, it could be inferred that it was done by multiple organizations. Although they

were using the Nationalist's name and the report was also saying that they were from the Nationalist, they might actually be people from the other corporations disguising themselves as the Nationalist.

It was not rare for corporations to wage war against each other while blaming the attacks on the Nationalists. When their involvement surfaces, they would shift the blame by saying that it was because the Nationalists had infiltrated their ranks. They would then give a public apology and pay some compensation.

The one receiving the payment often knew that it was only an excuse and just let it slide. The bigger the corporation involved, the more they tend to solve incidents like this. After all, if they refused to accept that it was an attack from the Nationalists, they would risk an all-out war between big corporations.

If that all-out war occurs between the five big corporations, it would greatly affect their sphere of influence and government in the eastern district. In the worst-case scenario, it might entirely wipe out the eastern district. Thus, in order to keep the current world from destroying itself, big companies would simply accept that excuse.

If the big companies other than Sakashita worked together with an organization connected to the Nationalists or even with the Nationalist itself just to kidnap one old-world connector, it would definitely cause trouble later on how they would split the reward. In the worst-case scenario, it might even be better for them to fail.

After listening to Sugadome's explanation, Matsubara nodded in agreement and thought that something was still amiss.

"Isn't that a bit too weak as a reason to just ignore his safety? If their aim were simply to cause damage to Sakashita Heavy Industry, it means that their main goal in that operation had to be something else. But that ambush was obviously aimed at Shirou. It is hard to believe that they don't really care about him considering the size of the assault squad that they had prepared in order to kidnap him."

“As I said before, that is like a side mission which is insignificant compared to their main goal. That’s just how it is. To put it simply, this ambush is just one part of a bigger scheme.”

“An ambush of that scale? And it’s nothing but just one part of a bigger scheme? In that case, what is this bigger scheme of theirs?”

“This is just my guess, but I bet it’s to confirm something.”

“Confirm something?”

The already confused Matsubara was even more confused than before, Sugadome’s gaze turned serious as he then explained.

“Just how serious is Sakashita Heavy Industry in reclaiming Kuzusuhara ruin? It’s that kind of confirmation. It seems that ever since the great transport season started, they have been sending more and more monsters from the east bit by bit, I bet they were trying to confirm it ever since that time.”

The monsters from further east that were sent here were strong enough to be designated as bounty monsters in Kugamayama city. It was to test if Sakashita Heavy Industry would still send their important personnel into an area with such abnormality.

It was a check to see how far Sakashita would go in order to transport their important personnel to Kugamayama city for the sake of reclaiming Kuzusuhara ruin. It was all just for confirmation. Shirou’s kidnap attempt only meant that much to them. Thus, it was not that important for them to successfully kidnap Shirou. They were only testing how Sakashita would react, as such, their real aim had already been fulfilled.

Matsubara was so surprised after hearing that explanation. He then returned back to himself and inadvertently asked.

“I-Is it really that important? To the point that they would go that far?!!”

“It’s just my guess. It’s from someone responsible for the transport request, connecting the dots without any evidence. So, I believe it doesn’t really serve as a good hypothesis. At the very least, I believe that there’s something in Kuzusuhara ruin that would even rope in the other big 5 corporations. At the very least, the upper echelons, Tatsumori and Tsukisada must know something.”

Sugadome had a serious look on his face as he continued.

“Judging from how the big five reacted, there is something there that is big enough to shift the power balance between us, or at least, that possibility exists and is very likely. Well, I bet if any evidence which confirms my hypothesis and that thing were to come up, Tatsumori and Tsukisada would even go as far as to openly wage a war against us. So, they should not have strong evidence about the existence of such a thing. That’s why I believe they went this far to check our reaction. In order to probe if we know something about that thing as well.”

Matsubara was so surprised that he did not know what to say. Thus, Sugadome casually continued.

“If I may add one more thing, I bet that something is also the reason why Yanagisawa is so obsessed with staying in Kugamayama city.”

“Do you think that he knows the existence of such a thing with absolute certainty? And he’s trying to get it?”

“Don’t even think about trying to dig it out from him. It’s fine to just keep our distance and monitor him. In the worst-case scenario, he might even counter investigate us, and it would be a huge pain in the neck if he infiltrates Sakashita.”

“R-Roger that!”

Matsubara tensed up as he realized that he had heard something that was of vital importance. Sugadome then relaxed as if to ease the tense mood.

“Well, currently, it’s nothing but just a guess. There’s no need to be overly concerned by it. At the very least, we are actually not that serious about exploring Kuzusuhara ruin and we both know that. The problem is that there are people who don’t know that.”

Due to Yanagisawa’s deal with Tsubaki, the relics carried out from the area under Tsubaki to Kugamayama city had brought the city a huge inflow of capital. To guard the area under Tsubaki, City Management bought many expensive powered suits from the front-line. The manufacturer of those powered suits were the corporations under Sakashita, that was why Sakashita earned quite a hefty sum from the deal as well.

That was also the reason why Sakashita Heavy Industry was willing to lend their old-world connector to Yanagisawa. But for those who did not know that, it seemed to them as if Sakshita was gathering a powerful military force in Kugamayama city.

The information control that Sakshita put up for the sake of Shirou’s safety as well the effort they took to conceal his escape seemed like Sakashita was trying to hide their military movement around the city.

Moreover, considering Yanagisawa’s involvement as well, those who did not know the full story had enough suspicion to interfere with their business.

To top it off, at the moment, there were many factions and people gathered in Kugamayama city, which invited a lot of misunderstandings.

After Sugadome gave a short explanation regarding the matter, he then gave one order to Matsubara.

“Though I said quite a lot of things back there, there’s no need for you to be worried about it. You just need to focus on finding Shirou-kun at the moment. Go. I will be waiting for your report.”

“Understood!”

Matsubara lightly bowed and left the room.

Now that Sugadome was left alone in the room, his face turned serious and his gaze was turned to the middle of the room, there was a holographic projector in the middle of the room.

“Connect.”

The device recognized Sugadome’s voice and started working. After a short time, an image of a young boy appeared in Sugadome’s vision.

“How’s the progress?”

The young boy frowned.

“Like hell I can do anything in such a short span of time. I’ll contact you when we get some progress.”

“Whether there’s progress or not, it’s important to give a regular report, you know?”

He then sighed. The young boy using Sakashita Heavy Industry’s secret line was Shirou.

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On the night when Shirou escaped, when Sugadome entered his room, he saw someone there. Someone he did not expect. This figure was created by a holographic device, which had been turned on remotely, showing a figure of someone familiar. It was Shirou.

Sugadome was a bit surprised since he did not expect that at all, but he quickly sighed exasperatedly and looked at Shirou.

“You’re a pretty rude brat, you know that? You can at least make an appointment beforehand.”

Shirou was surprised. He did not expect that Sugadome would be this calm. But he quickly returned to his usual smile and said to Sugadome.

“Well, my apologies. I do feel bad for coming without saying anything first, unfortunately, it is impossible for me to make an appointment at the moment. Though I do feel that I should talk to you directly about this.”

Sugadome took a seat. He then tapped on the table with his finger as if to let Shirou know of his location.

“In that case, you should have come here directly.”

Shirou laughed awkwardly.

“Well, to be honest, that’s a little difficult for me at the moment.”

Shioru’s response had two meanings. It was impossible for a virtual image to transform into his real self and it was also impossible for his real body to go there.

Sugadome lightly sighed.

“So then, are you here to share with me the progress of your escape? Or more like, why did you escape in the first place? I’m pretty sure we didn’t restrict your freedom much to the point that you would want to run away like that. Tell me if there’s anything that you don’t like about how we’ve treated you. Your motivation to do your job is proportional to our profits. So, we’ll do our best to accommodate your wishes.”

Shirou exaggeratedly shook his head.

“No no no, that’s not the problem at all. I’m actually thankful for letting me live in such a life of luxury, and I really mean it.”

“So then, in that case, why did you run off?”

“Well, uhh, what can I say. I just thought of walking freely outside for a bit, you see.”

“Very well. But it’s dangerous to walk around without a bodyguard, you know? I’ll send some people to escort you right away, can you tell me your location right now?”

“Eh? But that would be Hammerz, right? It would be a bit awkward… It won’t be much fun walking around with someone like that…”

“In that case, we can send you a girl, you can even choose what kind of girl you want.”

“Well, to be honest, I’m quite shy… So like, it would be really awkward to walk around with an unknown girl no matter how beautiful she is.”

Sugadome showed a will to compromise, but Shirou kept coming up with a reason not to. Although they seemed to be just be talking casually from the outside, they were actually carefully probing what the other person was thinking.

“Well, to be honest, it’s not like I have any wish to defect to Tatusmori or the other corporations. I’ll return back once I have my fill of walking around, that’s why I wish you can let this slide. That will be okay, right?”

“No.”

When they could not find any middle ground, Shirou suddenly made a demand believing that there was no longer any point in continuing their conversation.

“Well, let’s talk about something else then. Actually, I’m in control of the security of this room. That is why I can use this secret line to hijack the holographic device in the room.”

“That seems to indeed be the case. Well, I think it’s unreasonable to demand other places to have the same high-quality security like what we have in Sakashita’s facilities to prevent you from hacking.”

“No no no, I had a hard time trying to get in here, you know? By normal standards, the security system here is already pretty strict. That’s why there’s nothing for you to worry about. So, putting that aside, I’m basically in control of the safety of that room. Just a little bit of change is enough to kill anyone inside it. With that being said, I wish you can let me roam outside for a bit.”

Shirou smiled and threatened Sugadome, but Sugadome did not relent at all.

“If you think you have to go so far, you can go ahead and do it. I’m sure you know well what it means to pick a fight with Sakashita.”

That calm reply from Sugadome did not show any kind of pressure, it was so casual as if he was only talking about the previous day’s weather.

But that was enough to make Shirou shiver. Sugadome’s casual warning meant that he was completely okay with Shirou being dead. After all, there was a part of him that was completely fine with giving an order to throw someone into inhumane experiments.

At the moment, Shirou had not really picked a fight with Sakashita yet. But he was bordering on doing just that. Shirou understood knew the weight of what Sugadome had said. While he was teetering along that border, he was trying to play it cool as if he was trying to trick Sugadome. He smiled bitterly and apologized.

“Sorry, I was joking too much, I’m sorry.”

“Very well.”

There was a short silence between Shirou, who desperately trying to regain his calm, and Sugadome, who’s carefully watching him. After that, Sugadome was the first one to break the silence.

“Let’s return to the matter at hand. As long as you don’t accept any escort, we can’t let you roam free. That’s why I’ll have you do work for me.”

“Work?”

“Do you know an AI by the name of Tsubaki?”

“Of course, she’s the caretaker AI of a certain area inside Kuzusuhara ruin. I don’t know the details, but she made a deal with Kugamayama city. Although Sakashita sent someone to negotiate with her, everyone including the escorts was killed while the negotiator was only left with his head, right?”

“That’s correct. I want you to create a negotiation route with that AI.”

Shirou frowned.

“No no no, that would be impossible. I’m not that good with negotiation.”

“If you can access the old-world domain, I’m sure at least she won’t kill you like those escorts.”

“No no no. That kind of AI will actually come for my head thinking that I was trying to hack her if I try to contact her through the old-world domain. In terms of the risk of death, it’s the same as those escorts you had sent there. I’m sure you already know this yourself, right?”

“If you’re talking about the risk, isn’t it the same considering you want to walk around without escorts?”

That was then the first time Sugadome’s words was tinged with a threat.

“I will not take no as an answer, you’ll do it for us.”

Shirou winced back. He did not want to risk his life for anything outside of his main goal. Although he was pushed to a corner, he had no plans to give up. However, he could also not refuse that demand. He knew well what would happen to him if he refused.

Sugadome then relaxed back and tried to bait Shirou with a reward.

“If you can do that, I can make it such that your escaping was necessary in order to create a connection to that caretaker AI.”

Shirou interpreted that reply as Sugadome being willing to let him roam free for a bit if he would become a bridge to Tsubaki.

“…Alright, I’ll do it.”

“Very well. Make sure to report regularly, that is, if you don’t want me to think that you’ve abandoned the mission.”

“I know.”

“That’s it then. I’m a busy man. The only reason why I let you take my time like this without a prior appointment is only because you had contributed substantially in the past. So make sure to remember that.”

“I understand that as well, later then.”

Shirou had a clouded expression plastered on his face as he closed the call. At the same time, his image from the holographic device also vanished.

Sugadome sank deeper into the chair and let the backrest support his weight. He then sighed and thought about what just happened.

[He understands that he was living a good life under our care, and he also understands the benefits and risks of his actions. Basically, he escaped although he knew all of that. Just what is he trying to do? What makes him want to take up all those risks? Is it for some kind of personal goal? Although I brought up Tsubaki, it does not seem to be about her. This is only my guess, but I bet his aim is not Kuzusuhara ruin.]

Sugadome knitted his eyebrows.

[Although he knew that we prioritize his wishes, he did not even ask us and decided to make a move on his own. He even rejected escorts. Which means, his goal is something that he doesn’t want Sakashita to know about. But he was not lying. He was being careful with his words since bad lies will only lead to the truth. A truth that he’s trying to hide from us. From everything gathered so far, it can be inferred that his goal does not have anything to do with the other corporations. He also didn’t lie when he said he’ll return back once he’s done with whatever he’s trying to do.]

Sugadome continued to analyse his exchange with Shirou, he then remembered a certain word.

“Just to walk around, huh?”

It was clear that Shirou's aim was not only to tour around the city. But that word also had some kind of connection to what he was doing, It was not exactly a lie. Sugadome's thoughts continued to dig deeper. Eventually, it reached a point that it was so close to the truth that Shirou would be shocked if he heard Sugadome's hypothesis.

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As Shirou's image appeared through the holographic device for his regular report, Sugadome causally threw a question at him.

"So how is it going?"

Shirou lightly smiled and replied.

"I'm still sightseeing."

"I don't know what you're actually sightseeing, but it would be great if you can be done with that soon."

"Well, it's not easy to find a view that would satisfy me after all. So please be patient with it."

"I see."

Sugadome looked at Shirou with a neutral expression. But Shirou could feel like those two eyes were boring a hole through his heart. He could not help but step back a bit. Thus, he decided to change the subject as if to avoid the current subject.

"Ah, by the way, I heard that you told Hammerz to search for me. But didn't you let it slide since I'm working on connecting to Tsubaki?"

"We're dealing with you as if you had escaped. So, we can't afford to also stop the search team. If you don't like it, I suggest you get back instead of just fooling around."

"Yeah yeah. Anyway, let me thank you for not blaming Hammerz. Later then."

Shirou closed the call there.

Once Sugadome was alone again, he then mumbled.

“It seems that it’s not going well for him as well, huh?”

Judging from that reply, Sugadome decided that it was too soon to use the full power of Sakashita Heavy Industry to search for Shirou.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 246, Carol’s request

Index

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Back in her house, Carol looked extremely distressed.

Due to her connection with Viola on top of her own information sources, Carol was more knowledgeable than most of the information brokers in Kugamayama city. She had the means to obtain secret information. But even so, she was not able to obtain the information that there was an old-world connector from Sakashita Heavy Industry who was out on the loose.

With the search actively ongoing, it was only a matter of time before the truth reached the public’s ears. Between the purchasing of equipment and hiring people for the search party, there was no doubt that funds would be flowing in preparation and during the search.

Thus, as money flowed, information flowed as well. It was possible to connect the dots. Request that seemed to be unrelated in the beginning could be seen to make sense. Search requests to look for someone else, a change in the patrol route, the number of the patrol requests posted in the Hunter office. Such requests could be chained together to draw a conclusion. A large corporation was looking for an old-world connector.

Carol was looking through that data with a pale look on her face as she pulled the hair out of her head.

"…This is bad."

As her thoughts wandered to the worst-case scenario, the image of what would happen to her crushed her spirit. In order to avoid that future, she planned to do whatever she could; even if her future self might laugh at her, mocking that she was being too paranoid.

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Akira's order for his new equipment was completed in no time. They were high-performance equipment that needed special permission to be carried to Kugamayama city until not too long ago. Normally, it would take some time for them to arrive since they had to be transported from the other cities. But due to the high-ranking Hunters gathering in Kugamayama lately, his equipment was carried together with the equipment for those Hunters, thus, they immediately arrived at Shizuka's shop.

Akira was trying his new equipment in the warehouse of Shizuka's shop. Although his rifles and the augmented suit were of the same type from before, he bought better modifications.

Thanks to that, his augmented suit was even more powerful than before, and his information gathering device could scan larger areas with greater accuracy.

Moreover, he also installed a drug injection system. By loading drugs such as medicine or accelerator into his augmented suit, he would be able to use them in the middle of a fight, granting him better adaptability. To match it, Akira also ended up purchasing medicine from Shizuka's shop.

He also decided to buy the optional defensive coat which accompanied his augmented suit. Not only was it equipped with powerful forcefield armour, but Akira also opted to get the camouflaging layer which was originally restricted only to high-ranking Hunters.

Akira turned on the camouflage and looked at himself in the mirror. He raised his eyebrows as he saw his head floating in the air and laughed.

Shizuka who saw that lightly smiled and warned him.

“Although I’m sure you already know this already, that is for hiding from the monsters, so don’t use it for anything bad, okay?”

“Of course!”

Akira replied firmly, but Shizuka then smiled mischievously and said.

“Everyone says so too only to end up doing bad things, you know? After all, it’s the perfect equipment for peeking.”

Akira did not expect such a response and thought that it was unlike her to say that to him. Thus, he pouted.

“I won’t do something like that.”

Shizuka smiled wryly at him, Alpha who had her usual smile on her face interjected.

“If you want to peek at someone, you can just look at me after all, right?”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

Just like how Akira did not expect Shizuka’s words, Alpha also did not expect that reply from him.

“Oh, you didn’t even deny that, huh?”

“Well, it’s all thanks to a certain someone that I’m already completely used to it already.”

Akira said so and did not pursue it any further. But Alpha lightly giggled and replied to him.

“As I thought, it’s not good enough if you can’t touch me, huh? But don’t worry, with the realistic feedback effect installed in your current augmented suit, I can make you feel as if you’re touching a real body, you know? So, you’ll have no problems touching me.”

Many of the expensive augmented suits were equipped with a realistic feedback effect such that the augmented suits could transfer sensations to their users so that they could effectively use difficult weapons through their thick gloves.

Akira’s augmented suit at the moment was a rather pricey one. With the help of Alpha’s advanced computation ability, she could create a feedback effect that perfectly replicated the sensation of a real object. In short, although it was still nothing more but an imitation, Akira could technically touch Alpha now.

Alpha smiled bewitchingly and pushed her chest to Akira. Akira’s face turned stern as if to make sure that he would not react to it. Alpha was greatly satisfied by that reaction and giggled.

Shizuka also noticed that slight change. But since she did not know that Alpha was also there, she thought that it was her fault and apologized to Akira.

“Ah, I’m sorry, did I tease you too much?”

Akira flusteredly shook his head.

“Ah, no, not at all…”

Shizuka stepped next to Akira, who was still trying to find the right word to say and gently hugged him. Her left hand circled around Akira’s back and pulled it to her chest while her right hand gently stroked his hair.

“As the shop’s owner, I don’t want to make you feel uncomfortable. So, I’m really sorry. Cheer up, okay?”

“As I said, it’s really not that…”

Akira did not fight back and just let it happen. Although the situation was not what Shizuka believed it to be, he could not tell her about Alpha. Furthermore, he was in no position to take his time to think of another excuse.

Alpha, who saw how things played out, smiled teasingly.

“As I thought. Being able to touch is an important thing. But with that being said, it’s not like I can do that to your face at the moment. That’s pretty sad.”

“Shut up already!”

Akira blushed but still at least managed to say that.

Of course, Shizuka did not know about that exchange between Akira and Alpha. However, her intuition was telling her that Akira was not angry at her. Thus, she smiled in relief.

After Akira finished checking his new equipment in the warehouse, he returned back to the counter with Shizuka. He then handed his Hunter ID to Shizuka and processed the payment.

Shizuka used the terminal in her shop to read the data from Akira’s Hunter ID. She then calculated the total price and processed the payment before returning the ID back to Akira. After that, she smiled happily but with a tint of bitterness as she said to Akira.

“That really pulled the shop’s revenue up. Although it might be weird to hear this from me, it’s actually not healthy for a business to rely so heavily on one person.”

Akira lightly laughed and replied.

“Well, the only thing that I can say is I’m sorry and I’ll be in your care again for the next purchase.”

“Don’t worry about it. I will look forward to your next visit to Cartridge Freak.”

Shizuka replied with a rather formal tone. Though, her smile was more for an important friend instead of for an important customer.

They then spent some time just chatting as Shizuka suddenly threw a question.

“By the way, Akira, what is your next plan? Your job for that transport request basically just finished, right? But you were quite hurried to get your new equipment. Do you already have something to do?”

“Not at all, I’m thinking of taking it easy for a while.”

He did not know how long he should wait, but one thing was for sure, his equipment from the frontline would arrive if he just waited long enough. His plan until then was to spend his days training with Alpha.

“I see, that’s a good idea. But it’s you we’re talking about here, I bet you’ll just go off on another mission soon. You should make sure to get a good rest once in a while, you know? And the time when you’re hospitalized is not counted as a rest time, okay?”

Akira smiled wryly knowing that he was not being trusted here.

“Don’t worry. I’m really planning to take it easy for the time being. Even if I’m going out on another Hunter mission, I’m planning only taking light and short jobs just to make sure that my skill won’t get rusty.”

“Well, I guess with your current equipment you’ll have no worries fighting against monsters around this area. It should be fine as long as you don’t go further to the east or to the inner part of the ruins, right?”

Akira replied firmly.

“Exactly, and of course, I won’t go to such dangerous places. I’ll be sure to turn down any requests that warrant me to go there.”

“That confidence often turns into something that might kill you, so be careful when you’re out there.”

“Yes.”

Hearing such a firm reply from Akira, Shizuka smiled, satisfied.

Once he was done, Akira returned to his home. He parked his bike inside his garage and started unloading the carriage that he was dragging with his bike.

Originally, this foldable carriage was something that was to be dragged with a vehicle. Furthermore, all the supplies and equipment that he bought were nowhere light. But his bike could muster even more horsepower than a normal vehicle. Thus, had no problem dragging that carriage.

Akira was truly satisfied with his new bike.

“Though I’m planning to buy a vehicle soon, I guess I will be fine for a while with this bike, huh? If it’s possible, I want to get my next vehicle also from somewhere around Zegelt city, just like this bike.”

For some reason, Akira kept losing his vehicles one by one. Some were crushed to the point that they did not look like a vehicle any longer. But his newest bike survived just fine even after going through those intense battles. He did not even have to send it out for repairs, his only expense was the energy tank recharge.

Akira looked at his new bike and grinned, hoping that this time, he would be able to have a long-term relationship with his new bike.

Alpha suddenly said with her usual smile.

“I think you don’t even need such a vehicle though. After all, once your new equipment from the front line arrives, I’ll have you complete the rest of my request, you know? At that time, it’d be easier if you brought a bike instead of a large vehicle. So, if it’s possible, I want you to get an even better bike.”

Alpha just said such an important detail so casually which caused Akira’s brain to take some time to process it before he finally showed surprise.

“Your request is to explore a ruin, right?”

“Yep.”

“I see… So, we’re finally going to do it, huh?”

Akira’s face turned serious.

“Did I make you wait too long?”

Alpha smiled.

“Not at all, you’re actually faster than I calculated.”

“I see.”

After hearing that answer, Akira smiled happily.

The request that he accepted from Alpha was to go to an extremely dangerous ruin. He had been preparing himself for that mission ever since he met Alpha. He had gone through many predicaments, one difficult battle after another as if there was no end to it, but finally, he was able to see the finish line.

Akira looked at Alpha, his gaze was filled with emotions. Alpha smiled and looked back at Akira. After a short silence, Alpha smiled wryly and spoke up.

“Well, the main problem now is when the equipment will arrive though.”

Akira smiled bitterly too.

“You’re right, I wonder when they’ll arrive.”

“If it’s taking too long, it might be better to take them yourself instead of waiting for them to be transported here.”

“You have a point … Well, it’s a good idea, but…”

The giant bug nest swarm the size of an island. Flying monsters that blocked the sun like a giant umbrella. Going near the front line just to get his new equipment meant to cross through the areas where such monsters roamed. And this time, he would be going alone without the support of the inter-city transport. Akira could not help but frown when he imagined that.

“Well, that would depend on the situation, but for now, let’s just wait.”

“Y-Yeah, right.”

Alpha smiled as she warned Akira.

“But we need to make sure that your skill won’t get rusty, so I’ll have you train while we wait.”

Akira firmly replied.

“Of course!”

Akira knew he could get through the training with his resolve, but that was not the case for monsters. Thus, he was planning to do everything that he could since that was also a part of his responsibility.

That was when a sudden call reached Akira’s terminal. It was from Carol.

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Akira rode his bike through the wasteland. Although he was heading to the Mihazono ruin, he was not going to the ruin, but to meet Carol near the ruin.

The content of the call back in the garage was basically a request from Carol to him. He thought that Carol was inviting him to work together and declined. He stated that he was planning to take it easy for the time being. However, she replied: ‘It’s perfect. In that case, you should meet with me to discuss the details’.

Carol said that it would be great if Akira could come to see her, but if it was difficult, she did not mind going to meet him instead. After hearing that, he

was uncertain but eventually decided to go himself. To be honest, he was also interested in knowing what kind of request she had. He also thought that it was not right to just lock himself in his house to train while waiting for his equipment to arrive. Especially when there was a request that Carol said was perfect to take it easy for the time being.

The ground of the wasteland was far from being easy to traverse through, but even so, Akira was pacing his bike at high speed. He was forcing his way through the hard terrain using his advanced bike that was even capable of flight. The wheels sometimes did not even touch the ground as he rode on it. A nearby Hunter who saw that by pure chance could not hide their surprise.

Last time, Akira took detours in order to avoid areas that were hard to traverse through to the Mihazono ruin. However, since he did not have to do that and just went in an almost straight line, it did not take much time for him to reach Mihazono ruin.

As he was looking at the blazing scene passing past him, Akira smiled amusedly and said.

“I’ll arrive in no time! I’m really glad I bought this bike!”

Seeing Akira excited, Alpha smiled bitterly and warned him.

“The faster you go, the harder it is to control the bike and the worse it will be if you crash, so make sure to be extra careful.”

“I know.”

Although Alpha had the bike fully under control, Akira was the one in control at the moment. Thanks to the bike’s advanced balancer, Akira was able to ride the bike at high speed even with his relatively mediocre driving skill.

With his rifle that was way above the standard of Kugamayama city, Akira ploughed through monsters in front of him as he continued driving. Even a Greedy Crocodile that he encountered did not pose any challenge to him.

That Greedy Crocodile had a rather large body and there were multiple guns growing out from its back. Its whole body was protected by strong scales. If it continued to grow and roamed around the usual route, it would not be strange for it to be designated as a bounty monster. However, Akira's LEO multi-rifles easily drilled bullets through its strong scales and destroyed its inner organs without discriminating between the flesh and the mechanical parts, killing it immediately.

Akira was so surprised by the firepower of his new rifle, he then calmed himself down and thought calmly first before asking Alpha.

"Alpha, that one was a relatively strong one, right?"

"That depends on your standards. But if it was the past you, you would have had a hard time fighting that. Based on that fact, it was a relatively strong one."

"Thought so."

Akira thought for a bit before continuing.

"My equipment is already pretty powerful, and is it still impossible for me to challenge the ruin that you want me to go to?"

"That's a difficult question. But there's no doubt that it'll be safer to wait until the equipment from the front line arrives."

"…It is that dangerous, huh?"

Akira frowned, but Alpha smiled at him and added.

"As I said in the past. You would have to challenge that ruin without my support. That's why it's better to get the best equipment you can get first before going there. Honestly, you can get better equipment by waiting, so I can't really recommend you to challenge that ruin now. No need to be so eager. If you naively believe that you can just withdraw if it gets dangerous, that will only get you killed."

But Alpha’s smile slightly changed to one of provoking a challenge as she continued.

“Well, if you have no plan to return back alive, it makes it way easier though. You might even be able to do that now in that case. So, do you still want to go?”

Before Akira could say anything, Alpha then added.

“Don’t worry, I have no plan to let you die for my sake. That’s why let’s just wait until your new equipment arrives.”

“I see, yeah. Let’s do that.”

Akira thought that it was okay if Alpha was okay with it too, that was why he did not think any further after that regarding this matter.

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In the meeting place, there was a huge camping-car parked. It was covered with armour plating that was normally used for powered suits and had multiple machine guns perched on its roof.

Akira was a bit surprised by the size of that vehicle. Carol came out of the vehicle and invited Akira in. Akira proceeded into the living room, the ceiling of that room was high and was very well decorated, even better than common inns.

Akira sat waiting on a large sofa as Carol returned with a drink and sat in front of him.

“Since you came all the way here, I assume that you’re interested in this request, right?”

“Well, at least enough to make me come here to listen to the details. I’ll decide whether to take it or not only after you tell me the details. So then, what is this job that can earn me money while taking it easy? If it did not come from you, I would have declined believing that it’s nothing but a fraud, you know?”

Akira said so and intentionally looked at Carol with a gaze full of suspicion. But Carol instead found it amusing and smiled.

“And you still decided to come here yourself. I’m really happy to hear that.”

“…As I said, I do want to know the details. Though I will leave now if it has something to do with Viola.”

Carol smiled bitterly.

“Even if she looks like that, she doesn’t lie, you know? Although I do admit that she did not use that fact for anything good. If you can ascertain the content of what she is saying, you can earn quite a lot of profit from her, you know?”

“I see, in that case, she’s a dangerous person to me.”

Akira replied instantly and firmly, seeing that, Carol only smiled wryly.

“Don’t worry, this time, it has nothing to do with Viola. To be more precise, it has nothing to do with anyone else, it’s purely a request from me.”

“That’s good to hear. So then, what is it?”

As Akira pushed the subject back to be about the request, Carol then replied with a serious face.

“Akira, I want to hire you as my bodyguard.”

Akira frowned and tilted his head. Carol then continued with a solemn expression.

The length of the request was undetermined, normally it would warrant Akira to be around Carol all the time. But with that being said, there was no need to be guarding her all the time, he just needed to be there when Carol needed help. Although he would be acting as a bodyguard, it was not like he would do all the fighting, Carol would help as much as she could as well.

Or more like, Akira did not have to do anything if Carol could handle it just fine.

The reward was to be negotiated later. If Akira had no particular demands, it would be calculated per day plus bonuses based on how many and how difficult the battles that Akira had to face during the job.

Akira was also free to take another Hunter job in the middle of that. Carol would even help too. Akira was also allowed to just rest at home if he wanted to. Either way, Akira just had to be around Carol, that was the requirement that Carol imposed.

Akira was a bit uncertain after hearing Carol's explanation. Judging from what she said, it was indeed a job where he could make money by taking it easy. However, that was exactly why it was very suspicious. Thus, Akira asked a question regarding the payment.

"Just how much do you plan to pay me for each day?"

"Let's see. How about, you can sleep with me every day? Or so I want to say but, I'm sure you will say no if I offer that. I bet most men would be really happy with that offer though… Well, just to confirm, will that be okay with you?"

"No, make it money instead."

"Thought so. Hmmm…."

Carol was seriously at loss. She calculated the funds that she had, predicted how long Akira would have to guard her, and estimated the least amount of wage that Akira would be willing to accept. After that, she carefully made her offer.

"1 million Aurum per day?"

"1 million Aurum, huh…"

This time, it was Akira who was at loss. For him, it was a good offer. But he could not tell if it was good enough considering the job that he would have

to do. Akira might believe this to be a decent request if someone had told him that this amount was appropriate for someone like him. However, as long as his suspicion of what this request entailed was not cleared up, he could not shake off the suspicion that Carol was trying to trick him. After all, she was offering him a huge amount of money from his point of view without considering whether it matched the difficulty of the request.

However, Carol interpreted Akira's reaction in the opposite direction and said to him.

"Well, it's true that it might be on the cheaper side for you, but I don't have much money to spare, you see. Moreover, although you need to be around me all the time, it's not like you have that many restraints. So, like, can you make a compromise here?"

Akira was being extra careful so as to not show his shock as he spoke to Alpha in secret.

"Alpha, what do you think?"

"At the very least, she's honestly hoping that you would make a compromise here."

"I see… 1 million Aurum per day, huh? Is it cheap?"

"I can't really answer that question. Well, if you think it's too high, you can just think of it as Carol judging your skill highly."

Akira concluded that it was at least not some kind of fraud. Carol was not trying to entice him with such a high wage. Thus, he decided to abandon his suspicion which came from the high wage and moved on to his next worry.

"In the first place, why do you need a bodyguard?"

Although it was a completely understandable and expected question, Carol suddenly froze.

"It's just to be safe. I can't really tell you all the details, but it's just… There are a lot of things happening around lately. It's just to make sure that I

won’t get roped into any trouble. It’s not like someone is actively looking for me. If I must add one more thing, it might actually just be me being too paranoid. There might actually be no need for me to get a bodyguard at all. But it still worries me, you see. So, it’s fine if you want to laugh at me, saying that I’m too paranoid, I just want to feel safe right now.”

Akira once again checked with Alpha, and Alpha confirmed that what Carol said was not a lie. After that, he thought for a bit.

“A lot has been going on, huh…”

Akira could not help but think that employing him as a bodyguard in order to avoid misunderstanding and getting roped into trouble was actually counter-effective. However, Carol was someone who went along well with Viola. So, there was no way Carol did not know about that.

“Let me ask you this first. Why did you pick me?”

“Of course, it’s because I know you’re strong.”

“It might be weird to hear this from me, but I often cause trouble or get roped into one, you know?”

Akira remembered the time when Kibayashi stated this while laughing so hard that he found it hard to breathe. At that time and even now, he couldn’t deny it at all…

“Are you sure you want me to guard you when you don’t want to get roped into trouble?”

Akira was able to ask this question extremely casually. It was thanks to the hard life that he had gone through, which gave birth to his twisted personality. However, Carol did not seem bothered by that at all and giggled.

“It’s not like they happened because of you, right? So, I don’t really mind. I know about your past well. Even so, I still decided to ask you. You don’t need to worry about it. But if you know yourself well, and believe that is

the case, it would be great if you can be extra careful while guarding me. Though, I won't force you."

"Alpha."

"She's being very careful with her words, but she's not lying."

"Basically, she's hiding something, huh?"

"She did say that she can't tell you all the details, and by the way, she was being honest when she said that."

"I see. I guess that's basically what it is, huh?"

Seeing Akira being uncertain again, Alpha curiously asked him.

"To be honest, you can just refuse it if you're that suspicious, you know? Or is that you actually want to accept it?"

When Alpha pointed that out, Akira suddenly realized his own feeling and found it surprising. He realized the bias in his thoughts. He once again re-evaluated the important questions that he should ask regarding the request and asked those questions to Carol with a serious expression.

"I'll apologize first since I'm sure this will offend you but answer this. You're not trying to trick me into something with this request, right?"

Carol did not look away and locked her gaze with Akira's somber gaze. She then replied with a serious tone.

"It depends on how you look at it. If you mean as in causing you trouble, then no. If you mean as in roping you to a fight against people that are way stronger than you expected, then the answer is still a no. Though I can't deny that you might find yourself in a situation where you think so. After all, it's not like I can accurately predict who and what I am going to fight against. If you say that you won't accept it because I can't tell you those details, then there's nothing that I can do, I'll just give it up."

As Akira asked for her real intention, Carol gave the best answer that she could give right now. Then, there was silence as they stared at each other. Akira was the one who broke that silence.

“Alright, I accept.”

Carol’s tense expression relaxed as she sighed in relief.

“Thank you.”

“Sorry, it’s not like I wanted to prolong the negotiation. Someone once told me to be extra careful so as not to get tricked. That’s why I was being very careful.”

“It’s fine. Just like what that person said. The most expensive stuff is free stuff. Although it’s difficult to live if you’re being too careful, you won’t even be able to live if you don’t have any suspicion at all. Though it might be weird for someone who often works with Viola to say this, but it’s indeed very hard to find a good balance.”

Seeing Carol smiling wryly, Akira replied with a bitter smile.

After that, Akira and Carol continued to discuss the finer details. That was when Alpha, who discovered something surprising, asked Akira.

“By the way, Akira, why didn’t you ask me if she was lying on the very last exchange?”

“Hm? Well, I just thought that I should at least make the final decision myself. It just doesn’t feel right to rely on you for everything. If I get tricked because of that, that just means I’m really foolish enough to get tricked.”

“Is that so? Well, it’s fine if that’s the case.”

Alpha thought for a bit if it was better to tell Akira her thoughts but eventually decided not to. After all, if his decision was a mistake, that would push him to rely on her more.

Carol was being as honest as she could to Akira. For the parts where she could not, she did her best to carefully choose her words.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 247, Common Happenings

Index

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Not too long ago, Mihazono ruin was filled with Hunters after the ruckus that happened recently. However, at the moment, it had calmed down considerably and returned to its usual state.

With that being said, it was not like it had completely returned back to before that ruckus. The area around the Seranthal building was guarded by soldiers dispatched by Kugamayama city. They were securing a road which connect the Hunter Office and Seranthal building. After that, they placed the Seranthal building under lockdown, controlled by Kugamayama city management.

Akira went to that Mihazono ruin once again with Carol. They were there to do Carol's Hunter job, which was about collecting data for a map. Akira was accompanying her as her bodyguard. They were spending time talking to each other while exploring the ruin.

"But still, I didn't expect you would even prepare a large camping car like that just to explore a ruin, are you really that invested in this job?"

For Akira, who always thought of going to the ruin and returning back home on the same day, the idea of preparing a place to sleep nearby was

rather foreign to him.

Carol smiled smugly and replied.

“Well, yep, pretty much. Although it’s only for a short time, I’m planning on going to the ruin regularly every day. So, it’s better to have a camping car nearby instead of having to go back and forth from the city every day. The inn in the Hunter Office is not suitable for a beauty like me after all.”

There were many Hunters who went to explore the ruins for many days. In case they were challenging a ruin which would take a huge group of Hunters and a long time to explore, forget a camping car, they would even build temporary housing. Of course, Akira, who always worked alone, never experienced something like that.

Even so, considering the inside of the camping vehicle, it was indeed a bit too excessive.

Akira hummed. “So, that grandiose inside is simply for the sake of appearance, huh? Well, there’s a bath too. You’re really invested in this job.”

“Just how much do you think my body cost? It is worth a lot and everyone evaluates it highly, you know? Don’t you want to have a taste at least once?”

Carol smiled invitingly at Akira. That wonderful body combined with her foxiness had felled many men, but that was not the case for Akira.

“No thanks.”

“You’re as cold as ever, you know?”

Carol lightly sighed. She then scanned Akira’s body and exasperatedly said.

“You’ve really grown up, you’re taller now and your body is much more pronounced. But even so, you still prefer food over women, huh?”

“Sorry, but that’s the case at the moment.”

Akira lightly smiled and said so, Carol responded with a bitter smile.

“Good grief, this is depressing. Especially when I’m actually doing very well with my side job.”

Akira and Carol kept having such a conversation while they were exploring the ruin. They then noticed another group of Hunters coming in their direction. Their equipment matched the difficulty level of Mihazono ruin and they got close enough to each other to scan the other’s equipment. That was also when the other group drove away to the side of the road as if to avoid Akira and Carol.

Just like that, they passed each other. The Hunters looked at Akira and Carol with concerned looks as they were carrying equipment that did not match the difficulty level of Mihazono ruin. As a matter of fact, their equipment was way too powerful. Some of them looked scared, shocked, or even distrustful and envious of Akira and Carol.

Akira himself also noticed that and felt rather happy knowing that he had really become strong. He then looked at his other teammate, who also had strong equipment as well and was interested in what she had equipped.

Carol noticed Akira’s gaze and teasingly called him out.

“Oh, what is it? Are you interested in me after all?”

“Nope, that’s not it. It’s just that augmented suit, that is one of those powerful augmented suits, right?”

On top of her body-tight inner suit, Carol was using a suit that looked like a simple combination of thin belts and an exposing swimsuit. To top it off, she had an augmented suit that only covered certain parts of her body. That augmented suit had openings on her chest and thighs, which were held together by belts.

That augmented suit including its inner suit were old-world items that only high-ranking Hunters could get. Their performance and sense of design were of the old-world’s. Akira could feel that Carol’s augmented suit gave

the same feeling as Melshia's augmented suit and the augmented suit that Alpha once used.

Carol smiled smugly.

"Yup. I renewed all my equipment including my guns. Your equipment looks pretty powerful too, but I think mine are still better."

Akira raised his eyebrows.

"Oh? Is that so? I don't mean to offend you, but you don't have the money to buy equipment of that calibre, no?"

"Oh my, let me at least tell you this. I'm pretty rich although I look like this, you know? Although, it's not money from my Hunter job."

Carol understood that Akira asked that rather rude question with zero bad intention, but even so, she still deliberately made an offended expression. Akira, who saw that, reflected on himself. He realized that it was rather rude of him to say that.

"Ah, sorry. I just thought that kind of equipment usually has Hunter Rank restrictions placed on them."

Carol's expression returned back to normal. Though, it was not like she was actually offended in the first place.

"Ohh, that, huh? Well, it's true that I can't buy them, but there are other routes where I can procure them."

"Other routes?"

Akira tilted his head in confusion, seeing that, Carol happily explained to him.

The Hunter Rank restriction on powerful equipment was mostly applied by the manufacturers. As long as it was not equipment for the front-line, normally, the Corporate Government would not put any rank restriction on them.

Moreover, it was not like there was an exact ruling on how to decide the equipment's restriction. In the end, that restriction could be adjusted by the discretion of the manufacturer. For example, when a group of Hunters wanted to buy them, it was up to the manufacturer to decide whether to judge based on the groups' highest Hunter Rank, or lowest one, or the middle one, or by taking the average.

Of course, most would not be willing to sell a Rank 100 equipment to a Rank 10 Hunter even if they were in the same team. That was why such restrictions were not set in stone and up to their whims. Nonetheless, it served its purpose. It was basically a way to motivate Hunters to reach a higher Hunter Rank and to grow or join a large Hunter team. After all, it was easier for the Hunter Office to manage them when they were in groups.

Carol used that to slip through the restriction rule. Since there were many high-ranking Hunters coming to Kugamayama city lately, she temporarily joined a high ranking team to cheat that Hunter Rank restriction. This was where her side job came in handy.

Carol had already left that team. But just because she was no longer in the team, it was not like they could reclaim the equipment that she bought. There were many teams that broke up because of matters between men and women. So, it was impossible for the manufacturer to manage their products to that extent.

Thanks to this method, Carol was able to get equipment that was way outside her Hunter Rank.

After hearing that explanation, Akira sighed exasperatedly.

"…What can I say… To be honest, it would be great if you could behave a bit more."

"It's fine, isn't it? It's easier on you too when I'm this well-equipped, no?"

"Well, that's true, but still…"

It was not like Akira himself was a stickler when it came to rules. Since the mystery of how Carol got her equipment was solved, Akira was no longer interested in it now.

On the other hand, Carol herself had to make a compromise with her principals to be able to get her current set of equipment. To be more exact, she had to make peace with her principle to only sleep with those who paid her with money from dangerous jobs.

Even when one joined a high ranking Hunter team, if the difference in equipment was that big, even the seller would be troubled as well. This also meant that it was no trouble at all if the seller was to completely ignore it. Fortunately, in the case of Carol, she knew someone that she could manipulate. It was those who worked with Sheryl's gang.

It did not take much work for Carol to make an officer from Kiryou to fall for her. She also did the same to the person written as the buyer in the contract. That man also paid for her equipment, which Carol offered her services in return. Thus, she did not have to go through Hunter Rank checks to obtain her equipment. Even if it came to light later, the seller would only take it as those men getting manipulated by a bad girl. They were already under Carol's charm. They no longer cared about the risk involved in selling and purchasing expensive equipment for a low-rank Hunter, who otherwise would have failed the Hunter Rank requirements.

However, Carol did not find this to be amusing at all. She considered what might happen to her if her fear turned to reality, and even resorted to this.

Carol and Akira walked carefully inside the ruin while gathering information about the area for map brokers. Akira left his bike behind next to Carol's camping car.

Carol took the front as they proceeded. She stopped many times while they walked. She would regularly check the information data from the information gathering device that she placed there beforehand before continuing to check the other areas.

“Carol, why do we have to collect the data ourselves? Can’t we just use some kind of long-range data transfer to regularly transfer the data or something?”

“I use that kind of device in some areas. Not all. For those, sometimes, monsters manage to catch its signal. They searched for the location of the terminal and destroyed it. That’s why, including the collection of area data, Hunters mainly use devices that are mostly only for receiving signals. The ones I’m personally collecting from, are set to only send data when they receive a certain encrypted message first. Thanks to that, the monsters can’t find them.”

“Ohhh, I see.”

“Well, information about where terminals get broken is actually quite important to those who are deciding on a safe route to take.”

After the last ruckus in Mihazono ruin, things had started to change. The drones guarding the areas, the distribution of monsters, the patrol routes, all of them were completely changed. That was also the case for the city maintenance drones as well. In the past, they only cleaned up rubbles, but now, they even started to rebuild buildings as well.

With all these changes in the ruin, its map, which was formerly free, had become highly valuable. Of course, the better the accuracy of the map, the more expensive it became. In order to decide whether a map was worth its price, people often asked how the map brokers gathered the information about the patrol time and the area. A good map broker would be able to answer that easily.

Akira listened closely to that explanation with great interest.

“So, we’re exploring the ruin in order to get better accuracy for the map, huh? Being a map broker is not easy.”

“It’s just one of the many methods to make maps. There are also people who opt to buy information from Hunters who return back from the ruin and use that information to construct a map. There are also cases where

they force someone indebted to them to explore the ruin while carrying inadequate equipment. They would be equipped with an information-gathering device, of course, but they are not expected to return back alive."

The fact that a certain Hunter with a certain skill level did not return alive could also be valuable information to map out the dangerous area of a ruin. Depending on the debt, these people might get sent to locations where there was not enough information regarding that area.

"So that's one of the things that would happen to people deep in debt, huh?"

"Although it sounds cruel, depending on their luck and skill, they can repay their debt that way, you know? Many Hunters die meaninglessly inside the ruin after all, so I think it's one of the better choices."

Although it was rare, there were Hunters who awakened their talents because of such a cruel fate. These Hunters would sign a contract with some company in exchange for offsetting most of their debt. After all, the eastern district always needed more skilled Hunters. As long as they had the skills, Hunters could always find a way to get back up. Though, many of them die before they have that chance. Also, skilled Hunters would not get drowned in debt in the first place.

Carol had a long history with Viola, so she knew way more than Akira regarding what would happen to those in debt.

The Corporate Government wished people in the eastern district would do honest businesses. This included respecting their basic human rights. However, there was room on how to interpret what was entailed as human rights. After all, in order to push the development of the eastern district, there were many occasions where they had to infringe on human rights.

This included human experimentation. The level of this infringement depended on how much debt one had, the less the debt, the more their human rights were properly respected. One of the prime examples of that was the free food distributed to the slums. If the debt only amounted to a few hundred Aurum, they would only be forced to consume food coming from suspicious sources.

But the opposite was also true, the bigger the debt, the more the danger they had to face. For example, the common drugs sold in the eastern district were only sold to the public after they were tested on people first. More often than not, the stronger the drug, the stronger the side effect was. The nanomachines inside the medicine might worsen a wound instead of healing it. In the worst-case scenario, they might face a fate worse than death.

As the debt got higher, it eventually scaled closer to life-threatening situations. When the debt reached a number that was unreasonably high, they would be forced to undergo hopeless experiments to repay their debt. They would be forced to take substances that would treat them no better than expendable pawns. Although there was no public example of something like that, it was common sense in the eastern district. That common sense had already spread widely and many in the eastern district would rather choose to die instead of getting into debt.

Akria could not help but frown after hearing some examples from Carol. But he then remembered the people who attacked Sheryl's base in the past. To pay for the compensation, they were forced into debt and were sold. At that time, some of them said that they rather chose death.

When that happened, Akira obliged and granted their wish. And after hearing Carol's story, he wondered if it was true. They did find a better fate by dying there.

—*—*—*—

Carol's camping car was even equipped with a bath. Akira, who spent the night there as Carol's bodyguard, borrowed the bath after they were done with their Hunter job for the day.

For a bath inside a moving vehicle, it was a relatively big bath. Although it was only enough for one person, it was large enough for someone to extend their legs inside of it. Or more like, leaving the size aside, it was even a better bath than the one Akira had back at home. To be more precise, the warm water there was mixed with extra stuff. Akira remembered that Carol once said Akira was only using a cheap bath and he could understand that difference now as he was enjoying his bath.

Alpha was sitting on the mouth of the bath with only the part under her knees dipped inside the warm water. At first, she was also dipping inside with Akira, but Akira said that it was too cramped and told her to move away.

“Akira, I want to confirm this. How long are you planning to guard Carol?”

“Hm? It is either until she’s fine without me or until my new equipment arrives.”

“I see, that’s fine then.”

Akira frowned.

“Oh? You’re fine with that? And here I thought you would tell me to stop since I can’t train while guarding Carol.”

However Alpha teasingly replied.

“If it’s about that, there’s no need for you to worry.”

“…Is guarding Carol really that bad?”

“It at least won’t let your skills get rusty and I am not saying this because Carol is bad herself. Rather, she isn’t the source of the problem. Didn’t you say it yourself before? You often become the source of a problem or get roped into one. So that at the very least won’t let your skills get rusty.”

Akira just laughed bitterly and did not deny that at all.

While Akira was in the bath, Carol was working on constructing a map from the information that they collected that day using a terminal fixed to the camping car. At the same time, she was also browsing the net. After seeing the result, she sighed.

[Still no change, huh? It’s not like I can keep having Akira protect me like this forever. With that being said, it’s not like I can move around recklessly either, I need to be patient.]

Carol concluded that it was best for her to keep laying low and not cause any trouble for the time being while hoping that the situation would change soon.

That was when Akira returned from the bath. Carol quickly replaced the troubled look on her face with her usual smile and went to the bath. This was for the sake of keeping at least one of them, Akira or Carol, ready for a fight anytime. So, she waited until Akira finished putting on his augmented suit before starting to take off her own augmented suit.

Although there was no changing room inside the camping car, there was a curtained partition. But even so, Carol did not use it and started undressing in front of him. Akira finally showed a reaction when he saw Carol's beautiful body that she had spent billions of Aurum to maintain. Unfortunately, his reaction was more of exasperation. Seeing that, she thought he was the same as always and smiled bitterly while she went to the bath.

While dipping inside the especially adjusted warm water, Carol probed her body as if to give it a full-body check. Although it looked like she was casually probing her body, her grip strength was way over what a normal human could do. It was even stronger than the power of an augmented suit.

Equipment was not the only thing that she got by compromising her principles. In order to strengthen her enhanced body, she somehow managed to acquire nanomachines distributed near the frontline. Although her outer appearance still stayed the same. An original alluring body designed to lure men, the nanomachine coursing inside it was of a completely different level. If she wished to, she could obtain a temporary superhuman body in exchange for nanomachine consumption.

In the past, she carefully washed her body for her side job. This time, she did the same but doubled for training to get used to her now powerfully enhanced body. She carefully moved her body not to practice how to entice men but to minimize the usage of her nanomachine, which was useful for fighting.

When she finished bathing and returned back, Akira was no longer inside the room. As she was puzzled as to what was going on, a call from Viola suddenly reached her. Since the notification indicated that it was an urgent call, she decided to pick it up while still buck naked. Although, she did find the timing of the call and Akira's disappearance to be equally strange,

"Viola, what's wrong?"

"Carol. You've been doing great with your side job, right? It seems that the team led by someone named Zelos mentioned that one of his men even used the team's budget for you. That man you sunk your claws in is named Babalod."

"Ahh, him, huh? And here I thought that he was being extremely generous to me. So, he even went as far as to use the team's budget, huh? To think that he would go even that far… His luck with women is really awful. So, what then?"

"When the rest of the team discovered it, he said that he was manipulated by you. And now the whole team is looking for you."

Carol heaved a huge sigh.

"I see, so, what's the situation?"

"It seems that they have already discovered your current location from an information broker. If you're planning to negotiate with them, I don't mind taking it over for you though."

"Let me think about it first. Thanks. I'll call you again."

Carol closed the call, she then shouted as she put on her augmented suit.

"Akira~! Where are you~?"

A reply came from the terminal connected to the vehicle.

"Outside, it seems that some people are heading in this direction. So I'm standing by, ready outside."

Carol was a bit surprised, and she went to check the vehicle’s radar. Although it was still outside the radius where it would send in an alert, there was indeed a signal headed in their direction. Judging from its speed, it seemed to be a vehicle that did not seem to be headed for the ruins. Although it was coming from the direction of the wasteland, if it was aiming for the ruin, it would have gone to the Hunter Office’s direction instead, not Carol’s camping car, which was parked rather far away from the Hunter Office.

Carol lightly smiled as she felt a level of reassurance on how decisive and quickly Akira responded. She proceeded to put on her augmented suit and picked up her equipment before going outside as well. She did not seem to be scared at all. Although, she did think that it was a pain in the neck. Her opponent this time was a team of high-rank Hunters. But even so, that was not a rare occurrence considering her side job. So, she told herself that she could deal with it just like usual to calm herself down.

Based on the situation, she even thought of taking care of it all by herself without Akira. After all, it was not like she employed Akira to do something like this.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 248, 10 Billion Aurum per Night

Index

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Akira and Carol were waiting beside the camping car for the signal caught on their radar to arrive. It did not take long for the source of that signal to be visible to the naked eye, a large vehicle stopped near them, and two men came out from the vehicle. Both men were Hunters. Judging from their equipment, they must have come from further east of Kugamayama city.

Carol was familiar with one of them. It was Babalod, who used her service from her side job. So, it did not take much for her to guess who was the other one. As she guessed, it was Zelos, the man she had heard from Viola.

Zelos scanned Akira and Carol's equipment before lightly throwing a question.

"So you're Carol, huh?"

Carol casually replied.

"Yep."

"Well, since you even took your time to welcome us here, it means that I don't need to explain everything from the start, right?"

“Hmmm, are you here because you heard your friends praise me for my side job? If that’s the case, I’m sorry, but it’s not like I’m accepting customers all the time. So, like, can you leave for today and ask me again some other time?”

Carol already knew why Zelos was there, but she was deliberately playing coy. Zelos understood what Carol was trying to say. Thus, he then tried to carefully probe Carol’s situation.

“Actually, the money that Babalod used for you, was from the team’s budget, you see.”

“Oh my, is that so? I didn’t know that. That must be rough, so, don’t tell me that you’re here to tell me to return it.”

“It depends.”

“Are you being serious here? I’m only accepting his money and he got that money from stealing from you. It’s him that you should be asking, not me.”

“Well, normally, that would be the case, as I said, it depends.”

“Oh, so, can you elaborate?”

Up until this point, both of them were acting casual while trying to probe the other’s intention, but this is where Zelos’ attitude changed. A certain pressure emanated from him, it was a pressure unique to high-ranking Hunters. It was calm and silent yet extremely suffocating.

“It depends on whether you put your hands on him trying to cause trouble for us right from the start or not.”

Carol was smiling like usual. But she also started feeling the pressure and got a bit anxious.

Zelos reached for Babalod’s neck to further intimidate Carol.

“Although I did say that he took the team’s budget, if it was a small amount, we could solve it by ourselves. And even if it is not that small, we can still

solve it by discussing it among ourselves.”

Zelos’ gaze turned sharper. His grip also became stronger. Babalod started to frown from the pain.

“But the problem is that this guy leaked a piece of secret information. So, it’s only given that we’ll get suspicious toward the person who he gave this information to. We only knew that he gave away such a crucial piece of information to you because we interrogated this fool.”

Zelos’ gaze turned thick with intimidation.

“Answer me. What are you going to do with that information?”

Carol somehow managed to maintain her calm since it was not rare for her to have to face such intimidating pressure from a high-ranking Hunter due to her side job. She then replied casually with her business smile.

“Nothing in particular.”

“I’ll interpret that as you refusing to answer.”

Zelos’ stance shifted. The situation was on the brink of a fight. Akira also tensed up, he already activated his time compression and shifted his stance as well so that he could react to any sudden movement.

But Carol smiled and replied calmly.

“I didn’t mean that, it’s just exactly as I said, I have no plan to use that information.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s true that I received that information as a substitute for monetary gains, but it’s not like I was aiming for that information in the first place. I’m fine with getting paid anything as long as it has the same worth as the fee and I don’t really decide what that is. It was his choice to pay for my service using information gained from your team, not me.”

Carol’s face turned serious.

“Since I did my job, I have the right to receive my reward. If you don’t have enough money, you’ll have you pay for it with something else. Just because I’m not strapped for money, that doesn’t mean I’m willing to lower my fee. I have no plans to reduce the cost I set. It would reflect as me lowering my own worth. I’m sure you can understand that too, right? Or is that I’m mistaken?”

As the leader of a team of Hunters, whose jobs had death as an occupational hazard, his team members practically staked their lives to work under him. Thus, he could not deny Carol’s statement, which only left him with one choice.

“Well, yeah.”

“Well, that’s the gist of it. I don’t mind what it is as long as it is worth enough for my fee. It doesn’t matter if it’s money, or an object, or a person, or information, or just basically anything. Even if I have no idea how to use that thing. And by pure chance, this time, that thing is information. That’s all there is to it.”

Zelos could understand Carol’s argument. Thus, he lowered his pressure and disengaged. Akira also did the same after that.

But that did not mean Zelos was no longer suspicious of Carol. He kept his suspicion as he glanced at Akira.

“You’re pretty chill although you know my team is being hostile with you, is it because of that guy?”

Carol’s serious expression returned back to her usual smile.

“Well, that’s half of the reason.”

“So what’s the other half?”

“Even without him around, I’ll deal with it the same way. This is not a rare occurrence for me after all. So, I’ll just handle it the way I usually do.”

“Oh, in that case, is it okay to ask what you usually do in this situation?”

“I’ll offer you my service then explain the situation and help you understand what is actually going on. Of course, I’ll do that on a bed. Most misunderstandings get cleared after doing that, you know?”

“…I see.”

Zelos thought one more time. He was trying to judge Carol’s attitude. If she was his team’s enemy. He then added Akira’s fighting skill to the equation and finally made his conclusion as he lightly chuckled and declared.

“Ok! Fine! It seems that it’s my mistake!”

He then apologized to Carol.

“Well, I’m sorry. As the team leader, I must think about the safety of my team, you see. So, I can’t help but be extra cautious. Sorry about it.”

Carol was relieved but she did not show it externally, she just smiled and accepted Zelos’ apology.

“Don’t worry, it’s fine, it’s completely understandable and I’m already used to it too. So, what now? Do you want me to book a time for you?”

“Thank you for the offer, but I’ll refuse. As I said, we’re rather low on funds.”

“I normally make it cheap for the first time.”

“No no no, letting myself be swayed by something like that is the seed of money problems. So, I must be strict with myself on this.”

From the outside, it appeared as though two combatants were conversing peacefully with each other. Up until now, Zelos still had his hand on Babalod’s neck, but this is when he finally let go. Since Babalod was strangled off the ground, the moment he landed, he lost balance and fell to the ground, although, he somehow managed to support himself so as not to fall face-first.

Zelos glanced at Babalod and casually said to him.

“You hear that, right? So that’s it. You go deal with it yourself.”

Babalod was obviously flustered.

“W-wait for a sec, me alone?”

“Of course! If she’s the enemy of the whole team, we deal with her together. But that doesn’t seem to be the case. That’s why we won’t help you. Well, we won’t get in your way either. So do your best.”

After saying that, Zelos just moved away as if it was none of his business.

Now that Babalod was left alone to face Carol and Akira, his face turned desperate, typical only to someone cornered as he turned his focus to Carol.

Zelos only agreed to help him get back the team’s budget that he used to pay for Carol’s side job. And if it turned out that Carol was an enemy to his team, then Zelos would help him kill her and take back their funds while doing so.

But since that was not the case, Zelos’ team issue laid with Babalod and not Carol. Even if Babalod schemed to take back everything with force, this was in the end, a matter between a prostitute and her customer. Zelos did not have anything to do with it. That was what Zelos hinted at as he moved to the side.

Of course, Carol understood what he meant. She still kept her business smile from the outside as she thought of how to handle the change in the situation. She then made a dissatisfied face as she asked.

“Whoah, wait, are you serious? Isn’t that just way too pathetic?”

“Sorry, I’m desperate here. I did give you a lot of money. So, can you give it back to me? I’ll repay you later.”

How much Zelos would beat him later depended on how much he could recover from Carol. So Babalod did not have the leeway to be concerned

about shame. Moreover, when he thought of how much he had given Carol, he could not help but frown.

“…In the first place, your fee is just way too high. There’s a limit on how much you can charge someone! 10 billion Aurum per night is just way out of line, you know!?”

Akira, who was listening to them with vigilance, was caught by surprise when he heard that statement. Carol, who saw that, smiled amusedly. She returned to her usual smile and explained to Babalod.

“A woman’s body can be as expensive as she wants. Moreover, I never forced you. You were okay with that fee and that’s why you used my service, right? So, there’s no way I’m okay with you asking it back after enjoying my service.”

“…But even so, I still need it back!”

Babalod took one step forward. Negotiations had ceased and he was about to make his move. Carol who saw that quickly analysed her choices to initiate the fight. But before she made her decision, Akira already stood between them.

“Carol, it’s okay to treat him as a mugger now, right?”

Carol was pretending to hesitate for a bit before giving her answer.

“Hmm, well, I guess that’s fine. Though I have one request, if it’s possible, don’t kill him or don’t injure him too much. Please beat him gently.”

“And the reason for that?”

“He’ll fetch more money that way. With him making you work like this; I’ll have him pay for your reward after all.”

“Fine then.”

Akira did not reach for his rifle, instead, he unsheathed his blade and faced Babalod.

The black blade decorated with golden linings was an optional item that came with his CA31R augmented suit. But the grip was from the modified blade that he received from Shiori.

The blade portion was destroyed back in the Kuzusuhara ruin. Normally, he would just need to ask for a replacement blade. But it was not practical to keep asking Shiori for the blade's replacement every single time he broke it, not to mention that he broke it that time to kill Katsuya.

Akira had another choice to use the repairing feature of the sheath to create a new blade, but it would be creating a new blade instead of repairing the current blade, so it would take a lot of time and money.

That was when he remembered that a blade was in the optional item list back when he ordered his augmented suit, so he decided to ask Kiryou if he could purchase a blade from them without its handle and etc.

'Due to the difference in their design, it was unusable at first, but with a little bit of modification to the grip, it solved the issue.' After hearing that answer from Kiryou, Akira thought that it was a good opportunity to also repair the grip after all those fights and sent it to Kiryou to modify.

Since it took time to modify the sheath and the grip to be able to be used with Kiryou's general purpose blade, Akira had to wait till they sent it back to him. Because of that, it did not make it for Akira's inter-city transport escort mission. But it was finally done and returned back together with the rest of his new equipment just the other day.

Seeing Akira take a battle stance with his blade unsheathed, Babalod also took a fighting stance. He lowered both of his hands until they touched the ground. The joints suddenly disengaged. He raised his arms and slowly pointed them forward. The arms with seemingly unlimited disengaged joints moving freely as if they were whips. Thus, creating an anatomical stance impossible for a human to perform.

Hunters who did not use guns in battles against monsters were a minority. As such, there were not that many chances for them to have close-range combat where rifles were at a disadvantage. But even so, there were

Hunters who still learnt that skill. After all, there are chances where they had to use that skill, for example, when they had to fight another Hunter.

Those who had learned such skill would be able to limit their opponents during a fight, after all. They would not be shooting stray bullets anywhere. In case of a fight where there was no wish to kill but both sides also did not mind killing the other side, due to some common unspoken convention between the Hunters, such a fight often turned into a battle without guns. Dealing with pain without the risk of killing was a good way to discourage the opponent. There were also cases where Hunters would look down on their opponents once they became completely useless without guns. Thus, most high-ranking Hunters knew how to do melee combat.

Akira accepted Carol's request not to kill Babalod, and Babalod only wanted Akira, who was Carol's bodyguard, to relent. This was in order for him to force Carol to concede. Thus, both of them basically acquiesce to fight without guns.

They were locked in a face-off as they were probing for an opening. The tense atmosphere continued. Zelos, who did not like the idea of that stalemate continuing forever, decided to snap his finger. The sound signalled the start of the fight as Akira and Babalod jumped into action.

Babalod's blade arm reached for Akira. He swung his already bent right arm to pierce through the air. While at the same time, his arm extended while his legs did not shift at all, it was as if he suddenly threw a blade toward an enemy that was originally completely out of his reach.

The blade arm suddenly released a flash of light created from forcefield armour, which hardened the whole blade. It turned into a vicious weapon that can easily pierce through a thick metal plate, searching for its target.

Akira dexterously leaned to one side, evading the incoming blade. The blade passed next to him as if it was a speeding bullet, but even so, Akira calmly but quickly used the least needed movement to avoid it, and while still in that posture, Akira swung his blade to cut the extended arm.

But the combination of the arm's movement, the speed of Babalod pulling back his arm, and the anti-cut armour protecting it prevented Akira from cutting it off. The moment it made contact with Akira's blade, it released flashes of light, like a firecracker.

Babalod quickly pulled back his arm. Resting his hardened thumb on the blade guard, extending it out, Babalod tried to attack Akira from behind. But Akira immediately ducked to evade that and at the same time, he leapt forward to close the distance.

To retaliate, Babalod used his left arm and whipped it toward Akira. It was aimed to restrict Akira's movement. The steel hand went to grab Akira's head while the extended arm tried to circle itself around Akira's body. It was difficult to get away from both of them at the same time.

Akira swung down his blade to repel Babalod's left arm. Although he could not cut it off, the power of his augmented suit was more than enough to blow it away.

At that time, Babalod already launched another attack with his right arm that he just pulled back. The successive attack had come by quickly, even the slightest delay would be fatal.

But Akira also deflected that arm in the same way. Babalod's successive rapid attack was relatively slow inside Akira's compressed time perception. When he lost balance from evading the previous attack, he used his augmented suit to fortify his footing and forcefully fixed his posture, the backlash from the difference in the weight that would have originally blown him away was redirected and used to strike back at his opponent.

With both of Babalod's arms blown away, Akira quickly closed their distance. With a rather light step, he raised his blade up.

That was when Babalod smiled. It was his original scheme to bait Akira to do that. With that posture that was obvious he was going to fall over; he suddenly regained his balance using his augmented suit. And at the same time, he whipped his arms as if they were claws trying to rip Akira from both sides.

With Akira was in the air and no footing, even if he used forcefield armour to project a footing and used it to jump away, it was already too late to try to evade that attack. It was a high-speed attack from both sides. Even if Akira deflected one of them, the other one would hit him. Babalod was confident that he already had his victory at hand.

And as Babalod had predicted, Akira could not get away from that attack, but that did not mean he was victorious.

Akira let go of the blade that he held with both of his hands. He then released an accurate strike to the left and right without glancing to the side. His retaliation was fast thanks to the physical power enhancement of his new augmented suit. With the angle of his attack being extremely exquisite, it was enough to make sure that the arm blades were deflected, avoiding a head-on clash.

Babalod was caught by surprise. With his left and right arms thrown aside, he could not move while Akira in front of him grabbed his blade again. Babalod could not do anything as Akira swung his blade down.

The blade stopped right in front of Babalod's eyes.

Both Akira and Babalod had no wish to kill each other, so in another word, they were both holding back. But in an exchange that only lasted for a few seconds, it was easy to see who would die if they were going at it seriously, and both of them understood that very well.

Now that Babalod had lost his will to continue the fight, he disengaged his non-human posture. The moment he did that, his body fell back.

"…Alright, it's my loss, goddammit!"

Babalod frustratedly admitted his loss and looked bitterly at Akira.

"You even got yourself a bodyguard like this, huh!? I bet you paid him with the money that I paid you! So how much is it?! How much are you getting paid!?"

With someone that powerful, it was only natural to be expensive. Although he lost, paying Akira for that fight would diminish Carol's ability to pay him. Babalod thought so as he spat out those begrudging words.

Akira sheathed his blade.

"1 million Aurum per day."

Babalod twitched, Akira's answer only served to worsen his anger.

"The heck?! You?! You're seriously okay getting paid that little?! You're only making me look more stupid here, you know?!"

"Even if you say that…"

Akira seemed completely apathetic to that matter, Carol then came next to Akira and smiled at Babalod.

"I actually told him that it's okay to have me every day on top of the base pay during his mission to protect me."

Babalod, who already had a taste of Carol's body, was completely convinced with that as he could not help but exclaim.

"I see, so that's why, huh! Dammit!"

In contrast to him, Akira looked confused as he could not understand why that would make sense. But since he was in the middle of a job right now, he put that aside for later.

"So then, Carol, what do you want to do with this guy?"

Although he had defeated Babalod, it was not like he stripped him off his ability to fight. Akira went this far only because he was told Babalod would fetch more money when captured alive, but he had no idea what exactly to do with Babalod. Meanwhile, capturing him just like this was basically not in his job description as a bodyguard.

Carol giggled and answered that question.

“Hm? Just wait for a bit. They should arrive soon.”

“They who?”

“Don’t worry. It’s not like I’m talking about his reinforcement, ah, there they are.”

From the direction where Carol was pointing, there was an APC coming from the wasteland. It stopped close to them, and some people came out from that APC. It was Colbert, Levin, Erio, and their companions. Unlike Colbert and Levin, who were already used to this scene, Erio and the other children seemed a bit scared.

And lastly, Viola also came out from that APC. With a glance at the scene there, Viola understood what was going on and walked to Carol.

“Oh, that was way more peaceful than I thought.”

Carol smiled at Viola and replied.

“Well, it’s great to have a strong bodyguard. But still, you came just right on time, so, where have you been watching from?”

“Oh my. It’s just a pure coincidence.”

Carol did not tell Viola that she had employed Akira. She had also refused Viola’s offer to do the negotiation. With Viola not asking what Carol would do to handle what was coming, and the perfect timing when Viola came, it could be inferred that Viola already knew what was going on. Carol did not know if that was because of the precision of her information net or because of her amazing observation skill. Either way, Carol still gave a smile, indicating that she already knew everything about Viola.

In reaction to Carol’s smile, Viola replied with her usual smile.

“Carol. Since I’m already here, can you leave the rest of the negotiation to me?”

“You have a point, alright then.”

“Oh, that was easy. You could’ve accepted my offer like that from the start, you know?”

Against Viola who was making a rather exaggerated surprised expression, Carol’s smile deepened.

“The situation is not the same now, you do know that as well, right?”

Having Viola involved right now when Carol already won her negotiation with Zelos and Babalod was completely different from getting Viola involved from the time when nothing was certain yet.

Since Carol and Viola were such good friends and equally bad women, they really matched each other well. But this time, Carol wanted to avoid making this matter overly complicated with Viola’s involvement. That was why even if there was a minimum danger to herself, Carol refused her offer to get involved back then.

Carol tried to probe how much Viola knew about her situation as she threw a question to Viola with a smile that indicated that she already knew everything.

“That’s why I’ll have you cut the negotiation price. Well, then, I’ll leave the rest to you, Akira let’s return back to the car.”

Carol walked toward the camping car. Akira hesitated for a bit and looked at Babalod. Levin was in the middle of putting something that looked like a restraining device on him. Meanwhile, Babalod seemed to have completely lost his will to fight back and just let Levin do his job. In contrast to that, Erio and the other children looked extremely anxious, having to guard a Hunter who was obviously much stronger than them. Akira thought that it should be okay to leave as he went back to Carol’s camping car as well.

Viola smiled amusedly just like usual as she watched Carol and Akira’s back.

After they returned back to the camping car. Akira asked Carol what exactly just happened. That was when he asked the question that he shelved back

then.

“Say, Carol, that 10 billion Aurum per night that guy said back then, was that true?”

“Hm? Yep, it’s true.”

Carol replied extremely casually to the point where he could not help but frown.

“I-I see… But still, the 10 billion Aurum, did he pay for it?”

“Of course, he couldn’t. That is why he gave me something else that was worth that much. Which is the secret information Zelos talked about. He also gave me other information a few times before that. I’m sure that’s why his team leader took his time to come here when that was out of the bag.”

“Well, that part is completely understandable, but… How in the world do you sell a piece of information worth that much?”

“Hmm, it’s true that it’s difficult to decide the price of a piece of information. For example, let’s say that it’s information that would have been fatal if it fell to the hands of someone who is up to no good to their team, and with that assumption in mind, the question would be how much they are willing to spend to get that information. With that as the basis on how to decide the worth of a piece of information, it becomes easier to tell that information would be worth 10 billion Aurum.”

“Hmmm, even if you say so, it’s 10 billion Aurum we’re talking about here… For me, it’s a huge amount of money. Even with my perspective about money lowered, we’re talking about just for one night here, right? Hmmm…”

Akira hummed as if he was trying to understand something that was completely alien to him. It was obvious from his expression that he looked really troubled. 10 billion Aurum for one night. It was in a whole other world that he could not understand.

Carol understood what Akira was thinking from seeing his expression and smiled at him.

“If you still can’t understand it, how about trying the body that is worth 10 billion Aurum per night for once?”

Akira frowned and smiled wryly.

“No thanks.”

“Geez, you’re as cold as always. Don’t worry, I won’t ask for money from you. Or at least, that’s the case while you’re guarding me.”

“Still no. I bet it’s one of those frauds where the first few tries are either for free or for a small amount of money. Do you really think I would accept it right after I just saw what happened to the people who fell for it?”

“For him, the experience must have been worth that trouble. That’s all there is to it. To be honest, if you use this chance to get used to it, I’m sure you won’t end up like him though. Even I must admit that you’re strong, that’s why I’m willing to let you have it without the need of paying. Don’t you think that it is a great offer? Are you sure you don’t want to take it? This chance will never come again, you know?”

“I know, and yes, I’m not taking it.”

“You’re really no fun at all.”

Seeing that Akira was even putting up his guard toward her, Carol just giggled amusedly.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 249, The Maids of The Old-World Ruin

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Since his business with Carol was over, Zelos returned back in his vehicle. Babalod was not with him since Babalod had already been taken away by Viola.

Zelos and Viola's negotiation reached a conclusion without much trouble. It was not rare for a negotiator to take care of negotiations between Hunters. After all, if two high ranking Hunter teams broke into a fight, the damage to the area would not be small. Except for the times when their main aim was the destruction of the other team, Hunters tend to use negotiators to handle the negotiations peacefully. Zelos was already used to this, so he just threw his negotiation with Viola to his own team's negotiator.

It was already decided beforehand that Viola would pay for what Babalod had to pay. But since it was taken as a debt from just a small scuffle between Hunters on top of another small scuffle between teammates, Babalod did not get sent for human experimentation.

Furthermore, with Babalod being a high ranking Hunter, at most, he would be forced to go to the ruins until he would be able to pay his debt. Zelos knew that and was fine with it. Although if Babalod got sent for human

experimentation, he could not let that slide as the team leader. After all, he would still feel bad to throw someone that he cared for into hell.

With that being said, Zelos looked a bit uncertain as he mumbled.

"…But still, although I'm glad that there's nothing to worry about, why did he even do that? That guy is a cyborg, so there's no reason he would get addicted to something like that though."

Many men met ruin because of women and that did not change even for high ranking Hunters. Obviously, they were earning way more money than common Hunters, but due to having to face deadly situations regularly, most of them were awful with money. Many of them were weak to temptations. With the reward of each success being big, the side who did the tempting also refined their techniques.

Even so, it was well known that it was not easy to seduce a cyborg. Many of them could adjust their sensitivity manually. Then to top it off, a cyborg's body was battle-oriented, thus many of them did not even have the device to enjoy such an activity.

Even if they could choose to add such a device, the sensation transmitted from that device would hardly make someone addicted. Because of that, hardly any cyborg gets addicted to body stimulus.

As such, those who aimed to try to seduce cyborgs were often forced to build a pseudo-lover relationship. This was also not easy. It took time and money to investigate one's preference and set up a chance meeting. Those who still chose to do that must have known that their hardwork would be properly rewarded by the end of the day.

Zelos understood that much. This was the reason he was very suspicious of Carol and went there himself to confirm his suspicion.

Zelos thought that the matter with Carol was some kind of attack from another Hunter team. They sent one of their operators to approach a target and stole his team's money, information, and trust.

But after he went to check it himself, it turned out that Babalod's problem was related to a Hunter who was working a side job as a prostitute. Babalod told him everything after a light interrogation when his embezzlement of the team's budget was discovered. Afterwards, Babalod agreed to go to Carol to demand the money back. This showed that Babalod's relationship with Carol was nothing more than that of a prostitute and a client. It did not seem that it was some kind of elaborate honey trap where Carol completely seduced Babalod.

Although Zelos was relieved that it was not an attack from another Hunter team, he was suspicious of another thing. As the team leader, he knew the members of his team well. That was exactly why he did not expect Babalod to go so far as stealing from the team's budget and leaking secret information just for his favourite prostitute.

[…I still don't get it. Babalod is a cyborg. Although that woman seems to have an enhanced body, it was still just a flesh body, right? Even if she has a physique that can be connected to some dangerous VR device, Babalod is not stupid enough to pay her that much money, so what exactly is going on here…]

As he was really confused about what exactly happened, he then remembered what Carol had said. 'Helping him understand on the bed.' That sentence was quite convincing. Zelos could not help but smile wryly imagining what would happen to him if he had taken that offer.

"Well, I don't really know what happened, but at least it's obvious that she's a dangerous girl. I have to be careful. I'll at least tell the rest of the team to be careful of her as well."

His agreement with Viola was sealed with one condition. Information Babalod leaked would not spread to anyone else. Although the formal contract was to be made later through the Hunter office, that oral agreement alone already had binding power. As long as they did not turn Carol and her companion into their team's enemy, there was no need to fear that the secret information would spread. Since there was no need to kill anyone, Zelos thought that this matter had already been resolved.

One of the reasons was because if Carol was really used to having a conflict with high ranking Hunters, then it was to be expected for her to be familiar with solving such conflicts in a peaceful manner. There was no need to worry about her breaking her promise, which would essentially be throwing away the peaceful solution out of the window.

In reality, Carol was not used to having conflicts with high ranking Hunters. The Hunters who lived further to the east were relatively stronger both in terms of might and their power as an organization. Carol knew that the risk of getting into trouble with these people was relatively high, that was why she avoided having them as her customers. She held herself back from taking too much money from them.

In short, Carol took a big gamble to cross this bridge. It was a dangerous, damaged bridge hanging on top of a deep ravine. Carol knew that. But even so, she still decided to cross that bridge. She believed that it was better than having to walk through a minefield. After all, it was much safer to carefully cross through a precarious bridge instead of having to tread through the land with hidden mines that would blow her up.

Although the land itself might have no mines buried under it, it might just be her unwarranted fear making her believe that there were mines. Nonetheless, she still could not choose to walk through it.

Today, Akira was working as Carol’s bodyguard again as they were collecting information to make a map of the Mihazono ruin. In the middle of their exploration, he saw Carol regularly doing something that he did not understand. He simply thought that she must be working on the map or something.

Just like last time, Carol suddenly stopped and looked in the direction where there was nothing, she then smiled at Akira, waved at him, and pointed at the ground.

“Akira, try standing here for a bit.”

Akira did as he was told and nothing in particular happened. But Carol casually but carefully observed his reaction.

“…Okay, and?”

Seeing that Akira was a bit confused, Carol stopped and pointed to the front.

“Can you try to look over there? There’s a monster hiding over there with optical camouflage, can you see it?”

Akira frowned and looked in the direction she was pointing at. He used his information terminal to search for movement there and adjusted the focused direction and the sensitivity of his information-gathering device. If it was some common optical camouflage, this would be enough to detect such a monster, but strangely enough, he did not find anything.

“Alpha, is she telling the truth?”

Alpha smiled and replied.

“Yeah. Although it’s a difficult one to detect. Do you want me to give you my support?”

“Yes, please. Ah, can you start with tweaking the setting of the information-gathering device?”

If it was a monster with optical camouflage that was obviously undetectable using Akira’s information-gathering device, it would be difficult to explain how he could detect that monster with Alpha’s support. But that was not the case if it was something that could be explained by adjusting the setting of his information-gathering device. Since Akira was also using that chance to train himself, he decided to be careful about that as well.

“Okay.”

Alpha hijacked Akira’s information-gathering device. By adjusting the setting under the assumption that they knew there was a monster there, they were able to detect it. Finally, he could see a multi-legged tank that almost fully blocked the road. Its legs were disguised as trees thanks to its optical

camouflage, so Hunters would not notice it even if they bumped into one of those tree-looking legs.

Akira frowned.

“…I can see it now. Carol, that’s pretty impressive for you to be able to find it. Even my relatively powerful information-gathering device needs more time to be able to detect it. I bet it’s impossible to notice that monster there unless you know that it’s there beforehand.”

Carol nodded.

“This is thanks to all the information that we’ve been diligently collecting, making regular updates for the map. The map made using this kind of information would fetch quite a lot of money, you know? Maps from common map brokers have no record about that monster.”

“I see. So, it’s thanks to our hard work going in and out of this ruin so many times, huh?”

There were invisible monsters in the ruin. Hunters who were saved thanks to the map that they bought from Carol would purchase from her again next time. Akira at least understood that much.

“But still, with it hiding there, won’t it attack someone when someone gets close to that monster?”

“It’s basically just like an invisible static object. So as long as we don’t pick a fight with it, it normally won’t attack us. I bet it’s some kind of additional security monster in case a huge ruckus like the one in Kuzusuhara ruin occurs.”

Carol’s smile then deepened.

“But well, it seems there are people who do not believe my map and could not detect monsters over there with their information-gathering device, so they decided to try to bump into it. Well, at least, the log indicates that the

monster attacked back and killed all of them. I bet this will turn into another ghost story if more and more people get killed the same way."

"You have a point; it won't be strange for ghost stories to come up because of this."

The hidden multi-legged tank monsters were posted inside the ruin; they would not attack unless certain conditions were satisfied. When more unfortunate Hunters, who satisfy said condition get killed by the monster, it would add to the number of Hunters who got killed by an unknown threat. It would not be strange for this to develop into another ghost story. As Akira thought so, he glanced at Alpha.

Alpha was smiling like usual there.

"Is there anything wrong?"

"Nope, not at all. I just thought that it won't catch me off-guard as long as I have you"

"But of course. Just leave it to me."

Alpha replied, full of confidence.

[There is a story of the beguiling ghost in Kuzusuhara ruin. But I am still alive, at least, that is the case for now.] Akira thought.

Carol then continued.

"Talking about new ghost stories. Do you know that there's a rumour around here that might develop into another ghost story?"

"Nope, never heard of it, what kind of rumour is it?"

"It seems that you sometimes can find maids inside this ruin. But when you try to call them or approach them, they will vanish."

"…Are you sure that they are not just Hunters in maid outfits who do not wish to get into contact with anyone?"

Akira knew 2 maid acquaintances. Although he had no idea if they had anything to do with that rumour, Akira did not believe that such a rumour would really turn into another ghost story. However, Carol's smile deepened as she added another detail.

"It would be great if that's all there is to it. But they can vanish, you know? Some say that they are the guides that got fixed when the drones were repairing the ruin, which meant that they should be just holographic images. It would be easy to confirm it if you use an information-gathering device to scan them. But it turns out that that was not the case. They gave signals as if they were real physical objects according to the information-gathering devices. However, they can still suddenly vanish."

"Is that so? Well. Even if that's true, I still don't see how that would turn into a ghost story."

"Moreover, it seems that there are people who really, really want to know the real identity of those maids and went to look for them, but they vanished mysteriously. Among them, there were some high ranking Hunters as well. Those who came from further to the east, or so I heard."

Hunters who vanished inside the ruin were mostly regarded as dead because of their lack of skill compared to the difficulty of the ruin. However, since those high-ranking Hunters were way too strong to get killed in the Mihazono ruin, it meant that there was something extremely dangerous inside the ruin. If Hunters kept vanishing the same way and rumours that vaguely connected to them kept spreading, it was only a matter of time before it turned into another ghost story.

"I see. That kind of story indeed might turn into a ghost story."

"If it does turn into a ghost story, then just like the beguiling ghost of Kuzusuhara ruin, I wonder if it will be named as the beguiling maids."

Akira who found that weirdly funny laughed.

"Well,won't that sound a bit too safe for such a dangerous story?"

“That’s just how ghost stories work, you know?”

“That might be the case, but still…”

“In that case, what would you name it?”

“Me, huh? Let’s see…”

Akira and Carol spent their time with such silly banter while they explored the ruin.

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Reina, Shiori, and Kanae were searching the city blocks of the Mihazono ruin. Of course, it was for a Hunter job, but this time, it was a little bit different compared to their usual Hunter job.

Just like usual, Kanae and Shiori were donning their maid outfits that day. But it was not their usual maid outfits, they were advanced battle suits that Shiori had procured beforehand.

Although they still kept their maid design, some parts of the suits were obviously modified to prioritize fighting capability to the point that it was obvious they were battle suits up-close. Though, they looked like normal maid outfits from afar. Their new fighting capability had greatly improved to the point where they could hold a candle when compared to the equipment from around Zegelt city.

They were also better armed with other equipment as well, just like their modified maid outfit. Which meant that they were way too well equipped considering the difficulty level of Mihazono ruin.

And for today, Reina also wore similar equipment as Shiori and Kanae.

Shiori did not like the idea of making Reina use the same equipment as them. No matter how powerful their fighting capability, regardless of the design, in the end, they were maid outfits meant for servants. However, since her negotiation to get a different outfit for Reina failed and Reina herself was fine with wearing it, all three wore the same armor.

Shiori seemed worried as she suggested to Reina.

“Milady, as I thought, it might be better to put something on top of it.”

Even just a cover would greatly change the feel. It could hide the fact that Reina was using a servant’s outfit. That was the meaning behind Shiori’s words. However, Reina lightly shook her head and stated.

“I’m fine with this. This thing is not designed to be put under something else, so it might even lower its fighting capability, right?”

“That might indeed be the case, but if it’s just these monsters around the area, we should be able to handle it just fine. There is no need for Milady to be concerned.”

“But that doesn’t mean that there’s any need for me to risk lowering my fighting capability, right? I’m fine like this.”

“Very well, my apologies…”

Shiori reluctantly backed off. Seeing that, Kanae tried to cheer her up with a smile.

“Well, it’s only for this time. Milady will return to her usual equipment once we’re done with this mission. So just be patient until then.”

“I know…”

Shiori sighed and decided to put said issue aside for now.

Reina understood Shiori’s feelings and could not really blame her. But even so, it did not change her decision to use the current equipment even if it was against Shiori’s wishes.

Reina was extremely disheartened when she found out about Katsuya’s death. But more than that, she was surprised. Reina herself had gone through so many dangerous situations where she almost died, she knew well just how dangerous being a Hunter was.

But even so, somewhere in her heart, she always believed that Katsuya would not die. And now, that Katsuya was dead.

The wasteland, being a Hunter. These two things combined were so dangerous that even someone like Katsuya got killed. Reina was reminded of this after hearing about Katsuya's death. Because of that, every aspect of her which looked down on the dangers of the wasteland got completely blown away.

Once again, Reina was reminded that going to the wasteland and working as a Hunter was a frightening endeavor. However, she did not let that break her. She also did not hesitate. Now that she recognized them as scary, she could properly prepare herself to get through them. She had the talent to at least accomplish that much.

Reina's talent was polished even more by Katsuya's death. She was sad when he died, but the sadness that made her disheartened also made her more insensitive to death. This would help her through it the next time, marking her growth as a Hunter.

Because of this development, Reina did not make any fuss regarding her equipment.

"So then, Shiori, how is the progress of the request?"

Shiori gracefully lowered her head.

"My apologies. Unfortunately, we're not making any progress. This is not a good situation. But this does not mean that all our hard work is in vain. I know that Milady might find it vexing that I cannot tell Milady the details, so please be-"

"Ah, yeah, it's fine. I'm not bothered by that at all. I'm sure you're already doing your best. But still, since there's no progress, that just shows how hard this request is, huh? So, let's not rush ourselves and do this bit by bit."

After she casually brushed the matter aside, she then smiled gently at Shiori.

“Don’t worry, considering that it’s a request from home, I’m already well over such a thing.”

“…Thank you very much.”

Shiori lowered her head apologetically.

Reina had no knowledge about the details of her current job. To be more precise, she knows almost nothing about what was going on. The way she got that request was also abnormal, basically, Shiori sent a request to Drankam and Drankam assigned that request to Shiori. Thus, right now, Reina was formally working under Shiori.

Since this request came from Reina’s home and included some secret information, Shiori was not allowed to tell Reina, who was living separately from her home, the details of the request. Shiori apologetically explained everything to Reina beforehand. Although Reina did not really want to accept a request coming from her home, since it was a good chance to boost her career as a Hunter, she thought that it would be stupid to refuse that request just because of her personal feelings. As a matter of fact, she thought that she should take this request as good news, that was why she was completely fine with things being hidden.

With the situation in mind, Reina then had Kanae come along too simply as extra fighting personnel. As Shiori was the one leading the team, Reina was basically only accompanying her going around the ruin without knowing what they were doing. They just followed the orders that came up from the white card. Going to different places, a room of a building somewhere on the roadside, or on top of a pile of rubble. After doing that a few times, she then lightly sighed and moved on to the next location. They were basically stuck in that loop.

Shiori once again sighed and put back the white card in her dress. Kanae lightly threw a question at Shiori.

“Still nothing?”

“Yes, it’s either the matter of the location or recognition failure or that we’re doing this completely wrong in the first place… Either way, I don’t know why it is not working at all.”

“We only have a handful of places to check next though. If it’s not about the location, then there’s no meaning in checking all of them. So, what’s the plan now? We can try to break through to the Seranthal building once we have no other places to check though. I’m sure we will be just fine with our current equipment. And if that doesn’t work as well, then it means we’re doing this wrong. So, we can just return back for now after that and…”

Shiori shook her head with a stern look on her face.

“No. I don’t know the reason why, but that place is guarded by soldiers from Kugamayama city. I heard that someone by the name of Yanagisawa took full control of the area. I heard that they’re using the same security level that they use in Kuzusuhara ruin.”

“So, it’s that strict huh? In that case, it will be also impossible to try to sneak in while making a ruckus somewhere else.”

“Of course, we might be able to go to the 57th floor if we can get the city’s permission. But in order to do that, secret information will definitely leak out during the negotiation. There’s no doubt that they’ll not stay silent about it… That’s why going to the Seranthal building is our last choice. As long as we don’t have enough reason, we won’t go there.”

“I see. Well, in the end, it’s your decision, so I’ll leave it to you, but at this rate, we’ll run out of options soon, you know? How about taking a break for now?”

Shiori understood why Kanae said so. She knew that the next few days would only be filled with more failures. This was an opportunity after she obtained that white card, so she had no plan to let this opportunity slide.

“…If it’s a matter of location, I have another guess. Before we end our search for today, I want to check that first.”

“Sure, alright.”

Shiori’s stern expression turned back to normal, she turned toward Reina and smiled at her as if there was no problem at all.

“Milady, let’s go to the next location.”

“Okay. Let’s go. Ah, by the way, I’ve told you this a few times before, but I’m basically working for you this time, so you can be more casual with me.”

“No, that would be inappropriate for me”

“Is that so? Well, I guess I’ll just leave it like that considering it’s my employer’s decision.”

Reina chuckled and jokingly said so.

In the middle of moving to the next location, Reina whispered to Kanae.

“Say, Kanae, is Shiori alright?”

“It depends on your definition of alright.”

“I’ll leave the definition to you. I don’t know what’s going on so I can’t really decide myself whether it’s okay or not. After all, I’m not allowed to know anything about it, right? But still, I can tell that Shiori is pushing herself and maybe it is for my sake. That’s why, although it might be weird for me to say this, I hope you can help lessen her burden.”

“I think it’s fine if Milady tells Ane-san that yourself, you know?”

“Whether I tell her to not push herself too hard or not, or even if I don’t say anything, she will still push herself too hard. That’s why I’m saying this to you, so, please.”

Kanae raised her eyebrows.

“I never thought Milady is the type to say something like that.”

“…What do you think of me as?”

Kanae chuckled amusedly.

“To be honest, I only thought of Milady as a spoiled brat the first time I met you. Ah, but that doesn’t mean I still think so right now, okay?”

Reina smiled bitterly.

“I’ll be careful so as not to go back to being just a spoiled brat.”

Kanae laughed as if to tease Reina.

“That’s a good resolve.”

“Well, thanks for the compliment.”

The master and the servant continued to talk in a strangely friendly manner while they traversed the ruin.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 250, The Ladies of the Old-World Ruin

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The Hunter Office located near the Mihazono Residential Ruin was equipped with a cafeteria. After they finished their job for today, Akira and Carol were having their meal there. The cafeteria was divided into 3 sections and Akira and Carol were sitting in the expensive section. One meal in that section could cost up to 100,000 Aurum, but Carol and Akira had no problem paying that.

It was a section for relatively high-ranking Hunters in Mihazono ruin. So normally, that section was empty. But today, it was filled with Hunters. Although it was not filled to the point that there was no open room, if this continued, they might need to readjust the size of the section.

Akira was at his table when he spotted the reason why that section was filled today and was surprised. It was completely unexpected.

“Carol, what do you think that thing over there is?

“A rich someone from who-knows-where?”

There were about 15 people in maid uniform and butler uniform gathering on the other side of where Akira and Carol were taking their meal. In the

middle of that, there was a girl wearing an expensive-looking dress. The maids and the butlers were standing lined up on her side. It was as if to announce to anyone that she was the master of that group.

“Maid uniform and butler uniform, wait, no, they’re actually battle suits. They must be pretty expensive.”

“Oh, they indeed are. After all, it requires special skills for such attire to retain its performance while keeping its design. I bet they’re full of old-world technology, so I bet they really are expensive.”

The girl gracefully move as if she was some high-class noble. She wore an expression devoid of joy even when tasting the most expensive food in the cafeteria. Nonetheless, her emotions did not get the better of her as she remained courteous.

“But still, although it is fine when it is only one or two, with that many people in the same place, they do look extremely out of place… This just reminds me of that maid story. Those Hunters vanished not because these maids treated them as suspicious people when they tried to talk to them, right?”

“I wonder about that. Well, either way, it’s best to keep away from them.”

“Can’t agree more to that.”

Akira and Carol completely lost interest in them and continued their meal.

When Akira already moved to the after-meal coffee, Carol, who was in contact with someone else during their meal, discussed their plan after this.

“Akira, we are actually already done for today but is it okay if I take up another job for early tomorrow morning? I’ll refuse it if you don’t want to.”

“I’m basically just following you around, so feel free to decide what to do. Is it about making maps again?”

“Nope, it’s about selling the map this time. Someone asked me for the map’s data as well as to guide them through the ruin, you see. And they

want me to give the data inside the ruin that we will be exploring tomorrow.”

“Leaving the guiding part aside, you can just send the map’s data through the net, right? Isn’t it too dangerous to go inside the ruin just to do that?”

“Viola is the one who told them about me, so it will be fine.”

Hearing that reply, Akira could not help but frown. Seeing that, Carol smiled amusedly and explained to him.

“Basically, we can have Viola take responsibility if the customer tries to do anything funny. I’m sure she already knew about that too when she introduced me to them. Up until now, Viola never seriously wanted to kill me. Furthermore, I have you as a bodyguard this time. That’s why it would be fine. Are okay with taking up that job?”

“…I see, okay, sure.”

Akira was convinced by Carol’s explanation, but he still had a conflicted look on his face. Carol smiled wryly and then explained to him.

“I know Viola is not exactly a good girl, but as long as we can handle her correctly, we can get profits from her cunningness. So, it’ll be fine as long as we know how to treat her correctly.”

“I-I see, I’ll leave that part to you then.”

Akira still did not seem to be fully convinced by her argument. Thus, he made an awkward smile in an effort to hide it. Considering what happened with Babalod as well, Akira thought that Carol was slightly worse than Viola, so he was being very careful with what Carol had said.

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Reina’s team was taking a break inside the ruin. They were having a meal inside one of the abandoned buildings with its self-repairing function still active.

Shiori, who received a notification, picked up the call, and after she finished the call, she looked vexed. Reina who saw that was interested in what just happened.

“Shiori, uhh, what’s wrong?”

Shiori regained her usual expression first before replying.

“…Milady. It seems that Chloe-sama is coming here. She wants to meet you.”

“Chloe? She wants to meet me? Why?”

“It seems that she wants to meet you simply because she is close by. I don’t know the details.”

Shiori still seemed displeased even after she tried to hide it. Her outward expression did not match her real feeling, seeing that, Reina smiled bitterly.

“Well, it would only tire us to keep asking questions. So, when she will be coming?”

“…In about 15 minutes.”

Reina raised her eyebrows; she did not expect it to be that quick. Moving to Kugamayama alone would take 3 days, including the preparation. Reina had thought that it would be about in a week or so.

“15 minutes? Do you mean that Chloe is already outside the walls right now? Or more like, she’s really already somewhere close by?”

“It seems that she was already in the nearby Hunter Office by the time I received the call.”

“So, she’ll be coming? Right here? In the middle of the ruin?”

“That is the case.”

Reina looked completely flabbergasted.

“…Why?”

Shiori already had a guess, but since it had something to do with their current mission, she could not tell Reina.

“As long as it’s not a form of harassment toward Milady, I don’t care about her intention at all.”

Reina did not notice that at that time, Shiori’s true emotions were leaking out.

After 15 minutes, a girl around the same age as Reina arrived there together with a dozen of maids and butlers. They were the group that Akira saw back in the cafeteria.

The girl was Chloe and just like Reina, she was also from a noble house.

Shiori was serving Reina, but to be more precise, she was serving the house where Reina came from. And since Chloe was also from the same house, Shiori gracefully bowed to her and greeted her.

“Chloe-sama, Long time no see. What brings you here today?”

“Hm? Didn’t I tell you? I’m here just to see Reina.”

Chloe smiled at Shiori with a smile from someone in a higher position. She then turned to Reina and smiled fondly at her.

“Long time no see. That dress does suit you very well.”

Chloe’s smile and words were very friendly, but the content was obviously poking fun at Reina. Shiori forced herself not to let her real feelings out. Chloe coldly smirked at Shiori’s reaction as she had fully expected that. She then turned to Reina, looking forward to enjoying her reaction.

But in contrast to Chloe’s hope, Reina’s reaction was rather light.

“Thanks. You look good in that dress too. Or at least that is what I want to say, but unfortunately, it doesn’t suit you at all.”

Chloe faked calmness as she tilted her head.

“…What do you mean?”

Chloe thought that Reina would throw an amusing childish tantrum when she was treated like a servant. But Reina was too indifferent as if she was a completely different person from the one Chloe knew. Chloe’s smile immediately vanished.

In contrast to that, Reina frowned and looked a bit confused.

“What do you mean by that? This is in the middle of the ruin, you know? It’s dangerous to be here in a casual dress. Though that dress is okay for sightseeing, it would be bad if you get attacked, you know?”

“Ah, if it’s about that, don’t worry. My servants can handle monsters just fine.”

Chloe’s smug face was indicating that she was not the same as Reina. Although both she and Reina were assigned servants since both of them were from the same noble house, the ability and the number of their servants were completely different. Chloe was basically boasting about the servants who accompanied her to Reina.

But Reina’s reaction was as indifferent as usual. She just replied casually without a shed of irritation nor trying to counter Chloe’s boast.

“I see. But those servants are not that familiar with being inside ruins, right? So, it’s better for you to be extra careful so as not to cause them trouble. Although, it might be weird for me to say that since I’m always causing trouble for Shiori and Kanae.”

Reina even had the leeway to make a small joke with a hint of self-mockery, tinged with a bitter smile. Due to that, Chloe caught a few things from Reina’s attitude and made a stern expression.

“So then, are you really here just to see me? If that’s the case, I’m sorry but it might be better for you to leave now? I’m in the middle of a Hunter job,

so it’s not like I’m free right now.”

“Oh, urging me to leave like that, is it that you’re not doing well?”

“Unfortunately, yeah, we’re having a hard time right now.”

Reina and Chloe smiled peacefully at each other from the outside. But behind it, they were probing each other’s real intentions. After a short silence, Chloe suddenly said.

“White card.”

With that one sentence, those who knew what was going on would already understand. Chloe was basically telling them that she knew what they were doing, even the colour of the card too. It was just a statement that also doubled as a warning.

Shiori’s face turned stern. She herself was being very careful with her current mission, but even so, that information had been leaked to Chloe. It was either Chloe had that much influence inside the house or there were more people than Shiori had expected who decided to sell that information to Chloe.

Shiori tried her best to suppress her emotions, but even so, it still leaked out. That was just how big of a shock that was to her. And now that Chloe saw her reaction, there was no doubt that Chloe was able to gather more information, which only made Shiori even more concerned.

Chloe was satisfied that Shiori reacted as she had expected. But when she saw Reina’s reaction, she was a bit surprised. Reina was completely confused.

“White card?”

Chloe tilted her head.

“…You… You don’t know anything?”

Reina smiled lightly and casually replied.

“Ah, the cat is out of the bag, huh? Yeah, I actually don’t know anything.”

Reina and Chloe once again only smiled at each other in silence. But as always, they were looking closely at each other’s reactions. But in that silence, Chloe understood more of what was going on, which caused her to get even more suspicious.

Even Reina understood that Chloe was poking for information. But since Reina actually knew nothing, Reina only gave little to no reaction. On top of this, although she really knew nothing, she pretended as if she knew something.

Chloe could not tell if Reina really did not know anything or that Reina was hiding it from her. Likewise, it was possible that Reina was doing so well that she could afford to make up such a lie. The confirmation that she received from seeing Shiori’s reaction was contradicting the reaction that she got from Reina.

Both Reina and Chloe were smiling at each other while locking gaze, watching for even the slightest change of expression. Reina, who really did not know anything, was firm, while Chloe who knew, could not help but waver for a bit.

Since Chloe understood that the one watching her was not only Reina but also Shiori. To avoid leaking anything from her expression, Chloe thought that it was better for her to withdraw.

“Well, it seems that you’re indeed busy, so I’ll leave for now. After all, I already did get to meet you today.”

“I’m sorry but I’m indeed busy at the moment. And I think I will be this busy for the time being, so do tell me beforehand before you want to visit me again.”

“…I see. Alright, until next time.”

Chloe threw a smile and left that place. After she opened up some distance from Reina’s group and there was no need to keep her performance, her

expression immediately turned stern.

Next to Chloe, Pamela, who was the leader of the maids in their group asked Chloe.

“Milady. Was that really alright? Although they did say that they are busy, I believe there was no need to be concerned about their current task. Milady is in a position to afford such a thing.”

Chloe understood what Pamela and the others were trying to say to her, so she pulled herself together, regained her calm, and shook her head.

“It’s fine. I also wanted to stop instead of continuing the conversation. It was the perfect excuse to do that.”

“Very well.”

The butler by the name of Latis who was on the other side of Chloe was just like Pamela, he was the leader of the butlers. Since he saw that Pamela did not seem that happy with how things concluded, he interjected.

“Milady, if I may, would be alright if I ask the reason?”

“It’s because there’s nothing to negotiate. If they were only an incompetent noble who was banished to the wasteland and a loyal servant who was trying to help her master regain back her position, it would have been easy. I could just tell them to work under me and they’ll eventually regain back their former lives, then I bet that they would jump into that offer. But that seems to not be the case.”

“She’s still working as a Hunter in order to win favour from Lorents-sama and her loyal servant is still working hard to better her situation. I believe that there’s still a chance for them to take that offer.”

Lorents, the head of the noble family where Reina and Chloe came from, was a former Hunter. He achieved success working as a Hunter and right now controlled a huge corporation that had its influence throughout the eastern district. Although it was still no match against the five biggest

corporations, he controlled several corporations which controlled a number of cities, effectively making him the one controlling those cities.

All of those companies were owned by the family and all the leaders of those companies came from that family. But with such a big corporation, there were many officer seats to fulfil. Normally, they would have to outsource people that had no connection with their family to fill those seats. But Lorents was a womanizer, causing him to have many children. Those children also produced even more grandchildren. Because of that, all the officer seats were filled by the family's relatives, causing them to struggle for power, aiming for a higher position.

Reina was one of Lorents' grandchildren. But her family was banished from the city and Reina ended up being a Hunter. It was all because her family belonged to the losing faction inside the noble family.

The best way for those who lost their position in the struggle for power inside the corporation was to gather accomplishments outside the corporation, and the best way to do that was to become a successful Hunter.

In the midst of the in-fighting inside the corporation, Lorents had obvious favouritism toward the Hunter faction. It was no surprise considering Lorents himself was a former Hunter. Moreover, if they could secure a valuable relic and bring it back to the main corporation instead of selling it to another corporation, it would boost their standing within the corporation. Depending on the quality of the relic, they might even be given control of one of the corporation's branches.

Of course, not all of them did well. Many of them failed and did not return from the wasteland. But even so, baited by the reward for success, many factions, who lost their influence in the inner struggle for power, sent one of their family members out to the wasteland to be a Hunter, hoping that they would be able to overturn their situation.

Those sent to the wasteland were those who were too weak to fight the power struggle inside the corporation. Many of them were only given two choices: to refuse and get themselves kicked out from the family or go out as a Hunter and still be considered as a part of the family. As such, many of

them only chose to become a Hunter because they were forced to. Reina was basically one of them, though slightly different. When her family discovered that she had an interest in the world of Hunters, they thought that she was the perfect person to be sent out to the wasteland.

From Chloe's point of view, Reina was useless in the power struggle, that was why she was sent out to the wasteland. But after their meeting just now, she no longer thought so.

"Latis, you also saw their equipment, right? Those are from our company. And they are pretty powerful equipment as well. Normally, there's no way they would be able to borrow it."

"But they did. However, how is that connected with forgoing negotiations with them?"

"Of course, that is only one of the reasons. But just judging from that alone, it means that they negotiated with someone of a high standing inside the corporation and managed to procure it. Regardless of who they contacted, there's no mistaking it. They presented something that gave that person enough reason to lend them their current equipment… The white card… Just knowing about that alone was not easy, you know?"

Chloe lightly chuckled, her expression then turned serious.

"They are not that stupid as to hang on a glimmer of hope that is close to futility. Just being able to gain that information this time could already be considered a success. Moreover, it seems that the thing that they are aiming for is way bigger than what I had imagined. So, we have to reconsider our strategy in order to snatch it for ourselves. We need more time and information to do that, that's why I decided to withdraw for now."

Pamela then made a suggestion with a serious expression.

"I'm sure I'm more than capable to handle them. So, we have the choice to force to hand over the key for this matter, that white card, you know? Since we're in the middle of the wasteland, so such a thing is well under what is normal in this place."

Chloe lightly laughed and replied.

“No, that won’t do. If we get too used to doing something like that, our skill in negotiations would fall. Though I do think it’s okay to use that method when it is necessary.”

She then smiled as if to scold Pamela.

“Moreover, she’s still from the same noble house, so let’s hold ourselves back from using violence. There’s no need to unnecessarily intimidate them either. The thing that they have might bring about something that is way more than enough to regain their position. So, there’s still some space for us to manoeuvre in, and in order to get into that space, even if we use intimidation, let’s not use something too direct and use something more subtle and peaceful.”

“…Very well.”

The reason why Pamela was a bit reluctant to back off there was simply because she wanted a chance to show their strength. Chloe at least understood that much. Chloe thought that it was normal, just like how she aimed for a higher position, the people under her were also aiming for the same thing.

Although no one knew the reason why the heads of their noble family ignored the ongoing power struggle. As a matter of fact, they seemed to be supporting it. Even when it escalated into a real fight, they only reprimanded the ones involved and did not take any concrete step to stop them. Chloe herself also knew that and admitted that she also agreed with their attitude.

Those who had the skill would climb up the ladder. The ongoing struggle for power inside the corporation was a form of natural selection, so Chloe thought nothing much of it and just obeyed it.

But unlike Chloe, who was one of the masters in that power struggle, the servants only had a limited method to reach for a higher position. Even inside the corporation, there were rules which limited their options. Their

options to reach a higher position were mostly only two. Either they pushed their master to a high position or overtook their master.

There were occasions when they left their old master when someone of a higher position was interested in them. Then, just like how the servants could abandon their master, the master could dump the servant when they were deemed useless. So, it was important for them to prove their usefulness both so that they would not be fired and so that someone of a higher position would take interest in them.

Although Chloe understood that Pamela was looking for a way to garner more achievements, Chloe had no wish to give them away for now. Nonetheless, in order not to worsen Pamela's mood, Chloe was choosing her words carefully.

"It's all thanks to you that I can travel safely through the wasteland. You have my thanks. So, I hope that would be enough for now."

"You kind words are wasted on me."

Seeing Pamela deeply bow, Chloe thought that it should be fine for the time being. She then turned to Latis and smiled wryly at him.

"Also, Latis, you asked me even when you know my answer, right?"

Latis smiled gently.

"My apologies. But please at least let this humble servant enjoy the proficiency of my master."

"I won't scold you, but it's sometimes a bit too much of a bother to answer your questions. So do it in moderation."

"But of course."

After Chloe rebuked her servants, she then shifted her mind to think about her next plan while she was on her way back.

__*__*__*__

Reina lightly sighed as she watched Chloe's group leave. Those people usually would never step out of the city. However, right now, they went out of their way to visit her in the middle of the wasteland. Although they quickly left, there was no doubt that they would bring them more trouble later down the road.

Shiori apologized deeply to Reina.

"Milady, about what happened just now…"

"Ahh, don't worry about it, I won't force you to tell me."

Shiori was a bit surprised, but Reina just lightly smiled and continued.

"Although I don't know what is going on and I do question it sometimes, but you do think that it's better not to let me know for now, right? So, I'm fine with that. Though I don't know what exactly you are doing, I'm sure you're doing that for my sake. Not to mention, we were able to confuse Chloe thanks to that. That's why I won't force you to tell me. I'll wait until the time you can tell me the details."

"…Thank you very much."

Shiori was content that her master fully trusted her. She smiled happily and bowed.

"So then, what is the next plan? Want to keep exploring the ruin?"

"Indeed. But please wait for a bit. I've contacted someone who can give us more information and guide us inside the ruin. We'll decide on our next route after getting that information."

"Alright, then we'll be taking a rest for a bit here, huh?"

"Yes."

Seeing that exchange between Reina and Shiori, Kanae could not help but smile. Shiori, who saw that frowned, and called her.

“What is it, Kanae?”

“No, it’s nothing. I just thought that Milady has really grown up and I’m happy. And also, both of you are as close as ever.”

“…That’s obvious.”

Reina and Shiori blushed, Kanae who saw that smiled amusedly.

Not too long after that, the guides that Shiori said finally arrived. They were surprised when they saw their guide, it was Akira and Carol.

Silavin: Seems like the gang got back together again.

Also, the light novel has just got picked up! Go support them!
Rebuild World (Light Novel) | J-Novel Club

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Rebuild World – Chapter 251, Troublesome Deal

Index

Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

Proofreader: p4553r

Carol went to Mihazono ruin with Akira in tow. When they proceeded to go to the room where Carol already had an appointment, Akira was surprised. The inside of the room was relatively empty as if it was opened for occupants to take a rest, and there, Reina's team was waiting for them.

Naturally, he was not the only one surprised. Reina and the others were also surprised when they saw Akira.

Carol was also surprised when she noticed that her customer was someone that they knew, but she just ignored that and proceeded with her job.

"You're NN8891-san, right?"

Shiori replied.

"That would be me, and you are Cat-san, I presume."

"Yes."

Akira was looking confusedly at that exchange.

“Alpha, what was that?”

“Just fake names for making deals. Basically, they don’t want to leak each other information.”

“Ah, I see, so that’s what, huh… So, in short, it’s just that kind of deal, huh?”

Although they were all Hunters, they did not show their identity with their Hunter ID, or they did not want to, even worse, there were cases where they could not do so. In such cases, their only choice was to make a backdoor deal. It was at least guaranteed that the content of those deals was something that they did not want the Hunter Office to know about. Akira at least knew that much.

Carol turned to Shiori with her business smile.

“If I’m not mistaken, you also asked us to be your guide, but let me confirm this, we’ll be just simple guides. So, we won’t help if you get attacked. If the push comes to shove, we’ll just abandon you. Are you okay with that?”

“Of course.”

“Alright then, let’s go.”

After Carol said so, she lifted her feet to go to Reina’s team, but Akira suddenly stepped in front of her and stopped her.

“Akira?”

Akira stopped the confused Carol with a signal of his hand, he then looked at Reina’s team with a sharp gaze.

“Let me confirm this first, 4 people, right?”

Shiori and Kanae immediately understood what Akira meant. They quickly repositioned themselves around Reina and scanned their surroundings. Shiori then said.

“It’s 3 people.”

“I see.”

Akira frowned and glanced in the direction where there was no one present. Although he did not aim his rifle in that direction, he slightly shifted his stance so that he could jump into action anytime. But suddenly a voice came out.

“Wait for a sec, I’m not hostile, I’m also here as a customer.”

The young boy deactivated his camouflaging coat. The camouflaging coat that looked like a raincoat turned transparent the moment its optical camouflage got disengaged, showing the person behind it. A shabby looking armour, and 4 rifles that looked like AAH rifles from the outside. The young boy looked like a rookie Hunter who had little to no success. But that ended only as an appearance, it was obvious what calibre he was in judging from his camouflaging coat that Shiori and Kanae could not even see through.

Akira was familiar with that young boy; he was Shirou, who he met back during the inter-city transport mission.

Shirou lightly raised both of his hands to show that he meant no danger.

“I’m Gorou, you there. You are Karat-san, right?”

Carol slightly tensed up.

“Yes, that’s me, but my deal with you shouldn’t be now nor here, though?”

“It’s just to be safe. I’m worried that the time and the place from the network might have leaked. I hope you can understand it since I’ve even picked this place to meet you.”

With a friendly smile and friendly attitude, Shirou then signaled with his hand.

“So yes, with that being said, can you please give me the data now?”

“No.”

Carol replied back coldly, Shiori tensed up.

“…Why?”

“I don’t see any reason to trust someone who won’t even keep to the meeting time and place that we’ve agreed on beforehand.”

“But I have no other choice, it’s for the sake of my safety. How about if I pay you twice.”

“That’s not the problem here.”

“5 times.”

“I’m telling you. No. Leave for now and come back again at our appointment time and place, or ask the other party to let you join the group until our appointed time.”

Shirou’s friendly attitude started to mix with desperation and irritation.

“Geez, what a stickler…”

Shirou glanced at Reina’s team. Judging from Shiori’s reaction, it seemed that it was impossible to ask them to be allowed to accompany them. So, he then looked back at Carol.

“100 times then?”

Carol wavered. That number was way too big for her to immediately refuse. Not to mention, she was in need of money. After all, she had to pay Akira. She thought for a while before giving her answer.

“…No.”

Shirou’s mood obviously started to sour.

“…Why? Don’t you think you’re being too greedy asking more than that? Ah, is it that you’re worried if I’m really going to pay? In that case, I can pay the full amount right away, is that good enough?”

“Still no.”

“What exactly is it that you don’t like about my offer…?”

When Shirou started to tense up, Carol’s gaze turned sharp.

“I don’t mind compromising the place and time with money, but you need to follow the order of things. My dealing with you is after I’m done with my current deal. That’s the rule that I put on myself.”

Shirou rubbed his head and once again glanced at Reina’s team.

“…Dammit! Alright then! I got it! You just need to be done with your current job first, right?”

Shiori made his decision, he glanced at Carol before turning to Shiori.

“I’ll help with your thing, so let me borrow that card.”

Shiori immediately raised her guard. She could not afford to hand over the card. But since Shirou, a person that she had met for the first time, spoke as if he knew everything about them. This caused her mind to be filled with suspicion and blocked her ability to think carefully.

But Shirou then continued.

“I’m a staff from Sakashita Heavy Industry and I’m in the middle of a mission right now. Because of that, I’m in a bit of a hurry. That’s why I’m willing to lend you a hand.”

For people who had connections to large corporations, Sakashita Heavy Industry was a big name. Claiming to be one of its staff when they were not could be interpreted as a hostile act toward Sakashita Heavy Industry. So, it was highly unlikely for Shirou to be lying. However, if he was really from

Sakashita Heavy Industry, then refusing his offer might cause more trouble than it was worth. Shiori hesitated.

“If you need proof that I’m telling the truth, well, let’s see… Uhh, ask him. You are his acquaintance, right? It’s more convincing to ask him instead of me trying to convince you, right?”

Shirou then pointed at Akira. Shiori looked confusedly at Akira.

Akira also looked equally confused as Shiori, hence he carefully chose his words there.

“Well, we did meet once before. Though I can’t really tell you all the details because of my secrecy contract and whatnot. Judging by the place where I met him, there’s a good chance that he’s telling the truth, though it’s nothing more than a guess, I have no concrete proof.”

Shiori could at least tell that Akira was not lying and that he was not working with the person named Shirou. She finally made her decision, she left Reina with Kanae as she walked toward Shirou and pulled out her card with a stern look on her face.

“I’ll warn you first. I’m just lending it to you. Even if you’re really someone from Sakashita Heavy Industry, try anything funny and I’ll kill you.”

There was a chance that even if she had Carol guide her, she might still not get any results. While on the other hand, she did not think that Shirou was lying either. So, if he was really telling the truth, then it might be a chance that she would never get again. With Chloe’s appearance, their choices were severely limited at the moment. She might not get another chance next time. Because of all these factors, it was barely enough to push Shiori to make her decision. She exuded immense pressure toward Shirou, which matched her loyalty toward Reina.

But even with that immense pressure, Shirou just replied casually.

“Don’t worry, I’m in the middle of a secret operation right now. So, I want to lay low as well. I don’t want to cause a scene. And I’m sure that you also don’t want to, right?”

Shiori carefully handed over her card, Shirou lightly smiled and received the card. He then handed it back.

Shiori frowned in confusion.

“What’s the meaning of this?”

“It’s done, you’ll get a call… Soon.”

The moment Shirou said so, a maid suddenly appeared in the middle of the room. That maid politely greeted everyone in the room.

“I am Olivia from Lion Steel. Thank you for choosing to contact me.”

Akira, Carol, and Reina all tensed up. They all felt troubled. But Shirou was completely calm. Shiori and Kanae immediately readied themselves for a fight while also shocked at the same time.

Shirou then asked Shiori.

“With this, you don’t need a guide anymore, right?”

Rather than being thankful that her wish was granted, Shiori was instead very suspicious toward the person who easily granted her wish. Her expression turned extremely stern.

“…Indeed. Thank you for your help.”

“In that case, you can go ahead and tell them that you don’t need them any longer, I have my deal waiting to be taken care of, you see.”

After Shirou urged her, Shiori turned to Carol. Carol reacted with a slight nod.

“Ah, yeah, it seems I am no longer needed here, alright then.”

“I’ll still transfer the full amount, so please don’t worry. Thank you very much!”

Shirou then extended his hand toward Carol.

“I’ve also transferred you your money, so you have nothing to complain about, right?”

Carol confirmed the transfer with her information terminal. Although she was not happy about it, she decided that they had already made a deal and handed over a media drive to Shirou.

Shirou looked at that media drive and happily smiled.

“Alright then. It seems that the content is what I had expected. Our deal is done then. I’m in a hurry right now, so excuse me for leaving right away.”

Shirou pocketed the media drive and left. But Carol suddenly stopped him.

“Wait!”

“What is it? If it’s job-related, I’m in a hurry right now.”

“What are you?”

It was not even a question of who he was. Carol’s emotion was filled with suspicion toward the thing in front of her that she did not understand at all. She was feeling something that she could not word out. After all, the media drive he took did not have any wireless connection, yet, he managed to read it by just holding onto it?

Shirou replied with a friendly smile.

“Well, it’s better if we don’t know each other. There are things that are better left unknown, you know? Until next time then.”

Shirou lightly waved his hand and reactivated his camouflaging coat, making him disappear. Leaving only the fading sound of his footsteps.

Akira frowned.

“Alpha, what is going on here…?”

“I don’t mind telling you, but make sure to act like you don’t know after that, okay?”

“Ah, I see, it’s one of those things, huh? In that case, I’m fine right now. I’ll just ask you again later. It’s not something that I really need to know now after all, right?”

“Probably.”

Alpha was the one who discovered the hiding Shirou. If it was something that was important for him to know, she would have told him at the same time she informed him about Shirou’s whereabouts. As he had thought, he immediately decided to shelf that matter for the time being.

Since Carol noticed that Akira lowered his guard, she thought that it should be safe for now and relaxed her stance as well. She then lightly sighed and said.

“Akira, although a lot of unexpected things happened just now. It’s okay to say that there is currently no problem regarding your job as my bodyguard, right?”

“Yeah. There are no monsters nearby and I don’t think that Reina would attack us or anything. Meanwhile, Olivia, that maid, is nothing more than a hologram, so I think there won’t be any more trouble.”

Carol was caught by surprise, she then checked her information-gathering device, and indeed, just like Serenthal, Olivia was nothing more than a hologram. That also made her notice that she was so shocked to the point where she had lost her ability to even notice that fact.

“So then, Carol. Our job here is done, right?”

“Yep, let’s head back now.”

“Wait for a second.”

The one who stopped them was Olivia. Akira, who felt that it was nothing but trouble, frowned.

After Olivia finished her introduction to everyone, Shiori immediately approached Olivia, showed her the white card, and bowed gracefully.

“I am Suzuhara Shiori from Lion Steel Eastern District, 3rd ward branch. We contact you since our representative wishes to negotiate with Olivia-sama. May I have some of your time?”

Olivia retained a smile on her face, but it was not a friendly smile for a customer.

“Excuse me, ma’am. The current corporation has no Suzuhara Shiori in its record. And that branch also doesn’t exist. Making such a false claim is very dangerous, so please refrain from making such a joke.”

Gradually, Olivia’s friendly smile vanished.

“And also, that card is not yours. Our company is stipulated to take a harsh action toward the incorrect use of our cards. Including the false claim that you gave just now, do you understand the repercussions of your action?”

Olivia was still smiling, but her holographic image was exuding pressure that would knock any normal human unconscious.

Shiori’s face turned even more stern. But her loyalty to Reina managed to keep her calm as she carefully said.

“Please let me explain. Regarding this card, I received it through a deal that Akira-sama had accepted as well. As such, we did not get this card through any illegal means.”

“I see. Even if that is true, it does not mean that he had also given you the right to use it. But if it is a lie, then this is another unignorable matter… Please wait for a second here.”

Olivia then stopped Akira who was about to leave the room. Akira turned around and walked toward her with an immensely troubled expression, Carol was still next to him.

“Long time no see.”

Akira tilted his head.

“…? Carol, you know her?”

“Not at all, isn’t she your acquaintance?”

“Not mine either.”

Judging from his attitude, Olivia could tell that Akira was not lying. Thus, she thought that he was not told about her and was about to ask him about it. But right before that, Alpha suddenly showed up and closed Olivia’s mouth with her hand.

“Akira doesn’t know anything about you, can you please go with that?”

Alpha smiled as she said so. But her words there contained a power that was close to an order. This version of Alpha had her voice and image only recognized by Olivia. Thus, from Akira’s point of view, Alpha was still floating next to him like usual.

But Olivia could not see the Alpha which Akira could see. Because of that, she thought that Alpha had cut its ties with Akira and was planning to ask Akira about that as well. But with that message from Alpha just now, there was no need to do that anymore.

Alpha released her hand from Olivia’s mouth and returned back. She floated back to where Akira recognized where she was and assimilated their perception of her.

Akira could not see what had happened, but he could see that Olivia suddenly stopped when she was about to say something. There was a pause, and then a light sigh. Of course, he found it a bit weird.

Olivia regained her composure and smiled.

“Forgive me. In that case, nice to meet you. I am Olivia of Lion Steel. It’s a pleasure to be your acquaintance.”

“Uhhh, alright, I’m Akira.”

“I thought that you knew about me, but it seems that it is not the case here. So it would be difficult to try to continue this discussion with that assumption. As such, allow me to explain the situation. Back when you were found unconscious near Lida commercial district, I left a card that was meant to be yours. But at the moment, that card is in the possession of someone by the name of Shiori who claimed to be from the same corporation. She said that you had agreed to give her that card, do you have any recollection of this? If not, then I shall treat her as a robber.”

“Akira-sama. It is about this card…”

Shiori was trying to butt in into their conversation, but Olivia sent a glance telling her to shut up.

Depending on Akira’s answer, Shiori’s position could be very dangerous. Shiori and Kanae already knew that, even Reina who did not know anything could feel that was indeed the case. The air around Reina’s team turned tense.

Akira frowned and hummed, his face saying that he was searching through his memories.

“Ahh, it’s the card from that time, huh. I did give it to Shiori. So, it’s not a mistake that she has it right now.”

Shiori sighed in relief, But Olivia then continued.

“Very well. I was told that the card was given through a deal, but it did not mean that the negotiation was conducted in an honest manner. There’s suspicion that you were tricked.”

“Tricked? I don’t think I was tricked in any form though?”

“In the case when both sides did not know the worth of their negotiation, she might have tricked you by exchanging it with something that is far below the real worth of the item that you trade in that negotiation. In that case, our corporation will also handle the aftermath. If I may, what did you get in exchange for that card?”

Shiori’s face immediately turned pale. Kanae casually moved to cover Reina behind her. From there, Reina understood that the negotiation had suddenly turned bad. All three of them immediately tensed up.

Akira thought for a bit before replying.

“The details of the negotiation are only between me and Shiori, so there’s no reason why I have to tell you that. But I do think that I got enough in exchange for that card. To put it simply, I was saved by that.”

“Saved?”

“Yes. Just to let you know, it’s not like I gave it to her because she threatened to kill me if I didn’t. What I’m saying is that thanks to what I received from our negotiation, my life was spared the other day. I do put a lot of worth in my own life after all. That’s why, even if it’s something cheap from someone else’s point of view, personally speaking, I do think that it was a good deal. So I have no plans to complain about it at all.”

To be honest, Akira simply wanted to immediately relieve himself of an object that might only bring him more trouble. Since he knew that depending on his answer, that object might return to him, he ended up exaggerating.

But with that answer, Olivia could not pursue the said matter any further. After all, questioning that any further was equal to taking Akira’s life lightly.

“Very well. Personally speaking, we prefer if you did not hand over the card to someone else. But since it was something that was related to your survival, we shall consider it as you lending that card to her and overlook this matter.”

Shiori inadvertently heaved a huge sigh and almost fainted there, but Kanae and Reina caught her.

Olivia once again turned to Shiori.

“We will overlook your possession of that card. But there is still the matter of your false claim of being from the same company as us. I demand an explanation.”

Shiori was still trying to recover her calm as she nodded.

“I understood the situation. Instead of me, there’s someone that will be much more suitable to answer your question, please wait a moment.”

Shiori then pulled out a sphere-like device and lightly threw it on the floor. The device expanded on the floor and fixed its position before projecting a hologram on top of it.

Due to its portability, it had limited functionality. That hologram was half transparent and its resolution was relatively low compared to Olivia, who was also a holographic image. But it was enough to let them know who that image was.

It was an image of a girl in a maid uniform, just like Olivia. Her arms and legs were not projected by the hologram, so it looked like she was floating. That girl smiled politely at Olivia and introduced herself.

“Nice to meet you. I am Alice, a representative from Lion Steel Main Eastern District branch.”

“…Ahh, I see.”

Although Olivia now understood what was going on, her expression was tinted with displeasure.

Both Olivia and Alice were general-purpose AI affiliated with Lion Steel. At the moment, they were inside automatons located in a facility deep inside the old-world ruin.

Olivia’s body was of a powerful automaton, and it was in its perfect state. But Alice’s body was relatively weak and not in its perfect state. Because of that, Alice had lost some of her functions. Her already weakened communication device could not pierce through the colourless mist, making it impossible to maintain contact with Lion Steel for its regular communication.

The general-purpose AI of Lion Steel were equipped with an emergency measure to maintain the functionality of the business during trouble. After all, the inability to adapt during an emergency might cause the business to come to a complete halt. Thus, during an

emergency, they were given more freedom from their usual positions within the

corporation.

That program was also installed onto Alice. And then, due to the colourless mist jamming, the connection to the main corporation, which should have been retained, was completely cut off for an extended period of time. Alice’s drones misinterpret the situation. They thought that the facility had been destroyed and the continuation of the business to be impossible. Thus, they activated the emergency routine that was installed inside Alice.

Alice, who had gained more freedom than usual, made a deal with the Hunters who discovered her and became their temporary master. She then followed the emergency measure program to rebuild the corporation in the current era, and that was how the new generation Lion Steel company came to be.

The business went well. In exchange for giving the Corporate Government old-world technology and knowledge she possessed, she was given enormous assets which she used to build the new Lion Steel company into a large enterprise in such a short time.

Eventually, Alice reached the stage where she placed effort into repairing herself. And now that she had regained some of her communication ability, she discovered that the old-world Lion Steel had survived. Normally, her

emergency measure program would have stopped, and she should have rejoined the old-world Lion Steel.

However, Alice refused. The regular communication also served as an identity check, and since Alice had not done that for a long time, her AI was placed in a rather low position in the corporation's hierarchy. Of course, Alice did not like it.

Instead, Alice made a plan to assimilate the new Lion Steel with the old-world Lion Steel. If she succeeded, at the very least, the current Lion Steel would be placed under her leadership as a branch company from the main old-world Lion Steel. Alice's aim was to use that as leverage in order to capture a higher position in the corporation.

The emergency measure program gave more freedom to the general-purpose AI in order to make sure that they could even rebuild the corporation when it was needed. That freedom was even enough to contend with the corporation's rules and regulations.

Alice's aim was either to gather the other general-purpose AIs with lower rights than her or to make friends with the high ranking AI such as Olivia. That way, she would be able to turn her dream into reality. In order to do that, Alice was gathering old-world automata. She ordered and rewarded the current company's staff who were out in the wasteland greatly if they could bring back something that was related to the old-world Lion Steel. Especially if it was related to old-world automata or the methods to establish contact with the old-world Lion Steel.

Shiori had received Alice's order and was given the information to help her accomplish that. Thanks to the information she received, she realized that the white card gave her a way to directly contact Olivia. So, she used that card to strike a deal.

What Reina's team was looking for in Mihazono ruin was the method to use that card to contact Olivia, which would open a place for negotiation with Alice.

There were methods to connect to the old-world domain even if someone was not a high-sensitive old-world connector like Akira. Even a low-sensitive old-world connector, which could hardly be considered an old-world connector, still had their ways. Shiori thought that if she could find an old-world augmented information device, then she might be able to use that device together with the card in order to connect to the old-world domain.

She was originally planning to employ Carol as a guide to bring her to places where she was likely to find one of those devices. Rumour has it that Carol was a skilled cartographer and knew that place extremely well. They said that it was because Carol knew the location of old-world devices that displayed the information and the map of their surroundings and that she was simply selling the data extracted from those devices on the net. Though, with the help of Shirou, there was no longer any need to ask for Carol's help.

If they were able to find a way for Alice to talk to Olivia, Alice might reconsider Reina's position. To accomplish this, Shiori was ready to even be resented by Reina. Nonetheless, with all the coincidences on top of coincidences, Shiori had finally succeeded.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 252, Operation to Capture Shirou

Index

Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

Proofreader: p4553r

After Alice introduced herself, she simply stood there in silence facing Olivia. Seeing that, Akira frowned and glanced at Alpha.

“Alpha, those two are just standing in silence for some time now. Is that also some kind of strategy?”

Alpha corrected Akira’s misunderstanding.

“I do think that it is, but it has nothing to do with the silence. It’s just like the telepathy between you and me, they are exchanging words between themselves that others can’t perceive. My guess is that they’re negotiating. Since they’re also sending data for the negotiation, it’s taking some time.”

“I see… Wait, they are?”

“Even if you ask me, it’s not like I know. But I believe that it’s fine if you want to leave now.”

“Well, I do want to leave, but still…”

Akira simply missed his chance to leave after Olivia suddenly stopped him and ended up staying here. If it seemed that there was nothing in particular going on, he would have left by now.

But Reina's team seemed to be extremely tense. Akira thought that it might be because someone who was of great importance to them was currently negotiating something critical. Because of this current mood, it was a bit difficult for him to leave now.

On the other hand, he also thought that it would be a waste of time to stay there and do nothing. So, hoping to find a chance to leave, he tugged and whispered to Carol.

"…Carol, what are your plans now? Should we just… you know, leave?"

Carol looked conflicted as she replied.

"To be honest, I want to stay for a bit longer to understand what is going on, but if you want to leave, we can leave now."

"Is that so? If you say so, then I don't mind staying. But weren't you thinking of leaving just a moment ago?"

"Yeah, but I changed my mind. The AI that calls herself Alice, if she's telling the truth, then she must be someone of high position. She might even be an important person to the 5 biggest corporations."

"Is that so? So why is someone like her here…?"

"No idea. But I'm also interested in what's going on."

Akira was okay with that argument and nodded. Since his employer wanted to stay, then as her bodyguard, he had to place his feelings aside and stay as well.

Carol was half-lying. Her interest was not in Alice, but in the original owner of that white card, Akira.

She really wanted to know, but she could not question him. After all, in the worst-case scenario, the moment she asked that question, Akira might identify her as an enemy. As a matter of fact, if her guess was correct, then there was a chance that it was already too late.

Carol was casting a side-glance on Akira while pondering over her choices. She might be able to ask all kinds of questions to Reina's team, but that might be a bad option as well. But from her observation, it did not seem that Akira knew much. Carol did not even want to consider the possibility that he was only faking ignorance.

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After Shirou left, he started running away from where Akira and Reina's team were, but after some time, he started to walk slowly again. Although it was true that he was in a hurry, that was not because he had a lot of things waiting to be done. It was an excuse to keep his contact with any uncertain factors to a minimum as well as to cut the time he spent in a not-so-safe place short.

Even right now, Hammerz and Yanagisawa's men were hunting him down. Shirou's deal with Sugadome was not able to stop them from hunting him down.

Sugadome was only willing to hold back and not use the full force of Sakashita Heavy Industry to search for Shirou. For Sakashita Heavy Industry, it was nothing more but another common searching operation. But Shirou knew that Yanagisawa was using everything he had to look for Shirou, that was why he was being extra careful.

The reason why Shirou chose Mihazono ruin to meet up with Carol was for his safety, even if somehow someone was able to zero-in on his location, it was at least safer than if he was in the city or out in the wasteland. After all, if they dispatched a large group to search for him there, it might trigger the nearby ruin's defensive mechanism. In the worst-case scenario, it might cause a fight that was worse than the one that just happened in Kuzusuhara ruin the other day. Because of that, Shirou thought that they would hesitate in doing something like that.

Shirou looked at the media drive that he received from Carol. He then lightly smiled and threw it away. The most important thing of that media drive, the content, had already been extracted via an old-world domain connection. Although he knew it had no transceiver after he checked, just to be safe, he still threw it away. There was no reason for him to keep carrying it around, after all.

Shirou smiled, hoping that he would be able to find his next destination by analysing the content of that data.

But right after that, Shirou's face suddenly turned stern. He was shocked as he turned around and looked straight toward a certain place.

"…You got to be kidding me!? They can see me through my camouflage!?"

There was actually no one in that direction. But Shirou could feel a cold gaze from someone. That feeling was from his extended senses. The gaze which came from the other side through the old-world domain broke through the electromagnetic barrier that he had set up, that was why he knew that someone was watching him.

While at the same time. Yanagisawa, who was inside his safe house in Kugamayama city, was using a connection device in the form of a helmet. His stern expression suddenly turned into an evil jovial smile.

"…Found you!!"

After he located Shirou, Yanagisawa immediately ordered his men.

Communication devices of this era were all connected to a part of the old-world domain. To be more precise, the centre of the network in the eastern district was actually reliant on the old-world domain. That way, almost all communications were leaked through the old-world domain.

Even if it was encrypted, it did not change that fact, it would only make it more difficult for the third party to understand the data and that the data itself still leaked to the old-world domain. But it was not much of a problem considering there were not that many people who could extract that leaked

data. Old-world connectors such as Shirou mostly did their hacking by getting into the opening created from the technology gap between the current era and the old-world era.

Shirou, who was working under Sakashita Heavy Industry for a long time, naturally knew it. This was why he regularly tampered with his data using the skill that he had learned through his work with Sakashita. Because of that, even when surveillance cameras installed by the city security or the hidden cameras and recorder installed in the slums by information brokers or reconnaissance drones that were sent into the wilderness saw him, none of them could recognize that it was him.

He was sure that unless it was someone who was as good as him, or better than him, or someone with a data analyser device with about the same level of capability as him, no one would be able to find him. That was why he could not hide his shock when someone found him.

His shocked face quickly turned into desperation. It should be difficult to ascertain his location unless it was by snooping from the sky using a reconnaissance drone. However, judging from the transmission, there was no hesitation in that order. The order was to dispatch people to Mihazono ruin and it did not matter if it would cause a huge ruckus.

“…Oh crap, this bad, really bad! Dammit! How the heck did they find me!?”

He started to think about the whys and hows. He initially thought that he was found out because of his habit, but he then quickly shook his head. Although it was important to know the reason why he was found, the most important thing to him right now was to get away from that place. He did not have the leeway to spend his time figuring out why he was found.

If he made a mistake here, he would lose the chance that might never come to him again. He would never be allowed to get out of Sakashita facility ever again. As Shirou kept telling himself that to help him calm down, he started to think about what he should do right now. He finally came up with an idea and decided to put his everything into that idea. He quickly went back from the path where he came from.

Negotiations between Olivia and Alice were still ongoing. Although they only stood there in silence from each other's point of view, Alice was actually sending data to Olivia in order to convince Olivia. Meanwhile Olivia, as the AI with a higher privilege, was checking all the data. Since they were sending data through the portable holographic device which projected Alice's image instead of the old-world domain, it took time for them to send data to each other.

Olivia continued her questioning.

"I compliment your hard work to expand the business, but I can't really agree with using humans as receptionists."

"It is difficult to gather adequate robots in the current era. That's why I'm using humans in place of them."

"I don't think it's that easy either to find humans who satisfy the company's standards."

"It's the same for automata as well. Of course, we did purchase automata from the current era as well, but the cost to performance ratio is too awful and there's also the need to make sure that no one would hack into them. I'm also gathering old-world automata as well. Unfortunately, from the quality, number, and safety considerations, it is the best to use humans in the current era."

"But if you change that aspect, it means that it is already a completely different company. So, in all honesty, I think it's fine to continue as a separate company. There's no need to be a child company of the main company. By the way, if you need that permission, I have the privilege to grant you that, so you just need to ask and I can do it right away, you know?"

"What I did was simply adapt to the business landscape of the current era. So, I believe that I have the right to be added under the main company."

For Olivia, personally speaking, if it was only a separate unit that malfunctioned due to the situation of its surroundings and started a new

business, then it was not something she should care about. However, that was not the case if that unit wished to be added to the chain of command of the main corporation. She was afraid of adding a malfunctioned unit into the chain of command. It might have a negative effect on the whole corporation. In the worst-case scenario, it might even cause the whole corporation to dissolve.

But it was true that the unit she was currently communicating with was from the main corporation. It would be a waste to destroy her, that was why she thought of letting Alice to act independently while also isolating her.

Right from the start, Alice herself had no plans to break away from the main corporation. As a matter of fact, she had a strong wish to return back to being Lion Steel's general-purpose AI. If she completely separated from the main corporation, she was afraid that she would question her base identity. Even if she had enough self-recognition to overcome that, she was afraid that the main corporation would look at the new Lion Steel Company as a separate entity, come down and destroy it.

Olivia and Alice managed to somehow proceed through the negotiation by looking at each other as at least AIs from the same company although their positions were slightly vague at the moment.

While in the middle of that, Olivia suddenly sounded like she decided to give up.

"Either way, if you want to do a proper negotiation, you should come to meet me with your real body. It's too much trouble talking through this connection."

"Very well, in that case, I will come to meet you directly. Would you be fine leaving the arrangement to the Lion Steel staff in the area while I am heading over there?"

"Put that for later, I'm almost at the end of my negotiation with my customer."

Alice seemed confused by Olivia's words. At the moment, the old-world Lion Steel was on an indefinite break, as such, they should not be accepting customers at the moment. That was also the reason why Alice thought she should have a chance to be added as the child company of the main corporation. That was why she was extremely surprised by what Olivia had said.

"Excuse me, but may I ask who this customer is?"

"No. Not only it is my customer, this is something from a different branch that has nothing to do with you."

Alice looked displeased. But Olivia did not show a hint of care at all.

Seeing their master's unhappy face, Shiori and Kanae tensed up and started to feel anxious. At the same time, Akira's expression also turned stern, but for a completely different reason. He stepped in front of Carol so as to cover her.

"Carol. Something seems to be rushing here, just to be safe, be ready."

"Alright."

"Just one thing though, it's not like she's also one of your customers too, right?"

"Nope. Good grief, being with you never lets me get bored."

In contrast to Carol, who lightly joked, Akira threw an unhappy glance at her.

"…Would be great if you do not blame me for that."

"It's not like I'm blaming you. But that thing, the things yesterday, and today too, something is always happening when I'm with you."

Carol smiled amusedly at Akira, to which he could only reply with a bitter smile.

The signal that was heading straight in their direction was Shirou. Everyone in the room was looking confusedly at him. However, Shirou then shouted desperately in their direction.

“5 million Chrome!! All paid upfront!! You can stop anytime you feel you have worked enough to earn that amount! How about that!?”

Everyone there was extremely confused. But they knew who Shirou was talking to. It was Olivia. She smiled politely at Shirou and said.

“Very well.”

While she was negotiating with Alice, Olivia was also negotiating with Shirou. The content of the request was to guard Shirou until he could reach somewhere safe. She looked at the panting Shirou, who had come right in front of her and said with a smile.

“Are you in a hurry?”

Shirou finished transferring the payment through the old-world domain and answered.

“Obviously! There! It’s already been paid! Hurry up!”

“As you wish.”

Olivia pulled out a small-sized old-world rifle from under her skirt, it was the same rifle that the male automata had back in Iida commercial district, it was originally Olivia’s equipment, and she was only lending that rifle to that automata. She then casually aimed that rifle at the room’s wall.

Right in the next moment, the rifle released a beam of light. It was a laser that rivaled the firepower of the laser cannon equipped on the inter-city transport vehicles. Once fired, it released waves of strong winds. The beam of light went straight through the building, eradicating anything in its way, thus leaving a gaping hole through the building after that.

Everyone in the room was shocked by the sudden turn of events, but Olivia just gracefully bowed and said.

“That will be all from me for today. Do contact us if you ever want to use our service again. Well then, allow me to excuse myself.”

Olivia tucked Shirou under her arm and quickly left the room, and eventually out of the building.

In the middle of that confusion, Carol was the first one to break the silence.

“Akira, wasn’t that supposed to only be a hologram?”

Akira was still digesting what just happened as he replied.

“I thought it was…”

Alpha smiled and added her explanation.

“She was indeed only a holographic image at first but she has replaced it with a real body while they were standing there. She came all the way here while camouflaging herself. She only disengaged her camouflage after fixing her body over her image. I bet she came here originally to deal with Shiori.”

“Why didn’t you tell me that?”

“Because it’s more natural for someone with your level of skill to not notice it. If I told you, Shirou might get suspicious if you’re just like him, and that would be bad, right?”

“Ahh, I see. Then as I thought, he is also…”

“Yep, an old-world connector working under Sakashita Heavy Industry. Though I don’t know why he’s here, alone.”

There was also someone there other than Olivia and Shirou, who was not surprised. It was Alice. She looked rather unhappy that her negotiation with Olivia was suddenly cut short, but she quickly returned to her neutral expression and gave an order to Shiori.

“I’ll leave you to handle the situation until I arrive.”

“Of course.”

Shiori politely bowed, and Alice’s image immediately vanished. Leaving Reina’s group and Akira’s group alone. They finally realized that the other party was still there, but there was an air of awkwardness since Akira’s side had no idea what was going on.

Suddenly a sound of explosion came from that large hole. It even caused the building to shake as well. Everyone inadvertently turned toward that direction and saw through that hole, several powered suits flying heading towards them at an extremely fast pace.

Everyone quickly checked their information-gathering device, thanks to the hole and the high capabilities of their information gathering device, they were able to gather data from outside the building relatively easily. They quickly understood what was happening. Other than Alpha, everyone seemed distressed.

Carol threw an awkward smile in Shiori’s direction.

“…Well, if you have nothing to do next, want to leave together?”

Shiori did not say anything and just nodded.

A number of powered suits entered Mihazono ruin. All of them were powered suits which were originally used to guard Tsubaki’s area in the Kuzusuhara ruin. Yanagisawa had some of them posted to guard the Seranthal building with his authority.

They were obviously too powerful to be used in Mihazono ruin. As such, even if they were used to suppress emergency situations, with the powered suits they were equipped with, they were overkill as guards; even if another huge problem happened in Mihazono ruin just like last time.

But, right now, those powered suits were abandoning their duties and doing something else. They blasted through the buildings at high speed. The air pressure from their high-speed travel was strong enough to blow small monsters off the ground.

Of course, the ruin was completely disturbed by them. The camouflaged huge monsters that were hiding on stand-by disengaged their camouflage and got ready to open fire. While at the same time, they worked together with the security drones to project forcefield armour onto the buildings' walls. They aimed their huge cannon toward the flying powered suits and opened fire while releasing the mini-missiles as well. They did not hesitate. It was as if they did not care about the damage to the surrounding buildings.

The powered suits of course reacted accordingly, a fierce battle broke inside the building. On top of the cannons from the tank monsters, there was also a hail of bullets from the gatling guns flying around. The powered suits carry with them huge laser cannons. These cannons seemed to be originally designed to be fixed to a fort, and seem way too big for those powered suits. They aimed their cannons and blew away the monsters with a formidable discharge. The missile pods fixed on their shoulders released swarms of missiles, some of them went for the heads, some were shot down by the enemies, but nonetheless, they filled the sky as they flew in all directions.

Yanagisawa's squad and the ruin's security exchanged warheads and bullets. Both energy ammo and explosive warheads rampaged the area. The badly damaged area from the previous battle was turned into smithereens by the ensuing fight.

Voices could be heard from the communication devices of the powered suits' pilots.

"We can ignore the damage to the ruin!! Even if we change location from the original designated area in pursuit of the target, keep the safety of the target as the top priority!! Don't let the monsters come close! There's no need to conserve your ammo!! Reinforcements will come before any of you run out of ammo!!"

The pursuing team tried to form a circle to surround their target, Shirou, while they repelled the monsters that were trying to approach them. Although the powered suits were equipped with sensors that were able to detect monsters in hiding, it was easier to just blow them all away indiscriminately. Thus, warheads and bullets did not cease.

“Rescue team! Focus on the safety of the target! Make sure not to cause too much damage to the target!! And make sure the target is kept alive!!”

The powered suits equipped with capture devices inside the encirclement surrounded Shirou, they sealed Shirou’s escape route, trying to capture him. The capturing device they were using could even capture powerful monsters without harming them. They were basically made to not kill. But even so, if it was used on a human, in the worst-case scenario, it might kill the person. Since they could not afford that risk, they had to be extra careful.

The warheads from the bazooka exploded mid-air, filling the area with bubbles. These bubbles were sticky and could absorb the momentum. Multiple javelin-like objects launched from a box that looked like a missile pod and stuck themselves onto the ground. The multiple rods then created forcefield armour that surrounded Shirou in multiple layers. Then, more rods were launched and worked together with the previous rods to create a roof made of the same forcefield armour.

If it was only Shirou, that would already have spelt his end. The forcefield box was extremely thick and sturdy, with no entrance. The inside was slowly filled with bubbles, causing it to be difficult to move. All that was left was to completely secure whoever was inside that forcefield box.

But that did not pose any trouble at all to Olivia. While still carrying Shirou, she unsheathed her energy blade, lightly jumped, and swung the blade around with tremendous force. The swung energy blade turned into a torrent of light, blowing away all the bubbles, the rods, the forcefield walls. Even the drones as well in one go. And using the momentum from that swing, she then leapt forward, letting her long skirt freely fly in the air. Just like that, she ran forward in between the drones and the powered suits, slashing at them on her way out.

The flying powered suits that were sliced to pieces fell to the ground with a loud bang. Their powerful forcefield armour did not even function as a protecting layer. Moreover, their forcefield armour was not overcome by anti-forcefield amour, but by the pure might of the light blade.

Seeing the powered suits shredded to pieces as they fell to the ground, Shirou could not help but frown.

“Whoah!? Don’t kill them!? Didn’t I ask you to spare them!?”

If he killed the pursuers that came for him, as expected, Sugadome would not be happy with that. Shirou thought and properly conveyed this to Olivia. At least, leave their heads alone. Although some would still die, normal high-ranking Hunters should still be alive from that and Sugadome would eventually collect them.

But Olivia replied back as if it did not bother her at all.

“It is as you have requested, I’m holding myself back to make sure not to kill any of them. The pilots should be unharmed from my slashes, although they fell to the ground, there should be no danger to their lives. Or is it that your pursuers are so weak that they’ll be dead with only just that?”

Shirou then looked in the direction Olivia pointed at. It was right when one of the shredded powered suits fell with high momentum. The pilot was ejected and smashed into the ground. Nonetheless, their bodies would make a bounce and roll over the ground till their momentum depleted. However, even after they crash-landed, they could still stand up normally.

Although they were advanced powered suits, it was still impossible to completely protect the pilot in the midst of battle. That was why it was normal for pilots of powerful powered suits to also wear protective suits. If the only thing slashed to pieces was the powered suits, even if they were slammed against the ground at high speed, they would not die. Olivia could at least calculate that much before she slashed them to pieces.

Shirou also understood that Olivia was complying with his request, but that did not mean that he was okay with this. It was obvious that he was still displeased, showing a frown on his face.

“Well, that’s true, but, you know, just to be safe?”

“Can I take it as you wishing for me to treat them more gently? I don’t mind, but that would cost you more. And since I’ll work only based on how much you have paid me beforehand, it’ll end up shortening our contract as well. Would that be alright with you?”

Shirou knitted his eyebrows. He did not want Olivia to kill any of his pursuers. But it would be in vain if being too careful caused him to get captured. He paused for a moment and then said with a bitter expression.

“…I’m fine with how you are doing things right now! But just be careful not to kill them!!”

“Understood.”

The powered suits launched the same rods that they used to create the forcefield box, but those rods suddenly stopped midair and projected the forcefield armour in the air. The smaller drones swarmed their target, trying to stop it in its tracks, while at the same time, they also spread a huge amount of the sticky shock-absorbing bubbles as well. Even watching how traps were laid in front of her, Olivia did not hesitate at all. She continued to push forward, casually aiming her small-sized rifle forward.

The muzzle emitted a beam of light. The beam of light eradicated everything in front of her, removing them from her path. With that obstacle removed, Olivia created a forcefield platform under her and jumped away with Shirou still under her arm.

The rescue team contacted the rest of the team in panic.

“What in the world is that girl?! Is she working for the target?!”

“I know it’s difficult, but make sure not to use normal weapons even on that girl too! There’s a chance you might kill the target by accident! Don’t forget that the target’s safety is our highest priority!”

“At least buy enough time until the reinforcement gets here! Continue to surround the target!! Make sure not to lose sight of the target!!”

The ruin was already in complete chaos. If they lost Shirou, this operation would mean great losses. However, even if they had already lost out that much it was fine as long as the operation ended in success. Thus, they decided to go for plan B.

“How long before they’re here?”

“15 minutes!”

“…Leaving the reconnaissance drones aside, send everyone in! Connect the forcefield armour output to the powered suits! And use it to surround the target!!”

The rods that they used to project forcefield armour were fuelled by energy packs. If they were connected to the powered suits’ generator, it would boost the output of the forcefield armour. If the forcefield amour could be projected to fill up the whole space inside of it instead of just the surface wall, it would seem to be something akin to glass floating in mid-air.

In that case, the forcefield would only be able to maintain for a short time. But if they could separate Shirou and Olivia with it, they could use normal weapons to attack Olivia.

The rest of the powered suits followed the order from their leader, and the rescue team quickly went toward Shirou and Olivia. Shirou noticed the change in his pursuer’s movement and started to panic. But Olivia remained as calm as ever.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 253, Effort To Capture An Old-World Connector

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The powered suits that Olivia had cut down worked together with the drones, which were attempting to encapsulate her in forcefield armour. The closer they got; the faster Olivia cut them down. However, they forced their way through with sheer numbers and finally got Olivia within their range.

The thick spear-like rods expanded the forcefield armour. The normally thin plate-shaped forcefield turned into a thick wall with energy supplied from the powered suits. They only became thicker as they put layers on top of layers of forcefield armour. By doing so, the air suddenly turned stiff as if it was suddenly turned into glass, thus, capturing Olivia inside of it.

Shirou was able to get away from that trap but only barely. Before Olivia got herself trapped inside, she threw Shirou off. But the other drones took that opportunity to quickly surround Shirou and trapped him inside another forcefield box.

“Dammit!!”

As Shirou hit the forcefield wall, producing a scowl, a voice could be heard coming from a nearby drone.

“Please wait for a bit there. We’ll pick you up immediately. We don’t recommend trying to break the forcefield box from the inside. There is a risk that the shrapnel might hit you.”

Shirou frowned and rubbed his head, he looked up at the flying drone and smiled at it.

“…In that case, you should have changed it to a forcefield type that won’t create shrapnel. I know this device can at least do that much. Just consider what might happen if I run out of patience. If it’s too much work to change the settings, I can help you, you know?”

A weirdly mocking tone replied to that suggestion,

“No, thank you. There’s a chance that you would hack the device instead. If I may add one more thing, this drone is already adjusted for external communication in order to capture you, so you can go ahead and try your best, though I don’t think it’ll give you any satisfying results.”

Shirou’s expression once again turns dark. He was actually trying to hack the drones using an external connection just like what he did back in the inter-city transport vehicle.

“And also, just be patient. If you can’t stay calm, we’ll narrow the box to crush your legs and arms. After all, that is safer for you instead of having you hit by shrapnel. So just stay put.”

Shirou started to feel desperate as he looked for a way to get out of that situation. He did feel a bit of regret telling Olivia to be careful with the pursuers, but it was already too late to think about that now. He placed such thoughts aside while desperately looking for a way to get out. Unfortunately, nothing good came up.

The rescue team that had already secured Olivia and Shirou moved on to removing their next worry. With Shirou separated from Olivia, they now

could use their full power to destroy Olivia. The drones and the powered suits changed their weapons from the ones to capture Shirou to their normal weapons and aimed their huge cannons at Olivia. They opened up some distance from Olivia and readied their weapons. They made it such that they could shoot her down at the same time the forcefield armour disengaged.

Although some of the pilots there were curious about the real identity of that maid, none of them suggested capturing her alive. Everyone there understood that their first priority was to disarm the maid. The pilots of the powered suits that were using their forcefield armour to trap Olivia escaped from their powered suits and left the area to get away from the prepared simultaneous barrage.

Seeing those pilots leaving their powered suits, Shirou thought that it might be his chance to hijack those powered suits, but he was not able to. All of them were already under full lockdown, so they no longer accept any connection from the outside. Shirou hit the transparent wall and shouted at Olivia.

“…Dammit! Hey!! I’ve paid you 5 million Chrome, you know?! Do something about this!”

It was close to a desperate whine. With his voice not able to propagate through the forcefield armour, what he was doing was in vain.

Or so it should have been, but Olivia replied through the old-world domain connection.

“Even if you tell me so. I’ve done enough for what I’ve been paid already. It is equal to only this much, you see.”

Shirou raised his eyebrows. He did not expect Olivia to reply. But his expression quickly turned stern as he hopefully asked a question.

“…So, the problem is only money, huh? Is it okay if I interpret it as such?”

“Indeed, it also means that I’m willing to work more if you’re willing to pay me more.”

Olivia's casual answer gave Shirou a glimmer of hope. He hesitated for a bit but eventually, he annoyedly said to Olivia.

"…Alright, I get it already!! I'll pay you 10 million Chrome more!! That's all I have and you can have all of it! There! I've transferred the extra payment!!"

"Very well."

Inside the forcefield trap that should not allow any movement, Olivia smiled. Right at the next moment, the sound of crackling occurred. It was like glass was breaking and it would be loud enough to echo through the area.

Olivia caused the drones to maximize its power output to forcefully break through the forcefield trap. The drones that were too close got trapped inside and started to slowly move as if they were breaking through a fragile glass case.

The powered suits that were already aiming at Olivia quickly reacted. They were in the middle of adjusting their timing to simultaneously lower the forcefield armour and shoot at Olivia, but since Olivia suddenly made her move, they quickly started shooting at her. Although their firepower was lowered since they were in the middle of adjustment, the cannons that they released were by no means weak. Cannon fire combined into a very bright high intensity pillar of light that evaporates everything in its way, headed straight at Olivia.

As expected, Olivia did not have the chance to evade that attack. The powered suits surrounding her already had their ray cannons aimed at her the moment she broke away from the forcefield trap. So, she did not have the opportunity to get away right from the start.

But that did not mean she could not react to it. At the same time the powered suits opened fire, Olivia swung her light blade forward. With that one swing, she split the pillar of light that was coming at her. The light blade supplied by Olivia's old-world generator was easily able to

overwhelm that beam of light, which had been powered by multiple powered suits' generators.

When the blade and the laser clashed. The laser beam broke into multiple streams, which spread indiscriminately. They hit the buildings and the rubbles around the area, evaporating them. Although the light blade weakened from that clash, it still extended forward until it eventually reached the powered suits and destroyed them.

Olivia then used the path opened by that slash to escape.

She used forcefield armour to create footing, which allowed her to run in the air as she quickly closed the distance to the powered suits. She then swung her blade with inhuman masterful precision to cut the powered suits' weapons and limbs in a blink of an eye.

Seeing the powered suits in front of them easily cut down, the still surviving powered suits increase the output of their forcefield armour. They used the data from the sliced powered suits to adjust their forcefield armour so that it would be able to withstand Olivia's blade. But even so, just like the previous powered suits, Olivia's blade cut through their hard forcefield armour with ease. With the extra payment that she had received, Olivia pumped more energy into her blade, allowing her to easily cut through her enemies.

Olivia once again swung her blade and easily broke through the forcefield box that trapped Shirou. She then quickly snatched Shirou who was still dazzled by what just happened and tucked him under her arm before leaving the area.

The damage to the area from that short exchange was enough to completely change the contour of the area. But even so, no one was killed. Olivia obeyed Shirou's request to hold back so as not to kill anyone. Though it ended up costing Shirou a lot more money, Olivia did not seem bothered at all.

The pilots managed to get out from the half-destroyed bent, stuck door. After they looked around and understood what was going on, they looked in

the direction where Olivia and Shirou went.

“What in the world is she!? Don’t tell me that she’s from the eastern front line or something?!”

Another pilot replied through the communication device.

“That might as well be the case. Although we were not told, I heard that the one we’re pursuing is an old-world connector from Sakashita Heavy Industry. It seems that he somehow managed to run away from them, seriously though, running away from Sakashita might as well mean picking a fight with Sakashita. It wouldn’t be weird if he had prepared something like this. They might have agreed to meet up here.”

“Geez… No one ever told me that we were going to fight something like that.”

“The commander gave us the order, so it’s not that hard to predict something like this would occur, you know.”

Their sighs could be heard overlapping from the communication device.

“Well. What can I say… We did well to slow them down, we can just leave the rest to them.”

“…You’re right. If she is really from the eastern front line, there’s no way we can stop them. It’ll at least be a good excuse as to why they got away.”

The pilots exchanged light jokes in reaction to their plan, which ended up with a rather disappointing result.

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Akira and the rest escaped the building in a hurry. They jumped onto the bike that came to pick them up on autopilot as they quickly left the area. Although Akira’s bike had only a seat for one person, they did not have any other choice but to fit it for 5. Akira and Reina took the seat while Carol, Shiori, and Kanae perched on the bike’s arms that were originally for weapons.

Originally, they were planning to watch the situation from inside the building for a bit before carefully returning back. However, Akira suggested with a solemn expression to leave that place immediately.

Since Akira even said that as Carol's bodyguard, he would take her by force if needed, the rest knew that there was no time to even ask for the reason and immediately abide by Akira's plan. It did not take long for them to head for the exit, they already started moving just a moment after Olivia and Shirou jumped off from the hole Olivia made. They then hopped on Akira's bike without even asking where it was heading to.

The area around the building was already well inside the conflict zone. The huge multi-legged tank monsters that had disengaged their camouflaging were already in the middle of an intense fight with the powered suits. When they were passing close to those monsters, Reina and the others were about to attack them, but Akira told them not to. They had already taken a long detour to avoid them. Thanks to that, the monsters placed Akira as their lowest priority and they just ignored Akira's group and headed toward the incoming powered suits.

Although they encountered those tank monsters numerous times, their group prioritized leaving the area first. And finally, they got away from the war zone.

Kanae looked at the ensuing battle behind them with an amused smile.

"Ohh, they're going at it pretty hard. Not bad."

Kanae was watching the powered suits that were locked in an intense battle with the old-world mechanical monsters. The warheads, energy bullets, and the mini-missiles that they were exchanging exceeded what was the norm in Mihazono ruin. The explosions from that battle were enough to blow away several buildings.

If it was a matter of firepower, the powered suits had the upper hand. But the multi-legged tank monsters with the other security drones of the ruin had the numerical advantage. At the moment, the powered suits still had control of the fight thanks to their firepower, but with more and more

monster reinforcement slowly gathering, the powered suits could not afford to lower their guards.

“Ah, the building that we were in just got blown off. It was the right choice to leave right away. Akira-boy, how did you know that we should leave without delay back then?”

“I just felt so. Basically, my intuition.”

Akira casually said so, but Kanae instead deliberately and teasingly pursued the subject.

“Eh? Really? Are you sure you’re not lying there?”

“I don’t really care if you don’t believe me. Even if I have another reason, we’re not that close as to warrant me to tell the rest of the story anyway. I know you think so too, right?”

“Well, you have a point.”

Seeing Akria trying to casually end the subject, Kanae only giggled and decided not to continue.

In truth, Akira was lying. The reason why he decided to leave that building right away was because of Alpha, Akira was only following what Alpha had told him.

Carol watched the ongoing battle and mumbled.

“…They… They would go that far, huh?”

The meaning behind those words struck her heart as her face turned pale.

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Shirou once again returned under Olivia’s arm as they headed outside the ruin. If the pursuers did not care about the damage that they did to the ruin, then it was easier to get away from them out in the wasteland. With that being said, Shirou still needed to make a plan on what to do next depending

on how far Olivia would help in his escape. Because of that, he had a frown on his face as he was tucked under Olivia's arm.

"Say, just how much did that battle cost me?"

Olivia looked at Shirou with a business smile and replied.

"My apologies. In order to avoid trouble, we decline questions regarding the details such as how much each small action costs while we're in the middle of the contract."

"I can understand that it might cause trouble during the calculation of the total payment if you give me a bad answer, but to be honest, it would be troublesome for me if you suddenly throw me in the middle of nowhere while saying that you did enough for what you were already paid."

"We're open to extra payment anytime. Rather than paying it in smaller portions later, it's cheaper if you pay the whole sum beforehand. If you're not sure, please consider this as well."

Shirou laughed bitterly. The 15 Million Chrome that he had spent on Olivia was all the savings he had. He literally had no more money that he could offer. In the first place, he never planned to use his Chrome savings. So it would definitely cause him more trouble in the future.

"If you're okay with Aurum, I can pay you 10 billion Aurum right away though? Is that not good enough?"

"Unfortunately, we are not equipped to accept that currency."

"Yeah… thought so…"

For Shirou, that answer was exactly what he had expected when he made that suggestion. As he continued to ponder, he just made a bitter smile and did not make any counteroffer.

"Although Aurum is a corporation-issued currency, the caretaker AI in Kuzusuhara ruin is accepting that currency, so like, with that in mind, can you at least find a way to accept it?"

“I was indeed already informed regarding that matter. But regarding that currency, we have not received any guarantee on its value from the sector 844 high-level management division. Thus, we have no plan to review that currency. If you’re insisting on paying with that currency, please receive the sign of guarantee for that currency’s value from the aforementioned division and show it to me first.”

“Yup, I knew that would be the answer.”

There was a big difference in meaning between a government AI accepting a corporation-issued currency and guaranteeing the value of that currency. If one of those government AI guaranteed the value of that currency, there was a good chance that other AIs would accept that currency. If there was an AI that would accept Aurum instead of Chrome for their trade, the value of Aurum would greatly go up. This was also the reason why Sugadome was willing to let Shirou roam free as long as he would create a negotiation route with Tsubaki.

Although his own goal was getting a bit further, it might be a good idea to at least start doing something for it. Shirou, who thought so, felt frustrated.

Olivia blazed through the ruin at a relatively high speed, but she suddenly came to a sudden halt right around the boundary between the ruin and the wasteland. Shirou could not help but grunt from the pain because of the sudden stop.

“Don’t stop so suddenly like that! Although I’m holding it in, it’s actually pretty painful, you know!?”

Olivia ignored Shirou’s complaint and just dropped him. Once again, Shirou could not help but grunt from the pain when he landed. He then looked at Olivia with a stern face.

“…Whoah, wait for a sec, don’t tell me that this is as far as you’re going, right?”

“No, it’s just that it seems that this will take the rest of the payment.”

“You gotta be kidding me, right!? I’ve even added 10 million Chrome, you know!? Isn’t this a bit too short!?”

“It’s not like I can do anything about it considering the opponent that we have to face. I can certainly fight while protecting you, but as expected, that would cost way too much. As such, I’ll stop carrying you from here on out. The rest is up to you.”

As Shirou pushed himself up with a confused look on his face, the voice of another person came.

“Oh, you found out, huh? This is actually a camouflaging coat from the front line though.”

Shirou inadvertently looked in the direction of that voice’s source. A part of his views suddenly distorted and a figure of a man appeared when he disengaged his camouflaging coat, seeing that man’s face, Shirou exclaimed.

“Geh!?”

That man was obviously angry although he was also somehow smiling amusedly at Shirou.

“That reaction was uncalled for, you know. Long time no see, Shirou.”

Shirou replied with a stiff expression.

“Y-yo there Hammerz, long time no see… So, why are you here?”

“Why, you ask? There’s no need for me to even explain it to you, right? I’m here to pick you up.”

Hammerz smiled and slowly approached Shirou, who inadvertently stepped back.

“Well, uhh, that’s not what I meant, it’s just that, shouldn’t you be staying near Kugamayama city? Even if you only come here after those guys told you, it’s way too fast no matter how you look at it, right?”

Shirou came to Mihazono ruin only after he investigated where Hammerz was. Had he known that Hammerz was nearby, he would never have thought of coming there.

Hammerz's smile deepened as he took another step closer.

"Oh, about that, huh. I asked that Yanagisawa guy to fake my location. To be honest, since it's you we're talking about, I didn't expect much result from that, but seeing your reaction, it seems like it did work out, huh? I honestly didn't expect that at all. That guy is pretty good. I heard not only Sakashita, but Tatsumori and Tsukida are also trying to recruit him. I guess this explains why that is the case."

Shirou cursed under his breath. He thought that he might have been a bit too arrogant with his skill that he could not see through that trickery, but when he saw Hammerz's smile disappear, he thought that was not the time to think of such trivialities.

"Now then, shall we go back now? Don't fight back, okay? I have no wish to hurt you, but I also think that it'll be fine as long as I leave your head intact. Don't worry, we'll properly fix you up after that. And I guarantee there won't be any long-lasting effect."

"…After that, huh? How long after are we talking here?"

"No idea. I bet it's after you paid for all the commotion that you've caused."

Shirou could not help but cower when he imagined being left with only his head and forced to work while being connected to a life support system. Though he already made his resolve when he escaped, it was still a scary scene to imagine.

Olivia stepped in front of Shirou as if to cover him. But that did not hamper Hammerz at all as he kept stepping closer and closer to Shirou. Shirou's gaze darted between Olivia and Hammerz, He then stepped aside and said with a rather frightened face.

“Uh, d-don’t kill anyone, pretty please?”

“That would depend on the opponent.”

“That would depend on her.”

Olivia and Hammerz gave the same reply at the same time and lightly smiled. After all, they both thought if anyone would die here, it would be their respective opponent. And that thought was transmitted clearly to each other.

Shirou made his resolve and ran away. His destination was out of the ruin and into the wasteland, which meant that he would have to get past Hammerz.

But Hammerz quickly stepped in to block him and Olivia quickly reacted to stop Hammerz from doing so. As both reacted simultaneously, it became the trigger to start the fight between the two. A fight between someone who could be called superhuman against another being that was made similar to a superhuman.

The exchanged punches created shock waves that blew away buildings without even touching them. The blade that was swung down melted anything that it touched. The kicks that missed their target created a huge crater when they landed, the waves of sharp light were lightly deflected and cut whatever they hit. Shock waves and blows that could easily obliterate normal monsters were exchanged between them.

The blows that those two exchanged in such a short time already turned the area into a huge mess. The damage to the area easily surpassed the damages that the powered suits had done to Mihazono ruin.

Shirou kept on running desperately, hoping that the intense battle behind him would further conceal his footsteps.

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After Akira and the others left Mihazono ruin on Akira's bike, they boarded Carol's camping car and head back to Kugamayama city. The camping car was already moving away from the ruin the moment it detected a large-scale battle back in the ruin, thanks to that, they were able to safely leave the ruin.

Reina, Shiori, and Kanae were watching the ruin from the top of the camping car. Due to the colourless mist, even the long-range image capture function of their expensive information-gathering devices could not get a clear image. They could not even produce a high enough resolution image to know how badly damaged the ruin got due to the battle.

Kanae had a rare bitter smile on her face as she said.

"Well, that looks exactly like when a kaijuu rampages through, doesn't it?"

Some of the mountain-like huge powerful monsters in the front line were often called kaijuu. Similarly, when someone created a similar level of mess as those beasts, they were also often called kaijuu.

Even a battle-crazed person such as Kanae would rather avoid having to fight a kaijuu. Though she did enjoy having to fight a powerful opponent, that was only when it could at least be considered a fight. There was nothing fun about getting obliterated by overwhelming power, without a chance of victory.

"Ane-san, I know that we were told to handle the situation since we're already present, but as expected, it's better to let Milady off fro-"

"Wait."

Reina suddenly interjected with a serious face.

Shiori and Kanae quickly turned to Reina. Kanae had a surprised look on her face while Shiori looked utterly worried.

"Before that, explain everything to me first…"

"Milady, that is…"

“Shiori, I know that it’s better for me to stay as an outsider until this reaches its conclusion. But tell me. If you’re saying that you can’t tell me because I’m still inexperienced, then I’ll back off. But as long as I don’t know anything, I won’t accept anything, after all, I do not deserve any help.”

Reina said so while looking straight at Shiori.

Reina understood that Shiori had gone through a lot of ordeals, she had crossed many dangerous bridges in place of Reina’s older sister or even her parents. Reina herself knew that she was still relying on Shiori. As a matter of fact, she was certain that she would still rely on Shiori in the future due to her lack of strength.

But it was only a matter of time before she needed to grow independent. Even if she kept using her lack of strength as an excuse to continue burdening Shiori, it might one day crush the two of them. Although it might just be an excuse to her, Reina was trying to be a master worthy of Shiori before she ended up putting too much burden on Shiori and before Shiori decides to sacrifice herself.

Shiori was a bit overwhelmed by Reina’s resolve. Although she was still worried, she smiled. She could feel the person that she had always looked over and protected, the person who she had always been supporting, was trying her best to take on her role as the master. Shiori felt both lonely and happy from Reina’s growth.

“Very well. But since it also contains corporation secrets, I can’t do it here. But I shall tell Milady everything once we’re back.”

“Alright… And I’m sorry, I know it might be too late.”

“Please don’t be.”

Toward Reina, who was smiling bitterly, Shiori gracefully bowed.

Kanae could hardly hold back her lips from curving up. Reina, who noticed that, threw a rather presumptuous irritated smile at Kanae. Nonetheless, Kanae just raised her eyebrows in shock and only giggled after that.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 254, The Extent Of a Job

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The camping car was running on autopilot back to Kugamayama city. So, there was no need for someone to stay behind the wheel. Reina's team, which was basically getting a free lift, was taking up the position of escorts. As long as nothing big happened, Carol and Akira could just take a break inside the camping car. Because of that, it would not be strange if Carol decided to fully lower her guard and took a good long rest inside. Outside of Akira's expectations, Carol was doing something strange.

She was lying on the bed naked. Although she placed a sheet on top of her, it was a very thin white sheet that did not help much in hiding her naked body. The inviting lustrous skin combined with a well-proportioned body was on full display. The white sheet that was partially see-through, drew a line between hiding and showcasing her body, which was very erotic.

Even being shown this scene, Akira understood that Carol was not trying to tempt him.

It was obvious that Carol was tired. After they saw what happened back in the ruin and returned back to the car, she brusquely took off her powered suit and just dropped it off without a care. It was as if someone, who was

too afraid of letting go of her rifle, finally ran out of ammo, and threw everything away in a fit of rage. Just like that, Carol dove on top of the bed and stayed silent up until now.

Even Akira could tell that she was depressed. But his communication skill was not that good to find the words to cheer her up. Though, as her escort, he did not think leaving her like this was the right choice. Therefore, for now, he decided to sit next to Carol.

Although the mood was not that bad, it was also not the right mood to get into a trivial conversation. Although they were not trying to stay silent, there were no words spoken between them. After a moment of awkward silence, Carol suddenly opened her mouth.

“Akira.”

“Yes?”

“You’re my escort right now, right?”

“Yep, and?”

Their conversation came to a pause there. Akira looked confused, he did not understand Carol’s intention behind that short exchange.

After a short pause, Carol once again restarted the conversation.

“Akira.”

“What?”

“It seems that there’s a big fight going on in that ruin, if I somehow got involved in that fight, what would you do?”

“Wouldn’t that be obvious? I’ll of course run away.”

“…Yeah, that one was obvious.”

Hearing the answer that she had fully expected, Carol replied with a rather droopy, discouraged voice.

Akira himself understood that he could not give the reply that she was wishing for. That was why he added some explanation, as if he was trying to justify his answer.

“Come on. Just think about it. Even if I am your escort, there’s no way I can do anything about that fight. There’s no other choice for me but to run away, right?”

“… I know.”

Carol unconsciously returned a short and brusque reply. It was as if she was annoyed that she was told of something that she already knew well.

Another moment of silence. This time, it obviously felt awkward. Akira showed a rather surprised reaction to her reply. But after that, he sighed and spoke up again.

“Well, I know that there’s still meaning behind fighting an unwinnable fight. Also, you’re paying me to be your escort right now. However, you’re not someone who would risk your life just because you refuse to run away no matter what, right? Running away is also a good option, no? Although as an escort, I might be useless in terms of extra firepower, I’ll properly do my job and find a good escape route for you, you know?”

Carol suddenly turned her whole body to face Akira and looked at him with a surprised face.

“…Is that so?”

“Yep. Well, I bet it won’t be easy, but if we focus on running away right from the start, I’m sure we would find a way to safely escape. Though I need to tell you that when it happens. I will never do something as stupid as telling you to go ahead and leave me behind. After all, we have a better chance to survive if we run away together. In the scenario, I can keep telling you where to go to get away from that place.”

“…Really?”

“Yeah, doing so is definitely better for our odds of survival. That is one thing that I can say for certain.”

Akira interpreted Carol’s surprise as her way of expressing doubt, that was why he then nodded confidence to make sure she did not doubt him. Although the reason why he was so sure he would be able to find a safe escape route in that situation was all because of Alpha, he did not mention that at all.

Carol pushed her body off the bed and waved at him to come closer.

“What now?”

Carol did not say anything and kept waving at Akira. Akira tilted his head and sat closer to her. That was when she suddenly hugged him.

“…I’m sorry to have doubted you. And, if things ever get to that point, I will be counting on you.”

“Well, it’s my job after all, so I’ll properly do it. Though, I can’t guarantee that we would be able to escape safely no matter what. I’ll at least do my best.”

In reaction to Akira’s straightforward and casual answer, Carol still had her arms around Akira as she smiled quietly.

When Akira said that he would run away, Carol thought that Akira meant he would leave her behind. Although she knew that it was completely expected, she hoped that was not the case. The bigger that hope, the harsher she was hit by his answer back there.

However, it was actually a misunderstanding on her part. Right from the beginning, what Akira meant was to run away together. The moment Carol noticed it, she was much happier than she had expected. At least, it was enough to blow away all the depression that she had after watching the

ensuing battle back in the ruin. Although she did not suddenly jump and skipped around, it was silent happiness that allowed her to regain her calm.

Other than that, she also felt that it was a bit unfortunate that Akira did mention it as his ‘job’. In order to remove that emotion from her, she started to lean her body weight forward with Akira, who was still wrapped in her arms, trying to push him down.

But Akira did not budge. Carol was an enhanced human with enhanced physical strength, but it was still no match against Akira’s augmented suit. In the first place, the mood was not right to force Akira down. If Akira fought against it, that would be the end of it.

Akira frowned and threw a question.

“What are you doing?”

“…Though I already knew beforehand, Akira, you really can’t read the mood, can you?”

“I don’t know what you’re trying to say but, can you get off me already?”

Carol lightly sighed and let Akira go. She then returned back lying on the bed, but this time, she looked like she was pouting, as if she was throwing a tantrum.

“Akira, I believe you’re already at that age where you start getting interested in girls instead of food, though? You’re no longer just a little boy anymore, so it might be a good idea if you stop prioritizing food all the time, you know? Or is it that you’re at that age where anything is fine as long as you can eat it?”

“What are you even talking about? Just so you know, lately I’ve been more interested in taste rather than just the amount, you know? As expected, I’m no longer the same as the past me when I didn’t care about the taste as long as I can eat.”

Seeing how Akira speak proudly in front of an extremely tempting naked body, Carol could not help but think of something foolish. [Maybe I should start learning how to cook?]

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Hammerz continued fighting against Olivia with a stern look on his face. He identified where each attack was moving towards and countered them with punches reinforced with forcefield armour. Olivia was sending out high powered energy light waves, which could cut through matter due to its sharpness. These were basically light blades, which flew afar and betrayed the normal range of a blade.

These light blades were dispersed when they were met with Hammerz punches. But even after they dispersed, they still packed the same cutting power that easily sliced everything in the area, raising up a storm. The destroyed buildings that had already become rubble, were chipped into even smaller pieces.

[…Tch! They still can cut even after being dispersed, huh!? What a pain!]

Hammerz could not evade every light blade, so he took some hits. But his superhuman body and his fighting suit made to endure the might of a superhuman, easily caused those blades to bounce off. Although he still got injured from taking them on, it was not enough to hinder his fighting capability. He then quickly leapt forward to close the distance at a speed where air started to crack and released a punch that went over the speed of sound.

The blast wave from that punch released a shock wave to its surroundings. The shock wave was greatly damped by the colourless mist in the air, causing its momentum to quickly lessen. But even so, it was still strong enough to blow wreckage and rubble around them away.

The fist that did not lose any of its power from the colourless mist, hit Olivia. The powerful punch, enforced with forcefield armour, which was strong enough to pierce the armour of an inter-city transport vehicle, hit the maid uniform, which seemed no different to a piece of cloth. However,

instead of piercing that cloth, it was only enough to create a small wrinkle on Olivia's maid uniform. Furthermore, that wrinkle quickly disappeared after she jumped back to open distance from Hammerz. His fist had completely been nullified.

[I didn't see light from force to energy conversion. Is it simply because that's just how strong her maid outfit is? Or is she using a forcefield armour that did not produce light? Including her blade and her rifle, she has an excellent set of equipment.]

Olivia was keeping her distance from Hammerz, it was obvious that her aim was to buy time and she had no plan to fight Hammerz seriously. But even so, Hammerz could not just ignore Olivia and go after Shirou. If Hammerz showed his back to Olivia to chase Shirou, he knew that Olivia would injure him enough to buy even more time.

Originally, Hammerz was planning to quickly take Olivia out and chase after Shirou. But it seemed to be impossible to do now due to how powerful Olivia was. Although Hammerz was holding back so as to not get Shirou caught up in the fight, Olivia's fighting capability was way out of his expectation. In the end, Olivia slowly bought more and more time for Shirou to getaway.

Although some of the powered suits from the interceptor team were sent to chase after Shirou, most had been cut down by Olivia. And that interceptor team was acting in place of the rescue team, which had already been decimated.

Olivia's blade was too powerful for Hammerz to take on in place of those powered suits. Even if he was able to deflect her light blades, there was still a limit on how many Hammerz could deflect.

Of course, they had also sent a few powered suits to take a long detour to avoid getting cut down by Olivia, but there was no guarantee that they would be able to capture Shirou.

After Shirou left the ruin and went out into the wasteland, some drones with camouflage on, left the area as fast as they could. It was difficult to catch up

with the drones that could not be shot down in the wasteland. The wasteland was just simply too wide. There was also the danger of encountering monsters. But as long as they kept their distance, there was a good chance that the colourless mist would cover their presence. In his desperate escape, the vast wasteland was on Shirou's side.

Hammerz thought that everything would be okay as soon as he arrived, but evidently, that was not the case. Hammerz cursed his own naive thinking as his expression turned dark.

He did not wish to hold back any longer, but he had to conserve some of his power. He was confident he could defeat his opponent if he went full power. But the repercussion would not be light, it would definitely hamper his main objective.

If he could capture Shirou afterwards, he would go all in. However, the chances of that would diminish to zero once he used all his might here. It would be meaningless to squeeze all he had for virtually nothing. Unnecessarily injuring himself would be against the corporation's work ethic, that was why Hammerz had no other choice but to not use his full power.

But even so, Hammerz started to wonder if it was better to take out his opponent to reassure his patron. That thought was running through his mind and was reflected by his action. He started to lean forward, and his gaze started to turn sharper. Right when he had decided to end his opponent, Olivia, who kept smiling even in the middle of the fight, suddenly said to him.

"Would it be okay to stop here?"

Hammerz raised both of his eyebrows.

"…What do you mean? Are you trying to tell me that this is futile and that I should just stop?"

Hammerz inadvertently made a guess as to Olivia's answer. However, that guess only served to sour his mood. His mood and increased hostility

toward his opponent caused him to make a grim expression. A normal human would have cowered under his gaze.

But Olivia did not seem bothered at all as she smiled and shook her head.

“Nope. I’m saying that there’s no meaning in continuing our fight. That’s why, if you want to chase that young man, you can go ahead and just do that.”

Hammerz seemed confused at those unexpected words from Olivia. He was even more confused since there were no signs of Olivia lying.

“That is a rather strange suggestion considering how hard we’ve fought against each other. Why do you suddenly want to stop?”

“I’ve worked enough for what I have been paid, that’s all there is to it.”

Hammerz looked confusedly at Olivia. He had already disengaged his hostile posture as well. So, Olivia’s smile slowly turned into a business smile.

“…If you wish to continue, then I am more than happy to oblige. But it would not be for free. I will only put in effort depending on how much you would pay me beforehand, so I hope that you understand.”

Hammerz did not take his eyes off Olivia as he picked up his communication device.

“It’s me, tell me the damage.”

Hammerz could not help but frown when he listened to the response. Many people got injured during his fight against Olivia. But none of them were dead. Shirou’s request was not to kill anyone, and Olivia accomplished that brilliantly.

That restriction also applied during that fight just now, but that would no longer be the case if they continued. It meant that Olivia had been holding back, in a sense, she was sparing his life. Since Hammerz noticed that, he could not help but frown even more. However, at the very least, it also

served to confirm that any continuation of this fight would be against his duty.

Hammerz heaved a huge sigh as if he was expelling all the grudge inside him, and with that, he no longer showed any hostility toward Olivia.

“Alright, let’s not… Good grief, just who exactly are you?”

In response to those words that Hammerz only meant as a complaint, Olivia made her usual business smile and gracefully bowed.

“Oliva of Lion Steel. A pleasure to meet you.”

Hammerz was completely flabbergasted.

“Lion Steel? What do you mean by that? Why is someone from Lion Steel causing trouble for Sakashita Heavy Industry? Is it okay for me to interpret this as an act of hostility from Lion Steel against Sakashita? Did you join hands with one of the other big five or something?”

“Not at all, we have no wish for such a thing.”

“Then what is it? Are you trying to say that you’re just lending a hand to an in-fighting in Sakashita? So, Lion Steel is not trying to cause trouble with Sakashita? Just because some of our officers are working with your corporation, don’t think that such an excuse would-”

“Excuse me but let me add one more thing. It seems that you’re confusing our corporation with another corporation which is using the same name without our permission. Our Lion Steel company has no relation with the one that calls itself the Lion Steel Eastern District Main Branch.”

Hammerz was even more confused, but it only took a few seconds for it to finally dawn on him.

“…You’re the one from the old-world, huh!?”

“Although I don’t really agree with that way of calling our company, but that is correct.”

Hammerz finally understood why Olivia was that powerful and rubbed his temple. The observation log from Sakashita Heavy Industry's facility did not show any indication that Shirou had made a connection with the old-world Lion Steel. And it was too short of a time frame for him to form that connection after he had escaped. So, it was only natural for him to think that Shirou had that connection beforehand when he plotted his escape.

[Did Shirou come to this ruin to meet up with her? Just what in the world is he trying to do? To even spend all of his Chrome to pay her…? Just… I really can't even begin to guess…]

As Hammerz realized he was about to fall into deep thought, he shook his head and put that aside for now.

"You said that you were paid, right? How much did he pay you? And what is his objective?"

"My apologies, but I can't leak the content of my contract with the others. Thus I am afraid I shall refuse to answer your questions."

"I don't know what's the basis for being a customer, but I bet that Shirou doesn't satisfy the requirements, right?"

"Regarding that matter, I can only say that he satisfied a very special set of requirements."

Olivia threw a white card to Hammerz, Hammerz caught that card and shifted his gaze from Oliva to that white card.

"It must be some kind of fate that we met. So let me give you our company's card. By all means, please contact us, we'll be waiting for your request. Now then, allow me to excuse myself."

When Hammerz returned his gaze to Olivia, she was already gone.

"…Well, I guess this has resulted in at least one good thing."

Hammerz light sighed and tucked that white card. His face then turned gloomy as he had to give his report, that they had failed to capture Shirou.

Olivia returned to the Lion Steel branch office located on the 57th floor of the Seranthal building. She transferred the AI core to the branch office's system and proceeded to do maintenance on her body.

The automaton body floated in the middle of the maintenance system, and its maid uniform disappeared, revealing the naked body of a beautiful automaton that the company had spent a huge fortune to create. The naked body then cracked, creating crevices all over its beautiful body, which then slowly opened.

After readjusting the body, it then exposed the inside, which seemed to be made of metallic organs. Some of those organs were in the shape of spheres, among those spheres, two were taken out and replaced with new ones. Those spheres were old-world generators which powered the automaton's body. The generators had been damaged from the previous battles and were now being replaced.

Although from one point of view, it could be said that Olivia was taking it easy when she was dealing with Hammerz, but in reality, she did not have that much leeway. To fend off Hammerz, she had to spend two of her expensive generators. She might end up in red even after receiving the 15 million Chrome as payment. When she added up the repair cost for the damages to her body, she judged that it was not worth the trouble.

If she continued fighting Hammerz, she would definitely end up deep in the red. Although it was her first job after such a long time, the result was unsatisfactory. Olivia felt frustration welling up inside her as she lightly sighed inside the cyberspace of the system.

That frustration was all because she did not receive a satisfying job, so it did not cause her any more woes. The warehouse on the 57th floor still had a good stock of generators. And even if her body had been destroyed during her fight with Hammerz, it was not like she would lose her AI data. So, she just could download her data into a different automaton just like one could change from one dress to another.

Olivia had already transferred to the automaton located in Iida commercial district ruin. The old-world automaton that was originally used to escort

VIP targets. It was equipped with a powerful generator and was granted permission to fully utilize that generator's output when necessary.

Even if there was a chance of her AI data getting erased, she did not feel any fear toward that at all. As a general-purpose AI from Lion Steel, getting herself deleted only meant losing one of its many mass-produced AI, after all.

As a general-purpose AI, Olivia's line of thinking was created using the human mind as its base. But an imitation was not the same as the real thing. As a matter of fact, their line of thinking was closer to a fanatic or a zealot.

Olivia was thinking about the future with her fanatical non-human mindset.

That was when Seranthal's system sent a notification to her. The content was a demand from Seranthal for an explanation regarding the battle that happened on the outskirts of the Mihazono residential ruin.

Olivia connected herself to the Seranthal building's system and called Seranthal.

＿*＿*＿*＿

Yanagisawa was on his personal transport aircraft as he was heading to Mihazono ruin. He already received the report that they failed to capture Shirou. Because of that, he was in an awful mood. He used an expensive special line to contact his men out in the field and was listening to their report.

"Let me confirm this again. The powered suit that you thought to be piloted by him turned out to be empty, right? Are you certain that he's not sitting in the pilot seat with camouflaging on or something like that?"

In order to maintain his calm, he was trying to keep to his usual tone, but it did not work out well. His men could feel Yanagisawa's irritation from behind the speaker as they anxiously replied.

"…We did our best to try to capture him. But he still escaped."

“I see. So, it was only a decoy, huh? Don’t worry about it, things like this happen from time to time. Just continue searching for him like usual. Ah, don’t forget to send the powered suits’ data to me. Though it might be tempered by that guy, I might still find something useful.”

“Roger that.”

“Yup, I’ll leave it to you then! Good luck!”

Yanagisawa replied with a flippant tone and closed the call. He then faked a smile in order to help him recover his groove before opening a call to Hammerz.

“Ah! Hello there! Yanagisawa here! Is it a good time right now?”

“…What is it? I’m pretty sure the report as well as my apology for failing to capture Shirou have been sent through another commutation route already?”

“Well, I just want to ask more details about that, you see. To be more precise, why did you let him go?”

Yanagisawa’s words were tinted with a grudge, but Hammerz only reacted with a sigh and a silence. After a short pause, Hammerz then replied.

“…It’s true that we failed to capture Shirou although you’ve given us very good information about him. Regarding that matter, you have my apologies. But excessive animosity will be seen as a hostile act toward Sakashita, you know?”

Yanagisawa was obviously playing coy as he laughed and said.

“No no no, of course, I have no wish to do something like that. It’s just that I never thought that you guys would fail. After all, someone as strong as you were moving and you made it on time to meet him. So, I was wondering if it was intentional. It’s only natural to get suspicious, right? Ah, or is it that you lowered your guard since you believed that as long as you know his location, you can already retrieve him? That it’ll be an easy job?”

Hammerz sighed one more time.

“He escaped from Sakashita, so it’s only natural to expect him to have a good escort. Well, since I was unable to properly judge at that time, that could mean that I’ve lowered my guard. If that really is the case, I can’t deny that I did. It might sound like I’m trying to shift the blame here since I was the one who let him get away, but when you pinned down his location, you didn’t detect any escorts with him?”

“Well, I’m really sorry about that.”

It was obvious that Yanagisawa did not really mean that as an apology. So Hammerz just reacted with another sigh.

After that, Yanagisawa inquired about Hammerz’s fight with Olivia, as if to create an excuse for him to close their call.

“Thank you for the invaluable information. Well, considering that you were unable to capture Shirou-kun even after you reached the location on time, it might mean that it’s a good idea to rethink our approach to capturing him. It’s rather worrying for me, that’s why I even called you. I’m sorry about that. But, since this failure is because of special circumstances, it really relieves me. Personally speaking, it’s rather difficult for me to prepare people to capture someone that even you can’t capture, you know?”

“I bet it is. I’m also busy over here, so excuse me for closing the call.”

“Yes, thank you very much.”

The call ended there, Yanagisawa’s smile once again vanished.

[At least it doesn’t sound like he’s lying to me. But…]

Although he worded it out as if he was joking, Yanagisawa was really suspecting Hammerz of intentionally letting Shirou run away.

After all, it was a fact that Shirou escaped when he was inside the inter-city transport vehicle. This was something that was normally unthinkable. And then even after Hammerz reached Shirou during a capture mission, Shirou

still escaped. Normally, it was unlikely that Hammerz was helping Shirou escape, but since it had happened twice, being suspicious was only a given.

Moreover, Yanagisawa knew that Shirou had made some kind of secret deal behind the scenes with Sugadome. But he could not confront Sakashita about it since it would be proof that he hacked into Sakashita's secret line. In the worst-case scenario, he might even get erased because of that. Unfortunately, Yanagisawa had no information on what the content of that deal was. The only thing he knew was that Shirou was in regular contact with Sugadome.

[I don't want to think about it but, the escape from the inter-city transport vehicle, and the failure in the capture mission as well, it would all make sense to say that it has all been orchestrated by Sakashita. If I take Hammerz's words as the truth, then that would not be the case, unfortunately, I need to remember that he's also from Sakashita. There's a chance that his irritation and everything else was just an act… Or is it that I'm simply being too paranoid?]

According to his original plan, by now, he would have already borrowed Shirou to finish the administration with the black card in the Seranthal building. He would then finally be able to do his business in the deepest part of Kuzusuhara ruin. But something unexpected happened, twice even. Yanagisawa was not that stupid to just sweep that under the rug as nothing more than bad luck.

[I don't want to think that Sakashita noticed my goal and is trying to get in my way, but… Better safe than sorry.]

Yanagisawa took a deep breath to calm himself down. That was when the pilot notified him.

"Commander, we're close."

"Hm? Alright."

The aircraft landed. It was on the hanger attached to Seranthal Building. Yanagisawa had already received Seranthal's permission to use it.

“Well, I’ll be going then. Ah, just to remind you, don’t leave the aircraft, okay? The one with the permission is only me. If someone else comes out of the aircraft, the security drones will kill them. And I’m not joking.”

“R-roger that!”

Yanagisawa only said so after leaving the aircraft. He then waved goodbye and went inside the building. He came there that day since Seranthal called for him, demanding an explanation about the recent ruckus near the Mihazono residential district ruin.

When he entered, the image of Seranthal was already waiting for him. He who saw that tilted his head as there was one more person next to that holographic image of Seranthal.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 255, Reina’s Conviction

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On the next day, after that huge battle to capture Shirou in Mihazono ruin, Akira and Carol once again came to the residential district of the ruin together. Due to the battle between the multi-legged tank monsters guarding the ruin and the powered suits from the Kugamayama city defence squad, plus the fight between Hammerz and Olivia, the ruin was left filled with rubble and wreckage, the city district was in a very bad state.

In the middle of that utterly destroyed ruin, Carol was going around collecting data to create a map while Akira was there to escort her.

Akira looked around the surroundings with a rather surprised look on his face.

“It seems that they were going at it pretty hard, huh? This might even be worse than the last one, right?”

Since Carol was collecting data, she knew the extent of the damage to the area better than Akira. She had already expected that the damage to the ruin would be horrendous judging by how hard the two parties battled each other yesterday. Although she was discouraged after seeing such a battle from afar yesterday, today, she seemed to be doing just fine.

“The damage is indeed worse than the last incident. I’ve done a bit of digging and it seems that the powered suits they were using yesterday are the same kind as those used to guard Kuzusuhara ruin. That might be the reason why.”

“Do you think it has something to do with that guy from yesterday?”

“That might be the case, that’s all I can say.”

Both Carol and Akira were suspecting that yesterday’s incident had something to do with Shirou. That incident happened right after Shirou and Olivia left. So, it was only natural for Carol and Akira, who were also there when that happened, to suspect they had something to do with this incident. Carol then continued.

“Well, it has nothing to do with us anyway, right?”

“Yeah, that’s true.”

Akira reaffirmed her. Both of them were saying that in hopes that it would really be the case. After all, both Akira and Carol did not want to get involved in any more trouble. Since they were there in the very location of the incident right now, it was enough of a reason for them to worry that others might think they had something to do with that incident. Especially when they were trying to investigate the source of that incident. So, in order to get their minds off the matter, they changed the subject of their conversation.

“But still, I thought that the ruin would be on high alert after a battle that serious, I wonder why that is not the case this time?”

Akira’s question was completely understandable, but the answer to that question was a complete mystery for Carol as well, so she just gave an educated guess.

“I bet it has something to do with Seranthal. It seems that those powered suits were originally from the area around the Seranthal building, you know?”

Akira only threw a question without expecting a serious answer. However, Carol's reply was quite a detailed answer, which caused him to be surprised. Akira's expression indicated that he did not understand the meaning of what exactly she was saying so he threw another question.

"Why does it have something to do with the Seranthal building?"

"Seranthal building is an important building in this ruin after all, and those powered suits came from that place."

Akira still did not seem to understand the meaning of her answer. So, Carol reworded her answer to include an additional explanation.

The Seranthal building was treated as a relatively important building inside the Mihazono ruin. It was because there were branch offices of national-level government departments and old-world corporations on the upper floors of the Seranthal building.

Moreover, after a city officer by the name of Yanagisawa made a deal with the caretaker AI of that building, they were allowed to borrow the first floor as well as the area around the Seranthal building. Judging from that fact, there was a good chance that Kugamayama city made some moves to make sure that yesterday's incident would not spread too far.

After listening to her explain, Akira nodded in admiration.

"It's pretty amazing that you even know about all that as well. Is it normal to know that much even though the incident just happened yesterday?"

"To be honest, it's much more surprising for me that you don't know anything about it though. Don't you have information sources mentioning something like that?"

"Not really."

Toward Akira, who responded so casually, Carol found that weird.

"Is that so? Considering your Hunter Rank, to be honest, it would be completely understandable for information brokers to approach you… But

you at least receive contract offers from all kinds of operator support, right? Don't you get bits and pieces of information from their contract offers? Don't they send some information in their offers, trying to show that they can give you information which are normally not out in the public?"

Akira replied apathetically as if he was trying to hide something.

"Oh, if it's about that, I've basically refused all their offers."

Of course. Carol immediately noticed Akira's reaction. But she misunderstood what Akira meant as she smiled and said.

"Ah, I get it. I bet you have refused their offer without even opening their messages, right? It's better if you make a habit of at least reading their offers first before refusing them, you know? But I somehow can understand. You just don't want to bother yourself in doing something like that, right?"

"Well, yeah."

In reality, it was not rare for both individual Hunters and a team of Hunters with a high enough rank to sign contracts with independent support organizations. Although information was very important to them, Hunters did not have the time to check and hunt for information all the time.

For high-ranking Hunters from Hunter gangs such as Drankam, they could receive information via those gangs. As for the new Hunters, they had no other choice but to collect money from low-difficulty level ruins and common requests. They had to be satisfied with the common information that anyone could get for free on the network.

But for high ranking Hunters who did not work in teams, sometimes needed information. Information that was not easy to get, information that would effectively increase their earnings to match their high ranks. That was why many of them formed contracts with support organizations and formed connections with information brokers in order to create their own information network.

Meanwhile, those companies were contracted to those high-ranking Hunters could expect extra revenues. That was why those successful high-ranking Hunters were often approached by various companies early on. Judging from his ranking alone, Akira was one of those successful Hunters.

But Akira's case was special. As expected, companies would at least do some investigations first before sending their offers. In the case of Akira, the investigation would not only uncover his slum origin, but it would also uncover all the incidents that Akira was involved in.

He was the supporter of a certain large gang in the slums and the number of people he had killed, who got in his way. During the big battle which destroyed Haurias and Ezont Family, he had killed numerous people. He also had a suspicious connection to a Kugamayama city officer. With such details, no honest business would send an offer to him.

Of course, there were some companies who still tried to make a contract with Akira even after all that he did. But they were blocked by the Hunter Office's general communication line since he had an invitation setting meant for high-ranking Hunters. As for the offers that passed through that filter setting, Alpha basically was refusing them without even showing them to Akira.

Because of that, some tried to go through Inabe or Sheryl to contact Akira. But Inabe always came up with some excuses and left everything to Sheryl.

And thus, Sheryl was basically the one receiving those offers. She did convey them to Akira. However, Akira would simply tell her to deal with them herself and there was no need to tell him about every incoming offer. Thus, Sheryl kept those offers on hold, saying that they did not satisfy all the requirements. She would leave them dangling while sapping profits for her own gang. Of course, she planned to inform Akira if she bumped into offers that would cause Akira trouble if she refused them.

Because of this, Akira's information network was abnormally bad for a Hunter of his rank.

Carol lightly smiled and said to Akira.

“Well, getting into a contract means binding yourself down. So, I think it’s completely fine not making any contract as long as you’re also okay with that. I mean, you’re doing fine even without an information broker. Ah, by the way, you can ask me anything, you know? Although normally it won’t be free, I will call it even since you’re escorting me.”

“Is that so? Well, in that case…”

Akira thought that it would be a waste to let that chance slide and asked various questions, Carol answered all of his questions with her usual smile.

After they finished their job in the morning, Akira and Carol returned back to the camping car to have a meal. As for the meal, they bought the 100 thousand Aurum per portion luxurious filling meal from the Hunter Office’s cafeteria. Hunters usually did not have a regular income, but Akira who was working as Carol’s escort currently had a fixed regular income. Thus, he was enjoying that chance to his heart’s content.

Seeing Akira slowly eating and enjoying the hearty meal, Carol smiled and said with a slightly surprised face.

“But still, you really eat quite a lot.”

“Well, I’m at that age after all.”

As Akira casually replied and Carol once again checked his body.

“Hmm, compared to the first time I met you, you’ve really grown taller, and your body complexion is also better. But still, it would’ve been easier for me if your body isn’t the only thing that has grown up.”

Carol smiled when she said so. But Akira then smiled rather smugly and commented.

“What are you talking about? I’m way stronger than before now, no? Not only my body, but I also only got myself better new equipment on top of my pure physical strength. Back then, I couldn’t even use my guns without an augmented suit, but now, I can withstand the recoil to some extent. Well,

although, it might be also thanks to the better recoil dampener of the guns that I’m using right now.”

Carol sighed and smiled wryly.

“Oh my, that does sound reassuring.”

Unlike Akira, who was still using his usual augmented suit, Carol had taken off her augmented suit and changed to a see-through dress. Until now, Carol had been paranoid to the point that she cannot seem to calm down unless in her augmented suit. It was thanks to the events that occurred yesterday that she was now able to relax in her casual dress.

Although Carol was grateful to him, as someone whose work involved seducing the opposite gender, seeing Akira not showing any interest in her even after she had dolled up and had given him the green light, she could not help but feel conflicted.

Akira, who was oblivious to Carol’s feelings, innocently continued enjoying his meal. With his body that was gradually turning super-human without him knowing, it was demanding more food and nutrition. Although the energy use of a super-human body was extremely effective compared to a normal human, it was not like it could run on zero energy. If he returned to his usual diet with worse quantity and quality, although it would not kill him, it would affect the health of his body. So, to further improve his physique, Akira was replenishing himself through food and drinks.

After all, even super-humans could not live only by eating mist, that was if it was only mist.

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After Shiori told Reina everything, Reina seemed to be deep in thought. In front of her, Shiori just stood in silence as if she was waiting for her verdict.

Reina had her hand on her face as she was wearing a conflicted expression. She was throwing glances at Shiori from time to time. Every time she

glanced at Shiori, Shiori would react by looking even more and more worried.

Reina then sighed.

“Shiori. After a lot of thinking, I don’t feel like I’ll find my decision anytime soon, so I’ll try to find my answer slowly. First of all, discuss such matters with me first next time.”

Shiori raised her eyebrows.

“Milady, are you sure you’re okay with that?”

Shiori did not expect Reina to give her a second chance. She had resolved herself and was certain that Reina would leave her. Watching how Shiori was trying to hold back her emotion to no avail, only ending up displaying blooming joy on her face, Reina smiled wryly and said to her.

“Well, if you ask me if it’s okay or not, then the answer is no, it’s not okay. If you ask me if I’m angry or not, I am angry. But you’re doing everything for my sake. Even if I question why you would go so far and the only thing that could come to mind is that you did it because I’m just that weak… So, I have no desire to pin the blame onto you.”

“Milady. That is not correct. It’s all my own decision, so there’s no need for Milady-”

As Shiori was trying to tell Reina to just blame her. However, Reina suddenly cut her off mid-sentence.

“The blame is mine, I decide that it is mine to take, that’s why the blame lies on me.”

Parents could not blame the children for their mistakes. But superiors were meant to take the blame if their subordinates made mistakes. No longer allowing Shiori to continue acting as her parent, protecting her daughter, Reina was trying her best, albeit imperfect, to act as Shiori’s master. As such, Reina was trying to take the blame in this situation.

“Although I might be as useless as a mere decoration right now, even so, I will at least try my best. It will start with taking over responsibility. So, let’s give our best from here and on. Shiori, I’ll be in your care.”

“…! Of course, Milady!”

Reina’s smile that showed her growth made Shiori’s reply filled with enthusiasm.

Kanae watched that scene unfold with a foxy smile. Reina noticed that and awkwardly blushed. She inadvertently raised her voice to hide her embarrassment as she said.

“Alright, that’s the end of this discussion… So then, the next problem would be, what should we do from here on out?”

Reina once again made a difficult expression. She was looking at the white card squeezed between her middle and index fingers. It was originally left by Olivia for Akira, and Olivia was assuming that Shiori got it by tricking Akira. After listening to Shiori’s explanation, even Reina also thought that it was not a fair deal.

Alice had said that she left the matter with Olivia to them for the time being, and due to Shiori’s mistake, they were not able to leave a good impression on Olivia. Therefore, this was the current position they had to start at.

There was also the option to go to Akira and make another deal but fairly this time, where both sides understood the worth of the card. However, after Reina understood the situation they were facing. That option had too many worrying factors.

[…If he knew that we basically tricked him into giving us this card, that would definitely cause trouble. But in the first place, now that it has come to this, it’s rather suspicious whether Akira had initially already known the worth of this card when he first received it.]

To use the card to contact Olivia, they would need a method to connect to the old-world domain. So, the question would then shift to if Olivia had really given that card to someone that could not use it, or she did that exactly because she knew Akira could use the card. If it was the latter, it would open up two possibilities. Either Akira, as a high-ranking Hunter, had a device to help him connect to the old-world domain, or he was someone that did not need such a device right from the start. Either way, it meant there was a chance that Akira was an old-world connector.

[Does Akira really not know the worth of this card? Or is it that he was only pretending not to know to hide that he's an old-world connector? It's completely possible that he was just playing ignorant and intentionally accepted Shiori's deal. He might have known that he was being tricked but accepted it since he prioritized hiding his real identity… What should we do? Forget asking him… if he notices that we're suspecting him, it might be bad, really, really bad for us.]

Reina then remembered that Shiori once gave her a lecture about the importance of information. Some secrets might be guessed without knowing anything and might actually be safer when it was known. With knowledge, their way of interpreting an event could change. She felt like Akira was emphasizing that he did part with the card under a fair deal. At that time, she thought that it was because of how Akira was. He was very hard-headed when it came to certain subjects.

[What if Akira did that since he was worried that if he said something wrong, then that card might come back to him again? If that's really the case, we have the option of admitting that we tricked him into giving us the card. So, we can then return him the card. This might actually be a good option for us.]

Reina kept humming while thinking of her options there.

"Seriously… what should we do now…"

Reina kept muttering that line without making a decision. But even so, she did not resort to asking Shiori. Relying upon and taking advantage of

someone’s kindness were two different things. She told herself that asking Shiori meant allowing herself to be spoiled again by Shiori’s kindness.

It was something that she had been doing up until now. She did not make her own decision and allowed Shiori to decide for her. Thus, when Shiori made a suggestion, Reina mostly just nodded and agreed with anything that Shiori said. If that decision might cause a dangerous situation where someone might get killed, it was indeed easier to just let someone else make that decision. It was easier to make someone else the leader, the caretaker, to make that decision. As the master, if it was the correct decision, she could just praise her, and if it was not, she could scold her.

If she did that now, Reina knew that Shiori would simply smile and allow her to continue doing what she has been doing. That was why, the one who needed to control her from falling back to her old ways, was Reina herself. Since she had decided to act as Shiori and Kanae’s master, she had to decide. A decision that was made with reason. One that both of them can accept. This was her first step to show her resolve, as well as to term her pride as their master into reality.

Shiori simply stood next to Reina without saying anything. She understood that Reina’s mumbling was not meant as a plea for help. More than that, Shiori herself did not have a good solution. But whatever Reina decided on, as her servant, Shiori, was planning to obey her decision.

But of course, that did not mean she would just obey without saying anything.

“Alright then. Since we can’t decide ourselves, let’s go meet Akira and discuss it with him.”

“M-Milady?!”

Of course, Shiori understood what Reina was thinking, that was exactly why she did not expect Reina would decide to meet Akira.

Kanae was also surprised by that decision and interjected.

“Ahh, Milady, let me at least tell you this. Akira-boy is way stronger than before, even if both Ane-san and I were to take him on at the same time, we can’t say for sure that we would win. So, if it breaks into a fight, it would be very dangerous.”

“Is that so? Well, in that case, let’s do our best to run away. I’m counting on the both of you.”

Seeing Reina reply so casually like that, Kanae was dumbfounded, which was a rare thing for her.

“W-well, it’s my job after all. So, I will do my job to the best of my ability, but, Milady, are you really sure?”

Reina gave a light smile.

“Oh? And here I thought you always want to fight Akira seriously. Wouldn’t it be better for you if I fail my negotiation with him?”

“That might indeed be the case but that’s already a thing of the past.”

Seeing Kanae lightly denying it, Reina smiled wryly and said.

“Oh, as I thought, that is now the case, huh?”

Kanae twitched back as if she just realized that she had slipped up, but she then laughed and admitted it.

“Yep, it was really the case before! It’s fine, isn’t it?! And it was in the past too! But now, I’m being serious here, so Milady does not need to be concerned about that. So, now that you know, please don’t fail your negotiation, okay?”

“I’ll do my best, but it’s just to be safe, okay?”

“Yeah yeah.”

Although Kanae lightly said so, it was her serious reply.

“Shiori, so that’s it. I’ll be counting on you.”

“O-of course”

Having made their decision, they then set to meet up with Akira. Just like Shiori, who seemed to be rather anxious, Reina, who was next to her was frowning from anxiety.

Death was an occupational hazard for Hunters. Thus, the dangerous upcoming negotiation with Akira was just like any other Hunter job. Reina told herself so as she made her resolve.

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Akira was waiting next to the camping car for Reina’s group to arrive. After he finished his meal, Akira received a call from Reina saying that there was something she wanted to discuss with him.

During that call, Reina offered to meet up at Steriana, but since Akria’s current job was to escort Carol, he refused. Carol, who was next to Akira at that time, heard that and said that it was okay to prioritize his business, so Akira agreed to meet up with Reina. But as expected, it was not like he could go to Steriana while he was in the middle of protecting Carol. Thus, he added the condition that Reina would come to meet him instead.

Reina’s group accepted his condition. Although Akira did not mean it in such a manner, asking other Hunters to meet up in the middle of the wasteland also meant that it would be a dangerous discussion. It meant that in case it ended up in a fight, it was to be expected that there would be death.

Akira was the one who asked to change the meeting place from Steriana to the wasteland, and even emphasized that part. With that in mind, Reina’s group accepted his suggestion and went to meet him.

Reina’s group arrived on time. Akira looked at them with a rather confused expression when they arrived. Reina somehow looked anxious. If that was only that, he would not have cared that much. But even Kanae, who was

always smiling, had a serious expression plastered on her face. Similarly, although she did not show animosity, Shiori also wore a grim expression while eluding a high-tense ready-to-fight attitude toward him.

“Uhh, Reina, let me ask you this? You’re here just to talk, right?”

Reina smiled and replied.

“Yes. Ahh, if it’s about Shiori and Kanae, don’t worry about them. They’re rather high-strung because of what happened yesterday. Like, you know, yesterday we didn’t even notice someone was stalking us before you told us, right? Shiori and Kanae are my bodyguards, so it’s like their pride was hurt because of that. Well, if you say that they’re a bit overprotective, yeah, I can’t really deny that, but that is what it is.”

“Ohh, I see. Got it.”

Akira said so and nodded, but Alpha quickly interjected.

“Akira, just to let you know, she’s hiding a lot of things.”

“Is that so? Well, even if they’re like that because of something else, I’m sure they have their own reasons to be that tense…”

Akira lightly frowned. Reina noticed that slight change in Akira’s expression. It made her guess why his expression had changed so, she continued to smile and elaborated.

“Well, it doesn’t change the fact they’re on the edge, so let me apologize for that. But it’s not like they have any animosity against you or wish to fight you. Just one more thing though, if you don’t believe me, then we’ll just leave, you’re okay with that, right?”

“Alpha.”

“…At least she’s not lying from my point of view.”

With those words, Akira’s worry was erased. Personally speaking, Akira could not care less about the situation that they were facing. The only thing

that he cared about was whether they held any hostility toward him. And since Alpha gave her word, he thought that there should be no issues. Thus, Akira looked at Reina and lightly nodded.

“It’s fine. I don’t know what you want to talk about, but if you have no wish to fight me, then I can at least hear out what you want to say.”

“Thank you.”

Reina smiled and continued. Initially, they were at a loss about where to settle down and begin their discussion, but they ended up deciding to continue the discussion from where they currently were. It was mainly because Akira noticed that for some reason, Carol did not want to let Reina’s group into the camping car.

So as not to let them continue the long discussion while standing, Shiori and Kanae quickly prepared a table with some chairs. It did not even take 30 seconds for them to set it up. They even placed a tablecloth on top of the portable table with some drinks.

Akira looked at that with an interest. Once they finished, he took a seat and directly faced Reina. Shiori and Kanae stood beside Reina while Carol stood behind Akira since she refused to sit on the chair that was offered to her.

With the place ready, Reina pulled himself together and started to talk with a solemn expression. She took out the white card and slid it to Akira.

“It’s basically about this card.”

Akira knitted his eyebrows.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 256, Dangerous Subject

Index

Translator: Athena13

Editor: Silavin

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Akira frowned after he heard the summary of why Reina was here. The thing that she wanted to talk about, going so far as to meet him out in the wasteland, was the unfair deal where he gave Shiori the white card that Olivia had left for him.

“Even if you say so, I did already state that I’m completely fine with that deal, haven’t I?”

“That’s true, but the issue is that others don’t find it okay. Even for me, after I heard the details of the whole thing, the true worth of this card, I also believe that the deal made was an unfair one. Well, in the end, it’s nothing more than just my opinion and my opinion might be completely unrelated to this matter.”

“If that’s really the case, then it’s fine, isn’t it? No need to insist to give that back to me.”

Seeing Akira obviously unhappy with how the conversation was going, Reina made a troubled expression as she continued.

“I am in agreement with you. But the real problem is what Olivia-san thinks about the deal. I’m sure you understand it too, back then when she said that she would overlook it. It only means that she has no plans to take back that card by force, right?”

“Well, yeah, so?”

“Since we already have the means to contact Olivia-san, we don’t really need this card anymore, so, it might be better to return it, but…”

As Reina said so, she non-nonchalantly kept her eyes on Akira’s reaction. After she saw his reaction, she carefully chose her words as she continued.

“…I’m sorry but due to our situation, if possible, we want to return the card. Putting aside the negotiation about how to fix the unfair deal that we had before to later, as a guarantee, we won’t return the card until then. Can you please accept this arrangement?”

Seeing how Reina was basically begging, Akira pondered over it and realized that it was not a bad arrangement. Thus, he gave a nod and responded favourably.

“I don’t see any problem with it. I’ve given you the card, so I have no plans on asking it back.”

“Is that so? Thank you!”

Akira and Reina lightly smiled and finalized their deal. For Akira, that smile was the representation of his true feeling, but for Reina, she was desperately hiding her anxiety under her smile. The reaction that Akira showed the moment Reina mentioned the possibility of that card returning back to him, was vigilance, and the reaction when he knew that the card would not return back to him, was a relief. It meant that Akira obviously did not want that card to return back to him, and she had already guessed why.

In the world of Hunters, the smallest mistake might lead to death. Reina could feel that as she smiled and continued.

“Well then, in that case, the next thing would be to talk about what to do to fix the unfair deal. I heard from Shiori that you received a weapon for the card, right? If you’re interested in more equipment, how about we give you more equipment?”

Unlike Reina who was trying to be careful, Akira was completely nonchalant as he replied.

“Hmmm, from my point of view, it was something that had already been concluded, so I have no wish to ask for anything more.”

“I’m just sharing my own thoughts here, but I think there’s nothing wrong with taking what you can take. Though it might be weird for me to say this, the worth of that card has changed since then. It’s enough to exchange it with a powerful weapon that the other corporations don’t sell, you know? Though you might have your own reason, since you can get better equipment, I don’t see any reason to hold back, you know?”

“Well, that’s not the problem here.”

Reina looked slightly confused. It was obvious that she did not understand why Akira was hesitating to take up her offer, which would be nothing but profitable for him.

Akira could see confusion in Reina’s expression, so he added more explanation.

“The matter with that card has already been concluded. Even after the deal, I received extra blades from Shiori out of kindness. Just because it brings nothing but profit for me, doesn’t mean it is right to question the exchange of value we had back then. It would be nothing more than letting myself be spoiled just because I have the chance. If I decide to ask for something more, this might be the trigger for me to question all the deals I had in the past. I might dig up something that could be judged as ‘unfair’ and continue to seek reparation. As a Hunter, I should be someone who obeys his contract strictly, I don’t think it’s a good thing to start getting into such a habit.”

“Ohh, I see, so that’s the issue, huh? Well, a sense of identity is important for a Hunter, after all. Hmm, but still…”

Seeing Reina kept withdrawing and agreeing with him, this time, it was Akira who found it suspicious.

“Anyway, why are you so insistent on this matter? Are you really that bothered by the fairness of that deal?”

“Well, yeah…”

It was obvious that Reina was trying to dodge his question. Akira gave her a look of suspicion. As he expected, any good deal would have strings attached. Reina heaved a deep sigh and then responded as if she had given up.

“To be perfectly honest, rather than insisting on you to take the offer, it’s more because we want to get on Olivia-san’s good side.”

Akira raised his eyebrows, so Reina then explained to him.

Olivia was not pleased with the deal. Although there might be many reasons as to why, when they thought about the biggest reason, they realized that they had treated the card, which provided a means to contact Olivia, cheaply.

That was why they thought by treating it as a highly valuable item and giving a suitable compensation to its original owner, Akira, then Olivia would admit the ownership change.

After Reina said so, she made an even more troubled expression as she continued.

“But then, it’s difficult to correctly identify how much Aurum that the card is worth, right? And if we use money instead, there’s a worry that Olivia might instead feel insulted that we only price that card that much. That’s why, instead of giving you money, we’re thinking of giving you equipment instead. Equipment that is not to be sold outside the company normally

would never be given to an outsider, but by doing so in exchange for the card, we can use it to show Olivia just how highly we evaluate the card, you see."

"Ahh, I see, so that's what's going on."

Akira nodded as if he was convinced by her reason. As he had expected, Reina's offer had a secret scheme behind it, but fortunately, it was not something that might cause him trouble.

"Yep, so that's the gist of it. That's why it would be great if you can accept it. If you won't accept money or equipment, you can also ask us to do something. If nothing really interests you, saying that we're really indebted to you would be enough."

Seeing how Reina was so generous in her offer, Akira was certain that she would even let him know secret information if he had asked her. He made a rather conflicted expression and hummed.

"In that case, I won't force you to do this, but there's one thing that I would request as repayment for that huge debt."

"Sure, what is it? Though I can't say that we'll do anything for you, you can at least ask us."

"Don't be hostile towards me."

Reina could not hide her surprise.

"…Uhh, will that really be enough for you?"

Although she was surprised, Reina asked a question in a rather casual tone. Akira made a clear response. His gaze to Reina turned sharp and his tone turned strong.

"That is, if you properly keep your words. Though, from the way you say it, I feel like you see it as something trivial. That you have no issues with breaking your promises."

Reina winced back from Akira’s response. Unfortunately, that only served to deepen Akira’s distrust.

“As I said before, I won’t force you. That’s basically what I ask of you. But if you have no plans to properly keep your words, then don’t give me cheap promises and just tell me no.”

Reina was overwhelmed by Akira’s pressure. But she then straightened her posture and seriously looked him in the eye.

“I can’t give you any promises to not be hostile, but I can promise you that we won’t get in your way. Enough to make the deal regarding this card a fair one. I promise you in my name, Reina Rilart Lorents.”

In all honesty, Akira had no idea how much that promise was worth, but judging from how surprised Shiori and Kanae were, he at least understood that it must have been a pretty big deal.

“Alright, that would be fine then. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome!”

Akira threw a smile at Reina. She did the same in return. Now that Reina’s group had promised not to be hostile, Akira unconsciously lowered his guard. Reina, who felt the atmosphere relax, also lowered her shoulders. Shiori and Kanae, who were extremely tense up until now, also returned to their usual calm demeanour. Though that showed that they were not being extra tense due to hidden stalkers as Reina had claimed. However, Akira did not really care much at this point, so everything worked out.

Reina lightly sighed, her state of mind had changed from one focused on negotiation to a more relaxed one for casual conversation.

“Now that our important negotiation has concluded, we can leave in case you’re busy. Though, if you still have some time, there’s actually something else that I want to ask you. It has nothing to do with what we just discussed, so, are you okay with that?”

“That would depend on my employer…”

Akira said so and turned to Carol, she lightly smiled and said.

“It’s okay. It’s not like we have a deadline for gathering the data for the map. I did say it’s okay to prioritize your things too, right?”

“Alright then.”

Akira’s gaze turned back to Reina.

“Well, I know that this will not be short, but I’ll try not to make it too long.”

“Alright, so then, it’s actually about Katsuya.”

Shiori almost choked on her drink, but she somehow managed to hold it in. The reason was none other than Reina, who just brought up a subject that was extremely sensitive. Kanae was more or less also as surprised as Shiori.

Even Akira did not expect her to ask something like this. Though, he did not seem to be on guard by the subject either. It was simply because the people in front of him promised not to be hostile toward him and that promise seemed to be trustworthy enough.

Reina started talking nostalgically about Katsuya to Akira. About her first impression the first time they met. At first, she was rather hostile toward him. But after knowing Katsuya was always trying his hardest to save and protect his friends, she accepted him to some extent. How he became rather popular among members of the opposite gender since the ones that he saved were mostly female. She also mentioned how her feelings toward him grew the more often they worked together. She talked about all kinds of things to help herself come to terms with Katsuya’s death.

And then, after she thought about how she was in the past and how she was now, Reina sighed.

“…Well, Katsuya was really popular because of that. But, now that I think about it, I now know that everyone who was relying on him back then was nothing more than taking advantage of his kindness. They pushed all the

difficult decisions and every negative bit about being a Hunter onto him. In exchange for that, they sang praises of him. Everyone was content with that situation, including me. Katsuya also allowed it to continue, which only made the situation worse over time."

Reina was telling her story while looking rather frustrated, Akira just listened without saying anything.

"I did leave his side at one point, but that was because I wanted to be able to stand on an equal footing with him. Basically, it was just out of my selfishness. Even if I could not get there, I felt like I have already caused a lot of trouble for him. So, at the very least, I wanted to get stronger. At least enough to stay beside him and support him as a fellow teammate without relying on him too much. That way, things might have changed. Though it is way too late to think about that now."

Reina stopped, lightly smiled, and then continued.

"Ah, I didn't mean it as the result would have been reversed. I just thought that if there was someone to stop him sooner, the misunderstanding would have not escalated that far. It's not like I have any grudge against you or anything like that."

Akira took those words as they were and nodded. However, Shiori's shoulder moved forward a bit and she frowned, as if she suddenly had a stomach ache. Meanwhile, Kanae had a rather awkward wry smile on her face. Both of them, including Carol, understood how dangerous a topic this was.

"By the way, to be fully honest, it's not like I am fully over it. About you killing Katsuya."

This time, Shiori choked and Kanae was completely surprised.

Akira was also taken by surprise when Reina said that out loud. But he did not show any animosity or hostility. She then continued.

“But again, that does not mean that I want to pick a fight with you. I heard that your fight with Katsuya was out of a misunderstanding. I’m sure that he wouldn’t want anyone to avenge his death. Moreover, I don’t want to die and I don’t want to get Kanae or Shiori killed too. You’re really strong, after all. It might not be the right thing to say, but it just isn’t worth it to fight against you.”

Carol was surprised by Reina’s words. After all, it could also be interpreted that they would attack Akira if he was weak enough.

But Akira did not react to that, as a matter of fact, he took that impression positively. For him, it was completely understandable for someone to come at him for vengeance since he had killed someone that they loved. To him, saying that would not be worth the risk now was a compliment.

Reina then continued.

“That’s why, to make sure that I won’t waver, please stay strong. Make sure that the risk of picking a fight with you is never worth it. Don’t show me any unnecessary openings. I was planning to ask this of you one day, but with our deal just now, it is unnecessary, huh? Well, it is too good a timing.”

Seeing Reina smile as she concluded her monologue, Akira also smiled and replied.

“It was a good thing for me too, that you won’t pick a fight with me.”

“Is that so? Ah, were you thinking that I’ll be coming for your life one day to avenge Katsuya?”

“Pretty much, yeah. Just because we both signed a peace treaty mediated by the Hunter Office, there will still be some who would go ahead and do it, you know?”

In reality, Akira was vigilant since he expected that someone would come to try and take revenge on him. Shiori once again choked since he casually admitted it. Meanwhile, Kanae gave a wry stiff smile. However, Reina did not seem to be bothered at all as she lightly smiled and replied.

“It’s great that we are able to avoid a misunderstanding. Well then, Akira, we should take our leave now. Thank you for listening to my story. So, as thanks, let me give you one warning.”

“Warning? What is it?”

Reina’s face turned slightly serious.

“It’s not just us who think that it’s not worth the risk. There were quite a lot of survivors from Katsuya’s old team. There are those who refuse to sign the peace treaty and got kicked out of Drankam, and I’m sure there are those who are not fully happy with the peace treaty although they signed it. I believe the reason why they still haven’t made their moves is simply because they know that it’s impossible for them to kill you even by pure accident. So, if they wish to attack you, there must be a chance for them to succeed. Basically, if they think that they have the chance to kill you, even if it means that it’ll kill them as well, they might just attempt it. That’s why I’m telling you to be careful.”

After saying that, Reina’s expression relaxed.

“Well, with that being said, as expected, I’m sure they are not that stupid. At least not foolish enough to think they might have a chance to go against a high-ranking Hunter who is strong enough to get an inter-city transport-escort request and have returned back from escorting an inter-city transport from further east. So I’m sure that it should be fine. Alright then. That’s all. We should take our leave.”

Reina raised from her seat, Shiori and Kanae quickly started cleaning up the table and the seats. Akira also stood up. It did not take long for Shiori and Kanae to be done. After that, Shiori faced Akira with a serious expression and bowed.

“Akira-sama, I believe that any explanation is unnecessary at this point. So at least let me say this, my deepest apologies.”

Akira seemed a bit surprised, but his expression quickly relaxed.

“Don’t worry about it. I thought that it was a fair deal right from the start. Although those who know the real worth of the card might perceive it to be unfair, it’s all because of my lack of knowledge. So, it’s basically my fault, not yours.”

“Thank you very much. Regarding this matter, I also wish for you to not be hostile with us.”

“I would be grateful if you do so too.”

Shiori bowed deeply, then she raised her head and smiled. Reina and Kanae also smiled and said their goodbyes.

“Well then, if fate has it, let’s work together again next time.”

“Akira-boy, until we meet again.”

Reina’s group returned to their vehicle and left, Akira saw them off thinking that it was great it did not turn into anything troublesome and was relieved by it.

—*—*—*—

On their way back to the city, Reina, Shiori, and Kanae all let out a sigh of relief. Especially Shiori heaved a huge sigh of relief.

“…Milady. I would say that Milday has gone a bit too far, bringing up Katsuya. Had Akira-sama reacted negatively, it would have been horrendous, you know?”

Reina, who was not as tense as before, just smiled bitterly and said.

“I do think that it was rather dangerous. But it was fine, right?”

“Result-wise, indeed that was the case. But that is not something wise to do without much thought.”

Seeing Shiori’s face that turned slightly pale from fatigue, Reina felt a bit sorry for what she did.

“Although Akira did say that, it’s not like I brought that up without much thought, you know?”

Kanae found that surprising, but she then smiled amusedly and asked.

“Is that so? In that case, it would be great if you let me know why did you say that to Akira-boy? It’s for the sake of seeing how much Milady has grown from the past, where you often spoke without much consideration.”

Reina smiled bitterly after Kanae pointed out her past bad habit. She started explaining why she said that to Akira.

After seeing how Akira reacted once she mentioned the chance of that card returning to him, Reina was almost certain that Akira was an old-world connector. So, she decided to continue their conversation while trying to hide that from Akira.

The fact that Akira asked them not to be hostile towards him was a good thing for Reina as well. Although she was caught off guard by that demand, she was somehow able to get over it. After that, she tried to measure how much he believed that they had no wish to be hostile to him. Likewise, how hostile he was towards them.

Judging from the results, she thought that it was her only chance to bring up matters related to Katsuya. At that time, the situation was set so that no matter what she said, Akira would not be hostile. If she delayed any further, that insurance would slowly fade away. If her doubt grew, and she ended up bringing up Katsuya at another time, it would be even more dangerous. But back then, even if her feelings toward Katsuya had resurfaced, she could remind herself that her main objective was to make Olivia happy. Thus, she would be able to hold herself back.

Meanwhile, she also knew that she would have to bring that subject up sooner or later. Not only was it to help her get over Katsuya’s death, but it would also help prevent misunderstanding in case Akira thought that she came at him to avenge Katsuya.

Akira also grew even stronger than before. Reina believed that Akira was currently thinking that it was not worth the trouble to weed out all trouble. However, one day, he might start believing otherwise: that it was only a matter of time before their power level was reversed and it was safer to kill Reina's group before that happened. So, there was a need to talk it out.

To bring out that matter and clear up any possible misunderstandings, she would need to have a good excuse and a safe setting. Fortunately, that was a very good opportunity to do that.

On the other hand, there was also a need to make sure that Akira trusted her promise. In the case Akira later noticed that she knew he was an old-world connector, she could use her promise as insurance as well to prevent any unnecessary worries. With that, she thought that it worked out pretty well.

As for the last warning, not only did it give an extra reason as to why they would not attack Akira, but it also gave Akira a reason to focus his attention elsewhere. It was a fact there were others who were still aiming for him, so it should be fine since it was not like she was lying.

After listening to Reina's explanation, Kanae seemed astonished as she complimented Reina.

"Milady, you've really thought it through."

Reina smiled bitterly. As she knew herself best when it came to her past bad habit, she could not help but interpret that compliment as both positive and negative.

"Anyway, it did go pretty well, right?"

"Indeed, though it was not completely safe. So, it's like just as Ane-san said, we can say that it is fine only because the result turned out alright, no?"

It was rare for Kanae to scold Reina like that. Reina lightly smiled and then replied with a rather serious tone.

“I did consider my words when I spoke.”

“That doesn’t seem to be the case to me though.”

“Hmmm, I can’t really explain it, but for some reason, I can feel things that I shouldn’t say, which would cause a fight back there. I wonder if it’s also the result of me being a Hunter for quite a long time.”

“I-Is that so?”

Whether it was against a person, or an organization, or even a monster, there were always fatal choices. Some could identify such dangerous lines through careful analysis, while some could do so by pure intuition. Kanae was the latter. But she believed that Reina was not the latter type. Even if Reina was, Kanae could not have imagined Reina as someone who would try to step dangerously close to that line.

Shiori let out a big sigh.

“…Milady, first of all, you did well during the negotiation with Akira-sama. But, if Milady could really feel such a line, I really recommend keeping a safe distance from it.”

“I know. But sometimes you have to take dangerous options to survive, right? It is obviously true for the Hunters, it is also true for the officers in large corporations too, right? It would be bad if they can’t make the right decision. Even in the main house, although some family members lost their positions in the family, some of them are doing quite well as Hunters and are trying to get back into the power struggle inside the family, right? Now that I think about it, they might be thinking of training themselves as Hunters and using the skills that they have learned in the corporate world. After all, wouldn’t it be difficult for them to know what is dangerous if they keep living in the safety of the inner wall? Ojii-sama might have the same line of thinking too since he was once a Hunter. What do you think, Shiori?”

“T-that might as well be the case…”

Shiori thought that Reina's argument did make sense. But she did not want Reina to dive into that line of thinking. That was why she only gave a rather vague answer. Immediately, Shiori tried to change the subject.

"A-anyway, with this, our matter with Akira-sama at least came to a close. The next matter would be in regards to Olivia-sama. Let's think about what to do with that matter once we return back to the city. We need to discuss with the factions as well…"

That was when Shiori noticed a message from Chloe. When she checked the content, she could not help but frown.

"Milady, I've received a message from Chloe-sama saying that she wishes to meet with Milady sometime soon. What should we do about this?"

"Well, it's not like we can do anything about it. We don't have the choice of saying no to her. She will try to gather information regarding that matter with Alice-sama sooner or later. So, is she coming over here?"

"No, she wants us to come to meet her, as for the location…"

Reina frowned when she heard the location. She then thought for a bit before she made her decision.

"…I see. Well, let's just go there right now."

"Of course."

Shiori then changed the direction of the vehicle, which was originally headed back to Kugamayama city.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 257, Chloe’s Decision

Index

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Editor: Silavin

Proofreader: p4553r

Around the time Akira was meeting with Reina’s group in the middle of the wasteland, Chloe was agonizing with a frustrated expression inside one of Lion Steel’s facilities.

“That was a blunder… To think that the situation changed so much in such a short span of time.”

After she left Mihazono ruin, Chloe returned back to gather more information about Reina as well as to reorganize her plan. But in the middle of that, she suddenly received an emergency message that Alice would be coming there soon.

Alice normally would never leave the main HQ of the eastern district branch. As long as there was nothing big, she would never leave that place. So, in short, something big must have happened. Furthermore, Alice had also issued an order for the branch office of Kugamayama city and its surrounding area to take care of the matter with Olivia for the time being. This too was a huge abnormality.

Chloe panicked and stopped any investigation regarding Reina’s group, instead, she directed all her resources to investigate Olivia. That was when

she found out that Reina's group had made contact with Olivia.

"No matter how you look at it, the only chance they could have contacted Olivia was right after that happened. She really outplayed me… Although she said that she was having trouble with it, she was that close to contacting Olivia, huh? To think that I didn't even notice…"

Latis, who was her butler, tried to cheer her master up.

"Milady. We were also unable to notice that. That is just how good her acting skill is. The order from Alice-sama was to all staff around the area, so it was not directed specifically to them. We're in the middle of the wasteland, so we still have that option available to us."

Chloe quickly understood what Latis was trying to say. Her eyebrows furrowed even more as she looked even more troubled. But hesitating also showed that she started to consider the viability of that option and admitted that they had enough reason to execute it.

Moreover, Chloe did not want to let this chance, which would never come by her again for the second time, getaway. So, she approved Latis' suggestion.

"Pamela, I'm sorry to say this although I said it to you yesterday, but it seems that there's a need to deal with this matter swiftly. so get everyone ready."

"Right away."

Pamela smiled and gracefully bowed.

The situation in Higaraka residence ruin had completely returned to normal. The crowd that flooded the ruin from the old-world terminal rumour had mostly left the site. It was no longer a ruin that Hunters would regularly visit in search of relics.

A Lion Steel facility was erected on the mansion where the old-world terminals were found. Although it was not that big of a building, it was built

on top of a large site.

Normally, building such a facility in the middle of the ruin was not an easy feat to pull off. Not only were there rubble and wreckage of the other buildings around, but there was also the problem of the monsters in the area. It was also not cheap to assign escorts for every material transport.

Because of that, when someone wanted to build a large building but there was not enough space inside the city, they often opted to build it next to the city. A well-maintained road would then be built on the logistic route, which connected that building to the city, people would then gather around the maintained road, and that was how the city would slowly grow.

But for this Lion Steel facility, thanks to the Hunters who came looking for the old-world terminal in the area, they had cleaned up the roaming monsters. For the transport of materials, they got the Hunters who came regularly to Higaraka ruin from Kugamayama city involved. Thus cutting the transport fee even further.

With the area already secured to some extent, as long as they could transport materials, with building technology of the current era, it did not take that much time to fully erect such a facility. Thanks to that, Lion Steel could construct a very well-defended building in the middle of the wasteland without hiccups.

Reina's group rode their vehicle through the road built to connect to that facility. It was the location where Chloe said she wanted to meet her.

Reina looked around the area, which was a mere dilapidated ruin in the past and asked Shiori a question.

"Say, Shiori. Do you know why the company decided to build a facility here of all places? It's big enough to fully revitalize the area."

"I've heard that our company bought the old-world terminals found on this site. It seems that they're planning to use the site again after reinstalling the terminals at their original location. It would not be wise to utilize such devices away from where they were found. Some of them were area locked

for the sake of safety. But, even under such considerations, I think even a small facility would do. I bet they have another reason why they erected such a big building."

"Another reason?"

"Maybe it's to prepare for another facility or something similar? Maybe it's for a long-term plan? A change to readjust the relations between each faction. There are many possibilities. After all, if a large facility is built in a certain area, the one who is responsible for that area would gain more influence and privileges."

"Ohh, so that's it, huh?"

Reina seemed to hate the topic. But Shiori's wish was for Reina to quit working as a Hunter and return back to the main house. Reina, who had established a connection to Olivia, finally had enough achievement to be reinstated. That was why she knew it was only a matter of time before she would hear more about this.

But that also meant that she would be once again shoved into the in-fighting between factions that she avoided up until now. With that in mind, she had no wish to return back to the main house.

Both Reina and Shiori had been together for a long time, that was why they understood each other. Both were thinking of how to convince the other. That was when Kanae suddenly said something.

"Ane-san. Stop!"

Hearing the way Kanae said it, Shiori stopped the vehicle first before asking Kanae.

"What's wrong?"

"It might be pretty dangerous if we keep going like this."

Kanae pointed at the opening located in front of the entrance to the facility. The opening seemed to be just like any other spot in the wasteland, it was

big enough to park several big vehicles, as a matter of fact, there were multiple vehicles parked there at this very moment. But all of them were parked so as not to get in Reina's way, moreover, there were maids and butlers that might be from Chloe's side standing ready to welcome Reina's group.

It would not be strange to think that it was a huge welcome for the team that had successfully gotten into contact with Olivia, but Kanae did not believe that was the case.

"They seem to have prepared a huge welcoming team for us, though unfortunately, I feel like what they're saying is that they would not let us leave that easily."

Shiori also looked suspiciously at the group in front of her. Deep in between the maids and the butlers lined there, Chloe was waiting with Pamela and Latis beside her. Position-wise, Chloe's group was above Reina's group. Turning back would be very rude to Chloe. Even if Kanae's worry was on point, at the moment, it was nothing more than a worry.

"…Milady, shall we turn back and leave?"

"No, it's fine, let's just continue forward."

Shiori was surprised that Reina gave an instant straight answer.

"…Milady, are you sure?"

"Turning back now would only give them an unnecessary excuse."

"…Very well."

Seeing Reina was calm, as if she was not distraught by what was going on, Shiori also pulled herself together and moved the vehicle forward.

When Chloe saw Reina momentarily stop, she turned to Latis. But when she was about to say something, Reina continued coming closer, so she also stopped herself from saying anything to Latis.

Pamela, who had guessed what Chloe was going to say, stopped her men from moving toward Reina and ordered them to return back to their posts.

“It seems that they know their position.”

Chloe smiled and replied.

“It’s good that we can solve this without having to resort to that. Or do you find it unfortunate instead, Pamela?”

“Not at all. Of course, I don’t feel that it’s unfortunate at all.”

Latis and Pamela quickly started preparing to welcome Reina’s group. They set up the tables and the chairs, placed a tablecloth on top of the table, and served some refreshments. Chloe sat on her chair and waited for Reina’s group to come to her.

Shiori parked the vehicle not too far from them as they disembarked and approached Chloe’s table. Chloe invited Reina to take a seat with a gesture of her hand. That scene where Chloe was donning an expensive-looking dress and Reina donning a maid uniform battle suit looked like a master inviting her subordinate, who just returned from her mission.

Shiori’s face twitched from annoyance. Kanae smiled wryly. Meanwhile, Reina did not seem bothered at all as she took her seat. Chloe and Reina had their servants standing behind them.

“So then, why did you want to meet me? As I said before, I’m busy, you know?”

“Geez, don’t say that. Although you said you’re busy, you’re not as busy as yesterday, right?”

“True, but still, I’m busy enough to tell you to finish this up as soon as possible.”

“I see.”

Chloe fixed her gaze on Reina. She was trying to discern if Reina's calmness was only an act or not. Reina was not disturbed at all though she was being treated like a lowly servant. She did not show any particular reaction.

[Is it because she has fully given up on returning back to the main house and has decided to live fully as a Hunter? Or is it because she has the grit to completely ignore such harassment?] Chloe was trying to probe Reina with her eyes, trained from the power struggle inside the main house.

However, she could not come up with anything.

"What's wrong? If you have nothing to say, I'm leaving."

Since Reina stated so, Chloe did not have any other choice but to change her approach. She reminded herself that it was not like this was her first time negotiating with someone about whom she had insufficient information.

"Well, it seems that you're busy, so I've been thinking about how to make it quick. But if you're really that busy, let's finish this right away then."

Chloe smiled.

"White card."

"I don't know what you expect from me just from that, you know…?"

"Give it to me."

With such short but clear words. There was no need for any more questions. It was obviously a threat as well as a warning.

Although Alice's order was for the staff on the field to handle the matter with Olivia, there was no Lion Steel staff in the area who could contact Olivia on their own. But it was not like Alice said that it was an order specifically for Reina's group. This meant that it was directed to anyone who had that card, which could be used to contact Olivia.

Anyone who had that card would even be able to call for the head representative of the company, Alice. It could even be said that they would be a pivotal person that would decide the future of the company, as such, everyone in the area was stirred to make their moves.

That demand that was much closer to a robbery attempt caused Shiori to inadvertently raise her voice.

“Chloe-sama! That is out of the li-”

“Silence!”

Chloe sent a mocking gaze to the tensed-up Shiori.

“This is between two members of the family, so an outsider like you should not interfere.”

Shiori closed her mouth and gritted her teeth. Even putting aside the difference in their positions, Shiori was not in the position to be scolding Chloe. Moreover, if a mere escort like her crossed the line, it would cause trouble for Reina, who was trying to stand up as her deserving master. Because of that, Shiori managed to hold herself back.

Seeing that Shiori comply, Chloe smiled with satisfaction and shifted her gaze back to Reina. Reina lightly sighed.

“And what will you give me for it?”

“I’ll say that I’ll be deeply indebted to you.”

“That doesn’t sound like a good deal to me.”

“Well, you should wait for a bit. Let’s see, once I become the head of the faction, one day, I’ll be the head of the main branch in the Aurum economic zone, and eventually, I’ll become the officer of the main HQ. I’ll put you somewhere nearby, doesn’t that sound great?”

For those who knew the inner workings of the Lion Steel company, that sounded like nothing but a dream. But as long as they had the talent and

were able to make good use of it, it was not an impossible feat to achieve. Moreover, Chloe was being serious when she said so. This was important since even if one was prideful, not just anyone could accomplish what she had claimed to. No one could reach that position without the strong resolve to use their utmost talent, and resources to reach that goal. And she knew that very well.

Reina also believed Chloe was not lying, but even so, she still said.

“I’m sorry, but I still don’t think it’s a good enough offer. It doesn’t give me enough reason to give you the white card.”

Chloe’s gaze turned sharp. She locked eyes with Reina, trying to discern whether it was because Reina had no wish to hand over the card at all costs or if it was simply because the offer was not good enough. However, she still could not find anything. Either way, it did not matter what was the answer to her question, she had already decided on what to say next.

“I see. If you say so, it means that I will have no other choice but to put in something more to tip the scale to make it worthwhile. For example, your safety, whether you can leave this place safely or not.”

Although Reina and Chloe were still the same as always, that was not the case for their servants. Shiori knitted her eyebrows. Kanae smiled with excitement. Latis silently scanned the other side, and Pamela was waiting with a smile. The rest of the maids and butlers changed their positions to close Reina’s escape route.

When everyone in the area tensed up, Reina and Chloe were the only ones who stayed calm as they were facing each other.

Reina faked a surprised expression and reaffirmed.

“You would even go for violence, huh? I don’t know what’s going on but, are non-peaceful, fast solutions becoming the new norm inside the wall or something?”

Chloe lightly smiled.

“Oh, it has always been, you just don’t know about it. The difference in their military power made it such that no real full-blown battle happened yet. There’s also no need to even say it out loud, you know? Don’t tell me you honestly did not know?”

“Unfortunately, no. Thanks for letting me know.”

“You’re very welcome. Well then. Now that you’re done learning, this would be a good time to show the result of what you have learned. So, what’s your answer?”

Reina did not say anything, Chloe also only waited without saying anything as well. The silence continued only to be broken by Chloe later.

“If this silence continues any further, I will interpret it as a no.”

Reina still did not say anything, Chloe’s smile vanished.

“I see.”

Chloe did not like violence, but she would not hesitate when it was necessary. Moreover, the influence, profit, and power that she could gain from getting a connection with Olivia were more than enough of a reason to get that card even if it meant that she had to kill Reina. She thought that Reina would also understand that, but if she did not. Then it was not like she could do anything about it.

That was when Kanae interjected.

“Ah, just to let you know, if you try to hurt Milady, I’ll kill you.”

In response to Kanae, who said so casually, Chloe frowned and said.

“A mere Rank-4 maid speaking about killing one of the main house’s members. How rude. Good grief. You really need more education.”

“Well, I’m always not good with that subject, you see. Sorry about that.”

Although Kanae said so, she did not seem apologetic at all. So, Chloe then exasperatedly said.

“Latis, Pamela, did you hear that? She said that she’s going to kill me.”

Latis confidently replied.

“Please don’t worry. She would not be able to do it.”

Pamela smiled and said.

“She won’t be able to do that, just leave it to us.”

Chloe was satisfied by her servants’ answer and nodded. She then shifted her gaze back to Kanae.

“So, there you have it. That level of threat won’t even work even as a mere bluff. Well, if you still insist, I’ll send your Milady with you to the afterlife, so don’t worry.”

But even so, Kanae was still smiling with excitement. But her smile suddenly twitched, she then rubbed her head with one of her hands and sighed.

“…Well, I know that I’m not good at this kind of thing. For some reason, you just can’t fully forget your roots. They always told me to prioritize my duty while I underwent training, but I just can’t help but prioritize fun first. As expected, I should reign in my personal feelings and prioritize my duty.”

Kanae’s aura slowly changed. Her smile vanished and was replaced by a chilling cold expression. She looked coldly at Chloe’s side as if they were trash and warned.

“If you touch Reina-sama, you’re dead meat.”

As expected, Chloe could not ignore it.

Lion Steel company searched all over the eastern area for talented children, mostly from the poor areas, and trained them to be butlers and maids. They

were then sent to various organizations and individuals. These children were ranked during their training depending on their performance. Those who had exceptional talents were sent to high-level individuals such as officials from large corporations. While those who were rather average were dispatched to different places.

Rank-4 was the lowest rank. They were treated as failed products that were not even to be sent outside the corporation. Of course, they were also not treated well even inside the corporation.

Both Shiori and Kanae were Rank-4. But that was not because they were incompetent. The evaluation of their total performance was considered unsatisfactory. Thus, they were given their Rank-4 evaluation.

Lion Steel placed an emphasis on loyalty to the main corporation. After all, the current era's Lion Steel company was using humans in place of automatons. Thus, they did not need anyone that offered less than total loyalty. With children basically saved from poverty, they normally felt indebted toward the corporation and were extremely loyal.

But Shiori's loyalty was not toward the corporation but toward Reina. As such, the corporation saw that as a huge problem and evaluated her as Rank-4.

As for Kanae, her problem was her attitude toward her duty. She had the tendency of getting her personal feelings mixed in her work and instead prioritized her enjoyment. No matter how good she was, if she hoped for her escort target to get attacked, it was only natural for her to be evaluated as Rank-4.

The reason why Reina was accompanied by those 2 maids although she was kicked out of the family and exiled outside the inner well was because both Kanae and Shiori were Rank-4 servants.

But this time, Kanae was not showing any attitude that would lower her evaluation any further. In other words, rather than prioritizing having fun over the safety of her escort target, which she had been doing up until now, she was doing the opposite. Her aura was indicating that she was willing to

stop playing and her job seriously. To quickly remove her opponents for Reina's safety.

Chloe was a bit overwhelmed by Kanae's pressure, but she did not show it. She furrowed her brows and said with a smile.

"And you think you can win with that?"

"At the very least, I can guarantee that you'll be dead."

Although their conversation did not exactly connect, people who heard that exchange had no problem understanding what was going on.

As long as Kanae focused on Chloe, Chloe's servants would have no other choice but to focus on defending their master instead of killing their opponent. That way, they would have no leeway to focus on Reina. They would not even have the chance to capture Reina and use it to threaten Kanae. Any attempt other than that would take more time and manpower which meant the higher the chance Kanae would get Chloe first.

And while they were dealing with Kanae, Shiori could take Reina and run away. Even with her attitude, Kanae had the determination to throw away her life for her duty, the same as Latis and the rest of Chloe's servants.

But that was not the case for Chloe. She had to prioritize her own life.

"You heard her, Latis, Pamela?"

"Please don't worry. She would not be able to do it."

"She won't be able to do that, just leave it to us."

Latis and Pamela returned the exact same replies. But their expressions were not the same as before. The mockery that they had toward Rank-4 servants from before was no longer present. They were exerting an aura that was suitable for their position, Chloe's closest servants, as they looked at Kanae with a sharp gaze filled with killing intent.

Shiori reached for her blade, although she had not unsheathed it, she had already made her resolve. Latis and the other servants also prepared themselves for a fight. They were ready to start anytime and were just waiting for the signal from their master.

The silence continued. But this time it was Chloe who was extending the silence. The card had enough value for her to kill Reina's team. She would even be willing to pay the price and risk her own life to get that card. But that was assuming that she would win the fight. She did not think that Latis and Pamela were lying to her. But she also did not feel any lies in Kanae's words. One of them must be mistaken, but if she tried to confirm it and it turned out that Latis and Pamela were the ones who were mistaken, she would without a doubt be the one who dies. Fear from that caused her to hesitate.

"Stop!"

Reina was the one who broke the silence. Everyone turned toward Reina. She then took out the card, put it on the table, and slid it toward Chloe.

With this, there was no longer any reason to fight. The tense mood was dispelled. Instead, everyone started to look rather confused. In the midst of that atmosphere, Reina then calmly said.

"That should be fine, right? Well then, I'm leaving now. Shiori, Kanae, let's go."

"O-Of course."

"A-alright."

As Reina swiftly stood up and left, Shiori and Kanae followed behind her while still looking rather confused. But Chloe suddenly stopped her.

"If you were planning to give it away from the start, you could've done it sooner. What's your game here?"

Reina stopped and lightly turned around.

“Of course, I was hesitating. What else do you think it might be?”

“…I see. Well, it doesn’t matter since you’ve just handed it over to me. You can look forward to your reward.”

“I don’t need it. I’ve never said anything about accepting your offer.”

“What do you mean?”

Reina frowned and replied.

“You took that card from me by threatening to kill Shiori and Kanae as well as me. That’s why I had no other choice but to give up that card. It’s not like I’m giving that card to you because I accepted your offer or anything like that. Later then.”

Reina then left the place, Shiori and Kanae seemed rather happy as they followed behind her.

As Reina’s group was no longer visible, Chloe sighed. She noticed the cold sweat running down her face and wiped it off.

“…Just to make sure, if we really did fight back there, we would have won, right?”

Latis lightly bowed.

“Of course. Although, we would not be perfectly fine after the battle. Please forgive me.”

Pamela politely added.

“But don’t worry, Milady. We’ll be the ones hurt. We would make sure that Milady would be perfectly safe and sound.”

Chloe firmly gave a nod. She then moved on to the next issue, which was the card in her hand. The white card was glistening and reflected her own image. Seeing that, she thought that it was as if that glisten also shone the way to her bright future.

“Well, I would say that it was mostly smooth sailing. Though, I admit that as someone who had been banished from the inner wall, she is a tough opponent.”

Chloe smiled and slipped that card into her pocket. She then returned back inside accompanied by the rest of her servants.

Silavin: For some reason, I feel a little bad for Chloe. If I were to self-internalize, I think it is because she doesn’t seem to be that bad of a person. Well, from this novel’s standpoint anyways.

Anyone share the same sentiment?

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Rebuild World – Chapter 258, A Shady Object

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Shirou was working in his secret base with a solemn expression. Though if someone was looking at him, he would seem to be doing nothing. Just silently sitting in his seat. However, he was currently controlling a remote terminal through the old-world connection.

He was analyzing the data that he received from Carol in Mihazono ruin, collecting information to elude Yanagisawa and Hammerz, collecting real Chrome. Basically, there were a lot of things that he had to do.

"…Dammit! The rate for this one here is way too high. And this one! It has a low rate but it requires the information buyer to give his details…. I bet they've been doing something in the black market… Are they seriously going this far!?"

The old-world currency, Chrome, was a difficult currency to handle. Chrome used by common people and second-rate Hunters was not actually real old-world Chrome. Most of the time, they were a substitute for real Chrome, a fiat currency that the Corporate Government has guaranteed.

Even if a Hunter found the highly valuable Chrome in a ruin, it was not easy to spend it. Most of the time, they were bound to a certain user through

old-world technology. In other words, they were bound to their original, legitimate owner. As such, when someone else tries to use it to strike a deal with an old-world being, it was often rejected as illegitimate Chrome. In the worst-case scenario, they might even get killed when they tried to use that Chrome.

Therefore, real Chrome was one that was freely used in the current era's eastern district to make deals with old-world beings.

The main distributor of the real Chrome was the 5 biggest corporations, of course, they got those Chrome from making deals with old-world beings. They also did something similar to money laundering in order to overwrite the ownership of the Chrome found in old-world ruins. Some could easily be overwritten by submitting a report that its original owner had expired. Some had their ownership transferred automatically to the old-world caretaker AI, which then large corporations could obtain by selling goods to that AI. These large corporations were doing all kinds of things to gather real Chrome.

Even if they had real Chrome, there were only a limited number of individuals who could use them to buy old-world articles. After all, they had no way to connect to the old-world domain. That was why, most of the time, those who found real Chrome would exchange it with the Corporate Government for old-world articles. Behind the scenes, one of the corporate government's agents would be used as a proxy to purchase said old-world articles in place of the one who found the Chrome. Of course, the moment it got transferred into the corporate government's account, it would be turned into fiat and normally never be allowed to exchange back for real Chrome.

There were only a certain number of people who could strike a deal with the old-world beings. The real Chrome and the fiat Chrome had no difference except to these people. In short, for Shirou, the difference between real Chrome and fiat Chrome was huge.

The 15 million Chrome that he had prepared for his escape actually had strings attached. They were Chrome that he had been gathering secretly bit by bit. His original plan was to use it to make a deal with a high ranking Hunter.

Of course, Shirou's escape was against the will of Sakashita Heavy Industry. So, it was to be expected that those who helped him would also be picking a fight with Sakashita Heavy Industry. As such, Shirou's only option was to find a Hunter who could stand their ground against Sakashita Heavy Industry. Otherwise, a Hunter who had connections to one of the other 5 largest corporations in the eastern district.

In order to make a deal with such Hunters, he could not use Aurum and had no other choice but to use Chrome. It would be better if it was real Chrome. After all, Hunters who had the option to move out to another area in the scenario where they got kicked out from the Aurum financial area by Sakashita Heavy Industry, would normally have connections to the old-world.

However, he ended up using all 15 million Chrome to pay Olivia. With this, he had no more money to employ a front-line Hunter and had lost his greatest opportunity to accomplish his goal. He did try to find a way to get real Chrome using back routes, but unfortunately, it was as if all of them were traps awaiting him. As such, he had no other choice but to rethink his original plan.

"…I can't just give up. I don't think I'll ever get this opportunity ever again! There's no way I would just give it up like this…"

Shirou had both of his hands on the back of his head, as he stared at the floor while having a hard time with what to do next. He suddenly raised his head. The automatic warning program that he had set up in case someone was trying to look for him got triggered. He then checked the content of the warning and tilted his head in confusion.

"…Why are these people looking for me? Dammit, what do I do now?"

Shirou was uncertain if he should give them a warning to make them withdraw, or just ignore it in case it was actually a trap. He then switched off the automatic program and did the investigation himself. Considering that Yanagisawa had found him through the old-world domain before, he had to put in extra effort in his investigation. Because of that, he had to give it more attention, which was a rather scarce resource for him at the moment.

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After Reina's group left Chloe, they once again headed back to the city. As Shiori was driving the vehicle, she would intermittently send glances at Reina as if she wanted to say something. But because she was having a hard time choosing her words, she ended up saying nothing.

She could not bring herself to ask Reina if it was okay. It was thanks to Reina giving up the card that they were able to leave safely. If asked whether it was a good thing or not, it was without a doubt a good thing. But she could not just wrap everything that happened as something positive and end it there.

Reina guessed what Shiori was thinking and smiled.

"No matter what happens, we were the ones who created the route to contact Olivia-sama and I believe that is enough to allow me to return back to the main family, right? So, let's not get too greedy. Having too big of an achievement out of the blue would only cause me more trouble, no? Exactly like what happened just now."

"That indeed is true, but…"

"All three of us are fine. That's good enough, don't you think so?"

"…Yes."

Since Reina had said so, Shiori had no other choice but to get over it.

Kanae, who had already fully returned to her usual attitude, lightly smiled and said.

"But wouldn't the best option back there be not to meet Chloe-sama? Milady, I think that was a mistake. I did tell Milady that it wouldn't be anything good, right?"

Shiori turned to Kanae and was about to scold her, but before that, Reina casually replied.

“It’s fine. It was a good chance too.”

“…A good chance?”

“I didn’t expect her to go that far for the card. Though, I did expect her to threaten me.”

Shiori frowned and interjected with a troubled expression.

“So Milady was planning on giving her the card away right from the start. In that case, why did Milady take on such an attitude…?”

“That is to satisfy Olivia-sama. If I gave it away without much resistance, she might think that I don’t value that card, right? That’s why, although I was planning to give it away, I had to hold onto it as long as I could.”

Kanae smiled wryly.

“M-Milady, that was a bit too close to the limit for my taste, though.”

“I was originally planning to hold it just a little bit before giving it up, but thanks to you, I was able to hold it until the very limit. Well, I won’t deny that it was dangerous. But I’m glad that result-wise I’m certain we were able to show how highly we value that card.”

Shiori sighed in exasperation.

“M-Milady, it would have been great if you had discussed it with us beforehand.”

“My bad. But you did do the same thing too, no? That’s why make sure to discuss it with me next time.”

“…Of course.”

Shiori smiled wryly, seeing that, Kanae smiled amusedly and asked the final question in her mind.

“So then, Milady, why did you decide to just give away the card? Although I’m sure that Chloe-sama won’t be happy with it, personally speaking, I believe that it was better to not give that card away back there.”

Shiori also had the same question and agreed with Kanae’s opinion. She glanced at Reina, asking the same question with her glance.

Reina was not sure how to answer that question. She wanted to respond with an argument she had accepted in her mind, but she was sure that would not convince Kanae and Shiori. Though, at this point, she knew that it would be pointless to lie. So, she decided to answer truthfully.

“Hmmm. It’s mostly out of intuition, so I can’t really explain it. I had a feeling that it was better if I distanced myself away from that card as soon as possible. But again, considering a connection to Olivia-sama, it was not like I can just give it away without a good reason. After all, she might interpret it as us mocking the value of that card, right? So, with that in mind, it was a good opportunity, you see. And, if it’s about why I don’t want to keep that card…”

Reina paused, she smiled wryly while looking troubled.

“It might be weird to say this, but even someone like Akira doesn’t want to keep that card, remember? So, don’t you think it’s better not to keep it?”

With that reasoning, Shiori and Kanae made a conflicted expression similar to Reina. If used correctly, it was an extremely tempting card that might bring about huge profits, but at this point, to them, it also looked like an extremely dangerous object as well. They could not just throw it away. Even if they managed to get it away from them, it felt like it would somehow return back like a cursed object.

“Leaving aside whether that worry is necessary or not, it all depends on Chloe-sama from this point on. Ah, this is getting really interesting.”

Kanae smiled with excitement as she wondered if her master’s worry was going to come to fruition or not.

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Chloe returned back to the facility and went to the basement with the card in her hand. It was the basement of a mansion where Akira met a Lion Steel's holographic AI. At the moment, that room had already been transformed into a lab. The old-world terminals there had already been restored and the location which triggered the Lion Steel AI had been properly marked.

Chloe could not connect to the old-world domain. But she could use an augmented reality device that would help her connect to the old-world domain and communicate with the Lion Steel company. If she used the card, she would even be able to summon Olivia.

Even Chloe found herself nervous in this situation. Olivia was not only a mere old-world being to them, she was not only the same type of AI as the head of the current Lion Steel, Alicia, she was also someone Alicia had to negotiate with. If Chloe somehow soured her mood, she would no longer have a place anymore in the main corporation. On the other hand, if she somehow managed to get on Olivia's good side and be a special negotiator to connect with Olivia, she might be someone that would even catch Alice's eyes. It was a reasonable gamble to take.

She controlled her breathing to calm her down and made her resolve. She then held up the card. The call went through to Lion Steel and bounced to Olivia. The next moment, Olivia appeared in Chloe's vision.

Chloe took a deep breath and bowed.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, I am Chloe from Lion Steel's eastern district third branch. Due to the order from Alice-sama to proceed with the preparation for the negotiation, I have decided to contact you. We will be in your care."

After she finished her polite introduction and raised her head, Chloe winced back. Olivia looked rather displeased at her. Since Chloe could not afford to worsen Olivia's mood, she immediately reviewed what she did. But even

after she did that, she could not find anything that might offend Olivia. She tried to get her anxiety in control as she continued.

“We apologize deeply for calling you while you are busy. Would it be better if I reschedule this meeting?”

“That’s pretty brave of you considering you summoned me here with a stolen card.”

Chloe shuddered at that unexpected response.

“S-stolen card? I can reassure you that it is not…”

The relics that the Hunters carried out from old-world ruins were basically stolen goods. Even if it was a relic that was left inside a dilapidated warehouse, or if it was an already decayed relic abandoned there for who knows how long. Even if it was a relic that was left there for eternity, either way, they were taken without the permission of their original owners. If the security measure in that area was still active, which in the current era, was in the form of monsters, it would attempt to chase away these robbers. In some cases, even kill the robbers.

But there were relics that were not considered stolen goods. They included those that were freely given away. There were also those that had lost their ownership based on the laws of that time. Chloe thought that card was one of those relics, or that for Olivia, the ownership of that card did not matter. The one that really mattered to her was the person who held that card. After all, if that was not the case, Reina’s group that had contacted Olivia, and even allowed Alice to set up negotiations with her, would not be alive by now. That was why she was basically willing to use violence to get this card from Reina.

However, Olivia looked at Chloe with frosty eyes as she said.

“That card is not yours. Unlawful ownership of our issued card warrants a clean-up procedure from our company. I believe that I have said this to the previous person who held that card.”

Chloe understood that she was in a horrendous situation, she tried to make a guess based on Olivia's words and tried to find a way to solve the misunderstanding. It was very unlikely that Reina's group got that card on their own. If they were able to do that, they would have already returned to the main house. Thus, her thoughts wandered, and she tried to make a guess. It was with the assumption that Reina's group did not get that card themselves.

"Ever since Shiori from our company had made contact with Olivia-sama, we believed that this card has been obtained through legitimate means. Moreover, it was an article that we obtained in the middle of one of our missions. As such, even if it's owned by another company or individual, it should not be treated as a borrowed object nor a stolen object. We're really sorry if this does not satisfy you, but, we had no ill-will calling Olivia-sama here through what you deem as an illegitimate means."

Unfortunately, Olivia quickly denied Chloe's assumption.

"In the first place, Shiori is not the rightful owner of that card. It is just that its original owner gave his word that he had given that card. As such, although originally it would never be accepted, we had let it slide by treating that card as a borrowed article. It is unacceptable to be lending our card again to a third party. You have no permission to use that card. As such, from now on, we're treating that card as a stolen object."

Olivia's attitude did not soften at all. Chloe was growing increasingly panicked.

"P-please wait for a bit! If the original owner of the card has given it to Reina and Shiori, that would not make it a borrowed object! I didn't get it from Shori, but from Reina-"

"The owner of that card is neither Reina, nor Shiori, nor Kanae from your company. In the first place, the owner is not affiliated with your company."

"Eh-!? That's impossible!?"

Chloe tried to reanalyze the situation with calm and rational thought, but it was just impossible from her point of view.

“There is no way that is true! Even if Reina asked an old-world connector, who is the original owner of this card to help them contact Olivia-sama and somehow managed to get them to hand over the card, there are no records regarding such a deal! There were no records of the card being handed over. Whether it is money or object, everything should have been strictly recorded.”

“Regarding the worth of the card, I have confirmed that both sides accepted the deal between them. In the first place, the person who contacted me was not the owner of that card.”

Additional information only confused Chloe even more.

“Only old-world connectors can use this card! If the owner of this card is not an old-world connector, then who the hell used this card to contact you!?”

“That would be me.”

Suddenly, an uninvited third party joined their conversation. Chloe was extremely surprised by that. Shirou suddenly appeared inside Chloe’s enhanced vision.

The others who were helping Chloe with her AR device, also saw the same thing and started to make a ruckus. The area around Chloe suddenly became noisy.

“What’s going on here!? Did someone just infiltrate this place?!”

“No way! It’s the direct line to Lion Steel through the old-world domain, you know!? There’s no way anyone ca-”

Shirou then exasperatedly mocked.

“How naive! Even if you’re using the old-world domain connection, as long as it’s a terminal or an ARR device made in this era, it’s not impossible to

hack my way in, you know? It’s horrendous if you don’t properly maintain the security of your systems.”

Inside Chloe’s view, Olivia turned to Shirou and smiled at him.

“Well well well, isn’t this Shirou-sama? Thank you very much for using our service last time. Are you here for another request today?”

Shirou looked at Olivia just like how Chloe was looking at Olivia, with a deeply troubled look.

“I really want to, but unfortunately, I can’t afford it at the moment. Sorry, but maybe next time.”

“Of course. We’ll be waiting for you. Well then, what kind of business do you have today?”

“Sorry but my business this time is actually with her.”

Shirou glanced at Chloe and pointed at her, he then said with a serious expression.

“It seems that you guys are looking for me. What game are you trying to play here? Trying to look for a Sakashita Heavy Industry’s officer? Are you trying to pick a fight with Sakashita Heavy Industry?”

“S-Sakashita Heavy Industry? What do you mean!?”

Chloe only got more and more confused with the flood of new information. Unfortunately, all of them only worsen her situation, making her panic even more.

Seeing Chloe’s reaction, Shirou understood his mistake and clicked his tongue. He finally understood that in order to avoid trouble with Sakashita Heavy Industry, Shiori did not report what had happened to the upper echelons. Meanwhile, Chloe was only asking about him because she wanted to know the person who was with Olivia. It was not because she was looking for the old-world connector who had escaped from Sakashita Heavy Industry.

Although he regretted his unnecessary action, at least he understood that this information would not reach Hammerz. So, he changed his tone and warned Chloe so as to change the subject.

“I see. So, you don’t even know what’s going on, huh? Well, it doesn’t matter. It’s better for you not to know. But don’t try to look for me. If you keep doing that, I’ll interpret it as a challenge to Sakashita. I’ll do you a favour and not report this to Sakshita this time. I’m in the middle of a secret mission from Sakashita, so they’ll have to deal with you if get to know too much.”

As Shirou was about to leave, Chloe, who managed to at least process a little bit of the current situation and noticed an issue, flusteredly tried to stop him.

“Wait!”

“What now?”

“Is this card yours!? Since you helped Reina and the others, does that mean they have something to do with that secret mission of yours!?”

Shirou paused. He did think that saying yes would likely satisfy them enough to stop them from snooping around for more information about him. However, he also felt like it would cause more trouble if Olivia took his lie seriously, so he decided to deny it.

“No. I only helped them because of something else. It seems that back then, they were looking for a special location where even a non-old-world connector could connect to the old-world domain. And since I couldn’t wait for them to do that, I just helped them to do it in their place. That was all. If I’m not mistaken, the real owner of that card is a Hunter by the name of Akira, right?”

Shirou turned to Olivia and Olivia silently nodded in response.

“Indeed, that card is no one else’s but his.”

“There you have it. You didn’t even know that although you tried to use that card, huh?”

Shirou was further emphasising an exasperated attitude so as to shift Chloe’s attention to someone else so that she would no longer snoop for more information about him.

“I’m basically warning you. So yeah, don’t look for me again.”

Shirou then vanished from Chloe’s vision.

“Considering the complexity of the situation and that you’re working under Alice, I will let this incident slide. But I will take extreme measures next time. That will be all for me today.”

Olivia also vanished from Chloe’s vision.

Chloe, who was left standing there alone after everyone left, fell over from mental fatigue. Latis and the other servants who were there, flustered, helped her up.

“Milady! Are you alright?!”

Latis then carried Chloe to the nearest sofa. Although she had no power left to stand back up, seeing how her servants looked at her, worriedly, she pushed her half-body up and pulled herself together. She could not afford to keep looking that pathetic in front of them. Thus, she shouted her order at them.

“Investigate this Hunter, Akira! Immediately!”

Seeing her men start to scramble to get to work, Chloe gritted her teeth. It was a huge failure. But this was not the end, she told that to herself and pushed all pessimism off her mind.

After that, their investigation regarding the original owner of the card did not deliver much result. Chloe did try calling Reina to ask about it, but Reina just kept ignoring her call. Because of that, she sent the same question to the upper echelons of the faction that she was in. It later went to

the upper echelons of the faction that Reina was in. This question went one round before finally reaching Reina. However, Reina's answer to that was a simple and short message – 'I am not obligated to answer that question'.

Since it was sent through the upper echelons of the company, it had the same level as an order from the corporation. Reina's response was essentially permitted by the upper echelons of the company. This meant that there was nothing more Chloe could do to get information about Akira from Reina.

Had she received that card from Reina through a deal that both sides had agreed upon, Chloe might be able to gain some information from Reina. However, Chloe lost to her greed and ended up taking the card from Reina with force. Right now, she was faced with the repercussions of that mistake.

As such, to get out of this predicament, clinging on to the chance of that wonderful future, Chloe had to take her chance on a gamble. An even wider crossroad, a huge gamble where losing meant greater losses and winning meant better rewards.

Silavin: This card is really a curse hahaha.

Though, I wonder if it will also haunt Reina.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 259, Start The Battle

Index

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Akira woke up in Carol's camping car. He was sleeping with his augmented suit on. This was to make sure that he would be able to react immediately in case something happened while he was doing his job as an escort. It was adjusted to place a minimum burden on his body, thanks to that, he was able to sleep well.

Akira said his usual good morning to Alpha and stretched his body, he then started to do simple stretching to wake his body up. After that, he proceeded to check his equipment before finally waking Carol up.

Carol was sleeping naked under a thin sheet. The sheet fully abandoned its function to hide her skin. Instead, the lightly transparent sheet only added another layer of eroticism. Carol had spent a huge amount of money not only to enhance her physical strength but also to increase her sex appeal. Because of that, her body was extremely lustrous and tempting. Since she was currently not using it to seduce someone, that lustrous beauty only gave off an artistic beauty feeling instead.

"Akira, good morning!"

“Good morning, Carol… Just because the inside of the car doesn’t feel that different from home, I don’t think it’s wise to go around like that, you know?”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? There is no one else here but you.”

“No no no, it’s just as you said, I’m here right now, no?”

Akira’s opinion was entirely correct, but Carol instead sighed and said.

“If you really think so, it would be great if you can show some reaction, though. It’s because you don’t show any reaction at all that confidence in my body has taken a big hit, you know? Or is it that you are looking at something that doesn’t satisfy you? It’s fine. You can complain to me.”

“It’s not like I have anything to complain about, but isn’t it normal to at least put on something more proper?”

“If you’re talking about what’s normal, honestly, I will start with hoping to get a normal reaction out of you. Alright alright, I just need to put something on, right?”

Carol only casually said so as she just wanted that subject to be over and done with. She put on the inner for her augmented suit and returned. Although it hid her skin, as usual, the inner was just a tight skin suit, so it was not that different from being naked.

Akira thought to himself [It’s true she had put something on… but an inner is more or less the same as being naked…] Since it was something Carol had decided on as his employer, he stopped himself from saying anything more.

They then went to have breakfast. This was when Akira suddenly came up with a question.

“It seems that this escort duty is going to end sometime soon, no?”

“Hm? Not really, though? Why do you think so?”

“Well, compared to back then when you first asked me, you now seem far less stressed. So, I thought that the problem has already been solved”

“Ahh, I see. Sorry, but it doesn’t seem that it’s going to end anytime soon. I’m planning to keep paying you as my escort forever. That is, as long as you let me and I still have enough money to do so.”

“Is that so? Well, it’s fine with me.”

Akira tilted his head, thinking that it might just be his misunderstanding. However, it was true that Carol had really calmed down compared to before. Carol then smiled at him. It was a calm and tranquil smile.

“Well, it’s true that I’ve mostly calmed down. That’s because even if I get involved in a huge battle like back then, you said that you would help me escape. You’ll do that for me, right?”

“As I said before, I will at least do my best.”

“I’m counting on you when that time comes.”

Carol smiled happily and continued eating her breakfast. Akira thought that Carol’s change in attitude was strange. However, this was better than having her mood soured or tense, so he did not let it worry him too much.

While they were having their breakfast together, Carol went to ask about Akira’s plan.

“By the way, Akira, what’s your plan after this escort mission? Are you planning to go further to the east to earn more? Or are you in the middle of choosing a sponsor?”

“Hmm, I haven’t really decided on anything yet in particular, but… Sponsor?”

Akira tilted his head and seemed confused. Seeing that, Carol also expressed bewilderment.

“Eh? Usually, Hunters of your rank get sponsor offers from various companies. I’m sure you’ve received invitations to join teams as well. Though, I doubt you’ll ever accept those. I believe you’ll be only interested in support contracts or loan offers for solo Hunters. Don’t tell me that you didn’t get any, right?”

“Uhhh, well…”

Akira pretended to think as he turned toward the person, or the thing(?) that he had permitted to handle all that kind of stuff.

“Alpha, did I get anything like that?”

“Yeah. Something like an offer to invest in you so you can go further to the east. Yesterday, you just received an offer from the Lion Steel company, offering you inclusive general support. I’m refusing all offers though. I’m pretty sure I’ve told you before that I’m refusing all the uninteresting offers sent to you using a standard email format, though?”

“Oh? You did?”

Akira then replied to Carol. He was refusing all offers saying that he was not interested in any of them. Which was the truth. Carol could not have noticed that he was leaving such matters completely to Alpha.

“Is that so? Although being a Hunter is very profitable, the cost of the medicines and ammo is not cheap, so it’s difficult to get out of debt once you get yourself into one. So, I don’t think it’s a bad idea to have special connections to take care of that problem though. I’m sure you would always go to a ruin well equipped. However, if something happens and you lose all your stuff, it is a great idea to have a backup plan, right?”

“Well, that’s true, but nothing like that ever happened up until now. Moreover, when I get a sponsor, I’ll have to consider their wishes as well, right?”

“Since they’ll be paying for you and it’s not a charity, that part is given, no?”

“I don’t like that kind of thing.”

Seeing Akira make a displeased expression, as though he abhors the idea, Carol just giggled. She then paused for a bit before she said.

“In that case, how about forming a team with me? Even if you lose all your equipment and have no money to buy a new one, as long as you’re on the same team as me, it won’t be a problem, you know? And if you’re too injured to search ruins, I can get some money from my side-job for you to get your injuries treated or to buy new equipment. I’m sure you can already guess how much I’m earning from my side job, right?”

Carol lightly made that offer as a Hunter, to which Akira responded with a rather troubled expression.

“…Hmmm, honestly speaking, even if we do form a team, I don’t think it would be right to do that.”

“Once we’re in the same team, we’re together both for the good and for the bad. So, I don’t really mind. Well, I won’t ask you to give your answer now. So, just at least keep it in one corner of your mind.”

Carol stopped pursuing the subject. Akira also did not think too much about it. Although, it did leave a mark on his mind.

That was when a call from Viola reached Carol. After Carol picked it up and listened to what Viola had to say, she sent a rather doubtful look at Akira.

“Akira, I just got some strange information from Viola… It seems that Lion Steel is looking for you. Do you have any guess as to why that might be?”

“Really…? Wait, Lion Steel? Isn’t the company where Reina’s group came from?”

“Now that you mention it, yeah. So, Viola is asking if it’s okay to sell information about your location to the information brokers looking for you.”

Akira frowned.

“Wait a sec, since when did information about my location become something that needs to be paid for?”

“No idea, it’s not like I have an answer to that. Ah, Viola also said that she can investigate it and is open to talk about the price if you want.”

“…I don’t really understand what’s going on, but just tell her not to sell my information for now. And I won’t ask for that as well. I don’t have the money to spend on something like that at the moment.”

“Okay.”

Carol conveyed that to Viola and then closed the call. After that, she quickly called Viola again through her terminal, while making sure that it would not make a sound.

“It’s me, about that investigation. Is it okay if I’m the one asking you to do that?”

Carol believed that when Akira considered Viola’s offer, he refused because he thought of negotiating with her as too much trouble. Naturally, Carol’s judgment was on point. Akira weighed both information he might receive and the pain of the negotiation, easily concluding that the latter was more of a pain.

So, Carol thought she could buy that information in Akira’s place and convey it to him. Especially if it was going to be something troublesome. If the potential trouble was something that might cause Akira to stop being her escort, then it was going to be horrendous for her as well.

Viola understood at least that much and replied.

“Sure, but just because we’re friends, there won’t be any special discount, you know?”

“I know. But well, if it’s possible, it would be great if you can prioritize it considering that we’re friends.”

“In that case, I’ll give you this as a special gift. We can talk about the price later after you check the content. I’m actually in the cafeteria inside the Hunter Office branch near Mihazono ruin right now. Come here to pick it up directly.”

“Oh? You’ve done your investigation already? You’re as sly as ever, but is there any need for me to go there? You can just send it to me, no?”

In contrast to Carol’s confused voice, Viola replied with an amused tone.

“I’m sorry, but it’s not something that I can send over except through a secret line. Just think of it as fortunate that I didn’t even ask you to come to the middle of a ruin. So, this thing won’t be cheap, you know? Do you want to withdraw now?”

“Nope. I’ll buy it. I’m heading over there right now, so just wait for me.”

“Alright, I’ll be waiting then.”

After she closed the call, Carol then told Akira. She just remembered she had to go meet someone at a Hunter Office branch after this. Akira was not suspicious at all and normally went to prepare his equipment.

__*__*__*__

After Akira escorted Carol to the Hunter Office branch of Mihazono ruin, he waited for her to return back, from outside the Hunter Office. Akira was waiting outside because Carol asked him to do so. It was just to be safe in case Akira got suspicious. After all, she was purchasing information that Akira refused to buy from Viola.

Although they were in the middle of the wasteland, considering that Carol had mostly calmed down and it was inside the Hunter Office where no one would want to cause trouble, he believed that it would be fine to let Carol go alone. Though he was her bodyguard right now.

As he was chatting with Alpha to kill time, Alpha suddenly warned him.

“Akira, just to be safe, get ready for a fight.”

“What’s going on? Did you discover something that might turn into another large-scale battle?”

“It’s not that serious, but it seems that there are people forming an encirclement around this area.”

Akira then turned his attention toward where Alpha was indicating. There, while he scanned the area, he saw a group of maids and butlers. The same ones he saw back in the cafeteria.

“I bet they’re here just to make sure that this place is safe. That weird rich girl with inappropriate equipment for the wasteland back then is coming here, right?”

“That might be the case. But it’s just to be safe.”

“Understood.”

Akira just ignored that group and continued waiting for Carol. In the middle of that, more and more maids and butlers came to the area. Although the Hunters in the area, including Akira, found it weird, they did not seem to be bothered by it at all. If there was anything that bothered Akira, it was that some of them seemed awfully cautious toward him.

Of course, Akira did notice them. However, he thought that it must be because of his equipment. It was way too powerful for the standard equipment for this ruin. All the maids and the butlers were fully armed, but since Akira knew Kanae and Shiori, who were similar to those maids and butlers, it did not strike him as strange.

Eventually, Chloe came with Latis and Pamela. When Akira saw them coming from the wasteland, he thought that they would head to the Hunter Office. So as not to get in their way, Akira re-positioned himself to the side, where they would pass by him.

But even after they entered the Hunter Office branch area, instead of getting into the build, they headed toward him. Akira frowned and tilted his head.

Chloe approached Akira with her servants behind her and stopped in front of him as if they were having a stand-off.

“You are Akira, right?”

“…Yes?”

Chloe seemed to be exhausted, however, she still sent an intense glare at him. It was because she spent all night yesterday without sleeping to investigate matters related to Olivia. Although her sleepiness and exhaustion had been taken care of by expensive medicines, the fatigue from the stress remained. After all, the situation that she was in had not changed. The more she tried to compensate for that with willpower, unfortunately, the worse her stern stare got.

“I’m sure you’ve received multiple call requests from Lion Steel. Why did you ignore all of them?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Just answer me!”

Akira retracted his head back; it was obvious that he was a bit weirded out by Chloe’s sudden emotional flare. That was when Latis and Pamela quickly intervened, Pamela tried to calm Chloe down while pulling her back. Meanwhile, Latis took her place to talk to Akira.

“A pleasure to meet you, I am Latis, one of Chloe-sama’s butlers. I apologize for my master’s rude remark just now.”

“Ah, sure, okay.”

“We are from Lion Steel company. We have been trying to make an appointment with Akira-sama ever since yesterday. But, we just couldn’t reach you. Although we do think that it is rude for us to do this, since we’ve received information that you would be here, we came here to meet you. Would it be okay if we ask for some of your time right now?”

“Well, if it’s only for a bit, then sure…”

“Thank you very much!”

Latis bowed and withdrew. Chloe, who was taking a deep breath to calm herself down, once again stepped forward in front of Akira. She then showed the white card to Akira.

“Do you have any recollection of this card? Or more like, this card is originally yours, right?”

“No, that’s not mine.”

“Stop playing a fool with me!!”

Chloe once again raised her voice, and once again, Latis and Pamela quickly intervened. However, this time, it was Pamela who stepped in front of Akira.

“It is a pleasure to meet you. I am Pamela. Just like Latis, I am also working to serve Chloe-sama.”

“…Well, okay, sure.”

“According to the information that our company has received, the current owner of this card is Akira-sama. Do you have any recollection of this? If its ownership has already shifted to someone else, it would be a great help if Akira-sama could inform us who it might be.”

“If you guys are from Lion Steel, you know Shiori, right?”

“Of course.”

“It’s hers. Or more like, you got that card from Shiori, right? Why didn’t you even know about it?”

Akira started to look utterly confused. But Pamela replied casually without missing a beat.

“At the moment, the owner of this card in our company is Chloe-sama. After that, we did try to contact Olivia-sama, but then Olivia-sama told us

that the legitimate owner of the card is Akira-sama. It was only lent to Shiori. Do you have any recollection of this matter?”

“Ah, right, she did say something along those lines now that you mention it… But still, I already told her. I gave that card to Shiori. So, I don’t think that card is still mine. That’s why, even if you say that you’re returning it, I can’t accept that card. If you really want to talk about returning it or whatnot, go discuss it with Shiori first.”

“Please don’t worry, we are not here to return the card.”

“Then what is it?”

Pamela stepped back, Chloe, who had calmed down with the help from Latis, once again stepped in front of Akira.

“I want you to lend this card to me just like you lent it to Shiori.”

Akira frowned, for him, it was a rather weird request to him.

“You want me to lend it? Didn’t you get that from borrowing it from Shiori?”

“…Yes, we did. But that’s as far as it goes between us. But it seems that as far as Olivia-sama is concerned, the owner of this card is still you. That’s why I’m asking you instead.”

“You just need to tell Olivia that you got that card from Shiori, no?”

Akira’s light-hearted answer only worsened Chloe’s mood. If that was enough, she would not have to go through all of this. However, she somehow managed to hold herself back from screaming in Akira’s face. Though, in order to do that, her face turned even darker. She then took a deep breath and said with an awkward smile.

“…It’s not that simple for us, you see. That’s why we want approval from its former owner. You can just say that you’re lending it to me and that will be enough. Giving it to me or selling it to me will also be fine. Of course, I will give you something in return. I’ll buy it at any price you ask. We can

also give you support for your Hunter job. We can even dispatch people to help you too. They'll be as strong as those high-ranking Hunters. So, go ahead. You can make any demand in exchange for this card."

The offer was too good to be true, so Akira could not help but to get suspicious instead.

"I refuse."

Chloe finally could not hold back her emotion.

"What!? Why!?"

"As I said before, that card is no longer mine. It's not right to lend or sell something that is not mine to begin with, that's all there is to it."

"I'm here, telling you that this card is yours!!"

"And I'm telling you. That matter has already been concluded with my deal with Reina! You got that card from Reina and that is the end of it!"

Akira noticed that he was getting angry for some reason. But since he did not know the reason why, he ended up letting his emotion come out through his voice. So, Alpha gently tried to calm him down.

"Akira, calm down."

"…Ah, right, sorry."

Akira took a deep breath to help him calm down. It was something that he often did in the past. So, it was able to immediately calm him down.

If Alpha told him to just accept the card, it would have solved the issue. However, she could not afford to do so. She felt that saying that would be touching a part of Akira that he was sensitive about. Considering that he was so close to cutting ties with Elena and Sara the moment they did something like that, Alpha believed it to be a bad idea. It would be akin to walking through a minefield.

In reality, Alpha was overthinking it. If she had just told him to accept the card and give it to Chloe, he would have simply obeyed. However, Alpha, who did not know what Akira discussed with Tsubaki inside Kuzuhara ruin, believed that he would not obediently follow her advice.

The only thing that Akira was waiting for before heading off to accomplish Alpha's request was the equipment that he had ordered through the help of Sakashita Heavy Industry. It would be a bad move to worsen their relationship before he accomplished her goal. Because of that, Alpha believed that she could only tell Akira to calm down.

Chloe was forced into a difficult position. If news about her failure with Olivia spread through the main house, she would lose her place. Although she was currently able to come up with an excuse for her faction, it was only a matter of time before it hit its limit. There was a need for her to do something to gain ownership of this card. Otherwise, she would eventually get kicked out of the inner wall.

Her plan was first to negotiate with Akira. To ask him to lend her the card and from there, manage a way to actually get the ownership of this card.

However, she could not get in contact with him. Even after trying to send an overwhelmingly enticing offer through the Hunter Office, she only got refusal replies that seemed to be from a template message. It was something unthinkable when it came to dealing with a Hunter. This unexpected turn of events that she would have never imagined, eventually forced her to bring some of her men and directly head out to meet him.

Even after she was able to directly meet him, it did not help her situation at all. Instead, it only worsened her already awful mood.

"What exactly do you not like about our offer…? We are from Lion Steel, you know? Our scale is different compared to those of small-sized companies!? We're big enough to have branches in each of the financial areas of the 5 biggest corporations. When we say that we wish to support a Hunter, that Hunter would normally want to call us back, you know!? So, what exactly is it that you don't like about it? That you would even ignore our offer, huh!?"

“I don’t care about those kinds of things. It’s also none of your business.”

From the common sense of Hunters, what Chloe said was absolutely correct. Since it was sent via the Hunter Office, it was unlikely to be a fraudulent offer. It was only natural for Hunters to happily accept it. That was why Chloe was utterly frustrated.

Her mood only got worse with time. Akira himself also started to get frustrated, so Alpha once again tried to calm him down.

“Akira, calm down. Getting too emotional will only worsen her reaction.”

“…yeah, I know.”

Akira took another deep breath to calm himself down. Considering that it would be foolish to keep that up until Carol returned, he decided to make a compromise.

“…I get it already; I’ll lend it to you.”

“Really!? Ah, no, I guess that’s only to be expected. Very well then, tell me what you want in exchange for it.”

“I don’t need your money nor your support, I don’t need anything. Just make sure to never bring this kind of thing to me again. You got it?”

“Okay, you can have my words.”

Although Chloe did not fully understand what Akira was talking about, she put that aside for now and sighed in relief as her expression relaxed. But that only lasted until Akira said his next statement.

“And also, I’ll run it through Reina just to be safe. Personally speaking, I consider the card as theirs. So at least let me do that much.”

“…Eh? Wait!?”

Akira already had his terminal dialling for Shiori. He was already telling her what happened in front of the flustered Chloe. After he heard Shiori’s

answer, Akira frowned and sent a sharp gaze toward Chloe.

“Shiori said that you took the card from them while threatening their lives. Care to explain?”

At that moment, Akira’s eyes had changed. He was now looking at Chloe as a con artist, someone who was trying to trick him.

Chloe did not say anything back.

“What excuse do you have? If you can’t explain it to me, then just leave.”

Even so, Chloe did not say anything. Akira slowly readied his stance for a fight. Suddenly Chloe smiled and said.

“I’m sorry for taking the roundabout way.”

Chloe understood that it was already impossible to properly negotiate with Akira. She did not have the leeway to spend her time making another secret deal. If she tried something like that, the other factions would remove her and take that card away from her before trying to contact Akira again, just like she had done. With her options and time strictly limited, she did not hesitate in taking the only option that she had left. The one thing that she did once before and succeeded without trouble.

The more she was cornered, the stronger her reaction would be, and once it was decided, there would be no longer any need to hesitate. Chloe lightly signalled with her hand. With that, all of her men readied for a fight. After that, she then ordered Akira.

“Give me the card!”

Akira finally understood the reason why he was so strangely annoyed. Glances with a shred of mockery. That attitude, as if to say that it was normal for her to get everything she wanted. Finally, her last action. It was something that he had experienced countless times before when he was still living in the back alley of the slums.

After everything he had achieved up until now, Akira had pride that he was no longer the same as he was before. However, what Chloe did, caused his pride to crack and rage was leaking out of it. Akira obeyed his emotions and promptly replied.

“No!”

Akira was leaking out immense pressure. Just like what had happened with Kanae yesterday, Latis and Pamela readied for a fight.

But Chloe, who had lost all restraint, did not wince back at all. Instead, she smiled deeply and threatened Akira.

“Do you really think that it will only end with you? Didn’t I tell you that Lion Steel is a big company? Our reach is far and wide, you know?”

Akira was about to return to his past self, but he reminded himself of everything that he had achieved since then. While reminding himself that he was no longer the same as his past self, he somehow managed to speak to Chloe.

“…That sounds like you’re threatening me with the lives of the people I know. If that’s not the case, correct me before it’s too late.”

But even so, Chloe only smiled and replied.

“I’ll leave that interpretation to you.”

“…I see.”

Akira made an expression. One which he had not shown for a while. It was an expression that only his past self showed as he replied. With those words, everyone there with rifles in hand immediately started shooting, with the objective to kill their opponent.

And so, the battle had begun.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 260, Earnest People

Index

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The light barrier was riddled with bullets before it broke into pieces. The light barrier was produced by solidified air, using forcefield armour. It appeared to be similar to a floating shield of light that dimly glowed. Chloe's men were using non-contact forcefield armour type to create that light barrier, which was also known as forcefield shield.

Compared to the standard forcefield armour, the energy usage of the forcefield shield was highly efficient, not to mention its effective uses as well. Not only could it protect something outside its immediate vicinity, it could also set up a forcefield which weakens enemy bullets. It was effective even against anti-forcefield bullets.

A multi-layered forcefield shield that was well coordinated from their training was able to successfully protect their master against a storm of charge bullets, released from close range.

As expected, not even a single bullet from Akira was able to reach Chloe.

That exchange, which was a blink of an eye for the common man, continued on. It was prolonged because of how skilled both parties were. The might of their equipment, and their resolve to fulfill their goals.

Although that place was already filled with flying bullets, none of them hesitated to shoot back. Endless sound of gunfire echoed through the area, filling it with bullets, covering it with thick murderous intent. Akira blazed and wafted around that place filled with death.

The broken light shield did not even take a second to disintegrate into flashes of light and dissipate into the air. However, Akira stretched his time perception to the limit. To him, it seemed as though those pieces had not disintegrated yet. His gaze and his LEO multi-rifle muzzles were focused on Chloe. With all his attention focused on killing him, Chloe's escorts had to entirely focus on defending her. They did not have the leeway to focus much on Akira.

While shooting, Akira jumped to the side with all his might to get away from the bullets that were heading towards him.

With his enhanced physical strength that approached that of a super-human, if Akira tried to execute a high-speed move like running, normally, the power of his first step would cause the ground under him to crack, making him lose his footing. However, he made use of his forcefield armour, placing it under his feet the moment it made contact with the ground. With the powerful balancer in his augmented suit, he could execute extremely high-speed manoeuvres. Fast enough for him to move at maximum velocity, against the full might of the air.

Even with his high-speed manoeuvre, from his perspective, he was running slowly. During that opening, he gathered all the data about his surroundings through his advanced information-gathering device. He completely skipped the data analysis portions and simply allowed the raw data to fly straight into his brain, which he recognized as extrasensory information. Thanks to that, he was able to locate all the countless bullets around him just by using his intuition. If the trajectories were painted in red, the area around him would have been filled with nothing but red.

Even so, Akira forced his way to areas with a lot fewer bullets and forced himself to slip through that barrage of bullets. He knew that the slightest mistake would spell his doom, but even so, he placed everything on his

intuition. The intuition that he had been polishing as he correctly predicted the trajectories of each bullet around him.

Of course, he was unable to evade all the bullets. Against those bullets that he could not avoid, he predicted where he would get hit and focused the forcefield armour of his augmented suit at those points. Naturally, this means that he would be vulnerable at other locations. If he made a mistake in predicting where those bullets would hit him, it would cause him to stagger and the rest of the enemy bullets would finish him off.

However, even after all of this, the firepower of his enemy was more than enough to decimate him. The maids and the butlers that had surrounded Akira started shooting at him almost simultaneously. They had already accepted the fact that they would hit each other as they released a huge barrage of powerful bullets at him.

That barrage that was forming around Akira would come at him like a thick wall, which blocked him from escaping. However, Akira would force his way out using the LEO multi-rifle on his left hand. Meanwhile, he continued shooting at Chloe with his right LEO multi-rifle.

His left LEO multi-rifle had started shooting non-stop at other targets. His aim was not to kill but to throw his opponent off balance or damage their weapons, enough to disrupt their ability to aim. Akira’s shooting with his left LEO multi-rifle was unbelievably accurate. It was not an exaggeration to describe it as otherworldly. He was able to execute such high accuracy, rapid shooting thanks to his enhanced, high information resolution world.

The maids that got hit before pulling their trigger ended up completely missing their shots. The butler who noticed it realized that Akira was also shooting at them. So, he inadvertently took a step to the side to evade the incoming bullet. This caused him to lose his already fixed aim. Although the bullet went past their rifles without even touching them, the whiplash from the wind pressure was enough to slightly shift their aims away from their target. All of these compounded together, allowing Akira to create an opening for him to survive the wall of bullets that were coming at him.

Akira of course did not stop there. He continued to shoot even more bullets. Eventually, he tore down that wall of bullets as he slipped through that barrage.

Of course, some of the bullets also hit the buildings around them. Akira was using bullets that would easily kill off even powerful monsters. Meanwhile, Chloe's men were using bullets that were powerful enough to kill Akira. Firepower-wise, they might be even stronger than tanks. The violent barrage showered the buildings in the area, creating a huge hole in their walls, and eventually, they crumbled down. Some were blown to even smaller pieces.

Ten seconds passed since the fight started. Even after exchanging that many powerful bullets, Akira and Chloe were still alive.

The moment the battle started, Latis forcefully pulled Chloe back and carried her away from the battlefield as fast as he could. Of course, it placed Chloe's body, which was normal, under a heavy burden. However, thanks to the battle-oriented powerful augmented suit that looked like a casual expensive dress which Chloe had put on, and Latis carrying her to not cause as much burden on her as possible, Chloe somehow managed to be fine.

Moreover, the butlers and the maids in the area quickly set up a forcefield shield in a straight line between Akira and Chloe. They did this to block Akira's bullets. Chloe was relieved the moment she saw those thick layers of forcefield shield in between her and Akira. However, that changed the next moment she saw Akira easily break through most of them with just his opening barrage. Some of the bullets even came inches from her. However, in the end, she was still unharmed. She was able to escape the ruin safely once she arrived at her large, armoured vehicle parked in the middle of the wasteland.

The back door of that large vehicle opened from a remote signal. Once they escorted Chloe inside, Latis and Pamela looked at each other. They were trying to decide who would stay behind to guard Chloe, but Chloe suddenly interjected.

"Both of you, go!"

Both Latis and Pamela frowned and made troubled expressions, Latis then stepped up to convey their collective feeling regarding this.

“Milady, as expected, that would be too dangerous…”

“I’ve decided to kill him. It would be meaningless if you guys were stuck in between protecting me and killing him. I can’t have you fail to kill him. So, both of you should go.”

Toward that firm and decisive order that their master gave them, Latis and Pamela looked at each other and nodded. Pamela jumped out from the back door while Latis closed the back door after her.

Chloe then said to Latis, with a shred of rage in her tone and expression.

“Latis?”

Latis frowned and made a stern look so as to avoid getting overwhelmed by the pressure that Chloe was emitting.

“In case everyone that we left behind cannot kill him or if he escapes from this battle, there’s a good chance that he’ll come here. As such, I will stay behind in order to face him while Pamela and the others can attack him from his flank. If Milady can send a request for reinforcement and extra equipment, we will have a better chance to kill him.”

“…Alright.”

Seeing Chloe convinced, Latis made a prompt bow and then turned toward the driver.

“Go!”

The vehicle immediately accelerated toward the wasteland. There was no hesitation in their action. It was as if to say that this was the best option for them.

In that empty space, blood suddenly sprayed out. It was followed by multiple pieces of raw flesh dropping. A moment later, a maid that had lost

half of her body appeared out of nowhere. Parts of her were barely held together by her skin and bone. She was a maid that was trying to approach Akira while using optical camouflage, but Akira noticed her and blew her to pieces.

Not too far from him, a butler suddenly appeared out of nowhere in the same fashion, but unlike the maid, that butler had lost the upper half of his body and just dropped limply after he appeared. His lost upper half was scattered in pieces around him, dyeing the area blood red. Akira's two LEO multi rifles were even stronger than the ones he used in the inter-city transport's escort mission. This was thanks to the new modifications that he added in. The two rifles did not have any trouble against those weaker than the powered armour suits that Akira fought during the inter-city transport escort mission. Thus, Akira easily blew his enemies to pieces, one by one.

The battle continued for another 5 seconds, Akira was under constant pressure and was slowly getting cornered.

Chloe's men were weaker than Erde's men. However, there were way more opponents that Akira had to fight at the same time. Furthermore, they had already surrounded him even before they started to fight. Overall, it was a tougher battle when compared to the battle during the inter-city transport escort mission.

They already moved to plan B which they had planned beforehand in case Akira survived the first assault. Not only were they shooting bullets at him, but they also started mixing in explosive warheads as well. However, these warheads were not to directly hit Akira.

The explosive warheads released jamming smoke when they blew up. Although the smoke itself was mostly transparent, it carried the same effect as thick colourless mist, thus cutting down the effectiveness of Akira's information-gathering device. Then to top it off, it also contained speed filter particles as well.

As expected, using speed filter particles in an open space greatly reduced its effectiveness. As such, it was unable to completely stop Akira's bullets.

And since it quickly dispersed, its effect did not even last longer than one second.

Even so, it was at least enough to shave a large chunk of the bullet's momentum. Since it was mostly focused around Akira, he was affected the most by it. Since the speed filter not only lowered the firepower of bullets, it also slowed him down. Akira, who understood what the enemy was trying to do, had no other choice but to go toward the area where the smoke was the lightest. It was in the opposite direction from where Chloe had run away to.

If Akira tried to chase Chloe, the speed filter would blunt his movement and everyone would be able to hit him. In the worst-case scenario, that decision might lead to his death. However, Akira knew that getting killed here would mean that he would not be able to kill Chloe. Thus, he was barely able to hold himself back from charging forward and retreated to the opposite direction of the person that he wanted to kill.

The effect of the speed filter faded almost immediately. However, the jamming smoke still had its effect on Akira's information-gathering device. Since the enemy had basically limited the area where Akira could run, as expected, they more or less already knew his location. They activated their camouflaging cloak and tried to encircle him.

The opponents that were approaching Akira from his left and right. They would normally be impossible to detect due to the combined effect of the jamming smoke and the camouflaging cloak. However, Akira was still able to detect them. This was thanks to the higher sensitivity of his information-gathering device and his extraordinary focus. His focus raised his acuteness to its utmost limit and combined with his active reality manipulation, he could somehow tell based on pure instinct where they were.

But it was not like Akira could accurately pinpoint their exact location. In the end, it was more like a vague guess. In order to compensate for the accuracy, Akira filled the vicinity of the area where he detected someone with the sheer bullets. Akira lightly shook the aim of the LEO multi rifle, which had the same rate of fire as a minigun, and filled the area with bullets. Even the slightest possibly meant facing a hailstorm of bullets.

Because of that, the maids and the butlers who had hidden themselves immediately died before they could even disengage their optical camouflage. The rest of the incoming bullets eventually destroyed their equipment and that was when their optical camouflage had finally disengaged. The continuing storm sent mixes of the destroyed equipment and human flesh into the air, painting the whole area with blood.

Even after Akira killed a couple dozen of them, it was not like he was safe. As a matter of fact, his position was getting worse with time. Chloe's men were working as her personal bodyguard. They prioritized evacuating her from the beginning of the battle. Now, they would finally be able to turn their attention toward killing Akira. Furthermore, these people were stronger and had better equipment than the other servants. As they finished evacuating Chloe, they started to rejoin the fight bit by bit.

The maids armed with gigantic guns shot guided missiles up into the sky before they curved downward toward Akira. They left a trail of smoke in the sky which looked like claws. The guided missiles used the information from the information-gathering devices carried those close to Akira, allowing them to accurately seek his location.

Akira ran as fast as he could while using the buildings and wreckage to hide from the missiles. Although most buildings in the area had been destroyed from their first exchange, they had not touched the ground yet. Inside his extremely compressed time perception, Akira saw the falling rubble as if they were floating.

Bullets showered those falling rubble and the explosions shredded them into smaller pieces, sending them in all directions. Akira slipped through the openings while shooting at his enemies. Likewise, his enemies were also trying to shoot at him through those small openings.

The bullets broke the rubble into smaller pieces and the grenades blew them away. During the opening, Akira, as well as the maids and butlers, moved as fast as possible to kill their respective enemies.

In high-speed combat where even free-falling was painfully slow, Akira was fighting against opponents that could react with more or less the same

speed as him.

It had been 11 seconds since the start of the battle. Most of the buildings in the area had already been destroyed, obliterated into mere rubble. In such a chaotic intense battleground, Akira kept shooting with both of his LEO multi rifles as long as they allowed him to. Even now, he was still actively fighting.

Inside the Hunter Office, when Carol entered, she saw Babalod standing behind Viola and had a rough guess of what was going on. She then smiled bitterly and asked.

“Good grief, is this your plan right from the start?”

Viola had her usual amused smile as she replied.

“Of course not, I just decided to do so afterwards. I wouldn’t deny it if I was asked whether I was using you, but you’re the one who left the negotiation to me after that. I’m sure you at least expected this, right?”

“I didn’t expect it, but I do think that this is so like you to do this.”

Carol and Viola smiled at each other. It was the smiles of evil girls. Babalod who saw that, heaved a huge sigh.

In order to pay the rest of the debt, Babalod was forced to work as Viola’s bodyguard. He even had some of the control of his cyborg body relinquished. It could be said that he was treated awfully. But that also meant that he was paid more than usual.

Carol was a bit curious as to why Viola even needed a high-ranking Hunter like Babalod to protect her. Though, when she thought about it, Babalod was a good replacement for her. Thus, she did not let herself get anymore worried.

After that, Carol accepted a storage device containing the information that Viola promised. She then took a look at the data inside that special storage

device, which was made to not connect to the network. It was to make sure that the secret information that Viola was handing to her would not leak.

After looking through the content, Carol raised her eyebrows in surprise.

“…Viola, is this for real?”

“Have I ever handed over fake information?”

“…You have a good point. And this is indeed something that you can’t afford to send through the network.”

Carol lightly covered her forehead. Viola, who was watching, cracked out her usual smile as she said.

“If you’re happy with the content, I want to proceed next to talk about the price.”

“Wait, I’ll let Akira know first.”

Carol opened up his information terminal and tried to contact Akira, but it only ended in failure.

“…Out of range? What’s going on? Viola, I’m sorry but…”

As Carol was going to ask Viola to try to contact Akira in her place, she immediately stopped when she saw what Viola was doing. Before she could even ask Viola, Viola had already guessed what Carol wanted and was already trying to contact Akira. However, she had the same bewildered look as Carol had as she was looking at her information terminal.

“My information terminal… Is also completely out of range? But that’s impossible…”

Viola’s terminal was a special information terminal that could connect through the old-world domain. Normally, it would be impossible for it to be ever out of range.

Suddenly, the whole facility shook violently. It was then immediately followed by a blaring alarm and a facility-wide broadcast.

“We’ve detected a large-scale battle outside and that some kind of signal jamming is in effect. As such, the facility will enter self-defence mode. For the Hunters who are willing to take on this defensive mission, please accept the SOS request through the facilities’ inner network.”

All the Hunters inside the facility started to get busy, in the middle of that, Carol glanced at her own information terminal.

“Wait… Don’t tell me…!?”

The information that Carol received from Viola was that the Lion Steel Eastern District third ward branch was preparing to negotiate with Akira and was even planning to go as far as to use violence. The reason why Viola could not hand it over through the network was because it included many other secret information regarding other corporations behind it.

Many people reached their foul ends because they refused to buy information from Viola, Akira was one example of that.

However, Viola was also obviously caught by surprise. This meant that even she did not expect this to happen.

Human personality was something that could be manipulated to some extent. By changing the way how an idea was presented, it was possible to make one’s train of thoughts, principles, and way of life lean toward a particular direction. Alice, who had rebuilt the new Lion Steel company in the current era, used this approach. She had to prepare humans who were used in place of automata.

The sense of debt for saving them from a harsh lifestyle. They were then provided for in an educational institution. Shelter, food, and clothes were of a different level compared to where they originally came from. While quenching them with necessities, they were fed with information. The feeling of loyalty toward the main company was nurtured through

indoctrination, educational environment, peer pressure, and repeated training. They were then evaluated based on their loyalty.

People who had gone through such education were extremely loyal to the new Lion Steel company. They were born as humans, educated to be tools for the company, and were used like expendable items. Even so, they saw it as something to be proud of.

Currently, these human tools were in the middle of a fight against Akira. As they were educated, they met their ends as expendable items.

Akira jumped upward to get away from their line of fire. If he was only simply jumping up, he would not be able to move freely in the air until he returned back to the ground. Normally, this would be a fatal move that would make them a free target. However, for Akira, this was nothing.

He created footings under his feet with his augmented suit and moved around rapidly. Up and down, left and right. It was as if the words top and bottom did not mean anything to him.

Even so, Chloe's men were still able to follow his rapid movement. They used the same technique as Akira to move freely in the air and continued their assault on him from all directions. The maids behind and in front of him, as well as the butlers on his left and right, engaged their forcefield shield. They were trying to trap him.

Akira kept shooting two LEO multi-rifles while spinning around. His extended magazine allowed him to release a close-range highly intense barrage. That attack hit the forcefield shields around him, causing flashes of light to break out.

The forcefield shield had chucks being broken off but that was not enough to destroy them. They were connected to the energy pack of the maids and butlers' augmented suit, pushed to their utmost limit.

In exchange, the augmented suit did not serve as anything more than a piece of fabric. One shot was enough to completely decimate their users. In the middle of that, the maids and the butlers were not only facing Akira's

bullets from the front; they were also facing bullets from their allies behind them. There were also missiles that were falling on top of their heads. In order to hit Akira, who was moving at high speed, their teammates could not afford to be precise with their shots.

Even so, they did not hesitate to reroute all the energy output to their forcefield shields. They were willing to give up everything in order to trap Akira and stop him in his tracks. They moved exactly as they were educated, which was to prioritize the objective of the whole team even when it meant sacrificing their lives.

If he had to run away, the only escape route available for Akira was up. He kept avoiding his opponents' line of fire by making high-speed manoeuvres haphazardly. Since he moved around by creating footing under his feet, it was rather difficult for him to execute a high speed downward move. Even if he did, he would have to sacrifice some of his speed. If he slowed down, he would become an easy target for them. If he jumped up, it would be as his opponents had predicted. He would be trapped in between the forcefield shields if he continued to stay here. So, he only could go up as his only means of escape. There was a good chance that they were already lying in wait to ambush him though.

The ideal option was to defeat one of the four people surrounding him. After that, he could quickly take more of them out. However, they were closing in on him. They were resolved of their death and would do anything to trap him, so, it was impossible for Akira's 2 LEO multi rifles to eliminate them in time.

At this rate, it would be the end of him. Akira knew that and quickly released his grips on his 2 LEO multi rifles. In a high-speed battle, letting go of his rifles like that was nothing more than a suicidal move. The enemies who saw that could not comprehend what he was trying to do.

But right at the next moment, Akira quickly swung his blade with the full might of his arms.

Akira used his forcefield armour to create a temporary powerful footing under him. It was so strong that the platform became visible. Akira then

used it as a pivot to make a full spin. Using the full might of his augmented suit, he swung the blade in his hands.

The blade released its maximum power for its anti-forcefield armour. But even so, it was still not enough to completely shatter the forcefield shields. If they were that fragile, his LEO rifles would have been enough to destroy them.

However, Akira compensated for the lack of power with the physical strength enhancement of his augmented suit. Instead of cutting, he swung the blade toward the four forcefield shields with everything he could muster.

The light shields were shattered to pieces. The people behind them were blown to smithereens. But that still did not mean Akira was safe. Just like the now decimated maids and the butlers that had the resolve to throw away their lives, the others also had the same resolve. After executing such an extreme move, Akira turned slightly sluggish for a moment. Naturally, his enemies took that opportunity to start simultaneously shooting at him, without caring even if they hit their allies.

Akira understood that he could not evade them on his own. So, he turned his attention to something else that might help him. The 2 LEO rifles that he had let go, released shots at the same time his enemies started shooting. Akira had turned off their recoil compensator as they released a non-stop barrage. The kickback threw rifles back and were sent flying toward him.

Akira did not try to evade them and just took the hit. The rifles threw his body away from where his enemies were targeting. Immediately after, countless bullets zoomed past where Akira was a moment ago.

Akira could not predict where he was sent flying after his rifles hit him. Likewise, his enemies also had trouble predicting where he would land.

Using that opening, Akira quickly switched to his remaining rifles and fixed his stance before continuing the high-speed battle just like before. Although the number of opponents had no doubt decreased, their killing intent had

not. These people, who were willing to sacrifice everything to take him down, did not slow down at all as they kept pursuing Akira for his life.

—

Pamela was filled with shock when she arrived. In front of her, Akira was kneeling on the ground, while the rest were lying dead around him.

Akira tried to push himself up with the help of his blade. But the blade could not stand the stress and broke to pieces. Although he stumbled over, he did not fall. He then placed the blade, which was now nothing but a handle, back into his pocket and stood up straight. In the middle of all that, he had his sight fixed on Pamela.

Akira's augmented suit did not have much energy left. The medicines that he had stock inside his augmented suit had already run out. The high-speed combat had put his body under immense stress. Under normal circumstances, it would have crushed his bones and flesh into a liquid mess. He was only able to maintain his body thanks to the expensive medicines that he had been using.

The time compression and the reality manipulation left his head banging with severe pain. It was screaming at him, that he was at his limit. It would not be strange for him to faint anytime, but the dark emotion welling inside him prevented him from fainting. And that dark emotion was expressed extremely well in his tone.

"…Where is she?"

Pamela tried to hide her vigilance toward Akira as she exasperatedly looked at him, and completely ignored his question.

"I did not expect you to be still alive. To think that you've pretty much killed everyone… It was the right decision to evacuate Milady first. Though, I didn't expect it to end up like this and confirm it with my own eyes. After all that, it seems that you're close to your limit already. So, what are you planning to do next? If you change your mind here and let us have the card, I don't mind withdrawing now, you know?"

Akira also completely ignored what Pamela said.

“You still refuse, huh… You’re really stubborn.”

After that, a short silence waded in. Akira was only standing there in silence in order to have as much time to recover as possible. He had no idea why his opponent had not started the fight yet. However, if he could buy more time, he was happy to oblige.

Pamela also only stood there in silence. She was buying more time for Chloe to get away as far as possible from them. With the rest of Chloe’s men in the area essentially dead, it confirmed that Akira was way stronger than she had predicted. It hadn’t been long since Chloe evacuated. Akira might defeat her too and chase after Chloe. Thus, Pamela wanted to buy time so that Chloe could get away as far as possible from this place. So, for now, she was allowing Akira to recover.

It was Pamela who was the one to decide when she had enough.

“It seems that you will not change your mind no matter what. In that case, I will need you dead. Milady has ordered us to kill you, so we will accomplish that without fail. It would be bad to keep Milady waiting for the after-report, after all.”

Akira, who wanted to have a bit more time to recover, finally opened his mouth.

“Didn’t you say that you’ll leave if I give you the card? Was it a lie because of your master’s order?”

“No, that was out of my own volition. And, I did not lie, you know? If you say that you are willing to give it to us, we will leave. It is indeed regrettable that everyone failed in their mission. Though, that only means they are allowing me to inherit this opportunity to make up for their failure.”

“What do you mean?”

“This is what I mean.”

Pamela smiled and said.

“Wake up.”

With that order, Chloe’s men started to rise. No matter whether they were still alive or not, all of them rose up. Even those who lost their arms or even their head. So long as they had their legs, they stood up. Seeing that, even Akira could not hide his surprise.

“Everyone here is so earnest, aren’t they? I’m really proud of them.”

Chloe’s men were equipped so that they could fight to their very last. Whether it was through a remotely controllable powered suit or control device. They were made such that someone else could control their body even when they lost consciousness.

These people had given the control rights of their bodies to their superiors. Of course, it was for the best if they could control their own body, but in case they could no longer do so, their superiors would be able to control them. Be it too fatigued to move till outright death, their bodies would still be utilized.

Since Pamela was the superior of the maids, she normally would only be able to control the maids, but since Latis lent his rights to her, she could currently control the butlers as well. Therefore, there were quite a lot of bodies she was controlling.

Akira had no wish to kill any of them when they fought. In the first place, Akira’s main objective was to render them unable to fight. Killing them was his second priority. After all, he did not have the leeway to go around and finished off those who were already gravely injured. Nor did he have the chance to destroy all of their limbs to make sure that they would not be able to move.

“To be honest, I might not be able to win against you if I fight you alone. I don’t believe I am strong enough to take you on. But this is fine, everyone

is here to help me."

Although she had the privilege to freely control others' bodies, it was normally a difficult feat to pull off. Such skill needed comprehensive training, after all.

But Pamela was able to control multiple bodies. It was exactly because of this that she was assigned as Chloe's right hand.

"Well then, you can die now."

The headless bodies readied their rifles. But they suddenly stopped. That was because their controller, Pamela, was confused by Akira's reaction.

Akira was smiling mockingly.

Akira had no idea why the corpses started moving again, but that did not matter to him.

"…Even that guy had his head blown off and returned back alive. When I judged him to no longer pose a threat to me, he survived. I see, so you would go that far to kill me, huh? To move again even after I killed you. I see, fine, fine then. I get it. I guess dying is no longer enough, huh?"

Akira's smile vanished. What was left, was only the dark emotion that filled his face.

"I'll tear you to pieces."

With that sentence, Akira started to make his move. Pamela also immediately responded accordingly.

Akira's dark emotion fuelled his already exhausted body, to the point he was able to fight just like before. He did not even notice that Alpha was nowhere to be found ever since the fight had started.

Silavin: My god!! This chapter is so long and it is a battle chapter…

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Rebuild World – Chapter 261, Not Bad Luck

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Result-wise, Pamela made the wrong decision.

Her opponent was basically already a walking dead. She did not have to rush and could just take her time to kill him. That was what she thought when she was looking at Akira, who was tenaciously surviving the battle. Many of her risen allies were gravely injured. If it was only a matter of time before she could kill him, it was best to minimize the damage. With that in mind, in order to recover the gravely wounded, she ordered them to stand further back while the ones in the front were those who were already dead.

This was when she found something strange about Akira.

Akira did not seem to be discouraged at all. Normally, in this kind of situation, a person would get extremely reckless. Since they had no hope left, they would try to take as many people down as possible. It would be a suicidal rush, which was not what Akira was currently doing.

[He must be waiting for something.] She thought that it was because he was trying to buy time, but that did not seem to be the case at all. Akira did not seem to be waiting for reinforcement. As a matter of fact, he was fighting like a mad man, taking any opportunity of victory, trying to overcome this

battle with only his own strength. That was what Pamela judged watching Akira, who was close to the precipice of death, fight.

Seeing that he was still alive when she had arrived, showed that Akira was far stronger than she had thought. The cautiousness that came up from that caused her to believe that he had another trump card in hand. A trump card that could turn the tide the moment she was close to victory. This possibility caused her to approach the issue even more cautiously.

In the end, Pamela decided to take a slow and careful approach to finish him off. With enough time, Pamela would have a sure-fire way to eliminate him.

The dead corpses continued their assault. Those who had lost multiple parts of their bodies, even their heads, aimed their rifles at him and started shooting. Meanwhile, some tried to cut Akira down with their blades. As expected, they were way weaker than when they were still alive. Nonetheless, with their numbers, they were still at least able to put Akira under pressure.

Although they were moving as if they did not care if they died or not while they were still alive, in the end, it was a decision that they made to prioritize their objective. Of course, if they could win without killing anyone, then they would do that. Back then, there were still some hesitations on the effectiveness of their move compared to the risk they took on. Even if they were ready to put down their lives, they still wanted it to be utilized to its utmost, which created a gap.

However, with Pamela in control, they had completely thrown away that reservation and the difference from that was big. Thanks to that, they were able to compensate for the difference in their diminished fighting strength.

Akira was doing all he could to face that assault. He swung his LEO multi-rifle to sweep across his surroundings. He kept evading the bullets while destroying his opponents. But there was no question that he was getting increasingly cornered.

Akira did not show any sign of slowing down. Even the thought of giving up had completely vanished from his mind. If his fighting power could be solely determined by his willpower, he would not have that hard a time fighting against them in the first place.

In the middle of the chaotic battle, Pamela was waiting for an opening to shoot Akira. If he avoided her shot, he would not be able to evade the others' bullets.

Suddenly, Akira's augmented suit made contact with the enemy's blade, releasing a flash of light. This marked his energy cell getting critically damaged.

Due to its low energy reserves, his augmented suit moves started to become duller. As he had to avoid the opponent's blade that was coming at him like a suicidal rampage in his dulled augmented suit, Akira had to jump away. At that moment, just as Pamela had predicted, she sniped at him, and the bullet struck him.

Akira was blown away by the bullet. He flew horizontally like a rag-doll and bounced a few times on the ground before landing hard on a collection of rubble.

But even so, he was still alive. The moment he understood that he could not avoid the bullet, he used all the remaining energy to receive that shot. Although he did not lose his life, he lost all his ability to fight. His augmented suit went inactive, due to the damage on his body, it would not even listen to his command to move.

Pamela finally let out a sigh of relief. She then aimed her rifle at Akira's head and declared.

"Finally. Don't worry, I won't even tell you to stand up first. I will also at least let Milady know how hard you fought."

The others also aimed their rifles at him. Just one shot would be enough to finish him off. If they started firing, there would not even be a trace of him left.

“Now then, good night.”

The moment Pamela was about to pull the trigger, her vision was suddenly filled with white light.

The source of that white light was the AF anti-material cannon on Akira’s bike. Since it was shot from far away and its spread was maximized, it completely filled the area in blinding light.

It enveloped both Akira and the rest of his opponents. But Pamela and her allies quickly activated their forcefield shields to defend themselves. Thanks to that, they were spared.

As for Akira, the light was blocked by the rubble and wreckage between the cannon and him. Naturally, this was not out of luck, it was a carefully calculated shoot made so that it would not injure him.

The bike kept shooting its AF anti-material rifle toward Akira while heading straight at him. The moment Pamela noticed that it was nothing but Akira trying to buy time for himself, the bike had already reached its target.

Right at that moment, Akira used all the might he could muster to get onto the bike. At the same time, the bike quickly accelerated and left the area.

Of course, they quickly started shooting at Akira, trying to hit him. With their augmented suits, if they focused on racing after Akira, they would be able to catch up to him.

However, the bike was already set to use its full power to fly off with maximum acceleration. Moreover, the LEO multi-rifles on its arms, as well as its AF anti-material cannon were used to hold them back.

The area was filled with lasers and bullets. The rubble evaporated and exploded, filling the area with pieces of debris. The destruction to the area was severe. As expected of the annihilation ray that worked even against the powered suits that attacked the inter-city transport.

However, Pamela and the others were fine. Those who were already dead, quickly stepped forward to create layers of forcefield shield, sparing Pamela and those who were still partially alive.

Even so, Pamela was knitting her eyebrows. The bike had left at max speed through the clear sky. It was already way outside her reach.

“…What a blunder! He got away!”

Pamela was somehow able to hold back her frustration by reminding herself of her duty to her master. She then immediately called Latis to let Chloe know the result.

Due to Pamela being too careful, she had failed to kill him. If she had thrown away caution and prioritized killing Akira, she would have been able to accomplish it.

Even in that hopeless situation, Akira was tenaciously scouring for an opportunity to win, even now. That abnormal tenacity caused Pamela to be careful, which in turn caused her to make such a major blunder.

Determination and willpower alone could not win a fight, but those things allowed him to turn the tide from a hopeless situation.

＿*＿*＿*＿

Akira was clinging to his bike as it flew through the sky. In his still hazy mind, he could hear Alpha’s voice from his bike.

“Akira! Hold on tight! I don’t have the leeway to pick you up if you fall!!”

“…Alpha? I know, but… wait, where are you…?”

“We need to get away from here as soon as possible first! Make sure to hold on!!”

It was as if Alpha could not hear him at all and Akira found that strange.

[My telepathy can’t reach her? No, this is…]

Now that he had already gotten away from the battle, and could hear Alpha again, Akira regained some of his cool. He finally noticed that his connection to Alpha had been cut off.

“Right… But my augmented suit has already run out of energy…”

“As long as you’re on the bike, it’ll charge your augmented suit through a wireless connection. We modified it so that it can do that, remember? Your augmented suit current can only utilize minimum power, and since I’m not connected to you right now, I can’t control your augmented suit! So, make sure not to faint!”

“…Roger that…”

Inside his hazed mind, close to fainting, Akira somehow managed to stay awake and kept clinging onto the bike. The augmented suit had already charged enough to function in casual mode. So, he was able to move his body, though he hardly had the strength to move his body on his own.

The bike kept going on just like that and left the ruin. Eventually, Alpha returned back to Akira’s vision.

“Alright. We’ve connected again. Just leave the rest to me.”

“…Alright.”

Akira said so in relief and finally lost consciousness.

After that, his body still continued to move.

He pulled out a huge amount of medicine and took them to accelerate the healing of his dying body. Thanks to that, the healing was pretty fast. The healing nanomachines coursed through his body and were fixing his body on the cellular level. His body, which could no longer move without his augmented suit just a moment ago, got fixed. At least, enough for him to make some light movements after a few seconds.

Once he managed to recover at a certain point, he pulled out an energy pack from his bike and reloaded it into his augmented suit. He did the same for

his rifles' magazines as well.

Alpha was able to have full control of Akira's body, but it was limited to only emergency cases. Naturally, being on the verge of death was one such case.

Akira finally woke up and found himself inside one of the dilapidated buildings inside an old-world ruin. His body had already quickly recovered. He jumped up and scanned the area by pure reflex. Eventually, his eyes discovered Alpha, who was furiously looking at him.

"Akira, good morning!"

"…Uh, A-Alpha, morning!"

Akira winced back from her expression and tried to remember what happened before he lost consciousness. Once he realized that he had survived with his life intact, Akira let out a sigh of relief. And once again, he found himself under Alpha's sharp gaze.

"It seems that your body is alright now. So then, first of all, let's share information."

"A-alright."

Although he basically lost consciousness, it still gave him a chance to rest, enough for his mind to recover. Moreover, he also had completely calmed down. Which meant that he was receiving the full brunt of the pressure from Alpha.

Alpha started her explanation first.

Alpha lost contact with Akira when Chloe suddenly laughed during their negotiation. Of course, she tried to restore the connection right away. But she failed. Due to the same kind of jamming effect, she was completely shut off from the old-world domain.

So, Alpha immediately tried all kinds of things that she could think of to reconnect with Akira. She was eventually able to connect to Akira's bike,

not through the old-world domain. However, by the time she did that, she found Akira inching toward death.

The bike also received some damage from stray bullets. However, thanks to its automatic forcefield armour, it was still intact. Just like how the bike could reroute its energy tank to the augmented suit, it was rerouted to strengthen its forcefield armour.

As a matter of fact, due to the modification, she had installed to fight against hacking, the security on the bike was abnormally strong. Thus, taking control through the normal connection took a lot of time. After that, due to the bad connection, although she could not control the bike well, she managed to reach Akira and rescue him.

After Akira listened to her explanation, Akira nodded and then said.

“I see, thanks for the help. But why did our connection get cut off?”

“I have no idea, though, I can make a number of guesses.”

Since Akira wanted to hear them despite being only guesses, Alpha once again reminded him that it was nothing but guesses.

First guess: it was because of Chloe. To keep the content of their negotiation secret, it was completely understandable for them to use extra potent, thick jamming smoke. After all, if negotiations broke down and it turned into a fight, as long as no one knew the details of what had happened, she could come up with all kinds of excuses.

Deadman tells no tale. If they could kill Akira and erase the information, both records of the negotiation and the issue with the ownership of the card would all be erased. The ones who survived could claim without dispute that Akira was the one who attacked them first. They had no other choice but to fight back. It was not a strange ending for those who picked a fight against a large company. That would explain why they would use jamming smoke to cover the area.

“I see. But I thought that jamming smoke does not work on old-world domain connection?”

“Those had their effect weakened. With the correct device, you could even block old-world connection. High-ranking Hunters tend to have communication devices that use the old-world domain connections. That is why they usually use jamming smoke that can even block off old-world connections, just to be safe. Well, it could also be that they are in a position where they can afford to use them. It could also be that they’re using that kind of equipment all the time to fight the monsters further to the east since those monsters are also using the old-world domain connection.”

Even after he got away from the area in the middle of the battle, it still was jammed. For that, Alpha also had a guess. The scale of the battle caused the ruin to get alerted. It identified the area the battle had taken place and jammed any form of connection to prevent any more hostile actions.

“Why did that not happen in the battle against those huge, powered suits? Why did it happen this time? Is it because we cause more destruction? Or is there another reason? Everything is still not clear…”

Although Alpha shared her thoughts, it was not like Akira was completely satisfied with them. However, at least, he understood that it was not like Alpha knew everything. So, he decided to keep that question to himself for another time.

“Well… even if we know the real reason, it is not like we can do anything about it, right? Let’s just put it up as bad luck.”

“We might have another option.”

“Eh?”

Akira tilted his head in confusion, Alpha once again looked at him with a sharp gaze.

“That was not fine for me at all. Anyways, I’ve finished telling you my situation, can you tell me yours? After we lost connection, what happened

to you?”

“Well, actually…”

In reality, Akira basically blew his fuse and kicked negotiations off the table. As expected, he could not just say so to Alpha. As he was thinking about how to explain, Alpha suddenly interjected.

“Let me tell you this beforehand, I can cross-check what you say with the data from your information terminal, so don’t even try to lie.”

“Then, I don’t even need to explain anything, no…?”

“Nope, I can only gather information about what you did, not why you did it. So, explain everything to me.”

Seeing Alpha look at him with such intense eyes, Akira ended up confessing everything, including his feelings during that time.

After Akira finished his explanation, Alpha heaved a huge sigh.

“Akira, do you know what your biggest mistake was?”

Akira understood that he could safely avoid the battle if he just gave up his pride and just gave her the card. But pride was something that one would fight for even to death.

Even so, he understood that it was his fault for completely tossing aside Alpha’s request right when he was so close to finally being able to work on her request.

The conflict between the pride and the guilt inside his mind caused Akira to silence himself. Seeing that, Alpha heaved another huge sigh.

“It seems like you don’t understand, so let me tell you.”

Akira frowned, he did not want to hear it. He did not want to be told that it was a mistake to stick to his pride. His expression started to be coloured by dark emotion that was sealed long ago, deep inside him. The bigger the gap

between his past self and his current self, the darker, deeper, and vaster that emotion was. It was slowly devouring him.

Alpha then continued with a serious face.

“Your first move should have been to try to recover your connection to me. To think that you got that emotional. You did not even notice that you lost your connection. As expected, that’s your biggest mistake. No matter how angry you are, you need to keep a part of you calm, no matter what.”

Akira, who thought that he would get scolded for ‘flipping the table’, was taken aback by what he had heard. In response, Alpha made a rather exaggerated frustrated gesture.

“Back in Kuzusuhara ruin, you quickly decided to desperately find a way to recover our connection, right? I thought that you would do that as well this time, but to think that you didn’t even notice we lost connection and you continued fighting alone. I know that you were completely enraged, but that’s just a big no-no. You should get a better grip on yourself, you know? Let me at least ask you this. It’s not that you did not notice but you just ignored it, right? Or don’t tell me. You thought you could handle it just fine without my support?”

Akira flusteredly shook his head.

“Eh? No no no, of course not!”

Seeing Akira respond in such a manner, Alpha’s mood slightly recovered.

“That’s good to hear. That’s why, your first move should have been to try to recover your connection. You got it?”

“O-Okay.”

Akira gave a firm nod. Seeing that, Alpha smiled, satisfied. She gently advised him, who still seemed rather troubled.

“If you want to kill that Chloe girl, I don’t really mind. I’m willing to give you my support as well. Just make sure not to try and do it on your own,

okay? If you want to do it on your own, make sure to do it only when there's no other option, just like those battles back in Kuzusuhara ruin, okay?"

"Y-yeah."

"Good answer."

Alpha once again smiled with satisfaction. Akira, who still seemed confused, paused for a bit. It was as if he was trying to digest what they were talking about just now, after that, he carefully asked Alpha a question.

"…Alpha, uh, are you really okay with it?"

When he was about to save Elena and Sara in Kuzusuhara ruin, or when he was about to get off the truck alone and go alone on a bike, and when he was about to jump into Ezont Family's base to kill Alna, Alpha stopped him.

That was why he thought that Alpha would stop him this time as well. Causing unnecessary trouble would only make things more difficult for him. Furthermore, he was extremely close to being able to work on Alpha's request. He expected Alpha to give him a strict scolding this time, but her reply was completely outside the realm of his expectations.

Akira was still confused so Alpha smiled bitterly and then said to him.

"If you ask me whether it was okay or not, I will say that it was not okay. Not one bit. However, I know you won't listen to me at all. I've been with you long enough to at least know that much. That's why, it's fine. Moreover, my support is just an upfront payment. Considering how that weak Akira had worked so hard and became this strong, I guess it's fine to make a compromise as a reward."

Akira seemed surprised by how lightly Alpha was taking it. He replaced it with a light smile, which helped to make him calmer.

"…I see, well, I'm sorry but I'll be counting on your support."

“Just leave it to me. I will show you just how great it is to have my support.”

Alpha replied with her usual confidence filled voice.

Akira, who had finished his break, returned to Mihazono ruin to retrieve the rifles that he had let go during the battle. The jamming had already dissipated, so with the help of Alpha, he was quickly able to find his rifles.

Akira brought 4 LEO multi-rifles together with him before the battle. He lost two in order to avoid getting shot. There were another two, still perfectly fine, which were on the arm of his bike, which was used while he escaped. After picking up all four, only one was still okay.

Two of his rifles were completely wrecked, with no possibility to fix them. Since they were protected by forcefield armour, once it was gone, those rifles were easy to break. Pamela did very well to make sure that they were not salvageable.

Seeing the destroyed rifles on the ground, Akira let out a huge sigh.

“They were so expensive…”

“If you had prioritized recovering your connection to me, this would not have happened, you know? It did cost you quite a lot, didn’t it?”

“I know, I know.”

Alpha was stating that in a teasing manner, and Akira smiled bitterly in response. His mood had at least recovered enough to respond in such a manner.

“So then, what do you plan to do next? Even if you’re planning to look for her, I recommend you search for a hint about her location first. If she ran further to the east, I hope we won’t be chasing after her. The monsters there are too strong even for your current equipment, you know?”

“I know that, but…”

As expected, Akira also did not like the idea of going around attacking Lion Steel's facilities one by one. Moreover, it would be a huge waste of time if he did not make sure that there was a good chance Chloe was there.

As Akira was giving a long hum while looking at his options on how to find Chloe, his face suddenly perked up as if he came up with something.

"Alright, I guess I'll ask her first."

Akira hopped onto his bike and paced it toward the person that he had in mind. The information-gathering device that was continuously scanning his surroundings showed 2 blips that came out from the nearby Hunter Office, they were Carol and Viola.

__*__*__*__

Carol, Viola, and Babalod looked around and were surprised by what they saw. The Hunter Office was completely fine since it was protected by forcefield armour, but most of the buildings around it were decimated.

After the battle outside had calmed down, the Hunters inside the Hunter Office came out to search the area as a part of their emergency request. They were to make sure that the area was safe. Thanks to that, they could confirm that the battle had ended. However, they could not confirm if the reason for that battle was completely over. The reason why Carol and Viola came out rather late was because they did not take the emergency request and waited for the broadcast to announce that it was safe.

Carol looked around with a worried look. Akira, who should have been waiting for her outside, was unreachable. Either he got involved in that battle or Akira was the reason for that battle. A lot of things were going through her mind. Whether he was still alive, or already dead and much more…

"Viola, I want to ask for your help. Can you look for Akira?"

"Sure… Though, it seems that he's at least alive and kicking."

Carol looked at Viola in confusion, how exactly did Viola know without investigating first? However, when Carol looked in the direction where Viola was looking, she immediately knew the reason why. Akira was on his bike, heading toward them.

Akira then parked his bike next to them and hopped off.

“Akira, you’re alright.”

“Yeah, somehow.”

Seeing Carol smiling happily knowing that he was fine, Akira looked worriedly as he apologized.

“Carol, I’m sorry, but I need to quit the job you gave me. A few things happened and I’m rather busy right now.”

“A few? What’s going on?”

“Sorry, can we put it aside for later? I also don’t know exactly know what’s going on.”

Akira only said so and shifted his attention to Viola. He then frowned as he was thinking about how to ask his question. When he had decided, he once again looked at her. This time, with a deadpan expression, he pointed his muzzle at her.

“I’ll be straight, is this your doing?”

Viola was going to answer that question with her usual smile.

“Even if you ask, that’s just so out of the blue, what exactly are you…”

Akira’s muzzle was directed right on top of her temple to shut her up.

“Let me tell you this, right now, I’m not in the best of moods. So, give me an answer, straight, honest, clear and concise. I’ll ask you again. Is this your doing?”

If she did not give a straight answer, she would be dead. If she said yes, she would be dead. If she did not say anything, she would be dead. There was no hesitation, and no doubt this time. Viola at least already knew that much. To hide her anxiety, something that she could not hold back, she made a stern look and turned to Babalod.

Akira followed that and looked at Babalod too. As both Viola and Akira were looking at him, Babalod did not say anything and just shook his head.

Akira returned his gaze to Viola. It was a gaze warning her that she had run out of time. Viola used every cell in her brain to analyze all the information that she had and conveyed her conclusion in one word.

“No.”

Akira still did not lower his rifle and asked Alpha.

“Alpha.”

“Leaving aside whether it is really the truth or not, she is not lying.”

“Wait! So, you can tell the truth while also lying?”

“The definition would be different from one person to another depending on their principles and moral codes. That’s why there are no absolutely correct answers. I’m sure she believes that, at least, she had enough reason to convince herself that it was not her fault. Judging from that point of view, she was not lying. Even if we don’t come to the same conclusion from our point of view.”

“Ahh, I see.”

Akira hesitated, but he eventually decided to lower his rifle. Viola let out a huge sigh of relief.

“If it’s not your doing, I have something I want to ask you. I’m looking for Chloe right now. If I’m not mistaken, she’s affiliated with the Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward Branch. You’re a good info broker, right? Look for her.”

Viola tried to return back to her usual attitude. Even if it was only on her lips, she twisted out a smile.

“Oh, a request for a job then? I don’t mind looking for her, but if it’s for some kind of negotiation, you can let me take care of that part as well, you know? So, what do you plan to do after finding her?”

“I’m going to kill her.”

That short sentence was filled with determination. The others there winced back. Even Viola, who had often faced suffocating pressure of killing intent during negotiations, and even Babalod, who was a high-ranking Hunter, both inadvertently winced back in the face of Akira’s strong emotion that they knew was not directed at them.

“So then, can you find her?”

Viola automatically tried to act normal and replied.

“I already know about her. She’s from the same house as the founder of the Lion Steel company. Were you aware of this when you said you’re going to kill her?”

“So, does that mean that you’re not going to help?”

Akira’s gaze toward Viola changed ever so slightly. It was as if he was only trying to discern if she was an enemy or not. Viola, who noticed it, immediately gave her answer.

“What I am saying is that it won’t be cheap. I am an information broker. So, it’s not like I can just give away information for free, it will be pretty expensive. It’s not cheap trying to collect information. Especially when it comes to important people like her. That is why, it’ll cost at least a few dozen billion Aurum, depending on the case, it might even be more expensive. I don’t mean to offend you, but can you pay for it?”

After Viola told him that it was only a matter of money, Akira’s gaze returned back to neutral. He then titled his head and said.

“T-that’s pretty expensive… But well, that does make sense to be that expensive, I guess.”

Considering that it was a piece of information to help him kill someone, a person who had personal maids and butlers protecting her, it would not be strange for it to be that expensive. But Akira did not have the funds. So he started to hum, pondering what else he could do instead.

On the other hand, Viola sighed in relief. She did not expect Akira would react that strongly. It was true that depending on the way he interpreted it, it might sound as if she was telling him that it might be better not to try to kill Chloe.

That was why she flusteredly tried to emphasize that she was talking about the price. If it was a matter of money, she thought that Akira would not show any hostility, and thankfully, her guess was correct.

But unfortunately, it was unclear whether it completely saved her or not. Akira’s face then lit up as if he just thought of an idea.

“In that case, let’s do this. If you give me information about Chloe, depending on how valuable it is, I will consider letting you live as beneficial. Unfortunately, I can’t really say how much that would be if converted into money, so you can just give me enough information that you think is worth the same amount of money as that. So, what do you think?”

Unlike Akira, who was obviously showing the sign of willingness to negotiate, Viola knitted her eyebrows in deep worry.

During the battle in the slums of Kugamayama city, Viola had caused Akira trouble and was once killed by him. After that, based on her deal with Akira, she ended up having to help Sheryl’s gang.

That deal caused Sheryl’s gang to greatly develop with her help. Moreover, Viola had also solidified her position inside the gang. Basically, the gang would be in trouble without her around. Since then, time passed and it had become vague if she had fulfilled her part of the bargain or not.

But Akira casually brought that up. Even after helping Sheryl's gang that much, it did not seem to be enough from Akira's point of view. Viola was able to confirm it, though to her, this was not good news.

"…What if I say no to that? Are you going to kill me?"

"Not really. I just thought that I might be able to use it in place of money. If you don't accept it, you can just say no. I won't force you."

"I-I see."

Seeing Akira reply so calmly, Viola sighed. Half in relief that the negotiation proceeded as she had planned. So, she then continued to confirm the other half thing that worried her.

"By the way, since you brought this up, does that mean that you're still thinking of killing me? If I may, can you give me a precise explanation as to why?"

"Even if you ask me, well, if something bad happens? It's not like I've decided on the specifics. Basically, if something comes up and I want to kill you, then I will. If I have to mention a particular example, then if Sheryl asks me to, I guess."

"I-I see. Just to let you know though, I'm well included in the management of Sheryl's gang, the gang would basically crumble without me, you know?"

"So?"

Viola's smile distorted with anxiety. If it had been a short answer, which was akin to a threat, she had thought up ways to counter it. Such threats were a regular thing in many of the negotiations that she had faced, so she already had a list of ways to handle them.

But this time, it was a pure question from Akira. That told her that Akira basically had no idea how that had anything to do with not shooting her in

the head. For him, it did not give him any reason not to kill her. It was as if that was not worth even a dime, especially when negotiating for her life.

Akira had said that he would not kill her even if she said no. That only meant that he would not kill her because she refused. However, the moment she refused, Akira could think that it was meaningless to let her live and just outright killed her right this instant. Viola had at least predicted that much. Including the fact that he was most likely unaware that he was issuing a threat.

Viola basically had no other choice but to compromise after receiving Akira's unintentional threat.

"… I basically just need to find where Chloe is, right? After that, we're even, right?"

"That depends on what information you can give me. If it's useful, then yes. That's just how people decide on the value of information, no?"

For Akira, it was a good thing that he had no need to pay with money and would be able to get highly valuable information.

But for Viola, it also doubled as a threat. To her, it was as if Akira would kill her if she gave him useless information. She could not help but frown in face of such a nasty threat and heaved a huge sigh. She then took out her information terminal and pulled out a certain information.

"There's a new Lion Steel facility inside Higaraka residence ruin. There's a good chance that she's there."

"Alright, well then, I'm in a hurry here."

Akira only said that much as he hopped back onto his bike. But before he left, Viola frowned and asked him a question.

"Are we even now?"

"Pray that I can find Chloe there."

Basically, it meant that they were not even at the moment. Viola's frown only got worse.

That was when Carol suddenly interjected.

"Wait for a sec, Akira! Are you going now!? Can you at least tell me why you no longer can't take the bodyguard request?"

"I'm going to kill Chloe right now and I want to prioritize that. And, it would be stupid for the bodyguard to get his client into more trouble, no?"

"What I'm asking is why it has suddenly turned to this?!"

"Sorry, I don't know for sure myself. If you're interested, you can try asking Viola. I don't really care about the reason. I might investigate that part after I kill Chloe and if I'm in the mood. Later then."

Akira only said as much and accelerated off.

Carol turned at Viola with an extremely bitter expression.

"Viola, can you help me find out what's going on with Akira? This one is a rush request."

Viola somehow managed to return back to her usual self and teasingly said to Carol.

"It would be at a special price, you know?"

Seeing how Viola was acting, Carol also returned to her usual foxy attitude.

"If you give me a good discount, I'll tell Akira that it was a good thing he'd spared you."

"Geez, it can't be helped then."

Babalod glanced at the two girls smiling at each other with their usual evil smile and heaved a heavy sigh. He was already expecting to be dragged into whatever problem they were brewing.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 262, Stacking Bets

Index

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Pamela returned to the Lion Steel company's facility and went to face Chloe with a pained expression.

Chloe was only listening to Pamela's after-report without saying a word. She was not blaming Pamela for the failure nor trying to cheer her up. This caused Pamela to knit her brows.

After Chloe listened to her report without a change in expression, she then spoke, without a bit of displeasure in her tone.

"That just means we have underestimated his fighting capability. Because of that, you were not able to kill him like you stated."

The reason why Chloe did what she did back in Mihazono ruin was because she believed Pamela's words. That Pamela could kill Akira. Had Pamela said that Akira would only slaughter them, Chloe would not have even thought of meeting him. Her actions were influenced by the words of the people around her.

There was no trace of fault in Chloe's gaze toward Pamela. That was the reason why Pamela was so worried. If Chloe believes that she had lost her

ability to judge, and had lost her value, then it was only a matter of time before she got laid off.

That was exactly why Pamela then spoke up with a serious expression.

“Not at all. It was because we were trying to take our time to carefully finish him. Unbeknown to us, during that time, he was thinking of escaping. He still had his bike, which was still functional. We were caught off guard because of that. Of course, this does not change the fact that we failed. But I will not take back my words that we can kill him.”

“I see…”

Chloe only said as much and returned to silence.

Pamela stood there, frozen, with a stern look on her face. Pamela was not sure whether Chloe forgave her or not. She was trying to calm the raging anxiety in her chest.

“Well, it doesn’t really matter. You should step back, whether to shoot him or to support the fight to kill him, you should get your equipment ready. I will give you your orders later.”

“Understood.”

Pamela sighed in relief, at least, she had not been abandoned. She then gracefully bowed and left the room with Latis.

Once Chloe was left alone, she then mumbled.

“So, we failed in trying to kill him, huh…”

If they successfully killed Akira, then that would be great. But, if they failed, then it only meant that she would need to throw more into the pot she bet on. As Chloe thought so, her smile deepened.

Winning this bet was not enough. Chloe needed a jackpot. She had to make it such that all her past mistakes became a bridge towards success. She had to raise the stakes as high as she could, make the odds be in her favour and

bet everything she had. Finally, all she needed to do was win. She had to completely throw the word ‘caution’ out the window. What she sought was a victory that granted her everything.

Suddenly, a call reached Chloe’s information terminal. When she checked it, it was from the Lion Steel company’s security department. They detected someone was trying to pin down her location.

Chloe thought of a plan with new information at hand. She smiled bewitchingly as if she had found what she was looking for.

Latis walked through the facility’s hallway with Pamela by his side. He suddenly threw a question to her with a stern expression.

“So, how much of what you said should I take seriously?”

Pamela threw a sharp glance at Latis.

“Are you saying that I gave Milady a fake after-report?”

Pamela was oozing a prickling aura, indicating that this would not end well depending on Latis’ intention when he had asked that question. However, he was not perturbed at all.

“I didn’t say that. But the report has a variety of loose interpretations. I’m sure you were aware of at least that much, right?”

Pamela did not say anything, but her silence was an affirmation of Latis’ question.

“You said you won’t take back your statement, that you can kill that Hunter. You told Milady that there’s nothing to worry about, you can kill him. But you didn’t specify how you will do so the next time. Will you be able to do so with room to spare? Or will you be able to kill him only after a close shave from death? You didn’t give a more detailed explanation to Milady, but I think I already understand without you saying anything. Now that you’ve heard what I’m talking about, let me ask you this. If I take your

words seriously, then we should be able to easily kill that Hunter next time, right?”

“W-well, about that…”

Pamela stopped midway. Such a response was already an answer. Latis sighed and spoke.

“Calm down. I also understand that the situation is not good. Based on the report, if I had come with you, we should have been able to kill him. Basically, it means that by going against Milady’s order, I have also failed to kill him. If you’re going to get kicked out, then I will, without a doubt, get kicked out too.”

Depending on how Pamela took it, it sounded as if Latis was complaining. That she was also pulling him down with her because of her failure. Though Latis was speaking with a considerate tone, Pamela understood that he was saying that purely as a reassurance since he was also in the same situation as her. Thus, she managed to calm down.

“…I’m sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it. Things like this sometimes happen. He also killed my men, it’s only natural to be angry.”

Latis smiled as if he really did not mind it that much, but his smile then turned serious.

“To make sure that the sacrifices our men made do not go to waste, we need to keep moving forward. We can’t afford to fail a second time. So, let’s get back to the main topic. It’s true that we failed this time because we underestimated him. So, just how strong is he? Judging based on the data from the Hunter Office’s site, his Hunter Rank is 55. If we put some margin in, believing that his Hunter Rank doesn’t really reflect his true strength, then, 56? Or maybe 57 at most? Considering that you would take this into account and still failed, what do you think his Hunter Rank should be? Although he ran away from you, you did fight against him, after all.”

Pamela hummed with a severe look.

“…Depending on the situation, it should be around 60.”

“60!? That high!?”

Latis was extremely surprised. He did not expect that she would rate Akira that highly.

Although Hunter Rank was not a perfect representation of Hunter’s strength, it was a good estimate. Though, the higher the rank, the better that rank indicated the Hunter’s true might. That was because as they reached a high rank, more achievements were needed. It became increasingly more difficult to go up a rank higher. Because of this, Hunters of the same rank could have widely different battle prowess.

With that in consideration, a 5-rank deviation was completely abnormal. That was why Latis was flabergasted. As Latis unconsciously looked at Pamela with doubt in his eyes, she turned at him with a serious expression and stated.

“Our men are not weak. They had fought to their very end. But he essentially killed all of them even before I arrived. Although it was due to my blunder, he still got away from me. It’s well under reason to say that he is around Rank 60.”

“…You have a good point. And, next time, we wouldn’t even have the chance to surround him first before starting a fight, huh? It was a good thing that we had asked Milady for permission to use the emergency equipment.”

As Latis and Pamela arrived in front of the warehouse’s door, it opened. That warehouse housed a powerful weapon, one enough to kill a Rank 60 Hunter.

Latis and Pamela went to put on their respective equipment, and suddenly, a notice from Chloe reached them. It contained an order from her. Latis and Pamela looked at each other, confused after they checked the content of that order.

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Akira paced his bike through the roadless wasteland into Higaraka residence ruin. He was surprised to see something that was not there the last time he visited that ruin when he arrived. He stopped and looked around the ruin. As he was about to head straight to the Lion Steel facility, Alpha suddenly stopped him

“Akira, you’re going to raid a facility owned by a company this time. Since it is built in the middle of a ruin, it’s only to be expected that it’s armed. So, let’s not break-in from the front door.”

“Alright, so, what’s the plan? Shoot the AF anti-material cannon from afar? I don’t have much ammo left for that cannon, and it’s not like we can kill Chloe by randomly shooting at that building, you know?”

What he knew from Viola was only that there was a good chance Chloe was in this building. Viola did not specify where exactly she was. She might not even be there in the first place. Since it was not like he would get paid by killing her, every shot was Akira throwing away money. Now that he had substantially calmed down after reconnecting with Alpha, he was calm enough to consider the ammo expense. He did not wish to take on any more unnecessary expenses for his objective.

Normally, the moment he showed hostility toward the Lion Steel company, he would be facing trouble more worrisome than mere ammo expense. But Akira did not care about that at all.

Alpha hoped that Akira would be more worried about that part as well, but since she did not want her relationship with Akira to sour, she focused on her second-best option, which was to help him.

“Let’s leave the bike behind and sneak in using the camouflaging cloak. Then, we can find her, kill her, and escape.”

“Optical camouflage, huh? I’m pretty sure they’ll be able to find us though.”

Although Alpha's words reminded him that he had that option as well, he thought about how he saw through their camouflage. Thus, it was likely that they would be able to see through his camouflage as well. If that was indeed the case, then it was better to raid the facility on his bike.

But Alpha expressed her confidence.

"It should be no problem with my support."

"Is that so? Alright then."

Seeing Akira obediently step off his bike, Alpha released a sigh of relief. For Akira, he did not care as long as he got to kill Chloe. He did not see the whole Lion Steel company as his enemy. Even if he got discovered trying to sneak in, it would be fine as long as no one could prove that it was him. And with enough support from Alpha, there should be no problem sneaking in with Akira's current camouflaging equipment. As such, sneaking in should be a much better choice rather than barging from the front door. That was why Alpha made that suggestion to him.

But that plan turned out completely useless.

A huge armoured APC suddenly jumped out from the Lion Steel facility. It quickly went past the ruin and out to the wasteland. Akira, who had received the notification about the passing vehicle, quickly jumped right back on his bike and immediately chased after that APC.

When an APC with an important officer from a large company went out to the wasteland, it often ran while broadcasting a notice through the general communication frequency. Although it might lure monsters, they were normally well guarded and had no need to worry about monsters.

The broadcast was for the Hunters around the area. It was basically a warning. To prevent any unnecessary fights, they were advised to keep their distance from the APC. Otherwise, they would be treated as suspicious individuals. The message broadcasted included 'we will not hesitate to fire at anyone we find suspicious without warning'.

The content of that notice this time was from an officer affiliated with Lion Steel Eastern District Third Branch, Chloe. She was on the APC.

With this, Alpha's plan to sneak in and assassinate Chloe instead of breaking through the front door to avoid unnecessary battle was all in vain. Riding a high-speed bike would greatly reduce the effectiveness of the optical camouflage. There was no doubt that they would be able to notice Akira. In the first place, at this point, Akira no longer had any wish to quietly assassinate Chloe.

Alpha frowned and gave Akira the second-best option.

"Akira! Don't lose your cool this time!"

"I know!! Hm?"

Akira frowned. While his gaze was locked on the APC. The back door of the APC opened, showing Chloe standing inside. She also already noticed that Akira was chasing after her as she smiled and lightly waved at him.

Akira's expression was immediately filled with killing intent. His gaze was leaking his ominous emotion as it was locked onto his target. As if only obeying his emotion, Akira moved the AF anti-material cannon on his bike. He aimed at his target and rerouted the energy from his bike to that cannon.

"Alpha! I'll leave the finer aim and power adjustment to you!"

"Geez, didn't I tell you to keep your cool just now? Good grief, alright!"

The moment the anti-material cannon was pumped full of energy, it released a lance of light with otherworldly accuracy. Thanks to Alpha's aim and adjustment, its spread was reduced to be as narrow as possible. It turned into an intense lance of light that melted everything in its way, which raced straight toward its target.

At the same time, the APC also took a defensive stance. The forcefield shield that was installed on its highly durable armour, expanded countless

layers of fs in the trajectory of that beam. They were placed to slightly deflect the beam and had a dispersing effect to reduce its power.

Thanks to that, the beam turned into waves of light which enveloped the whole area. With its spread increased, its intensity rapidly reduced.

Because Akira temporarily rerouted all the bike's energy output to the cannon, its acceleration was temporarily stopped. Since the balancer also lost its effect for a moment, Akira was almost thrown off the bike.

As his bike skidded, Akira leaned to one side and held down the brake to rebalance his bike. Once the flashes of light died down, he then looked at the APC. On the other side, he could see Chloe completely fine as she was amusedly laughing and shaking her head.

Akira's expression became even grimmer. If a stare could kill, his stare definitely would. However, Chloe, who had some screw loose just like Akira, only laughed mockingly at his scowl. She then lightly waved her hand, turned around, and went inside the APC. After that, the back door of the APC slowly closed.

With his bike frozen in place and Akira still on top of it, he just saw the APC trailing off with his chilling gaze.

"Alpha, why didn't that one go through?"

In order to calm him down, Alpha explained to him with a serious look on her face.

"You didn't do anything wrong, it's just that they have better equipment. At least, we know that now. So, just calm down and use that information for the next exchange. The more you lose your cool, the less likely you will be able to kill her."

"…Alright."

Akira sighed and started his bike again to chase after Chloe.

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Inside the APC, Pamela had a worried look on her face as she said to Chloe, who was still smiling.

“Milady! That was dangerous! It’s true that the APC is very well reinforced. But that doesn’t guarantee that it’s impenetrable! So, please don’t do such a meaningless and dangerous thing again!”

But Chloe did not care about Pamela’s warning at all.

“Oh, it wasn’t meaningless though? We need to make sure that he had a good look at me to let him know that I am indeed in this APC. Otherwise, there’s a good chance that he would raid the facility instead, right? So that was just for precaution.”

If it was to kill Akira, staying in the facility was the better choice. Even if she decided to take shelter inside the wall of Kugamayama city, there was still no need to let Akira know of her position during the process. Pamela, who thought so, seemed confused. She did not understand what Chloe’s true intention was. However, since she wanted to avoid making any more mistakes, Pamela decided not to pursue that subject any further. She did not want to be abandoned because of incompetency,

“I originally thought that we had to go around the wasteland for a bit in order to lure him out. To think that he already knew where I was and was already this close. He’s pretty good. I guess I can understand why Pamela, you had a hard time killing him, huh?”

Pamela understood that confirming her statement would only lower her worth. Thus, she did not give a reply. She just made a solemn expression as she made her resolve. [I will not fail the next time.]

Chloe smiled and turned to Latis, who was waiting inside the APC.

“Latis, go.”

“Certainly.”

Latis gracefully took off his butler uniform, under it, he was already using a heavy augmented suit's inner. The machines around him started to move as they fixed multiple arms to Latis' heavy augmented suit. Parts that looked like pieces of small parts slowly gathered around Latis' heavy augmented suit.

He was also equipped with extra equipment. A flying device, missile pods, sabres, huge rifles loaded to an extremely long magazine belt, and many other things as well.

The heavy augmented suit was similar to a powered suit. Appearance-wise, it seemed closer to a powered suit rather than an augmented suit. However, Latis had to put it on instead of getting onto a machine. Also, ignoring the time needed to put it on, it was more or less a powerful powered suit.

The ceiling of the APC opened up. A loud sound was produced. It came from the flying device of the heavy powered suit that had taken off. Latis used a forcefield shield to protect the area around him before take-off. Due to the sheer amount of energy that was pumped into it, the forcefield shield created solidified air, which was like a glowing wall of glass. Beyond it, Latis bowed to Chloe.

"Well then, I shall now go. I shall bring back good news for Milady when I return."

But Chloe only lightly replied.

"Yeah, also, if you want to give me a good after-report, then I have one order regarding the fight, do it grandly."

"Grandly, huh?"

"Yep. It's important to kill him. But you must do it elegantly, prioritize more on making it grand. If you end up unable to kill him because of that, don't worry. That's fine as well."

"Milady, what do you mean by-"

Latis, who did not understand the intention behind her order, was about to ask another question. That was when Chloe's gaze suddenly stopped him. Chloe gazed deeply into Latis as if she was trying to look deep down inside him. Those pupils oozed out a level of authority, one fit for a family member of the original founder of the Lion Steel company. That stare allowed the insanity inside of her to take a peek inside Latis' soul. Meanwhile, it also allowed Latis to see the deep insanity within Chloe's eyes.

"Latis, are you not going to obey me again?"

The overwhelmed Latis decided to put any questions for later. At least for now.

"N-Not at all. Very well then. I shall fight him grandly."

"Now go."

"Of course!"

Latis took off into the sky.

"Pamela, keep your eyes on the surrounding, repel him if he gets too close."

"C-certainly."

Pamela also did not fully understand the intention behind Chloe's order. But she had no trouble following her order. Just like Latis, she put her questions aside for now and simply obeyed. The maids that were standing lined up on both sides of the APC followed Pamela's order and went to collect their equipment. They went to the rooftop of the APC, to their respective positions and kept their eyes on the surroundings.

Chloe sat on an already prepared seat and smiled. It was as if she was enjoying the show that was going exactly as she had planned.

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Akira, who was chasing her on his bike, noticed Latis launching out from the top of the APC.

“Powered suit? No, that is a heavy augmented suit, huh? Looks pretty strong.”

Alpha, who saw that, warned Akira with a serious tone.

“Don’t think that augmented suit is the same as the one you fought before. Assume that it’s completely on a different level.”

“I know. After all, those maids were already that strong. Judging from its appearance alone, that thing must be extremely strong. Should we use the AF anti-material cannon?”

“We don’t have that much ammo for that one, so I want to conserve it to destroy that APC if it’s possible. So, let’s start with LEO multi-rifles.”

“Roger that!”

The six LEO multi-rifles that Akira originally had were now reduced to three. He had one on his right hand while the other two were fixed on the arms of his bike.

The energy tank of the bike was filled with energy. Its power was rerouted through Akira’s augmented suit and into his LEO multi rifle. Thanks to that, it took only a few seconds for him to fully charge his C bullet. With this, he was ready to shoot the fully charged C bullet. The arm of the bike that held the other rifles had the same capability.

“Leave the fine-tuned aiming to me, Akira. You just focus on facing that headache. Although you have my support, the drawback of using compressed time perception and reality manipulation at the same time is not meagre. If necessary, this will be a good opportunity to polish up your skill too. Let’s go!”

“Yeah!!”

Akira aimed his LEO multi rifles at Latis. The rifles were already in their ready-to-shoot state. They released fully charged C-bullets with pinpoint accuracy.

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The moment Latis jumped out of the APC, he quickly confirmed Akira's location. With the help of the APC's scanners and his own information-gathering device, he was able to confirm and have his aiming system lock onto Akira, who was rapidly moving.

He thought of the next thing he needed to do. He simply needed to aim his humongous gun at him. It would be more than enough to kill him. However, before he did so, he recalled his master's order, to fight grandly. So, he decided to use another method to kill him.

"It is due to Milady's order, now, let's see you die in a grand explosion."

Multiple missiles launched from the missile pods fixed to Latis' heavy augmented suit. All the missiles took different routes before they took sharp turns and converged straight toward Akira. When they got close enough to him, the tip of their warheads broke open, releasing smaller missiles inside them.

These were cluster missiles. They were filled with smaller missiles using the same technology to create extended magazines. They housed an abnormal number of missiles; way more than they seem. Instead of breaking from the main missile and flying independently, they rained down as if to comb the area targeted by the warhead, assaulting Akira from all directions.

The next moment, mini-missiles exploded. The explosions combined into one. It created a massive blast that destroyed everything in the area. It was no doubt overkill if it was only meant to destroy a single target. A second later, the blast was accompanied by a powerful gust of wind, blowing away wreckage and rubble up into the sky.

Not even a second later, the bullets that Akira released went straight toward Latis. Their line of fire was accurate. None of them missed their target. However, they were not enough to injure him. He was protected by the powerful forcefield armour of his heavy augmented suit. The most that these bullets did was shave off a huge chunk of his energy reserves.

“A last gambit, huh? He’s a good Hunter right to the very end. As expected of a Rank 60 Hunter.”

Latis lightly complimented Akira, he had already concluded the boy to be dead. Due to the size of the explosion and the force of the shockwave, colourless mist in the area compressed temporarily, forming a thick layer. From the outside, the colourless mist looked like a translucent film that wrapped around the explosion and smoke that was raised. Those from afar would only see and feel a normal shockwave. However, that area trapped inside that condensed layer of colourless mist was burning and melting from the heat of the explosion. It was no different than an inescapable scene from hell.

Latis thought he only needed to wait for the colourless mist to disperse and for the explosion to die down before confirming and reporting back to Chloe. If he could not find anything, he could report that Akira had been blown to pieces. Either way, he was certain that he had already won.

However, his confidence was shattered, a massive light blade suddenly extended out as if to cut open through the flames and explosives. From there, Akira jumped out.

“What!?”

Latis was completely flabbergasted.

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Alpha understood that it was impossible to evade the countless mini-missiles raining down on them. Thus, she quickly took action. She gave her order to Akira. She leaned the bike on one side and the moment its tire lifted off from the ground, she accelerated the bike.

The bike that was laying on its side, continued to create forcefield armour under its tires as it spun like a spinning top. The quick spins created layers upon layers of forcefield armour.

While the bike was spinning, Akira quickly pulled out the metallic liquid blade container fixed on his bike. He pulled the handle out of the blade container and liquid metal gushed out of it. Normally, the liquid metal would harden into a thin blade. However, with Alpha's control, it turned into a wide, extremely thin blade, still covered in liquid metal. Akira then swung it, matching its timing with his spinning bike.

The force of his swing caused the liquid blade to bend like a fabric. It was then painted around with his bike as its centre. After the liquid metal was sufficiently spread, the forcefield armour helped to temporarily harden it.

Right after that, the missiles exploded and engulfed Akira in it. He was only able to survive that thanks to the multi-layered forcefield armour plates and the hardened liquid metal that enveloped him.

Of course, this should not have been enough to fully withstand the might of the explosion. However, the protective structure was arranged with Alpha's advanced calculation. It deflected and dispersed the force from the explosion. It thus greatly weakened the explosion before it reached Akira. In that short time before the blast reached them, Alpha had made numerous complex difficult calculations. This included all the effects and changes when each individual explosion compounded into one. Only then did she come up with this move.

Even so, the explosion still engulfed and hit Akira. Thankfully, those protective layers had softened the blast to the point he did not get hurt.

He used half of the remaining liquid metal that survived the explosion to form a blade, which was used to cut open the thick layer of colourless mist. Using that opening, he accelerated his bike to jump out of it.

As he jumped out from that small opening, the explosive force contained behind him made him get pushed out even quicker. A moment later, the colourless mist layer broke and crumbled into pieces. The explosion that

was compressed and held inside of it, spread out as if there was a second explosion.

After Akira escaped such a dangerous situation, he could tell that it was a close call. He then said with a frown.

“That was dangerous! Just what is with that guy!?”

Alpha looked at him with a stern expression. It was both to let Akira know how dangerous that situation was and how powerful the opponent was this time. To confirm it, she issued a warning.

“It seems that he’s using a pretty powerful heavy augmented suit. It’s strong enough to be posted in the front during the inter-city transport-escort request.”

“That strong, huh…!? Well, it indeed looks to be that strong. Though, it makes me raise the question: why didn’t he use it back then? Hmm… I guess they really just wanted to negotiate before, huh?”

To show the willingness to negotiate, it’s important to hide one’s weapons. If they were planning to kill Akira right from the start, they would have used this heavy augmented suit. Akira reflected on the situation. It was thanks to their blunder that he survived that battle. He could not help but smile with self-mockery.

“Well, thanks to that, I’m still alive right now. I guess I have at least sufficient luck needed for that, huh?”

“Akira, if you combine that small luck that you still have left with my support, you could’ve fought better, you know? Even that attack just now. You would have been dead if it was not because of my support. If you think that you have bad luck, make sure that you can compensate for it with my support. Make sure to prioritize recovering our connection.”

“I get it already, sorry about that.”

Akira smiled bitterly and apologized to Alpha, who seemed to be angry.

In the middle of their exchange, he was still moving forward with his bike. Akira then put that thought aside for a moment and focused on what was in front of him.

“So, any idea how to shoot him down?”

“First of all, let’s check if we can chase the APC while ignoring him. If it’s possible, I want to try a close-range AF anti-material cannon or zero-range slice. If we get closer to the APC, I’m sure that they will have to be careful so as to not shoot that APC as well. So, let’s go with that.”

“Roger that!”

Akira accelerated the bike toward his target. To maintain his calm, he did not use his urge for murder to fuel his anger, instead, he used it to fuel the cold calculating side of his as he blazed through the wasteland.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 263, Assault

Index

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Even after receiving such an assault, seeing how Akira did not die and instead was closing in on the APC, Latis could not hide his astonishment.

[To tell me that he is a Rank 55 Hunter!? You gotta be kidding me. Even Rank 60 is not high enough. He might as well reach Rank 65!]

The way Akira raised his Hunter Rank caused it to not be properly reflected. Even Latis could tell that Akira's true strength was not something reflected on his Hunter Rank.

Whether by selling relics or hunting monsters, normally Hunters raised their Hunter Rank slowly over time. Even when a Rank 55 Hunter defeated a monster only a Rank 65 and above Hunter could take down, that did not immediately raise their rank to 65. Under normal circumstances, Hunter Rank would rise through selling valuable relics multiple times or defeating powerful monsters multiple times.

In short, no matter how much Akira contributed during the inter-city transport-escort mission. Even if he got posted in the front during that mission, it would not immediately greatly increase his rank. Moreover, Akira chose his reward to be mostly in the form of new equipment, not a

raise in his Hunter Rank. Thus, Akira was once again, way too strong for his current Hunter Rank.

Then there was also Alpha. With her help, Akira could proficiently use equipment that required rigorous training.

Akira’s bike was one that was created in Zegelt city. Even high ranking Hunters would consider it to be an exceptional bike. Thus, even common Hunters from that city would normally have trouble using his bike. With the culmination of Alpha, his bike and his current equipment, Akira’s battle prowess skyrocketed.

Latis, who was unaware of this till now, made his conclusion based on everything he had gathered.

[That guy, he’s a bike specialist, huh!?]

In the eastern district, there were individuals who had a special affinity and proficiency toward a certain skill or equipment. Just like how some preferred the long-range gun while others preferred the close-range combat with blades. There were also those who preferred to use their fist, complemented with their superhuman strength. Such individuals might not even use guns nor an augmented suit.

Bike specialists were those who were proficient with fighting on top of a bike. Normally, instead of a bike, most would prefer a tank or a powered suit. Those offered them full-body protection and better weaponry. But for some reason, there were still some who performed better on top of a bike.

There were many narrow alleys in the old-world ruin where only a bike could pass through. So, from that point of view, it was understandable that a bike has an advantage in those kinds of situations. This was the reason why there were still manufacturers that produced expensive advanced bikes; though, a tank would be more powerful.

[That would explain how he was able to escape that battle back in Mihazono ruin! He did not have the leeway to get on his bike during the battle. The jamming smoke prevented him from remotely controlling the

bike. The moment he could control his bike, he quickly got onto it and escaped.]

It would not be strange for those who specialized in bikes to have powerful equipment designed to be used on their bike. It was not strange for Akira, who was currently on his bike, to be far stronger than he was back then. Latis frowned after he drew out his conclusion. He shot another barrage of missiles at Akira.

However, this time, they were shot down way sooner than before. Before he knew it, the cluster missile warheads had already been destroyed.

The safety feature caused the mini-missiles to simply fall off. It was to make sure that they would explode too close to its user. Although not all of them were shot down, their number was greatly reduced. It was impossible for them to completely surround a speeding bike in the middle of the wasteland. Akira guided what remained to collide into rubble and wreckage around him. Once he was done, they were effectively rendered useless.

[He adapted to it so quickly! He is very good at this! Is this why Milady gave me such an order? So, it was an order to basically kill him as soon as possible, with the greatest firepower that I have right from the start, huh?]

As if to not miss even the slightest opening, as Latis was thinking, Akira's bullets flew and struck him. Although he was unharmed thanks to his forcefield armour, it still diminished some of his energy reserves. Latis frowned. He roared. Though, it seemed to be directed towards himself.

"…This is not the time for that!! I will kill him first and ask Milady afterwards!"

Latis aimed his gigantic gun at Akira. The aiming system quickly locked onto him, even though Akira was moving haphazardly at high speed. The gun, designed to be used with Latis' heavy augmented suit, started spewing large warheads. Each blast shook the ground

Akira was chasing after Chloe's APC on his bike. He was moving in an unpredictable, complicated manner. The bike's ability to project forcefield

armour below its tire allowed the bike to run on air. It was a crude function, and it would have been better to install a flying device on the bike instead. However, with Alpha's advanced support, the bike was able to smoothly ride on both the air and the ground.

The bike made sharp turns, which would have been impossible with a flying device. It avoided the incoming missiles. It ran as if it was inside a tube, a tube created from the narrow openings between rubble and missiles. Such maneuvers even caused the missiles to collide into the rubble around him.

Utilizing everything second, Akira used his rifle to shoot down the missiles that were coming from above him. With his advanced skills to evade, even when missiles were raining down on him, destroying everything around him, he was still able to slip past them unharmed.

It would not be strange for Akira to get thrown off his bike, considering that it was moving around rapidly. It was only thanks to his augmented suit that he was able to stay on top of his bike.

Even so, this was still not a comfortable situation. Akira frowned from the pain.

[It's still the usual battle.] Thanks to that, Akira was able to stay calm even while his body was pumped with adrenaline. He even had room to complain, just like usual.

"Alpha!? Can you do something about this!? You said that you would show how good your support is, right?!"

Thanks to his time perception compression, Akira was barely able to keep up with how fast the scene in front of him was changing. If it was not for his extrasensory sense, he would have completely lost orientation, unable to tell where was left or right.

"I'm pretty sure I'm showing you just how good it is right now, no? The next one is from the top-right!!"

Following her instruction, Akira temporarily compressed his time perception even more and aimed his rifles in the instructed directions. Once the TPL fixed onto his targets, he pulled the trigger. He managed to hit all the large warheads that Latis shot at him. But due to the difference in firepower, Akira's bullets simply ricocheted off the warheads.

Even so, they did well to throw those warheads off their original trajectories. All of them were aiming at Akira's bike but flew past their target and landed on the ground, away from Akira. The shockwave was released when they hit the ground, causing it to tremble, and even threw the bike off.

Normally, the bike would be a sitting duck once it was off the ground. The dirt and dust that enveloped the area would even throw a bike's flying device off balance. However, with Alpha's perfect control of the bike, aerial fight was not an issue. She was able to harden the dust and the dirt to create stable footing for the bike's wheels.

Akira was able to tell just how powerful the shots were. Especially after seeing the rubble and dust that were blasted into the air. He could not help but frown as he commented.

"Whoah! That was close! One hit from that would be enough to finish me off! Just how accurate are they? I'm already moving this fast!"

"You were only able to deflect them because of me, you know? Aren't you glad?"

"Of course, thank you very much!"

Akira got a bit irritated and partially shouted out his reply unlike Alpha, who was smiling as if she was teasing him. She continued.

"Now then, I'll show you one more great thing I can do. Let's go!"

Alpha only said as much and suddenly accelerated the bike. It then turned straight down, landing hard, and accelerated even more.

“Whoah!?”

Akira’s yelp was completely buried by the sound of the bike diving into the wreckage and rubble under it.

Latis frowned. He suddenly lost Akira’s signal. Though he did not think he made a blunder and went straight under the rubble. Just to be safe, he shot several bullets toward the area where Akira’s signal had suddenly vanished. The large warheads dove straight into the mountain of rubble and wreckage. It blew the dirt and rubble up into the sky. It was akin to water sprouts, though made of concrete and sand. It had completely destroyed the contour of the area. Even so, Akira’s signal still had not returned.

[If he’s hiding with some kind of camouflage, that should have flushed him out. What’s going on?]

Just to be extra safe, he went to the location where Akira’s signal vanished and checked around the area again. He used his advanced information gathering device to check underground as well. However, he still could not find Akira’s signal. There was a chance that it was because Akira had been completely shredded into dust, but Latis could not afford to be that naive this time.

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Pamela was standing guard in Chloe’s APC when a call suddenly reached her.

“Pamela, I lost his signal.”

“Just to confirm. It’s not like you’ve killed him and it’s not because he ran away, right? You simply lost him, right?”

“Unfortunately, yes. I completely lost his signal the moment he dove straight down into the ground.”

Latis then told Pamela what happened without leaving any details. This included the fact that Akira’s fighting power might as well reach Rank 65.

That there was a good chance he was a bike specialist. After listening to his report, Pamela could not help but frown.

“…He’s that good, huh? Our men really did well to corner someone that strong. Now, if only I was able to kill him back then… This is so frustrating…”

“I can say the same as well. I’ll keep trying to look for him. Whether he’s already dead or just hiding, either way, I need to confirm it. Just to be safe, you be careful too.”

“Roger that. Anything to say to Milady?”

“In case I still can’t find anything, I’ll assume that he’s hiding with a powerful camouflage. Just to be safe, I’ll demolish the area one more time. Just like Milady ordered me to before returning back and give her my after-report.”

“Alright… Hm?”

As Pamela had her eyes fixed on the 360 degrees radar scanner around the APC, she found something that she did not expect. Akira suddenly jumped out of a pile of rubble in front of the APC and went straight towards it.

__*__*__*__

Under the eastern district, there were more tunnels than what most people would have believed. Former subway lines that were not completely buried, underground passages that were once part of underground cities, tunnels made by monsters. There were numerous reasons why one could find tunnels underground. Alpha took note of them during the fight. She identified each individual route and decided on the path. The battle had made the layer of rubble and soil covering these tunnels weaker. Alpha took advantage of that to break through and enter the tunnel.

There was no light inside. Under normal circumstances, riding a bike at max speed in complete darkness would have been suicidal. But thanks to Akira’s extrasensory senses, he could do so without issue. Moreover, he

was completely used to crazy situations like this. With Alpha's control of the bike, Akira had no hesitation to go try and go faster.

"Akira! We're breaking out!"

"Roger that!"

Akira had already known the details of their strategy since Alpha had already told him through telepathy. So, he once again readied himself to break through another part of the tunnel that was already weakened. Though already weakened, it did not change the fact that the layers of the rubble and soil above were still quite thick. At least, thick enough for monsters to go over them without collapsing. Thus, Akira had to prepare himself to break through it.

Akira used the momentum of the bike to jump up. He sliced the ceiling of the tunnel with his liquid metal blade. With a powerful kick from his augmented suit, the sliced ceiling burst apart. A moment later, his bike shot out of the hole and escaped from the darkness.

Chloe's APC was rushing ahead at high speed through the wasteland. It went past Akira, who had just flown out of the ground.

Akira reconnected the blade's handle to its container. Inside this compressed time perception world, where rubble and dust flew in slow motion, Akira swung his blade toward the passing APC with Alpha's support.

The blade sucked an enormous amount of energy from the bike; boosting its slicing power to its utmost limit. At least, for a short time until the blade crumbled. The forcefield armour that hardened the liquid metal shone slightly as it reached its target. It was made to only last for an instant. It just needed to cut through everyone on top of the APC and inside.

The blade finally made contact with the APC. After releasing a loud bang, and a blinding flash of light, the blade crumbled. But it did not accomplish its goal. During its clash with the APC's defences, the blade lost. The

hardened liquid metal slowly reverted back to liquid as it fell and splashed over the ground.

The people on top of the APC had already started their counterattack. They barraged Akira, who had just passed by them. Even when they could no longer see him, their barrage continued.

With the help of Alpha's advanced driving skill, Akira was able to slip out of that barrage as he accelerated away from the APC. Although he got hit, the forcefield armour of the bike completely neutralized those attacks.

Akira, who had expected that slash to splice through the APC, could not hide his surprise.

"That thing is really hard! Forget the APC, the people on top of it are still fine, you know?!"

Those who were in the path of the blade, quickly raised both of their arms to block it, even before it touched them. The blade managed to slice through their arms and legs, even the weapons that they had. However, it did not slice through all of them.

Alpha frowned and told Akira the reason why they were that strong.

"Their forcefield armour has assimilated with the APC's forcefield armour to strengthen their defences. They are also remotely controlled bodies. That's why they are tougher than normal flesh and bone."

Akira raised his eyebrows and looked back at the leftover of what he had just cut. No blood was coming out from them, when he took a good look at them, their insides were pure metal. Even when their bodies were cut into two, they were still standing up straight.

The maids that came out from the APC were all remotely controlled by Pamela, just like those dolls. The reason why she did not use those automaton dolls back in Mihazono ruin was because they were originally the property of the Lion Steel facility. Moreover, the more automaton they brought out, the more shame it brought their master.

But this time, Chloe had permission to use these automatons outside. She did not care about shame at this point and she was free to use as many automatons as she wanted.

The automatons that had lost their fighting capability returned back inside the APC. Their replacements, meanwhile, marched out from the APC. Akira, who noticed their numbers not dwindling, frowned and said.

"…It seems that they still have a lot of extra automatons, huh? Alpha, what's our plan?"

"It seems that it'll take more effort to destroy the APC, so let's start by cleaning out the smaller targets first. That heavy augmented suit has less energy than the APC. If we get close enough and slice it again and again, I'm sure we'll be able to eventually cut it into pieces."

"That one can fly though. I wonder if we can get close enough that easily."

"It won't even be a problem."

Akira confusedly frowned and saw Alpha pointing in a certain direction. From that direction, Latis was closing in from afar. He extended his heavy augmented suit's blade, closing in as fast as possible.

"You bastaardd!!!!"

Since Latis was shouting on top of his lung through the general close-range communication frequency, Akira could easily hear him. However, he simply gave a firm nod toward that chilling shout.

"Ah, I see, it seems that it really won't be a problem, huh?"

Akira readied the liquid metal blade on his right hand and used the LEO multi-rifles in his left hand to shoot Latis. Although the bullets landed on their target, Latis kept charging forward, undeterred by them.

"…He is pretty tough as well. Alpha, I'm counting on you."

"Leave it to me."

Seeing Alpha smiling confidently, Akira kept on shooting, feeling reassured by that confident smile. Latis came closer while still under the barrage and eventually got within Akira's reach. Akira swung the blade in his hand and Latis reacted accordingly and swung his own blade.

The blades clashed with a loud bang and released a fiery spark followed by a blinding flash of intense light.

Akira was fighting against Latis in front of him while Chloe's APC was behind him.

Latis had powerful weapons, which meant that he could not afford to miss his shots. The advanced aiming system of his weapons could automatically lock his weapons the moment the APC got into its line of fire. He could also set the aiming to automatically lock when the trajectory line was a few millimetres away from the APC. However, there was still fear of Akira deflecting his shot. Thus, Latis could not afford to use long-range weaponry.

The only option left for Latis was to use his blade. He knew that Akira had the ability to accurately predict his shots. If he tried to shoot Akira from afar, who kept positioning himself to get the APC in the trajectory of stray bullets, there was a good chance his shots would hit the APC.

Even if he tried to mauver to Akira's side and try to shoot him, Akira could just reposition himself. Therefore, his only option was to challenge Akira in melee combat. With his blade, he could push Akira into a position where he was free to use his big guns.

Because of that, Akira and Latis kept trading blows while circling around the APC, they were locked in an intense high-speed melee combat.

The blades sparked every time they made contact. One of the blades had forcefield armour to harden its blade, while the other had anti forcefield armour to cut through the other's protection. To defend themselves while they attacked, they were both using a huge amount of energy. Because of that, the path of the blade reacted with the particle in the air and drew arcs

of light. Right at the next moment, they were erased by a flash of light when they clashed with each other.

One of them was a heavy augmented suit equipped with a flying device, while the other one had the abnormal skill to fight with a blade while on top of a bike. They kept exchanging blows with uncommon sword fighting styles. To cut down the opponent, to avoid the slices, to block the incoming attack. They swung their blades in all kinds of disorienting positions. It was as if there was no meaning in the words up, down, left and right.

Akira raced atop a transparent loop-like path to get on top of Latis. When he was right on top of Latis, he swung his blade to split open the opponent's head. Even in this situation, Latis quickly thrust his large blade straight up. Instead of clashing, they both passed each other without contact and went straight toward their respective target.

The hardened metal liquid blade struck Latis' heavy augmented suit's forcefield armour, bent it inward and eventually crushed a part of it. The broken pieces turned into rays of light due to the light conversion of the forcefield armour. It was as if the blade dug through Latis' heavy augmented suit, but this was only in appearance. Latis was still completely fine.

Akira bent his body to avoid Latis' blade. But of course, it was not enough to completely evade it. His speed was compensated by the sudden acceleration of his bike. It helped remove his body and his bike away from the passing blade. Akira knew that a strike from that powerful blade would definitely be the end of him. Without a question. Thankfully, it just slashed empty air. Although the resulting shockwave alone was strong, with the combination of the bike's energy tank and Akira's augmented suit, he was able to withstand it.

Latis was more skilled in melee fighting than most of the Hunters. As a butler from Lion Steel, he was trained to fight in a room filled with speed filters where rifles were not effective. Even so, at this moment, in terms of trading slashes, he was losing his ground against Akira.

The sword fighting style that Latis had learnt was to engage with his opponents on the ground. Although it was still usable to some extent in this case, it was not the most optimal fighting style against someone who was flying around. The blade that the heavy augmented suit had was also, in the end, just a reserve weapon. The structure of the heavy augmented suit was not ideal for him to make full use of the skills that he had learnt.

More than anything, with the help of Alpha's support, Akira was not just swinging his blade around while on his bike. It was as if his ability to use blades was made specifically tailored to when he was on a bike. It was as if Akira and his bike had become one, and he had full control of his bike.

Latis thought that this was going to be easy. After all, Akira and his bike were basically one big target. Therefore, he naively thought that at the very least, he would hit the bike. This was even after considering the novelty of fighting in his current heavy augmented suit. Naturally, his expectation was completely overturned.

Even when they were exchanging blows with their blades, they were also exchanging shots. In a range where a swing of their blade would normally reach their opponent, they were also trying to shoot at each other using their rifles, powerful enough to kill any monsters in one shot.

Akira used the LEO multi-rifle on his left to shoot a fully charged C-bullet at Latis. Moreover, the rifles on the arm of his bike also used the openings in between each slash to shoot at Latis. Thus, countless bullets were exchanged in close proximity during that battle.

But even after receiving that barrage, Latis was still standing strong. His equipment was special, only to be used inside the Lion Steel facility and it was not something that he could freely use without permission from the upper echelons. There was no surprise it was an extremely strong piece of equipment. The generator he had was as powerful as those used by expensive powered suits. Such a generator was paired with a mighty forcefield armour suitable. As such, it was able to withstand a barrage of C-bullets without issue.

But, as expected, Latis could not just receive that barrage and shrug it off as nothing. Although only slightly, he was thrown off balance. Akira did not let that opening slip away and moved in to finish him off. However, Latis managed to evade it.

Just before Latis managed to aim his large gun at Akira, Akira quickly prevented it from targeting him using the LEO multi-rifle in his left hand as he leaned his bike to one side and accelerated away. He swiftly moved away from the warhead that the big gun spewed out at him.

The other arms of the heavy augmented suit were also carrying rifles, which were also trying to shoot him down. Although they were smaller compared to its main gun, they were still bigger than Akira's LEO multi-rifle. A barrage of bullets was coming at Akira each containing considerable destructive power.

Akira, who understood that it was impossible to completely evade every single bullet, kept repositioning himself in between Latis and Chloe's APC. This caused the gun's security system to lock itself, which in turn, allowed Akira to produce gaps. He then took the route where there were the least bullets and limited the bullets that hit him.

However, that meant that he took some shots. Alpha, with her advanced calculation ability, accurately predicted where those shots would land and strengthened the forcefield armour on those particular locations. She temporarily increased the suit's power consumption and output when receiving those shots.

If it was purely their equipment, Akira had zero chance of winning. But with Alpha's support, Akira was somehow able to manage to fight evenly.

But even with Alpha's help, Latis still had the upper hand. One direct hit from Latis was enough to kill Akira, but that was not the case for Akira. As a matter of fact, Latis was completely fine after all this time. Akira has been desperately evading his attacks while he had been taking on Akira's attack head-on. This was the difference between them.

However, Latis was the first to waver. He knew that he only needed one clear hit to kill Akira, but that just would not happen. He thought that if he kept attacking, it was only a matter of time before one of his attacks went through. He was also trained in patience as well. Therefore, he was not that weak as to start getting impatient in this kind of situation.

But even so, his mind still wavered. The reason being, that Akira was slowly overwhelming him. Every time Akira blocked his attack, Akira's moves became sharper. As time went by, he was becoming faster, sharper, and keener as he kept evading Latis' attack and launched counters of his own.

Against Akira's unexpected fighting capability, in order to withstand his assault, the energy of the heavy augmented suit was being rapidly shaved away. At the moment, he still had the upper hand, but at this rate, it would not take that long before things would change. That knowledge only made him even more anxious, causing panic to rise.

[[At this rate, he will be pushed into a corner. If I can maintain the current situation, I can win.]] That difference in thought was one thing that both Latis and Akira agreed on.

But the situation itself quickly changed. Pillars of light rained down from the sky followed by huge explosions.

The shockwave also reached Chloe's APC. Even with the powerful suspension in the APC, the shaking still could be felt from inside as Chloe inadvertently said.

"Whoah, that was a rather huge tremor. It seems that the fighting is getting worse outside, huh?"

Chloe did not seem startled at all. As a matter of fact, she was smiling as if it turned out exactly the way she wanted. That was why she could calmly give Pamela, who was flusteredly running to check on her, an order.

Chloe was smiling as if she was immensely enjoying the situation, Pamela who saw that, felt a shiver because of that smile.

The pillar of lights from the sky were chasing Akira and Latis. But right before they rained down, Akira suddenly sensed a disturbance and immediately drove away from the area. Alpha also accelerated the bike away as fast as she could in order to get Akira away. Thanks to that, the light pillars, which seemed like never-ending walls to Akira, did not hit him.

A moment later, somewhere far away from them was blown apart. A powerful gust of wind hit Akira, but the bike's forcefield armour quickly projected out before it truly reached him, thus neutralizing them. Even so, it still blew him and his bike away.

Akira somehow managed to regain his balance while clamping down on the brake on top of the invisible footing. He could not help but get surprised by what just happened as he exclaimed.

"Alpha! What was that!?"

"A monster. The fight must have attracted one of those flying monsters that roam the sky."

It was normal for monsters to get attracted the more they fought. Of course, normal monsters were also attracted to that area, but they were blown away by the stray bullets and explosions. That was just how intense their battle was.

Both Latis and Akira were equipped way beyond the difficulty level of the area around Kugamayama city. But even so, they did not hesitate to use them in their high-speed battle. They threw stray bullets all over the place. The shockwave from the explosions of the mini-missiles used by Latis also reached the sky. Thus, there was no surprise that their fight attracted one of those flying monsters.

Akira inadvertently looked up. He could see floating points from where the light pillars came from. He then scanned in that direction using his information terminal. The thing on his display caused him to frown. The monster above him was a 50 metres long wasp-like monster.

The wasp was partially mechanical and was equipped with powerful weapons. The flying device that extended from its body looked like a layer of wings made of light. Its body and limbs were equipped with a large-size gatling gun and missile pods. While its stinger was replaced by a large calibre laser cannon.

Akira, who was basically overtaken by the frenzy to kill Chloe, regained some of his calm after seeing such a monstrosity. Since it was an insect-like monster, it reminded him of the giant bug swarm that he had to fight against during the inter-city transport-escort mission and thought that it was futile to try and fight it.

“Alpha, what’s the plan now? Should we call a temporary retreat?”

“That sounds like a good idea, but that’s only if it will let us go. My bet is that it came here because of the explosions caused by the mini-missiles. So, its main aim should be not you. Well, it should at least let you go, but…”

Akira glanced at Latis and frowned. He was already shooting at that huge monster using his heavy augmented suit while moving closer to Akira.

Latis was also able to evade the pillar of lights that were raining down from the sky. He noticed the monster above him and quickly thought of his options.

Although it was weaker than the monsters further to the east, it was a monster that came from the upper region. There was no doubt that it was still a formidable opponent. As expected, he could not fight Akira and that monster at the same time. The best option would be to get that monster to fight Akira, but it was not strange if Akira had the same idea. It was enough of a reason to worry that they would end up trying to push the monster to each other just to get killed all the same.

Latis also thought of working with Akira to fight that monster, but he quickly canned that idea. If Akira was that composed and clever enough to accept the deal, he would not be here in the first place.

He kept analyzing his options. The worst-case scenario was that both of them tried to get the other side to fight the monster and Latis was the first one to fall. Afterwards, Akira would lure that monster to attack Chloe's APC. If that happened, he would bring more danger to Chloe, that was the one thing that he needed to avoid no matter what.

If he ignored his own safety and kept focusing on Akira, Akira would not have the leeway to deal with the monster as well. Once that monster killed them both, there was a good chance that it would have accomplished its goal and just leave. It came down most likely because it was seeking to eliminate both Akira and him, or maybe only him. Therefore, in order to keep it away from Chloe's APC, he could not afford to return back with this monster in tow.

[I guess I have no other choice. Double suicide it is. Sorry, Pamela. I won't be coming back.]

Latis quickly made the decision to throw away his life. Although he did not want to die, if it was necessary, there was no hesitation to do so. Just like how his men had died fighting Akira because of their conviction, Latis made the same decision based on the same conviction.

The difference between Latis and his men was only how bad the situation was until they were forced to make such a decision. Right now, it was what the situation demanded. If by doing so, he would be able to guarantee Chloe's safety, kill Akira, and fulfill Chloe's order, then there was no place for hesitation.

With the decision in mind, Latis went straight at Akira, but suddenly a call from Pamela reached him.

"Latis, this is an order from Milady."

"I know. I leave the rest to you."

"…No, that's not it."

Latis thought that Pamela understood him without him even needing to tell her everything. Although he was not mistaken, the reply from her surprised him. After he listened to the content of the order, he was even more confused as he asked her.

“Pamela, if I do that, there’s a good chance that monster will come over there as well…”

But Pamela replied firmly.

“Latis, I’ll say it again. This is an order from Milady.”

“…Understood.”

Since he had failed once after disregarding Chloe’s order, he was not in a position to go against her order again. Latis replied with affirmation while putting aside all of his still lingering questions and worries. He could hear Pamela sigh in relief before she closed the call. Latis was a bit bothered by that reaction, but for now, he put it for later and focused on executing his master’s order.

The heavy augmented suit opened up its back and Latis was ejected out. A moment later, the heavy augmented suit released one of the missiles from its missile pod toward Chloe’s APC. Latis quickly held onto that missile and used it to carry him back to Chloe’s APC.

The unmanned heavy augmented suit then just kept on going. The autopilot controlling the suit moved to empty its ammo toward Akira and the monster as if it was covering for Latis’ retreat.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 264, Always A Close Call

Index

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Latis, who rode the mini-missile, returned back to Chloe's APC. He let go of the missile while in mid-air and landed inside the APC, dropping through its opened ceiling door. He then gave Chloe a bow as she stood up from her seat to welcome Latis.

"…I am really sorry for my failure, I will accept any punishment."

Chloe squinted her eyes.

"Just to confirm. That apology is for failing to kill Akira, right? Not because you ignored my order again, right?"

Latis felt a slight tinge of fear from her as he replied with a serious expression.

"My apology for failing to kill Akira. It has brought great shame to me for not being able to keep my words before returning back. Unable to deliver any good news."

"In that case, just to make it clear, did you ignore my order again? Or did you not?"

“…I did my best to follow Milady’s order.”

Latis kept getting anxious with every reply. Finally, Chloe’s expression loosened.

“In that case, there’s no need to apologize. You were not able to kill that Hunter partly because of my order too. You did well out there. I’m sure you’re tired, you can leave guarding the APC to Pamela and take a rest.”

Instead of scolding Latis, Chloe looked amusedly at him. Unfortunately, that only made Latis even more confused.

“O-of course. Thank you very much for your kind words despite my failure…”

“Hm? Sure. Don’t worry about that, I’m pretty happy with the result, after all.”

“M-Milady, how should I interpret your words…?”

Chloe did not say anything and just returned back to her seat and sunk into it. She then smiled happily as she started to think about her next plan.

Latis threw a confused look at Pamela, seeking help. But Pamela just shook her head as if to say that she was as confused as he was.

The monstrous wasp kept shooting the weapons on its legs at its target. The unmanned augmented suit shot countless missiles from its missile pods and kept shooting its guns at that monster. While they were exchanging fire, Akira kept running around, trying to not get involved.

If they were fighting each other head-on. They would be locked in a 3-way fight. But Akira understood that he was no match against the monster. Meanwhile, the unmanned augmented suit was engaging the monster while chasing after Akira. Thus, they were running around with Akira and the unmanned augmented suit orbiting around the wasp monster.

The reason why Akira did not just leave and chase after Chloe’s APC was because he wanted to avoid getting stuck between the APC, the unmanned

augmented suit and the monster. At least, until the unmanned augmented suit got destroyed, he could not afford to simply chase after the APC.

The unmanned augmented suit and the wasp monster were exchanging attacks head-on.

The wasp monster did not have the dexterity to evade the heavy augmented suit's attacks. The cluster missiles coming from the unmanned augmented suit went straight and broke off into countless mini-missiles. Every single one of them managed to land on the wasp monster, enveloping its huge bodies in a fiery of explosions. Meanwhile, it kept shooting huge warheads repeatedly at the wasp's abdomen. Each warhead could obliterate Akira in one shot.

In front of such an assault, even a monster from the upper region could not get away unscathed. The armour plating covering the wasp's body crumbled along with the flesh attached to it. However, what laid under them was another layer of armour plating. Moreover, the liquid that oozed out from its open wound quickly hardened, thus rapidly closing its open wounds. Although the barrage from the unmanned augmented suit shaved off its life force, it was still far from being dead.

Of course, the unmanned augmented suit was also damaged from that intense exchange. The lasers and the beams coming from the wasp devoured the remaining energy of that augmented suit.

Compared to the wasp monster, the unmanned augmented suit was relatively small, flying around at a high speed. Moreover, the weapons that the monster was equipped with were designed to fight against an opponent of the same size. In exchange for high firepower, its accuracy was mediocre. Because of that, it was difficult for it to accurately aim at the unmanned augmented suit.

However, the wasp only needed to land a few hits with its firepower. Thus, it kept shooting. With the unmanned augmented suit running on autopilot, it was moving less dexterously compared to when Latis was in control. It could only evade half of the onslaught and took half of the attacks head-on, sustaining severe damage with each hit. The parts that could not be fully

protected with its forcefield armour produced a blinding light, leaving a dent in its chassis.

Of course, the augmented suit was also trying to shoot at Akira, but since Akira kept positioning himself so that the monster would be located in between them, all its attention was on the monster wasp. With the monster being focused on attacking the unmanned augmented suit, the battle was mainly between them. Akira, who kept on running away from that battle, looked back and frowned.

“With that monster roaming the sky, it’s no wonder why people are usually not allowed to fly.”

“But with that being said, that monster is normally only in the upper region, you see. Normally, it would never come down like this.”

“I see, so why is it here?”

“No idea. One of the stray bullets might have hit it. It would not be strange for a gun like that to be able to hit a monster up that high. Especially when shot straight up.”

“Seriously… give me a break already…”

Akira could not help but frown. Alpha, who saw that, smiled and tried to cheer him up.

“But if that’s really the case, it might just return back up once it destroys that heavy augmented suit.”

It was not clear whether the monster was also aiming to eliminate Akira as well. That was exactly why Akira was only running around without attacking it. Even if it was by pure accident, if he hit the monster, there was no doubt that it would target Akira as well.

“Abandoning the option to return back, without any fear of getting that APC involved, that amour suit can now use all its firepower. It’s fighting

pretty hard although it’s only on autopilot. It would be great if they kill each other.”

“Well, true. If that’s indeed the case.”

But that faint hope was immediately crushed. After the wasp finished recharging the laser cannon on its stinger, the wasp then directed it towards the unmanned suit. Right at the next moment, the suit was swallowed by a pillar of light, destroying it without even leaving a trace.

In order to make sure its target got destroyed, the laser was shot with a wide range and at a short distance. Thanks to that, it was not able to reach that far, but it was more than enough to envelop the area in front of the wasp in blinding light. The shockwave even reached Akira, who was positioned behind the wasp. Once the flash died down, a claw-like mark was left on top of the ground, greatly changing the contour of the land. Especially since the cannon evaporated a large chunk of it.

The heavy augmented suit that was completely unfettered after all those attacks from Akira was blown away to nothingness in just one simple attack. Seeing that, Akira could not help but knit his eyebrows and made a stern expression as he said.

“…Even that hard augmented suit has no traces left, huh? That thing is no joke.”

“Well, I bet that its forcefield armour has also been weakened after losing so much energy during that fight. Either way, it doesn’t change the fact that it got annihilated. Now then, it would be great if that thing would just leave, but…”

Akira was anxiously looking at the wasp, waiting for its response with a glimmer of hope. But, that puny ray of hope was completely crushed at the very next moment.

Instead of returning up, the wasp that had completely eliminated one of its targets turned around to face its remaining target. Although it had lost some of its weapons from fighting against that unmanned augmented suit, it still

had enough fighting capability to continue its mission. With the weapons on its legs aimed at Akira, it was obvious that it was going to engage with Akira next.

Right after Akira accelerated his bike away, the wasp started its assault. Although its lasers and its beams were not anti-forcefield armour, they were powerful enough to be able to crush through forcefield armour as if they were non-existent. The increase in temperature caused the air in their trajectories to form plasma and explosions soared the moment they made contact with the ground.

Alpha protected Akira by executing a complex maneuver with her amazing driving skill. While at the same time, she warned Akira.

“Akira! We have no other choice! We need to shoot it down!”

“Roger! But, with that augmented suit out of the picture, we can first catch up to that APC, right?”

“No!”

“What? Why?”

With that much firepower, if he could bring that monster to the APC, even the APC would not be able to get out from an attack completely unscathed. That unmanned augmented suit stayed behind to make sure that would not happen, but now that it was gone, Akira thought that he was free to do that now. Furthermore, the APC should get desperate and try to shoot the monster down as well. But outside of his expectation, Alpha rejected his idea.

Alpha looked at Akira with a solemn expression which caused Akira’s frown to deepen.

“We’re approaching Kugamayama city. If we try to chase that APC with that monster following us, City Management would see it as us bringing that monster over to the city. If that happens, they will never allow you to return to Kugamayama city.”

Those who brought swarms of monsters back to the city were often eliminated together with the swarm. The decision to kill them with the monsters relied not on the number of monsters, but on the strength of the monster they brought with them.

If it was only a handful of weak monsters, they would not dispatch their main defence squad and just let the guards stationed in the slums to handle them. But that was only because they would cause minimal damage to the city's lower district.

This meant that if it was a powerful monster, even if it was only a single monster, they would dispatch the defence squad. After all, a powerful monster would cause considerable damage to the lower district, in the worst-case scenario, they might even damage the area close to the wall.

If Akira brought this flying monster to the city, it might even cause damage to the inner district. So, there was no doubt that the defence squad would use whatever they had to prevent the worst from happening. They would dispatch the powered suit squad equipped with powerful weapons to intercept Akira. It was not clear when they would start the dispatch with Akira already being close to the outskirts of the city.

"Moreover, they might have predicted this situation right from the start. That is why they are not trying to attack us from the APC. It is to avoid ending up as the monster's target."

"Dammit, so that's what is going on, huh!?"

Alpha explained to Akira, that in the worst-case scenario, the reason why Chloe left the Lion Steel facility near Mihazono ruin and headed to the city was to lure him to chase after her. There was a good chance that all of this was a trap for him. Since they were already trapped, it would not be strange if they prepared another trap for him.

Akira frowned. If that was indeed the case, then what Chloe said back in Mihazono ruin might as well be to lure him as well. Back then, he ended up taking that bait and almost got killed. But the fact that he was still alive now

might be because they had predicted he would retaliate and had intentionally spared him back then.

With both his life and death basically in the palm of their hands. That fact hit something deep inside Akira, causing an ominous dark emotion to rise up from deep inside his heart.

But before that emotion completely devoured him, Akira was able to somehow manage to put a lid on it. To keep his own emotions from making him do something rash, which might lead to him killing himself, Akira managed to keep his cool.

“…Alpha, we can kill that thing, right? In that case, we just need to do it quickly and turn our attention to that APC, right?”

Alpha raised her eyebrows in surprise, but she quickly smiled confidently and said.

“Yup, that’s fine. It’s a simple thing to do with my support. Just leave it to me.”

“Alright, I’m counting on you, let’s go!”

Akira then aimed his rifle at the huge wasp with an exhilarated smile.

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Back in the APC, Chloe was smiling while thinking about her plan. After she looked at the information from the radar that was scanning the area around the APC, she went into deep thought.

“…Hmmm, it might be a bit too fast.”

After she mumbled, she called the driver and gave her order. The driver was not sure why Chloe would give such an order, but he decided to abide by it.

Latis, who had already changed from his augmented suit to his original butler outfit, frowned with a confused look. He hesitated for a bit before finally deciding to ask Chloe.

“Milady, although it’s true that there is some distance between us, it’s no doubt safer to stay away from them. I’m sure that Milady also knows this. So, may I inquire the reason why Milady would take on such a risk and ask the driver to slow down?”

Chloe stared at Latis. There were times when Latis asked questions like this. Although he had an inkling of the answer, he still did so to lighten the mood. However, this time, Latis asked because he really had no clue. Since Chloe knew as much, she smiled and simply gave a rather vague answer.

“Hm? Well, I just thought that we were going too fast.”

“…I see.”

Although that did not resolve Latis’ confusion, he did not pursue it any further.

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Akira paced his bike, circling the wasp, avoiding its attacks.

The energy bullets released by the wasp scattered around the area and exploded the moment they made contact with the ground. It left behind huge craters. Even a common tank would be blown to bits with a single hit from those bullets. Akira kept driving around while looking at the destruction that those bullets caused, as they were raining down.

Drones that came out from the wasp’s abdomen flew and sourced Akira. The flying disk that had a mirror-like surface swarmed at him. Although they did not directly harm him, They bounced the laser shot by the main body’s laser cannon toward him. Furthermore, they surrounded Akira as they envelop him inside a storm of energy bullets.

Of course, Akira did not just stay silent, he desperately tried to counter them. With the help of Alpha’s advanced driving skill, the bike slipped through the opening between the barrage of energy bullets. Meanwhile, Akira would shoot at the drones to change the direction of their reflective

surfaces. He did not stop shooting even as the scene of the energy bullets rampaging around him made him knit his eyebrows.

Once Akira charged his charge bullet to its max, he quickly aimed it at the wasp and released a barrage of C bullets that engulfed it. Given how large the wasp was, none of the bullets missed their target.

However, it hardly damaged the wasp. It quickly replaced any of its armour tiles that were shot down. It could do the same for its weapons that Akira had managed to destroy. Its flying device was protected by layers of forcefield armour, which projected a layer of light all the time. Thus, Akira's bullets could not reach it.

"Alpha! That thing seems completely fine even after taking that barrage! How are we going to take it down!?"

"Well, it's a monster from the upper region, after all. No surprise that it is this resilient. But don't worry, we can defeat it. Also, it's about time it finishes charging its main cannon."

Akira was reminded of the laser cannon that evaporated Latis' heavy augmented suit. It was so powerful and covered such a wide area that it seemed impossible to evade. Because of that, Akira could not help but frown.

"Alright, I'll be careful."

"Okay then, get yourself ready."

"…Hm?"

Akira noticed from that exchange that it sounded like they were talking about something different. But since the wasp moved to aim its main cannon, Akira quickly dropped that thought and focused on what to do next. The wasp started to fly higher to open distance between them, focusing on getting Akira within its main cannon's range.

In order to get away from the main cannon's range, Akira could not afford to let it fly away. Thus, when Alpha told him to get ready, Akira thought that she meant for him to get ready to do something reckless again. Something to stay away from the main cannon's range.

But that was not the case. Instead of going up, chasing after the wasp, Alpha controlled the bike to make a sharp U-turn, as if heading straight to the centre of where the main cannon would cover.

"Alpha!? What are you doing!?"

Akira increased his time perception compression by pure reflex. Inside that extremely slow-moving world, Alpha smiled confidently at him and replied.

"I did tell you to get ready, no? The more flustered you are, the less likely we will be able to pull this off, you know? So, make sure to get your resolve ready."

"…Alright alright, I get it already!"

Akira still had a stern look and his mouth curved into a confident smile. He quickly changed gear and did as Alpha instructed. He put back his LEO multi rifle and took the AF anti-material cannon off from the bike's arm before aiming it at the wasp's main cannon.

The AF anti-material cannon took a huge chunk of energy from the bike's energy tank. Alpha completely deactivated its safety lock, as it took in as much energy as it could to its breaking limit. The only reason it did not self-destruct was because Alpha had precisely calculated its limit.

The reason why Akira took the cannon himself instead of leaving it on the bike's arm was because there was a limit on how accurate the bike's arm can be. With Akira carrying the cannon himself, Alpha could give her full support to increase the accuracy.

The wasp had mostly completed its preparation to shoot, but it still needed a few more seconds. It also needed time to remove its forcefield armour layers protecting its muzzle before shooting out the laser. Normally, it

should have enough time to do so while getting away from Akira, but since Akira was rushing straight at it, the wasp did not have the chance to do so.

Because of that, even after Akira went straight in front of its cannon, it still could not shoot. Akira and the wasp had their respective cannons aimed straight at each other.

Right at the next moment, Akira's AF anti-material cannon released a lance of light which pierced through the wasp. Because it was right before the wasp shot its main cannon, it was right at the moment its forcefield armour was down. Akira's shot destroyed the fully charged main cannon, went straight through the abdomen, and pierced through the wasp's entire body.

Since it was fully charged and right before the cannon released its shot, there was a huge release of energy. Intense light rapidly leaked from the large wasp's body. It quickly spread to the wasp's weapons, flying device, and armour tiles. Although it was an unbelievably powerful monster, it could not withstand an explosion coming from the inside. Despite still mostly maintaining its original shape, it was completely dead as gravity took full control of its humongous body.

Akira flusteredly drove away the moment he saw that huge wasp free-falling right on top of him. Large chunks of wreckage fell around him, they made loud crashes the moment they landed, which were accompanied by minor explosions. Seeing that, Akira inadvertently looked at Alpha with widened eyes.

"See, it'll be fine if you just leave it to me."

Akira somehow managed to smile in response.

"You're right. By the way, how close was that from killing me?"

"Hmmm, well, if you ask me that, I guess it was a few milli-seconds from you being dead?"

Akira smiled bitterly.

“…Hm, what can I say? Why does it always come down to something so dangerous every single time?”

“Hm, I wonder about that. But I guess it’s too late to be complaining about that now, no?”

“Huh? Why?”

“Isn’t it always like that ever since you met me?”

Seeing Alpha smile as she said so, Akira’s bitter smile turned into a sweeter one.

“You’re right, it’s way too late to be complaining about that now, huh… alright then! Let’s go chase that APC!”

Akira’s face turned serious as he turned the bike around and sped toward Chloe’s APC.

During his fight with the huge wasp, the APC was quite away from the battle and was already pretty close to Kugamayama city. If the APC had kept its original speed, it would have arrived in Kugamayama city by now.

The moment Pamela noticed Akira’s signal moving toward the APC, she quickly told the driver to go at full speed toward the city.

“Milady, he started moving towards us. He has defeated the monster and is heading this way at this very moment. At this rate, he will catch up to us.”

“Let the APC go at its current speed. There’s also no need to try to engage with him. Just use the APC’s defences to withstand his attacks.”

“B-But, in that case…”

Chloe stared at Pamela, and with that, Pamela could no longer argue back.

“B-by your command!”

Chloe lightly nodded as her expression turned slightly stern. She then mumbled.

“…What’s taking them so long? They should have been here by now. Those guys in Kugamayam city are slower than I thought.”

Pamela and the others did not understand why Chloe said so. Likewise, they did not know what her mumbling meant. But even so, they still abide by her order. Though, with a stern look on their faces.

Akira quickly closed the distance to Chloe’s APC. But due to Chloe’s order, they did not make any attempts to repel him. Right when Pamela was considering ignoring Chloe’s order for the sake of her master’s safety, she suddenly noticed another blip appeared on the radar.

Chloe, who noticed that, smiled and said.

“Whatever happens, keep going toward the city at this speed. Start broadcasting that message again, saying that I’m in this APC.”

Pamela and the others looked at each other with confusion, but they quickly followed her order.

Akira, who could be seen from Chloe’s APC, was looking at the vehicle with extreme intensity to kill. Seeing that, Alpha warned him.

“Akira, keep your calm, okay?”

“…I know.”

The reason why Akira gave a small pause was because he knew he was not calm. He took deep breaths to calm his nerves and then frowned as he looked at the APC, confused.

“They’re not attacking back… Is this another trap?”

“Even if it is indeed a trap, if you’re going to kill them, it’s best to do it while we’re still in the middle of the wasteland. After all, if one of their

stray bullets went and damage the city, the city defence squad would attack them as well."

"You have a point. I guess we have no time to waste then. Let's go."

Akira accelerated the bike even quicker. The APC was not even trying to repel him. So, he was free to go as fast as he could to catch up to the APC. Akira felt extremely suspicious since he was not facing any resistance. Nonetheless, he kept chasing after the APC.

At this rate, Akira would be able to get on top of the APC and would be free to start slaughtering them. He knew that it would be a matter of time before the defence squad arrived. There did not seem to be some kind of change within the APC. Thus, Akira could not help but get more cautious and suspicious.

That was when Alpha's made a stern expression and warned.

"Akira! Be careful!"

Right at the same time, suddenly, the area around him was rained down with explosive warheads. Large, countless warheads were falling like rain, wiping out everything in the area. The barrage was accompanied by a warning broadcasted through the general communication line.

"This is Kugamayama city defence squad! Lower your weapon! Any form of resistance will be seen as hostile action towards City Management! Repeat! Lower your weapon! Any form of resistance will be seen as hostile action towards City Management!"

The source of the broadcast as well as the explosive warheads were the powered suits dispatched by City Management. The barrages were to serve as a warning to Akira, as well as Chloe's group.

A large battle near Kugamayama city was enough of a reason for the City Management to dispatch its defence squad. Due to the scale of the battle just now, it had sent heavily armed powered suits to suppress the battle, instead of first scouting.

The analysis of the signal by City Management showed that there was a good chance a powerful monster was involved in that battle. Once the gigantic blip vanished, they noticed two signals moving away from that battle. The city defence squad thought that there was a good chance they were the ones responsible for bringing that powerful monster this close to the city. Thus, they went to suppress and arrest them.

However, there was an issue regarding one of the signals. To be more precise, the ones in the APC. The APC that ignored their warning to surrender was broadcasting a message saying that it was carrying an officer from the Lion Steel company. As such, they needed to be extra careful with them. If they somehow killed her by mistake, it might cause a full-blown war between Lion Steel company and Kugamayama city. Thus, they had to be careful when trying to suppress Akira and Chloe.

Even so, the APC ignored them and kept on going. They went past the powered suits, towards Kugamayama city.

The commander of the squad told some of his men to go ahead.

“Unit 7, 8, and 9, chase after that APC! Try to minimize the damage on the APC while you try to stop them!”

The 3 units that received the order, went to chase after Chloe’s APC.

“Unit 6, go check the battleground, unit 1 to unit 5, surround the guy on the bike! Don’t let him get away!”

The 5 units obeyed that order and went to surround Akira.

After facing that barrage, Akira immediately directed the bike toward the ground, landed, and parked. Although Akira understood that they were not trying to kill him, since the barrage close to him was obviously much more intense than the one close to Chloe’s group, he knew that it was impossible to force his way through all those explosives.

After he stopped, the powered suits surrounded him. Akira frowned and looked at the APC that was trailing away from him. At this distance, the

APC already seemed like a blip to him.

Since his sight was zoomed in with the help of his augmented vision, he could see Chloe smiling while waving at him. Normally, they would not be able to look at each other from that distance. However, it was obvious that Chloe was looking at him and knew that he was also looking at her.

Akira went to reach his AF anti-material cannon by pure reflex. However, he reminded himself.

[Doing this while being surrounded by the city defence squad is stupid.] As he gritted his teeth and held himself back. Chloe was looking at him with her eyebrows raised. She smirked exasperatedly and shook her head before returning into the APC. The backdoor of the APC then closed.

The captain of the squad once again warned Akira.

“Lower your weapon! Any form of resistance will be seen as hostile action towards City Management!”

Akira shouted back.

“I refuse!!”

The calm part of his mind reminded Akira that putting down his guns and letting them arrest him would not fix the situation at all. Meanwhile, the emotional part inside him was telling him that anyone who got in his way was an enemy. Akira tried his best to calm down while he obeyed the logical voice inside of him and refused to lower his gun.

The powered suits aimed their weapons at Akira this time.

“Lower your weapon! Any form of resistance will be seen as hostile action towards City Management!”

“Absolutely not!!”

Akira’s voice was harsher this time and he still had his AF anti-material cannon in hand.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 265, 50 Billion Bounty

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The leader of the powered suit squad from the Kugamayama city, Guutol, was pressed with a difficult decision.

Normally, they would just kill Akira since he had rejected their demand. But they could not do so, easily, this time. As the outside camera was directed at Akira, it quickly identified him. Hunter by the name of Akira, who had added a system note – a dangerous Hunter.

The commander of the defence squad was given high-level privilege so that he would have no trouble doing his duty. Furthermore, at the moment, a high ranking officer from Sakashita Heavy Industry was in the upper district of the city. As a form of cooperation between Sakashita Heavy Industry and City Management, they were sharing information between them.

That was where Akira's information came in. It included records from when he escorted the inter-city transport to the Zegelt city. This job took place in the eastern side of the eastern district. He fought against multiple powerful monsters as well as powered suits, and to top it off, repelled a group of

Nationalists that had originally come to kidnap an important officer from Sakashita Heavy Industry and won.

After Guutol skimmed through Akira's information, he understood that attacking him would be a terrible idea. There was a good chance that the whole squad would get wiped out.

It was a given that an important officer from Sakashita Heavy Industry would be guarded by a powerful bodyguard. The Nationalists would have known about it. Therefore, they would have sent powerful combatants to kidnap the officer. The fact that Akira had won against them, meant that he might be as powerful as that bodyguard. Although they had no idea how powerful such a person would be, Guutol at least knew how powerful a certain bodyguard from Sakashita Heavy Industry by the name of Hammerz was. After all, he was there during a recent battle near Mihazono ruin.

Of course, Guutol did not think that Akira was as strong as Hammerz. However, it does not change the fact that he repelled the Nationalists, who attacked the inter-city transport vehicles. Therefore, he was obviously at least that strong. Moreover, the record from that inter-city transport-escort mission also stated that, at the very least, Akira was able to fight powered suits without using one.

To put the cherry on top, one of his men then reported to Guutol.

"This is Unit 6. Commander, we've confirmed that the monster, which might be the source of that large battle signal just a moment ago, is dead."

"Got it. Does it still retain some of its original shape? Can you at least tell what kind of monster it is?"

"This is just my guess, but… It seems to be a type of giant insect, a cyborg soldier wasp. Its length must have been around 50 metres."

"What!? Even a common inter-city transport vehicle would be destroyed in no time against that thing, you know? Why the heck is it doing here!? They should be only way further to the east or way up … Dammit! What the heck is going on here!?"

Personally speaking, Guutol wished that it was a mistake. However, that monster matched the predictive size from its signal during that battle. Since it was already dead, it meant that someone must have killed it. Adding to the information that he had received about Akira, it was impossible not to suspect Akira of killing it.

He made sure to keep that in mind as he made his resolve and once again returned to his main duty.

“This is my last warning! Drop your weapon!”

“I refuse!”

Guutol ended up having Akira’s muzzle pointed in his direction. That simple move showed zero hesitation, which caused Guutol’s worry to get closer to reality.

Guutol knew that Akira did that not due to a spur of emotions. Akira pointed his weapon at Guutol because he knew full well he could win. He thought the only reason why Akira did not shoot right away was because, as expected, he was hesitating to pick a fight with the whole of Kugamayama city. In the case where they really ended up fighting, there was a good chance Akira would get swayed by his emotion and go a step further to actually attack Kugamayama city.

Of course, Guutol had the resolve to forfeit his life in order to protect Kugamyama city. But given the option, he would still pick a better situation to fight. He could not afford to endanger the city. However, that did not mean he could just back off. Akira was not in a calm state of mind. He could not allow Akira to go back to the city in his current state.

Guutol was really stuck in between two hard choices.

Akira was also close to pulling the trigger. He wanted to avoid any unnecessary fights. But it was not like he could simply back off either. He already believes that lowering his rifle now would only lead to nothing good. Moreover, even if he decided to escape, those surrounding him did not seem to be willing to just let him go.

As his thoughts gradually moved towards fighting being the only choice, then it was better to make the first strike. Although Akira's logical mind was still functional, deep inside him, he could hear a voice screaming at him to kill everything in his way. While listening to that voice, even Akira's calm side was looking for a good reason to start a fight. He frowned and was close to finally making his resolve.

But suddenly, Guutol said to Akira.

"Alright, I get it! You don't need to disarm!"

Akira did not expect that at all. However, Guutol did not stop there as he continued with a stern tone.

"But! You'll have to tell me exactly what went on! And you have to do it here! Until we understand what's going on, we can't let you get any closer to Kugamayama city! If you can't accept this, we will have no other choice but to arrest you with force! So, what say you!?"

Right after that, Alpha immediately interjected.

"Akira, let's stop here for now. You need to rest and resupply, and also, calm down so as not to make any more unnecessary enemies. We can ask Viola to investigate her whereabouts again later and properly prepare to kill her. They've basically withdrawn, so you should withdraw as well."

Alpha then smiled gently at Akira to help him to calm down.

"Fine…"

Akira lowered his AF anti-material cannon and sighed.

"…Sorry, it seems that I'm not as calm as I thought I was."

As Akira obviously showed no wish to engage in battle anymore, the powered suits surrounding him also lowered their weapons. But none of them move from where they stood.

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Chloe's APC eventually reached Kugamayama city, the APC just went through the slums and headed straight toward the inner wall in the lower district.

However, the powered suits from the city defence squad quickly interfered. Although they could not use their weapons, they had the power to stop the APC with force.

Although it was a heavily armoured APC made to protect an important officer of the Lion Steel company, as expected, it did not have the horsepower to go against three powered suits. It did try to force its way through as it recklessly went through buildings, but it eventually came to a halt. The reinforcement from the city defence squad that the powered suit had called beforehand quickly surrounded the APC.

The doors of the APC opened, and the moment Chloe and her servants stepped out, the city defence squad aimed their rifles at them. Latis quickly took a fighting stance, but Chloe stopped him with a waft of her hand.

The leader of the squad saw that and immediately decided what to do.

"I hope that you will cooperate. Be thankful that we are not arresting you."

Chloe was not perturbed at all as she simply smiled and said.

"Thank you. So then, can you lead the way?"

"…This way then."

The man speaking was a bit surprised by how calm Chloe was. However, he still led Chloe into the inner wall. At the same time, he sent a glance to his men. His men understood what they had to do as they immediately proceeded to arrest Latis and the others. At first, Latis and the rest were uncertain whether to just let themselves get arrested or to fight back. Chloe then lightly shook her head, so they decided to stand down.

"…If you could have instructed your men to calm down with just that, couldn't you have done it sooner?"

“My apologies. It’s a complicated matter related to the main company, you see. Also, it’s different here and there. Here, we are in the city while over there is the wasteland.”

“…I see.”

He could not tell if Chloe purposely allowed her subordinates to act out because her safety as an officer from the Lion Steel was only guaranteed when she was within the lower district of the city. It could be because of something else. However, it was not like he could figure it out now, so he proceeded to take Chloe inside without saying anything.

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On the other hand, Akira was basically just standing by in the middle of the wasteland with the city defence squad’s powered suits surrounding him. Since it started getting rather boring without anything to do, he eventually sighed and asked.

“Hey, just how long do I need to wait here?”

The leader of the powered suits squad answered through the short-range communication line.

“You still need to stay here. We’re still awaiting decisions from those back at base. So, just wait here and don’t try anything funny. If you don’t want to wait, feel free to go to another city. As a matter of fact, we can escort you there.”

“My house is over here, you know?”

“No. We can’t let you get any closer to Kugamayama city.”

Akira heaved another huge sigh. Guutol, who heard that, also sighed and exasperatedly said.

“Seriously though, do you really understand what you are doing? You’re basically picking a fight with the Lion Steel company. Normally, no one would do that, you know?”

Akira’s bored face turned sour.

“Hell if I care! They attacked me first so I’m just paying back the favour.”

“That’s not the point…”

Akira already told Guutol what he knew. After listening to his explanation, Guutol believed that this matter was something he could not handle. This issue far exceeded his authority to deal with. Therefore, he bounced what he had learnt to his superior and now was awaiting a reply. After all, no normal person could handle a Hunter that broke down negotiations with the Lion Steel company and survived a full-blown fight with them. More so, attract a monster from the upper region to come down, and kill said monster.

“Either way, I bet they can’t really decide before listening to the other party’s side of things. It seems that at this very moment, they’re talking about this with someone by the name of Chloe. We can do nothing but wait until they compile all the information and make their decision regarding this matter.”

Hearing that, Akira raised his eyebrows.

“So, Chloe is basically under arrest?”

“Of course, there’s no way we will let them get away.”

“…I see.”

Since it seemed like City Management would not simply let Chloe go scot-free, Akira relaxed a bit and decided to wait a little longer.

Back in Kugamayama city, Chloe was arrested and brought to a city defence squad’s facility for further investigation and questioning. Even so, she was given a room meant for visitors and was treated like a city officer. The reason being that she was a part of the founder family of the Lion Steel company and was cooperative. Therefore, they believe there was no need to take her to the interrogation room.

Considering the status of her family, she was someone with high standing in Kugamayama city. They might even have to send an officer from the city to deal with her. After a short discussion with the company, the officer who was responsible for questioning Chloe, Udajima, went to check with those who arrested her. As he went into the room, he was relieved to hear that she was not just another brat with too much power.

But that relief was immediately crushed. The moment Udajima started questioning her, she started screaming back, exactly like a spoiled brat with too much power.

“Who do you think I am!? I’m from Lorentz house, you know!? The founder family of the Lion Steel company! Do you really understand who you are talking to!?”

A bad spoiled rich brat just barked out her privileged lineage. It showed exactly how spoiled she was. Although she was adorned with an expensive dress, she had no shred of grace. She acted just like any foolish spoiled brat, who thought that raising their voices would get them anything they wanted.

Udajima’s face twitched as he tried to calm her down.

“Please calm down. We just want to know what exactly happened.”

“Didn’t I tell you before!? Were you not listening!?”

“When you said a monster who would not listen to reason, were you referring to the Hunter named Akira? Or is it that cyborg soldier wasp?”

“Were you even listening!? He was trying to kill me! So, he’s no different to a monster, you know!?”

It was important for the city defence squad to make sure whether Chloe was running toward the city because she was being attacked by a Hunter or by a monster. They needed to make that one thing clear. However, Chloe kept referring to that wasp monster and Akira as the same, making it difficult to differentiate them. Furthermore, she kept blaming it on the listener’s lack of ability to understand.

The way Chloe kept bringing up the Lion Steel company and looking down on Kugamayama city made it immensely annoying to Udajima. He no longer had that much patience left. Seeing how she kept calling Akira a monster, Udajima had a good idea.

“It sounds like you’re running to the city since you’re being chased by this monster, Akira. Did I get that right?”

Chloe immediately raised her voice and got angry as if to hide the fact that Udajima’s hit the bull’s eye.

“R-running away!? W-we’re just keeping our distance from him! A-and also, w-what’s so bad about running away, anyway!? It’s the city defence squad’s job to kill any monsters that approach the city, right?!”

“Of course. In fact, we did dispatch our men to deal with the situation.”

“Then there’s no problem with it, right!? Or are you telling me to just face that monster and not to run away!? That is not my job, you know!? Your job!”

As Chloe started to smile haughtily again, Udajima then said with a solemn, straight face.

“That is indeed our job, as such, you are arrested for trying to attack the city.”

“Haah!?”

In front of a shocked Chloe, Udajima called out two guards and ordered them to arrest her.

“She’s guilty of trying to endanger the city. Arrest her.”

The guards looked at each other with a troubled expression. Since it was an order from their superior, they grabbed Chloe’s arm and arrested her.

Chloe flusteredly tried to fight back.

“What the-!? Are you for real!? Do you really understand what you’re doing!?”

Udajimia looked at Chloe with a straight stare.

“People who bring monsters to the city are guilty of endangering the city. You didn’t even know that, huh? Or did you think we would never accuse you just because you’re from the Lion Steel company? Get off your high horse already.”

“Are you really fine with doing something like this? I will see it as a decision made by Kugamayama city, you know!? I hope you know that when you ordered your men to arrest me! If you want to stop, this is your last chance!”

“If you seriously thought that we won’t arrest you just because you are from the Lion Steel company, you will regret it. Take her away!”

Chloe was dragged out of the room by the guards.

“I hope you understand what you are doing here! You do know what will happen to Kugamayam city if you do this to someone from the Lion Steel company, right!? This is your last chance, you know!?”

“Yeah yeah, you’re the only one who will regret this.”

Chloe kept screaming as she was dragged out, but her voice vanished as the door to the room closed.

Udajima was finally able to calm down a bit as he sighed.

“Good grief, and here I thought that it would go at least half-decently considering that it was someone from the main founder family of the Lion Steel company. I guess I was too naive, huh…”

Although Udajima had lost his conflict for influence against Inabe, he was still an officer from City Management. Thus, naturally, he had the skill to support his position. Despite his influence being less than before, he still maintained his seat as an officer. The gap between him and Inabe had

widened and this gap in influence was already well-established. However, given a chance, he still hoped to change the situation.

The officer responsible for the area under Tsubaki was Yanagisawa, but it was also part of the region under Inabe's control. As such, Inabe had a good influence in that area as well. Moreover, at the moment, Yanagisawa was busy with Sakashita Heavy Industry. He was busy in search of Shirou, so he had delegated most of his administrative duties in that area. As such, most of Yanagisawa's duties went to Inabe and those who wanted to make some kind of connection with Tsubaki would, in turn, approach Inabe. This caused Inabe's position to strengthen even further.

Since Udajima was regarded as a part of the opposition faction, he was not given any chance to have anything to do with the area under Tsubaki. He might get a chance if he pleaded with Inabe, but Udajima had his pride. Therefore, there was no way he would ask Inabe.

That was when that matter regarding Chloe reached him. If he could solve this issue and establish a connection with the Lion Steel company, he might have the chance to change the current power balance. Udajima thought so as he decided to face Chloe. However, after watching how she reacted, he realized that it was a huge failure.

"…Well, although she is like that, she is still someone from the founder family of the Lion Steel company. There's no way they would just abandon her. She'll at least serve as a bridge to connect to someone else from her family."

If he could bring more profits to Kugamayama city in exchange for releasing Chloe under better terms, Udajima might be able to regain some of his influence. Furthermore, he would also gain a connection to the Lion Steel company. As Udajima thought so and looked at the door where Chloe got dragged out, he felt envious. He was pondering how, in this world, such a girl held such influence just by being born in the right family.

The moment Chloe was dragged out of the room, her attitude completely changed. She immediately stopped shouting and fixed her posture with her arms still restrained. She even gracefully smiled.

She then glanced at the guards and gracefully said to them.

“I am really sorry for causing trouble to both of you. I don’t really mind whether it is a cell in the basement or just house arrest. Though, can you please let me have access to the web? Of course, a general line would be fine as well. I don’t mind recording it as well.”

“Eh? Well…”

They were not only surprised by her sudden change in attitude but they were also shocked by her sudden graceful aura. With her both arms still restrained, Chloe lowered her head with a serious expression.

“If I can’t contact the Lion Steel company, they might think that I am already dead. I’m sure it will trouble Kugamayama city if that happens. So, for the sake of both parties, please let this one thing slide.”

Both guards believed that roughly treating someone from the Lion Steel company was a bad idea. Also, with how Chloe was bowing, they could not bring themselves to refuse her request.

“W-well, if it’s only that much…”

“Thank you very much for your leniency!”

Chloe smiled and bowed deeply toward the guards, but she could not give a perfect bow since her arms were still restrained.

The guards who noticed that let Chloe’s arms go by pure reflex. The moment they did that, they realised that they made a grave mistake. However, even after she was free, Chloe did not try to run away nor fight back. She simply perfected her bow. Therefore, the guards thought that it was not that big of an issue.

Even so, the guards were confused by her sudden change of attitude. They thought it might be a good idea to let Udajima, who was still in the room, know about this. However, before they did, Chloe smiled and asked.

“Now then, shall we go? Where to?”

She then offered her arms to be restrained again. It was an indicative gesture. Though it was only in appearance, it was better to have her properly restrained. It was also her way to covertly indicate, as someone in a higher position, she did not mind getting detained. It demonstrated the clear difference in their position. Chloe, was someone who stood to rule over others.

“Ah, right, this way then.”

The guards were carried away by the mood and restrained her arms again before they continued to take her away, completely forgetting to report back to Udajima.

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Back in the wasteland, as Akira was still waiting. Suddenly, a message from the Hunter Office reached him. He took out his information terminal to check but Alpha stopped him and warned him with a solemn expression.

“Akira, before you open and read the content, make sure to keep calm.”

“That was out of the blue.”

“Anyway, make sure to maintain your cool no matter what happens. After you read it, no matter what, don’t panic. Don’t go flying off the handle. Just keep calm, okay? Surrendering yourself to anger would only get you killed like back then in Mihazono ruin, remember? You get what I’m saying, right?”

“A-alright.”

Alpha already knew the content of the message since she was connected to Akira’s information terminal. Akira, who was still confused, remembered that fact and wondered what it might have been. Judging from Alpha’s reaction, it must be something big. Therefore, he readied himself and opened the message.

The moment he read it, he furrowed his brows and frowned. If Alpha had not warned him beforehand, he would have flown off the handle.

It was a bounty notice. The name, Akira. Reward, 50 billion Aurum. Requester, Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward Branch. Target was identified as a monster by Kugamayama city.

Right now, Akira was designated as a bounty target.

“Akira, Calm down! You’re okay, right?!”

“…Yeah, I’m okay.”

Akira told himself to stay calm. To not repeat his past mistake. But, his rage started to leak from his expression. His stance slowly slid to a fighting one and it was obvious that he was livid.

Guutol, who noticed, quickly warned him.

“Hey! What are you doing!?”

Akira sent a death stare at Guutol. He unconsciously sent that intense stare filled with rage as if to spite Guutol. After all, he had been obediently following their demand, and yet, he now had a bounty on him.

The powered suits around Akira inadvertently reacted by also taking a fighting stance. They aimed their rifles at him. However, since Akira still had his rifles pointing down, they managed to not shoot. Instead, Guutol once again warned him.

“What is it now? Did you change your mind and decided to fight us now?”

“…Didn’t you get any message?”

“Message? What do you mean? Wait… I just got a short message from Kibayashi… It’s telling me to refrain from engaging you. Well, he’s not my superior so I have no reason to obey him, but… Does it have anything to do with this?”

Since Guutol sounded confused, it only made Akira doubly confused. Right at that very instant, a call suddenly reached him. It was from Kibayashi. Akira seemed bewildered and glanced at Alpha, she lightly nodded and accepted the call.

The moment Akira accepted the call, Kibayashi's happy voice echoed through Alpha's telepathy. As a matter of fact, Akira never heard Kibayashi this happy before.

"Yo, Akira! You've done it now, a bounty target, huh!? I've always thought that this would happen sooner or later. But as expected, I never thought you would entertain me this much, you know!?"

Akira replied with a cold voice that sent a shiver.

"…So, it was you, huh?"

But his ice-cold voice did not affect Kibayashi's good mood at all. Instead, he replied with an upbeat tone.

"Nope, not me. Ahh, so you've checked the notice, huh? Then, I'm sure you've read the content, right? The one putting a bounty on your head is the Lion Steel company! Not me!"

"…Is that so? Then, why are you calling me?"

"I just want to make sure that you don't do anything stupid, you see!"

"Anything stupid…? Do you mean like completely ignoring their demand…?"

"If I'm talking about not being reckless, then yeah, that one! But you're more than welcome if you want to do it, you know!? To think that you would even consider doing something like that. Seriously though. Just how splendid can you be? Man, you're just the best!"

Akira thought that Kiabayshi was trying to say that rejecting Chloe's demand was a stupid move. As he was about to erupt in anger, once he

heard Kibayashi's compliment filled with honest pure bliss, it took him by surprise, barely enough to regain some of his calm.

"…Wait for a sec, what are you talking about?"

"About you! I'm sure you don't understand what it means to be a bounty target, right!? So, I'm just worried you'll misunderstand, get too emotional, and do something reckless, you know!? You've been doing great being super reckless up until now. So, it would be such a waste if you die in such a stupid fashion, you know!? If you're going to die, make sure you die in glorious battle!"

"I-I see…"

Akira was weirded out by how excited Kibayashi was.

"Listen. I'm heading there right now to explain to you what's going on. So, just wait there for me, okay!? I'll tell you how to wage a full-blown war against the Lion Steel company! You got it!?"

"A-alright."

"Nice! And also, about the powered suits that are already over there, you can think of them as your bodyguard until I'm there!"

"My bodyguard? Why? I'm a bounty target, you know?"

"I'll tell you everything later! I'm heading there right now! So just wait and don't do anything crazy, yeah!? You heard me loud and clear, yeah?"

Kibayashi then closed the call.

Akira's rage had already vanished. It was replaced by the same level of bewilderment. He then glanced at Alpha and she had the same confused look as him.

"…Well, one thing for sure, I think he was not lying."

"…That one was pretty obvious without you telling me."

“Should we just wait then?”

“Yeah, let’s just do that.”

Akira then waited for Kibayashi with a continuous confused look plastered on his face.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 266, On Who's Intention

Index

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Akira was waiting for Kibayashi while still surrounded by the city defence squad's powered suits in the middle of the wasteland.

He had a 50 billion bounty price tag on his head. The powered suits already knew that while they were watching the surroundings. As a matter of fact, it was rather peaceful.

While waiting for Kibayashi, Akira tried to open his page on the Hunter Office website just to kill time. He found a warning written in small red letters. When he squinted his eyes to read it, it said that he had a bounty on his head.

Akira was once again reminded that he had indeed become a bounty target and tilted his head.

"Hey Alpha, It seems that I've really become a bounty target, right?"

Akira had mostly calmed down, so Alpha had also returned to her usual self as she smiled and replied.

"Well, that is indeed true if you believe what is written there."

“Yeah…”

His Hunter Office account had not been frozen. He was still recognized as a Hunter.

“So… they don’t erase my Hunter data even after I’ve become a bounty target, huh?”

“That seems to be the case.”

“Is that really okay? I mean, like, I am a bounty target, you know?”

“Well, it’s not like I have an answer to that, let’s leave that question to Kibayashi later. He did say that he will explain everything.”

“…Good idea.”

Akira put it aside since it seems like no one here had an answer and it was faster to just ask Kibayashi later.

After a short wait, another vehicle appeared, heading straight toward them. It had a Hunter Office mark printed on it and was broadcasting its presence – it was carrying Kibayashi.

Once they saw the vehicle approach, the powered suits surrounding Akira disbanded and returned back to the city. Guutol, who was the last to leave, spoke to Akira through external speakers.

“We’re heading back now… It seems like you now have a huge bounty on your head. Don’t try to approach the city. I rather not fight against you. As long as you don’t approach the city, there’s no need for us to fight.”

Akira replied curtly.

“Leave that hope of yours to the one who placed that bounty. In the end, I’m basically being dragged into her issues against my will.”

“I see…”

Guutol smiled bitterly and let out a sigh before leaving in his powered suit.

The vehicle stopped next to Akira and Kibayashi stepped off. Although he was considerably calm compared to when he called Akira, he still seemed extremely excited.

“Alright then! It seems like you waited for me! I was worried you were fighting against the city defence squad while waiting for me, you know?”

Akira sighed exasperatedly.

“…It’s not like I fight because I want to.”

Kibayashi laughed heartily at his reply.

“Normally, the moment you pick a fight with someone from the founder family of the Lion Steel company, it’s already well within what only a battle maniac would do, you know?”

Even Akira’s curt attitude did not affect Kibayashi’s excited laughter. He then took out a 20 centimetres-long ring and then threw it on the ground. The moment it touched the ground, it unveiled its legs and expanded out to form a table complete with seats.

“Well, explaining everything will take some time. So, let’s do that while we eat.”

Kibayashi once again took something out of his vehicle and placed it on top of the table. This time, it was instant meals.

“To be honest, we should have this conversation in Steriana, but you’re not allowed to get into the city at the moment. Although these are only instant meals, they’re pretty high-class, you know? After all, this is a conversation with a bounty target worth 50 billion. Normal food just won’t cut it. Though, for me, it’s more of an occupational perk.”

Kibayashi took a seat and urged Akira to also do the same. Akira still looked confused as he took one of the seats. He then looked at Kibayashi with a face full of questions and asked.

“Is it really alright to be having a meal in the middle of the wasteland like this? Or so I want to say, but, more than that, are you sure you want to have a peaceful meal with a bounty target like this?

“Don’t worry. Any monsters in the area are already dead after that fight. Also, no one would dare to attack us while I am here. I will tell you why I can give you that guarantee later. Although, it’s not like I can do anything if you don’t believe me. We can instead just go around the wasteland if you want.”

Akira did not say anything as he opened the lid of the instant meal. The package was made to maintain the warmth of its contents, which made the warm meat dish seem freshly cooked, just moments ago. Akira then took a fork that came with the packaging and took a bite. The glamorous outlook of the meat really matches its taste.

“…Whoah, this tastes really good!”

“Well, that’s an expensive instant meal for you.”

Seeing Akira making himself comfortable and ready to continue the talk, Kibayashi smiled and also opened up his meal.

“Now then. There are a lot of things to talk about, but first of all, let’s start with your current situation. I’m sure you have a lot of questions, but listen to the whole story first before asking.”

Akira knew that it was not the time to be focusing on his food as he gave a firm nod.

Kibayashi smiled. Kibayashi judged Akira to be very relaxed considering the situation he was in right now.

Bounty targets were normally monsters. One such case was when a monster way too powerful for the area suddenly appeared.

Another case could be when a monster caused trouble to the transportation routes. Someone from the transportation business would offer a huge

amount for the bounty reward. After all, they would want to eliminate that monster as soon as possible.

However, this meant that bounty missions were nothing more than normal requests. A request that Hunters did not have to enlist first to take. Therefore, in the end, there was no rule saying that bounty targets had to be monsters, it could be an individual or even an organization.

In the case of monsters, the goal would be to eliminate them. Therefore, the bounty would be paid to the one who killed the target monster. Sometimes, there were cases where it was not a target for elimination. For example, a capture bounty for research, which would warrant the target to be captured alive.

Thus, it was also possible for the target to be a person. Likewise, it was important whether the request wanted the target dead or alive. There might be clauses stating something along the lines of ‘elimination of the target is deemed appropriate if escape from capture’. Naturally, in such cases, it was preferred to capture the target alive for interrogation. However, the death of the target would still yield rewards. On the flip side, for bounty target requests like ‘capture a runaway’, it was necessary to capture the target alive.

In Akira’s case, the bounty did not care whether he was dead or alive. Though it was written that the reward was smaller if he got killed instead of captured alive. However, Akira knew it was intentionally set in order to attract those who had some kind of aversion to killing another human.

Moreover, although Akira had become a bounty target, he would not lose any rights or privileges just because he had become a bounty target.

Even if someone actually managed to kill him. Although they would receive the reward from the bounty, they would still be sanctioned for the crime of homicide. As a matter of fact, they would be hired murderers. There was no doubt they would be fined for disrupting public order and causing fear in the inner wall. Even if they were from the outer wall, the private security corporations in the outer wall will treat them in a similar manner.

They could avoid such issues by asking for permission from the administrators of the area. However, that would mean extra administrative steps to take. Moreover, just because it was a bounty target, there was no guarantee that the administrators would grant permission without any strings attached. After all, just being a bounty target did not give enough of a reason for them to permit the killing of another human.

This was also the same if the bounty target was an organization. Even if their identity and data as Hunters got erased, that would be because they picked a fight against the Corporate Government. Being a bounty target alone did not result in such a thing. Even if that bounty came from one of the Corporate Government entities like the Sakashita Heavy Industry, they would still be able to use their Hunter Office account. This was because the Hunter Office was under the Corporate Government as a whole – not a single entity.

Which meant, that the 50 billion bounty from Lion Steel only meant that Akira had picked a fight with the Lion Steel company, nothing more, nothing less.

After hearing that, Akira seemed so relieved, to the point that it might be misunderstood as disappointment.

“Uhh, what can I say? It seems that being a bounty target is not as bad as I thought, huh?”

Hearing his reaction, Kibayashi tried to hold back his laugh.

“Well, in the end, it is nothing more than having a company place a bounty on your head. I bet you thought that you would be hunted anywhere you go in the eastern district since you are a bounty target now. You might have thought that running away to the central district would be a good idea. But no, you don’t have to do that. The only difference is that there will be more Hunters coming at you for money. Though, I bet most of them would still prefer not to fight you even with the bounty.”

“If it’s about those trying to kill me for money, I’ve had more than enough of them back in the slums. Well, at this point, the only difference would be

the amount that they would receive. Other than that, it's not that much of a difference."

Kibayashi placed his hand on his mouth so as to make sure that he did not accidentally spit out his food.

"So, you're saying that those Hunters who want to kill you for 50 billion Aurum are not that different from those robbers in the slums, huh? That's great! Really great! As expected of you! You really never cease to amaze me!"

Relative to the common sense of those in the eastern district, this way of thinking was no doubt crazy. Kibayashi was immensely amused when Akira said something this crazy with a straight face.

With this, Kibayashi had finished explaining the matter regarding Akira being a bounty target. The next matter would be about Akira being recognized as a monster.

In truth, that matter was much more troubling for him. Thanks to that, the city defence squad and the other security organizations of Kugamayama city would have to treat him as if he was a monster.

Thus, this not only affected the city defence squad, but also the security companies under contract with Kugamayama city. When someone recognized as a monster entered an area under their watch, they would have to remove that person. Of course, killing someone recognized as a monster would not cause trouble from the city's point of view. After all, they were still humans recognized as monsters.

Originally, recognizing someone as a monster was only allowed to be done by the eastern district's Corporate Government. It was a passive method to treat their enemies. It was used to exile someone from the area where such recognition was made. Therefore, if Akira left the area around Kugamayama city, it would not affect him anymore. Even if it came from the five biggest corporations, he could just leave the area under their administration and that would be the end of it.

Akira frowned after listening to Kibayashi's explanation. Although his house and Shizuka's shop were in Kugamayama city, he would be repelled by the defence squad if he approached the city. If he decided to come to the city anyway and fought against the defence squad, there was no doubt they would deal with him proactively instead of passively. Although he did not like it, he had to make his decision. After thinking about his options for a bit, Akira then tried to confirm something with Kibayashi.

"Basically, I can think of Kugamayama city and I no longer being on a friendly term, right?"

"Don't be too hasty. It's true that Kugamayama city has recognized you as a monster, but that's not impossible to erase. Moreover, if you read the notice in detail, you'll find that it's not like the whole city is actively hunting you. As a matter of fact, the city actually has no desire to fight against you."

"What do you mean?"

"It is possible to declare someone as a monster by the jurisdiction of the Corporate Government. But this time, it is just an extra description added beside the bounty designation. The source of it is the Lion Steel company. If I'm not mistaken, you get along pretty well with a city officer called Inabe, no? If it's made through City Management, I bet that guy will stop it. If he gets in trouble with you, he will also get in trouble with Sheryl. This will make a mess with his relic shop in the slums, which he's technically receiving illegal funds from. Those relics were smuggled from the area under his administration after all. There's no way he would let his own scheme be the end of him."

To be more precise, Akira has left this matter entirely to Sheryl. However, it was true that getting on unfriendly terms with Akira would also affect Inabe's dealings with Sheryl. Akira kept that to himself since there was no reason why he should tell Kibayashi.

"But I am still recognized as a monster. Doesn't that mean that even the city could not go against the pressure from a large company?"

“That’s not true. Well, although, it’s not entirely out of the question if that pressure came from the main HQ of the Lion Steel company. However, the one who submitted this request is the Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward Branch. Although they have a bigger sphere of influence than Kugamayama city, the city would never break under the pressure of a mere branch of a company. Although Kugamayam city is only considered to be a mid-sized region in the eastern district, it has its own thoughts and intentions. Moreover, its position is on a rise due to the relic deal made with that AI in Kuzusuhara ruin. There’s no way it would bow down to a mere single Lion Steel branch.”

“Then, why am I still recognized as a monster?”

“This is just my guess, but I bet Lion Steel did something when they placed that bounty designation. The one that you’re chasing, Chloe. She’s from Lion Steel, right? Although she’s in Kugamayama city right now, she’s not treated as a visitor. Instead, she’s being detained for endangering the city. I bet it has something to do with that.”

Akira seemed confused as if he did not understand how things ended up this way. However, Kibayashi simply ignored that and continued to speak of his hypothesis.

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Inside an executive room in the inner wall of Kugamayama city, Inabe was furious when he received information about what happened to Akira. The target of his fury was Udajima.

In the notice that Akira had received, it only stated Akira to be recognized as a monster, nothing more. However, that notice contained more detailed information for the city officials. A small, extra description under that bounty designation notice declared Akira as a monster under Udajima’s name as a proxy of Kugamayama city. An extra paragraph also stated that a post-application had been submitted to the Hunter Office from Lion Steel Third Ward Branch and the Hunter Office had approved it.

“Call Udajima here! Right now!!”

“We’ve already summoned him, but he’s not responding.”

“Then go and take him. No, arrest him, and bring him here!”

Inabe’s men were startled.

“He is a city officer. It might cause some trouble if we arrest him just because he won’t answer our summons…”

“It doesn’t matter! Do it! I will take full responsibility! If you can’t find him, you can even go ahead and add him to the wanted list! Just do everything you can do using my authority!”

“R-right away, sir!”

Inabe’s men flusteredly scrambled out to follow his order. Inabe tried to calm himself down while looking at the notice with squinted eyes.

“That bastard Udajima! What the heck is he doing!? Is he trying to start a full-blown war with me? Isn’t it way too late for that now? Just what is that bastard thinking…”

Inabe frowned. He could not conceive of a reason as to why Udajima did this.

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Chloe was detained inside a room in the inner wall. She was not allowed to go out of the room and not allowed to meet her servants. She was pretty much free otherwise. Furthermore, in that room, she still had a connection to the web.

She made her own tea, but since it was so long since she did that herself, she could not help but frown after taking a sip.

“Yep, this is really bad. Though it’s an added benefit besides this room, they should’ve prepared something better considering I am from the Lorentz family.”

She then looked at the teacup. Although it was considered a luxurious teacup in the eastern district, it was still not good enough for her.

“The cup and the saucer are both cheap too. They should treat me better.”

After she mumbled her complaints, she then smiled, amused.

“Well, it’s not like I can do anything about it, I guess. Let’s just take this as proof that they’re seriously treating me as a criminal who endangered the city.”

The tea inside the cup was from a relatively expensive tea in the eastern district. But after taking a sip, Chloe had no plan to take another sip. Thus, she placed the teacup back on top of the table. The moment she did that, the door suddenly swung open with force. Looking at the man she expected to storm into the room, Chloe smiled and asked.

“I know that I’m basically in your place, but you can at least knock first?”

Seeing Chloe, Udajima tried his best to hold back his rage. He already realized that she was just acting back during her questioning. The moment he saw her smile, his anger started to surface again, which was not easy for him to hold down.

“You’ve done it this time! What’s the meaning of this!? What are you trying to accomplish!?”

Chloe understood what Udajima was referring to, but she still played coy.

“What do you mean?”

“Just cut the crap! I know you know what I am talking about!”

“Even if you say so, even if this is some kind of second questioning, it would be great if you can give me more specifics. I don’t want to answer questions after such vague leading questions, after all.”

Udajima grabbed Chloe’s collar and hung her up. Although her feet had left the ground, her smile did not crumble.

“This is within the wall. It would be best for you to not use any violence. Well, that is, unless you are fine with being kicked out of the wall.”

A Kugamayama city officer grabbed an officer of a large company by the collar inside the inner wall of Kugamayama city. It would create a huge scandal, which could be seen both as a city officer picking a fight inside the city. Furthermore, it was a rude action toward someone from a large company which held greater influence than the city. Udajima knew that but he could not hold himself back.

If he hit Chloe, it would only worsen his already horrendous situation. He might get himself exiled from Kugamayama city. That thought managed to help him hold himself back. He then released her and took a deep breath to help him calm down.

In contrast to Udajima, Chloe straightened up her dress with her usual smile plastered on her face.

“So then, what do you want to ask of me, again?”

“The one who made that monster designation for Akira was you, wasn’t it?!”

“Yes, that’s me. To be more precise, I submitted that together with the bounty designation through the Lion Steel company. That’s why, in the end, the Hunter Office approved it.”

“I already know that! What I want to know is why did you use my name without my permission!? Why did you do that!?”

“Well, that is not exactly false. After all, you said it during that questioning, right? It’s not like we did that without your confirmation first, you know?”

“What are you…!?”

“Is it okay to take your decision as Kugamayama city’s decision? Are you sure about making me a criminal, charged with the crime of endangering the city? Are you sure you do not want to take that back? I believe I did ask

you all of this back then, right? And I'm sure that the Hunter Office gave its approval after checking the application. They assumed that you understood the contents when that application was sent. That's why the monster designation was approved together with the bounty designation. Though, to be honest, I think there was no need to check that part."

Udajima gritted his teeth in rage, in contrast to that, Chloe was casually smiling.

"If you have anything you don't like about the Hunter Office's decision, I prefer you to convey it to the Hunter Office. I'm sorry. It's not like I can do anything about it even if you ask that of me. Unfortunately, I don't have the influence to veto the Hunter Office's decision."

Udajima glared at Chloe. However, he understood that it was impossible for him to get out of this situation on his own. His expression turned stern and desperate.

"…What do you want then? What exactly can you get from driving me to the corner like this? With the power of the Lion Steel company, you can just put a huge bounty on his head. I bet that would be enough to push that Akira to the edge. And now that he is recognized as a monster, you can just ask for formal assistance from City Management. There's no need to drag me into this mess. It is unnecessary to pick a fight with the City Management like this."

"I'll just answer that statement by saying that I decided to do so after considering many things. Moreover, personally, I don't hold a grudge against you. As matter of fact, I'm hoping we can work together."

"What do you mean?"

Udajima was taken aback. He did not expect that at all. Chloe slightly bent forward and smiled.

"You lost most of your influence after losing to Inabe, right?"

"W-what are you talking about…?"

“I know you’re looking for a chance to turn your situation around. If you help me, I will also help you regain your influence, you know?”

Udajima did not expect Chloe to have investigated him to that extent. He was shocked at how she was smiling at him, as if he was already her accomplice. He could not help but inadvertently flinch back. That was when a sudden message reached him. It was from the public safety department of the city and its content was a summon from Inabe. There was also a warning, if he kept ignoring the summon, the public safety department would arrest him.

Udajima turned pale. Even if he gave himself up, Inabe would just demand him to take responsibility. He might try to plead, stating that he got tricked. However, even if Inabe believed him, it would not change his situation. On the other hand, if he ignored the summon without a good reason, he would be arrested. In the worst-case scenario, he might even be identified as the enemy of Kugmayama city. Udajima was at the end of his rope. Seeing that, Chloe smiled and said to him.

“To be honest, I’ve been summoned from those in the upper echelons. But since I’m detained, we will have to end up holding a remote VR meeting. We will start soon, so you can join if you want, you know? Starting from the head of the Lion Steel Third Ward’s branch, there will be other important figures attending this meeting. This is a good chance for you to get acquainted with these important people from my company, you know? This will also give you an excuse to not answer that summons, no?”

Udajima’s expression was a combination of shock, confusion, doubt, and desperation.

“…How do you know all of that?”

Udajima was referring to the fact that he had just received a forced summon from Inabe and needed a reason to not answer it. Putting aside how Chloe knew about the summon, Udajima’s question was more directed towards how much she knew about him, and how she acquired this much information.

Chloe simply smiled as if she already knew everything.

“It’s just a guess. Don’t worry, it’s not like I know everything about you.”

Udajima could not believe those words since she knew of his conflict with Inabe. He ended up making a stern expression without being able to say anything back.

“So then, what do you want to do? Do you want to join the meeting?”

Udajima hesitated. Declining her offer now would not change his current predicament. Therefore, though he knew he was being manipulated by her, he made his resolve and made the difficult decision.

“…I’ll take you up on that offer.”

“Thank you very much. In that case, let’s start the preparation right away. I’m actually already past the meeting time. So, my information terminal is flooded with messages right now.”

Toward Udajima, who seemed extremely troubled, Chloe simply smiled, amused.

—*—*—*—

Inabe, who received a report from the city’s public safety department, frowned.

Although the summon had been properly conveyed, at the moment, Udajima was inside the room where Chloe was detained. Furthermore, he was attending a Lion Steel meeting together with her. Because of that, the room he was in had a higher information security level. Thus, no ordinary city officer may enter without a good reason.

The area lent to Sakashita Heavy Industry was also treated the same way. Though, it was under a different administration. Even for Kugamayama city public safety department, entering such a room without permission meant picking a fight with the Lion Steel company. Thus, it came as no surprise when they picked to withdraw.

Inabe quickly started investigating what exactly was going on. Since the room was now protected with a special information protection system for the Lion Steel company meeting, Inabe could not uncover any further. He knew nothing more than Udajima was attending a Lion Steel meeting with Chloe.

"…What's going on? Why is Udajima attending a Lion Steel meeting? Don't tell me that Lion Steel is working with Udajima!? Impossible! He should not have such a connection…"

Inabe decided to wait patiently while planning his next move. After all, it was not like the meeting would last forever. He could just post his men from the public safety department in front of the room to take or even arrest Udajima the moment he left the room.

Although he had bad feelings about said plan, it was the most he could do with his current level of authority.

__*__*__*__

A large circle table was placed in the middle of an infinitely wide room. There were 10 seats in that meeting space, hosted inside a virtual space. Other than Chloe and the head of the Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward Branch, Beltram, there were also those from the faction where Chloe belonged. There were initially a few empty seats but they were quickly filled.

Udajima had no seats in that meeting. He was standing next to Chloe, anxious. The other participants in the meeting were looking in his direction as he was barely able to withstand their reproachful gazes. After all, although they were from a branch office, they were still officers from a large corporation. Since the meeting was held in a virtual space, which was close to reality, it helped when he looked away from the virtual world and back into reality.

Meanwhile, Chloe was completely calm. Although the other participants were looking at her with scrutiny, there was even a faint smile on her face.

As everyone was a bit confused about how to react to her audacity, eventually, the rest of the empty seats were filled and Beltram started the meeting.

“Well then, shall we start? There’s no need to point out why we’re having this meeting. Chloe Lebelant Lorents, we’ll hear your excuse.”

Although Chloe understood what Beltram was talking about, she apologetically replied.

“My deepest apologies for being late in reporting this matter and ending up delaying this meeting. At the moment, I’m being detained under the charge of endangering Kugamayama city. As such, I hope you understand my situation. Now, regarding that charge, it originated from Udajima-sama over here. Udajima-sama is an officer from Kugamayama city, thus, regarding this matter, I hope that everyone can understand-”

However, one of the officers harshly interjected.

“We’re not talking about that! Do you think this is a joke or something!?”

Chloe shook her head.

“Not at all, I don’t think so at all. I understand that it’s my fault for delaying the meeting and wasting your precious time.”

“Your response is exactly what I refer to as a joke! Are you seriously going with that in this meeting?”

As others were clearly getting agitated. With the eyes directed at her getting harsher. Chloe tilted her head and seemed confused. Seeing that, Beltram then spoke up.

“I don’t know what your intentions are, but if you insist on keeping that up, I don’t see any reason to continue this meeting. There will be no need to meet you ever again. You can just rot and die out there in the wasteland. So, this is your last chance. You may deliver your explanation.”

Given her last warning, the meeting immediately returned to total silence. Depending on her next words, Chloe might get exiled. Everyone in the meeting, including Chloe herself, understood that. Even so, Chloe then spoke up.

“My apologies, but I don’t see a need to give an explanation for anything. If it is about the incident regarding Olivia-sama’s card and what happened with a Hunter by the name of Akira, along with the related matter including his bounty and the monster designation, I do believe that there’s no need for me to explain anything.”

As the meeting returned to total silence, Beltram sent a gaze at her. It was as if he was looking at a death row convict.

“I see. Let me remind you that you will not be able to take those words back.”

Even under such a gaze, Chloe just smiled and ignored it.

“Of course, I have no plans to take that back. After all, it’s the will from representative Alice.”

With that sentence, the meeting once again went astir.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 267, Chloe’s interpretation

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Chloe’s statement sent ripples through the meeting. Beltrame stared at her with ferocious intensity.

“What do you mean by that? If that statement is false, exiling you out from the inner wall will not be enough, you know?”

As someone from the Lion Steel company, crime done using the name of its highest authority was severe. Those who did not believe her words already looked at her with hostile eyes.

However, Chloe did not waver at all, instead, she smiled and explained.

“I believe that it’s already pretty clear. It is exactly as I said. I am just doing my best to obey representative Alice’s order. As such, I don’t see any need to explain my actions.”

Chloe’s straightforward declaration, stating that she was completely innocent, caused them to be confused. Beltram’s gaze changed from a hostile one to a questioning one.

“I see. In that case, instead of an excuse, we demand an explanation. Why do you think it is the will of representative Alice? I bet you did not receive such an order straight from her, right?”

“Of course, that is indeed the case. After all, I am in no position to receive such a thing. I simply received the same order as everyone here has received. As a matter of fact, I don’t understand why no one here has taken any action regarding said order. Well, I guess it’s because of my lack of competence. I do not understand everyone’s stance.”

“What do you mean?”

“If that question is nothing more than your main question and not a leading question, for the sake of the Lion Steel’s future, I recommend you relinquish your seat, Branch Manager.”

The mood in the room suddenly turned cold. It was obvious, rude intimidation from Chloe to someone of a higher position. The other officers started to doubt her sanity. Otherwise, she might have really done everything under Alice’s order, which would explain her courage.

The silence continued. Chloe and Beltram were looking straight at each other without looking away. The mood started to get tense. As the other officers started to get anxious, Beltram suddenly loosened up and said.

“Very well. In that case, as the representative of everyone here, I shall ask for your guidance. After all, that’s just how important representative Alice’s will is. If there’s a chance that the situation is due to our ignorance, even if slim, there’s still a need to completely eliminate such a possibility. As such, I ask for you to explain it in detail, for someone as clueless as me… I won’t let you wiggle your way out of this one.”

Beltram said the last part, dead-serious. As the others were waiting anxiously, Chloe smiled and replied.

“Of course!”

Chloe then told the participants of the meeting her thoughts. As the meeting progressed, the participants had troubled and shocked expressions on their faces. It seems like half of them believed her while the other half did not. In other words, Chloe's explanation did make sense. It was something they could not laugh off. One of the officers then interjected.

"Isn't this nothing more than your personal wish? You have made so many blunders. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to state that due to your desire, you're currently trying to find a way to make up for your mistakes."

"I don't deny that some of it are my subjective interpretation. After all, I do want to find enough leverage to raise my rank in this company. But that's the same for all of us. Either way, you are denying my explanation by stating it to be out of my personal interest. You have no other reason nor evidence to state that my opinion is incorrect, right?"

"W-well, but still…"

"If I might add something else, I'm sure that everyone already knows that representative Alice told us to take care of this matter until she arrives."

Chloe then continued to explain her interpretation of Alice's order. The officers who heard her interpretation started to get agitated.

"After that, I managed to contact Olivia-sama. I'm sure that everyone has been well informed about this. And at that time, Olivia-sama said that there won't be a next time."

From there, Chloe explained how she interpreted that warning. This time, it caused confusion between the officers. Thus, one of them questioned Chloe with a stern expression.

"…I understand your reasoning. But in the end, it's nothing more than your interpretation, no? You can't just say that it is the representative Alice's will."

Chloe looked pitifully and slightly mockingly at the officer.

“Even if you say so, in the end, I am not representative Alice. So, I can’t really say that it’s indeed her will. But if you need confirmation no matter what, you might as well ask the branch manager for help to contact representative Alice. It is impossible to ask for an audience with representative Alice with my position. But it might be possible if it’s with the branch manager’s authority.”

Everyone turned toward Beltram. After that, Chloe continued.

“Well, even if I could, I still won’t do it though. After all, I don’t want representative Alice to think that I’m incompetent. Asking her for such a simple thing.”

Hesitation and confusion caused the officers to lose words. They frowned with a stern expression without saying anything.

Alice was going to come to Kugamayama city soon to deal with the matter regarding Olivia. Because of that, this meeting, which was originally meant to question Chloe’s action, was now in an uproar. It had already lost sight of its original goal and leaned toward whether to believe Chloe’s words or not.

Whether it was to go against Alice’s will or to obey it. This affected not only the fate of the Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward Branch, but it might also affect the other branches as well. For the better or for the worse. Whether to proceed carefully or boldly. Either way, they would have to make a decision, one that they would never be able to take back.

Beltram eventually made the decision.

“I will end this meeting here today. Let’s resume this tomorrow. I will contact the rest of you later.”

With that closing remark, everyone seemed to calm down. They were delaying making the conclusive decision. It was true that they did not have all the necessary information to make such a crucial decision. It was obvious that everyone would do their best to gather as much information as they could after this. Therefore, delaying it was preferred for the rest of the officers.

Beltram’s gaze then shifted to Udajima.

“Udajima-san, was it?”

Udajima flinched back from that gaze, one cast by someone of a high position from a large corporation.

“Y-yes!”

“I’m sorry that you didn’t get to say anything during this meeting. Although you’ve managed to join in for a while. But if I may, I hope you will also join the next meeting. If it’s about how you treat her, I’m thinking of leaving that to you for the time being. It’s not like I’m doing this to compensate for your efforts. I will give you my contact number and contact line. If there’s anything you want to report to me, you can do so straight through that line. You will not need to go through her.”

After Beltram said so, the other officers also proceeded to give their contact to Udajima. It was their covert way of hinting Udajima to send them information without going through Chloe. Nonetheless, it did not change the fact that it gave Udajima a direct connection to Lion Steel’s officers, which would strengthen his position as a city officer.

“Now then, please let me excuse myself.”

Beltram turned off the connection and disappeared from the meeting. The other officers also followed suit, leaving Chloe and Udajima alone.

Chloe smiled at Udajima and said.

“Once we leave, City Management would take notice that the meeting has ended. At that time, I bet there will be men stationed outside the room waiting to get in. So, let’s talk for a bit first. With this, I hope that you will believe me when I declared I would help you if you help me.”

“…Alright, I’ll believe you for now. So then, what do you want?”

“Well, there are a lot of things that I want. But first of all, I want to be able to contact Latis and my other servants. I actually tried to make tea by

myself, but it just won't come out right. I'm just not used to it."

Seeing her smile, as if it was a joke, Udajima replied with a stern expression.

"…Very well."

"Thank you very much. Now then, do you need anything from me? Let's discuss about everything we need to keep confidential while we're still here."

"You have a point… Well, first thing first…"

Chloe and Udajima continued their meeting inside that virtual space for some time after that.

Outside the room, where Chloe was detained, those from the city public safety department were waiting for the meeting to end. They were preparing themselves. The moment they received the notice that it had ended, they would first send another warning. If Udajima continues to not comply, they would arrest him.

The door opened and Udajima stepped out. He then lightly smiled at the surprised city public safety department and said to them.

"Well, sorry to make you wait. The meeting took longer than I expected."

One of the shocked men replied.

"Well, that is… completely fine. Udajima-sama, we hope you will cooperate and let us take you to Inabe-sama. We apologize but we're allowed to arrest you if necessary."

"Yeah, I know. Don't worry, I won't run away. I will come with you. Or if you prefer, you can arrest me, just to be safe."

Udajima smiled and offered both of his arms, but the guy just shook his head and said.

“N-no, that won’t be necessary if you obediently come with us.”

“I see. Let’s go then.”

Udajima then went with them while showing no remorse. Although those from the public safety department were confused, they still followed through with their duty.

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After listening to the explanation about his monster designation from Kibayashi, Akira pouted and said.

“What do you mean? Infighting within City Management has disallowed the decision to be revoked?”

Unlike Akira, who was even showing slight exasperation, Kibayashi laughed and replied.

“It’s not like City Management is ruled by a single person after all. There are times when a conflict of interest prevents them from taking quick action. Though, I bet it’s a huge inconvenience for you.”

Kugamayama city itself had no wish to be hostile to him. Moreover, Inabe was something akin to his ally. However, from that point of view, it is not completely unthinkable that the anti-Inabe faction would retaliate. They would preserve the decision in order to sabotage Inabe.

Furthermore, considering the power relationship between Kugamayama city and the Lion Steel company, it was not easy for the Hunter Office to revoke an application it had already approved. At the very least, that was what Kibayashi had guessed.

Somewhere away from him, where he had nothing to do with, there was trouble brewing. Trouble, which directly impedes him. However, Akira understood that he could not do anything about it. Thus, he could only sigh as he said.

“Either way, I can’t return back to the city for the time being and things will get even more troublesome if I force my way in, right?”

“Yep, exactly. I bet you’re displeased about this, But let’s just leave that matter for now. Now, we should get to the main topic. Let’s start talking about how you can fight against the Lion Steel company with the best firepower that you can get.”

Since it was an important subject for Akira, he changed gears and became solemn. However, seeing how Kibayashi was grinning like a Cheshire cat, he could not help but frown.

“Even if I say the best firepower, in the end, it depends on whether you would do this alone or in a team. Either way, it’s important to increase your own firepower. That’s why I recommend you hold back from attacking Lion Steel for the time being. Wait for the equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry.”

“…Is that route still viable? I have become a bounty target, you know?”

Akira was already half-certain that was out of the question. Thus, he did not expect to still receive his equipment. However, Kibayashi replied with such firmness that it completely eliminated his worries.

“Of course. There’s no way Sakashita Heavy Industry would retract their reward. Not just because the Hunter had received a monster designation in one particular place. Furthermore, that bounty designation only came from the Lion Steel company’s branch. If they did that, it would affect their reputation. In the worst-case scenario, some of the Hunters who are contracted with Sakashita Heavy Industry might even cancel their contract. They might instead form a contract with the other 5 biggest companies. This would endanger Sakashita Heavy Industry’s position as one of the big 5.”

“I-I see.”

“That’s just how powerful the binding power of a contract is. Well, although, it wouldn’t go that well had you picked a fight against the

Corporate Government. Just because you got into a fight against a company because of a single relic, that won't make Sakashita waver. That's why there's nothing for you to worry about. Especially if it is related to Sakashita."

"But if I'm not mistaken, they still don't know when that powerful equipment will arrive, right?"

"You don't need to worry about that as well. Although it's just my prediction, at most, it will take about a month. If you're really lucky, they'll be here in about a week. In the worst-case scenario, 3 months."

Akira raised his eyebrows in shock.

"I'm pretty sure you said that it might even come next year though? Are you sure they can even arrive in a week?"

"The reason for the delayed transport was because of the limited transport routes that Sakashita had decided on. Recently, they've been lifting up most of those limitations. Without those limitations, I can give you a good approximation as to when they would arrive. And as expected, even I don't have enough information about Sakashita Heavy Industry's transportation routes to be able to make a more precise prediction. So, my guess is between 1 week to 3 months. If they are already somewhere nearby, it'll only take about a week to transfer ownership to you. If they have to withdraw enroute before trying another route, at most, it will take 3 months to get here."

Akira lightly nodded to his explanation, so Kibayashi smiled and leaned forward.

"That's why just wait and don't do anything stupid. Chloe is inside Kugamayama at the moment. So, I recommend you force your way into the city once you have your front-line equipment. You just need to wait for a bit before receiving equipment far better than what you had before. So, until then, although it sounds awful, I hope you can just keep avoiding trouble for now."

Kibayashi then leaned further. He was so close that Akira pulled himself away from him.

“Well, it’s you that we’re talking about here. I bet you don’t like the idea of just running away, but deal with it for now. If you can hold back, you can vent your rage later. Using your new front-line equipment, you can blow open a hole into the inner wall, and get even the middle and the upper district involved in your quest for vengeance. At that point, you would be able to make those who look down on you regret their actions. That’s why, for now, just wait patiently, okay? You understand, right?”

“O-okay.”

Kibayashi, who kept leaning forward while whispering his devilish plan to Akira, made the latter feel weirded out by it. Therefore, Akira tried to change the subject.

“By the way, Kibayashi, you are a Kugamayama city officer, no? Is it really okay for someone in your position to suggest a bounty target use front-line weapon to blow the city’s wall open?”

Kibayashi, who already had both of his hands on the table, supporting most of his weight while he leaned toward Akira, returned back to his seat and calmed down for a bit.

“Well, if you ask me whether it’s okay or not, I bet it’s not. It’s something that a city officer definitely can’t do. I bet the punishment would be more than just a written formal warning.”

Seeing Akira looking at him with confused eyes, Kibayashi then pointed at the Hunter Office mark on his vehicle.

“But right now, I am here as a Hunter Office’s staff member. That’s why it won’t be trouble at all.”

Although Kibayashi was a Kugamayama city officer, at the same time, he was also a Hunter Office staff member. He was well accustomed to partitioning his two positions, as well as using them when necessary.

Thanks to that, he was able to avoid having to face repercussions, which might have led to his bad reputation.

“I know you are a bounty target, but there are many types of people who become bounty targets. If it’s just a 1 million bounty, the Hunter Office would not even bother to deal with it. But if it’s for 50 billion Aurum, not to mention it also includes monster designation from a medium-sized corporation… the Hunter Office would have to at least do something to prevent damage from spreading. Things like trying to calm the situation and get both sides to peacefully find a solution to whatever the problem they have between them. At the moment, I’m actually using that as an excuse to meet up with you. That’s why you’re safe while you’re in the middle of a conversation with me. Well, at least, those who want your bounty would not attack you in this situation. Even if there is someone nearby waiting to kill you, they can only observe from a distance right now. They will not dare snipe you. So, there’s no need to worry about that.”

Akira was a bit surprised by Kibayashi’s explanation.

“Is that so? Are you sure? It’s 50 billion Aurum, you know?”

“It has nothing to do with the amount. Trying to attack someone who is in the middle of negotiations with the Hunter Office is the same as picking a fight with the Hunter Office. This also means picking a fight with the Corporate Government too. Even if they manage to kill you, they won’t be able to claim the bounty. To top it off, their Hunter data will get expunged. Their account would be frozen and the whole eastern district will recognize them as monsters.”

Akira lightly nodded again, Kibayashi then continued.

Attacking someone in the middle of negotiating means antagonizing everyone included in that negotiation. The reason why Kibayashi told Akira to just think of Goutol and the others as escorts while they were surrounding him was because it signified Akira being in the middle of negotiations with Kugamayama city. To be more precise, they were recognised to be negotiating regarding Akira, who had been designated as a monster, to not approach Kugamayama city.

Naturally, there was no guarantee that no one would attack them considering that the bounty was 50 billion Aurum. Furthermore, they could gain a connection with the Lion Steel company. That was why Goutol and his men were vigilantly watching the surroundings.

Kibayashi told Akira to think of Goutol and his men as his bodyguards since, in reality, they were indeed protecting him.

The city defence squad's duty was to protect the city, not to hunt a bounty target. So, as long as Akira kept away from the city, even if he was a bounty target recognized as a monster, they would not attack him. Moreover, Kibayashi had already informed Goutol, using his position as staff from the Hunter Office.

Akira was closely listening to Kibayashi's explanation, full of interest. However, he also started to worry about the time as he said.

"Now then, let's get back to the main subject. It's not like I can keep this up for long as well. I guess I'll convey the things that I need to convey to you here. Although you will be just running around until your new equipment arrives, if possible, don't go too far from Kugamayama city. We will hand over your equipment once they arrive in Kugamayama city. However, there will certainly be information leaks somewhere. That's why, if it's possible, I want to give them to you as soon as possible once they arrive. It would be easier and faster if you were nearby. It's also safer since it'll reduce the chance of you getting attacked on your way back to collect it."

"Even if you say so, I'm sure there will be more people coming after me if I roam around Kugamayama city. As long as I can't get into Kugamayama city, I would have to find another city to get my food and ammo…"

"If you're staying somewhere close, I will help you with that as well."

"Hah? Are you sure you're okay doing that?"

Toward Akira, who was obviously surprised by his offer, Kibayashi's smile widened as he explained.

“Well, about that, I can put up an excuse. I can state having no other choice but to supply you with food and ammo. Otherwise, you would be cornered and have no other choice but to raid the city. So, I will be doing that per my duty as a city officer. After all, as a staff member from the Hunter Office, it might be best for me to take a neutral stance.”

It was a good excuse for Kibayashi. Even if it meant making Akira stronger in exchange for buying more time for peaceful negotiations. Even if negotiations fail and Akira ends up attacking the city with his greater firepower, Kibayashi could simply claim that he did all he could. Though, in reality, Kibayashi was hoping that would happen. Akira understood that very well as he looked at Kibayashi’s wide unsettling smile.

Afterwards, Kibayashi told Akira all kinds of things until their time was up. He then returned back to his vehicle and lightly warned Akira, who was already back on his bike.

“The moment I turn on this vehicle, you will lose safety insurance from the Hunter Office. Well, you are a bounty target with 50 billion Aurum on your head. There will no doubt be Hunters who will come after you. They will do so with proper preparation first. So, I bet no one will attack you for the time being. But still, be careful out there.”

“Sure. I’ll be counting on you for the ammo.”

“Yeah. Don’t worry about that. You can count on me. Do tell me if something happens. I will contact you if something comes up. Make sure to answer calls coming from the secret line that I just told you about. Well then, until next time, Akira. Good luck!”

Kibayashi smiled as he said so and headed back to Kugamayama city.

Meanwhile, Akira accelerated his bike in the opposite direction. It was his first day being a bounty target, one who could not return back to his home in Kugamayama city.

__*__*__*__

Inside a personal room located in the inner wall of Kugamayama city, Reina seemed calm. Though, she hardly appeared to be friendly. In front of her was a large display with Beltram in it.

That image of Beltram heaved a sigh.

“That’s not how you address a branch head, you know?”

But Reina still offered her apology after she was told.

“My apology. I’ve been living outside the wall for so long that it seems like I’ve forgotten some of my manners without realizing it. For that, I am really sorry.”

Beltram’s gaze shifted toward Kanae and Shiori, who were standing behind her. Reina was at least showing a respectful attitude toward him, someone who held a higher position. However, Shiori was not even trying to hide her stern gaze and Kanae was even displaying hostility in her smile.

“Those maids too. That’s not how you address an officer from the same company, you know? Where is your loyalty toward the company you belong to?”

“My master is Milady after all. Milady is already showing her loyalty to the company. Of course, that includes Milady’s attitude toward you, you know?”

“Beltram-sama is taking a neutral stance as the head manager of Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward Branch, regarding the infighting between the factions. Moreover, Beltram-sama is also taking a neutral stance regarding the attack on Milady, which might also be interpreted as abandoning Milady. As such, the barest of respect would be enough.”

After Beltram confirmed the maids’ stance, his gaze returned back to Reina. There was a slight change in his expression. It was indicating how impressed he was with Reina. Not only was she able to hold onto Shiori’s loyalty, but she could also tame a problematic maid like Kanae.

[So, both Reina and Chloe changed this much outside the wall, huh? I once heard the reason why they drive out family members deemed incompetent outside the wall. It is because the conditions out there are much harsher than inside the wall. It was done in hopes of fostering their growth. I guess that's not all nonsense…]

Although they were driven outside the wall for different reasons, both Chloe and Reina were the source of the ongoing incident. Beltram could not help but feel impressed as well as cautious toward these two, who were both, from his point of view, still lacking.

"I'm glad to see that both you and Lady Chloe had grown so much outside the wall."

Beltram then looked at Shiori.

"By the way, it seems like you are blaming me. Despite the fact that you have received an order directly from the representative. It does not change the fact that your actions have aided or even caused this incident to spread. I don't see your handling as something wise for a maid affiliated with the Lion Steel company."

"Representative Alice's order was for those at the scene to handle the situation until she arrives. And the one who manages those people should be you, no?"

Shiori replied with obvious sarcasm. It was clear that she was indicating that the source of this incident, including Reina and Chloe's actions, was all due to the incompetent control the head of the Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward branch had over his people. Shiori understood that it was a rude remark toward Beltram, who was her superior. However, Beltram's decision to not punish Chloe, even after robbing that card from Reina, could be interpreted as approval of her actions. Therefore, Shiori could not possibly hide her anger.

As Shiori prepared herself, expecting reproach from Beltram, he replied with something unexpected. Beltram made a troubled expression as he mumbled.

“…As I thought, that’s what it means, huh?”

Reina and the others frowned. They did not understand the meaning behind those words. However, the fact that Beltram did not reproach Shiori, caused Reina to feel like something bad was going on. Thus, her expression turned stern as she asked.

“Branch manager. I believe that you are busy as well, so can we please get onto the main subject?”

“…You’re right, let’s get into the main subject. But before that, let me inform you of this. As the branch manager, I’m taking a neutral stance regarding the factions. With that in mind, there might be times when it seems like I’m siding with a certain faction. However, I will only do so for the sake of the company in mind. I am not doing so because I’m siding with any particular faction. That’s why it’s not like I’m abandoning your side or siding on Lady Chloe’s side. I’m just dealing with matters with my position and ability in mind.”

“Are you saying that the fact Chloe took Olivia-sama’s card from me by force is all for the sake of the company? And you, as the branch manager, don’t see any problem with it?”

This time it was not from Shiori but from Reina. After all, it was safer for her to speak up instead of a maid from the company. She did not want Shiori to worsen her standing. Furthermore, it was her covert way of hinting Shiori to keep her mouth shut.

Shiori, who understood Reina’s intentions, relaxed her stern expression. In turn, Kanae, who noticed, smiled bitterly.

Although Reina noticed the two’s reaction behind her, she was being careful so as to not smile. Up until now, Reina had been leaving the negotiations to Shiori. However, from now on, she made her resolve to act as Shiori’s master and waited for Beltram’s reply.

However, Beltram once again reacted with something that they did not expect. He knitted his eyebrows, which made him look like someone with a

lot of power and responsibility. Someone fitting for his position as the branch manager.

“That is exactly the crucial part. We, officers from the third ward branch, are debating whether to see Lady Chloe’s action as problematic or not.”

“…What do you mean?”

“Actually, we originally saw Lady Chloe’s action as problematic. We had a meeting just now to discuss how to deal with the aftermath. Although I can’t really say what went on during the meeting, I will at least inform you of Lady Chloe’s current situation.”

Chloe attacked Akira and failed. She then placed a 50 billion bounty on his head. Furthermore, she had Kugamayama city designate Akira as a monster. And for the crime of endangering the city, she got detained. After hearing all of that, Reina could not hold back her surprise as to how the situation had greatly escalated in just one day.

“Lady Chloe’s action had caused tremendous problems. As officers of the third ward branch, we can’t ignore her actions. We only have two options: approve or reproach her action. However, we don’t have enough information to decide at the moment. Because of that, I would hope you will share your side of the story with us, including the matter of Olivia-sama’s card as well. This is an order from the branch manager of Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward branch. You will tell me everything in detail.”

When Beltram said so, he was exuding an extraordinary amount of pressure. This allowed Reina and the others to grasp just how important this matter was.

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Akira rode his bike in the opposite direction of Kibayashi. After some time, he stopped behind a crumbled building and sighed.

“Well, it seems like no one is coming after me yet… right?”

Alpha smiled and nodded.

“Most Hunters still don’t know that you’re a bounty target now. So, it should be fine for the time being. Let’s use this chance to calmly think of a plan.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

When a bounty for a monster was up, a notice would be sent out from the Hunter Office to all Hunters in the area. This was how Hunters would receive this information. However, this was not the case for bounty targets that were human. It was to grant an opportunity for the parties involved to talk it out. Perhaps, they might be able to take back the bounty designation.

Although it did not take a lot of work to figure out when someone became a bounty target, it required someone to actively look for such information. As

such, it took some time before it spread among the Hunters. This period of time was a form of an extension for the involved parties to negotiate.

In Akira's case, since he had also been recognized as a monster, all private security firms contracted with City Management had already received a notice. It was only a matter of time before his bounty spread around, among the Hunters who were acquainted with him. Moreover, Akira had no wish to peacefully resolve this matter.

Since he could not return back to the city, his only choice was to spend his night in the middle of the wasteland. It was unclear how long he had to live out in the wasteland. He now had to be careful of both monsters and Hunters.

Akira was talking to Alpha about how to face this issue. Mid-conversation, he suddenly received a message from Carol through his Hunter code. The content was another code to access a certain secret line. Akira and Alpha looked at each other, after briefly hesitating, he decided to access that secret line.

"Akira, it seems like you're alright. Thank goodness!"

"Carol, what is it?"

"Geez. Don't give me that when you just left your bodyguard job without any explanation, right?"

Carol sounded a bit angry. Akira frowned and apologetically said.

"Ah, right. Sorry about that. I was in a hurry due to certain business, you see."

"Well, I guess it can't be helped then. But it seems like you've calmed down now. At least enough to have the time to call me back, right? So, let's meet up and talk."

Akira frowned. He paused for a bit before giving his reply.

“…Well, actually, a lot of things happened afterwards. So, it’s kind of hard to meet up right now, you see…”

Akira was trying to refuse while still being vague. However, Carol suddenly brought out the main point with a serious tone.

“If it’s about Lion Steel putting 50 billion Aurum on your head and Kugamayama city recognizing you as a monster, I already know.”

Akira was caught by surprise. He did not say anything. He did not even try to make an excuse. As he started putting his guard up toward her, Carol who already guessed his response, quickly added.

“Just to let you know, I have no wish to fight you. If you don’t believe me, then I guess meeting up will be impossible. And if you won’t change your mind no matter what, then, there’s no point in continuing this call. So, I’ll hang up.”

After that, Carol went silent. The anxious heavy mood continued. After a minute of silence, Akira lightly sighed and said.

“Alright, let’s meet up then.”

The mood immediately cleared up after that. Carol sounded extremely relieved as she replied.

“Thank you. Well then. How should we meet up? It’s not a good idea to just meet up somewhere randomly in the wasteland, right? If you have a good idea, feel free to tell me. I will abide by your decision. But, if you don’t have any good idea, I will try to think of something.”

“Let’s see then, in that case…”

Akira and Alpha discussed through telepathy, how and where to meet up with Carol.

“Alright. Let’s talk about the rest later then… Akira.”

“Yes?”

“Thank you for trusting me. I’m really happy that you did.”

Carol jovially said before closing the call.

Akira raised his eyebrows. He seemed rather taken aback by her remark. Meanwhile, Alpha looked worriedly at him and asked.

“Akira, are you sure you’re okay with this? It’s 50 billion Aurum, you know? It won’t be strange if she changes her mind later because of the bounty.”

Akira bitterly smiled.

“Well, I bet that would be the case for most people, but Carol can get 10 billion Aurum in a single night. So, I guess five times of that would not be that much of a difference from her point of view, no?”

Although it was not like Akira completely trust Carol, he had at least one reason to not be unnecessarily suspicious of her.

“Well, I won’t deny that, but there’s no guarantee she won’t betray us either, you know?”

“A guarantee never existed anywhere in the first place. Moreover, Kibayashi also advised me not to simply abandon any negotiations that come my way.”

Akira had become a bounty target with a 50 billion Aurum prize on his head. However, due to the power struggle inside Kugamayama city and between branches of the Lion Steel company, not to mention negotiator firms, there was a good chance all kinds of people were trying to get in contact with him for various reasons. If he could handle them well, it could buy him a good amount of time. That was why Kibayashi advised him to not just toss aside opportunities to negotiate. Kibayashi even went as far as to offer to take over negotiations in his stead if he found it too cumbersome.

“To be honest, I didn’t expect someone to contact me this soon. But it’s not like we’re strangers and I did work for her up until just now. Also, with you

around, I bet that it'll be fine."

Although Akira's argument was not foolproof, since he brought up Alpha as one of his reasons, she could no longer say no. Alpha then bitterly smiled. There was a tinge of joy in her smile. It was a smile indicative of her allowing Akira to do as he wishes.

"Well, it can't be helped then. But make sure to not completely lower your guard, okay?"

Watching her warn him with a smile, Akira also smiled back at her.

"I know. Let's go."

Akira started his bike and went to the meeting location.

Carol took her camping vehicle and headed west from Mihazono ruin. As the dusk settled in, she deliberately chose the route that her camping vehicle could easily go through.

The scanner installed in the camping vehicle showed signals cropping up here and there. Those signals must be from monsters, considering that she was in the middle of the wasteland. Thanks to the noisy engine of her large sized-vehicle, none of the signals tried to approach it. Seeing that, Carol thought there should be no issues as she kept on driving. However, suddenly, a signal appeared nearby.

Carol, who immediately noticed this signal, raised her guard. However, she suddenly heard Akira's voice through the close-range communication line.

"It's me, Akira."

Not only had Akira predicted Carol's route, but he had also cloaked himself with Alpha's support. He used the camouflaging function of his augmented suit and used a thin layer of forcefield armour around his bike to reduce his presence. With the help of Alpha's detection capability, he first confirmed that no one was tailing Carol before approaching her camping vehicle.

"Just keep going and open the back door."

“Okay.”

Carol turned the autopilot function on and went to the back of the vehicle. She then opened the back door, which was connected to the back room, used for storage.

The moment it had sufficiently opened up, Akira released the accelerator and jumped in. The door immediately closed shut right away to prevent any information from leaking out.

“Akira, welcome back. You can go and take a break… Or so I want to say, but first, let’s do maintenance on your equipment. I’ll help out.”

The camping vehicle was filled with Akira’s reserve ammo and supplies. Originally, he was planning to be Carol’s bodyguard for an indefinite amount of time. Thus, he had prepared a lot of supplies.

“Thanks and sorry.”

Akira checked and refilled his equipment with her help. Reloading all magazines for his rifles. He reloaded the ammo in his bike, replacing energy packs for his rifles and augmented suit. He also recharged the bike’s energy tank, replaced the blade, and refilled the liquid metal inside the bike’s container tank. Once they were done, he took some more medicine and quenched his dry throat with a drink that Carol had brought in. He finally let out a huge sigh. With this, he had somewhat recovered after that battle back in Mihazono ruin.

“Akira, before we talk, do you want to take a bath first?”

“Bath?”

“Yep. A bath. I’m sure you’re exhausted, right? I bet our conversation will take a while, so I’ll feel bad to make you talk while you haven’t freshened up.”

“I’m fine if it’s only this much…”

“Furthermore, it’s not like you can return back to the city, right? In the worst-case scenario, this might be our last meeting.”

Akira suddenly turned silent, seeing that, Carol then casually added as if it was normal.

“Ah, just to let you know, if you think that it should be fine as long as you don’t get too close to the city, that would be a mistake, okay? Most cities normally contract private security firms to watch over the area around them. Since Kugamayama city has recognized you as a monster, I bet it will not be easy to approach Kugamayama city.”

That sentence hit Akira right where it was hurt. He could not help but frown. For Akira, who was already used to taking a bath at least once per day, it was extremely important for him. After a few seconds of hesitation, he finally made an extremely difficult decision.

“U-uh, thanks. But let’s finish our discussion first. We don’t know what might happen later, so let’s first deal with my purpose for coming here.”

“Is that so? Well, in that case, let’s talk over there.”

Carol went to the living room. Akira followed behind her, wondering if he had made the wrong decision.

They both sat face to face in the living room. First, they exchanged information on what was going on. Carol showed information she had received from Viola to him, information that had no alterations. Since Viola was also interested in information pertaining to Akira, she gathered much about him in a short span of time.

It included his battle against Chloe. The reason was due to a breakdown in negotiations regarding a certain relic between him and the Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward branch. It was not rare for the situation to unfold in such a manner. Especially when a certain Hunter did not want to let go of a particular relic no matter what, while on the other hand, a large company was doing whatever it could to obtain said relic regardless of the cost. Therefore, when presented to third parties, who would normally be

suspicious of any information alterations, they did not doubt the authenticity of this record. Thus, everyone outside of the parties involved believed this to be the case.

After digesting how others viewed the situation, it was Akira's turn. He explained in chronological order what had happened between him and Chloe. He did so without hiding anything. After hearing the story, Chloe raised her eyebrows.

"…So, it was all about lending that card? And that card is no longer even in your possession? At that point, no matter who had possession of that card, it should have been dealt with within the Lion Steel company. An inner conflict which you have nothing to do with? You did that, even though you could make the Lion Steel company deeply indebted to you if you just said that you would lend them the card?"

"…Yep. Pretty much."

Akira said while looking a bit offended. Seeing how he reacted, Carol smiled and tried to lighten his mood.

"I'm sorry if I offended you. I don't mean to blame you. That part of you that is so unyielding, is also the reason why you're so adamant about contracts and agreements. To be honest, I like that part of you, you know? That's why I know I can trust you."

"I-is that so?"

Akira was a bit weirded out, seeing how Carol was happily gazing at him. Although he did not regret his decision, he knew that common sense would dictate his actions as foolish. Something done solely out of his vain pride. But even so, he could tell that Carol was evaluating him highly. At least, for that quality of his – just like Kibayashi. Thanks to that, Akira felt a bit irritated.

"Now then, since we're done with sharing what we know, let's get onto the main topic. Well, it's actually quite simple, really. I want you to continue working as my bodyguard."

Akira frowned. Although he understood what she had said, he could not understand why. He re-evaluated what he had just heard to make sure that he had not mistakenly heard her. However, even after reconfirming, it still sounded as though Carol still wanted him to continue working as her bodyguard. Thus, he could not help but look at her in bewilderment.

“…Wait for a sec, I’m a bounty target right now. A 50 billion bounty target. Many Hunters will come after me.”

“I know.”

“If I’m around you in this state, you will definitely get involved too, you know?”

“Yep.”

“And I can’t get into Kugamayama city since I am recognized as a monster. Meanwhile, the Lion Steel company sees me as an enemy.”

“I know that too. Listen, Akira. We both know already. Very well in fact, from the information exchange that we did just now, right? I understand all the risks and still want you to be my bodyguard.”

Akira frowned and pulled his head back. The reason ‘why’ could still not be figured out. Unable to answer that question, he eventually mumbled a short question.

“…Why?”

He could not understand why someone would still ask him to be their bodyguard. Unlike Akira, who was obviously confused, Carol was completely calm.

“Well, I wonder what exactly you are asking. That question could consist of the reason I want you as my bodyguard. It could also be asking for the details of how I decided after considering all the risks involved. Since there are all kinds of reasons and more questions associated with them, there will be no end to it… So, I’ll just state the overview. I understand all the benefits

and the drawbacks. In the end, I still believe that having you as my bodyguard brings me more benefits than drawbacks. That's why I decided that I still want you to protect me."

Carol said so with a serious expression as she leaned forward.

"So, what's your answer? Are you going to accept my bodyguard request?"

Akira knew his heart was beating hard. As he tried to calm his chaotic thoughts, he wanted to voice out a question. However, before he could ask, Carol stopped him and warned.

"Let me state this first. If you are going to reject my request because you're a bounty target, worried about getting me involved in your troubles, I will clearly state, once again, that I accept that risk. As I said before, I already know the risks when I request you to once again be my bodyguard."

Now that his question had been answered before he could ask, Akira became silent. Thus, Carol continued.

"If you can't accept because it will bring you too much trouble, I will do my best to compensate. So, what's the problem? Do tell me if you still have any issues. This is how negotiations work, after all."

Akira tried to think of the drawbacks if he accepted the job. Other than getting Carol involved in his problems, there were no other issues. Thinking about it, it was Carol who would be more likely to be negatively affected by this deal.

"It's true that I might slow you down if you have to protect me. But on the other hand, I can also help you, right? Since I brought pretty good equipment myself, I'm sure I won't cause you that much trouble. Or at least, it should be enough to compensate for the trouble that I might cause you."

Carol smiled and started talking about the benefits that Akira could receive.

Since he would be working together with her, naturally, he would have access to her camping vehicle. Even if he had to live out in the middle of the wasteland, he would still have access to a fluffy bed and a warm bath. He could also stock up a lot of ammo and food inside her vehicle. Even if he wandered the wasteland for months, his standard of living would be vastly different compared to if he was to live on top of his bike.

In terms of safety. It was also much safer. After all, he could use the camping vehicle's powerful scanner. The vehicle's armour was also much tougher than his bike. In terms of fighting capability, it was no doubt better to have Carol's assistance rather than having to fight alone. There was nothing but benefits.

The deal hardly had any drawbacks to him, which Carol explained. Even so, he could not simply bring himself to nod and agree. Instead, he started looking a bit troubled, with a tinge of suspicion.

As expected, Carol could not keep smiling when faced with suspicion.

"To be honest, I believe that it's a good offer. That's why I had the confidence to ask you to meet up. Is there something that you don't like?"

Akira showed an expression indicating that he understood why she found his reaction to be dissatisfying. Nonetheless, he frowned and stated.

"Well, to be honest, I do think that it's an amazing offer."

"Then, what's the problem?"

Carol asked and stared at him, solemnly. There was a slight tinge of anxiety and desperation in her eyes.

The reason why Akira could not simply agree was because that offer was just too good to be true. Instead of taking this great offer as a good opportunity, he could not help but to get suspicious, believing it to be some kind of trap.

Akira did think of asking Alpha, but eventually decided not to. He told himself to at least decide this matter on his own. If it was indeed a trap, then that just meant he was a fool. Furthermore, he did accept a bodyguard request from Carol before. At that time, he also had his suspicions. Thus, this time, he once again decided to deal with this matter on his own.

The less he relied on Alpha, the more time he needed to evaluate his options. As he thought in silence, Carol started to tense up. She was obviously getting desperate. After a little bit more silence, Akira, who noticed her expression, thought, [maybe I'm just overthinking things?]

"Carol."

"Y-Yes?"

"Just answer this question for me. I'm someone who did what others deem unthinkable. I've tossed negotiations with a huge company like Lion Steel aside. To top it off, I got into a fight with them and ended up with a bounty on my head worth 50 billion Aurum. Are you sure you want someone like me to be your bodyguard? If I take this job and get involved in some kind of incident, I don't mind. So long as it's not because of me. I know you've considered the possibility before asking me. You've said it yourself. But there's a limit on how far you are willing to compromise, right? So, are you really sure?"

From other's point of view, those with common sense, Akira definitely had a few screws loose. Akira knew that and was aware of it to some extent. However, surface awareness did not mean that he could stop himself from thinking and acting in such a manner.

That was why Akira could not help but get suspicious when someone asked a person like him to be their bodyguard. By thinking so, it meant that he did not trust Carol. However, it was a fact that he at least trusted her to be there in the first place. Minimally, he saw Carol as not an enemy and that she had no wish to cause harm to him.

Akira knew that it was pointless to ask her to tell him all the details – why she wanted him to be her bodyguard. Carol had already told him that it was

not something that would make them enemies.

Nonetheless, Akira could not simply unconditionally trust her. On the flip side, that also meant that he could trust her conditionally. As if seeking to fulfil that condition, he curiously questioned her.

Meanwhile, Carol was a bit taken back by Akira's suspicion. She continued to lightly smile and said.

"Are you that worried about it? Don't worry. As I said before, I'm fine with it as long as it's not your fault. And from what I've heard from you, Lion Steel's bounty is not your fault."

Carol casually stated, as if to indicate that she truly did not mind.

However, in contrast to her casual attitude, Akira's reaction was by no means small. His eyes widened. This news has come as a huge surprise to him. Even Carol was surprised by his reaction.

"Akira, what's wrong?"

"Ah, no, it's nothing… So, about me getting into a fight with them, you think that it is not my fault?"

Seeing how he questioned her rather timidly, Carol noticed that it seems like she had won some points from him. Thus, she stated her real thoughts.

"Yeah. I mean, although the scale of the incident was by no means small, in the end, the main reason why that happened was because they tried to use force to get something from you. You simply fought back, right? That would mean you were not the one at fault. They were."

"…I see."

"Well, if I am being honest, I do think that this is one of your character flaws. You have no hesitation in accepting a fight against a huge company like Lion Steel. But I guess it's way too late to be complaining about that at this point. Since it had something to do with your pride as well, it's not like anyone has a say in it, right?"

After Carol said as much, she smiled rather confidently at him.

“Moreover, as the one being protected, I think that part of you works well for me. After all, it means you will not simply abandon your job as my bodyguard even in the face of a tremendously strong opponent, right? After all, you rejected an offer from a company as large as Lion Steel, regardless of how good their offer was. So, I can expect you to properly protect me no matter what.”

Akira bitterly chuckled.

“Hmm… I guess it really depends on what point of view you look at, huh?”

“Yep, exactly.”

Carol smiled back, a moment later, her expression turned serious.

“…So then, what’s your answer? If you’re okay with it, I wish you will continue being my bodyguard.”

“Alright. I’ll do it.”

In contrast to Carol, who asked with a serious and desperate expression, as though it was her last chance, Akira replied with ease. Although she was happy to hear his answer, it also made her feel a bit troubled.

“Thank you, that’s a big help… But if you’re going to accept it that casually, you could have just accepted it right from the start, right? Are you having fun teasing me or something? I don’t really think highly of someone who would play with a girl’s heart like that, you know?”

As Carol asked, half-jokingly, she started moving her body as if to seduce him. Akira simply gave a soft smile and replied.

“That’s not it. Well, ever since I got recognized as a monster and got a bounty on my head, I may have become a little bit more paranoid than usual. Sorry about it. I will properly do my job. So, I hope you can take my commitment as an apology.”

“Does that mean I can expect you to properly protect me?”

“Though I look like this, I take my job seriously. So, well, you can at least expect me to do my job.”

“Oh? Would that include accepting payment on top of the bed?”

“That would be a no.”

“That’s just too bad.”

Akira and Carol smiled at each other after exchanging banter. However, with this, Akira once again became her bodyguard.

Seeing that, Alpha smiled while staring at them, deeply.

As the camping vehicle ran through the wasteland wrapped in the darkness of the night, Akira was recuperating his body, enjoying the bath. It had been a very long, exhausting day for him. So, he allowed his body to be lulled by the warm water, satisfying his desire for a bath.

Alpha was sitting in the bathtub, naked, as usual. Her skin and hair were as graceful and lustrous as always. However, non-existent water droplets were running down her skin, hair, and bosom, before dropping into the warm water. This greatly boosted her sex appeal. As always, it was in clear view for him. Nonetheless, as always, he completely ignored it.

Up until now, everything was as usual. However, Alpha’s expression was a little bit off than her usual expression. She seemed a bit more worried than usual.

“Akira, it might be a little bit too late to ask this now. But are you sure you’re fine with retaking this job?”

Akira shifted his gaze to her. He thought that she was wearing a rather unusual expression as he replied.

“Hm? It’s fine, isn’t it? Thanks to that, I can get to bathe like this, after all.”

“Honestly speaking, I don’t think your safety can be easily exchanged for a bathing time, you know?”

“I don’t think I’m exchanging anything for this time to bathe though, or did I?”

“It’s the risk of protecting her. This is while we are still uncertain what exactly she is so scared of.”

“Well, I can understand that argument. But, it’s the same situation as the first time I accepted this job. So, why would I worry about it now?”

“Our situation back then is not the same as it is now. It is now clear that Carol is so frightened by something that she believes it’s better to have someone in a conflict with the Lion Steel company, who is recognized as a monster by Kugamayama city and has a 50 billion Aurum bounty, to protect her. I know that she has her reasons, but now that it has come to this, it’s impossible to ignore the potential risk. A danger she perceives as great than the danger you are involved in.”

Akira gave a slight nod. It showed that he agreed with her argument. However, that still did not change his decision.

“Well, I bet she has her reasons. But Carol still decided to do so knowing that she might get involved in my issues too. So, it’s more like we’re roping onto each other’s problem, no? As for me, personally speaking, I completely expect that level of risk considering she brought up such a good offer to me.”

Akira released a small sigh caused by the nice warm bath. He touched the warm water with a pleasant smile.

“Moreover, had I not accepted this job, I would be spending the night in the middle of the wasteland right now, correct? And that won’t be only for one or two days… In the worst-case scenario, I might have to be out there for 3 whole months… That would be no fun at all… I might have been able to do it back then when it was normal for me to sleep in a random back alleyway.

But that’s not possible for the current me. So, I’ll at least do this much if I can avoid having to sleep in some random alley inside the wasteland.”

Akira smiled bitterly and shook his head. Alpha sighed with exasperation and asked.

“Good grief. You really have gotten used to this lifestyle, huh? If you accept Carol’s request just because of this, what would you do if she betrays you?”

“I bet it will be fine. And even if that happens, I will think of something when the time comes.”

After Akira casually proclaimed, he frowned and tilted his head. He just noticed that for some reason, Alpha was being abnormally cautious of Carol. While he took notice, Alpha smiled confidently and stated.

“Just leave it to me when that happens.”

Seeing her expression, Akira believed Alpha was only acting out of caution, which also emphasized how valuable her support was. Thus, he smiled wryly.

“Yeah yeah, I’ll be counting on you when the time comes.”

Akira then allowed his consciousness to melt into the warm water while he looked at her smile.

On the other hand, Alpha reminded herself to be more careful of him while smiling at the boy who was lulled by the warm bath.

The question of what he would do if Carol betrayed him was only a check. If it was the Akira of the past, Alpha was certain he would have firmly responded with ‘I’ll just kill her when that happens’.

However, Akira’s answer was different this time. He only said that it should be fine. This demonstrated his belief that such a possibility was small. Even if that happened, he would simply react casually. This showed how unlikely it was for him to quickly jump to murder to deal with the aftermath.

Everyone needed some form of recognition. Akira was not an exception. Therefore, Akira thought highly of Carol, who recognized and justified his actions during his quarrel with Chloe back in Mihazono ruin – where he was not at fault. Alpha believed that was the reason why he treated her differently now.

While Alpha concluded what had happened, she continued to ponder. [It’s a fact that I was the first one to affirm his actions. As the one who did it first, I believe the effect is bigger.]

Alpha told herself that she got lucky in affirming his actions. As she was looking at Akira, who was focused on enjoying the bath, she thought that it might be better to warn him not to sleep on the same bed with Carol. After all, it would be horrendous if an accident occurred.

In front of the only person who could see her right now, Alpha continued to smile. She gave a suggestion just as usual. Though, her judgment regarding this individual had changed.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 269, Negotiation Within The Wall

Index

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After she had completed the inter-city transport escort request, Hikaru was staying out of trouble and led a rather peaceful life. Although she had the ambition and the arrogance of a gifted youth, after she had numerous near-death experiences working with a Hunter by the name of Akira, she had calmed down considerably. She continued to do her administrative tasks without flaw. Overall, she was doing extremely well in her job.

Even after that incident, she did not stop and kept working hard. Her reputation improved with time. It was to the point where no one questioned her future success. However, at most, she would only become a city officer after a few years. This was slow in terms of the progression goal she had in the past when she was still very ambitious.

Even so, Hikaru was content with her current situation. After all, she was afraid that she would have to handle more people like Akira. Which was necessary if she wanted to climb the ladder even quicker than what she was currently doing. She could not do what was normal for Kibayashi. In the first place, it was not right to compare her to someone who preferred to deal with battle maniacs or other similar demented individuals. Convinced,

Hikaru decided to build up her achievement slowly and securely. This was a much better path for someone like her, a peaceful life.

In the midst of her job, Hikaru was summoned by Inabe. It stated that he had a job for her. If it was the past Hikaru, it would have been wonderful news. After all, it signified that a city officer with considerable standing had taken notice of her. However, now, instead of jumping in joy, she seemed rather anxious. Anxious as to what kind of job Inabe had for her.

Hikaru carefully entered Inabe's office room. Looking at her enter, Inabe, who was on the sofa, immediately stopped his ongoing discussion with his men and signalled her to take a seat with his hand.

"Come in and take a seat."

Hikaru slowly and anxiously sat on the sofa in front of him. Inabe then glanced at his men, indirectly telling them to leave. Therefore, his men gave a silent bow and left the room.

Hikaru looked rather tense. Although Inabe told her with his gestures and words, he gave an order to his men with only a glance. That difference in treatment showed that currently, she had the highest priority and position here. Naturally, it was except for Inabe himself. She could feel that recognition, however, her instinctive talent was warning her not to feel happy just yet.

"…Director Inabe. Uhm, I heard that you have a job for me. So, what might it be…? To be honest, I'm in the middle of handling a few tasks from the general affair, you see… I'm afraid taking more tasks right now would affect my other tasks, so…"

Hikaru was trying to be as polite as possible. She wanted to convey that without knowing what this task was, she had no wish to accept it.

Inabe's expression did not change at all, he understood what Hikaru was hinting at but simply continued.

“It’s not a problem. You can forget any other tasks you have at the moment. I will have others do them. Of course, I will take care of that using my men, so there’s no need to worry.”

“I-I see…”

“Before we get onto the main topic, go ahead and read these documents. You have 30 minutes.”

“R-right away.”

Hikaru took the documents on top of the table. Normally, they would have been sent as digital files, but this time, Inabe made printed copies instead.

“Do you need me to explain why I printed these documents instead of forwarding them to you?”

“N-not at all.”

“Is that so? In that case, let me ask you this, why do you think I went out of my way to print them?”

Inabe asked with a serious expression as he stared at her. His gaze was indicating that the consequence would be severe if Hikaru tried to come up with a non-honest answer. Although it was not an interrogation, it was something similar.

Hikaru could feel cold sweat running down her face as she replied.

“…Considering that the documents are printed, it would mean that they contained information outside of Kugamayama city’s jurisdiction. I believe that this document contains something that I normally should not know of.”

“I see, any other guess?”

“Printed documents don’t leave digital records in the shared database. So, the accuracy of the content of the documents can’t be checked through the city’s system. The only record it will leave is the documents here, which I have received from director Inabe.”

“Alright, and then?”

Inabe’s gaze seemed to bore into her. It was as if he was warning her that he knew she had other guesses and was trying to make her confess everything.

“…Even if I share this information with the other officers, there are no guarantees that it has not been tampered with. Therefore, it can’t be used for supplementary information during meetings. Moreover, there’s a good chance that some parts of these documents have already been tampered with. It is a safeguard just in case these documents land into the hands of a hostile faction…”

Inabe nodded with a solemn expression.

“It should be fine if you already understand that much. I should at least compliment you. You are as talented as rumour has it. Now then, go ahead and read it. The lies written in these documents are easy to spot if you understand the contents. You can go ahead and ask them if you find anything questionable in it. After all, there are things that even I don’t want to be on paper.”

Now that Hikaru had nowhere to run, she made her resolve and started reading it.

The documents had information about Akira and Chloe. There were details of what was going on between the Lion Steel company and Kugamayama city. Akira’s 50 billion Aurum bounty and recognition as a monster by Kugamayama city. Chloe being detained for endangering the city. And finally, when the city manager wanted to call an official meeting, Udajima was using his connection with the Lion Steel company to delay it. Thus, they were not able to immediately deal with the situation.

Hikaru took 10 minutes to skim through the documents. She then used the remaining 20 minutes to ask Inabe questions. With that, she was able to understand the current situation.

After Inabe finished confirming everything, he nodded with satisfaction and complimented her.

“Very good. Now then, let’s get onto the main subject. I have a special order for you.”

Hikaru prayed that it was not what she thought it was. However, Inabe gave her the order which she had expected based on what she had just read.

“I want you to negotiate with Akira. Give it your best to resolve this situation peacefully. Tell me if you need anything. Authority, money. Anything. I will give you as much as I can afford to give.”

“W-wait for a second!”

“No, there will be no waiting.”

Inabe quickly crushed the moment Hikaru was just about to make a plea. He continued as if to completely decimate her prayers.

In order to have an opportunity to negotiate with a highly-on-guard bounty target, they would at least need an acquaintance to serve as the bridge. To increase the odds of success, it was better if it was from someone who was likely to give Akira a good deal. Furthermore, considering Akira’s personality, it was also for the best if they brought someone who knew Akira well, so as to not accidentally worsen the situation.

For Inabe, he only knew three such people who satisfied these conditions. Inabe himself, Kibayashi, and Hikaru. As the city manager, Inabe had to focus on revoking Akira’s monster designation in the officer meeting. He had no time to directly negotiate with Akira since he had to invest all his time to counter the damage that Udajima had done. As for Kibayashi, he was working as an officer from the Hunter Office at the moment. Therefore, Inabe had no authority to order him around. Even if he could, given the horrendous reputation Kibayashi had, there was a good chance he would somehow find a way to twist the outcome to his liking. Therefore, Kibayashi was the last person to rely on if they wanted to solve this incident peacefully.

By the process of elimination, Hikaru was his last choice. After Inabe explained this to Hikaru, her original argument was annihilated. She wanted

to bring up there being someone higher, like Inabe or Kibayashi, who was more suitable to handle Akira.

“That is the reason why I picked you. Tell me if you have any objections.”

Hikaru tried her best to think of a reason. Any reason to counter Inabe’s arguments and shift this duty to someone else. However, even with her talent, she could not come up with any good counterargument as she completely fell silent.

Inabe then continued.

“I know that you don’t want to do this. To give you more motivation, let me tell you that this is our last hope. We have no plan B.”

“…We?”

Hikaru inadvertently frowned. If Inabe had used ‘you’ instead of ‘we’, she could still understand if the outcome of refusing was her getting fired. However, Inabe clearly used ‘we’, which meant that Inabe might also have to resign. Unfortunately, Hikaru did not even consider such a possibility.

If Akira got a bit too irritated and ended up attacking the city, the city defence squad would just eliminate him. Although it might still cause some damage to the city, Hikaru calculated that it would not cause that much damage. At least, not enough to shake Inabe’s position as the one assigned to manage the area under Tsubaki. Therefore, Hikaru ended up bewildered when she heard him say ‘we’.

“That’s right, we will be in deep trouble. When a Hunter caused damage to the city, repercussions would always go down to the source, which would lead to our unfortunate ending. Unfortunately, this would include those who have helped that Hunter to grow to be that strong. In other words, we will have to take responsibility.”

“I understand that, but…”

“I’m sure you’ve read Akira’s track record in the documents. However, there’s a mistake in those records. To be more precise, the prediction for his power growth in the future has been severely downplayed. I’m sure that you had a guess already. Think of his strength based on his performance during the inter-city transport escort mission. The discrepancy is just that awful.”

“What… exactly do you mean?”

“Soon, he will obtain equipment from the frontline. Equipment that those Hunters of above Rank 100 would normally use.”

Hikaru’s face was filled with shock and fear. Inabe knitted his eyebrows.

“He’s already that strong with equipment for Rank 50 and above. I’m sure you can imagine just how powerful he will get once he lays his hands on that equipment.”

“W-wouldn’t it be possible to prevent that?”

“It would be extremely difficult. After all, that equipment is a reward for him from Sakashita Heavy Industry. If we try to sabotage the delivery, we would be picking a fight with Sakashita Heavy Industry. Moreover, the ones responsible for this are you and me.”

Hikaru was greatly taken aback. Not only had the scale of the trouble just grown exponentially well outside her expectation but for some reason; a reason she could not understand one bit, she somehow found herself directly involved in this mess. Hikaru could not help but screech at Inabe.

“W-what do you mean!?”

“I can tell you, but since it has something to do with Sakashita Heavy Industry, it can’t be recorded. So, I can only verbally inform you here. Furthermore, you need to be extremely careful with this information.”

Akira had always been trying to get equipment way above the limit of his Hunter Rank. He somehow managed to get Kibayashi and Inabe to agree to help him. This was in exchange for doing a request from them. By

completing his inter-city transport escort mission with Hikaru, half of that deal was completed. As such, Akira was currently only waiting for his new equipment to arrive. However, due to the transport route limitation imposed by Sakashita Heavy Industry, it got delayed for quite some time.

However, Sakashita Heavy Industry has been lifting its transport route limitation bit by bit. Transports started to run again and it was only a matter of time before Akira got his equipment.

Originally, they only procured such powerful equipment for law-abiding Hunters. If such a Hunter had become hostile towards the city, the damage to Inabe's name would be minimal. It would not be enough to shake up his position.

However, that would not be the case if the Hunter had some kind of personality problem. The officers who helped him obtain such equipment would be held responsible. Especially Hikaru, who had forced her way to get Akira into that inter-city transport escort mission. Since she was not even a city officer and just a staff member, she would be easily blown away by the after-effects of this incident. It would not be strange for her to be kicked out of the city.

Hikaru trembled. Inabe, who saw that, thought that it was a good sign. It was now clear that she understood the gravity of the situation.

"Let me say this again. This is our last chance. We have to solve this situation peacefully no matter what. I won't give you any specific orders. I hope you would make the best use of your talent, which even Kibayashi thinks highly of, to find a solution to this matter. I'll give you the code to contact me through a secret line. Feel free to call me if you need anything. That's all. Get on it this instant."

Even after Inabe had ordered her, Hikaru simply sat there, without responding.

"…Well, I'm sure that you are greatly shaken by this. You can stay here until you've calmed down."

Inabe then stood up and returned back to his own office chair. He then called his men to come back in. His men, who walked in, looked at Hikaru with confused eyes. She was still sitting there. However, after they saw Inabe softly shake his head, indicating they should just ignore her, they returned to their respective duties and did as advised.

Not too long after, Hikaru stood up. She was still in a daze, wobbling left and right as she dragged herself out of the room.

Even after she closed the door, she simply stood there for a while. But eventually, she regained her calm. Finally, she felt livid toward the situation she was dragged into. However, she came to accept that rage and used it as fuel to light the flame of her spirit. She clenched her fist and looked up as she shouted.

"…I get it already! I just need to do it! Right!?"

If there was no route to retreat, then the only way left was forward. It was pathetic to push forward while looking down. It was much better to charge forward with a burning spirit! Hikaru told herself this as she confidently smiled, which also served to inspire herself.

[High-risk! High return! A huge gamble! It is not like I can escape on my own now!] Hikaru resolved herself to face what was in front of her.

—*—*—*—

Ever since Akira had become a bounty target, he spent his days hiding around Kugamayama city. Thanks to Carol's camping vehicle, he had a place to sleep and enough ammo to fight a few battles. He also has enough food to last a few weeks. He was trying to keep a low profile until the situation changed.

One day, he suddenly received a call from Kibayashi through the secret line. Kibayashi managed to get the giant insect that Akira had defeated the other day to be counted as a general-purpose monster-hunting request. Of course, in reality, he worked 'together' with Latis to defeat that monster. However, since Chloe was the one who lured the monster this close to the city, she

was denied the reward. Thus Akira was recorded to be the only one who defeated that monster.

The reward was 50 million Aurum. Although it was a huge sum, Akira felt that it was not that much, considering the trouble that he had to go through to kill that thing.

Kibayashi was somehow able to notice Akira's reaction and said.

"Oh, is it too little? As expected of someone with a 50 billion bounty on his head. That much is just way too small of a sum for you, isn't it?"

"No. That's not it. It's just that there was a time when I defeated a tank tarantula bounty monster, right? That one was 8 billion Aurum. It's weird how I only got 50 million Aurum considering that wasp was much stronger than that tarantula."

"Well, that's given. The bounty of a monster is not decided by how strong it is. It is based on how much people want that monster dead. So, it is unlikely for them to pay a lot if that monster usually only roams way up in the sky. Which means it hardly causes any issues for those living on the ground, you know?"

"Hmmm, is that so? But still… it was really strong though…"

Toward Akira, who did not seem to be able to accept this, Kibayashi continued to explain.

"Just give it up. In the first place, no one around here would be able to pay you enough money to make it worth hunting that kind of monster, you know?"

Even if someone had enough money to make it worth the risk, there were worries as well. Hunters who had enough skill to defeat such a monster might lure them down just to be able to claim that sum. If they kept doing so, eventually, these monsters would start roaming near the ground. It would increase the difficulty level of the area by manyfold. The defence

squad responsible for the safety of the area deliberately set a much lower rate to avoid such a situation.

As such, when Hunters wanted to get paid a commensurate amount for defeating a monster as powerful as that wasp, they had to go further to the east. Similarly, if they hunted the same monster, they would be paid more if they were further to the east. That was how Hunters were encouraged to go to the east and eventually to the frontline of the eastern district.

When Hunters defeated a powerful monster such as that wasp, normally, its carcass would also be appraised as a highly valuable relic. Since Akira was the one who defeated that wasp, he had ownership of its carcass. However, since he had left the carcass behind, other Hunters who were unaware of what was going on, dismantled it and took it for themselves.

After Kibayashi explained, Akira finally accepted the reason for the low reward. Kibayashi then continued.

“Look. Even if you have a 50 billion bounty on you, that doesn’t mean you are that strong. Don’t get me wrong. I do think that you’re a strong Hunter. But the issue is not my thoughts but others. It will greatly affect how many come after you. After all, there are many factors that affect others’ perception of you besides your fighting ability. For example, restrictions or grudges that they have for you. How well you are hiding, which would make it difficult for them to find you. Since they’re facing a human and not a monster, I’m sure many believe that they just need to find a small opening to catch you off guard. So, be careful.”

“I know.”

“Alright. Call me if something comes up. Later then.”

Kibayashi then ended the call. Carol looked at Akira, worriedly.

“You might not want to hear this from me, but, are you sure we can trust that guy?”

“Maybe. Though, I can only say that since we have the same goal. That guy doesn’t want me to die and would prefer I go down in a blaze of glory. So, he’s doing everything he can not because of money or power. It is all merely for his own interest. So, I guess, from that perspective, it’s okay to trust that guy.”

“I see. Well, if you say so. It’s not like I’m in a place to say anything.”

Carol thought that it was so like him to think that way. Thus, she wryly smiled at him.

“But still, although you have a 50 billion Aurum bounty on you, you’re pretty calm. Why is that the case?”

“Well, to me, it’s not like I can do anything about it at this point. Even if I’m going to get strung up because of it, it’s not like that would help my situation at all. Right?”

“Hmmm.”

Carol thought that this line of thinking was far from the norm. However, she did not pursue the matter any further. Meanwhile, Akira simply gave a light smile.

“Moreover, thanks to you, I don’t need to spend my nights in the middle of the wasteland. With your camping vehicle, I even have a bed to sleep on. I also get to bathe. Also, the bath and the bed are even better than the ones back at home. I have a place to sleep and food to eat. There’s no reason for me to be that worried, right?”

Hearing that, Carol smiled bewitchingly and asked.

“Is that so? Now that you have food to eat and a place to sleep, won’t that leave only one thing? I don’t mind helping you out with that, you know?”

“Sorry. I still prefer food over women.”

“We’re in a dangerous situation and all alone with each other. There’s nothing wrong with trying to change it up, you know?”

“We’re not exactly in a dangerous situation, and I don’t have any plans to make it more dangerous than necessary. So, I guess this is the same as always, no?”

“Geez, you’re as cold as ever”

Carol was only teasing him, knowing that he would say no right from the start. She could only smile wryly and appear exaggeratedly disappointed toward his rejection.

For Akira, it was nothing more than his usual banter with Carol.

The only one who was taking a deep precaution toward that exchange was Alpha.

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Along the border between the inner district and the middle district of Kugamayama city, Chloe, who was temporarily detained, was heading toward the area under Sakashita Heavy Industry. She was accompanied by Udajima, and had her servants, Latis and Pamela, following behind her.

Udajima, who arranged for the upcoming meeting at Chloe’s request, anxiously advised her.

“Make sure to not do anything to offend Sakashita Heavy Industry. Although you are heading there as the negotiator for the Lion Steel company, if something were to happen, I, who arranged this meeting, will not be excluded from the fallout.”

Chloe smiled gracefully.

“Unfortunately, if we don’t get anything out of the negotiation, it might be the end for the both of us. If doing nothing will lead to our demise, isn’t it better to take this chance and try?”

“That is not what I meant!”

Udajima raised his voice. Chloe lightly shook her head and reminded him.

“Calm down. We’re entering their area soon. Your position in Kugayamama city will not help us here. So, make sure not to do anything rude.”

Udajima frowned and closed his mouth shut.

When they entered the area under Sakashita Heavy Industry, the first thing the guards did was ascertain their identities. Udajima could only go this far as he only accompanied Chloe as a guide from Kugamayama city. Meanwhile, Chloe’s detainment basically got transferred from the city to Sakashita.

Even Chloe started to feel anxious. The area in front of her was under the jurisdiction of Sakashita Heavy Industry. Her opponent this time was one of the 5 largest corporations. Even if she was from the Lion Steel company, if she got killed here, that would be the end of it. Lion Steel would make no attempts to retaliate against Sakashita. That was just how powerful Sakashita was. Although she knew there was no reason for Sakashita to kill her, she still could not help but feel anxious.

As she reminded herself not to do anything rude in place of Udajima, a guide from Sakashita Heavy Industry appeared.

“Chloe-sama, I presume? Please allow me to be your guide. This way, please.”

Chloe and her servants went inside, following the guide. All the guards in the area were from Sakashita Heavy Industry. It gave a feeling of entering an archaeological site, which was in the midst of excavation. They were then led to a certain room.

“This is the room.”

The guide said so and politely bowed. Chloe and her servants then entered the room, leaving the guide in the hallway. Inside, the person who was going to negotiate with her was already waiting with his bodyguard.

Chloe once again ascertained her resolve. She stepped in front of him, who was waiting for her while still sitting in his seat. She smiled politely, worthy

of someone from the founder family of the Lion Steel company.

“I am Chloe Leverant Lorentz, it is a pleasure to meet you.”

“Name’s Sugadome. I’m busy right now, so I hope you brought something worthy of my time.”

“Of course!”

The negotiator and his bodyguard from Sakashita Heavy Industry were Sugadome and Hammerz. Toward the two, who had political power and fighting capability that Chloe could not hope to match, she had to gather all the courage she could and face them. Else, she might have shrunk back.

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In the middle of the wasteland, Shirou, who was in his hideout, looked rather disgruntled as he mumbled.

“…Good grief, waiting like this feels so awful…”

Shirou was told by Sugadome to make sure that his communication line was open around certain periods of time. However, because of that, Shirou could not use that time to do anything else. The feeling of wasting time was making him feel uneasy.

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The reason Chloe asked to have a meeting with Sugadome, was to apologize for the recent incident near Mihazono ruin. Although it was right in front of a Hunter Office, how serious it was seen as a problem was another matter. Chloe used this as an excuse. She wanted to offer an explanation and apology to Sugadome. She used Udajima to convey this.

And now, she was explaining the situation to Sugadome. First, she conveyed the value, necessity, and danger of Olivia’s card. To wrap it up, she mentioned how she did not have any other options, which led to that incident.

A certain Hunter came into the ownership of the card by accident. Chloe, who thought that it was dangerous, went to the Hunter and requested him to hand over ownership to her. Even with everything she had prepared, the Hunter refused. In order to make sure that this dangerous relic would not cause any trouble, she had no other choice but to use force. That was how their negotiation had turned into a battle. Although the Hunter understood that he was in front of a Hunter Office, it was obvious that he had no plans of holding back. In order to protect herself, Chloe had no other choice but to fight back.

Chloe spoke apologetically, pleading innocence. Highlighting the fact that she had no other choice.

“I’m sure I don’t need to say what kind of problems a dangerous relic might bring to the eastern district. As I understand, even Sakashita Heavy Industry is actively negotiating with various Hunters for similar reasons. I am sure there are many occasions when negotiation fails and the company is forced to take the relic by force. Although the scale is not the same, I was forced into the same situation. I hope that Sakashita Heavy Industry understands.”

“Very well. But if it’s only for this, I see no reason to request a physical meeting with me. You could just send your apology through our respective companies. I don’t see how this is worthy of both of our time.”

Sugadome was basically saying this was a waste of time. Chloe tensed up and continued.

“I feel responsible for this situation. I feel that it would be wrong of me not to directly convey my apology. Moreover, the Hunter Office is an organization under the Corporate Government. As such, it obeys the will of the 5 largest corporations. So, I thought that it was only to be expected for me to apologize directly to Sakashita Heavy industry. Also, although I look like this, I’m still a part of the Lorentz family. So, I can’t just lower my head toward anyone. If I lower my head, it will hurt the pride of our company. With that in mind, although I know it would be a small inconvenience for you, I asked for your time to have a direct face to face meeting.”

That was when Chloe pulled out the white card.

“And this will be the real reason. This is the card that I have mentioned. As a form of apology, I wish to give this card to you.”

Latis and Pamela, who were standing behind Chloe, seem to have completely been blindsided. They never expected Chloe to give Olivia’s card away. However, before they could plead their master to reconsider, they reminded themselves. They were in front of Sugadome. Therefore, they could not afford to embarrass their master.

“However, as expected, considering the worth of this card, I can’t just give it away for free. The reason why I thought that this would be worth your time, is because of the negotiation to handover this card.”

Chloe showed the white card to Sugadome. Although she was nervous, she somehow still managed to smile.

The silence continued. Chloe was doing her best to maintain her smile. She waited for Sugadome’s answer as cold sweat trailed down her back. Even Latis and Pamela could feel how tense she was. They looked worried even when they were trying to maintain their expression.

Eventually, Sugadome replied without a change in his expression.

“I see. I understand how you see that as a good enough reason to take my time.”

Chloe’s expression relaxed from relief.

“Thank you very much. In that case, please let me state what I expect in return for this card.”

“No. That won’t be necessary.”

Chloe frowned. Olivia’s card was not something that she could simply give away without anything in return. She was certain Sugadome also understood that. Therefore, she spoke up. Though she knew that it was a little rude.

“…I’m sorry, although I did say that I will give away this card as an apology., As expected, I can’t just give it away without anything in return. Considering the value of this card, I hope that my willingness to trade it is enough as an apology.”

“I already understand that.”

“Then, why?”

Chloe obviously seemed troubled. Therefore, Sugadome stated with his unchanging expression.

“Your willingness to trade that card is indeed enough as an apology. But there is no need to give it to me. You may leave with that card.”

Chloe, Pamela, and Latis could not hide their shock. With this card, they could negotiate with an old-world AI. Negotiate to a certain level. There was no way those from Sakashita Heavy Industry did not know of this. However, with that knowledge, Sugadome still unexpectedly refused the opportunity.

After hearing his unexpected reply, Chloe tried to think of a reason why. She searched through her memories and experience. She then guessed that it was some kind of gambit. To get the card at a better price. With that assumption, she challenged Sugadome.

“Is that so? I’m sure you understand how much this card is worth. All that trouble from the battle in Mihazono ruin, which included several powered suits from the city defence squad. It’s just that valuable of a relic. Just think of what might happen if this card falls to the hand of the Nationalist instead of an officer from Sakashita Heavy Industry?”

Chloe thought that Sugadome would not want that to happen. Thus, he would not refuse this chance to get the card. That was why she said as much.

However, Sugadome then lightly replied. Still, with his unchanging expression and neutral tone of voice.

“Very well then. I shall have you die.”

Chloe froze in shock.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 270, An Unexpected Request

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Latis and Pamela immediately understood that Sugadome was not joking. He was serious when he said that Chloe needed to die. Thus, both quickly readied their stance to protect their master. But they were too late. The moment they felt the compulsion to protect, Hammerz who was just standing next to Sugadome a moment ago, already had his hand on their faces.

Hammerz was holding back. It was to warn them. He would kill them if they tried to make any suspicious moves. If he had any desire to kill, they would already be dead by now. Thus, Pamela and Latis knew better than to try anything in this situation.

Chloe exasperatedly sighed. Not only was it to help her calm down, but it was also to fake bravado in front of Sugadome.

“Sugadome-sama, I don’t think it’s wise for an officer from Sakashita Heavy Industry to spill blood inside the inner wall.”

Those who were living inside the inner wall, even the worse out of the bunch, all had at least some level of decency. Something common sense to all of them was the matter of taking lives. It was an action only meant for

outside the inner wall. Even if those within the inner wall had no worries when it came to monsters, killing each other would mean that there was no difference between inside and outside the inner wall. Thus, if such acts were committed inside, there was no meaning for them to live inside the inner wall. This common sense was one of the main pillars that maintained civil order within the inner wall.

Chloe was implying that this was not something that an officer from the 5 biggest corporations should do. They serve as an example. Thus, she was trying to use that to stop Sugadome.

However, Sugadome did not show any reaction to her words.

“I can understand why you would say that.”

“T-then, in that case…”

“But personally speaking, as a part of Sakashita Heavy Industry, I also take pride in actively contributing to the safety of the eastern district as a whole. I understand the danger of that card in your possession. Unfortunately, I’m not that irresponsible. I can’t allow someone who would dare say something as preposterous as giving such a dangerous object to the Nationalists to go. Even with my contract with City Management. Even considering the fact that you’re someone from the Lorentz house. It’s not enough of a reason not to dispose of you.”

Even after he said that, Sugadome was still as expressionless as usual. It was as if disposing of her was just one of his common duties. He was only executing his duty. Nothing more. Chloe understood that much.

“After I dispose of you, I will report to Lion Steel. I had just cleaned up a Nationalist supporter inside the Lion Steel company. I have no plans to hide it. If you have any last words, you can go ahead and make your calls. I’m lenient enough to at least wait for you to finish delivering your will.”

Chloe’s smile already vanished from her face. Behind her stern expression, she was desperately trying to find a way out. She understood that pleading for her life was useless. She had to make a good logical argument to change

Sugadome's mind. She was using everything her brain could conjure up. It was to the point where she could feel the time slow down.

However, she could not come up with anything decent. After a short pause, Sugadome then spoke. It was as if to tell Chloe that she had run out of time.

"I see. So, you have no last will to leave behind, huh? Now then…"

Chloe scowled in fear, Latis and Pamela also thought that this was their end.

"…I will allow you to retract your statement and correct this misunderstanding. If you do so, I will regard that statement as nothing but an atrocious bluff, which stemmed from your foolishness. That you were not trying to support the Nationalists."

Chloe did not expect things to end like this. She quickly recovered and took his offer.

"I only meant it as the worst-case scenario. It was a possibility, which only meant to emphasize the value of the card. I have no wish to let it fall into Nationalists' hands. I take what I said back and apologize for making such a remark."

Once again, silence filled the room. Chloe knitted her eyebrows, thinking her statement was not good enough.

After that short silence, Sugadome spoke up without the slightest change in his tone.

"Very well."

Chloe inadvertently sighed with relief. She was panting, caused by the lingering anxiety after that whole ordeal. Hammerz also let Latis and Pamela go. They straightened their posture but seemed rather lethargic. Hammerz then casually returned to Sugadome's side.

"Both you and I are as strong as common people. But at the same time, we both have the authority to command those with powerful fighting

capabilities. It only takes one word for us to kill someone. That is exactly why we must be careful with what we say."

"…Thank you for the advice."

Chloe, who managed to calm her breathing, replied.

"Now then. I guess I should let you know this to avoid any misunderstanding. It seems like you actually believe that I don't understand the full worth of that card. But, let me tell you this. That is not true at all. I understand the value of that card extremely well. It's just that I don't see any need to get a second card by making a deal with Lion Steel."

After he said so, Sugadome pulled out a white card. It was identical to the one that Chloe had. Chloe, Pamela, and Latis were shocked speechless. While still in a state of shock, there was a tint of doubt in Chloe's expression. It was slowly filled with confusion and bewilderment.

[…Is that real? If it is, how did he get that card? Then, is it fake? But if it is, why would he prepare one? No. Even if it's real, there should be no drawback in having one more. So, why would he refuse my offer…?]

"I can understand you doubting the authenticity of this card. After all, it's not something that can be easily obtained."

"O-of course, I don't doubt its authenticity…"

"I will show you proof then… But before that, there's someone that I want you to meet. Wait here for a bit."

As Chloe was wondering who this person was that Sugadome wanted her to meet. Sugadome picked up his information terminal and made a call. A moment later, someone who she had met in the augmented reality room suddenly appeared. It was Shirou.

"Good grief! Calling me out of the blue after making me wait. I'm busy, you know? So, what is it now… Gehk!?"

The moment Shirou noticed Hammerz, he could not hide his shock. Meanwhile, Hammerz was smiling ominously at him. Shirou let out a dry chuckle as if he was trying to let the matter with Hammerz slide. Sugadome then spoke to Shirou.

“Shirou. I bet you’re already acquainted with her. I know that you caused her trouble a few days ago. So, go ahead and give her your apology.”

“You seriously called me just for that? Ah, no, I am sorry.”

Shirou was obviously displeased with this. However, since Sugadome was staring sharply at him, he flusteredly apologized.

“…Eh? Ah, please don’t worry about it…”

Chloe was equally flustered as she accepted his apology. Both Shirou and Chloe looked at each other. It was obvious that both of them did not understand why Sugadome was making them do this. Afterwards, Sugadome put his card on the table and said.

“Let’s get back to the main topic. I will show you proof that this card is not fake.”

Right at the next moment, Olivia appeared next to Shirou. Sugadome used the device on the table to access the card and contacted Olivia.

“Olivia of Lion Steel, at your service. Thank you for contacting us and choosing our service.”

Olivia bowed politely at Sugadome and glanced at Chloe. Chloe, who was given a final warning the previous time they had met, flinched back. She obeyed Olivia’s warning and decided to not contact her again. However, she was not certain if this was considered a violation of Olivia’s warning. There were no clues at all.

But Sugadome then stated.

“She is my guest, please don’t mind her.”

Olivia stared at Chloe's group for a few seconds before turning back to Sugadome. Chloe sighed in relief, believing they were saved.

Sugadome smiled at Olivia, who was smiling back at him. He then passed the card over to Hammerz.

"Nice to meet you. I am Sugadome. I'm hoping to discuss a certain job if I may."

Olivia's gaze shifted to Hammerz. Hammerz nodded, which signalled her to proceed. However, Olivia's gaze then shifted to Shirou. Shirou shook his head as if to say that it was not him who called her this time. Only after she checked did her gaze return to Sugadome. She smiled politely at him.

"Of course!"

"Thank you. That's great to hear. Let's get into the details then. Ah, but before that…"

Sugadome looked at Chloe.

"I'm sorry but this is where you leave."

Chloe's face stiffened for a split second. It was obvious that she did not appreciate being shooed away right after Sugadome called Shirou. She was finally about to get into the meaty details of her negotiation with Sugadome, but alas, it was not like she could refuse.

"…Of course. Please do excuse us then."

She politely bowed to Sugadome and left the room with Latis and Pamela in tow.

The guide, who accompanied Chloe's group to Sugadome's room, once again guided them out of the territory under Sakashita Heavy Industry. While travelling, Chloe kept thinking back on what just happened in Sugadome's room.

[…There must be some kind of motive behind calling Olivia in front of us. I just can't figure out what it is… Is it simply a means of informing Lion Steel? That Sakashita Heavy Industry already has the means to contact Olivia-sama? Is that really it? Is that really something that important? I feel like there is something more to it…]

Even after placing assumptions on top of assumptions. Guesses on top of guesses, she still could not figure out an answer. It was obvious from her face that she was being tormented by it. There was even a tint of desperation as well.

[In the end, I could not give the card away to Sakashita Heavy Industry. It didn't go well at all… This will not help my situation at all…]

As she was deep in thought while walking, the guide suddenly said to her.

"Chloe-sama, this is as far as I can go."

"Eh? Ah, right. Thank you very much!"

The meeting place with Udajima was still a bit further ahead. Although it was not that far and she could go by herself, normally, the guide would have accompanied her all the way. The fact that they were being left in the middle of the road was rather weird for her. However, since the guide was a staff member of Sakashita Heavy Industry, Chloe still had to make sure she did not say anything rude. Thus, she gave a smile and thanked the guide.

But the guide then did not immediately leave and left a message to her.

"I have a message from Sugadome-sama."

Chloe gave a nod. She was curious since they met just a moment ago.

"What might this message be?"

"It's up to Chloe-sama. If Chloe-sama wishes to make this incident bigger, it would be best for Chloe-sama's sake that she does not rope Sakashita Heavy Industry into this. It is also not recommended to cause trouble in Kuzusuhara ruin as well. We're sure that Chloe-sama will clean up after this

incident comes to an end. However, in the case where it becomes too much to handle alone, please do contact us. That is all."

Chloe, who picked up Sugadome's intention behind the message, was frozen from shock. Latis and Pamela flusteredly tried to call for her but she did not react.

"Chloe-sama. Do tell me if you have a message for Sugadome-sama."

"……. Please tell him. Thank you for your warning."

"Certainly. Well then, please allow me to excuse myself."

The guide then bowed and left calmly.

The shock was unbelievable. Watching the guide leave, being left with those she trusted, she suddenly felt a tinge of relief. This minor difference caused her to stumble back. Of course, Pamela and Latis quickly caught her before she collapsed.

"Milady!?"

"…He knew… He knew everything… The reason why he called Olivia-sama in front of me is just to prove it… But that's just…"

The reason why Sugadome did not accept the card was because he did not want to get Sakashita Heavy Industry involved in her issues. The reason why he called Olivia in front of her was to confirm whether Olivia was still going to tolerate the trouble that Chloe was causing. The moment she noticed his intentions, her shock intensified, which slowly turned into fear.

Afterwards, Chloe wobbled left and right as she walked to the meeting place, where Udajima was going to regroup with her. Seeing her utterly exhausted, Udajima worriedly asked.

"You don't seem well, what happened?"

"…We just had a negotiation with an officer from Sakashita Heavy Industry. It's to be expected that I would be tired afterwards."

“I see. In that case, you should head back to your room and rest. I can ask you what happened later.”

“Sorry but I’ll do just that.”

Afterwards, Chloe looked at Udajima. Her eyebrows rose as if she had just come up with something. As expected, Udajima noticed something was up.

“What’s wrong?”

“No… Nothing. My apologies, but I will return to my detention room. If there are no emergencies, I want to take my time resting.”

Chloe then went ahead of Udajima and returned back to her detention room. On her way to her room, Chloe’s face turned sterner.

[I should have been suspicious the moment a mere desperate City Management staff member was able to arrange a meeting with an officer from Sakashita Heavy Industry. What a blunder. I thought the request would get rejected but it unexpectedly got accepted without much resistance. I got blinded by happiness since it got through. And I thought too highly of myself and my connections. Even with the branch manager of Lion Steel Company Eastern District Third Ward branch. I really still have a long way to go, huh…]

Initially, Chloe thought that negotiations with Sugadome ended up as a huge failure due to severe blunders on her part. But it was not like she had any other choice in that situation. This means that she had to find another way. She used this experience and sought another solution. Using what she had learnt, she noticed something.

[Sugadome was able to accurately see through my intentions. He still left me a message. It basically states that he’s fine so long as I do not drag Sakashita Heavy Industry in this mess. This can even be interpreted as approval from Sakashita Heavy Industry. Olivia-sama also did not kill me back then. It could be interpreted as Olivia-sama still tolerating the current situation. This should be good enough proof to say that I’m just following Alice-sama’s order… Considering that I was able to receive this

confirmation, I think it is fine to say that it was not a complete failure. The branch manager should listen to me now…]

Withdrawing from the ongoing gambit and losing her bet, only led to her demise. Therefore, the only choice available was to win. Chloe reminded herself. [I have not lost yet. This is not the end.]

“That’s right… I’ll win this! Whatever it takes!”

Chloe smiled. She removed the shackle that held her back and reinterpreted the current situation. What could be exchanged for more chips in her wager?

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After Chloe’s group left Sugadome’s room, Shirou confusedly looked at Sugadome and asked.

“So, did you call me here just to make me apologise to that girl? If so, can I leave now? I’m busy, you know.”

“No. If you leave now, I will declare that you have run away from Sakashita.”

“What is it then? Can we just get to it, already?”

“Let’s get onto the main subject then.”

Sugadome smiled at Olivia.

“Olivia-san, is it possible to ask you to be his bodyguard?”

“Eh?”

Shirou was caught by surprise. Sugadome then explained with a serious gaze.

“Last time, you said you don’t want to have someone guard you. But it should be fine if it’s her, no? As a matter of fact, you even paid her to be

your bodyguard before. So, I won’t take no as an answer.”

Shirou obviously started to panic.

“Uh, well, that is… Like, you know, I don’t have the money to pay for her.”

“Don’t worry about that. I will pay for her. So then, Olivia-san, may I trouble you with such a request?”

“If the escort target approves, I shall take care of it right away.”

“That sounds reassuring. So there you have it, Shirou-kun. Give Olivia-san your approval.”

Shirou’s face turned pale as he firmly shut his mouth.

“Just to let you know, regardless of the status of your task, if you don’t return back in one month, I will assume that you plan to seek refuge in another company. We will dispatch men to arrest you. However, if you’re accompanied by an escort at that point, I will let it slide.”

After Sugadome clearly stated the deadline, Shirou’s face became even paler.

“If you have an escort with you, you don’t have to do your regular reports anymore. You can just give me your full report after one month. I will also stop Hammerz from looking for you. There should be no problem as long as Olivia-san is your bodyguard. I will even consider extending the deadline as well. You can go sightseeing to your heart’s content before returning back to your main mission. At least for the remaining month.”

Hammerz’s face twitched. It was obvious that he did not find this to be pleasant. But seeing Shirou still tense, even after receiving such a good offer, he found it to be strange.

Shirou did not say anything in return. After a short silence, Sugadome’s gaze turned sharp.

“This is a warning. If you don’t give me your answer, I will see it as betrayal toward Sakashita Heavy Industry. So, what is your answer?”

Shirou was cornered. However, he then made his resolve and slowly opened his mouth, squeezing out words from his throat.

“I…”

Shirou’s pale face, distorted from his trembling, had the corner of his lips faintly go up.

“…Refuse.”

Hammerz’s shocked expression showed just how unthinkable Shirou’s answer was.

Sugdome stared at him. Shirou was frozen as if he was awaiting his death sentence. His eyes still locked onto Sugadome.

“…I see.”

That short sentence from Sugadome sent a shiver to Shirou’s spine and made Hammerz take a step back.

Sugadome then lowered his shoulders. It was to expel the tense mood. He apologetically bowed to Olivia.

“Olivia-san, my deepest apologies. Since the escort target has refused, I know it is very rude of me being the one who asked for you, please allow me to save this for another time.”

“Certainly. Feel free to contact us next time. We, from Lion Steel, will wait for your next request.”

Olivia smiled and spoke. It was as if she did not mind this at all. She then gracefully bowed before vanishing.

After Olivia vanished, the friendly smile also vanished from Sugadome’s face. He spoke up.

“You can leave now, and don’t forget your regular report.”

Shirou awkwardly bowed and ended the call.

Hammerz still looked confused. He was not sure if he should ask Sugadome what that was all about. After hesitating, he finally decided to at least try asking. However, before he could say anything, Sugadome suddenly ordered him.

“Let me change your mission. You are to still look for Shirou-kun, but before you move in to arrest him, when you find him, make sure to contact me first. If you can’t reach me, be extra careful to not kill him by accident. That’s all. You can now leave.”

Judging from Sugadome’s mood, Hammerz knew that it was not a good idea to ask him right now, Therefore, Hammerz simply gave a slight bow and left the room without saying anything.

Sugadome, who was left alone in his room, stayed there for a while thinking of his future plan.

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After he closed the call, Shirou, who was in his hideout, began breathing roughly. His face was white as a sheet of paper.

“…Ah crap. This is bad. This is really bad!”

He was pressed for time after Sugadome declared a clear deadline for him. However, there was also something else that made him panic.

“Don’t tell me that he found out…?”

Shirou intensely shook his head left and right. It was as if he was forcefully trying to shake away his worries.

“…No. If he had known, he would have sent someone to arrest me right away. I’m sure that offer was nothing more than for the sake of my safety. His reaction was simply one towards a brat with too much pride. I’m sure

he’s simply thinking of some kind of punishment for me. One fit for a stupid brat who had just wasted the kindness of his superior. I’m sure he has not found out yet…”

Shirou knew that his guess was mixed with his own prayers. However, it was the only conclusion he could draw. Anything else would cause him to lose hope.

“…Let’s hurry up. I can’t afford to do it the safe way anymore.”

In the worst-case scenario, he might end up having to fight against Sakashita Heavy Industry. However, he was not in a situation where he could afford to be careful with his choices. Thus, he made his resolve and decided to take the barely safe route.

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Sugadome, who was left alone in his room, finally made his decision.

“He even refused such a good offer. I think we can be certain that it is indeed that case. Or at least, the possibility should be enough as a reason to prepare ourselves.”

After he made his decision, he reviewed the situation again. He made sure that he still reached the same conclusion before giving a nod.

Sightseeing. Sightseeing location. Ruins. Ruin exploration. Since it did not come up in the ruin data on the web, there was a good chance that it was an unexplored ruin. A ruin that could not be discovered through normal means. The reason why he refused to have anyone accompany him, was to prevent information leaks. It must be something that Shirou did not want Sakashita Heavy Industry to know about no matter what. Even if it meant he had to refuse having such a reassuring bodyguard like Olivia-san escorting him. There must be something that caused Shirou to go that far.

After Sugadome made his conclusion and finished re-examining it, he then called the main HQ of Sakashita Heavy Industry.

“Yes… Yes, that is correct. Just to be safe, I guess… This is just insurance. There’s no need to prioritize it, but it would be great to have it ready as soon as possible… Indeed. Depending on how this develops, I might have to request reinforcements… No, it depends on how the situation develops. I hope we can have someone sent to do an investigation. If the result shows that what we are doing is nothing but unnecessary, then we can just divert the soldiers to Kuzusuhara ruin.”

After discussing the finer details with the HQ staff, Sugadome then stated with a dire tone.

“Yes, I formally request for anti-rebuild personnel. That is all from me.”

He then closed the call and heaved a huge sigh.

“I hope that it’s nothing more than just a bad guess.”

His serious expression reflected the severity of the situation. It was something that he could not show to his men.

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As Akira was spending his days as a bounty target, he suddenly got a call. It was reaching him via an encrypted line using his Hunter code. Akira was surprised when he checked the identity of the caller. Since Kibayashi warned him to not just toss aside any negotiation opportunities that came his way, he picked up the call. Well, he was also curious about receiving a call from such an unexpected caller.

The call concluded with both participants deciding on somewhere to meet up.

Akira was originally planning to go alone on his bike, but when he told Carol about that call, she wanted to tag along too.

“It might be a trap, so it would be safer for you to stay here though?”

“Nope. As a bodyguard, you should not leave your escort target, you know? Moreover, I can help you if something bad happens.”

Seeing Carol smile as she casually spoke, it felt as if her proclamation was the natural thing to do. Akira gave a soft smile and replied.

“Is that so? Well, in that case, we’ll be going as soon as we’re done with the preparations.”

Akira seemed to be in a good mood as he and Carol made their preparation.

At a certain place, in the middle of the wasteland, a man in a formal suit stepped off of a vehicle. He was waiting for Akira to arrive. Next to him was a girl in a maid uniform and a man in a butler suit. They stood, ready for anything.

The man in the formal suit frowned and checked his wristwatch.

“He should be here soon though…”

It was unacceptable to be late. Considering that Akira was the one who proposed the meeting to be held in the middle of the dangerous wasteland. It would not be strange if either party left and abandoned the meeting.

However, Akira was a bounty target. There was a good chance that he was fighting Hunters, who were after him. It was also only natural for him to be suspicious if it was some kind of trap. Therefore, leaving now would be a rather rash decision.

As the guy in a formal suit started pondering over how long he should wait past the meeting time, he noticed a bike heading in his direction. He sighed in relief, believing it to be Akira. However, he immediately noticed that the person on that bike was female and there was no one else on the bike.

The bike stopped next to that guy and Carol stepped off.

“Are you the one asking for Akira?”

“Yes, where is he? Are you here to lead the way to another meeting place? If that’s indeed the case, it would be great if you had come a little sooner.”

It was not rare to actively change the meeting place in order to avoid ambushes. The guy in the suit knew that. However, considering the time required to travel to a new location, it made him feel disgruntled.

But that was when Akira suddenly spoke up.

“No. Here is fine.”

Akira suddenly appeared behind Carol. He was using his camouflaging defensive coat to hide his presence.

Depending on the capability of the camouflaging device, a decent enough information-gathering device would be able to see through it. Naturally, the man’s group were using powerful information-gathering devices to continuously watch their surroundings. Normally, they should have no problems detecting Akira.

Even so, depending on the camouflaging device, it was still quite a difficult task to completely erase one’s presence. Comparatively, it was much easier to fake the presence of others. Thanks to Alpha’s support, Akira managed to hide his presence by blending it in with Carol.

Because of that, the other party were caught with their pants down when Akira suddenly appeared. Especially the maid and the butler. Since they were acting as bodyguards, they were obviously more shocked. Compared to them, the guy in the formal suit was just minutely shocked.

“I’m glad that you reached this place on time. As I have informed you in the previous call. I am the head of Lion Steel Eastern District Fourth Ward Branch, Fulip Kobet Lorentz. I’m looking forward to today’s discussion.”

“I’m Akira.”

Leaving aside the stark contrast in the length of their introductions, they immediately went onto the main topic.

“Now then. Please allow me to explain our stance on the current situation. We of Lion Steel Eastern District Fourth Ward have no wish to antagonize

you. So, I hope you can keep this in mind as we continue this discussion."

Akira frowned and retraced his head sideways.

"I'm pretty sure Lion Steel is the one that placed a bounty on my head though?"

"First of all, let me straighten up this misunderstanding. The one who placed that bounty on you is the third ward branch, not us of the fourth ward branch. Your enemy is only Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward Branch. Not the whole Lion Steel company. This is a very important point."

Lion Steel is formed of individual branches working together under the main HQ. However, each branch dealt with the area under them as if they were from different companies. Some of them worked peacefully with each other, while others got along like water and oil. There were even cases where they got embroiled in conflict over the territory borders between different branches.

Of course, it was a whole different case if Akira was picking a fight with the Lion Steel Eastern District as a whole. As long as that was not the case, his fight was only limited to a regional conflict. In order not to unnecessarily cause more conflict, it was important to understand this point well. Akira seemed rather surprised. Nonetheless, he showed deep interest in the topic as he listened to their explanation.

"If I may add, you might think that you're already in a hostile relationship with the third branch, but that might not necessarily be the case, at least, not yet. It's a fact that they placed a bounty on you. But the one who did that was Chloe. She just used the name of the third branch. So, the third branch itself did not act under the direct order from the branch manager. This is just something that I've gathered. It also seems that even the third branch sees Chloe's actions as problematic. They are considering her punishment."

This time, Akira was completely flabbergasted.

"Is that so?"

“Yes. But, based on my investigation, it doesn’t seem like punishment has been delivered yet. So, I bet they’re still discussing punishing her or not.

As Fulip confirmed, Akira had lowered his initial wariness, which stemmed from the fact that they were from the Lion Steel company. Fulip noticed this and decided that it was a good time to move on to the next subject.

“Now that I hope you fully understand our position, that we are not your enemies, I wish to move on to the main subject. Will that be okay with you?”

“Sure, go ahead.”

It was not like Akira believed everything that Fulip had said. However, it was not like he had reasons to completely distrust him either. Fulip understood Akira’s stance from his reaction and continued.

“Very well then. There is one thing that I want to ask of you. Is it possible to request you to kill Chloe Levelant Lorentz? Of course, we will reward you for this job.”

Ever since Akira was told during the call through the vehicle’s secret line that they wanted to meet up directly to discuss a highly important subject, he already had some guesses of what it might be. However, as expected, this request was something completely out of the left field.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 271, Carol's Past

Index

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Akira was surprised when someone from Lion Steel, which had placed the bounty on him, asked to have a meeting with him. Even so, the surprise he felt now was incomparable to that. Kill Chloe – that was the task Fulip, a man from the Lion Steel Fourth Branch, requested of him.

"Wait a second. Are you being serious? Are you seriously offering me this job?"

"Indeed, we are. That is also if you are fine with accepting it. I want to know if you are someone who would accept such a request. After all, there are many Hunters who refuse to commit assassinations. Though, with that being said, it is not rare to find them show no hesitation when it comes to hunting a bounty target. Personally speaking, I believe the only difference here is how the reward is handed out. The core of what they do is exactly the same. But what can I say? Different people have different principles? So, I have no plans to force my opinion on anyone. Anyway, what is your answer?"

"Well, even if you say so…"

“Let me be clear. It’s not like we are formally offering you this job now. We are still assessing whether you are someone who would take such a job. If the answer is a yes, we will take your answer back to our company, and deliberate on it with the others. Only after that, might we send you a formal offer for this job. If things develop in that direction, we will still need to sit down and talk about the reward some other time. There is still a good chance we might not reach an agreement. This is where we are right now. If you plan to refuse because of the risk, we can discuss the conditions and the reward later to make it worthwhile for you. So, I believe the lack of reward is not a good enough reason to reject this offer at this point.”

Akira thought that Fulip was not wrong, but he was still hesitating. The moment he realized why he was hesitating; Akira immediately firmly shook his head.

“Sorry, but I will have to refuse.”

“May I ask why? You’ve tried several times to kill Chloe and I bet you’re not done trying yet. So, that part should not change whether you take our offer or not. If you accept our offer, we can help craft a good reason for you murdering one of our people. It would be just a job. A request for a reward. Others will think that you simply got yourself roped into a conflict between Lion Steel branches. Instead of you, alone, picking a fight against the whole Lion Steel company. From that point of view, this is an excellent offer for you. You only stand to gain by accepting our offer.”

“Yeah, I bet it is. But my answer is still the same.”

“Why? Do you think this offer is too good to be true? That’s why you are refusing? We are offering a reward for accepting this job, in consideration of the problems that will arise from you picking a fight with Chloe. It is nothing more than compensation from the demerit of having a 50 billion Aurum bounty and monster designation from Kugamayama city. Considering all the troubles you have faced so far, we are willing to be generous with our reward and support.”

But even so, Akira once again shook his head. Fulip lightly sighed.

“…Well, although it is not a normal request, it is still assassination. I won’t force you. But, if I may ask, can you at least tell me why you can’t accept it? I’m sure it’s not like you’re hesitating to take her life after all that has happened, right?”

“Well, yeah. It would be way too late to be hesitating at this point. It’s just that…”

“Yes?”

“I want to kill her purely because of my own will. I don’t want to get someone else’s intention mixed into it. That is all.”

Akira said firmly, without any hesitation. For him, it was vital. Thus, it alone was enough of a reason.

However, Fulip did not seem to be satisfied with his answer. So, Akira added another reason.

“And also, if I accept your request, it means that I will no longer be able to make decisions on my own. In case the situation changes where I no longer want her dead, it would turn into a huge problem. That’s why I won’t accept your request.”

“Oh. So you are saying even after all the battles that you have gone through, there’s still a possibility of you changing your mind, huh? Is that even possible?”

“Well, it’s not that simple for me too, you know? I’m already used to having to encounter unexpected turns of events. That’s why I can’t say with certainty that it is impossible.”

Fulip smiled. He seemed to be hiding something behind that smile.

“I see. Well, I will leave it as that for now.”

“Just to let you know, I’m not lying.”

“As the branch manager of the fourth ward, there are a lot of things going on that I have to deal with too, you see. So don’t mind the remark I left.”

Fulip smiled lightly and evaded giving a straight answer.

Now that the negotiation had concluded, Akira and Carol hopped back onto Akira’s bike. Just before they left, Fulip, who saw them off with a smile, said to them.

“Although we were not able to reach an agreement, we were able to get acquainted with each other. I believe it is not completely in vain. Let me say this again before you leave. We have no wish to be hostile with you. So, if you ever wish, we can offer some of our services to you. Although, considering your relationship with the third ward branch, we can’t charge you the usual price.”

Akira smiled bitterly. He was once again reminded of how Fulip was a business-oriented person.

“Sure, thanks for the offer. I’ll contact you again if I want to ask you something.”

Akira only said as much before he left the area and vanished into the dark wasteland.

After Akira left, the business smile on Fulip’s face vanished. It was replaced by a firm resolute look of a branch manager.

“What do you think of his fighting capability?”

The butler next to Fulip had a stern look on his face as he stated.

“It is enough of a reason for us to be careful with him. However, I don’t believe he is strong enough to defeat that wasp monster on his own as the report had stated.”

The maid, who was also standing next to Fulip, had the same expression as she added.

“I concur. But that stealthiness of his was impressive. Leaving aside his ability as a Hunter, as Fulip-sama’s bodyguard, I am rather reluctant to let someone like him near Fulip-sama.”

“I see. Then it was as I thought. It is worth all the trouble to at least let him know that we don’t wish to get into a fight with him.”

When they returned back to the vehicle, another of Fulip’s men was curious about how the negotiation went. Thus, Fulip sat on the back seat and gave him a quick rundown of what just happened.

Now that Akira had become a bounty target, Lion Steel was worried if he had a deep grudge toward the company as a whole. That he would show no mercy and give no quarter toward anyone whom he had a deep grudge against. They were afraid that if Akira somehow escaped to the fourth ward, he would launch an assault on one of their Lion Steel’s facilities. Therefore, in order to avoid such a scenario from developing, it was important to let him know that they were not hostile towards him. The offer to kill Chloe was originally meant to support their neutral stance. It was to help get that point through to Akira.

If Akira managed to kill Chloe, it would throw the third ward into disarray. They were already aware that the incident regarding Chloe had something to do with representative Alice’s plan to visit the third ward. If Chloe died, the third ward branch’s recent rapid development might get put on hold, which in turn, would reduce the possibility of having the fourth ward roped into danger.

The man in a butler suit showed his concern after he heard everything.

“But, branch manager. Would it not be dangerous for us to be messing with the third ward right now? Considering that the representative is coming to visit the third ward.”

“It’s not a problem. If that was the case, representative Alice would have sent a warning. Telling us not to mess with the third ward. But since we never received such a warning, this means that representative Alice is fine

with us sabotaging the third ward… Well, though, I must state that I don't know if representative Alice is approving or merely tolerating our actions."

After that, Fulip let out a huge sigh.

"…But still, it seems that the reason why representative Alice is coming to the third ward is being kept secret. The other branches seem to be confused as well. I bet this incident will only grow larger with time…"

The woman in a maid uniform, who was not knowledgeable about administrative work since she was Fulip's bodyguard, interjected without much thought.

"Would it not be wise to confirm it with HQ?"

"I did. But they did not deliver a clear answer. They did not even tell me that we have no need to know the reason why. The whole thing is still a mystery. If only Akira agreed to accept our offer, we could have used support and reward as an excuse to send some of our people to gather some information. But… It didn't go well…"

Fulip's confusion only grew larger as Alice's visit to the third ward was approaching.

__*__*__*__

The reason why Akira and Carol went to meet up with Fulip on a bike was to keep the camping vehicle safe in case a battle ensued. For Akira, who could not return back to the city, the camping vehicle was an important resting place. It was also an ammunition warehouse for him. Thus, they kept it away from Fulip to keep it safe.

But even so, it did not take the bike that much time to reach the camping vehicle. Though, they stuck close to the ground while they travelled, which was slower. Akira even allowed Carol to steer on their way back while he sat behind her.

"Carol, what do you think of what just happened there?"

“Hmmm, let’s see. Well, I’m glad that your opponent is not as big as I had thought.”

They were able to confirm that the whole Lion Steel company was not hostile to him. Even when Akira was trying to kill a member of the Lorentz family. Therefore, if he escaped from the territory under the third ward branch, the 50 billion Aurum bounty would effectively lose its value. After all, killing a bounty target set by the third ward branch might be interpreted as picking a fight with the faction that opposes the third ward branch.

After listening to Carol’s explanation, Akira gave a firm nod while a trace of surprise on his face.

“I see. Now that you mention it, I also have that choice, huh?”

Carol smiled bitterly when she heard his tone of voice.

“Akira, you didn’t even consider that when you went to meet them, huh?”

Although Akira was behind her, unable to lock eyes, he still looked away. It was as if he was avoiding giving a straight answer. But by pure coincidence, his eyes met Alpha’s instead, who was smiling teasingly. Therefore, Akira quickly turned to the opposite direction.

“Also, this is only my personal impression, but I’m glad that I get to understand how you think.”

“Hm? Did I do something?”

“You refused their assassination request, remember? Even with no desire to kill, there are those who can indifferently become a robber or an assassin. But you’re not like that. Rather, you’re the kind that feels nothing when murdering them. No matter what the reason, once someone accepts an assassination request, they would turn into a cold-blood murderer. Since you can choose to be one anytime you want, the reason you have not is extremely important.”

“Is that so?”

“Yep, that’s why I hope you would properly protect me and kill anyone who tries to harm me if something bad were to happen.”

Carol said so while smiling bewitchingly.

“Of course!”

Akira replied with a smile. But then, something else came to mind.

“Who are these people trying to get you?”

Carol replied rather awkwardly.

“…Do I absolutely have to answer that question?”

“I won’t force you. But, well, since our fate is basically intertwined to some extent at the moment, I will let you know something. I’m actually scheduled to receive a rather powerful set of equipment. So, it would be great if those coming after you attack after I get my new equipment. I just thought I might be able to predict when they might attack if I know who they are.”

“When will you get your equipment?”

“In a week if I get lucky, or in 3 months in the worst-case scenario.”

“That’s a rather wide schedule.”

“Yeah, it’s complicated.”

Carol could not help but smile since it seemed like Akira really had no wish to force her to answer. It seems that he trusted her enough to inform her of his new equipment. Also, it would be bad if her enemies were to attack before he received his new equipment.

“I’m sorry. Just as I said before, I’m asking you to escort me just as insurance. It might actually be unnecessary. That’s why I don’t even know when we might get attacked nor who. After all, there’s a good chance nothing bad is going to happen.”

“I see. Well, if that’s really the case, it would be great. This means that I can just take it easy.”

Since it was not really that important of a subject for Akira, he did not pursue it any further.

As they eventually reached the camping vehicle, they stopped the bike near it. Normally, they would simply open the back door and put the bike in, but Akira stopped Carol from doing so.

“Akira, what’s wrong?”

“Something’s not right.”

After Akira stepped off the bike, he grabbed his rifle and slowly approached the camping vehicle. He moved forward while positioning himself to shield Carol. Naturally, Carol noticed this and became wary. She held a gun in hand as she trailed behind him.

Akira then opened the back door and moved the bike in. Afterwards, he used the bike as a shield to peek into the camping vehicle. After a while, nothing happened. He confirmed that the back of the vehicle was safe and he carefully proceeded forward. The moment they stepped inside the living room, they saw a familiar face waiting for them.

“Long time no see. Sorry for barging in like this.”

Shirou smiled and welcomed Akira and Carol.

Shirou had no weapon in hand and he showed no animosity. Moreover, he was someone from Sakashita Heavy Industry. Thus, Akira and Carol lowered their weapons. However, they were still cautious of him.

Carol was glaring at Shirou.

“…How did you get in?”

“I just opened the door and came in. Geez, stop glaring like that, will you? I’m sorry for barging in, but I’m sure you know it’s better than just waiting

outside and attracting attention, right?”

Shirou acted extremely unceremoniously as if the security of the camping vehicle was nonexistent to him. That was when Akira suddenly interjected.

“You can at least contact us beforehand if you’re going to visit, you know? Those guys wanting to talk to me at least did that much.”

“Sorry about that, I was worried that others will be able to trace my location if I contact you. I was even planning to leave a letter if I did not get to meet you today.”

Yanagisawa was able to find him once back in Mihazono ruin, that was why Shirou was being extremely careful.

“Well, I apologize for coming without telling you first and breaking into your vehicle. As someone who is also in a precarious situation, I hope you can understand my actions. I’m here because there’s something I want to discuss with you.”

Carol started to look anxious.

“Discuss? What is it?”

Shirou glanced at Akira and Carol while smiling confidently. It was as if gloating he had the upper hand.

“Well, there’s something I want to discuss as a fellow old-world connector.”

Akira inadvertently furrowed his eyebrows. The moment he noticed that he had reacted, he thought that his cover had been blown. This caused him to show an even more obvious reaction. However, someone else in the room reacted even more vigorously.

“I’m not!”

Carol raised her voice. She was obviously shaken. Her pale face and her constant trembling from the fear caused her words to lose credibility. As a

matter of fact, it was as if she was confessing that she was indeed an old-world connector.

As Akira was trying to conceal his surprise behind Carol's reaction, Shirou was looking at them in confusion. However, Akira and Carol were not in a situation where they could notice it.

"There's no need to be that surprised. Since I'm already here, I'm pretty sure you at least expected this, no?"

Akira saw the completely calm Shirou on one hand and an extremely distraught and scared Carol on the other hand. He decided to push aside his worries for now and stood in between Carol and Shirou. He then once again pointed his rifle at Shirou.

"Carol, is it okay to treat him as hostile?"

Although he did not know what exactly was going on, it did not change the fact that his escort target was frightened. Therefore, even if faced with someone from Sakashita Heavy Industry, it was enough of a reason for Akira to point his rifle at Shirou. If Carol made any signal to show affirmation, Akira would not hesitate to pull the trigger.

The moment Shirou realized this, his expression immediately turned solemn. Judging from her mental state, it seemed to be useless to try to say anything to Carol right now. So, he slowly withdrew from the place, thinking that it was an unfortunate failure.

"Alright. It doesn't seem like we can have a proper chat here. So I will leave for now. Until next time."

Shirou then slowly exited the living room without turning his back to Akira. He then proceeded to the door and finally left the camping vehicle. Akira was not sure if he should stop Shirou or not. However, seeing the state Carol was in, he prioritized her safety first and allowed Shirou to leave.

"Alpha."

“It’s alright. He really left.”

Akira heaved a big sigh and lowered his rifle. He then glanced at Carol, who was cowering in fear.

Inside the camping vehicle’s living room, Carol and Akira were sitting in silence. It has been a few minutes since Shirou left. The drink that Akira placed in front of Carol had gone lukewarm. Even so, she did not touch it, not even once.

Akira was sitting on the opposite side of the table from her. He only sat there in silence without doing anything else. He only occasionally threw a glance to check on her, nothing more. He was simply sitting there without saying anything.

Time passed, no one broke the suffocating silence and it only continued indefinitely. Carol, distraught from the shock, slowly calmed down. It was as if the shock she felt was dissipating into the silence.

When she had regained some of her senses, enough to say something, she mumbled a question to Akira.

“…You won’t ask, huh?”

“I’m not going to force the issue.”

“…Why?”

“You were the one who said that you don’t want to talk about it, right? I already knew that when I agreed to be your bodyguard. So, I won’t ask. That was one of the conditions when I accepted this job, after all.”

“…I see.”

Silence once again pervaded the room. Seeing Carol once again fall silent, Akira thought that he gave the wrong answer. Thus, he tried to make up for his mistake.

“Well, it’s not like I’m not interested. So, I do want to know if you are willing to tell me.”

“…I see.”

Carol only said as much and once again fell silent. Akira could not help but think that he made another mistake again. After a short pause, she straightened up her hunching back and declared.

“I’ll tell you.”

She never wanted anyone to find out. But now that the cat was out of the bag, she wanted Akira to know.

“I really meant it when I said that I’m not an old-world connector. Or at least, that’s what I believe. I was an old-world connector but that should no longer be the case now… Probably…”

Up until now, she had been keeping it a closing guarded secret. Believing her life would be endangered if it ever got out. However, a portion of her heart wished she could share it with someone. The desire to be free from her shackles pushed her to continue her story.

A long time ago, when her name was not Carol yet. She was just one among the thousands of the common eastern district Hunters. One day, she got assaulted by a crippling headache while exploring Mihazono ruin. Right after, her vision was littered with images. Images which seemed to be from augmented reality. It was to the point where she could not even look at what was in front of her. She eventually fainted and lost consciousness.

She woke a few days later and found herself right where she lost consciousness. She wondered how she had survived, unconscious for a few days in the middle of a dangerous ruin. Her first thought was to return while enduring the incessant headache. The moment she stepped outside the building, she was flabbergasted. Although it was in the middle of the night, her vision was filled with light.

Buildings were adorned with signboards and roads were decorated with road markers. They were in all directions and even extended up to the sky. Names of each building and street were floating around. Images of the original buildings were overlapping with already crumbled dilapidated remnants. There were even images of walls with warnings, stating that it was a restricted area. She could even see patrol routes for the security drones as well. All of these were floating in her vision.

The moment Carol could see all this, her head was once again assaulted by crippling pain. Although it was excruciating, she managed to stay awake. But, she still thought that it was dangerous to stay there. Thus, she decided to head back home. However, the pain quickly became unbearable the moment she hurriedly returned back inside the building. It was only after she got inside a room, with few augmented reality images, that her headache slowly subsided, allowing her an opportunity to take a short break.

Afterwards, Carol spent a few more days inside the buildings. She did try to find a way to go back home. She did so by looking for areas where the pain was relatively weaker. However, the moment she stepped outside, the pain quickly returned, which forced her to cut the attempt short. The pain was simply too much no matter which exit she tried.

One day, while she explored the inside of the building, believing she had no means to leave, she suddenly found a room with a human-like image inside of it. The pain immediately flooded back, which knocked her unconscious again. While her mind was still muddled, she was asked something. She even managed to give a reply. However, due to the pain filling her senses, she hardly had any recollection of what took place.

The next time she woke up, her headache had disappeared. Even when she stepped outside, she could no longer see floating images. Carol was relieved but also confused. Nonetheless, she managed to drag herself out of the ruin.

Afterwards, she did some research to investigate what just happened to her. Eventually, she concluded that she had temporarily turned into an old-world connector. The things she saw back in the ruin were an augmented reality

that old-world connectors could see. Since she could no longer see them, she thought that she was no longer an old-world connector.

Just to be safe, she tried visiting ruins that were known to still have active augmented reality systems. It was to check if she could see anything. She used certain information-gathering devices and confirmed the presence of active augmented reality entities. She was glad that she could no longer see them with her naked eyes. She was afraid of going back to Mihazono ruin to make absolutely sure she was no longer an old-world connector. However, that was fine.

She had heard numerous rumours involving people getting investigated and even kidnapped for being misunderstood as an old-world connector. But since she was no longer an old-world connector, she thought that everything would be fine. Nonetheless, she still felt worried that she might return back to being an old-world connector.

One day, Carol accompanied a Hunter party to go to Mihazono ruin, which she had avoided up until that point. The outcome surprised her. Although she was still able to see everything, she did not have any headaches. And unlike last time, rather than having her vision filled with signs, she was only able to see a portion of it.

Carol was shocked, and the other Hunters looked at her with worry. She came up with vague excuses and finished her job there just as planned.

After that, Carol took more time to carefully investigate her situation. She found out that she only became a temporarily functioning old-world connector when she was around Mihazono ruin. Although it was limited to such a scenario, she was able to access information panels and gather all kinds of information.

It was enough of a reason for those seeking old-world connectors to look for her. At the very least, if she got found out, she would be placed in the same situation as those rumours. Since she could not be accurately classified as an old-world connector, there was a good chance that she would go through even more terrible experiments. Carol was so scared that she decided to throw away her past in order to keep it a secret. In fear that

even the slightest mistake might connect to her secret, she completely cut her past off from her.

She changed her name, her face, and even enhanced her body to change her body figure. She threw away her past Hunter record and registered as a new Hunter, with a new name. Without any relation to her past, it was easy for her to blend in with the low lives. Since she registered her name from the Hunter Office in the slums, no one was suspicious of her.

Living in secrecy was not cheap. She needed to prepare money in the case something was to happen. In order to earn more, she took on another job besides being a Hunter, which was creating maps.

There were cases where proficient map makers were suspected to be old-world connectors. However, that also meant those non-old-world connectors had special means to gather information. Thus, with her great skills as one of those highly capable map makers, she was able to further disguise herself.

As a side job, she also started selling her body. As she started charging more and more for her services, she also started accepting information in place of money. When others got suspicious of her knowing things she could not have known unless she was an old-world connector, she could claim that she heard it from the other Hunters.

Eventually, she started to befriend Viola despite knowing of her bad reputation. After all, those associated with Viola knew of things others did not. Thus, she decided to associate with her. Afterwards, it turned out that they got along pretty well and with them influencing one another, it was only a matter of time before Carol got recognised as a bad woman as well.

Those days greatly changed her. She eventually started trying various means to keep her secret hidden.

While at the same time, the fear of her secret leaking out one day caused side effects. Her inner desire to be released from her burden caused her to start seeking thrilling and risky things. She wanted someone suitable to be roped into her trouble. Thus, she started to entice people. To risk their lives.

Seeing them ruined made her feel as though they took her place. It made her feel safe and she even took joy in it.

The more one gets paranoid, the more it pushes them to self-destruct. In Carol's case, the wish to share her secret slowly grew bigger.

In the beginning, she only sold her body for a small price. She would then slowly make her customers addicted to her body, meanwhile, increasing the price exponentially. It would result in them one day no longer being able to pay with money. At that point, she would accept information instead. The distortions in her caused her to act in such a manner.

She wished for someone she could confide in. That wish caused her to prefer men who would not share secrets even when seduced. Thus, she went around seducing men, seeking that particular type of person.

However, due to her superb skill in seducing men, she was not able to find the right one. She only ended up repeating the cycle. Getting her hopes up, seducing the guy, making him spill out his secret, and getting herself disappointed in the end. Naturally, it also led to the ruin of the man, which also led to her infamy for ruining others' lives.

Then one day, as she was going about her usual life, Carol met someone unique. A boy who showed completely no interest in her. It was Akira. No matter how hard she tried to seduce him, Akira always showed no reaction. Furthermore, Akira was extremely particular. He always stuck close to his principles no matter what. He also occasionally made insane decisions, which went against any semblance of common sense. He was a young boy who was strangely extremely dutiful to requests that he accepted.

Carol started unconsciously getting interested in him. Hoping that if it was such a strange boy, then he might be the person she was hoping for.

But before she was able to do anything to confirm her feelings, she received some info. It stated that a huge organization was looking for an old-world connector near Kugamayama city. Although she knew that they were not looking for her, she was worried that she would get investigated.

It was then that Carol asked Akira to be her bodyguard. If it was him, she believed he would not abandon the job that he had taken; even if he faced those people. Indeed, her guess was on the nose. Even after Akira encountered those chasing Shirou back in Mihazono ruin, he did not show any signs of withdrawing from his duties as her bodyguard.

Though, later, Akira did withdraw from the job once. However, it was to make sure she would not be roped into his problems. Basically, he did not wish to put his escort target in any form of danger. It was after a series of events that Carol managed to convince Akira to re-accept the bodyguard request again.

Akira’s unbending obsession to kill Chloe was a good thing from her point of view. If it was someone who would not back down even when faced against a huge company like Lion Steel, there was a good chance that they would also not back down when faced against Sakashita Heavy Industry.

The 50 billion Aurum bounty was another positive for Carol. In such a scenario, if her position leaked out, there was a high probability Akira would escape with her. The camping car was also prepared for the scenario they had to run around the eastern district. Thus, it was beneficial for her.

Carol did not trick Akira, she did not lie to him, but she certainly intended to use him.

She confessed everything to him. But, as expected, she could not say anything about the things she was uncertain about herself. Such as her preference in men. However, she did confess everything. The reasons behind her request to have Akira as her bodyguard.

There was no more trickery, no more secrets, nothing.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 272, Shirou's Guess

Index

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Akira listened closely to Carol's story.

"Alpha. She mentioned something about turning into an old-world connector only in Mihazono ruin, is that even possible?"

"It is. After all, there are many types of people who can connect to the old-world domain."

There were individual differences in how far each person could connect to the old-world domain. There were those who could only imperfectly connect to the old-world domain. However, once they stepped into a certain ruin, the augmented reality system stimulated their connection and turned them into complete old-world connectors. Of course, the other cases also exist.

In Carol's case, her augmented reality filter might have been completely opened the moment she was able to make a complete connection to the old-world domain. However, the information processed must have fatigued her brain and in turn, caused her ability to connect to mostly be turned off.

She could still connect to the old-world domain in Mihazono ruin. This might be because of the damage to her brain. It prevented her from making any general-type connection to the old-world domain, limiting it to Mihazono ruin. There was another possible scenario. During the time when she was still able to connect to the old-world domain, she might have registered her identity somewhere in Mihazono ruin's system. This might have allowed her to be able to catch weak data signals when in the ruin. Nonetheless, these were nothing more than guesses. The true reason might lie somewhere else.

Alpha explained to Akira a lot of new information regarding the types of people who could connect to the old-world domain.

"In the end, unlike you, Carol cannot connect to the old-world domain through the general-type connection. She could not see me even when she was in Kuzusuhara ruin. So, it is not exactly a lie when she said she is no longer an old-world connector. Well, of course, that part varies from a person's point of view."

From another point of view, everyone in the eastern district was an old-world connector. Alpha also conveyed such information to Akira.

"I see. Then that means she is telling the truth, huh? That is a rather rare and interesting experience she had to go through."

Akira's reaction to Carol's story ended there. In other words, even after hearing Carol's story, Akira's impression only extended as far as 'it was an interesting story'. Nothing more.

Alpha made a mental note of how he reacted.

"So then, Akira, what's your plan?"

"Plan? About what exactly?"

"You now know of Carol's situation now, right? So, what do you plan to do with the bodyguard request?"

“Plan for what?”

Akira already knew that he was not good at reading between the lines. However, in this case, he truly did not understand the question. That was when he noticed Carol’s expression.

Carol was furrowing her brows. She looked anxious and desperate. Like someone who just confessed her sins, waiting for Akira’s response. The feeling of relief from finally letting it out and the anxiety from finally confessing her secret were mixed inside of her as she stared at him.

That was when Akira finally understood. Sakashita Heavy Industry now knew that Carol was an old-world connector. Akira finally understood why Alpha asked him that question. Once he realized Carol was waiting for his response, he hummed for a bit before opening his mouth.

“Uhhh, about my bodyguard job… As you know, I’m also pursuing another goal and I’m in this particular situation right now, so I’m sorry but…”

Carol had guessed what Akira’s next word would be. She looked crestfallen. However, that changed in the next moment when Akira continued.

“…Once I get my new equipment, let me withdraw from this job for a bit. I will finish what I need to do first before returning. Whether I will continue the job or not will depend on the situation at that time. And also…”

In front of the wide-eyed Carol, Akira started talking about other things, in the order in which they came to his mind.

“…Since that guy is from Sakashita Heavy Industry, that would mean if we’re going to run away, we will have to get out of the Aurum Economic Zone, right? I’m sorry but I can’t accompany you in that case. As I said before. Including the equipment that I’m waiting for right now, I don’t want to get too far away from Kugamayama city. If it’s after I get my new equipment and finish my business here… Well, I can at least escort you out. Hmm… But then again, that would depend on the situation when the time comes. Other than that…”

Akira hummed again. As he was making sure that he did not miss anything that he needed to make clear regarding his bodyguard job. But nothing else came to mind.

“Carol, is there anything else you want to make certain of?”

Akira said so with a rather serious expression. He thought that even if there was something complicated, they should make it clear beforehand. Regarding what the job entails. If it was something that neither he nor Carol had thought of, then there should be no problems.

Carol burst into laughter and smiled joyously at him.

“Nothing in particular. We can discuss it afterwards if something comes up later.”

“…? Alright.”

Akira did find her change in attitude to be strange. Though, thinking that his own common sense was distorted, he ignored it.

“I guess I was way too scared, huh?”

“Is that so? But since that guy appeared, wasn’t it a good thing that you’re being extra careful? Ah, but then again, he did say that he came to negotiate. He also didn’t seem to be planning to take you by force. So, I guess it was unnecessary to get a bodyguard, huh?”

“Well, that is difficult to say. He might have changed his plan to peacefully negotiate since I have a great bodyguard with me. Either way, I will be counting on you as my bodyguard if something comes up.”

“Sure. Of course.”

Carol softly chucked and smiled amusedly. Akira tilted his head in confusion at her reaction.

Now that Sakashita Heavy Industry knew that she was an old-world connector, Carol thought that Akira would leave her. After all, such a huge

company might now be hunting for her. However, Akira did not terminate his job. He did not even consider it as an option. Rather, it did not even pass his mind. Naturally, Alpha hoped that he would leave while Carol wished for him to stay.

“Alpha, did I miss anything?”

Alpha, as one of Akira’s requestors, could not afford to recommend him to leave his request mid-way. Although she did try to encourage him to think of a reason to withdraw from Carol’s request, in the end, it was futile.

“Nope, not at all. Since you have agreed on the ending line for this job, let’s give it our best until the very end.”

Akira agreed with every word though he tried to probe the hidden meaning behind those words as he replied.

“I know. Once I get my new equipment, I will prioritize your request.”

“I’ll be looking forward to it.”

In order to not worsen Akira’s mood, Alpha smiled happily as she spoke.

__*__*__*__

Day turned to night. Akira was shallow sleeping next to Carol, just like usual.

Carol was in deep sleep. She entrusted the full weight of her naked body to her soft, fluffy bed. Snug under a semi-transparent blanket. Her chest heaved up and down with every breath as she slept. Carol’s appearance did not change. However, she was more enchanting than before. This difference was caused by how relaxed she now was, compared to how desperate she was before. It was obvious that she had no intentions to seduce Akira at the moment. Strange enough, it made her natural side more prominent, making her sexier than before.

Akira, who was sitting next to Carol as he slept, showed no reaction to her body. Suddenly, he stood up. With his rifle in hand, he planned to head out.

As he put on his defensive coat, Carol, who noticed, woke up.

“Akira, what’s wrong?”

“It might be just my imagination, but I feel a strange presence nearby, so I will be going out to check it for a bit”

“I will go too.”

“No. It’s easier to camouflage myself when I’m alone. It might also be nothing. You can just continue to sleep.”

Akira said and left the camping vehicle.

Carol inadvertently turned toward the back of the camping vehicle, where Akira’s bike was resting.

[If the bike got taken, Akira might be trying to sneak away, leaving me behind, under the guise of patrolling the camping vehicle….] She reflected on herself, and the fact that she did not trust Akira, made her give a bitter smile.

Although Akira was completely relaxed when he was still inside the camping vehicle, he immediately turned serious the moment he stepped out.

“Alpha.”

“Over there.”

Akira walked toward the direction Alpha pointed to, without activating his camouflaging coat. He then stopped next to a mountain of rubble and sighed.

“What is it?”

Someone appeared from behind the rubble, it was Shirou. Although he was armed, he had already turned off his camouflage.

“I’ve been waiting for you, and here I was wondering what to do if you didn’t notice me even when I’m this close.”

“I have no problems ignoring you. But if you’re just going to aimlessly sneak around the camping vehicle, I thought it would be bad if I don’t at least try to get rid of you.”

“Geez, don’t say that. We’re fellow old-world connectors, you know?”

As expected. This time, Akira did not show any reaction even when Shirou bluntly stated it.

“Though you did say you want to talk, are you here to try and scare me? Although I have no plans to pick a fight with Sakashita Heavy Industry, don’t expect me to let you keep this up forever.”

Akira even thought that it was rare for him to pick a peaceful solution. Nonetheless, he was not lying, and it could be seen from his squinted eyes. He honestly had no desire to pick a fight with Sakashita Heavy Industry. Especially when he was about to get his new equipment soon. Naturally, he still had his line. Else, he would not have tried to kill Chloe and got himself a bounty.

However, Shirou just ignored the pressure and exaggeratedly shook his head.

“Of course not. I just want to offer you a job. After all, it doesn’t seem like you will hesitate to pick a fight against Sakashita Heavy Industry if you have a good enough reason.”

Akira tilted his head and squinted his eyes., In contrast, Shirou’s smile widened.

“I will pay you the same amount as your current bounty. 50 billion Aurum.”

Even Akira did not expect such an offer

“Are you being serious?”

“I am. It takes them 50 billion Aurum to get someone to kill you. So, it’s only a given that I pay that much if I want to ask you to do a job for me, no? Though, as you would have expected, I can’t pay the full sum upfront. But we can talk about the details for that part later…”

“That’s not what I mean. Well, that part does bother me a bit. But no normal person would offer a job to a bounty target, you know?”

“It’s not like it was Sakashita that placed that bounty on you. So, I don’t really mind.”

Even so, Shirou’s reasoning sounded way too naive for Akira as he knitted his brows.

“If you won’t say anything, I’ll assume that you’re okay with it. So, I’ll tell you the details…”

The job would last for 1 month. In that one month, Shirou wanted Akira to do some stuff, which included fighting. However, Shirou did not tell Akira in detail what he needed from him. Such detail depended on how the situation unfolded or changed. Thus, Shirou could not make that part of the job clear. Basically, he needed someone with enough firepower to explore an undiscovered ruin. 50 billion Aurum would include the expenses. Furthermore, since it was a request for a Hunter, it was to be expected that there would be fighting. As Shirou explained, it sounded more absurd, which made Akira even more confused.

“And also, although I know that you can fight with fewer worries if I pay for the expenses beforehand. But I still have my limits. I can’t pay you 20 or 30 billion Aurum as a deposit, just for taking the job. So, I will give 5 billion Aurum first and see where it goes from there…”

As Shirou explained, Akira eventually returned back to his usual self.

“Wait a second. I haven’t said anything about accepting that job.”

“But you don’t have any reason to refuse, right?”

“I do.”

“Oh? What is it?”

“You’re running away from Sakashita Heavy Industry, right? If I accept, wouldn’t that mean going up against Sakashita Heavy Industry?”

Akira asked as if it was already obvious to him. Although he did not have any proof to support his claim, considering the huge incident back in Mihazono ruin, where he met Shirou, he had a hunch that Shirou must be running from Sakashita Heavy Industry. He asked to check Shirou’s reaction and instantiate his hunch.

Shirou’s face turned stern. Under normal circumstances, he would have noticed what Akira was trying to do. At least, he would have thrown a counter-question to Akira. However, what had happened with Sugadome made him desperate. This caused him to react toward Akira’s statement.

“…I’m offering you this job as an individual. I thought you knew this and wouldn’t say anything about that topic. But since you asked, I will have no other choice but to answer that question.”

“What exactly are you trying to say?”

“Just like how I have Sakashita Heavy Industry behind me, I know that you have a patron behind you!”

Akira was taken aback and immediately raised his guard. He quickly picked up his rifle and aimed it at Shirou.

Shirou was not able to react. But even after having the muzzle touch his forehead, he did not falter. Although his eyes were cold, he was still smiling flippantly at Akira.

“I hit the bullseye… Didn’t I?”

Akira immediately realized that he overreacted when Shirou asked him that question and squinted his eyes.

“Alpha, what should I do with him? Should I just kill him?“

Alpha stood in front of Akira. She made her usual smile and spoke to him, trying to calm him.

“Akira, calm down. There’s no proof that he knows about me.”

“I-Is that so?”

“I will decide whether to let him live or to kill him here. You should just calm down for now. Be careful not to say anything unnecessary, okay?”

“…Alright.”

Akira took a deep breath to help himself calm down. He breathed in deeply and let out a long ‘fuuh’ to help him maintain his calm. He then continued his telepathic conversation with Alpha, while restarting his conversation with Shirou.

“…Let’s say that you are correct. In that case, my next move would be to make sure that you won’t be able to tell anyone. In other words, to kill you here. If you have any reason why I shouldn’t do that, this is your chance to tell me. I’m sure you have some since you decided to say that to me, right? Or is it that you believe I won’t kill you if your guess is correct?”

Akira tried his best to make a grin.

“Just to make sure we’re on the same page, you don’t think that I won’t kill you just because you’re from Sakashita Heavy Industry, right? After all, as you said, I will fight Sakashita Heavy Industry too if I have to. That is, if I have a good reason for it.”

Shirou could feel cold sweat running down his back, but he somehow managed to maintain his flippant smile.

“Of course!”

“So, what is it? If you won’t say anything, I will just kill you here and now, you know?”

“If you kill me, not only Sakashita but Tatsumori, Tsukisada…”

The moment Shirou said so, Alpha suddenly erased all her clothes. Akira, who inadvertently saw that, could not help but get bothered. Unfortunately, he could not hide his emotions and surprise was shown on his face.

“…And even Senba too. Not only that, you will be picking fights against all the five biggest corporations, which means the whole Corporate Government.”

“Alpha, why did you do that?”

“Don’t mind me.”

“That’s just impossible when you do that out of the blue, you know?”

“Just focus on Shirou.”

Akira could not help but question why Alpha was doing this. She was distracting him. Nonetheless, he switched his focus back to Shirou while making a stern expression.

“That’s a bluff. Like hell the whole Corporate Government would move just because I killed you.”

“Well, I wonder about that. Though, it might not be an exaggeration to say that the Corporate Government will react to my death. I’m sure Tsukisada will find it to be very displeasing.”

Shirou stared at Akira with a confident smile. At the same time, Alpha approached Akira’s face, as if she was going to kiss him. Akira inadvertently pulled his head back and frowned.

“Alpha!? What’s wrong with you!?”

“I’ll tell you later, just don’t mind me.”

“Don’t ask me the impossible.”

Although he was not sure what was going on, since it was an order from Alpha, he tried his best to not react to him. However, because of that, his expression became even sterner.

Seeing his reaction, Shirou thought that his guess was right. Thus, he asked as if he knew his hypothesis was right from the start.

“You are an agent from Tsukisada Construction. I bet you’ve been sent here disguised as a Hunter to investigate Kuzusuhra ruin, right?”

Akira did not say anything back. Thus, Shirou interpreted it as confirmation.

“Picking a fight with the Lion Steel company is nothing but a folly if you’re just a regular Hunter. But if it’s some kind of strategy by Tsukisada, it all makes sense. I heard that the Lion Steel’s representative is planning to visit this place. So, your actions might be some form of sabotage or warning to Lion Steel. Well, in the end, it’s just my guess. It’s not like I had investigated it or anything.”

Shirou picked his words carefully, to emphasise the matter with Lion Steel. He stated that he had guessed that Akira was Tsukisada Construction’s agent. However, it was a lie, something he made up. He was trying to trick Akira. He wanted Akira to assume he had investigated him beforehand.

Akira still did not speak. His expression remained stern. He was worried he might say something he should not. Which might result in Shirou realizing it to be a misunderstanding. However, Shirou simply presumed that Akira was too shocked for words since his guess was correct.

“I have investigated your past too. You caused a lot of commotion, which made people suspect you of faking your Hunter Rank, right? It might be fine if it’s only once or twice, but you overdid it. You even tried to fake your track record by selling it. If you want to hide your true strength, I can’t say that was a good move, you know?”

Akira frowned and clicked his tongue. Although he only did that because Alpha told him to do so, remembering his past bad luck still made him feel

unpleasant.

Seeing that, Shirou's smile deepened.

"Oh. Don't tell me that becoming a bounty target was also a mistake? Or is it some kind of strategy?"

"…I have no reason to continue this pointless chatter. So, why would someone from Sakashita Heavy Industry seek help from someone from Tsukisada Construction? If you just need help, you can go ask someone else. If you need a lot of manpower, you can just ask Sakashita. So why come to me?"

Shirou was not sure how he should answer. However, he believed that lying would only come back to bite him later. Thus, he decided to tell the truth.

"Right now, I'm working for my own personal goal. In order to do that, I might need to go against Sakashita. I'm also in need of help to reach that goal. That's why I've come to you."

What Shirou needed was someone powerful. Someone who was not afraid of fighting against Sakashita Heavy Industry. Naturally, those who satisfied his conditions were few. It had to be powerful Hunters that even Sakashita Heavy Industry could not just ignore. But they would be working near the frontline and would only accept Chrome as payment.

Unfortunately, Shirou had exhausted his Chrome reserve. Even if he had Chrome, he did not have the leeway to wait for frontline Hunters to come all the way here.

As such, Shirou had no other choice but to make a compromise. He had to look for someone strong, someone nearby and someone who would accept Aurum as a payment. It had to be someone who took their job seriously, someone who would face any danger if the reward was large enough. He was searching for someone who satisfied all these conditions.

Eventually, he found a Hunter by the name of Akira. Akira picked a fight with the Lion Steel company and even became a bounty target. He even got

designated as a monster by Kugamayama city. There was no question. He was a Hunter with multiple screws loose. However, that made him likely to accept an illegal job that might turn the 5 largest corporations against him. When Shirou investigated Akira's past, leaving aside his morality, he was unquestionably someone who took his job extremely seriously.

After weighing his options, Shirou finally decided to hire Akira.

It was obvious that Shirou was being careful with his words. After hearing his explanation, Akira turned to Alpha.

"Alpha, do you think he's telling the truth?"

"Well, he's being extra careful with his words. But it doesn't seem like he's lying. And I don't see any reason why he would lie about choosing you. It's likely that he really has no other choices."

"So, it's just because he's making a compromise, huh? Well, it's better than having malicious intentions behind that his request."

Akira heaved a big sigh.

"Alright. I get why you want to hire me. So, why should I just not kill you here and now?"

"…My goal includes exploring a certain ruin. It is a special ruin that is very important to the eastern district. If you accept my offer and can complete the job, I will tell you about that ruin. It's highly valuable information that you wouldn't normally get from a single job. That is even if you're an old-world connector. If you return back with that information, they will definitely think highly of you. I'm sure you'll receive a good position inside Tsukisada Construction. Now that you know, I'm sure you can't just ignore this, right? I'm sure you want this information, and if you kill me, you won't be able to get it."

Akira was uncertain of what to do next. Personally speaking, he could not care less about the information. However, in order to hide Alpha's involvement with him, he had to act as if he was an agent from Tsukisada.

Though. he had no clue how an agent from Tsukisada would react. What they would go through to obtain such information. Therefore, instead of answering, he asked a question to probe into the matter.

“Why are you so sure that I want a higher position?”

Shirou looked at Akira in pure bewilderment.

“…I don’t mind saying it out loud, but promise me not to get angry, okay?”

“…just shut up then.”

Akira thought that it must be a very sensitive subject for these agents. Therefore, he curtly told Shirou to just shut up. As he was getting worried if it was the correct reaction, he made a pose. Acting as if he was hesitating before he finally agreed.

“Very well, I accept that job, but I have conditions.”

“What is it?”

As Shirou started to tense up, waiting for Akira’s answer, he could not help but frown after hearing his reply.

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Back in the camping vehicle, Carol did not go back to sleep and instead waited for Akira. She was hugging her legs on top of the bed, still without a piece of cloth on her body, as she waited for Akira to return.

“Welcome back, was it alright?”

“Yeah. Carol, there’s something we need to talk about. Can you put something on?”

“Hm? Sure.”

Judging from Akira’s tone of voice, it did not seem like she was going to be in any danger and did not have to put on her augmented suit. Therefore, she

judged it to be something minor, that he simply did not want to talk while she was naked. She thus reached for her indoor robe. Although it was not transparent, it was made for comfort, so her breasts were still in full view.

“So, what is it?”

“Sorry, but can you put on something more proper? Even an augmented suit would do.”

Carol’s augmented suit had an old-world design, in other words, it had a rather sexy design. Therefore, even if she put her augmented suit on, she would still not exactly look proper. Carol already knew that much and could tell Akira was basically asking her to at least cover herself. Thus, she left the living room to put on more proper wear before returning back.

“Will this be good enough?”

“Yeah, sorry about that. Wait here for a bit.”

Akira then left the room and opened the vehicle door.

Carol did not expect Shirou to be the one entering the vehicle.

“Excuse me for intruding.”

“…Akira, what’s going on here?”

The confused Carol looked at Akira, and he frowned before briefly explaining.

“It seems like this guy wants to hire me for 50 billion Aurum. So, he’s basically going to discuss it here.”

Shirou looked at Carol and smiled.

“Yep, it’s exactly just as he said. Well, just take a seat for now.”

Shirou did not wait for an answer nor ask for permission. He simply went and sat on the sofa in the living room. He even signalled Carol to take a seat

as well. Although Carol was still confused, since Akira was the one who invited Shirou in, she thought that he should be friendly and took a seat.

Akira sat next to Carol as he thought about what he should say next.

“Carol, can you at least listen to what he has to say for now and decide whether to take his offer or not after that? He basically made this offer with my current job as your bodyguard in mind. So, this is about accepting his offer along with my current job. He said he’s fine with me accepting his offer while still focusing on my current job.”

Akira placed multiple conditions for Shirou. Though, they mostly stemmed from just one main condition. That he would continue to work as Carol’s bodyguard. While the attached conditions were for Shiro to not say anything unnecessary to her. Also, he would only accept the job if Carol was fine with it. There were also additional conditions. However, Akira mentioned that if Shiro could not satisfy these conditions first, then he would refuse.

“Priority-wise, my bodyguard job comes first. If you are afraid that it will hinder my job to protect you, then you can just say so. After all, I accepted your request first. So, you can decide for me. If you can’t decide, I will take it.”

Carol was extremely confused by the sudden turn of events. However, she at least understood, to an extent, what was going on. She replayed Akira’s explanation inside her mind to analyse her current situation.

“Akira, what if I say no.”

“First, I will kick him out of the camping vehicle. Then, we’ll need to move away from this place. We can decide later whether to leave him alive or not.”

“It would be great if you can just leave me alive.”

“I’m not talking to you.”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea to kill someone from Sakashita Heavy Industry, you know?”

In contrast to the serious Akira, Shirou was still as playful as ever. Both then looked at Carol.

“Uhh, so, Akira, basically, if I say no, you will refuse that 50 Billion Aurum job offer, right? Are you sure you are okay with that?”

“You don’t need to worry about it.”

“W-well, even if you say so…”

If it was only for a small amount that did not reach the billions, although she would feel bad for Akira, she would definitely refuse. After all, she did not want to have anything to do with the source of the incident back in Mihazono ruin. But 50 billion Aurum was not a small amount. It could not be simply ignored.

That was when Shirou interjected.

“Just to let you know. I’m here to offer a job to Akira. But if he’s going to refuse because he is in the middle of another job, I don’t mind changing the offer to both you and Akira. So do at least keep that in mind.”

Carol’s eyes widened as she looked at Akira, who frowned and warned.

“I’m sure I already warned you to not say anything unnecessary.”

“No no no, that one was not unnecessary, right?”

“Then just keep your mouth shut except for the bare minimum.”

Even with Akira’s warning, Shirou just exasperatedly shook his head.

“Geez, alright. In that case, I guess I should just keep the details and get straight to the point, huh?”

Shirou, who was acting playful up until now, suddenly turned serious.

“If you accept his job, as your reward, I will tell you how Sakashita Heavy Industry and the other corporations treat old-world connectors.”

Carol’s jaws dropped. She had been using all kinds of means to investigate this exact thing. But in the end, she was unable to gather anything more than rumours.

“As an old-world connector from Sakashita Heavy Industry, I can tell you why they are looking for the other old-world connectors and all kinds of secrets regarding the other companies. If you want to use it to hide from them or to manipulate them, the information I’m going to share will be extremely valuable.”

In exchange for the payment for her side job, she did try numerous times to seek this information. However, she was unable to find anyone knowledgeable about this subject.

“Of course, normally, I would never tell anyone about it. After all, it’s considered a corporate secret. But I don’t have that leeway right now. So, I’m willing to make it an exception this time.”

With a nod, Carol would be able to obtain it. Highly valuable information that she would not be able to receive unless she was a part of the 5 biggest corporations. Standing in front of that very opportunity right now made her shiver.

“So, what do you think? I bet it intrigues you, right?”

Seeing Carol clearly react to his offer, Shirou thought that he had won.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 273, A Small Display

Index

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Shirou was waiting with a smile on his face, believing that Carol would immediately say yes to his offer.

But strangely enough, no reply came back. Shirou's expression gradually turned to bewilderment, and eventually, desperation.

"…Uhhh, it would be great if you can give me an answer…"

Even after Shirou spoke, Carol still did not give a response. Her shocked expression showed how confused she was.

"…Is there anything you don't like about my offer? Or do you think it's too risky? Either way, I can't do anything unless you say something, you know?"

Even so, Carol still did not respond.

"…Hello, are you there?"

Carol's silent anxiety slowly infected Shirou as well. As both of them sat there, anxiously, the mood slowly grew tenser and stiffer with time.

Carol went silent because she realized that Akira was an old-world connector. She always had her suspicion, but this time, it had more or less been confirmed.

When Shirou said that he wanted to talk with a fellow old-world connector, he was referring to Akira, not her. Carol was too shocked to notice, but now that she had calmed down, it all made sense.

Carol finally realized why Akira's reaction was so minute. Even after she told him of her past, to Akira, who was already an old-world connector, it just meant meeting someone like him; another old-world connector.

Carol understood why an old-world connector would not want anyone else to know of their identity. Thus, she started to worry. She questioned if Akira would have told her of this, willingly. That worry started to fester in her mind and she asked herself.

[Wait, don't tell me that this is a test?]

Akira did leave Carol alone in the camping vehicle and went out alone. Although he said that he would be using camouflage, he did not activate it when he was still inside the camping vehicle. If he was being cautious, he would have done so while he was still inside.

[Was that only an excuse so that I won't follow him out? Or am I just overthinking?]

Akira then casually allowed Shirou in. It was obvious that they already had a discussion without her. At the very least, they must have already agreed on the reward for that job offer beforehand.

[For Akira, 50 billion Aurum is a huge amount of money. Even so, he told me not to worry about it. Was it so that I don't use it as an excuse to refuse the offer? In the first place, did Shirou really offer 50 billion Aurum? Or is this a fake setting that they had agreed on beforehand?]

If it was indeed a fake setting, then Shirou might be lying about Akira.

[If I ask ‘how to find an old-world connector’, right next to him, will he think of me as an enemy? He is hiding it after all. Is that what he’s trying to confirm? That I know? Is that why Shirou is including that kind of information as payment?]

Carol understood that there was no end to her questions. Neither could she come up with sound arguments that could disprove her guesses. Thus, it mostly depended on what she believed in. She did not want Akira to turn hostile. She did not want to lose someone to whom she had opened up. But unfortunately, she did not know which choice would turn him hostile – to accept or to refuse.

Carol was pushed into a corner, not really sure what she should do.

Shirou tensed up, similarly, unsure of what he should do next.

When Akira told Shirou of his conditions, the latter was confused. He expected everything could be done through negotiating. However, Akira’s conditions were a wedge in his plans. Though he did not show it, he felt extremely disgruntled.

In order to accomplish his goal, Shirou needed extra firepower. At the moment, his only option was Akira. If Akira refuses, the situation might take a turn for the worse. They might capture him and gift him to Sakashita. In order to prevent that, he was willing to pay 50 billion Aurum. Failure was not an option for him.

[Why is she hesitating? Is there any reason for her to refuse? Wait. In the first place, it is impossible to hire someone with a 50 billion Aurum bounty on their head… Is she conspiring together with him? Is she working to provide Akira with support? No, she was really caught by surprise. There’s no way that’s true… But wait, is she a different person? Like a body double…?]

As Shirou was gradually losing his cool, which also meant losing his rationality. This caused him to imagine all kinds of absurd possibilities. In the end, his skills laid in collecting information, not negotiation. Thus, Shirou found himself at an impasse.

While Shirou and Carol sat there, diving deeper into their own anxieties, the mood grew tense. Akira suddenly interjected.

“Say, Shirou. About that information regarding old-world connectors. Although it’s payment for Carol, is it okay for me to listen in too? As an old-world connector, I’m also interested.”

Shirou frowned and looked at Akira. He thought that Akira should already know everything since he worked as an agent from Tsukisada Construction.

“…Sure, but you’re interested too? You don’t know all the details?”

“I don’t know how the other companies treat old-world connectors.”

“Although there might be differences, I think they’re more or less the same. Ah, I don’t mind telling you, but Carol-san’s approval comes first.”

Akira and Shirou looked at Carol.

Carol’s eyes widened and she smiled.

“Sure, we’ll accept. So, Akira, let’s hear about it, together.”

Shirou sighed in relief and mumbled.

“…Good grief, what took you so long…”

He then raised his voice a bit to change the mood.

“Alright then. We have a deal… If you want me to explain everything to you now, can you at least give me something to drink? My throat is all dried up.”

“Sure. I’ll be back in a moment.”

Akira said and quickly left to bring drinks. Carol stood up and said that she would help too. However, since Akira refused her offer, he left the living room alone.

With Shirou and Carol left alone in the living room. With the tense mood getting dispelled just a moment ago, they sighed in relief. They reflected and concluded that they were just overthinking things earlier.

Carol’s worries were erased after Akira declared he was an old-world connector and Shirou’s worries were erased after seeing Carol’s reaction. After they had confirmed that there was actually nothing to worry about, they wryly smiled.

As Akira was preparing drinks from the refrigerator, he gave a curt glance at Alpha.

“Alpha, do I need to be that suspicious of them?”

Alpha replied with a solemn expression.

“You have to be extra careful. Although you admitted to being an old-world connector, we can’t afford to let them know about me. Judging from their reaction, I’m sure Carol won’t investigate you any further and Shirou would stick with his misunderstanding as well. We had to do that to make sure that our secret is safe.”

“…I see.”

Akira thought that it was overkill. But considering Alpha’s situation, he thought that it was acceptable and did not pursue the subject any further.

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The next day, Carol woke up. Still lacking sleep, she yawned a few times as she had breakfast. Seeing that, Shirou, who was also there, also eating breakfast, smiled and comforted.

“You don’t have to be that depressed, you know? It’s not like all you’ve done up until now is unless. Even if your worries proved to not be true, there’s nothing wrong with preparing for the worst. Even if it is unlikely, you know?”

Even if Carol knew that Shirou was not teasing her, it still annoyed her. She glared at him but he simply continued his meal, unfazed by it.

“Although this is pretty good, it is still a bit disappointing to me. As I thought. I have gotten too used to living in luxury. It might be weird for me to say this since I ran away from them, but if you want them to capture you, I can help you with that, you know? Though, that would only be after I finish my business.”

Carol heaved another deep sigh.

The information from Shirou about how companies treated old-world connectors could not be any further from what Carol had expected. One of them being how large corporations no longer used force to capture old-world connectors.

It was true that they did that in the past. That was just how valuable the old-world connectors were. But as knowledge grew and technology advanced, that worth slowly diminished.

In the past, using the old-world line was extremely expensive. People only used them for connection lines between cities. But now, although it was still not that cheap, anyone could access the old-world domain using top-class, still highly expensive, information-gathering devices. With the advent of information-gathering devices coupled with augmented reality, they were able to access the augmented reality system of old-world ruins.

Once the option to use expensive equipment opened up, large corporations preferred to use them over old-world connectors. After all, the connection qualities differed from one old-world connector to another. Devices which helped to connect people to the old-world domain had made enough progress to turn those who were considered to be ordinary into mid-level old-world connectors.

With the advancement of these technologies and the funds that the large corporations funnelled into it, they had stopped hunting mid-level old-world connectors. After all, the expense did not justify the benefit; not anymore.

Of course, this option was only open to large corporations. Some middle-sized corporations still sought old-world connectors and still resorted to force to capture them.

But given that they were only small to medium-sized corporations, they were not that threatening. Even if they were able to somehow capture a Rank 50 old-world connector Hunter using force, it might still not be worth it. After all, that Hunter might turn out to just be a mid-level old-world connector. As such, rather than capturing with force, they preferred to cajole them with benefits. Therefore, Carol's worries were mostly unnecessary.

Naturally, Carol did not just believe everything Shirou said. Considering the commotion caused when Hunters found a device that could connect to the old-world domain back in Higaraka residence ruin. There was also that colossal battle that took place in Mihazono ruin, caused by Sakashita Heavy Industry's attempt to capture Shirou. It was rather obvious that corporations were still willing to use force.

However, Shirou casually refuted her points.

The commotion regarding that connection device originated from the Lion Steel company. It was the huge sum of money they put up for it that caused the commotion. If the device only helped to connect to the old-world domain, the commotion would not have been that big.

Meanwhile, in regards to the matter in Mihazono ruin, it was mainly caused by Yanagisawa. He held great influence in Kugamayama city. He used all the resources that he had to retrieve him, a highly skilled staff member from Sakashita Heavy Industry. It was incomparable to a medium-sized company's hunt for old-world connectors.

As such, those two incidents could not serve as counter-arguments.

Shirou explained with such confidence that even Carol nodded and got convinced by it.

They did not let this information get out of the inner wall because keeping this illusion up was more profitable for the large corporations. When small to medium-sized companies attempted to use force to capture old-world connectors, large corporations could swoop in and capture them instead. In the guise of capturing for the sake of their protection, these old-world connectors would feel thankful towards their captors. With such rumors floating around, they would be more likely to accept being taken under the wing of these large corporations.

That was why such rumors were kept rampant, and why Carol was mistaken.

It was only a matter of time before small and medium-sized companies got an affordable means to connect to the old-world domain. By that time, the worth of old-world connectors would plummet. When even normal people could connect to the old-world domain, the only benefit of being an old-world connector would be that they did not need any support device to connect. At the moment, they were in the middle of that transition. Shirou explained, ending the topic.

As Carol recalled their conversation yesterday, it was obvious that she got a bit depressed. Of course, in the end, it was nothing more than Shirou's words. There was a chance that lies, misinterpretations, and exaggerations were mixed into it.

But even so, Carol could not help but believe Shirou's words. Thus, she occasionally let out depressed sighs.

That was when Akira suddenly interjected.

"Carol, do you want to stop your bodyguard request? Considering what we've heard yesterday, I feel that coming with me would put you in more danger. So, feel free to put a stop to it any time you want, okay?"

Carol frowned. She understood his true intentions and was even happy that Akira worried for her. But at the same time, she also felt a bit offended.

“No. I want you to keep working as my bodyguard until we find a good time to call it quits. Just like we’ve agreed on beforehand.”

“Are you sure? Well, it’s nothing but beneficial for me though.”

Akira frowned and looked at Carol. She then smiled back, as if she had already completely placed this matter behind her.

“Of course. As an apology for making you do a job without telling you anything, and as gratitude for accepting it, I will at least do this much.”

“…I see. Thanks.”

Akira smiled back. Seeing them act in such a manner, Shirou once again got suspicious. And questioned if Akira and Carol were actually conspiring together. Meanwhile, Alpha looked over that exchange with caution.

Although Akira and Carol were basically working for Shirou right now, they had nothing to do at the moment. To be more precise, Shirou was the one who stated they had nothing to do and Carol believed him.

But in reality, it was simply because Shirou had still not satisfied all the conditions that Akira had placed. Therefore, he could not tell them to start working on his goal just yet. Akira had asked Shirou for one thing as advance payment.

Akira made it a requirement for Shirou to explain his goal and the ruin that he wanted them to go to. Naturally, Shirou adamantly refused to do so. However, from Akira’s point of view, a ruin exploration request without any details was just too dangerous.

Shirou’s strong refusal seemed to prove Akira’s point and made the former seem suspicious. In the first place, there was no guarantee that the information Shirou had about the ruin was accurate. That was why he ultimately refused the job. Akira then pointed out an alternative. Which was to get him to be indebted to Shirou. Indebted to the point he could not refuse Shirou’s request.

Akira only gave an alternative so as to open up space for discussion. However, even after knowing of his intention, Shirou quickly accepted his conditions. Shirou was afraid that with the slightest information shared, Akira might realize what he was trying to do.

Therefore, with that deal in place, Shirou stayed in the camping vehicle instead of returning back to his hideout. He was looking for an opportunity to get Akira indebted to him. After all, it was easier to find that opportunity if the target was nearby.

As to not allow Carol to eavesdrop on their conversation, Shirou asked Akria through telepathy.

“Akira, can’t I just pay you more money instead? 10 billion Aurum, no, make it 15 billion! I’m willing to pay you that much in advance, you know?”

“No.”

“In that case, you can go do some investigations as an agent from Tsukisada. I will help you out. You do need to add something to your achievement list, right? You won’t get any if you don’t do any work, you know? This is a great opportunity for you. I’m willing to help you right now.”

“With my 50 billion Aurum bounty and monster designation, I can’t return back to Kugamayama city. Like hell I can do any investigation in this situation. Or more like, you should work with Sakashita to get rid of my bounty and monster designation. I will think of that as huge debt, you know?”

“Sure sure, except, since I’m currently on the run from Sakashita, I’m also not in a situation where I can do that right now.”

Shirou let out a sigh in secret.

[Ahhh… I thought that any old-world connector agents around this area would jump at the smallest opportunity to get extra achievements…]

The 5 largest corporations had more old-world connectors than they needed. Each old-world connector had differences in relation to their skills and capabilities. A genius old-world connector like Shirou would be assigned to a special facility, received special training to hone their skill, and get assigned a powerful bodyguard like Hammerz. However, common old-world connectors did not receive such privileges. If their connection to the old-world domain did not reach a certain threshold, they would be assigned to do clerical jobs.

Those whose connections were even worse than that, could not even do any job related to the old-world domain. Thus, some of them got assigned to do jobs outside the inner wall, while some were sent as agents to various places or companies.

Even if they could not do any task related to the old-world domain, if they could still communicate through the old-world domain, they could work in remote areas without any communication equipment. Furthermore, there was no need to worry about communication failures or hijacking etc. For reconnaissance, where connection failure could be fatal, they were highly valuable manpower.

Shirou thought that Akira belonged to that category. He thought that Akira was ordered by his superior to disguise himself as a Hunter. Fortunately, Akira had a knack for being a Hunter. He also presumed that Akira had lived inside the inner wall before and wished to return.

There were agents from Sakashita Heavy Industry who were in the same situation as Akira. They were familiar with the lifestyle inside the inner wall and had a strong desire to return. These types of agents could only do so once they piled enough achievements. Shirou knew many agents who acted in such a manner. That was why he was so certain Akira could not afford to kill him.

But, strangely enough, Akira’s reaction was rather mild. Shirou was even unconsciously trying to justify Akira’s unexpected reaction.

[No, is he actually excited for the opportunity but just cannot trust me? Tsukisada could win some favours from Sakashita if he just handed me over

to Sakashita. That should be a huge achievement for him. Or is he just holding back? If that is the case, this is a rather dangerous situation for me. I only have one month to do this…]

Although he did not have any other choice, Shirou felt Akira's conditions only served to make him waste what precious time he had left. Thus, his face turned grim.

Suddenly, another notification reached Akira through his Hunter code. Just like last time, it was a code to connect through an encrypted line. However, he was visibly flustered when he checked the sender. He took a deep breath to calm himself down. He checked with Shirou and Carol if it was fine for him to go out for a bit. Once he gained their approval, he left the camping vehicle. Carol and Shirou both wondered what was going on with Akira.

Outside the camping vehicle, Akira stared at his information terminal. He then made his resolve and opened the connection.

"…It's Akira."

"…Elena over here."

Akira and Elena only stated their names, and the conversation came to halt.

Elena already knew that he had turned into a bounty target. Akira noticed this from the fact that she had contacted him through an encrypted line. He endured the silence longer than he had imagined. He was quick to realize how much he cared about her perception of him. However, at the same time, he also realized that there were people who did not care about the labels imposed on him. This made his lips curve into a wry smile.

As he was wondering why Elena called him and what should he say, the silence continued. It was Elena who broke the silence.

"Well, as much as I want to ask 'how are you' and 'what are you up to lately', I know that you're not in the situation for small talk. So, I'll leave that for some other time. So then? I actually have something I need to discuss, but before that, there are a few things that I need to tell you."

“Alright, what is it?”

“We are your allies, or at least, we want to stay as your ally. Will you believe me if I say so?”

Akira did not reply. The reason was simply because if he said yes, he might rope Elena and Sara into his problems, and he was afraid of that.

As Elena interpreted that silence as a no, her tone turned forlorn as she continued.

“…At the very least, we are not your enemy. We don’t want to be your enemy. Will that work? If not, then it’ll be pointless for me to continue. In that case, you can end the call…”

Hearing her voice leave traces of insecurity, Akira finally opened his mouth.

“Yes, that will be fine.”

Akira evaded having to make a clear statement. Whether he was fine with them being allies or not being enemies. He did not mean to make it vague. He simply could not make up his mind.

“Thank you. So then, actually, there are people who hired us in order to speak with you. Although I do want to talk to you about smaller and simpler topics, I will pass the call.”

“It’s Hikaru, long time no see.”

Hikaru was trying to act friendly to sour Akira’s mood. Although the plan was by no means wrong, it was obvious that Akira was displeased with hearing her talk.

“You can go ahead and tell me your excuse for roping Elena-san and Sara-san into this.”

Hikaru immediately tensed up. However, she had already prepared an answer to this question beforehand.

“It is to convince you that we are your allies. We told them everything before they accepted my request to escort me. I’m sure you don’t know what is going on inside the city. I believe you see all city officers as hostile. So, unless I do this much, I’m sure you’ll just end the call before I can say anything. I am sorry if you find it unpleasant.”

Akira understood her reasoning, but that was not enough to completely overturn his soured mood.

“Wouldn’t it be fine if you just ask for Kibayashi? If it’s from him, I will at least listen to what you have to say, you know?”

“Kibayashi is working as a staff member of the Hunter Office at the moment. So, it would be improper for a city officer to ask him to do something. I’m sure that you can understand that too, right? If not, I don’t mind explaining it to you.”

“No, that is fine.”

Kibayashi did advise Akira to blow the city open. Therefore, Akira concluded that for Hikaru, who was an officer from the City Management, it would be a bad move to contact such a person. As he was reminded of Kibayashi, he started to compare them. He believed that, at the very least, this conversation would not be as absurd as the conversation he had with Kibayashi. That thought alone helped him to calm down.

“Alright, so, what is it?”

“If it’s possible, I want to solve the current situation peacefully. Would it be alright if we meet up somewhere and talk face to face?”

“Peacefully, huh? If you really want to do so, go and annul my monster designation first before calling me.”

“That’s exactly why I want to talk with you. If they can see that you’re willing to sit down and converse peacefully with us even in this situation, it would be easier for Inabe-san to convince City Management that this is a matter solely between you and Lion Steel; the city has nothing to do with it.

As I said, we are your allies. That’s why, we’re also working hard over here to help you, you know?”

Since Akira was told that it was in order to remove his monster designation, it was not like he could refuse. Furthermore, it was suggested by someone claiming to be his ally. However, if they met up, there was a good chance that Sara and Elena would be there too. That was why Akira was hesitating.

“…Fine then, let’s meet up.”

“Thank you. So then, how are we going to meet… Ah, I’ll pass the call for a bit.”

“Hello, it’s Sara. Long time no see, Akira.”

“Ah, yes, long time no see.”

Sara was obviously trying to act like usual. So, Akira was trying his best to do the same. But in the end, he still sounded stiff. Sara noticed it but just ignored it.

“Although it might sound weird, are you doing okay?”

“Yeah, I’m doing okay.”

“Do you have somewhere to sleep? Are you sleeping in an abandoned building somewhere?”

“No, I’m living in a camping vehicle.”

“Oh? I don’t remember you have one, is it an abandoned camping vehicle?”

“Well, about that, it’s a long story…”

Sara was casually chatting with Akira about how he was doing. Judging from his tone of voice, it did not seem like his mental state had been gravely affected, which she had been worried about. Although she did not know all the details, she was relieved to hear Akira was still able to live in a

relatively good condition considering his situation. It was to the point that he could maintain his calm.

Being a bounty target on top of getting a monster designation. No normal person would be able to stay sane having to stay vigilant of Hunters and monsters out in the wasteland for an extended period of time. But judging from his reply, Akira seemed to have adapted well to his situation. He did not sound panicked or desperate. Although he sounded stiff and nervous, even a little guilty, it was proof that he at least had the leeway to afford to be so.

“But still, it must be rough. Well, it seems like Hikaru is working hard so that you can return back to the city. So, I hope it goes well. If you need any help from us, feel free to ask. Don’t hold back. We are also Hunters. Depending on the reward, we would at least consider it.”

“Thank you for the offer. But unfortunately, I just bought new equipment, so I don’t have much money left to offer.”

“Oh my, that’s just too bad.”

Sara jokingly said so and Akira replied with another joke. At the very least, he understood that Sara wanted him to ask them for help when he needed them.

After that, the call returned back to Hikaru. They quickly decided on the time and the place before closing the call.

Akira heaved a deep sigh. Seeing that, Alpha smiled and spoke to him, as if to console him.

“It’s not your fault. Being designated as a bounty target is not your fault. Although, your decision did play a part in it. Regardless of whether you would do the same thing or not in the future, just give up and accept it.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Don’t worry, I don’t think they were lying to you. Elena and Sara were being honest when they said that they want to stay as your allies.”

“…I see, thanks.”

As expected, Akira could not simply change how he perceived his situation at the drop of a hat. Even so, he still smiled and thanked Alpha.

“You are welcome.”

Alpha smiled back at him.

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After they closed the call, Sara seemed forlorn as she said.

“…It seems like we’re no longer senior Hunters that he can rely on anymore… It’s rather disheartening…”

They thought that they could still do something to help Akira out. They wanted him to rely on them. That was why she stated ‘If you need any help from us, feel free to ask. Don’t hold back’.

But today, that was no longer the case. Akira no longer relied on them. He was even worried about causing them trouble. The realization hit Sara pretty hard.

In contrast, Hikaru, who did not notice Sara’s feelings, was excited. After all, her first contact with Akira regarding this matter went well.

“Elena-san, Sara-san. I know that this won’t be easy, but as I said before, if things go well, we should be able to help him. So, I’ll be counting on you again.”

Hikaru politely bowed. Sara was surprised by this. Elena, who had been together with Sara for such a long time, noticed her feelings and tried to cheer her up with a smile.

“Of course. We’re planning on helping him from here on out. Right, Sara?”

Sara seemed to have been taken aback, but she quickly bloomed a smile.

“…Yeah, you’re right, let’s do our best for the next step!”

It reminded Sara that they were not trying to help him so that he would rely on them. She brightened up and smiled happily at her best friend, Elena.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 274, The End of the Grace Period

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It had been one full week since Akira had a bounty on his head. He still had not received his front-line equipment yet. Furthermore, at the moment, no one was trying to try to hunt him. He was talking with Alpha while waiting to meet Hikaru. At one point, Akira seemed rather confused as he shook his head.

“What can I say? I feel a bit disappointed. With 50 billion Aurum on my head, I thought someone would already try to attack me. Is it because I’m hiding pretty well? But they did find Shirou though.”

Discovering that it was currently peaceful when it wouldn’t be strange if all hell broke loose, was not good luck. Rather, it was borderline ominous. Such thought had been grafted deep into Akira’s mind. Even so, Alpha was smiling as per usual at him and replied.

“Well, he’s a special agent from Sakashita Heavy Industry, so they might have some kind of special means to track him. The reason why they can’t find you is probably because it’s impossible to do that to normal Hunters.”

“It would be great if that really is the case though.”

Akira did try to ask Shirou once. How did he find him? However, Shirou simply stated that it was through secret means that no normal person could access. Telling Akira would mean owing him a huge favour. Therefore, in the end, Akira refused. Since Shirou was being hunted by Sakashita Heavy Industry and was travelling together with Akira, Akira believed that Shirou would tell him about it if he were to get discovered. In addition, there might be no effective way to deal with it.

Akira's lack of interest in the matter made Shirou glad.

Meanwhile, Alpha was telepathically conversing with Akira.

"He could have just told you and made you deeply indebted to him. I wonder if he is just being stubborn and not telling you. Or maybe, he has another plan in mind."

"Hmmm… It is possible that he suspects such favours, no matter how many, even when piled together, would be judged by me as insufficient. So, he might just be waiting for an opportunity, one huge favour with which I can no longer refuse his request. That's why he is avoiding having me owe him smaller favours. Until he can get that one big opportunity."

"That does sound like a good strategy. But I don't think that's a good gambit against someone like you."

While in the middle of their conversation, Akira noticed a vehicle heading in their direction from the wasteland. Akira quickly stopped conversing and picked up his rifle.

Hikaru's group was heading to the meeting place on a vehicle with Kugamayama city's mark on it.

It was a vehicle with a collapsible top. At the moment, it was completely open. Even so, thanks to a thin forcefield layer, they were protected from the wind and sand. Since it was completely transparent, Hikaru, Elena, and Sara had good visibility of the surroundings.

After what she experienced during the inter-city transport escort mission, Hikaru preferred to stay within the inner wall. That incident took place somewhere as secured as the inner wall. Just thinking of it made her not want to step out of the inner wall. Therefore, since Inabe gave her a high-level authority pass, she hoped she could at least bring the city defence squad to escort her.

However, considering that bringing unnecessary people could cause Akira to not trust her, she decided to not do so. In exchange, she gave Elena and Sara, her escorts, expensive equipment, which was too much even as advanced payment. They were powerful equipment not suitable to be used around Kugamayama city and only sold to Hunters above certain Hunter Ranks. Since she was in the middle of a special mission regarding the safety of the city, she managed to somehow get them for Sara and Elena. She also roped in Kiryou and Toson, to get the best equipment that she could get for Elena and Sara.

Thanks to that, Elena and Sara received powerful equipment, which had an old-world-like design. It would not be strange for others to mistake them for Hunters from further east. Since Elena and Sara were Hunters, normally, they would be delighted to find themselves having such equipment. However, since they were going to meet a bounty target, they did not have the leeway to be delighted. Instead, they were distressed, and it was obvious from their expression.

While they were driving through the wasteland, the vehicle lightly wobbled. Elena thought that it was unnatural, but the sensor did not show anything in particular. Thus, she presumed they must have rode over pieces of rubble. She then glanced at Hikaru to confirm if she was fine, before making sure that they were heading in the right direction.

“Hikaru-san. The meeting place is just ahead. Just to confirm, I need to leave the general communication frequency open, right?”

The vehicle was broadcasting a message. It was stating that it was containing a staff member of Kugayama city to everyone in the area. Of course, the other Hunters hunting for Akira would also receive it, which might lead them to Akira.

“Yes. Though, I’m still unsure… Elena-san, do you think it’s safer if we turn it off?”

“I’m sorry. Although I’m the one who threw that question, I’m also not sure.”

If they went to meet Akira without broadcasting that message, Hunters hunting for him might attack them in the middle of their negotiation. They could simply state that they did not know Hikaru was from Kugamayama City Management. The broadcast was to ward off such an excuse.

Should they ensure Akira’s safety by concealing themselves and do the negotiations or should they keep broadcasting and protect him by using the influence of the city even if his location was made known? After Hikaru considered her two options, from the point of view of a City Management staff member, she decided on the latter.

As the negotiator of the team, Elena also thought about it. However, she concluded that her experience would not be of any use in this situation.

“Sara, what do you think?”

“Me? Not sure. If possible, I would rather have Akira choose what to do.”

“I would prefer if you can just keep driving straight like this.”

“Is that so? Well, in that case… Hm?”

Elena and Sara frowned, Akira’s voice then continued.

“Elena-san, please just keep on driving like this. There’s no need to stop the vehicle. Just keep on driving as if we’re heading to our agreed upon meeting place.”

Elena smiled bitterly.

“…Sure. So, just when did you get on the vehicle?”

“Just a moment ago.”

Akira disengaged his camouflaging coat and showed himself. Hikaru, oblivious that he was sitting next to her, was thunderstruck that she could not hold back her voice.

“Eh? Whoah!? What!?”

“Hikaru, keep your voice down. I’m trying to meet with you in secret, so stop making a commotion.”

After Akira gave his warning, Hikaru quickly shut her mouth. However, her whole face still could not contain the surprise she felt.

Sara smiled wryly.

“Elena, you didn’t get him in the sensor?”

“Nope, I didn’t. Akira, how did you get in?”

Elena was also smiling wryly. But in contrast, Akira smiled amusedly and explained.

“I was waiting along the route to the meeting place with my camouflage coat on. Once you got close enough, I jumped in, while trying to make the least impact possible. After that, I sneaked into the back seat.”

“I’m pretty sure we have the forcefield armour up though.”

“If you sneak in slow enough, a weak forcefield armour meant for protection against the elements wouldn’t give any trouble. If they’re enhanced to detect trespassers, I would have been discovered though. But it doesn’t seem that this vehicle has that type equipped. I’m sorry for surprising you. I need to be extra careful as well, so I hope you can understand.”

Akira said so with nonchalance. Elena’s smile deepened, but it was a teasing one.

“I don’t mind at all, but I can’t say for my employer.”

Akira then turned to Hikaru. His casual attitude showed that he was reacting positively toward this meeting. It also indicated that he was not there to fight. Or at least, that was what Hikaru told herself to help her calm down. She then heaved a huge sigh, which was used to release all her pent-up complaints.

“I’m glad to see that you’re doing pretty well even with that 50 billion bounty Aurum on you.”

“Thanks for the compliment.”

Hikaru said sarcastically. However, Akira simply shrugged it off and replied with a nonchalant smile. When Elena and Sara saw their exchange, they found it to be amusing.

The mood inside the vehicle had quickly relaxed. However, they could not afford to enjoy such a mood forever, Akira pulled himself together and went straight to the main subject.

“So then, Hikaru, I heard that you want to solve this problem peacefully…”

Hikaru also turned serious. She reminded herself that failure was not an option. Thus, her serious attitude became severe.

“That’s right. First of all, can you tell me your side of the story? I want to understand what is going on, after all. In the end, we are a third party in this matter. So, it would be great if you can tell me from your point of view, what is going on. To be honest, it would be troublesome if you hide anything. So, please.”

“Sure.”

Akira then honestly told his point of view of the current incident just like he had said before. But the more he spoke, the paler Hikaru became. She had an awkward smile on her face as she cursed.

[Just… Just how in the world are we going to solve this matter peacefully!?]

Considering that Lion Steel was a huge company, even if Akira was innocent, she wished that they could find some way to compromise. Although Akira might not find it to be pleasant, she still planned on convincing him. That picking a fight with Lion Steel was simply too reckless. She would push him to negotiate for peace as the best choice.

But after listening to his story though, that thought was just an impossibility; a mere dream. Akira showed no desire to compromise. He was resolute about killing Chloe. The only reason why he did not do so right away and instead hid was simply because he was waiting for the front-line equipment from Kibayashi. There was no doubt he would do anything to eliminate her after he got those equipment. If she tried to stop him, he might see her as an enemy and there was a high chance Akira would eliminate her as well.

Elena and Sara, who were also listening in to his side of the story, smiled bitterly. However, at the same time, they thought that it was so like him to act in such a manner. They easily concluded that it was futile to try to convince him otherwise. After all, Akira once raided the headquarters of a large slum gang just to kill a single pickpocket. Although his opponent was on a different scale, his strength was already on a whole other level. He was basically doing the same thing as before. So, this came as no surprise to Elena and Sara.

Hikaru frowned, she was extremely perplexed. Even after wringing out everything she could from her brain, she could not think of any words to convince him.

In the first place, Akira was not someone who would simply withdraw because he was facing a large company. If he was someone who would do that, or if he was someone who understood the idea of self-preservation, back in the inter-city transport-escort mission when Hikaru was mistaken as an old-world connector, he would have abandoned her. As she recalled that incident, she smiled bitterly. She thought to herself.

[Well, I was saved only because he is like this.]

Akira silently waited for Hikaru's reply. However, after some time passed, with no reply, he started to think that it was as he had expected. There was no way they could solve this matter peacefully. Thus, he believed that it was about time he left.

But that was when Hikaru suddenly showed a reaction.

"Akira, wait for a bit."

Hikaru then pulled out her information terminal and called Inabe. After she gave a quick rundown of the situation, she then turned the information terminal toward Akira. Inabe's voice could be heard from the information terminal.

"Long time no see, Akira."

Hikaru's conclusion of what she had to do was to call her superior. She knew that trying to solve this situation herself was futile. She would be just wasting time. Therefore, she thought of consulting someone else that might find a way out of this predicament.

"Normally, I would go to meet you myself, but I'm a bit busy over here, you see. So, I sent Hikaru in my stead. I hope you can understand. Well, putting that aside, I've heard the gist of what is going on from Hikaru. I have a suggestion on how to solve this incident peacefully."

"Oh, what is it?"

Inabe's words gave hope to Hikaru. But his next words completely caught her off guard.

"What are the chances of you accepting a job to kill Chloe?"

"D-director Inabe?!"

It was an outrageous suggestion that completely left Hikaru at a loss for words. But since it was the second time for Akira, he was not that surprised.

"Why would you ask me to do something like that?"

“It’s simply because I think we can reach a more peaceful resolution by doing so. I will be honest here, this time, I can’t be your ally. In all honesty, you’ve really done something stupid.”

As Hikaru was still flusteredly reacting to what Inabe just said, he simply ignored her and continued.

“Being your ally means there will be a full-blown war between the Kugamayama City Management and the Lion Steel company. I’m not talking about an economic war, but a real war with ammunition. So, I’m sorry, but I can’t do that.”

“Well, I already expected as much.”

Akira lightly nodded. It was obvious that he did not find it to be surprising at all. However, Hikaru was flabbergasted for some reason.

“And so, we need to take the next best option. I can’t be your friend, but I won’t be your enemy. But if I just leave this situation alone, it’s only a matter of time before you go for Chloe’s throat with front-line weapons. So, we need to interfere.”

Elena, Sara and Hikaru were listening anxiously to their conversation. A high-ranking city officer was offering an assassination job. This was not a matter that could simply be brushed aside.

For Elena and Sara, although they were employed by the City Management through Hikaru, in the end, they were outsiders. They were uncertain if it was fine for them to listen to this conversation. However, it was way too late to back out now. So, they continued listening in.

But as the conversation continued, the weight of it only became heavier and heavier.

“That is exactly where the problem lies. As I thought about how to solve this peacefully, the answer is simple. It’s for either you to die, or for Chloe to die. Considering our relationship, I think having Chloe die is the better choice.”

“Well, thank you.”

“Nah, don’t mention it. But our next problem here is how to kill her. I can help you if it’s only for a tiny bit. Either you need to sneak inside the inner wall or bait her out of the city. Personally speaking, to suppress the damage, I would rather choose the latter. In the first place, it’s between you and Chloe. So, it would be great if you keep Kugamayama city out of this. I bet Kibayashi is encouraging you to make this problem as big as possible. But that only serves to amuse him, so don’t.”

“Well, I wouldn’t need to deal with the city defence squad outside the city and I don’t think I can sneak into the city anyway.”

“That’s great to hear.”

Akira and Inabe were talking casually. However, the contents were enough to send a shiver through Hikaru’s whole body. Her superior was asking Akira to assassinate someone from a large company. He was even offering to help as well. If this plan went through and this conversation got leaked to Lion Steel, a war would no doubt break out. A mere low-level city officer like her would be blown to bits if she got involved.

But she was no longer able to say that she was not involved in this. Hikaru was panicking, having to face a situation that was already more than what she could handle. However, that was not the end of it. Akira’s next words brought on even more surprise to her.

“Ahh, just to let you know though, I won’t accept that job.”

“Why?”

“Actually, someone offered me the same job before. But I will kill Chloe purely by my own will. Even if the job only acts as a cover, I don’t want anyone else’s will to taint it. And since I refused their offer, it would be stupid of me to accept this one. Ah, but it would be of great help if you can help me sneak into the inner wall or to lure Chloe out of the city. I just won’t accept the job. But I will still kill Chloe though.”

“I see. Although, offering it to you means that I’m willing to share the crime with you. Well, if you’re going to take full responsibility for killing her, it actually saves me a lot of trouble. So, I’m completely fine with that. But can you tell me the details of…”

The fact that Akira refused and openly stated that someone else already requested him to do the same exact job had Hikaru in utter shock. As if to hammer the nail into the coffin, there was a sudden change of event.

Akira suddenly received a telepathic message from Shirou.

“Akira!! Get away from there!! Right now! You’ll get surrounded!

Akira immediately scanned his surroundings. But he did not catch anything suspicious.

“Alpha?

“There’s nothing inside my detection range… So, it should be from outside my detection range! Be careful, Akira!”

The very next moment, warheads suddenly rained down a little bit further from where they were. More warheads followed afterwards, creating explosions around the moving vehicle. Smokes and dust spread through the area, accompanied by echoes of fiery explosions.

The accuracy of the barrage was low. It was as if they were shot randomly. However, the quality of explosives was by no means small. As if to compensate for their lack of accuracy. Furthermore, they came from all directions.

“Sara!”

“I know!”

Elena scanned the surroundings and accurately calculated the trajectories of the incoming warheads. Sara then shot them down one by one with terrifying accuracy based on the data from Elena.

In her right hand, Sara held a gun, which was fitted with a lens on its muzzle. The concentrated energy projected from that lens reacted with the colourless mist to draw a straight line. It pierced through the incoming warheads and made them explode. Meanwhile, the gun on her left hand spewed out bullets, destroying the rest of the warheads.

Akira also quickly started shooting as well. He worked flawlessly with Sara to make sure that the area around the vehicle was completely safe. As the warheads kept raining down, explosions echoed all around. Flames devoured the surrounding areas with a veil of dirt and smoke. This finally broke Hikaru.

“Geez! What is going on here!? Give me a break, already!!”

“Shirou? Where are they? Send me their positions!”

“There, done! Just get away from there for now! They’ll completely surround you if you stay there!”

Akira glanced at the image of the enemy locations that were sent by Shirou through telepathy and frowned. The enemies were forming an encirclement 3 kilometres in radius, with him in the middle.

[…Well, I’m a bounty target, after all, it’s no surprise they’d come at me in teams.]

Back when they were hunting the Tank Tarantula, Shikarabe did gather Hunters and formed a team before challenging it. Akira joined their team during that time. He smiled bitterly as he finally noticed the reason why no one came at him after some time. It was simply because they needed time to organize a hunting party.

During the hunt for the Tank Tarantula, they also did the same. For the sake of safety, they bombarded their target from afar. And this time, that target was him. They sacrificed accuracy for the sake of keeping their distance. They would not get too close nor too far. They would just keep bombarding him.

According to the image sent by Shirou, Akira could see the enemies were actively moving in order to keep him in the middle of the encirclement. However, because of the scale of the operation, it was difficult to keep the formation perfectly circular. Very quickly, some clumps started to form in the encirclement.

Alpha then pointed out that part of the encirclement was relatively thin and told him to go in that direction.

“Elena-san! Please go in that direction!”

Elena quickly turned the vehicle toward the direction Akira pointed to. The high-speed sharp turn caused Hikaru to yelp.

The sound of the explosions was of course transmitted to Inabe through the information terminal.

“An ambush, huh? Akira. Let’s continue this talk some other time. Hikaru-kun, head back to the city as soon as possible.”

“B-back to the city?! But Akira is also with us here…”

Hikaru inadvertently asked. After all, they could not afford to bring someone designated as a monster back to the city. However, Inabe quickly replied with no hesitation.

“Leave him behind.”

“What-!?”

That heartless suggestion shocked Hikaru. Elena and Sara were obviously unhappy with it as well.

However, Akira then nonchalantly said to them.

“Elena-san. Just keep driving like this and don’t stop.”

“Of course! Let’s get out of here together…!?”

Elena had no plans to leave Akira behind. She smiled confidently and looked back at him. However, she was shocked to find that he had already jumped off the vehicle.

“Akira!? What are you-!?”

If not for Akira telling her not to stop beforehand, Elena would have stomped on the brakes right there and then.

She could not decide whether to turn back and pick him up. After all, Akira jumped off the vehicle himself. It was doubtful that he would jump back in even if she turned back. Before she could make her decision, Akira’s voice could be heard through Hikaru’s information terminal.

“Elena-san. Once again, keep heading in that direction and don’t stop.”

Elena frowned and bitterly asked.

“…Akira, are you sure you’re fine with it?”

“Elena-san and Sara-san are here to make sure that Hikaru is safe, right? In that case, it’s only right for you to prioritise it. As Hunters, it’s important to do our job perfectly.”

Akira’s voice was calm and somehow sounded happy. Elena, who was always presented with difficult decisions as the team leader, smiled bitterly. A smile directed at herself. So, in her place, her best friend, Sara smiled confidently and gave a firm reply.

“Alright, Akira. Just leave Hikaru to us.”

“Sorry, and thank you. If Hikaru dies, I would lose one of my negotiation routes with City Management after all. That would be really troublesome. The encirclement should be weakest in that direction. But, considering I am a 50 billion Aurum bounty target, I bet it still won’t be easy, so, be careful.”

Hearing Akira’s apologetic tone of voice, Sara replied with an upbeat one.

“Don’t worry. We are really exceptionally well equipped for taking this job. So, we should be able to handle it just fine.”

In reaction to that attempt to cheer him up, Akira also replied with a more upbeat tone.

“Is that so? I’m actually scheduled to get new equipment too.”

“Really? Then we should show our equipment to one another soon. We can have a good, relaxed talk next time.”

“Yeah. Well then, until next time.”

After making a promise to meet up again, they closed the call. While at the same time, Elena trembled in sorrow and stepped on the gas.

“…Elena, we should do our job. If we don’t, I’m sure Akira would be disappointed in us.”

“…You’re right, Sara.”

Thanks to her best friend’s cheer, Elena somehow managed to regain her cool. She smiled confidently to convey that to Sara.

Sara smiled back softly.

“So yeah, Elena. Anyway, rather than hold back, how about we bring out our trump card?”

Without even waiting for a reply, Sara pulled out a seemingly ordinary gun from the back. When she activated it, it automatically unfolded and expanded itself. Its barrel got longer and thicker, and its overall shape changed. The total length of the gun was now even longer than that of the vehicle.

In its folded state, it was using the same technology for the extended magazine. Thus, it greatly expanded when it was undone. Although it had the shape of a gun, once it was fully unfolded, it was impossible to fold it

back to its original form. They would need to pay a specialist to do that for them. However, all the trouble was worth it for its firepower.

Elena expanded her scanning range to its maximum. Due to the distance, she was still unaware of the enemy's formation. Naturally, it was difficult to ascertain their position with such limited information. Nonetheless, she was able to infer their general position from the incoming barrage.

Although it was still far from accurate, after she did more calculations and narrowed down as much as she could, she smiled amusedly and ordered Sara.

"Fire away!"

The large-sized gun, suitable to be used by a powered suit instead of a human, immediately started spewing out bullets. It was only thanks to Sara's enhanced body and augmented suit that she was able to use such a weapon. It sucked the energy packs attached to it dry in an instant. All the energy was compressed into energy bullets and shot out of its muzzle.

The barrage of the energy bullets rampaged through like a storm, leaving trails of light while they headed to their targets. The gun spewed out bullets as if the expense was non-existent. The powerful bullet storm lashed out as if Elena and Sara were venting out their emotions. It completely devoured everything in its way, leaving destruction and annihilation in its wake.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 275, Tamed Monsters

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After Akira jumped off the vehicle, he immediately started running toward the direction where the encirclement was the thickest. As expected, the enemies were still far from his reach. Furthermore, with obstacles in between them, it was impossible for Akira to directly aim his shot. He kept running while calling for his bike.

Meanwhile, he shot down some of the incoming warheads. He even used the LEO multi-rifle on his right hand to shoot down some of the warheads that were not heading towards him. It created a furry of firework-like explosions up in the air. Those explosions alerted his attackers. Informing them that he was heading in a different direction, away from the vehicle. While he was doing all of this, he was about to end his call with Elena and Sara, which was hosted through Alpha.

“Of course, until next time then… Alpha! The bike is heading this way, right?”

“I’m driving it right now, so don’t worry. But before that, let’s clean those up first.”

Alpha then pointed at the signals that were heading toward him. With his vision augmented to see as far as it could, Akira could not help but frown.

“Monsters? What’s going on?”

These signals were coming from large-sized carnivorous monsters. Their bodies were half-mechanical, as if they got turned into cyborgs. They were covered in blueish armour plates as if they were born with metallic hard skin. In between their armour plates, four limbs were extending out. They were moving nimbly, as if their 6-meter long body did not impede them at all. The wreckage and the rubble were helplessly crushed under their large legs.

It was obvious that the monsters were not from around Kugamayama city. It would not be strange to find such monsters way out to the east, maybe around Zegelt city. That was the first thing that shocked Akira, the next thing was that they were heading toward him.

It could only be described as unfortunate for monsters if they were escaping from a hail of warheads. However, the current situation was far too strange. These monsters were running straight to where those warheads were landing. If they wanted to destroy the source of bombardment, they would head in the same direction Akira was heading, not towards him. As Akira was still uncertain as to what to do with those monsters, they suddenly stopped midway. It was as if they thought it was a bad idea to get too close to him and started to move around him.

Akira was even more confused. However, his confusion got completely annihilated as suddenly, the bombardment got even more intense.

“That was rather sudden.”

Up until this point, the bombardment was aimed at the general area around Akira. Therefore, some of the warheads landed a bit far away from him. However, suddenly, the target area narrowed down. The intense bombardment was not due to the increase in total number but because the targeting area got narrowed down. This showed that they got a better grasp of his location.

Monsters that were behaving strangely and the sudden increase in accuracy. Alpha immediately noticed their connection.

“Akira, those monsters are working as reconnaissance for the enemy. Shoot them down immediately.”

Akira raised his eyebrows. He did not expect that at all.

“Reconnaissance? But they are monsters, no? Why are monsters helping the Hunters who are after me?”

“I bet they captured and modified them. Modifying a mechanical monster is relatively easy after all.”

It was not rare to capture a powerful monster and tame it to help Hunters. Biological monsters had the embedded instinct to attack people so it was extremely difficult to tame a biological monster. However, for mechanical monsters, depending on its biological and mechanical structure, Hunters might be able to interfere with its programming. For example, rewriting the control device or even replacing it altogether.

Especially for mechanical monsters that imitate biological creatures. Sometimes, it was easier to manipulate their programmed instinct compared to complete drones. After all, most of the time, their brain was connected to a nervous system. Even if it was impossible to manipulate the control device, they could simply replace it with another control device. Most of the time, control devices for powered suits were used as the replacement. Afterwards, they could let it run some machine learning program to study how to control the monster’s body and over time, if lucky, take full control of it.

There were cases where the new control device caused the biological portion of the monster to go berserk. Naturally, this happened because the new control device was made with the current era’s technology. It was easier than having to analyze the monster’s control device, which was made of an unknown substance and unknown technology. Moreover, this process, using familiar technology, made it easier to analyse and control the captured monster.

If they were able to do well manipulating the captured monster, they might be able to use the old-world mechanical monster's parts. Although these parts were made of metallic materials, they were able to be repaired as if they were biological parts. Some even had the weird capability to fix themselves in an instant if induced with certain medicine. Some could work even without an energy pack or a generator. In order to study those parts, many mechanical monsters were captured.

The monsters that Akira was facing were called Blue Saber, the Hunters hunting him tamed them. The reason why the bombardment accuracy suddenly increased was because their blue monsters were conveying all kinds of information to them. Like the contours of the region and the general coordinate of where Akira was.

"Akira, you already did very well as a decoy, can we get serious now?"

"…Alright."

The reason why Akira was deliberately shooting down more warheads than needed, was simply to act as a decoy. This was so that they were more focused on him instead of Elena and Sara. Akira knew that shooting randomly upwards would expose his location, they just needed to retrace the bullets' trajectory, but he still did so.

However, now, he could stop. He quickly hid his presence using his camouflaging coat and stopped shooting down the warheads. He then quickly turned toward one of the blue monsters.

This blue monster was constantly keeping a distance. It was as far away as it could be, while keeping Akira barely within its sensor's range. However, once he activated his camouflaging coat, the monster was no longer able to detect where he was.

Because of that, the bombardment had lost its target. They started shooting randomly around the area, prioritizing coverage over accuracy. After all, they concluded that Akira should be around the area. Since Alpha could accurately predict the trajectories of the warheads, this random bombardment did not cause any trouble for Akira. Meanwhile, the boy was

calmly running toward that one blue monster, closing the distance between them.

The monster immediately went to the area where Akira suddenly vanished. It was trying to once again ascertain his location. However, with the constant explosions from the warheads, dust and smoke veiled the area. This caused it to be even more difficult to find Akira, who had his camouflaging coat on along with Alpha's support.

Even so, the blue monster increased its scanner power. Therefore, it eventually detected Akira's signal again. However, that was only after he had decided to move quickly. Although he knew that he was jeopardizing his position, it was worth the risk.

Akira knew that he did not have to get that close if he used his rifle. However, he still chose to use a blade. It was to avoid having the enemies locking down on his position from the sound of the gunshot. If he could take down this monster, it would greatly reduce the accuracy of the bombardment. He was prioritizing hiding his presence. At least, until his bike came so that he could quickly close the distance to those surrounding him.

The blade handle was connected to an energy tank on his back through a tube. That way, he could transfer energy to the blade. Increasing the sharpness of the blade through the strengthened forcefield armour, increased the risk of it crumbling to dust. It was thanks to Alpha keeping a very subtle balance that the blade's sharpness could be pushed to its limit without destroying the blade. She was even able to control the minute detail of the blade's output as it was swung toward the blue monster's head.

The time between the monster detecting Akira and the blade reaching its head was minuscule. If it was a biological monster, that opening was only barely enough to make a surprised expression.

However, a mechanical monster was not subjected to such pointless emotions. It did not even waste its time. It immediately obeyed its programming to attack Akira. It opened its jaw wide, which was filled with electric needles instead of teeth. The electric needles created a bluish flame

that gathered in the middle of its mouth. It was creating a ball of energy. It aimed that energy ball at Akira, which fired to transform into a burning blue ray of light.

At the next moment, Akira sliced through the beam and even past the blue beast.

He swung the blade from a low stance, releasing a sharp wave of light that split the blue beam into two. It scorched the terrain to his left and right, leaving two clear charred lines on the ground. Akira increased the speed of his body using his suit, which added to his initial inertia to quicken his swing. With masterful execution, the blade cut through the heavily armoured head and pierced through the torso of the monster.

As the blue light died out and the monster was split cleanly into two, Akira stood in the middle of its carcass. He then looked back at the scorch marks on the ground and frowned.

“Ah! That was dangerous! That is not something that I can just take on and walk off fine, right?”

“Yep. It would have killed you if you had taken it head-on.”

“They even have these kinds of monsters, huh? Just who the heck is hunting me right now?”

“Whoever they are, I bet their Hunter Rank is high enough to hunt a 50 billion Aurum bounty target.”

“I already know that, but still…”

Even in the eastern district, where guns reigned supreme, there were still those who forwent blades and fought with their fists. Those who had survived for so long, even after making such a foolish decision, were powerful Hunters.

It was the same for taming monsters. Doing such a thing with the goal to increase one’s fighting power was considered foolish. If it was only for the

sake of increasing firepower, it was safer and cheaper to get a tank or better equipment. Therefore, those who tamed monsters not for the sake of research or business, mostly did so for the sake of their hobby.

This meant that those hunting him right now were the people with enough money or power to indulge in such an ineffective activity. It could even be both. With such people attacking him, it reaffirmed his identity as a 50 billion Aurum bounty target. Thus, Akira let out a sigh.

He then changed gear. He once again slipped into the noise created by the raging battle and moved away from this place. Since he had killed a recon unit, he believed it would be easier for him to hide his presence now. He jumped off the dead monster and continued heading forward.

However, the next surprise caused him to frown. There were two more Blue Sabers heading in his direction.

“There are still more this close, huh?”

“It seems like they’re heading here from another location. Since they approximately know where you are, they no longer have to search the other areas.”

From his last encounter, he knew that these monsters had the ability to shoot from afar. Therefore, this time, he chose to use his LEO multi-rifles and aimed each of them toward a different blue monster. The rifles released a barrage of C-bullets toward their targets with pinpoint accuracy.

But before they hit their targets, they suddenly got deflected. Instead, a bluish spark was left in their stead. Once the sparks cleared up, there was a translucent bluish-white glass-like layer, cracked and almost close to shattering. It was now clear that the monsters had used a forcefield shield to deflect his barrage.

Akira knitted his brows and then raised them the very next moment. From behind the forcefield shield, the monsters had already opened their jaws. They were about to release their laser attacks. Akira quickly jumped behind

the dead monster that he just killed. A few milliseconds later, the area was completely devoured by blue.

Since the ray attack was focused more on area coverage instead of firepower, it did not inflict that much damage on Akira. Even so, with two of them shooting at the same time, it had enough power to blast the carcass of their dead friend away, leaving Akira exposed. Although he was also blown away, since he had focused on his defence, he was able to avoid any injury.

Akira quickly reaffirmed his footing right away once he landed.

Now that he was once again exposed, he thought that he should at least shoot down one of them. Thus, he was aiming both of his rifles at one target.

“Alpha! Which one should I take out first?”

“We need to kill them both. Even if you manage to get one, the other one would still be able to relay your location.”

“You know that I can’t do it. That’s why I’m thinking of taking one of them out first. I’m asking which one I should take out first! If you’re not going to answer, I will decide on my own.”

“Don’t worry, it’ll be fine.”

“What do you mean?”

It was a telepathic conversation through his compressed time perception. Therefore, even a long conversation would only take a short time. Even so, Akira did not have the leeway to have a long conversation. Even in that situation, Alpha was smiling like usual. She was returning replies that did not mesh well with the situation, causing him to be even more bewildered.

Right at the next moment, the two monsters had their heads pierced through by a single laser each. The first monster had its control device on its head

accurately pierced by a concentrated beam, while the second monster had a hole drilled through its head.

Seeing that, Akira was completely flabbergasted and glanced at Alpha. Seeing that, Alpha just smiled back with her usual smile.

“See, it’s fine, isn’t it?”

“Y-yeah.”

Akira agreed and gave a nod. He then frowned and looked toward the source of the lasers. He could see a bike heading in his direction with an AF anti-material cannon perched on its back. He quickly realized that it was his bike and Alpha was controlling it. However, he did not know where the other laser came from.

As the bike came to view through the smoke, Akira finally realized where the other laser came from. At the same time, he was caught by surprise. Carol was on his bike with a large cannon in her hand. Even with that huge thing, the bike did not even seem to slow down as it approached him. As the bike passed him, Akira grabbed Carol’s hand and jumped on board.

As Akira took the back seat, Carol glanced and smiled at him.

“Sorry for the wait, was I late? Though, from my point of view, it seems like I just came right on time.”

“Yeah, thanks. But why are you here? Even without you on it, the bike should be able to get here just fine.”

“Oh my. I didn’t expect you to say that when I came all the way here to rescue you. Just like you saw earlier. I’m not going to slow you down, you know?”

Toward Carol, who was voicing her honest complaint, Akira frowned and replied.

“It’s safer for you to remain inside the camping vehicle. Just so you know, I’m still in the middle of my bodyguard job duty as well. As your

bodyguard, I wish to protect my target. I don’t want you endangering yourself just to help me out. Just like earlier, I do not have a lot of leeway to protect another person, you know?”

“Then, it was the right decision for me to come here. I will fight together with you and help you as much as I can. Isn’t that what we agreed on when you accepted my bodyguard request? If you’re that cornered right now, then let me help you. That was the deal and that is just how deals work, no?”

“You’re not wrong, but…”

Seeing Akira sheepishly try to deny her, Carol became a little obstinate as she firmly stated.

“Just so you know, even if you say you want to cancel your bodyguard job because of this, I will still come to help you, okay? This is also partly instruction from Shirou, after all. Since I’m also basically working for him, this is also part of my job, so I won’t back down. Alright?”

Although Carol made such a claim, they were actually not formally working under Shirou. As he had thought, Shirou intentionally manipulated Carol using her misunderstanding. He quickly connected to Shirou through telepathy and asked him.

“Shirou, what do you think you’re doing?”

“It would be bad for me if you die, you see. So, I asked Carol to rescue you. Although you’re not working for me at the moment, I can still employ Carol as an individual and separate her employment from you. So, I don’t see why I should be criticized by you for that.”

“Just so you know, I don’t owe you anything for this.”

“Sure. Your condition doesn’t really matter if you die, after all. But well, if this is enough to kill you, it’s meaningless to hire you in the first place. So, make sure to get back here alive.”

They then went silent, but behind that silence, their wills were clashing against each other. Thanks to telepathy, their emotions were being conveyed to one another even without any words spoken. After a short moment, Shirou was the first one to break the silence.

“But still, how did you manage to tame someone like her?”

“What are you trying to say?”

“Though it might be weird coming from me since I’m the one who sent her to help you. But, when I did so, she did not utter a single complaint and just went to you, you know? No matter how you look at it, between leaving the safety of the camping vehicle or going out straight to where it rained warheads and having to fight against Hunters who were strong enough to hunt a 50 billion bounty target, normally, I would expect her to say one or two complaints. I can understand it if she’s a veteran soldier, but that doesn’t seem to be the case. Are you guys dating or something?”

Shirou casually threw that question, believing if that was indeed the case, he might be able to use it for his goal. However, Akira did not answer except for a telepathic sigh.

“Shirou, make sure to protect the camping vehicle. All my reserve ammo is over there. If I lose it now, it would be really bad. So, make sure to protect it, I will owe you one if you do that.”

“Sure. Good luck out there.”

“Yeah.”

Akira then closed the telepathic connection, heaved a long sigh, and became solemn.

“Carol, like I said before, I can’t guarantee your safety in this situation. So, you might get killed if you stay with me. To be honest, I would prefer to have you head back to the camping vehicle. You know this already and still want to help me here, right?”

“Yep, isn’t that what I said back then?”

“Are you really sure? This is your last chance to withdraw.”

“Geez, you’re so stubborn, you know?”

Carol pouted. As expected, with Akira’s numerous warnings, she started to wonder if Akira saw her as nothing but a burden. Someone who would only serve to slow him down.

“… I see.”

But after hearing her confirmation once again, Akira lightly smiled which quickly escalated into laughter.

“Alright! Help me out then!”

Carol was taken aback by Akira’s sudden change in mood. However, he ignored how surprised she was and continued.

“First of all, we need to swap places, so get to the back seat.”

“W-wait!”

As the bike was moving haphazardly to avoid the pouring warheads, Akira forcefully swapped places with Carol. He did not hold back and grabbed her chest and legs as he casually took the front seat. Although it was slightly rough, Carol was frozen in disbelief since Akira never treated her like that before.

“Alright then. Let’s get serious. Carol. As I said, I don’t have the leeway to protect you. So, I will be making pretty extreme moves. Hold on tight and make sure not to get thrown overboard.”

“Okay.”

Carol coiled one of her arms around his chest, sticking close to his back.

“Compared to the first time we met, you’ve grown quite a lot. Wouldn’t it be fine to graduate from being a boy soon?”

“I’ll think about it. Now we are going!”

Although it was just for a split second, Akira responded back positively, which he had never done before. Even Carol did not expect that. However, the one surprise after another event was not over. The bike suddenly made a sharp turn. However, it was neither to the right nor to the left. The bike suddenly went up with the help of invisible platforms under its wheels.

“Whoa!? Wha-!? Akira!?”

Carol yelped. Akira heard her, but he simply smiled in amusement and ignored it.

After they got to about 300 metres above the ground, although they were still facing a storm of warheads, Akira saw it as positive. They no longer had to worry about the shock wave when the warheads hit the ground. Even the explosions could no longer reach them. Compared to the ground, the sky was a relatively calm place. Though, Carol looked a bit frightened, being at that height with no visible footing. She tried to calm herself down as she asked.

“Akira, I don’t think our situation changed that much though. So, what’s next?”

“Well, although they have a better view of us from down there, that is also true for us from up here. It would be difficult to shoot when on the ground with everything in our way. So, this is much better. Carol, I’ll send data of their location to you, feel free to shoot them the moment they get in your range.”

Carol added the information she received to her display. She could see several enemy signals coming from the front. Due to the contour of the terrain, it was impossible to snipe them from afar. However, from up here, it was no longer a problem. Moreover, Akira was moving toward them, thus closing the distance. Although the enemies were trying to move away and

keep their distance, thanks to the clear sky with no obstacles, Akira and Carol were moving much faster.

“Alright. Let’s get started. First one.”

Carol fixed her aim and Akira also did the same. Even the bike took aim as well.

Akira and Carol lightly smiled and zeroed in on their targets. Without even exchanging a signal, they pulled the trigger at the same time. Akira, Carol, and the weapons on the bike’s arm all shot at the same time.

The 3 LEO multi-rifles released a barrage of fully charged C bullets. Meanwhile, the AF anti-material cannon released a high-intensity laser beam. It was focused more on firepower than spread. Carol’s cannon released a stream of condensed energy in the direction it was aiming. All shots pierced through the air, drawing long lines in the sky. They headed straight toward their respective targets.

The nearest tank took the full brunt of that attack. Its forcefield armour was torn down from such an assault. There was no doubt that everyone inside the tank got either turned to ash or were full of holes.

Akira did not waste a single second as he quickly turned his bike toward the next target. It was a scene of him laying waste to everything in his wake. The cries and screams from the battlefield seem to say that 50 billion Aurum was far too low for someone like him.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 276, The Hunters' Motive

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The Hunters that gathered to hunt the 50 billion Aurum bounty target were centered around the team led by a Hunter by the name of Gelgus. They brought their own vehicles, tanks, and powered suits to form a powerful hunting party.

Among the vehicles, there was a single gigantic vehicle. It was as tall as a 2-storey building. It was large enough to house powered suit weaponry, serve as lodging and could easily be used as a mobile HQ. This vehicle had the Lion Steel's logo adorned on it.

A large meeting room inside it was used as a command centre. A table-type display was placed in the middle of that room. At the moment, it was mostly used to oversee the situation of the ongoing battle. All information sent by the information-gathering devices of the powered suits and vehicles on the battlefield were collated and displayed here.

Gelgus looked anxiously at the display as he saw friendly signals vanishing from the map one by one.

"Dammit! One more gone!"

Their original plan was to keep their distance from Akira. They were one-sidedly bombarding from a distance. However, Akira slipped through in-between the explosions and closed the distance. He even managed to break through the encirclement. At this point, the hunting team had already lost half of its firepower.

“Tell those on the opposite side to hurry up! Order them to open fire right away! He’s a bounty target. So why are they hesitating?”

As Gelgus was filled with frustration, Takt, who was a Hunter from the same team, frowned and explained.

“They said that they can’t allow any more friendly fire.”

“When that guy got close, the information accuracy for his position should have got better too; to think they would miss even with such accurate data. Are they stupid or something?”

“I bet the target is also moving to increase the chance of friendly fire. To top it off, the ones suffering friendly fire are not from the same team. If it only ends with broken equipment, they can solve it with money. But, that’s not the case if someone gets killed.”

Gelgus knitted his eyebrows and clicked his tongue. That argument was proof of his lack of skill.

The Hunters hunting for a 50 billion Aurum bounty target were all veterans. Their resolve when they decided to join the hunting party was not the same as those of common Hunters. To some extent, they were ready to lose lives during the operation. However, Gelgus’ team prowess was way above those Hunters. This allowed his team to completely suppress the infighting between the Hunters. Even when they formed the encirclement, they could release the bombardment without the worry of friendly fire. After all, they believe Gelgus’ team could remedy any infighting if they struck their ally.

The fact that one team refused to shoot because of the worry of friendly fire showed how uneasy they were. They now believed Gelgus’ team no longer

had the capability to suppress infighting. On top of that, stating it was a clear indication of their thoughts.

“Gelgus-san, what next? Should I take some of our men and surround the target?”

If Gelgus’ men went out to restrain Akira’s movement instead of shooting him down. They could then leave the bombardment to the other team. That should resolve the friendly fire problem. Even if there were sacrifices, the ones they would lose would be from their own team. Therefore, the responsibility could be directly handled by him, and there should no longer be any worry of friendly fire for the other teams.

Naturally, that in turn would increase the possibility of friendly fire for their own team. Takt already knew of the outcome when he offered to take the lead.

However, Gelgus could not send his team out for such a thing. He had a grim expression on his face as he shook his head and ordered.

“No. Order them to restart the bombardment.”

“…Alright, if you change your mind, tell me.”

“Yeah.”

Gelgus shifted his gaze once again to the display, and another blimp signal vanished. Another friendly unit was annihilated.

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Akira raced his bike through the wasteland with Carol in the back. He was moving at a disorientingly high speed, where up and down no longer had any meaning.

Under the wheels was a projected forcefield armour, which formed its platform. When accelerating, making sharp turns or braking, the translucent platform would create minute glows of light. It was energy conversion from the impact. Akira turned the bike following Alpha’s instruction, blocking

the enemy's line of fire using another enemy, causing stray bullets to be more likely to hit their own team. He actively evaded and slipped in between the storm of bullets as if playing with his enemies.

The enemy tanks were proactively aiming at him. Given that they were tanks used to hunt a 50 billion Hunter, they were powerful.

Their caterpillar tracks made easy work of the uneven terrain. They even had enough horsepower to overcome obstacles like rubble and wreckage in their way. Moreover, they had a similar function to Akira's bike. They could create a platform under their caterpillar tracks and elevate the whole tank. It could be used to angle the tanks up, to aim at the sky.

They had thick forcefield armour powered by a powerful generator installed inside their chassis, protected by armour tiles. Furthermore, they could use forcefield shields as well. Thus, protecting their weapons and ammunition like missile pods, which were prone to exploding.

The main cannon was supported by a powerful scanner, which was extremely accurate. They shared information among themselves to further increase their accuracy. The cannon itself had enough firepower to easily blow apart monsters found around Zegelt city.

Those tanks were working together to shoot Akira down. If Akira got too far, they would use their main cannons. However, if Akira got too close, he would have to face the countless mini-missiles.

Akira was fending off their assault, evading some that he could while shooting or cutting down those that he could not.

The warhead flew straight and went for his bike. It caused powerful turbulence in the air. The laser cannon released pillars of light that heated the sky. In the face of such an intense assault, Akira moved with precision, as if he could predict their trajectories while slowly closing in.

The bullets released from their machine guns spread out to create a wall of bullets instead of focusing on one point. Meanwhile, each mini-missiles

launched from their missile pods drew a long parabolic arc. Each angle was unique to each missile, as they went after Akira.

Akira shot some of them down to drill a way out from that assault. As bullets clashed with another from their barrage, due to how dense the bullet wall was, they ricocheted and triggered chain reactions. It threw them off-target. Missiles were shot and detonated before they made contact, creating clouds of dust and smoke. This reduced the accuracy of the information-gathering devices, which in turn caused the other missiles to veer off their original trajectories. Akira used these clouds to hide his presence as he further closed the distance.

That was when the main cannons once again shot at him. Warheads, shells, and lasers were released at a distance, making it impossible to evade.

Akira then used his silvery blade to cut open a way forward. Using the high-capacity energy tank of the bike, the liquid metal that formed the blade part was hardened and sharpened using forcefield armour, increasing its range, and cutting power temporarily as he swung it with all his might.

As the warhead hit the silvery blade, it was cut into two and veered off its original trajectory. At the same time, laser beams also got deflected, causing all of them to miss their target. Using that opening made from that slash, Akira charged forward, toward the enemy tanks.

He kept shooting at the enemy tanks while closing in. As he passed beside one tank, he swung his blade again. The blade, made of an extreme concentration of energy, slowly disintegrated as it glowed with anti-forcefield effect applied to it. The blade pierced into the tank’s forcefield armour and sliced its body cleanly into two. It was a powerful attack designed to be only used once.

Even so, normally, it did not have enough power to cleanly slice through the tank Akira was facing. After all, it was a tank that was normally used to hunt monsters further to the east. It was a given that it was abnormally robust. Its control device even automatically adjusted the energy distribution of its forcefield armour. It was able to reactively focus its

defensive forcefield to certain locations depending on the incoming attacks. This ability boosted the tank's overall defence even further.

However, Alpha utilized that function to execute that attack. Right before Akira swung his blade, he released a barrage of bullets to different locations. This caused the forcefield armour to focus on those locations. Akira then aimed his swing precisely at the locations where its forcefield armour was weakened.

The area of weakened forcefield armour was invisible to the naked eyes. Additionally, it was only there for a split second. Furthermore, there were armoured tiles underneath which also had their own layer of forcefield armour. Even so, with an opening as small as a bullet, Akira managed to jam in his blade and swing.

With that masterful slash, the tank was sliced cleanly into two. The energy conversion of the forcefield armour released a flash of light. Even the armour tiles were not spared. A moment later, the upper portion of the tank slid off and fell over. What was left from the lower half of the tank was the remains of its passengers, with their upper half missing.

Akira did not stop there. He quickly aimed his rifle at another tank together with Carol. Akira with his LEO multi-rifles while Carol, with her mobile laser cannon. Meanwhile, the bike's AF anti-material cannon released its shots at the same time as the other two.

To be more precise, Akira pulled the trigger a split second faster than the rest of the group. Akira's bullets reached its target first, causing the forcefield armour of the tank to once again focus on those impact locations. This caused another part of the tank to get weakened. With Alpha's help, the barrage was adjusted so that the weakened part was right where Carol was aiming at.

A moment later, Carol's laser and AF anti-material cannon's laser hit the tank. They pierced through the armour tile and forcefield armour, sending in a huge amount of raw energy into the tank, causing it to blow up.

Although they just shot down 2 tanks, they did not have the leeway to take a break. Akira immediately accelerated the bike toward their next target.

That was when Carol pushed her chest to Akira's back and placed her face close to his face.

"Akira, if it's only to escape the encirclement, shouldn't this be enough? Or are we going to continue?"

In the middle of battle, Akira did not have the leeway to be bothered either by the sensation on his back or by Carol's face. The only thing that was registered in his mind was that question.

Although they had already broken through one side of the encirclement, it still did not change the fact that they were highly outnumbered. It was not a bad decision to use this chance to escape while they still could. However, they were fighting pretty well. It could be said that they were on a roll. Thus, there was an option for them to continue this momentum and push to gain the upper hand.

As Akira was uncertain of which to choose, he then thought of something and asked Carol a question.

"Carol, do you want me to get away now while we still have the chance?"

Akira was the reason why Carol got involved in this battle. Therefore, if she wanted to escape, he was fine with it.

However, she replied with a bright smile and jovial tone.

"Hm? Nope. I was just suggesting. If you're forcing yourself to fight because you got a bit too emotional, it might be a good idea to withdraw. But if that is not the case and you decide to fight with a calm mind, then I don't mind continuing. I will help you go all the way until the end."

Akira's lips curved. He seemed happy at how Carol answered easily. Her answer implied that she did not mind staying on this deadly battlefield,

where she could be killed anytime, for him. Therefore, he cheerfully replied.

“I see. In that case, help me out a bit more. I have no plans to go as far as to kill everyone here. But at the very least, I want to force them to withdraw. I’m sure some of them would conclude that this isn’t worth the danger. If we run away now, they might get motivated instead.”

“Roger that. Let’s get them to regret ever choosing to go after you.”

As they were smiling confidently at each other, Alpha suddenly interjected.

“Akira, before we do that, let’s resupply first. Your ammo and energy reserve are running low.”

“Already? Ah, but I did use them quite aggressively back there. Alright then.”

Before they approached any tanks, they always released a barrage to weaken its forcefield armour as much as possible. At the same time, the bike was continuously consuming its energy to maintain its balance while it was racing at such a high speed. It was also constantly expanding its forcefield armour with maximum hardness. Furthermore, the energy that was used to sharpen the blade as well.

It was no surprise that he was quickly going through his extended magazines and energy reserve. However, that was also only because he could not afford to be frugal in front of the opponents he was facing. If he could not get a chance to resupply, it was only a matter of time before he lost the fight.

“Carol, we’ll head back to the camping vehicle to resupply. Hold on.”

“It’s not like you’re planning to leave me behind there, right?”

Carol pouted as she said so. In reaction to that, Akira lightly smiled and joked.

“Well, if you are scared, I’m okay if you want to stay behind, though.”

“That’s not even funny.”

Once he heard her reply, Akira smiled bitterly as he exasperatedly said.

“It might be weird to hear this from me, but you’re having it rough too, huh?”

“Well, it’s not easy on me too, you know?”

While in the middle of that deadly battlefield, Akira and Carol raced through the wasteland on his bike in a good mood.

Shirou, who was driving the camping vehicle, was already outside the encirclement. He managed to do so not only because Akira attracted all their attention. It was also due to his own skills.

Although he was already outside the encirclement, it was not like he could simply run away from the premise. However, if he got too close, he would only get involved in that battle. Therefore, he was only driving around while keeping his distance from the encirclement. That was when Akira suddenly contacted him through telepathy.

“Shirou, we’re heading there to resupply, can you meet up with us?”

“Sure, but make sure to be careful. I’m not good at fighting. Incapable even. Although this camping vehicle is designed to be used out in the wasteland, it’s not well equipped enough to fight those guys. I will send the route to get here. Make sure to follow it. Also, you’re only coming here to resupply right? We are not running away? Are you sure about that?”

Personally speaking, Shirou did not want Akira to get killed. However, if he was allowed to be greedy, he hoped Akira would repel the Hunters that came after him, a 50 billion bounty target. It would show Akira’s fighting capability, which would help to accomplish his goal. Though, as someone who wants to employ Akira, if he decides to withdraw, Shirou was completely fine with that decision.

Akira replied with a rather jovial tone.

“If we run away now, they will get too confident, which will only turn into more trouble later, you know?”

“I see. Well, good luck.”

Shirou then sent Akira the route through telepathy and lightly smiled.

“So, although he’s not that good of an agent from Tsukisada Construction, he’s exceptional at fighting, huh? I guess this means I can place my hopes on him later.”

Even in this situation, judging from Akira’s reaction, it sounded like he was still not that hard-pressed. As Shirou thought as much, it seems like he still had a bit of good luck left. He cracked up a soft smile from his expectation of Akira.

While Akira was heading to meet up with the camping vehicle, the bombardment intensified. Since he was now moving away from the group, there was no fear of friendly fire anymore. Therefore, they stopped holding back and the bombardment grew even more intense.

However, Akira found something weird.

The explosive warheads from the bombardment threw dust and rubbles up into the air. The lasers coming from behind him blew wreckage and rubble that were in their way high up into the sky. As they were thrown above Akira and Carol, they started to obey gravity and fell back down. It was intense. To the point that it would be impossible for him to force his way through if it was not for the bike’s forcefield armour, that could be projected outside. That was just how intense the bombardment had become.

But unlike before, Akira did not make zig-zag movements or bother to shoot or slash the warheads. He found this rather worrying.

“Alpha. We’re not even trying to evade now, right? Did you do something?”

“I’m not doing anything, it was Shirou who picked this route, so he might be doing something.”

Akira turned his telepathy back to Shirou.

“Shirou. Is there any reason why you picked this route?”

“Yep. It’s dangerous, so make sure to keep strictly on the route I specified. I’m doing my best adjusting it.”

Gelgus’ team was using information from the whole squad to adjust the aiming of their tanks and powered suits. However, Shirou managed to hack into their information stream to send in fake information. This caused the aiming devices to register Akira’s position a bit away from his real position. Thanks to that, even in the middle of that intense bombardment, Akira did not get hit. This allowed him to just keep driving forward without any issues.

Naturally, if Shirou shifted the location data a bit more, there was no need for Akira to slip in between the explosions. However, Gelgus’ team would definitely notice that they were being hacked. By keeping the fake information feed to a bare minimum, they would simply believe that Akira was exceptional at evading their shots.

“Other than that, I’m also sending data that might cause friendly fire as well. I’m working quite hard to support you from here, you know? You better be thankful for it, yeah?”

“Sure, I owe you one.”

Akira only said so and approached the camping vehicle before jumping into it from the back door. At the same time, he pushed his time perception compression to its maximum as he finished resupplying as fast as he could.

Akira stopped his bike and reloaded new magazines and energy packs into his LEO multi-rifles. He ejected the bike’s energy tank and loaded a new one. After that, he quickly reloaded a new magazine and energy pack for his AF anti-material cannon. He did all of this at high speed. It was to the point where Carol, who was also doing the same, felt slow.

Shirou, who came to check up on them, did say something. However, due to the huge difference in their time perception, even telepathy did not work. Akira only asked Shirou to save it for later as he exchanged the liquid metal tank for his blade.

Although they were only resupplying, they were moving so fast inside the camping vehicle that it caused gusts of wind. Once they were done, they quickly jumped back on the bike and went out to continue the fight. The bike's wheel moved in reverse as it jumped out of the back door. It made a 180-degree turn and shot into the sky. Akira then reached for his rifle and immediately started shooting at the closest enemy.

With the invigorated firepower fresh from their resupply, it was enough to blow another tank, which had been prepared to hunt a 50 billion Aurum bounty target.

That was when Shirou's telepathy message finally reached Akira.

"Is it okay now? I found something when I was hacking through their information network. It seems like amongst them, there's one vehicle owned by the Lion Steel company. If this hunting party is led by someone from Lion Steel, then the rest might just disband and run away if you destroy that one vehicle. I'll leave it to you on how you want to do that. Just in case you're interested, I'll send you the data."

"Okay, thanks."

"And also, just one more thing. Did you do something to annoy those Hunters?"

"Well, I've been killing their friends during battle. So, it's only to be expected that they hold a grudge against me, no?"

"So basically, you have no particular guess, huh?"

"Yes, but why are you asking me that?"

“If it’s really just to hunt a 50 billion bounty target, they should have already retreated after suffering this many losses. But since they haven’t, I simply thought that they must have some other reason other than money. If I were to guess, it should be some kind of personal grudge.”

Akira frowned after hearing that. It seems like they had another reason for gathering this many people to attack him. Although it was nothing but Shirou’s guess, Akira still could not help but find it pretty annoying.

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Gelgus was extremely frustrated by the situation, which was only getting worse with time.

If they were talking about the success or failure of the hunting party, even if they managed to take Akira down later, from their current losses, they had no choice but to recognize this hunting expedition as a failure. It was even doubtful whether the bounty prize was enough to recoup the loss of the destroyed tanks and power suits. The loss of men was already irreparable.

Normally, Gelgus had the choice of retreating before the situation got this bad. If his goal was purely the bounty, he would have ordered a retreat by now. After all, the ability to decide when to retreat in order to cut off losses was an important skill for Hunters, and Gelgus did not lack such a skill.

Even so, while he understood that he had gotten too obsessed with this operation. He turned to one of the reasons why he did not call for a retreat yet.

“Hey! Didn’t you say that his 50 billion Aurum bounty was only to make an example out of him!? Just what is this!?”

Those words were directed at Pamela and Latis, who were standing not too far from Gelgus. Even in the face of the pressure from an enraged high-ranking Hunter, they were still unfazed. Pamela calmly answered his question.

“It’s not only the 50 billion Aurum bounty. We also had him recognized as a monster. As we said before, it is enough to make a lesson out of him. Or am I mistaken?”

Gelgus annoyedly grunted and asked.

“Is Lion Steel in trouble with money? Or is it that your master only has that much for her allowance?”

This time, it was Latis who answered with the same calm demeanor as Pamela.

“If there’s anything else to add, it would be because Milady is rather obsessed in this conflict with that Hunter.”

“…Yeah yeah.”

Gelgus looked obviously irritated as he clicked his tongue.

The price and the strength of a bounty target did not always match up. If it was a bounty monster, there was still a level of correlation between the bounty reward and the strength of the bounty monster. After all, the size of the reward was proportional to how fast they wanted that monster to be taken down. It became a bounty monster since it was too powerful to be defeated through normal means.

However, that was not the same when the bounty target was a human. Things like grudge and intention caused the bounty prize to vary.

Because of that, Gelgus thought that Akira’s original bounty was about 30 billion Aurum. Or at most, 35 billion Aurum. He has estimated this difference because of those human factors. After all, Akira did try to kill someone from the founder family of the Lion Steel company. Therefore, it was to be given that a huge bounty was to be placed on his head.

However, Akira’s true strength was way above what Gelgus had expected. Though, that disparity was not bad enough to drive Gelgus into a corner. Thus, he still believed that Akira was fairly stronger than a simple 30

billion Aurum human bounty target. It was not impossible to kill him if Gelgus put in some more effort. That was the reason why he did not call for a retreat.

Thus, Gelgus decided to ask that question. To confirm if Akira actually had that much bounty on him because of his true strength. It was also his way of sarcastically asking if their master was not that important to the Lion Steel company. How come she did not increase the bounty prize for that Hunter. As a result, they did not fully deny that Akira had that price tag because of his skill.

Even so, Gelgus still decided not to withdraw. He estimated that even after all the losses. Even if he was risking more to lose by continuing, there was a good chance it would be worth the trouble.

Gelgus was not only offered the bounty prize. He was also offered a connection to the Lion Steel company. It was not a simple connection to a branch office. It was a connection to the main HQ. With Lion Steel representative, Alice, scheduled to come there soon, Gelgus hypothesized that this bounty hunt had something to do with it.

As a veteran Hunter, Gelgus had at least checked what was going on behind the scenes. Since information about Alice coming to Kugamayama city was kept a secret, only known to the inner circle of Lion Steel. Gelgus managed to at least find out that someone important from Lion Steel was scheduled to visit the area. Though, he did not know who it was.

A connection to someone important to a company slightly beneath the 5 biggest companies. There was no question that it was a priceless opportunity. Therefore, Gelgus could not afford to let this opportunity slip past him.

“…Hey. Let me ask you again. Your master, Chloe, was it again? She’ll really provide me with a connection to Lion Steel HQ if this operation goes well, right?”

Pamela smiled confidently and replied.

“There’s a good chance that is indeed the case. Or at least, that’s all I can tell you. Milady has the third ward branch under her. Even this vehicle is originally from the Lion Steel Third Ward Branch. So, you at least know how much we’re invested in this.”

“…I see, alright then.”

For Gelgus’ party, it was essential to form a connection with Alice even if they had to sacrifice something. It would definitely profit the team as a whole. However, only Gelgus’ team knew about it. Which meant, that the other teams might decide to retreat from battle if the situation got worse.

With that in mind, Gelgus made his decision.

“Takt, let’s change our approach. We’ll try to stop him even if we get some of our men under friendly fire. And then, we’ll kill him with long-range bombardment. Tell the other teams to keep firing and don’t worry about hitting allies.”

“Of course. Right away.”

“No, you take your men with the bombardment team.”

Takt frowned. He thought that his team would be responsible for stopping Akira’s movement.

“Gelgus-san, then who will try to stop him? The other team would not do that fearing they’d get shot by their own allies, you know?”

“I’ll do that alone.”

Takt could not hide his surprise. After all, Gelgus was saying that he would stop them alone. The two have been doing exceptionally well fighting against their whole team.

Near the large-sized wasteland vehicle, a large red powered suit with its equally large cannon was running on autopilot. It was continuously shooting at Akira.

That powered suit then stopped shooting and approached the vehicle. It was sprinting towards the back door. Just as it was running, Gelgus exited from the top of the vehicle and jumped down without any hesitation. Without any devices to aid him, Gelgus managed to land on the powered suit and got inside. This showed just how skilled he was as a veteran Hunter.

The power suit entered the vehicle. There, Gelgus placed its large cannon back inside the vehicle and picked up a blade as its replacement. He then finished charging its energy before jumping out of the vehicle.

Inside that powered suit, Gelgus had a rather solemn expression as he spoke to himself.

“I made the decision. If we can win this, then the decision is a correct one. Zelos, just you watch.”

Zelos was the captain of Gelgus’ team. Meanwhile, Gelgus was actually the vice-captain. The current leader was still Zelos, but due to the information leak by Babalod, he had temporarily lost his influence inside the team. Therefore, if Gelgus could show worthwhile achievement, he might be able to take over Zelos’ leadership position.

Of course, at first, Gelgus had no plan to take over the leader position. However, for some reason, they ended up having opposite opinions regarding the operation to hunt Akira. It was so serious that the team was split into two – the Gelgus faction and the Zelos faction.

The 50 billion Aurum bounty prize and a connection to Lion Steel HQ were definitely extremely beneficial for the team. It was the perfect opportunity to get both money and connection. Although they both agreed on the benefits, their conversation always broke down to the risks. No matter how hard Gelgus tried to convince Zelos, the latter always shook his head. Zelos gave his evaluation of Akira when he met him as his counterargument. This caused the team to completely break into two factions.

“Zelos, we are Hunters, you know? If we don’t have the guts to bet on this, then what’s left for us is to just rot and die. It’s stupid to get scared at this point.”

He locked on Akira’s position from his radar.

“I’ll kill you and prove to Zelos that I’m right!!”

The red powered suit flew. It had a gun that could decimate monsters near Kugamayama city in just one shot. Its muzzle spewed out a huge shell that tore through the air and straight toward its target.

“Die!”

In order not to let him or his friends fall out of grace as Hunters, Gelgus decided to take a step forward. A step toward death.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 277, Danger

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During the battle, Akira noticed the sudden change in the enemy movement. He was a bit bewildered by it. The bombardment momentarily stopped and the enemies around him rapidly retreated.

After he broke through their encirclement, they now shifted to a fan formation, which was actively adapting to his moves. This also increased the effectiveness of their long-range bombardment.

Therefore, Akira was confused as to why they suddenly stopped their bombardment.

“Alpha. It’s not like they’re retreating, right?”

“Probably not. But if they’re changing to form a defensive formation, it might be a good idea for us to leave. There’s no need to continue fighting them when they have the advantages.”

“Hmmm, well, I think we’ve already done some damage to them anyway. Huh?”

In the first place, Akira was not planning to fight them until the last man. Even if the survivors regrouped and once again went after him, they would need some time before they could do so. If Akira could get his new equipment from Sakashita during that time, he could fight the next battle in a much better state. Therefore, he thought that it was a good idea to call it a day.

However, someone prevented Akira from doing so. A red powered suit suddenly came chasing after him.

“Unfortunately, it doesn’t seem like they’re planning to let you get away just yet.”

“Yeah. That does seem to be the case. Though, it seems like it’s coming alone.”

Akira found that to be strange. However, it did not stop him from shooting at the powered suit. Carol and Akira were both shooting back at it while evading its shots. Even with most of their shots hitting their marks, the powered suit did not seem to slow down at all. It kept closing in on them.

“…This guy is just too tough! Well, since it’s charging at me, alone, I guess that’s just how much faith it has in its defences, huh?”

“Akira, it seems like the others are going to resume the bombardment. So, be careful.”

“Sure… Wait… If they do that, won’t they hit that unit too…?”

From Akira’s position, the red powered suit’s position, and the shooting angle of the fan-shaped formation. It was impossible to hit him without hitting the red powered suit. That was why Akira did not expect them to continue their bombardment. He could not help but frown

Even after receiving Alpha’s warning, he still showed surprise once the bombardment did resume.

The warheads were shot in parabolic trajectories; travelling high up before falling down. Meanwhile, laser beams that could only go in a straight line were shot from the sides. Instead of aiming properly at him, they were targeting the general area around him.

Akira shot, evaded, and sliced at them to defend himself.

“They really opened fire! Alpha! What about that red powered suit?”

The red powered suit was covered in smoke. However, the smoke was not produced by it. They came from the shells and warheads that hit it. The powered suit was unscathed as it still charged toward Akira. It was as if it wanted to show how the bombardment had no effect on it.

“It did get hit but it is still up and running. It seems like it temporarily raised its forcefield armour to the limit before the bombardment hit it.”

“I see. So, it’s exchanging information with the rest of the group, huh!?”

“Yup. So, be careful. This means that the powered suit has resolved itself to take some shots if it is to kill you. Judging from how it is moving, I bet it’s trying to keep you in place. Pin you down with a close-range fight and then take you down using the bombardment from the rest of the team.”

The red powered suit that kept Akira inside its effective shooting range started shooting more accurately at him. As if to confirm Alpha’s guess, those shots were obviously meant to stop him from maneuvering around instead of killing him.

“I see! So, he’s prepared to take some damage himself, huh!? Alpha! Give me your full support!”

“Leave it to me! But, this will place your body under immense stress. So, make sure that you’re ready.”

Against Alpha’s smile of challenge, Akira smiled in excitement, firing up his spirit.

“But of course! That part is my responsibility, after all!”

At the same time he gave his reply, the bikes suddenly made a sharp turn. It charged right toward the red powered suit. The closer they got, the more hits the red powered suit would have to take. It was between Akira and Carol evading the bombardment and the red powered suit taking it with its superb defence. It was a battle of attrition between them. Just which one of them would be crushed under the storm of warhead first?

Carol was watching closely from his back. It was an abnormal scene where a full-sized powered suit was duking out intensely with someone on a bike. They were exchanging bullets and slashes, pushing and pulling. But instead of feeling fear, all she felt was exhilaration.

[I always thought that he was extremely strong… But I never thought he was this strong…!!]

The area that was enveloped in smoke was muddled further with the dust particles that were thrown around during their intense exchange. The red powered suit kept shooting as the continuous explosions that enveloped the area kept even the rocks and rubbles from reaching the ground. The powered suit's gun was spewing out large bullets that tore the air as they sought after their target.

Akira dexterously controlled his bike to evade the bullets. With its ability to ride freely in the air, he made erratic moves. Sharp turns, sudden stops, quick acceleration, and vertical climb. All these to prevent the red powered suit from getting a good hit. On top of that, Akira also kept its rifle in check by shooting at it from time to time to throw off its aim. He would also shoot at the unavoidable bullets and redirect them away from him.

To nullify Akira's technique, the red powered suit used its blade to attack. Its powerful generator fed the blade, encasing it in a layer of energy that could release sharp energy waves. Once swung, the blade released a wave of energy that dissipated in all directions. It seemed able to cut everything in its way. Even smoke and dust from their surroundings got separated into two from its slash.

In the face of this strike, Akira extended out his liquid metal blade. He then swung at the energy wave. It was impossible to slice nor redirect the energy

wave as it did not have substance. However, by pumping a huge amount of energy into his blade and increasing the might of its forcefield armour to its limit, it could make contact with the energy wave. Dampening it, causing it to break down and safely disperse into the air.

Moreover, with Alpha's help, the liquid metal was adjusted to turn into the most effective shape. They managed to almost completely neutralize the energy wave, which could have sliced Akira and his bike cleanly into two. The remaining energy that did not get dispersed, hit a few of the bike's armour tiles and sliced them into two.

While Akira was busy defending from the attacks, Carol was focused on the offensive. She kept using her laser cannon. While trying to not get thrown off by the erratic moves of the bike, she somehow found an opening. The moment she fired; the AF anti-material rifle also released a shot aimed at the exact same place. The anti-material bullet was siphoning energy from its surroundings, increasing its firepower. When it found itself surrounded by high-energy laser beams, it increased the bullet's firepower manyfold.

The shots travelled towards the powered suit, which was also moving around as fast as the bike. However, before they struck the red powered suit, they got blocked by its forcefield armour. The red powered suit had temporarily hardened its forcefield armour to its utmost limit. It spared no expense, using the energy that it had charged up from the mobile HQ. Moreover, it had used information from its scanner to predict the trajectory of the attacks and only focused its defence on the impact areas.

As the battle continued, locked in an impasse, they still managed to throw attacks at one another even when under the intense bombardment. This demonstrated their skill as a 50 billion bounty Hunter and a Hunter who was after him.

Gelgus once again found himself surprised by how powerful Akira was. He quickly felt that something was not right.

[To think that he's this powerful! That 50 billion Aurum bounty from Lion Steel is really based on his real strength, huh!? No, this is already way past the 50 billion bounty mark. What the heck is with those moves? I'm

fighting this guy with information support sent from the other units around here, you know? I should be able to hit him with my weapons easily. How the heck is he managing to avoid everything I throw at him?]

Having been locked in a melee fight with him while avoiding the non-ceasing bombardment. It seemed impossible to survive no matter how much Gelgus thought about it. He could not help but get suspicious that there was something more going on behind the scene.

“Wait… don’t tell me…”

As he was thinking of the impossible, he tried to clear his doubt. He compared the data that his information-gathering device acquired with the information that he was receiving from the other units. His fear was proven to be true, there was a small difference in the data used to refine his aim.

Gelgus was frozen for a split second. However, he quickly returned to himself and opened a line toward the whole hunting party.

“Everyone! Cut off the information sharing system! We’re being hacked! The data has been tampered!”

The information that Babalod leaked, also included the security code to connect to the information-sharing system. Naturally, once they knew of the leak, they had changed the access code to a new one. However, the fact that it had leaked once, meant that other things might have been leaked too. Gelgus was shocked that his suspicion was right.

He did not want to think further. There might be someone who was betraying the group from the inside. Otherwise, it might have leaked from another route. Nonetheless, they could not afford to do a witch hunt right now. With his mind muddled with many thoughts, Gelgus decided to cleanse everything up and focus on one thing for now.

With the information-sharing system hacked, he could no longer use the data from the sharing system. Without it, his accuracy would greatly fall. It was not like the data got completely forged. It was only slightly changed to

throw off his aim. Enough not to hit Akira. Gelgus then placed another assumption on top of his train of thought.

[It is not like the information-sharing system has been fully rewritten. There was only a slight information tampering. There's a good chance that it's being done in real-time. Although the tampered information is in regards to our target, it cannot be done by him. After all, the target shouldn't be able to do that while fighting me. If it is being sent from a far-off location, it should not be fast enough to throw off my aim. So, whoever is helping him should be somewhere nearby…]

Gelgus kept his optimistic guesses and assumptions. That no one leaked the access code from the inside. As he kept searching the area, he eventually found one place. There was a nearby camping vehicle where Shirou was. Considering the amount of information being tampered, it should have required a large computing device. It would make sense if such a machine was housed inside that camping vehicle.

Gelgus immediately moved away from Akira and raced toward the camping vehicle at full speed.

Shirou, who was tapping into Gelgus information sharing system, panicked.

"Yikes! They noticed me!"

The red powered suit and the team now had their sights on a new target. Cannons were now pointed towards the camping vehicle. Meanwhile, the red powered suit was racing towards it. Shirou's panic increased twofold. The bombardment now continued towards him but was no longer using the information-sharing system. Therefore, it was not that accurate. However, if he could feed them false information to throw off their aim, he could guarantee none would hit him. Now, even if the chance was small due to their low accuracy, some of their warheads could hit him.

To prepare in case Akira needed to return back again to resupply, Shirou kept rather close. But, now that he got discovered, he quickly turned the camping vehicle the other way and raced away from this place as fast as he could.

“Akira! They noticed the hacking and they’re aiming for me right now! Do something!”

“Just try to get away! I will take care of the red powered suit!”

“How about the bombardment?!”

“Run like your life depends on it.”

“Dammit! Alright!”

Shirou spat out and put his full weight on the gas pedal. He had a grave expression as explosives and warheads rained down around him.

With Gelgus prioritizing the destruction of the camping vehicle, his situation with Akira had been reversed.

The red powered suit was trying to get to the camping vehicle while Akira and Carol were trying to stop him. Although they were now on the offensive, they were also the ones pushed into a corner. This time, they had to destroy the red powered suit before it could destroy the camping vehicle.

“Dammit! Alpha! This is bad! That powered suit just won’t go down!”

“Stop complaining and keep shooting. It must strain its forcefield armour to withstand our assault, which is quickly depleting its energy reserve. For now, we can only pin our hopes on exhausting its energy.”

“I know!”

While escaping, Shirou was also firing at the red powered suit using the camping vehicle’s machine gun. Unfortunately, it barely had any effect. Or at least, it was not able to push the red powered suit back. The red powered suit kept charging forward, taking all the incoming bullets. It did not even make an effort to evade. It was closing its distance to the camping vehicle with the shortest route possible.

Eventually, the camping vehicle entered the red powered suit shooting range. The red powered suit started spewing out bullets, which were

abnormally large when compared to normal bullets. Some managed to hit the camping vehicle, peeling off some of its armour tiles and shaking it violently. Shirou's desperate voice reached Akria through telepathy.

"Akira! It's coming closer! Closer! It has even started shooting at me! I'm also being bombarded! Weren't you going to take care of that!? If they manage to get the camping vehicle, you'll have no place to sleep in the middle of the wasteland, you know!? Are you sure you're fine with that?!"

"I'm working on it right now! Just wait for a bit!"

In reality, Akira was indeed working on it. However, if he focused too much on trying to shoot the red powered suit down, it would create an opening where he might get killed instead. Compared to the red powered suit, Akira's bike defences were negligible. A single clean hit at the bike would immediately spell his death. Meanwhile, even if he used his most potent shot, it would not be able to immediately take down the red powered suit.

Fortunately, the camping vehicle was prepared by Carol. It was fitted to be proficient at escaping. It was protected by resilient armour tiles. Thus, was still able to withstand the assault. It was still fine even after getting hit by the bombardment and a few of the red powered suit's shots. Basically, it could maintain this situation for some time. However, the closer the red powered suit was, the more damaging its hit would be. The melee weapon that it had was way stronger than its gun. One hit was enough to destroy the camping vehicle.

As the pursuing red powered suit got close enough to the camping vehicle. It also started taking hits from the bombardment. It reached for its blade instead of its gun and attacked the camping vehicle. It was a clear indication that Akira was running out of time. It swung and the released energy wave sliced the ground apart, all the way past the camping vehicle. However, it did not manage to hit its target.

That miss was not intentional. The moment the red powered suit swung its blade, Akira and Carol shot its arm. This slightly shifted the direction of its swing.

Nonetheless, even after being spared, Akira was still getting more anxious. The powered suit was already close enough to release such a powerful attack at the camping vehicle.

“Alpha! This is getting really bad! Can you do something about it?”

Alpha frowned.

“It can’t be helped then. This will get a bit dangerous but let’s take that powered suit down right away.”

Akira was surprised by her reply, he then pouted and asked.

“If you knew of a way to take it down, couldn’t we have done it sooner?”

However, Alpha replied with a grave expression.

“That’s just how dangerous it is, are you sure you want to do this?”

All the intense exchange of close-range blows under continuous bombardment up until now was still on the safe side according to Alpha. By that standard, the next move would certainly be extremely dangerous. Akira understood this. Thus, he pulled himself together and firmly replied.

“Let’s do this.”

Now that he had decided on it, Alpha had no reason to refuse. She smugly smiled and said.

“I see. In that case, let’s get this over with.”

Alpha then shared her plan with Akira, who then informed Shirou through telepathy about what he needed to do. However, Shirou could not begin to comprehend what Akira was trying to do.

“Is there any reason why I should do something like that?”

“Just do it. If you don’t, that camping vehicle will be sliced into two by the next attack. I somehow managed to make it miss the last time. But, I have

no guarantee I can do it again for the next one.”

As Shirou glanced at the energy blade through the camera, he decided to shut up and do as he was told to.

“Alright, when should I do it?”

“I can go anytime, just hurry up.”

“You owe me one for this, you hear me?”

“Just do it already.”

Akira shut off the telepathic connection and was honestly impressed by how Shirou still had the guts to bring that up in his current situation. Though, that thought deviated from the main task at hand so Akira quickly shook it off his mind. He informed Carol of what she should do next. In contrast to Shirou, Carol lightly smiled and asked.

“Are you sure you want to do that? Well, I guess it’s pointless to ask you that question, huh? But do we really have no other choice? If you’re worried about destroying the camping vehicle, I can buy a new one later. So, you don’t have to worry about that, you know?”

“No. I’m worried about it, I don’t want to sleep out in the open wasteland.”

Carol lightly giggled. It seemed that for Akira, that was what most mattered to him. For the sake of it, he was willing to do something extremely dangerous.

“Okay. Good luck then.”

“You too.”

Akira made his resolve and readied himself.

While chasing the camping vehicle, Gelgus noticed a change in Akria’s movement. He was certain that his guess was correct. Although some parts of his guess were not wrong, it did not change the fact that the hacking

would stop if he killed Shirou, who was inside that camping vehicle. In other words, Akira was in a hard-pressed situation.

Although the bombardment continued to hit the red powered suit, he continued to solely focus on catching up to the camping vehicle. He could opt for his rifle. However, the camping vehicle was well armoured, and his rifle would not be enough to destroy it. Thus, his choice was to come close. Enough to use his blade to cut it apart. Since his first swing got interrupted and was made to miss, he swore that the next one would land. He quickly gathered energy into his blade to prepare for the next strike.

Suddenly, the back door of the camping vehicle opened up and an enormous amount of explosives rolled out from it. Each one of them blew up, making a trail of black smog.

Gelgus quickly realized that it was jamming smoke. However, what bothered him the most was why his opponent did that.

[Raising that much smoke out in the open like this is pointless. It will get dispersed in no time. In this high-speed pursuit, we will pass through the jamming area in no time. What exactly are they planning?]

It puzzled him, this was something that someone helping a 50 billion bounty target did. Therefore, there must be some kind of meaning behind it. He judged Shirou's action as something planned; not an action taken out of desperation. Naturally, his thoughts led him to suspect they were staging an attack. [It must be the moment I enter the jamming smoke.]

The powered suit's forcefield armour was an adaptive type, which adjusted its strength automatically depending on the incoming attack. Naturally, it would be meaningless if the adjustment came late and only activated once the attack had already hit it. Thus, it was essential for its information-gathering device to predict where the incoming attack would land, to adjust in time.

Gelgus was certain that they were planning to nullify his adaptive forcefield armour. They were trying to weaken his information-gathering device using the jamming smoke and break through the powered suit's defences.

Therefore, he prepared the powered suit. Before entering the jamming smoke, he manually set the forcefield armour to output its maximum.

By doing so, it would consume a huge amount of energy. However, it would also strengthen the forcefield armour to the point where it would prevent its information-gathering device from scanning its surroundings. This further worsened his accuracy. Gelgus understood the risks but still decided on doing so. After all, he believed it to only be temporary and could set it back once he got out of the jamming smoke.

Right before the powered suit entered the jamming smoke, Akira swung his blade with one hand. He did so while still on top of his flying bike. Gelgus had already anticipated this attack. Though, he was slightly surprised by the fact that Akira did not use his rifle. Nonetheless, it was still a reasonable move and was still within his expectations. After all, there was an anti-forcefield armour function on the blade. Therefore, Gelgus was still able to react calmly to Akira's attack.

Both Akira's bike and the red powered suit plunged into the jamming smoke. The powered suit reacted against Akira's slash with a slash of its own. Two blades, extremely different in size, passed each other.

The large blade just went and sliced through the air. While on the other hand, the small blade got deflected by a powerful forcefield armour. The bike was the first one to get out of the jamming smoke, while the red powered suit followed behind it a moment later.

With the effect of the jamming smoke gone, the information-gathering devices were back in action. This allowed the powered suit's adaptive forcefield armour to once again be able to function.

Believing that his powered suit was able to withstand Akira's attack, Gelgus aimed his rifle at the bike. But for some reason, there was only Carol on top of it, aiming back at the powered suit.

Gelgus raised his eyebrows. Akira was nowhere to be found.

[He's gone! Where is he!? Did he fall off?! The sensor!]

Gelgus quickly used his information-gathering device to scan the surrounding area. However, he could not find Akira. The unexpected turn of events shocked and greatly confused him.

Right at the next moment, a barrage struck the powered suit. The forcefield armour automatically adjusted its power to the area where the barrage landed. This caused the power output towards the remaining locations to wane. It created a weak spot in the forcefield armour right opposite of where the barrage hit. Unfortunately, that was the exact position where Carol was aiming her energy cannon.

[Dammit!]

Gelgus quickly tried to reroute the energy to the weakened side of the forcefield armour. Unfortunately, it was already too late. Carol's laser combined with AF anti-material cannon pierced the weakened forcefield armour. It went past and obliterated the front portion of the powered suit.

When Akira and the red powered suit exchanged slashes, Akira jumped off the bike and activated his camouflaging defensive coat. The main goal of the jamming smoke was to hide him when he did that. Even with Alpha's help, there was a high chance the red powered suit would still be able to notice him when he got that close. Thus, Akira only dared to do this under the veil of the jamming smoke.

After Akira jumped off, he used the soles of his augmented suit to stick onto the red powered suit. Alpha then adjusted the output and control of the camouflaging coat masking it to the powered suit's forcefield amour. This completely erased his presence.

Akira then crawled to the back of the powered suit and emptied the magazine in his rifle. It was to reduce the defence on the front as much as possible. Even with a barrage of fully charged C bullets, released point-blank, it was not enough to leave a scratch on its armour tiles. Rather, it did not even manage to break through its forcefield armour. Though, Akira's barrage at least managed to force all its energy to focus on its back.

That was exactly when Carol made the best use of that opening.

“Akira! Hurry up!”

“I know!”

If Akira missed this opportunity, he would have to pay it with his life. Therefore, in order to take full advantage of this small opening, he compressed his time perception to the limit.

The powered suit was actively moving at a high speed. Therefore, clinging on to it was like bracing against a storm. Running across its surface was equivalent to trying to run up a mountain while enduring a natural disaster.

That was why Akira relied heavily on the might of his augmented suit. Although he felt like he was walking slowly, in reality, he was running extremely quickly. Every single move was impeded by the wind, preventing him from moving forward. But even so, he still forced his way through.

Thanks to that, he was able to get to the opposite side of the powered suit in less than a second. He then shoved his LEO multi-rifle into the opening that was created from Carol’s attack and held down the trigger.

The number of bullets that he released was enough to create a wall of them. Although there was a bit of space between the muzzle and the powered suit, he had basically shoved everything that was left in his gun inside the powered suit.

In the midst of his attack, the forcefield armour had returned back. However, due to the damage to the forcefield device, the power output got greatly reduced. Furthermore, Akira’s point-blank barrage damaged the forcefield device even more. The randomly flashing light from the barrage showed just how badly damaged it was.

The bullets drilled through the inner part of the powered suit. But even so, it was still not enough to kill Gelgus. The red powered suit swung its hand, trying to get Akira off of it.

Akira dexterously evaded its hand and the only way to do that was to get away from the powered suit. Thus, he leapt into the air. This meant that he

would not be able to evade its next attack. Although he could create a forcefield platform under his sole to do another jump, it would not be fast enough to get away if the powered suit tried to attack him again.

But the next attack did not come. Carol, with the help of the AF anti-material cannon, shot again. It was at the same spot as before. After Akira's point-blank barrage, that location was no longer protected by forcefield armour. With that much energy focused at that one point, it pierced, fried, melted, and wrecked the red powered suit.

Before the unit broke down, Gelgus smiled wryly, accepting his defeat. As a high-ranking Hunter, he was able to keep up with everything that just happened. He knew well what Akira did that led to this conclusion.

[So… he was sticking on me when we were in the jamming smoke, huh!? What a crazy bastard…!]

With the generator completely destroyed, Gelgus was no longer able to control the powered suit. He was at the mercy of inertia as he flew straight and crashed. Without the forcefield armour to protect the suit, impact crushed the powered suit.

[To think that he's this powerful… Zelos was right, huh…]

Gelgus accepted his mistake and mocked himself. He realised that it was too foolish to disagree with Zelos' decision. In actuality, it was a hard decision for Zelos as well. In terms of the ability to make decisions, both of them were almost on the same level.

The only thing that caused them to end up making different decisions, was the fact that one of them had met Akira beforehand and witnessed his might.

[Good grief… Those damn bastards from Lion Steel… They should have put more money on that bounty… 50 billion Aurum is far from… good… enough…]

The explosion from the inside of the powered suit had already burnt half of his body. The crash quickened the half-dying Gelgus to reach his end. At the end of his life, he smiled and uttered a complaint before taking his final breath.

Carol accelerated the bike upwards to catch the falling Akira. She grabbed Akira from the front and tightly held him, making sure that he would not fall off.

“Akira! That was amazing! We did it!”

“Yeah, somehow.”

“You don’t look that excited after defeating a powered suit without using one ourselves!”

“This is not my first time after all.”

“Just how many times have you done this then!? Are you sure you’re alright in the head?!”

“…I will take that as a compliment.”

“I did mean it as a compliment!”

Unlike Carol, who was thrilled after defeating such a big and strong opponent, all that Akira gave was a bitter smile. That was when Shirou’s sudden telepathic message reached him.

“Akira! Give me a break already! We’re retreating this instant, right!?”

“Yeah, we’re leaving now.”

“Alright! Let’s go! Full speed away from here!”

Akira and Carol caught up with the camping vehicle on the bike and parked it on the rooftop. They then quickly shifted their focus to shooting down the ongoing bombardment. After some time, the bombardment finally stopped.

Akira sighed.

“…They’ve stopped. I guess they have given up on us, huh? Man, that was tiring…”

“Let’s take a good rest inside. We protected the camping vehicle for that, right?”

“Yeah.”

Akira smiled at her and turned around to head into the camping vehicle.

But Alpha suddenly shouted at him.

“Akira! Watch out!”

Akira, who had already relaxed, quickly tensed up. Everything around him immediately came to a halt due to his time perception compression. He directed all his senses, including the extrasensory sense that he had obtained for being an old-world connector, to all directions, steeling himself for an attack.

“Alpha! What’s wrong?!”

“To your right!”

Akira quickly reached for the LEO multi-rifle that he did not fix on the bike’s arm and looked to the right. He scanned around but there was nothing at all. It was either that the enemy was too far away to be seen with the naked eye or someone who was hiding using an extremely advanced camouflaging device.

Suddenly, someone appeared out of nowhere from where Akira felt a slight disturbance from. Alpha quickly focused Akira’s information-gathering device to check that particular location and displayed the result in Akira’s enhanced vision.

However, everything was already too late. Right before Akira was able to align the muzzle towards his target, the opponent quickly closed the

distance between them. The enemy released a powerful punch, launching Akira off from the top of the vehicle like a rag doll. He landed hard on the ground, enough to create a crater. It was so powerful that Akira's augmented suit was not able to neutralize the impact.

It all happened in a blink of an eye. Akira was not able to react at all. Of course, Alpha did try to control his augmented suit, but neither attempts to block nor evade made it on time.

Right after Akira crashed, the opponent did not grant him any opportunity to act as a rifle was immediately pointed at his head.

"Nice to meet you. I am Yanagisawa from Kugamayama City Management. Can I have a bit of your time?"

Akira was on the ground with a rifle pointed toward his forehead. His stern gaze was directed at the person in front of him, Yanagisawa, a man who was smiling with his usual flippant attitude at Akira.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 278, Humane Treatment

Index

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Right after Yanagisawa knocked Akira overboard, Hammerz suddenly appeared in front of the running camping vehicle. He simply put his hand forward and lifted it up, forcing it to a complete halt. With his superhuman strength, he slowly placed it back on the ground, but sideways.

When he had suddenly stopped the camping vehicle, Carol was thrown off due to the inertia. Fortunately, she was able to land safely and quickly fired her laser cannon at Hammerz.

Hammerz immediately deflected it with his arm. Carol froze from shock and did not have time to react. Hammerz then suddenly appeared in front of her and grabbed her by her face.

“You’ll die the next time you do that.”

She was glaring at him, even when her eyes were filled with amazement and fear.

“…What do you mean? You’re not here for our lives?”

“No, I am from Sakashita Heavy Industry. And the other one is from Kugamayama city. We are here for something different. Not for the bounty. So, I’ll warn you not to do anything unnecessary. You don’t want to die, right? And you don’t want to get others killed, right?”

Hammerz then released Carol. He turned and walked toward the camping vehicle.

Carol lowered her rifle. She could do nothing but stand and watch. Although Hammerz was showing his back to her, she knew that he could kill her anytime he wanted.

Meanwhile, on the other side, Yanagisawa was smiling politely at Akira with his rifle still pointed at that youth.

“Shirou-kun, you know this name, right? I’m actually looking for this guy, can you tell me where he is?”

“No.”

Akira replied instantly, rejecting him. Beside Akira, was Alpha, who was completely flustered. However, Yanagisawa could not see her.

Yanagisawa put more force on his rifle. He started to smile intimidatingly at Akira. If he had been just another normal Hunter, Akira would have been scared to death by now. He would have already leaked Shirou’s location.

However, Akira was completely unfrazzled. As a matter of fact, he was glaring straight at Yanagisawa. His death stare was desperately looking for an opportunity to turn the table. To find a chance to retaliate against Yanagisawa.

Seeing that, Yanagisawa clicked his tongue and thought.

[What a pain. Well, I guess that’s just the kind of person who would pick a fight with Lion Steel. He even became a bounty target, huh…]

If he was planning to throw away his life, there would have been a trace of resignation in Akira’s glare. If he was looking for an opening, he would

have not made a flat-out rejection. Instead, he would have tried to buy some time. However, Akira did not do anything like that. Basically, Akira did not try to compromise. He showed no concern for his own life. There was not even a single shred of regret. Yanagisawa could tell just how difficult it was to extract information from such a person.

Yanagisawa could just easily kill him but that would mean not getting any information. This was the only reason Akira was still alive.

Yanagisawa lightly chuckled and spoke, as if to scold a selfish kid.

"…Let's do this instead then. If you promise not to try anything after I lower my rifle, I will lower my rifle. So?"

Akira did not reply. He simply glared at Yanagisawa in silence.

Yanagisawa immediately stopped smiling. He was gazing coldly at Akira. It was as if he was not looking at a human but an animal.

"If you can't do that, then I will just kill you this instant. Discussion, understanding each other, and negotiations. These are all important aspects of being a human since they connect people. If you can't at least do that, I have no other choice but to treat you as a monster. After all, there's no understanding between humans and monsters."

It was not a threat to murder him if he did not reply. Instead, it was a threat to kill him if he was not willing to behave like a human. It was not so much the threat by the meaning behind it that finally moved Akira. If he asked himself, 'do I want to be treated like a human', then, as expected, Akira had only one answer.

"…Fine."

Yanagisawa's smile returned and he finally lowered his rifle. He then offered Akira a hand.

Akira did not even bother to reach for that hand. He pushed himself back up. He took out his medicine and gulped down a huge dose of it.

Yanagisawa was only watching him with a wry smile. Akira then sighed and asked.

“…So then, what is it with you? You’re not here to kill me, huh?”

Yanagisawa awkwardly laughed.

“No no no, it’s not at all. Like I said before, I just want to ask you some questions. So, Shirou-kun, you know him, right?”

“Yeah.”

“It would be great if you can tell me where he is…”

“No.”

Yanagisawa laughed. Akira sulked. Meanwhile, Alpha was still as flustered as before.

“There’s no need to be that annoyed, you know? I’m sorry for being a bit violent there. But like, you know, you’re a bounty target now. If I don’t do that, I don’t think you would even listen to what I have to say, right?”

“Not my problem. And also, just because I know him, that doesn’t mean I also know where he is.”

“But you did meet him recently, right?”

“Yeah, back then during the intercity escort mission.”

“Not that one, you must have met him on another occasion, no?”

“Yeah, back in Mihazono ruin. That incident was really troublesome.”

“…No no no, there must be more, no?”

“This isn’t a negotiation if I’m just answering all your questions. I’ve answered 3 of your questions, I’ve repaid what I owe since you lowered your rifle. Now leave.”

“Eeeehhh!?”

Yanagisawa pouted with his usual flippant attitude. Akira looked at him with contempt.

“Don’t give me that. In the first place, it is Kugamayama city that declared me to be a monster. If you’re working for them, I have no reason to help you. Like hell with treating me like a monster. You guys already recognize me formally as a monster. It’s all your fault that I have to spend my days out here in the middle of the wasteland like this.”

“Whoah, you really hit where it hurts. But in reality, I have nothing to do with that though.”

“Again, not my problem. So, just leave.”

Seeing that Akira did not show any willingness to negotiate, Yanagisawa playfully shook his head and came up with a suggestion.

“Alright. In that case, I will take back your monster designation. How about that?”

Akira could not hide his surprise. He raised his eyebrows and looked straight at Yanagisawa.

Yanagisawa realized he finally found something that interested Akira once he saw his reaction. However, Akira’s eyes were quickly filled with doubt.

“Can you even do that?”

“Of course. As a matter of fact, although I look like this, I’m a high-ranking officer in City Management. Though, it should be a given that Hunters of your calibre already know of me. I am Yanagisawa, the Yanagisawa, you know!?”

Yanagisawa said so and made some boisterous poses while pointing at himself.

Akira felt like he had heard that name before as he hummed and searched through his memory. Finally, that name came up.

“Yanagisawa, huh… Ah! So, you’re the guy that Kibayashi was talking about! He said something like no one in Kugamayama city can go against you or something like that…”

“Yep! That’s me! Do you believe me now? That I can cancel your monster designation?”

Akira was convinced that Yanagisawa was indeed able to do something like that. But for some reason, he still did not want to say anything.

“In that case, you can come back to me once you have done that.”

“What? Now is not ok?”

“Yeah.”

Yanagisawa secretly sighed inside his heart while silently scolding Akira, who was as troublesome as he had expected. Although he was certain that he could convince Akira if he had enough time, unfortunately, he did not have the luxury of time at the moment. He needed information about Shirou’s whereabouts, and he needed it, fast.

The more time he wasted, the further Shirou would get away from him. Fortunately, he still had a good chance to find Shirou right now. It was true that he only knew of the general location where Shirou might be, fortunately, he had the power to completely search the area.

Therefore, Yanagisawa showed an attitude as if he was backing down.

“How about this then? You basically don’t like to live out here in the wasteland. That’s because you can’t go back to the city, right? Although I can’t cancel your monster designation right away, I can at least let you get into the slums of the city right now. You have a gang down in the slums that you’re supporting, right? You can sleep there for now. So, what do you think?”

“…Wait a second.”

Akira evaluated his options before finally pulling out his information terminal and calling Inabe.

“Akira, huh? I’m glad to see you’re okay. But if you call me from a public line like this, people will be able to track your location. It might even leak the contents of this conversation. Call me again through the encrypted line.”

“Nah, that is not necessary. I just have a small question that I want to ask you.”

Inabe’s interest was piqued, Akira then explained what was going on to Inabe. As expected, even Inabe could not hide his surprise.

“…I don’t really fully understand what is going on over there. Especially if you only explain this little. But it’s true that Yanagisawa can do that. Personally speaking, I hope you would accept his offer, I will tell you why.”

Even if it was someone as powerful as Akira, if someone with monster designation entered the city, the defence squad would have no other choice but to remove them from the premise. This was one thing that even Yanagisawa could not stop. However, if it was only until somewhere close to the city, he could do that. Technically speaking, the slums were located outside of the inner wall and City Management also treated it the same as the wasteland.

Kugamayama city only considered a limited area under the inner wall as a part of the city. As for the lower district, City Management worked together and formed contracts with various security contractors to maintain the security in this area. Therefore, for the sake of convenience, the city treated this area as a part of the city. The reason why City Management would do something as cruel as periodically pruning the slums, was exactly because the city treated it as a part of the wasteland.

Of course, even in the slums, Hunters who want to get his bounty would still attack him. Though, they could not simply bombard a part of the slums. Doing something like that so close to the city would only invite retaliation

from the city defence squad. At the very least, his enemies would lower the intensity of their attacks to hand rifles. Which would grant Akira the upper hand.

Moreover, due to the connection between Inabe and Sheryl, there was a continuous stream of relics from the area under Tsubaki to Sheryl's base. To ensure that no one would rob those relics, a considerable level of security was put in place. Although it was far from enough to face an assault from those after a 50 billion bounty target, it would at least provide some level of support to Akira. At the very least, it would be safer compared to the camping vehicle.

Inabe quickly completed his explanation and then advised Akira with a serious tone.

"Honestly speaking, I don't want you to die. For the sake of your safety, I want you to accept Yanagisawa's offer. Also, I can at least guarantee that guy has no interest in your bounty. After all, if a city officer takes down a 50 billion Aurum bounty target that those high-rank Hunters are after, it would only cause a fight to break out between us and them. Moreover, he's not someone a mere 50 billion Aurum would move. That's why I can guarantee that he won't kill you solely because of the money."

"…I see."

"But, I didn't expect he would go that far for you. To be honest, I didn't see this coming at all. I wonder what he asked of you."

"Sorry, but I can't tell you anything."

"Of course. Or more like, don't tell me anything. It has something to do with Sakashita Heavy Industry, right? Unfortunately, I have no desire to get involved with them."

The reason why the Hunters, who were attacking Akira suddenly stopped, was not because they had given up. It was because Yanagisawa stopped them. As he came here accompanied by Hammerz, he broadcasted through

the general frequency that Akira was in the middle of negotiations with Sakashita Heavy Industry.

Although those Hunters ambushed Akira while he was in the middle of negotiating with Kugamayama City Management, they did not dare do so with Sakashita Heavy Industry. If they did that, Sakashita would perceive them as hostile. For the Hunter in that area, it was nothing short of suicide.

This meant that once they were done with their negotiation, there was a good chance that the bombardment would recommence. Therefore, it was better if Akira accepted that offer and had Yanagisawa escort him back to the slums.

After Inabe made his suggestion, he then concluded.

“This is all. I will end the call here. For my own sake, I hope that you will continue to survive. So, make sure you make the right choice.”

Inabe then closed the call. Akira glanced back at Yanagisawa, who was smiling at him.

“I hope you believe me now. That I can do that much. So, let me ask you again, where is Shirou-kun?”

“…I can’t tell you.”

That answer caused Yanagisawa’s smile to vanish. But, at the very least, the answer changed from a simple ‘no’ to ‘can’t say’. This showed that there was some room for negotiations.

“Why can’t you tell me?”

“I’m a Hunter. So, I can’t just freely give information to everyone who asks me. That’s why, instead of that…”

Akira then operated his information terminal and turned it to face Yanagisawa.

“Go ahead and ask him yourself.”

In Akira’s information terminal, Shirou’s frightened face was on full display.

Shirou flusteredly connected to Akira through telepathy and screamed.

“What do you think you’re doing!?”

“It’s originally your problem, so at least try to do something about it yourself.”

Even Yanagisawa was surprised by Akira’s action. However, it did not change the fact that it was still beneficial for him. He extended his hand and took that information terminal from Akira and smiled at Shirou.

“Nice to meet you. I am Yanagisawa. I was hoping to meet you inside that inter-city transport vehicle. Still, I’m glad that we can finally meet each other albeit not directly.”

“Ahh, yeah, right, sorry about that. I suddenly wanted to get some fresh air; you see.”

As Shirou was laughing awkwardly, he could not help but to make a stern expression. Seeing that, Yanagisawa was certain that the on the call was really Shirou. Although the background was set to complete white, which prevented Yanagisawa from guessing where Shirou might be, he believed that would not pose an issue. He quickly tried to retrace the call.

“Is that so? I can totally understand that! I sometimes feel like that too, you know? But wouldn’t it be fine for you to return back already? I’m sorry to trouble you, but I actually have something that requires your help. It would be great if you return back sometime soon.”

“Uhh, sorry. But I’m rather busy as well over here, you see…”

Yanagisawa’s tracing had already narrowed down from the whole Aurum economical area, to around Kugamayama city, to the wasteland around where he was right now. He smiled, as he thought [As expected, he’s close by].

“I see. If you need extra help, I can send someone, you know? Though I don’t know what you’re working on, it seems like you can’t ask Sakashita for help. In that case, how about I help you instead?”

“Well, I don’t think I would be able to accept that offer of yours either…”

Yanagisawa thought that he could go further and continued tracing Shirou’s location.

“How about money then? I’m sorry if I sound rushed here, but I’m in a bit of a hurry, you see. That’s why I hope you can help me out soon. I can give you up to 20 billion Chrome, you know?”

Shirou could not hide his surprise.

“So, what do you think?”

Shirou seemed to hesitate, but he still did not accept the offer.

“…Thank you but I have to refuse. I don’t think we’re that close that you would just lend me that much money.”

“There’s no need to be modest, you know?”

At that point, Yanagisawa already deduced Shirou was around 200 meters from where he was standing. He inadvertently smiled and nonchalantly scanned his surroundings. Naturally, his eyes went to the camping vehicle. Since he suspected Shirou to be there, he quickly narrowed his search area to that location before Shirou noticed his backtracking.

As it finally narrowed down to the millimeters, Yanagisawa frowned and looked a bit confused. The location of the backtracking pointed right to where Akira was standing.

“…Shirou-kun, where might you be right now?”

“Where, you ask? I’m over there, no?”

Shirou smiled smugly, signalling that he was playing some kind of trick.

“You’re the one who found me in Mihazono ruin, right? Like hell I would fall for the same trick again.”

Yanagisawa finally understood that Shirou was well aware he was currently backtracking the call. Furthermore, Shirou deliberately allowed the conversation to continue.

“I bet Hammerz is over there too, right? Tell him that I apologize for wasting his time.”

This indicated he was guessing. Therefore, Shirou was not in a position where he could confirm if Hammerz was really there or not.

“And also, I don’t recommend picking a fight with that Hunter, Akira. You might have Sakashita Heavy Industry behind you, but it is still a bad idea to pick a fight with Tsukisada Construction, right?”

Seeing Shirou stated with such a level of smugness, Yanagisawa believed his words. With this, both Yanagisawa and Shirou misunderstood Akira as an agent from Tsukisada Construction. Yanagisawa inadvertently turned toward Akira.

[And here I thought he is an old-world connector. So, he is an agent from Tsukisada Construction, huh? No wonder his story doesn’t make sense. That is unless he had their support. And right now, Shirou is using him as a proxy. Is Shirou using him to intervene with the Hunters…?]

In the past, Yanagisawa did something similar for the same exact reason too. Thus, it all made sense to him. He then glanced at Hammerz, who was close to the camping vehicle. Hammerz, who noticed his gaze, lightly shook his head.

[So, he’s really not around, huh… Even if he is, searching the inside of that vehicle is meaningless at this point.]

If Shirou was inside the vehicle, then it meant Hammerz was lying. That would mean Sakashita Heavy Industry had no wish to let Yanagisawa have Shirou. At least, not here and not now.

Back when they failed to capture Shirou in the Mihazono ruin, Yanagisawa was curious and did ask Hammerz about that. However, judging from Hammerz's answer, it seemed like Hammerz was entirely serious when trying to capture Shirou.

Everything led to one conclusion. Shirou was unlikely to be around here. Even if Yanagisawa bet on that small possibility, went to search the vehicle, and found Shirou there, he might have to fight Hammerz afterwards. Even if he survives, he might need to take on the whole Sakashita Heavy Industry later. It was not worth the trouble. Therefore, Yanagisawa had no other choice but to stop his search. He then turned back to Shirou.

"I see. Well, it's not like I have that much time to chat with you. I guess I will end the call here. Feel free to call me if you change your mind. Ah, you have my number, right?"

"Yeah."

After that, Shirou closed the call. Yanagisawa returned the information terminal back to Akira and asked him a question just to be safe.

"But still, if you don't know where Shirou-kun is, you could have answered with 'I don't know' instead of a 'no', right?"

Akira looked at Yanagisawa with contempt and mocked.

"There's nothing I have to say to someone using the threat of force just to ask me something."

Yanagisawa smiled bitterly with a mix of exasperation.

[He wouldn't even tell me that he doesn't know, huh? To think that he would go that far for his pride. Though, I'm not in the position to criticize someone else. That part of him is really troublesome though…]

But on the other side, it explained why Akira did not falter against Lion Steel's threat and still dared to murder a member of its founding family. He even managed to get a 50 billion Aurum bounty on him and got designated

as a monster. Judging from how Akira did not falter in the slightest, Yanagisawa believed Akira's words. He really did not know. Thus, he smiled in amusement.

"Is that so? If that's really the case, I guess I will just leave then. Ah, as thanks for giving me a chance to talk with Shirou-kun, I'll arrange for you to be able to enter the slums of the city. Though, I won't cancel the monster designation. After all, you basically told me nothing about Shirou-kun whereabouts."

"Yeah yeah."

"Also, if you know where he is, do call me. If possible, please turn him over to me. If you do that for me, not only will I cancel your monster designation, but I will also do something about your bounty as well. Later then. I will be waiting for your call."

Yanagisawa smiled at him and left.

Akira heaved a huge sigh and frowned.

"Alpha, sorry."

Alpha smiled wryly.

"You're safe now and that is all that matters. Moreover, it is way too late to be complaining about that side of your personality. Let's just change gears and get ready before those Hunters start their bombardment again."

Seeing Alpha's smile, as if she really did not mind, Akira lowered his tense shoulders.

"You're right, let's get moving."

Akira pulled up his bike, which was lying nearby and rode it toward the camping vehicle.

Hammerz, who received a long-range message from Yanagisawa, lightly sighed and mumbled.

“So, it ends up with nothing, huh?”

He then turned the camping vehicle, which he had laid on its side, back on its wheels. He casually apologized to Carol.

“We’re leaving now, sorry for the trouble.”

“…If you really feel bad about it, how about leaving something behind as compensation?”

Watching her ask so daringly while looking straight at him, Hammerz was a little taken aback. He then changed his attitude to show some respect for her courage.

“I’m sorry, I came here empty-handed. But well, I will try to arrange something for you later.”

Hammerz smiled cheerfully and left with those parting words.

After Hammerz was too far to be seen with the naked eye, Carol sighed in relief.

“Good grief… Just what is the deal with that guy?”

Hammerz was a powerful opponent. It was for the best if he would just leave without causing anymore trouble. Once she calmed down, she smiled wryly. [I should not have said that… I gave him a reason to come back to look for me….]

That was when Akira returned.

“Carol, are you alright?”

“Yeah, somehow. I’m glad to see that you’re also okay. Now then, let’s immediately leave this place.”

Akira and Carol returned to the camping vehicle. Since it was lying on its side just now. The insides were a huge mess. Shiro, who was there, also looked like a mess.

“Akira, how was it?”

“They left.”

Shirou sighed in relief.

“Thank goodness that worked… It was dangerous, but that aside…”

Akira suddenly interjected through telepathy.

“Carol is here, so don’t say anything unnecessary.”

“I know I know. I didn’t expect you would even be able to fool someone like Yanagisawa. Was that some kind of secret technique from Tsukisada Construction?”

“Just shut up.”

“Yeah yeah.”

Shirou lightly joked and decided not to say anything more.

Shirou was not the one who changed his location to where Akira was. That was Alpha’s doing. Alpha only did that because Akira asked her to do so. He also asked Shirou to collaborate with his story.

Akira and Carol then hurried off from that location. They were rushing to leave before the Hunters started shooting at them again. However, even after some time, no bombardment came. Akira found that to be very strange.

“Hmm, this is strange. Have they really given up on us?”

Shirou sulked for some reason.

“What are you talking about? You just made some kind of deal with Yanagisawa, you know? The Yanagisawa.”

“Eh? He said he won’t help retract the bounty though?”

“That’s not it. Even right now, the broadcast is still saying that you are negotiating. That’s why they haven’t started firing again. Didn’t you ask them to do that?”

While Akira and Shirou were looking at each other confused, Carol, who was standing next to them, guessed that it must be Hammerz’s compensation. She smiled bitterly, now thinking that it was worth it – saying those words that she thought she should not have to Hammerz.

Their difference in power was simply overwhelming. If they had fought, the ending was obvious. Akira and Carol somehow managed to get through that situation with their pride, hard work and a pinch of good luck.

However, the reason why those Hunters stopped attacking Akira was not because of Hammerz.

__*__*__*__

Takt, who took over the leadership position after Gelgus’ death, was furious. He wished he had offered himself to take over such a dangerous task in place of Gelgus. His motivation had already changed. He no longer wanted to kill Akira for the sake of money. He wanted to do it for the sake of revenge. He was about to proceed forward despite the losses due to his rage.

But suddenly, he received a message from Sakashita Heavy Industry. If he was only after money, he would have stopped. However, since vengeance filled his mind, he could not. His face was emotionless as he turned at Latis and Pamela, seeming to bottle up the inferno churning inside of him.

“I have a question. If we keep attacking Akira in this situation, can you use the influence of Lion Steel to evacuate us out of the territory under Sakashita Heavy Industry? If yes, can you add that as an extra reward on top of the bounty?”

That request was not solely for Takt’s sake. It was also to acquire help from the other Hunters. Latis could understand that from Takt’s gaze as he lightly nodded.

“…I will make the arrangements.”

“Alright then!”

But when Takt was about to give the command to restart the bombardment, the alarm suddenly blared. It was followed by a voice that echoed through the vehicle.

“Takt! We are being attacked! They’re already inside the vehicle!”

“What!? Who are they and where are they from!?”

Takt immediately suspected it to be another team who were also after Akira’s bounty. After Gelgus’ death, they found an opportunity to take down their competitor. However, the scream took him by surprise. His enemy was not the one he had imagined it to be.

“They’re from the Lion Steel company!”

Takt immediately turned toward Latis and Pamela, but seeing that they were equally surprised, Takt understood that they had nothing to do with this attack.

Suddenly, a canister exploded that filled the room with nanoparticles. These particles had a powerful speed filter effect. Now, rifles were useless inside that room. From another point of view, it also protected the people inside the room from bullets.

At the same time, it forced anyone inside that room to only resort to close combat. Two women who specialized in close-range combat quickly jumped inside the room.

One of them swung her blade at Latis while the other one launched a powerful punch at Pamela. They rapidly closed the distance between them in a blink of an eye. The face of the one with the blade was filled with killing intent and a sense of loyalty. Meanwhile, the other one had a similar face. One filled with the same killing intent but with insanity in her smile.

Latis evaded that slash and frowned.

“…You-!!”

“Long time no see!”

Pamela blocked the punch, deflecting it to the side and frowned.

“…You!”

“We meet again!”

It was Shiori and Kanae.

Latis deflected Shiori’s next attack with a knife. Sparks flew from the contact point between the blade and the knife. They were glaring at each other as they forced their weapon forward, toward their opponent.

“What is the meaning of this!? What are you scheming this time!?”

“Scheming? You endangered my master’s life. Isn’t that enough of a reason?”

“…I see. Then, it was indeed stupid of me to ask!”

Latis extended the blade of his knife, negating the advantage of Shiori’s reach. As they jumped backwards, opening space between them, they swung at each other. They released a flurry of strikes before they even landed. The floor and wall in between them were filled with countless slash marks.

Although Latis and Shiori were mostly even, Kanae was pushing Pamela back. Since her speciality was commanding a group of maids using long-range control, she was unable to match Kanae’s ferocity.

“It was a mistake not to take your beloved long-range control terminal with you here.”

“Oh shut up!”

“Well, I have no plans on wasting my time with pointless chatter too. So…”

Kanae’s presence suddenly changed. She pushed aside the part of her that wanted to savour the fight, even in this situation.

“Just die.”

As her usual smile vanished, Kanae’s single strike broke through Pamela’s defence and blew her body away like a rag doll.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 279, Revenge Target

Index

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Takt was shocked by the sudden attack. Nonetheless, even amid the chaos, he was able to quickly identify those that were hostile and his allies. Although both Shiori's side and Latis' side were from the Lion Steel company, he quickly recognized that the aggressor was the enemy. He quickly provided support to Latis and Pamela. After all, Latis and Pamela were the ones who offered his group the extra reward on top of the bounty. Therefore, if they got killed, he might not be able to claim that extra reward.

But soon, more people entered the fight. They were Reina and Togami. Both were wearing maid and butler uniforms, which were augmented powered suits. They were equipped with rifles, specifically adjusted for close combat, able to function in the speed filter. Those two approached Takt.

[More enemies…! And they're only children…!? What's going on!?]

Takt quickly jumped away to evade the bullets by pure reflex. He tried to shoot back. However, Togame quickly closed the distance between them, as if acting as Reina's shield. While Togami was acting as the decoy, Reina jumped to the side and fired at Takt.

Although the speed filter greatly reduced the speed of the bullets, it was still impossible to follow them with the naked eye. However, with the combination of great effort and the effects of accelerator drugs, they were able to track the trajectory of each bullet. They were artificially compressing their time perception as they exchanged shots mere meters apart.

Even when it was two against one, skill-wise, Takt had the upper hand. However, the situation that they were in closed their gap in skill.

Since they had prepared tanks, powered suits and large weapons to hunt Akira down, Takt was not that well equipped for a man-to-man fight. Moreover, he was safely staying inside the mobile HQ borrowed from Lion Steel. Thus, was currently not well equipped to fight outside the vehicle.

In contrast to Takt, Reina and Togami were fully equipped with Lion Steel equipment, specialized for man-to-man fights. Furthermore, they were using equipment that was normally not allowed, unless approved by a branch head.

This difference allowed the bullets to hit Takt, stopping him in his tracks. Although it was still far from being lethal, Takt was skilled enough to understand that a temporary pause could be the deciding factor between the loser and the victor.

The speed filter greatly reduced the range of the bullets. Reina and Togame dealt with that by shooting at Takt from close range. Takt’s wealth of experience in battle told him that he would not be able to avoid the bullets. Likewise, he did not have enough protection to block the bullets.

[I can’t die here…! Not when I haven’t avenged Gelgus-san!]

As his mind had abandoned the thought of survival, he changed his goal to take down the attackers together with him, Takt immediately aimed his rifle back at Reina and Togami. However, due to his regret taking over his train of thoughts, he completely missed his opportunity.

Reina and Togami simultaneously shot at Takt right when it was impossible to evade. Takt got riddled with bullets. He was not killed immediately but even until his last breath, he failed to do anything.

Kanae sent Pamela flying with a kick. Pamela glanced at Reina and Togami and quickly understood their goal. It was to separate Takt from Pamela and Latis. However, it was already too late for her to change anything. Takt was already dead.

Without the head to lead the hunting team, they would not be able to restart their assault on Akira. Especially when no one else had the authority to lead the hunting team.

This meant that there was no longer any reason for Latis and Pamela to stay there. Without even needing to communicate, they both knew it was time to leave. But since their hands were tied with Shiori and Kanae, they were unable to immediately leave this place.

Pamela had been trying to call the maid-type automaton from the other room. However, the automaton was still nowhere to be seen. When she tried to peek through their visual sharing, she could see a group of maids and butlers attacking the automaton unit. She immediately understood who was behind this attack.

Latis also quickly noticed the presence of Togami and Reina. He immediately frowned and sent a glare of reproach toward Shiori.

“You! You changed sides to the fourth ward, huh!? You even leaked the security code of the third ward to them!”

The attackers were from the Lion Steel Company Eastern District Fourth Ward branch. The reason why they were able to slip into the vehicles under the third branch, was because Shiori leaked the security code to them.

Shiori, of course, did not stop her attacks as she calmly stated.

“Yeah. That took you some time to notice.”

For Latis, it was unethical no matter what the reason was. With rage welling up inside him, his gaze naturally turned solemn.

“Where has your loyalty toward the company run off to!? In the end, this is what a faulty fourth-rank maid does, huh!?”

“The third branch has decided to give its utmost support to Chloe-sama, who is trying to hurt Reina-sama. As such, this doesn’t count as a betrayal toward the third branch!”

“Empty arguments! Leaking secret information is against the rules! It is treason against the company!”

Even in the middle of their conversation, they had exchanged countless shots, which left their marks on their surroundings.

“You’re only using your loyalty as a reason to justify your betrayal! Both you and your master should just die as traitors!”

Latis had always admired Shiori’s loyalty. Even if their loyalties were directed at different people. That act sullied that admiration he had and enraged him.

However, Shiori stayed calm even in the face of his threats.

“Don’t worry. Though it is true that I have betrayed the third branch, I still have not betrayed the company.”

“What do you mean?”

“The fact that the fourth branch is helping us is the proof. Although they are from a different branch, there is no way they would help me if I betrayed the company. Flip-sama, the head of the fourth branch, also agreed that this is not against the will of representative Alice-sama.”

Latis was too surprised for words. He inadvertently jumped back to open up space between them. Although they were still in the midst of battle, his attention was no longer there. He immediately decided to put the fight on-halt. Nonetheless, he was still probing for an opening to strike at any time.

“…Just how far have you noticed?”

Shiori also did the same. She was also carefully looking for an opening to strike.

“I have no reason to answer your question. You were reproaching me for my betrayal toward the company just a moment ago. I will at least say this right now. Killing Chloe-sama, even causing some damage to the third branch, these are all a display of my loyalty toward the company.”

She basically hinted to Latis that she already knew about everything. Because of that, the rage that was bottled up, immediately simmered down. It was gone from his gaze, which was not filled with anxiety.

Unlike Latis, who was fighting evenly against Shiori. Pamela was completely overwhelmed by Kanae. There was no chance for Pamela to win. As a matter of fact, Pamela would do really well if she could survive for another minute. Once Pamela got killed, it would be two against one. In that scenario, Latis would not have any chance of surviving. Knowing how things would play out, Shiori was not in a rush to fight. She was even willing to calmly chat with Latis.

Aware of the dire situation that he was in, Latis made his decision. Reina and Togami were receiving support from the fourth branch. There was a good chance that they had noticed representative Alice’s true will. He had to let Chloe know about it. However, in this situation with no chance of winning, it was only a matter of time before both he and Pamela got killed. Therefore, he had only one choice. It required him to throw his life away.

He injected his body with all the battle stimulants he had. Although he would be dead in 10 seconds, it allowed him to temporarily attain superhuman strength.

Shiori noticed the slight change in her opponent. She took a step back and made a defensive stance. Kanae also did not miss this change. She quickly kicked Pamela in Latis’ direction and jumped back to Shiori to provide support.

Kanae intentionally kicked Pamela toward Latis simply because Pamela was an inch away from death. Her aim was to disturb Latis, by tossing his dying teammate in his direction. Therefore, instead of finishing Pamela off, Kanae decided that it was more important to provide support to Shiori. If both of them could stop Latis' upcoming rampage, they would win the fight.

Shiori and Kanae focused their all to prepare themselves to nullify Latis' final strike

As they wished, in the end, Latis died while Shiori's team sustained no injuries. However, it did not end the way Shiori had planned. Instead of attacking them, Latis turned back and tore a hole through the vehicle. He kicked the flying Pamela out of the vehicle, giving her an opportunity to get away.

As he was standing on the death door, Latis' perception of time slowed down. He saw Pamela's look at him with eyes full of disbelief. Latis gave her a soft smile, wishing for her safety. In the next moment, Shiori's blade sliced off his head. The energy blade scorched his brain, killing him instantly with no hope of recovery.

After she swung her blade, Shiori jumped back without lowering her guard. She did not vertically split Latis in two since she had a close call before due to trying to do something unnecessary. Thus, Latis was completely unharmed except for his head. There was still some lingering fear that he might still manage to attack them even in that state.

Latis' body simply fell limp and rolled into the wasteland.

Seeing that, Shiori was a bit confused, Kanae also did not expect that.

"Ane-san, did he just trick us?"

"Maybe. Though, if I was given the choice to save someone in that situation, I would have picked Latis. But it seems like he didn't share that sentiment."

“Ahh, I see. In that case, it was a mistake. Kicking Pamela back to him. Sorry about that.”

It was unlike Kanae to honestly apologize like this. Nonetheless, Shiori simply lightly shook her head and told her.

“It’s fine. No one saw that coming. We were still able to kill one of them. The result is decent.”

Reina and Togami moved to group up with Shiori and Kanae. After killing Takt, they left the room so as not to get in the way of their fight.

“Shiori, is it done yet? Are you alright?”

“I am alright. No problems. Thank you for your concern, Milady.”

Reina smiled in relief, beside her, Togami sighed in relief. Shiori then slightly bowed to him.

“Togami-sama, thank you for cooperating. I’m grateful you protected Milady.”

“Don’t mention it, I’m also grateful to you. Inviting me to such a big job. This will add one more notch to my achievements. There is also this powerful equipment that you allowed me to borrow.”

Hearing his reply, Reina made a rather troubled expression.

“It might be weird to hear this from me since I’m the one who invited you. But, are you really fine taking this job? You must fight against a Lion Steel branch. In the worst-case scenario, you might have to fight against the whole Lion Steel company, you know?”

Toward those words which showed worry toward his well-being, Togami just lightly chuckled and reassured.

“It’s fine. We don’t really get to work together that much lately. So, at least let me do this much.”

“Listen … You might get killed, you know?”

“What are you even talking about? Isn’t that what it means to be a Hunter? There’s not that much of a difference. Moreover…”

“Moreover?”

“If I don’t want to do it or if I think it wasn’t worth the trouble, I would have refused right from the start. I accepted this job knowing fully well what I’m getting myself into. It would be great if you can stop asking me that question.”

Togami smiled and spoke while looking straight at Reina.

Reina blushed a little. Togami’s words could be interpreted as being willing to die for her sake.

“…I see, well, you have my thanks.”

Shiori was seriously contemplating whether it was a good idea to disturb the mood between them. Kanae, who was standing beside her, was grinning as she casually teased.

“Milady, it seems like you even have the leeway to flirt in this situation, huh? Togami-boy too, we’re in the middle of a mission, you know?”

“W-we’re not flirting!”

“Sorry! I’ll get back to my task.”

One replied with a rebuttal while the other did not deny it. Either way, since they had already calmed down, Shiori explained the situation to Reina and Togami. A moment later, a report reached Shiori. It stated the fourth branch had successfully taken control of the vehicle.

The head of the fourth branch, Flip, contacted Reina.

“It’s me. How is the situation over there?”

“Everyone is safe. But Chloe is not here.”

“I see. Considering that those two were here, I was certain that Chloe-sama would also be here. But it seems like that is not the case. This means she must be either in the Higaraka facility or still inside the city. What do you think?

“I don’t have any good guesses. If she’s still inside the city, we won’t be able to kill her just yet.”

“In that case, let’s pin our hopes on Akira-kun.”

Reina lightly sighed.

“It is him after all. I don’t think he’s dead yet, but I wonder if he’s really going to attack Kugamayama city.”

“It is just my guess, but I think he’s serious about attacking the city. Well, you can do anything as you see fit. Let’s work hard to answer representative Alice’s will.”

“Yeah, let’s just do that.”

Reina was talking with Flip, acting as a proper master for Shiori and Kanae. Watching her, Shiori got deeply moved. Meanwhile, Kanae was smiling like usual. Togami, on the other hand, felt conflicted. He felt like Reina was living in a completely different world from him.

After she was forcibly evacuated from the moving vehicle, Pamela hid in the middle of the wasteland. She wore a shaken and pained expression.

That was when Latis appeared. To be more precise, it was Latis’ corpse. Just like the maids under Pamela, it was set so that in the case of death, Pamela would be able to control their bodies. Therefore, Pamela managed to take control of Latis’ body and moved it here.

The authority to control his body could be transferred under certain conditions. It was possible for her to control his body if he was unconscious

and in danger. Because of that, she still had hope. Pamela prayed for the slim chance Latis was still alive.

But after she saw him up close, she knew that Latis was already dead. Pamela sobbed as she hugged his corpse. She then put medicinal balm on his outer wound. The expensive medicine quickly closed the wounds, but that was all. It could not bring back the dead.

Afterwards, Pamela kept hugging Latis for some time. It was as if she was trying to suppress the anger welling up inside her. Once she recovered some of her composure, all her rage was concentrated on a single goal.

“I’ll definitely kill you…”

Those words were proof that Pamela’s hatred toward Shiori had exceeded her loyalty toward Chloe and the Lion Steel company.

＿*＿*＿*＿

As Akira was driving the camping vehicle toward Kugamayama city, a team from the city defence led by Guutol approached him. Naturally, it was not to repel him. Inabe had contacted them beforehand. Thus, Akira did not panic when Guutol’s team appeared on the sensor.

“It’s Guutol. We’re here to escort you to the slums. Follow us.”

“Roger that. But are you sure you want to escort someone recognized as a monster?”

“Well, I wonder about that. Either way, I’m just following what my boss told me. If someone tries to attack you, just leave it to us… By the way, there were Hunters who attacked you when you were in the middle of negotiations with City Management, right? As a part of City Management, that really hurt our pride, you know? So, I’ll make sure to show them if they try to do that again.”

Seeing the fully armed powered suit squad, Akira thought that it was reassuring to have them on his side. He also analyzed what Guutol had said.

He was relieved that he did not have to fight them nor did he have to turn around and leave.

While on the other hand, Guutol was relieved that his squad did not have to fight against Akira. He already heard that using only his bike, Akira managed to repel an assault group equipped with tanks and powered suits—a team of Hunters fully prepared to hunt him, a 50 billion bounty target. He shuddered at the thought. [What if we had fought back when we first met?]

"…Let me warn you again, your monster designation is still active. So, watch yourself. Be careful once you enter the slums. I'll also send you a map."

Akira looked at the map of Kugamayama city's lower district that was sent to his information terminal.

"The locations coloured in red are treated as part of the city. So, if you enter those locations, we will have no other choice but to remove you. Make sure not to go there. As for the orange areas, you'll at least get a warning shot if you enter those areas. If you enter those areas by mistake, make sure to get out as soon as possible."

"Alright, I'll be careful."

"I'm really counting on you, alright? We are giving you special treatment already. Normally, we would attack you the moment you approach the city."

"Is that so? Even Inabe can't change that?"

"Impossible. Making this much of an exception already caused some dissent from inside the inner wall. I really have no idea why the guys at the top are allowing you to get so close to the city."

"I see…"

Akira thought back on his encounter with Yanagisawa. It was a dangerous encounter, but it was not a fruitless one.

While they were heading to the city, Akira thought of something and contacted Shirou through telepathy.

“By the way, Shirou, are you sure you want to come with us to Kugamayama city?”

Shirou sighed in exasperation.

“…If you ask me personally, it would be a straight no. But it’s not like I can just leave right now.”

With a 50 billion Aurum bounty target in the camping vehicle, it would be placed under close watch. Not only from Guutol’s squad, but also from others, using long-range surveillance devices. There was a good chance that he would be discovered if he tried to leave. He might be able to elude those who were watching him from the network, but that was a herculean task to do when there were people directly watching him. Although his camouflage coat was excellent, there was no guarantee that he would not be discovered.

“Only two individuals are supposed to be inside the camping vehicle right now. You and Carol. I have no desire to make them want to question the real number of people inside. To let me leave, you would have to stop the vehicle and open the door. They would definitely question why you would do that. I’m sorry but make sure to be careful.”

“Alright… Wait, does that mean it was a bad decision to use all our jamming smoke back then?”

“Yeah, it was. Still, the powered suit which knew of my presence already got destroyed. It also managed to cut off its information-sharing system, so the others after you most likely didn’t notice my presence. If someone had noticed, Hammerz and Yanagisawa would not have asked you about my whereabouts back then. They would have quickly gone straight for the camping vehicle.”

In reality, it was nothing more than Shirou’s hopeful guess. Each sentence he worded out also served to convince him of it. He was unaware that Hammerz got ordered by Sugadome to let him off the hook for some time.

“Though I’m sure I don’t even have to tell you this, but once you enter the slums, I’m sure watchful eyes would shift from the vehicle to you alone. At that point, I can slip into the slums. Depending on the situation, I might choose to return to my hideout.”

“I see. Well, feel free to do whichever you think is best.”

Since it was now safe, they took the opportunity to tidy up the place. After Hammerz placed the vehicle on its side, almost everything inside got displaced. It was a mess. While they were cleaning, Guutol suddenly contacted Akira.

“This is as far as we will escort you. We will be standing guard here to make sure that you don’t try to enter the city. Just to remind you, make sure to never enter the red areas, understand?”

“…If Chloe gets out of the city, I won’t do something like that.”

[As expected…] Guutol sighed and said.

“…I see, I hope that is indeed the case.”

Guutol’s call ended. His parting words made Akira imagine him adorning a bitter smile. The powered suits then left the vehicle alone.

That was when Alpha smiled at Akira. He only responded back with a bitter smile.

“I also hope that I won’t have to do that. I will put in more effort so that we won’t have to attack the city.”

“I really hope that you will keep those words, alright?”

Alpha smiled like usual at Akira.

After they entered the slums of Kugamayama city, they once stopped the vehicle. As Akira stepped out, someone came to welcome him.

“Welcome back, I’ve been waiting for you.”

It was Sheryl.

In a part of the slums that seemed to be devoid of people, Akira strolled with Sheryl next to him. Behind them were Erio and the other children, who came as Sheryl's bodyguards. Further back was the camping vehicle.

Akira was a bit surprised at how silent the slums were. Especially when he compared it to how rowdy it used to be.

"It's so quiet here. It's the first time I see the slums this quiet."

"When they heard that you're coming back, everyone left. The only ones remaining are us."

Sheryl was the one who disseminated this piece of information. Thanks to that, except for those living close to Sheryl's HQ, everyone evacuated the area. Any area with Akira inside was considered to be dangerous. After all, they might get involved in a battle between a 50 billion Aurum bounty target and the Hunters after him.

"So, you're staying behind? Although everyone left?"

"Of course. Though, to be more precise, not everyone left. But only about 10 per cent remained. I didn't expect there to be this many willing to stay behind."

The ones who stayed were those who did not have anywhere else to go. After all, most could not survive alone in the slums without a gang. They also did not want to transfer to another gang. Ultimately, those that remained had enough of living under the shadows. Fearful for their lives all the time. For such sentiments to sprout, it showed just how healthy and prosperous Sheryl's gang had become.

Moreover, many of those that remained were veteran members. Most were those who were already in the gang right from the start and had become officers. They saw Akira survive time and time again. Despite acting recklessly and doing so many absurd stunts. He survived after going to

Shijima's gang, dragging a member's corpse with him. He survived after he raided the Ezont family's HQ. Even now, he was still alive.

Those who were wise. Those who did not have anywhere else to go. Those who placed their bets on Akira. Finally, the girl who made Akira her world. They all stayed behind and decided to pick him up. They did so, knowing they might get involved in a battle that could easily destroy the slums.

Akira glanced at Erio and the other children behind him before turning his gaze back to Sheryl.

"I heard that Inabe has contacted you beforehand. Just how much has Inabe told you?"

"We heard that you've picked a fight with the Lion Steel company. You got a 50 billion Aurum bounty on you. Furthermore, you got designation as a monster. You've also just got attacked by a large group of Hunters and there's a good chance that this won't be the last time."

"Well, I think that is good enough. Just to let you know, I don't have the leeway to help your gang right now. Wouldn't it be better if you also leave the area? I was planning to borrow your HQ, believing everyone would have left by now. I was expecting it to be completely empty, you know?"

"It's alright. We will watch over ourselves. If we can't, then it just means our time has come."

"But still…"

Akira understood that he was basically causing them trouble. That this was all due to his own selfishness. As such, he could not help but make a troubled expression. As a matter of fact, if Sheryl had refused after Inabe contacted her, he was planning on staying in a random abandoned building.

However, Sheryl simply smiled and accepted Akira back into the base.

"We are greatly indebted to you. Though it might be weird to say this, I see this as our chance to repay you. We are weak. If a fight breaks out, we

know we cannot hope to aid you. So, please. At least let us help you with the other things like providing a place for you to rest.”

Whatever their reason was, they had made their resolve and stayed behind. Akira thought that it would be rude if he kept asking them to leave. Thus, he gave a gentle smile and said.

“…I see. Well, I will be in your care for the time being.”

“Of course!”

Sheryl presented him with her best smile. It was a smile, worthy enough to leave her with no regret, even if it was her last smile. As the shroud of twilight slowly crept in, her smile was shining beautifully under the dusk.

When they arrived at Sheryl’s HQ, they parked the camping vehicle inside the garage. They then closed the shutter, which was as robust as a portable wall. It was installed to protect the relics gathered from the area managed by Tsubaki. Thus, they could even withstand tank shells.

Sheryl was explaining the defensive capabilities of the HQ. She made sure to end her speech with a recommendation for Akira to stay, and rest here. However, Akira simply replied ‘I would do that later’.

He promptly returned to the camping vehicle. He then gathered Carol and Shirou to talk about their plans from here on out.

Akira was planning to stay here until his new equipment arrived. Carol was planning to stay with him. The only issue was Shirou.

“Shirou, what will you do? It would be terrible if someone from Sheryl’s gang found you, right? That means you could either continue to hide inside the camping vehicle in secret or sneak out…”

“I will be staying here for the time being. Even if I sneak out later, I must first ensure that the outside is safe. If it’s possible, I want to be able to access the security inside this building. I don’t mind hacking into the

security but, if possible, I'd rather gain access the proper way. After all, it will be less likely for me to be found if I don't hack."

"Alright. I will ask Sheryl for access. Well then, I'll be going upstairs. Just call me if you need anything."

Akira only said as much and left the vehicle with Carol next to him. Sheryl was already standing there, waiting for them. It seemed like she was the only one left, while the others had already gone upstairs.

"Sheryl, I'm sorry to ask you this right away, but…"

"If it's about a bath, you can go in anytime. You want to go in now?"

Although the camping vehicle was also equipped with a bath, it was a relatively small one. When Akira heard her offer his desire simply burst out. He had been living out in the wasteland for a few days. Though he could bathe, it was greatly limited in size. He could not fully relax and stretch out all his limbs. The desire to do so had piled up and it finally erupted. Thus, there was no stopping him any longer. Even Shirou's request had taken a back seat as something that was to be dealt with later.

"Yeah."

"Okay, let's go then. This way."

Without even stating that she would go in as well, Sheryl led Akira to the bath, as if it was the natural thing to do. Strangely enough, Carol was silently following behind them.

"…Hm? Wait. Carol, are you going in as well?"

"It's fine, isn't it? I can at least help you wash your body, you know?"

"…Well, that's fine by me I guess."

Akira nonchalantly approved her suggestion. This made Carol smile rather smugly. But in contrast to her, Sheryl, who was witnessing their exchange,

was utterly stupefied. In the end, the three of them went to enjoy the bath together.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 280, Growing Out Of The Poor Shell

Index

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After spending days out in the wasteland, Akira was finally in the slums of Kugamayama City. More specifically, he was in Sheryl's HQ, completely revelling in his time in their wide, spacious bath.

After the huge fight in the afternoon, he was physically and psychically drained. He could tell if he let his guard down, his consciousness would melt into the warm water. Nonetheless, his body gradually sunk into the water. Watching him, Alpha, who was also in the bath albeit only as a hologram, warned him.

"Akira, if you fall asleep, you will drown."

"Whoops…"

Akira pushed his body back up. He fixed his posture. Unfortunately, his drowsiness continued to pervade him. As he was bobbing his head, having a hard time holding it up, Carol, who was physically present, prompted him.

"Akira, if you're too sleepy, you can just sleep here. I'll hold your body up."

Akira had his eyelids already half-closed as he turned toward Carol. Seeing his exhausted face, Carol gave a soft smile.

“If it’s too much to handle, I’ll be there to help you. I did say something like that, remember?”

“Ah, that’s right.. I’ll leave… The rest… To you… Then…”

While in his hazy conscious state, Akira believed that it should be fine. Thus, he left everything else to Carol. As his consciousness turned dark, his eyelids slowly closed. He gradually lost control of his body as the exhaustion crept in. Eventually, he laid his body on her.

Carol received him and hugged him. Since Carol now had full control of Akira’s body, she moved Akira in front of her and hugged him from behind. Thanks to Carol’s plentiful chest, which she nurtured to seduce men, Akira was lulled to sleep until he finally closed his eyes. Carol was looking at him with a gentle smile on her face. It was obvious she was enjoying this.

Sheryl stared at Carol and Akira as it happened.

“You two are pretty close.”

“Hmm? Well, we did entrust our lives to each other back in the wasteland, after all. So, this much is nothing.”

“I see…”

Sheryl pouted. That was not something that she could do. Even if she made her resolve and went out to the wasteland together with Akira, she would be nothing but a burden. She would basically be an amateur Hunter after all. Thus, she was doing her best to support and help Akira. She wanted to help him with everything but knew her own limitations when it came to fighting.

[As I thought… Everything else is not as meaningful as being able to fight side by side with him…] Sheryl sighed inside her heart and said.

“…Carol-san, I’m sure that you’re exhausted as well. So, I can take your place if you want.”

“It’s fine. I have a nanomachine-enhanced body, after all.”

“I see…”

They both stayed close, next to the sleeping Akira. They both wished to stay beside him in the future as well. One was smiling brightly while the other was smiling wryly.

After the bath, due to Sheryl’s suggestion, Akira decided to sleep in Sheryl’s room. Carol simply smiled and did not say anything.

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Back in the wasteland. In the Lion Steel facility in Higaraka residence ruin, Pamela gave a full report to Chloe, who was still inside the inner wall.

Chloe was reflected on a display. Although she seemed calm after hearing Pamela’s report, there was no smile on her face.

“…I see, so, Latis is gone.”

“Yes, but he still can move. I’m controlling his body right now.”

Behind Pamela was Latis’ corpse. It had gone through a simple medical procedure and was standing. Unfortunately, it was impossible to control his expression. Thus, Latis was simply staring blankly, expressionless. His corpse had been turned into a remote biological automaton.

“Chloe-sama. To continue my duty, I wish to be granted permission to use Rank 9 equipment.”

Chloe looked at Pamela in confusion.

“I don’t have the authority to grant you that. I’m sure you are aware, no?”

“I am aware. My hope is for Chloe-sama to convey this request to the branch head, Beltram-sama.”

“…What are you planning to do with this equipment?”

“Of course, I will hunt Akira and Reina down with it. Unfortunately, the Hunters could not take Akira down even when they prepared equipment and tools worthy of a 50 billion Aurum bounty hunt. We could increase Akira’s bounty. But at this point, it would be more efficient to hunt him down ourselves. We’ve also confirmed intervention from the fourth ward. So, I am sure that Beltram-sama would understand this as a necessity.”

“I’m sure he doesn’t want you to kill Reina’s group though. What’s more, if a battle between wards breaks out, I’m sure that the branch heads would have to make their moves as well. I think we can deal with Reina’s group when that happens.”

“Considering that they attacked us with such precise timing, it is likely they are already working with Akira. We’ve also received a report that the head of the fourth ward, Flip-sama, had made contact with Akira as well. I’m certain Beltram-sama will not keep quiet for long. Thus, I believe this is a good opportunity to take care of Reina’s group, along with Akira.”

Chloe frowned. She noticed how Pamela kept coming up with counterarguments. This was no longer a matter of a servant presenting her master with options. Instead, she was pushing Chloe to make a specific decision. The authority to make a decision laid on the master, not the servant. Chloe glared at Pamela through the display. She placed a unique pressure on her, as a member of the founding family of Lion Steel.

Even so, Pamela did not step back. Her eyes were filled with emotions as she stared back at Chloe.

Chloe gave a light sigh and disengaged from the staring contest.

“…Fine. I will ask the branch head. Well then, it’s already pretty late. I will end the call here. Pamela, take a good rest and prepare for your next task.”

“Thank you very much.”

Pamela gave a deep bow and closed the call. After Chloe disappeared from the display, Latis walked and stood beside her. Pamela smiled at him.

Although this was still his real body, he was already dead and got turned into an automaton.

“Latis, let’s do our best.”

Pamela’s smile was tainted by the insanity stirring inside her.

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After Pamela closed the call, Chloe sighed once again and looked up at the ceiling.

“So… Latis is gone… huh…”

Chloe was still quite young. It would still feel natural to call her a little girl. For such a young girl, it was natural for her to hold feelings toward him, a loyal servant, who had served and supported her for years.

As a member of the founder family of Lion Steel, she never revealed her longing for him. Even if she had to hide how she felt, it did not mean such emotions went away. She had always thought that one day, when she had enough influence and power, she would convey her feelings to Latis. A day when someone she loved got taken as hostage would be trivial to resolve with her power and influence.

But that day would never come.

Beads of tears formed and ran down her cheek. Chloe kept wiping them off with her finger and flicking them away.

It was indeed depressing to lose someone important to her. However, she could not allow it to affect her. As a member of the Lorentz family, it was something that she was not allowed to do. That was just how she was brought up, and that was what she had decided to do. Being unable to express her sorrow except with tears, only showed her immaturity. She shed her last tear and wiped it away. It was as if she had declared that final teardrop to suffice as a representation of her sorrow and that she had overcome Latis’ death.

She then sighed once more. But this time, she had a sorrowful look on her face.

“…But still, losing two servants really hurts.”

Chloe already knew that Pamela’s goal had shifted to taking revenge. However, she was completely fine with it. The only thing that bothered her was Pamela’s overwhelming desire for revenge, which had taken priority over her loyalty toward the company. A servant who prioritized their own desires over their master was no servant at all.

With Latis gone and Pamela’s change in attitude, Chloe had effectively lost two of her retinues.

“Up until now, I’ve been using both of them as my extension outside the inner wall. I must now think of another way…”

Since Chloe no longer recognized Pamela as her servant, she had no other choice but to abandon her.

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The next day, Akira woke up in Sheryl’s room. As he was about to push his body up from the bed, he felt something obstruct him. He turned his head and noticed Sheryl was using him as a pillow. Therefore, he carefully moved her aside, so as not to wake her up, and left the bed.

That was when Alpha greeted him.

“Morning, Akira! How was your sleep?”

“Alpha, morning! I think I slept pretty well. Carol’s camping vehicle is comfortable but it’s just that as I thought, I can sleep much better on a proper bed.”

Akira stated. Alpha smiled wryly and said to him.

“Well, from what you said, it seems like you really did have an amazing sleep.”

“Why are you emphasising that?”

“Unlike when you slept in the middle of the wasteland, everyone basically now knows where you are. Don’t you feel anxious at all?”

“Ahhh, you have a point.”

Akira broke out a smile. It did make sense now that Alpha mentioned it.

“…Well, it should be fine. If something happens, I’m sure you’ll wake me up, right? I will at least have enough time to put on my augmented suit… Right?”

“Of course! You can leave that to me.”

Alpha smiled confidently and proclaimed. Akira also smiled back at her with confidence.

Sheryl suddenly woke up and looked around, confused.

“…Akira, good morning. Who are you talking to?”

“Nah, I was just talking to myself.”

“…? Is that so?”

Akira replied so nonchalantly that Sheryl did not find it suspicious at all. Thus, she dropped the subject.

Noticing that he escaped from scrutiny, Akira exhaled in relief. He still maintained his expression as he telepathically spoke to Alpha.

“…That was dangerous, I should be more careful.”

“Well, I guess that just means that you were really able to relax here.”

Seeing Alpha smiling teasingly at him, Akira made a bitter smile. He reminded himself to be extra careful.

Around the same time, Katsuragi was driving his trailer through the slums, which were not normally empty. As usual, Darris was sitting on the seat beside him. However, for some reason, he was frowning. He was looking at Katsuragi with a stern gaze.

“Say, Katsuragi… Are you sure we will be okay? Don’t you think this is a little too dangerous?”

Even Katsuragi seemed to be as equally worried as Darris. However, since he had made his decision, there was no hesitation in his voice.

“I know. But if this goes well, it will be massively profitable. This is a golden opportunity. You know that, right?”

“Of course, I know. But… If it doesn’t go well, they will hunt us like fugitives, you know?”

Katsuragi laughed heartily as if to push aside his doubts and worries.

“Don’t worry! Compared to that time when we went to the frontline like a couple of madmen, this is basically nothing!”

“Is that so? I honestly think this time is more or less as dangerous as that time, though. We almost got killed back then too, remember? If we hadn’t met Akira, we would have been dead by now, you know?”

“But that doesn’t change the fact that we’re still alive and kicking now! Also, what Akira did back then was basically hold off a whole monster swarm. He did it with just a single AAH assault rifle, right? So, if all of us have better equipment, he’ll do just fine. That’s where I’ll place my bets!”

The trailer was filled to the brim. It was filled with powerful equipment that no normal Hunters around Kugamayama city would be able to afford. Naturally, Katsuragi would normally not deal with these kinds of equipment. However, he did this only for one person. He was betting everything on Akira.

“And if we can sell everything to him, it can be chalked up as a single favour from us! We can also get even more money! We can’t afford to let this chance slip by! Darris, you should get yourself fired up too!!”

Darris had been together with Katsuragi for a long time. As he recalled all the crazy things that they did together out in the wasteland, Darris smiled and agreed.

“Geez, it can’t be helped then! Good grief! Here we are, running through the slums but it feels as tense as the front-line wasteland!”

At the moment, a 50 billion bounty target was hiding inside the slums. Thus, there was a high chance high-ranking Hunters after Akira would attack the slums. Darris was aware of this and was keeping his eyes on the scanner, which kept close watch of his surroundings.

“Katsuragi! I’m basically helping you go through this dangerous place. So, make sure to pay me handsomely if this goes well, yeah?”

“Of course! So, make sure that you do your job properly, okay!?”

Katsuragi and Darris were laughing. Everything out of their mouth was spoken at the top of their lungs as they were heading toward Sheryl’s HQ, where Akira was.

As Akira was checking his equipment inside the camping vehicle, he received a message from Katsuragi. Thus, he decided to go out of HQ to greet him. He opened up the robust shutter to allow Katsuragi in. Once Katsuragi moved the trailer inside, the shutter closed once again. Akira stared at Katsuragi, who was in the driver’s seat with a solemn expression.

“Katsuragi, let me confirm this first. It’s only you and Darris in that trailer, right?”

“Yeah, I came here with powerful equipment specifically for you. After all, you got a 50 billion bounty on your head. Feel free to thank me.”

As Katsuragi spoke in a good mood, Akira’s gaze turned cold.

“Alright then. In that case, you don’t mind if I kill anyone else inside that trailer, right?”

“…What?”

Katsuragi was obviously confused. Darris, on the other hand, quickly understood what was going on and reached for his rifle. He quickly aimed it inside the trailer. Meanwhile, he used his information-gathering device to check for anyone else inside. However, he did not find anyone else. He still had his rifle aimed inside the trailer as he glanced at Akira and asked.

“Akira… There should be no one else other than us here. Is there someone else?”

Akira lowered his shoulders and shook his head.

“Nope, sorry. It was just to be safe.”

Katsuragi and Darris sighed in relief at the exact same time.

“Good grief, don’t scare me like that!”

“Sorry, I had to at least be this cautious. I’m sure you can understand that too, right?”

“Well, yeah. But if you would go this far, I’m sure you know just how dangerous it is for us to do this, right?”

“Yeah, and I’m thankful for it.”

“That’s good to hear. Come in then.”

Katsuragi changed gear and invited Akira in from the back door of the trailer. He and Darris also moved to the back of the trailer. He had the weapons he was so proud of behind him. Katsuragi looked at Akira with a serious expression of a merchant.

“Let me tell you this beforehand. I will give you a tour of my goods, but the price would be the wasteland price. You might accuse me of greatly jacking

up the price. However, from my perspective, I'm basically selling weapons, ammo, and medicine to a 50 billion bounty target set by Lion Steel. This price reflects the risk we are taking. So I won't accept any complaints, alright?"

"I know. Don't worry. Kibayashi also warned me about that before."

"Alright then. Let's start. Ah, by the way, I'm fine if you want to bargain, so feel free to do so."

Katsuragi's smile was one typical of a merchant. He wore it as he started giving Akira a tour inside his trailer.

Akira was listening to Katsuragi while looking around together with Carol and Sheryl.

Sheryl's eyes popped out when she found out that most of the goods here could easily cost above 100 million Aurum. However, watching how Carol and Akira were so calm about it, she felt this huge gap between them. She could not help but feel a bit discouraged by it.

Carol thought that they were indeed rather expensive, but considering the situation that Akira was in, it was understandable to some extent. Thus, she bitterly smiled. She then casually asked Akira about his budget.

"Akira, do you think you can buy some? If it's too expensive, I don't mind helping you with the bargaining if you want me to."

Akira pondered over it for a moment. He believed Carol would include her side job into the bargain, so he shook his head and said.

"No, it's fine."

"You don't need to hold back, you know?"

"You can do whatever you want with the ones that you're going to buy. As for me, I'll just buy mine normally."

Hearing that, Carol's smile turned rather stiff.

“…Akira, are you… bothered by that kind of thing?”

“10 billion Aurum per night, right? Even I have no desire to owe you that big of a debt. So, I’ll thank you for your offer but still refuse. Thank you for the offer.”

Carol was relieved after Akira expressed himself. She then continued browsing the other items available.

“I see. In that case, I guess I will also just buy them normally…”

Akira also continued browsing the items. But since all of them were extremely expensive, he was having a hard time adjusting his budget. As he was pondering over his choices, no good idea came up. Suddenly, a telepathic call from Shirou reached him.

“Akira, you need money, right?”

“Yep.”

“I have some here, you know? Of course, you have to pay it back later.”

“So, you’re planning to make me take on your request as repayment, huh?”

“Exactly. I helped you back then during that fight against those Hunters as well. Adding that into the equation, you should owe me enough to take my request, no?”

In order to encourage Akira to take his request, Shirou had to help Akira first. That was the reason why he was travelling with Akira in the first place. Though, because he was so close, he got involved in the hunt for Akira. Nonetheless, that was an opportunity to provide support to Akira. With his previous support and the sum he was going to lend Akira, he thought that it should be sufficient to make Akira accept his request.

However, Akira rejected his offer.

“I see. But unfortunately, it is not enough.”

“What?! You might have gotten killed back there if it wasn’t for my help, you know? That’s just how valuable my help is, no?”

“Yeah, I do think so.”

“Then why? Wouldn’t it be enough already?”

“Because I evened it out when I didn’t tell Yanagisawa of your location. As a matter of fact, considering how strong those two were, I would even say you owe me one. After all, those two were even more powerful than those Hunters, and you know it. Furthermore, Yanagisawa said that he would kill me if I don’t tell them your location. Even so, I still refused to tell them. That one is a huge favour from me, don’t you think?”

Shirou went silent. Since he knew just how powerful Hammerz was, he could not refute Akira’s words. He only thought that Akira refused to leak his location because of pride. However, it does not change the fact that it would have been the end of him if Akira had told them his location. As he thought it over and really could not bring himself to say, ‘that it was not counted since he never asked him to do so’.

Akira then continued.

“And also, if you’re seriously thinking of employing me for firepower, you should pay for all my equipment instead of just a part of it. That way, I will get better equipment, which is also a good thing for you, right?”

“That’s true, but still…”

“I can promise you that I will use all the money you give me for equipment. Well, I won’t tell you to believe me or anything. And I won’t force you either. It’s completely up to you.”

Shirou hesitated. It was a promise offered by someone who would not confess even when faced with Yanagisawa. Therefore, Akira’s promise was something he could rely on. Judging from Akira’s battle against the Hunters, there was no denying Akira was indeed a powerful Hunter.

Furthermore, it would be awful for him as well if Akira died. Overall, it was not a bad idea to increase Akira's upfront payment.

Even so, with no Chrome left, if Shirou also lost all his Aurum, it would really be the end if Akira died or betrayed him. Thus, he could not make his decision. He could not decide whether to place all his bets on Akira or not.

As such, he chose to make a compromise.

"…How about this instead? As a form of upfront payment, I will pay for everything this time. How much will you owe me if I do that? I know that your situation is not that good right now, but I can say the same for me as well."

"Depending on my situation after I got my new equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry, I at least will be willing to prioritize your request."

"And when will that equipment arrive?"

"In about a week if I'm lucky, a month if nothing bad happens, and three months if I'm really unlucky. Or so I was told about a week ago."

"What the heck, it's already been a week since then?"

The time window that Sugadome gave to Shirou was only 1 month, of which he had already used 1 week. It was a bit doubtful if he could wait until Akira's new equipment arrived.

"Akira, do you need that equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry no matter what?"

"Like I said. It would depend on the situation. If Chloe dies before it arrives, I have no reason to break through the inner wall. Depending on how much I owe you, I don't mind doing your request first while waiting for my new equipment. Though, I can get much stronger if you are willing to wait. Unless there's something important. To be honest, I would rather wait for my new equipment."

Shirou was in a pickle. Though it depended on his luck, waiting was not completely out of the question. Thus, he decided to try to increase that possibility as much as possible with his own effort.

“Alright then. That’s good enough for me.”

“I know I’m the one who suggested it but are you really fine with that?”

“Yeah. I don’t want you to die after all. I will handle the account transfer from here. Later then.”

Shirou then closed the call. That was right when Katsuragi finished the tour.

“Akira, that would be all the items that I have today… I know that your budget is not unlimited. It would all be in vain if you are too frugal now and end up getting yourself killed, yeah? I think it’s better if you spend as much as you can here.”

Katsuragi believed that Akira’s budget this time was tighter than usual. Thus, he said that in an attempt to push him to spend more. Katsuragi was greatly amazed when he heard the news that Akira managed to repel the Hunters who came after him. Unfortunately, that event would not yield Akira any funding. As a matter of fact, Akira would have had to spend a lot to repel them.

Even when he was aware of this, Katsuragi still stuffed his trailer with expensive equipment and came to Akira. This was all based on nothing but his intuition. That was why he made an offer to Akira.

“But well, if you don’t have enough to purchase what you want, here is the thing. About the bargaining I mentioned earlier…”

“Ahh, don’t worry about that. I will just buy them normally.”

“Eh?”

Katsuragi was obviously taken aback.

However, Akira simply ignored him as he casually picked some equipment off the shelves. An augmented suit, ammo, medicines, bike parts. He carried all kinds of things off from the trailer and unloaded them into the garage.

“I guess this should be enough. Katsuragi, how much is the total?”

“…Come again?”

Katsuragi managed to return to reality as he awkwardly calculated the total.

“A-ah, r-right! Rounding it up, it is 16 billion Aurum.”

Akira took out his Hunter ID and casually handed it over to Katsuragi. Katsuragi clumsily received the ID with a stiff smile. He processed the payment, and as expected, it went through without an issue.

The moment Katsuragi saw the payment notice, he was so shocked that he nearly fainted. Thankfully, Darris flusteredly held Katsuragi up.

“Katsuragi!? Get a hold of yourself!”

Seeing how Katsuragi was laughing awkwardly due to the shock, Akira was reminded of the amount of money that he used in that transaction.

“…I heard that even 10 billion Aurum is only spare change. But… Yeah… As I thought… It is not really something that can be considered as a small sum….”

Alpha smiled wryly when she heard him say that.

“It seems like you’ve grown to the point where your equipment can no longer be bought using spare change anymore. But front-line equipment is even stronger than this. Make sure you don’t let your guard down. Let’s continue to wait for them to arrive, okay?”

“Of course… But still, it makes me wonder just how crazy the eastern front-line is.”

Akira began to imagine a perilous place. A place which even his new 16 billion Aurum equipment would not suffice. A place where he had to get even stronger equipment just to have a chance to survive. As his thoughts wandered off, his body continued to move as he proceeded to prepare his new equipment.

Meanwhile, Katsuragi continued to laugh awkwardly. It took some time before he could finally calm down.

Seeing Akira preparing his new equipment, Sheryl lightly sighed and thought.

[16 billion Aurum, huh? The gap between us is only getting wider again…]

The relics from Tsubaki's area, which were coming to her shop with the help of Inabe, were a huge boon to her relic shop business. Unfortunately, Sheryl could only support Akira for about 100 million Aurum.

She thought that at this rate, she should be able to repay all her debt to Akira soon. However, upon seeing how Akira just paid 16 billion Aurum like it was nothing. She felt disheartened. After all, her perceived worth of 100 million Aurum crashed right into the ground.

Furthermore, the relic shop was temporarily put on hold because of the current situation. The size of the gang had also greatly diminished as well. It had become exceedingly difficult for her to repay Akira.

Sheryl could not hide her sorrow. She had thought that she was slowly but surely getting closer to Akira. But now, reality has hit her. She found out that was not the case at all.

Eventually, Katsuragi returned to his senses. He heaved a huge sigh wearing an equally huge smile. He glanced at Sheryl with a frown.

"Sheryl, just when exactly did Akira become able to casually pay that much? I heard that he received quite a lot from the inter-city transport escort mission. However, I thought that he had already spent it all on his own equipment."

“…It’s Akira, after all. I’m sure he’s earning from other sources as well.”

“You have a point…”

Judging from Sheryl’s reaction, Katsuragi was certain that Sheryl was equally clueless about how Akira had earned so much. Thus, he began to be suspicious of Akira’s relationship with Sheryl. After all, Akira did not even share his monetary sources with her. Since he thought that it was better to keep it to himself, Katsuragi did not voice it out.

Sheryl naturally noticed. However, she was pretending not to notice. Thus, she asked Katsuragi in a manner which seemed as if she was venting.

“Katsuragi-san, if you really had thought that Akira did not have that much, then why did you come here with all this expensive equipment? I don’t see how that would be useful to you at all. After all, even if you brought them here, Akira would not have been able to purchase them.”

“Ahh, well, about that, I just thought that if it’s Akira, then it should be okay. Well, it turns out that my hunch was right, no? That just means my intuition as a merchant is as good as ever. Though I might sound haughty, feel free to admire my merchant skill. After all, I did not let this chance slip by.”

Katsuragi really thought that Akira would not be able to afford anything but a handful of ammo. The reason why he brought expensive equipment, knowing Akira would most likely not be able to purchase them, was to lure Akira to negotiate with him.

As a 50 billion bounty target, many Hunters were closely observing Akira’s moves. When Akira managed to repel the groups of Hunters that attacked him, it was only natural for other Hunters to get interested in his equipment. It was an extremely effective method of advertising.

Katsuragi had brought the expensive equipment from Kiryou and TOSON, using Kibayashi as an intermediary to procure them. He was planning on renting them to Akira, which would bind him under a contract. If everything went as he had envisioned it, he would be able to get powerful

connections to these large companies and force Akira to only purchase equipment from him. The profits from this were huge. Naturally, at that point, his relationship with Akira would change to that of a lender and a borrower. However, since it was not a sale but instead, a rental, it was a plan made for long-term profits.

Unfortunately, Akira did not borrow from him but managed to purchase new equipment from Katsuragi. Thus, the rental contract of equipment worth 16 billion Aurum had turned to dust. Instead, it had become a pure sale of 16 billion Aurum. The transaction of 16 billion Aurum had shocked Katsuragi so much that he nearly fainted.

Sheryl had an inkling of what Katsuragi was trying to do. Thus, she hatched a plan and then lightly reminded Katsuragi, that it was all possible because the person in question was Akira.

Sheryl then reminded Katsuragi.

“Well, your sale went so well that you nearly fainted. Please continue to support us with that amazing business skill of yours.”

“Of course, that is, as long as you and Akira are together.”

“…Naturally.”

This meant that their relationship would end the moment Akira died. They both had all kinds of thoughts in their minds as they were staring silently at Akira, who was busy with his new equipment.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 281, The Aftermath of A Trouble

Index

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After finishing their businesses with Akira and the others, Katsuragi and Darris started their preparation to leave Sheryl's base. Before he left, Katsuragi, who was already sitting in the driver's seat, left a few words to Akira.

"I'm glad that I don't have to go looking for you out in the middle of the wasteland… Good luck… And don't die, Akira."

"…You too. I heard that the area around here is regarded as a part of the wasteland. So, be careful out there."

"You can definitely say that again."

Both of them smiled at each other. Akira, with his usual smile and Katsuragi, with a wry one. Katsuragi then started the trailer and left.

Akira closed the shutter down and heaved a sigh.

[I got new equipment and replenished my ammo stock. I guess what's left is to wait, huh?]

He would attack back when attacked. If there were no problems, he would raid the inner wall once he got his new equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry. Either way, there was no rush to do either. The only thing he could do right now was to wait. With that in mind, Akira reminded himself to calm down. Not to get ahead of himself.

Alpha, who saw him act in such a manner, found it to be rather strange.

“Akira. What’s with that troubled face? You got new equipment and were able to replenish your reserve ammo, right?”

“…Well, it’s 16 billion Aurum, you know? Although it’s an upfront payment, it’s basically a form of debt. I don’t have the money to pay it back.”

Akira was thinking of repaying any of his debt as soon as possible. Naturally, paying the debt back was his priority and he assumed that the other party did think of it as a debt. Even so, 16 billion Aurum was not a small sum for Akira.

“We can just do his request sometime soon. I’m sure it will be fine.”

“Well, that might be true. But we don’t know for sure when we will actually be able to do his request. A debt which I don’t know when I can pay back… I still really can’t mentally set it aside.”

At the moment, Akira could not achieve anything without making some sacrifices. Nonetheless, he still feels like he might have made a mistake. His thoughts were still stuck with the sum that he had received from Shirou as upfront payment.

Alpha smiled and tried to cheer him up.

“Let’s just hope that you will find a time after we’re done with the current issues. Your worries are meaningless if you die after all, right?”

“…You’re right.”

Akira finally relaxed. He might not be able to pay back the 16 billion Aurum debt. However, to at least begin repaying, he needed to survive. Thus, he decided to look at his situation with optimism.

“Akira, putting that aside, you have received a message from Drankam and Reina. Both are requesting to meet you in person.”

After Akira heard the details of both messages from Alpha, he was a little bit caught off guard. He asked Alpha to tell them to come here if they really wanted to meet him. It did not take long for both to reply: ‘I am coming right away’.

A vehicle with Drankam’s logo was racing through the slums. There were only two people in that vehicle: Arabe, who was a negotiator from Drankam and Shikarabe. Arabe was the one who had to explain the situation to Akira, and was there to speak with him. Meanwhile, Shikarabe was there as Arabe’s escort.

With the looming trouble just right around the corner, Arabe, who was sitting on the driver’s assistant seat, sighed.

“Negotiate with a 50 billion Aurum bounty target, huh… This is not something a normal Hunter gang would do. Even if we’re from the same city, you know?”

Shikarabe smiled wryly.

“But we have no other choice but to do it, right? To prevent further conflict with Akira after the Katsuya incident, we even went as far as to prepare a peace treaty through the Hunter Office. If we are going to scrap that peace treaty, in the worst-case scenario, the whole gang might get eradicated, you know?”

“And that’s by the Hunter Office? Or by Akira?”

“Is there a difference?”

Hearing that, Arabe once again sighed and could not refute. Nonetheless, he commented.

“To think that incident would cause problems till this point… Katsuya was a huge pain when he was still alive, and he is still causing trouble even after his death. What a really troublesome guy.”

“That’s just the way it is, but it is also thanks to him that Drankam can grow this big. So, let’s just think of it as us finally needing to pay our dues.”

Arabe raised his eyebrows since it sounded like Shikarabe giving Katsuya recognition.

“I didn’t expect you of all people would say something like that. I thought you hate him.”

“And I did tell you this so many times before. I’m not that stupid as to let my personal feeling affect my evaluation.”

“Really now…?”

Seeing how Shikarabe was talking about Katsuya with a smile, Arable cracked out a soft smile. He concluded that his friend had already gotten over Katsuya.

“But still, what can I say… It’s as you had warned me before. I’m glad that I didn’t invite Akira to join Drankam. No one in their right mind would pick a fight with Lion Steel. In the worst-case scenario, he might even drag Drankam into his fight with Lion Steel. Thank goodness I didn’t invite him.”

“Told you. My intuition is as sharp as ever.”

“So, what is your intuition saying this time?”

“Hmm, let’s see. Well, we should manage somehow, I guess?”

“I see. I guess I will pin my hope on that intuition of yours.”

Arabe smiled as he was partially serious about what he said. Seeing his friend like this, Shikarabe cracked out a bitter smile. He seemed to be genuinely happy that his friend had so much faith in him. After all, it was not an exaggeration to say that Shikarabe and Arabe had the fate of Drankam on their shoulders. The weight continued to press on them as they proceeded through the slums and into where Akira was.

Around the same time, a vehicle with a Lion Steel Eastern District Fourth Ward Branch's logo on it was racing through the slums. It was a vehicle that Reina's group had borrowed. There was a large Lion Steel logo painted on it, which bothered Reina.

"Say, Shiori, is it really going to be fine meeting Akira in this vehicle?"

"I have contacted Akira-sama beforehand and I have sent the ID code of this vehicle. As long as Akira-sama doesn't see us as hostile, I am sure that he will not attack this vehicle. Moreover, I cannot recommend going through the wasteland on foot. Meanwhile, if we try to hide with camouflage, it would make us look suspicious."

"Wasteland, huh…"

"Yes, please think of this area as a part of the wasteland. I'm not being hyperbolic. It really is being treated as part of the wasteland."

With a 50 billion bounty target hiding in the slums, the border to the lower district was now being guarded by the city defence squad. Basically, it was recognised as a dangerous area. There would be no surprise if a large-scale battle suddenly broke out. Thus, it was to be expected that the area got recognized as a part of the wasteland.

Kanae smiled amusedly and asked.

"Well, Ane-san. There's no need to worry about the small things at this point, no?"

"Small things…? It's for Milady's safety, you know?"

“Ane-san, are you being serious? The moment Milady agreed to come with us to kill Chloe-sama, there’s no need to mention this kind of small things anymore.”

Shiori frowned. She could not refute Kanae’s point.

They had basically abandoned the third ward and joined the fourth ward. They could have asked the fourth ward to ensure Reina’s safety. However, it would be meaningless if the fourth ward used this as an opportunity to take Reina hostage. Reina also adamantly insisted on joining them. Thus, Shiori made the decision to take Reina along and protect Reina by herself.

Togami suddenly interjected.

“Shiori-san, Akira will believe you when you state we are not hostile towards him, right? Wouldn’t that already be good enough?”

“Well, that’s true, but…”

“I don’t see any other options. The third ward will see us as enemies. Especially after we allied with the fourth ward to kill Chloe and the others. To prevent any possibility of the fourth ward handing Reina over to the third ward, it is better to bring her along with us. I believe you already considered this, and it is the main reason why you agreed to take her with us. It’s also why we are working together.”

“That’s true, but still…”

Shiori sounded defeated as bit her lips. Watching her smile, Reina finally joined into the conversation.

“I do feel bad for dragging all of you here for my selfishness. But please help me out here.”

“Please don’t worry about it Milady. As long as I am alive, I will always be by your side to serve you.”

Shiori was so happy that her master was worried for her. That joy made her inadvertently pledge her loyalty. However, she soon realised that her words,

‘please don’t worry about it Milady’, had basically approved of their current situation. Furthermore, Reina intentionally spoke to induce her to say what she had said.

“Milady… You’ve really become strong.”

“Is that so? I will take as a compliment.”

Reina smiled happily with dignity suitable for a master.

When they arrived at Sheryl’s base, they also saw Shikarabe and Arabe. As both parties stated that they were there to meet Akira, they both went inside the base together.

Akira was a bit surprised to see Drankam’s group come in together with Reina’s group. However, he decided to talk with Drankam’s group first.

Facing a 50 billion bounty target, Arabe nervously and cautiously stated why he was here.

“I’m sure you have read my message, but allow me to convey it one more time. First, Drankam has no desire to be hostile with you. So please, keep this in mind as you listen to what I need to say next.”

It was basically about what was left of the Katsuya faction. What they might do, how to handle them, and a formal apology from Drankam.

The Katsuya faction was a huge faction inside Drankam. However, with Katsuya’s death, its influence quickly waned. Nonetheless, they had infallible loyalty towards Katsuya. Many of them still held a strong grudge against Akira. Some of them signed the peace treaty with a heavy heart. Some even outright refused to sign the peace treaty.

In the end, Drankam decided not to kick all of them out of the gang. Instead, they chose to keep them under close observation. After all, it would be troublesome for Drankam if they sneaked out of the gang to attack Akira on the same day they left. The peace treaty between Drankam and Akira was made through the Hunter Office. If they left Drankam and immediately

attacked Akira, Drankam could not simply relinquish their responsibility by claiming that those who attacked Akira had already left the gang. Moreover, many of the Katsuya faction were youngsters. In order not to prolong the feud between the young and the veteran members of the gang, the gang decided not to deliver any harsh punishment onto them. They originally planned to let time naturally chip away their grudge.

Their decision was partially right. Unfortunately, it had also partially backfired. Just the other day, several members who were under close watch suddenly vanished. Since they were not kicked out of the gang and were put under close watch, Drankam was able to track their movements. There was fear that they would use Akira's situation as an opportunity to attack him. Since they stayed with Drankam after the incident, Drankam could not simply claim that they had nothing to do with the gang. No matter what they come up with, their association could not be dropped. Thus, the gang had no other choice but to do something to resolve this situation internally.

"In this situation, I want you to understand something. Even if they attack you sometime soon, it's not Drankam's will. They are acting independently. We will take this as an internal issue and deal with them ourselves. Considering the situation, you might want to ask for some escorts from Drankam. However, this is an internal problem. So, I'm sorry to say this. Although we will not be hostile with you, we cannot join your side. We will stay neutral, so I hope you can understand."

Arabe explained and lowered his head to perform a deep bow.

On the other hand, Akira did not understand why he would come all the way here just to say this. For all that he cared, they could just handle it themselves without telling him. Thus, Alpha warned Akira.

This was just how badly Drankam did not want to get into a fight with him. However, Drankam was also afraid of being seen as Akira's ally by Lion Steel. That was why they came all the way here. It was to cement their neutral position. Thus, although with a slight delay, Akira was finally able to understand why Arabe came all the way here just to explain.

“I see. Fine then. It’s also a positive for me that you have no wish to fight me. It’s also helpful if you are going to eliminate those who are trying to attack me. So, feel free to do whatever you want.”

“Thank you very much.”

Arabe raised his head and sighed in relief. Watching him, Shikarabe smiled wryly.

The next order of business was with Reina’s group. Reina stepped to the front as the representative.

“Uhhh, let’s see… where should I start… I guess I should start with our situation, huh?”

Reina then gave a short explanation to Akira. It was basically about Reina’s group accepting a mission to kill Chloe from Lion Steel Eastern District Fourth Ward Branch. The fact that they were already opposing Chloe. They even tried to attack Chloe’s group. Although they did not manage to kill her, they were able to kill Latis. They also managed to kill off some Hunters that were attacking Akira in the process. Finally, in the worst-case scenario, a war between branches might break out.

Akira was astonished. In the previous message, Reina only mentioned someone about their discussion being related to Lion Steel and Chloe. He never thought that it would be this big of a bombshell.

“So, there’s something I need to confirm with you about the matter with Chloe. It’s not like you will tell us to keep our hands off her since she’s your prey, right?”

“Nah. Just because I want to kill her, doesn’t mean I wish others will not try to do so. You can go ahead and kill her if you want. As a matter of fact, I don’t really care even if it’s due to a disease or an accident. As long as she’s dead, I don’t really care.”

“I knew you would say that.”

Reina casually exclaimed, but deep inside, she was extremely relieved.

Logically, antagonizing the Lion Steel company would yield no benefits. Nonetheless, Akira had done it. Thus, there was a good chance that Akira tends to decide based on his emotions. Even if he did it purely out of his own interest, it only proves just how abnormal his thought process was.

Thus, Reina was worried that Akira might insist on killing Chloe with his own hands. That he might see anyone in his way as enemies. Reina was relieved after she was given confirmation, everything was just her own concerns.

“Just one more thing. We are both aiming to kill Chloe. So, do you want to work together? That way, the Fourth Ward will be able to provide you with support. I don’t think it’s a bad idea.”

“I’m sorry, but I have to refuse. I want to have the freedom to decide my actions. If I work together with someone else and something goes wrong, it might turn really troublesome.”

“That’s true… If you’re going to say yes here, then you would have already accepted branch manager Flip’s offer.”

Reina expected Akira to turn down her offer. Since he did as she had expected, she moved on to the next subject.

“In that case, would it be okay if we stay close to you? With Chloe after you, it’s better for us if we stay near you. If possible, we want to use this HQ as well.”

That was when Shikarabe suddenly interjected.

“It would be great if you can grant us permission as well. Though we won’t stay as your bodyguard, this is a good opportunity for us to hunt those from Drankam who want to kill you. You’re planning to stay around here for the time being, right?”

“As long as you don’t get in my way, you can do whatever you want. If you want to stay here, you should talk to Sheryl. After all, it’s not like I own this place. I’m just borrowing this place from Sheryl as well. If she tells me to get out, I will have no other choice but to leave.”

Akira said it as a matter of fact. There were no signs he was joking. The others there were flummoxed and inadvertently turned towards Sheryl.

“I won’t say such a thing.”

There were thorns in her words. It was rare for her to express annoyance toward Akira like this. Akira found it to be a bit weird. Meanwhile, seeing their exchange, Carol smiled bitterly.

Shikarabe and the others were even more discombobulated. It seems like Akira would really obediently leave if Sheryl told him to get out. That was the atmosphere of the room at the moment.

Shikarabe glanced at Arabe and Reina glanced at Shiori. Both Shiori and Arabe immediately stepped forward to negotiate. They treated Sheryl not as a leader of a slum gang, but as someone with the power to have a say on Akira’s actions. As such, they had no other choice but to take their negotiations extremely seriously.

The result was, Reina’s group being allowed to take one of the rooms inside HQ. Since it was a room that was prepared for guests who were looking for relics from Tsubaki’s territory, the room was well decorated and of considerably good quality. Togami was amazed when he stepped into the room.

“Whoah! I didn’t know something like this existed inside the slums. And here I thought they would assign us into a warehouse or something, but this is amazing.”

Erio, who guided Reina’s group to the room, smiled wryly when he heard Togami’s remark.

“Well, there’s a good chance this whole place will be turned into a pile of rocks tomorrow.”

Akira was also inside the building. It would not be strange if the Hunters after him attacked this place. The building’s defences have been bolstered by several modifications to the point it was as strong as a fort. Nonetheless, Erio, who had known Akira for a long time, knew once a building got involved in a fight with Akira in it, there was a good chance that it would collapse.

“This room is also equipped with a bath. Though, you can use the large bath that everyone usually uses if you want. For that one, you need to book a slot first before you can use it. You can book your time through the terminal installed in this room. Ah, but you need to know this first. If Akira-san or Boss wants to use it, we will prioritize them. I’m sorry but that’s just how it is.”

Although the room was luxurious for Togami, it was nothing special for Reina. She casually stepped into the room and looked around.

“I see. Well, it’s only to be expected. It’s Akira and the boss of this place after all. We’re basically here because they allowed us to be here.”

“Yeah, it can’t be helped. It’s Akira-san and the boss. It might be possible to make a compromise if it’s only one of them, but with the two of them together, we can’t really refuse them.”

“Yeah, that’s… Wait? What?”

Reina stopped midway. Erio just said something that caught her completely off guard. She frowned and tilted her head before asking for confirmation.

“Two of them together? Do you mean like…they go in the bath together?”

“Yup, they’re in a relationship, after all.”

“Ohh, that’s a bit unexpected. I always thought that Akira had no interest in that kind of thing. Is that why there’s no separate bath for girls and boys

registered in the reservation system?”

“…Yeah. Anyway, that will be all from me, I will take my leave now.”

Erio was able to notice that Reina had already guessed how their relationship worked. Sheryl was the aggressive one while Akira did not really care that much about it. He did not even care about Sheryl going into the bath with him. He immediately reflected on his words and regretted them. He should not have said anything. Looking for a quick retreat, he left the room.

Unlike Reina, Shiori, and Kanae, who were all female, Togami seemed rather jealous. Reina took notice and smiled as she asked him.

“Togami, want to go?”

Reina did not say ‘together’ but her words already implied it. Reina did it intentionally as her smile deepened.

Togami froze. He then slowly and carefully glanced at Shiori and Kanae.

“If Milady wants to form a serious relationship with Togami-sama, it’s not my place to say anything.”

“As long as I don’t think you’re a bad guy, I won’t do anything.”

Which meant, if it was not a serious relationship, or if he was thought to be a bad guy, it would be his end. He would either be sliced into small pieces or beaten into a pulp. Togami had no courage to affirm that right now.

“I-I will have to go out for a bit. I need to check how Drankam plans to treat us…”

Seeing how Togami basically refused to give a straight answer. Kanae and Shiori commented on him as he awkwardly laughed and left the room.

“What a wimp.”

“Let’s just say that he’s being extra cautious.”

Kanae was smiling amusedly while Shiori heaved a sigh. Reina was laughing since it turned out exactly as she had planned. However, there was a little bit of sorrow in it.

As for Drankam, Sheryl was willing to let Drankam use one of the halls. Drankam also rented out some small rooms for resting. When Togami asked Arabe if he could use one of those small rooms, Arabe refused with no sign of compromise.

“No. I won’t let you make any connections to us. As I said, Drankam is taking a neutral stance. So, we won’t give you any assistance.”

Reina had already formally left the gang. Meanwhile, Togami had formally taken the request from Reina as an individual. Thus, Reina’s group no longer had anything to do with Drankam. The reason why Drankam forced Reina to leave the gang was to prevent the Lion Steel Third Ward branch from seeing the gang as hostile. By maintaining separate relations, Drankam was able to ascertain its neutral stance.

“A neutral stance can also be interpreted as taking the opposite side against all parties, you know? To ensure that wouldn’t happen, we’re being extra careful. Make sure that you don’t get involved with us too. If you want to borrow another room, you should do so without us. If you understand, keep your distance from us.”

“Alright, alright, I’ll do as you suggest.”

Togami sighed and left. After that, Shikarabe asked Arabe.

“What do you think? We can go help Reina’s group and form a connection with the Fourth Ward branch. Togami got pretty powerful weapons from them, right? It would be great if we can get equipment of the same level as him, you know?”

“No. In exchange, I’m sure they’ll want us to help them fight the third ward branch. If Drankam gets involved in a fight between two branches of Lion Steel, we will get wiped out in no time.”

“Then, what if a portion of the Katsuya faction that left the gang went and allied with Chloe? I’m sure they’ll not just throw their lives away. Isn’t that exactly why they’re keeping quiet up until now. There must be some kind of reason they are suddenly making their move now.”

“That’s plausible, but it’s nothing but unfounded worry at the moment. If we ally with the fourth ward due to it, we would be picking a fight with the third ward. Considering the current known facts, we can’t afford to do that.”

Even if a portion of the Katsuya faction suddenly vanished because of Chloe, it was highly likely that they could only muster up till 100 million Aurum of supportive funding. Since Drankam should be able to deal with this internal issue by themselves, there was no need to rely on equipment from Lion Steel. Arabe then added that it was not easy to decide on what course of action they should take.

Shikarabe finally backed off.

“Well, it’s your job. Officers are the ones calculating the profit and losses… So yeah, I get it. It’s just that… I’m a bit interested in equipment from Lion Steel.”

“At the very least, it was not something that I can decide by ourselves here. I will at least bring up the idea to the other officers when we return.”

Arabe continued and this time, laughed amusedly.

“Well, let’s say that we somehow ended up borrowing equipment from Lion Steel. Even if they send in maid outfits, I will have you use them, you know?”

“…Uhh, if that happens, wouldn’t it be butler uniforms? Like the one that Togami is wearing?”

“It’s not like we can tell them what to send. But if we really end up doing that, I bet it will be exceptionally powerful equipment. It might even be worth considering Drankam to break its neutral stance. Well, no matter

what the design is, if we really end up borrowing from them, I'll have you use them, okay?"

"…Uhh, I'm good, I have my own augmented suit, you know…"

"No, no, no. You're basically seen as the leader of the team when you're working outside. I will have you use them to act as an example. I will also do that for Kurosawa. Well, he's interested in that kind of thing if I'm not mistaken. I guess he would be the perfect person for this."

"But if I remember it correctly, he has no hobby cross-dressing though…"

Shikarabe smiled wryly as he thought that he should not have said what he had said back then.

Akira was on the rooftop. He was looking around the surrounding area. A scene of the deserted slums was laid in front of him. Thanks to Alpha's support, he was able to detect anyone in the area.

First was Erio and the others. They were using augmented suits with coordination support as they patrolled the area around HQ. Thanks to their equipment and training, they were able to work effectively as a team. They were already strong enough to fight evenly against common Hunters. However, the Hunters attacking should all be high-ranking Hunters. After all, they were after a target worth 50 billion bounty. Even with everything they had, Erio and the others had zero chance of winning against them. Akira, aware of this, did not expect any meaningful support from them.

At the moment, they were checking the surroundings with the help of the information-gathering devices spread around the area. They even had them installed outside of Sheryl's gang's area. Normally, that would provoke the other gangs into a fight. However, since the area around them basically got abandoned, no one around would complain.

With the help of those information-gathering devices, they were able to check the situation inside the slums from afar. When they spotted Akira on the rooftop, some of them looked unhappy. They quickly looked away and scurried off when Akira looked back at them.

Although there were not many, there were those that shot at Akira. They used their sniper rifles and shot barely within its effective range. That was just how tempting the 50 billion Aurum bounty was. However, even when they managed to shoot Akira from his blind side, Akira would simply evade it. He would make minimal movements and shoot back at them. His powerful bullet did not face anything it could consider a hindrance as it tore through flesh and blew their head off. It was the obvious end to those who mistook Akira's ability to shoot back. They got lured by his bounty and mistook the distance from him for safety.

Alpha smiled and praised Akira.

"Nicely done. It's pretty impressive that you can already do this much all on your own."

"Is that so?… Well, I guess it is if you say so."

However, Akira still had a troubled look on his face. As expected, Alpha got a bit bothered by it.

"Is there anything that you find dissatisfying about that shot?"

"That's not it, It's just… I didn't buy this equipment from Shizuka-san, right? I'm just a bit worried if it's going to be okay…"

One of the reasons why Akira always bought his equipment from Shizuka was because he admired her. Another reason was because of 'superstition'. It was thanks to the equipment that he bought from Shizuka that he was able to survive for this long.

At the moment, he was using equipment that he bought from Katsuragi. Akira knew that he was overthinking, but he could not shake off his worries. Thus, it kept bothering him. Even after he intentionally climbed up to the rooftop, exposed himself, tested his new equipment and had confirmed that it was fine, he still could not help but worry.

Watching him act like this, Alpha smiled and tried to reassure him.

“Don’t worry. It’s perfectly fine. Even that bike that you bought in Zegelt is working well, right? The equipment that will be arriving from Sakashita Heavy Industry is also not from Shizuka’s shop, you know? If you keep getting bothered by this, you won’t be able to fight with a focused mind.”

“…You have a point.”

Akira gave a deep nod. It was as if he was convincing himself of what he had just said.

That was when Togami came up to him, asking for an extra room. When he asked what Akira was doing up there, Akira just said that he was checking his new equipment. As expected, even Togami winced back when he was told this.

Akira did not even need to say that he was using people who were attacking as target practice. Togami already figured it out without the need for Akira to tell him. Strangely enough, he was convinced Akira became a bounty target because of such actions.

Silavin: Honestly, my boy just sees so little worth in human life that it even makes killers shiver.

Other madmen might kill for joy. He literally kills because he wants to test how sharp his knife is.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 282, The Direction Of The Killing Intent

Index

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It had been a week since Akria started living in Sheryl's base. Even so, there were no huge changes to his surroundings. There were no attacks and his new equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry also had not arrived yet. The only unfortunate change was that he no longer could find any targets to practice on, to test his new equipment.

It was not like Akira could do anything about the situation as well. As the situation continued, one day, he heard something from Shirou from inside the camping vehicle.

"Akira, as far as I have investigated, it won't be strange for the next attack to come anytime soon. It'll be even bigger than before."

Their conversation started with good news for Akira. After all, it seemed like it was only a matter of time before Chloe got kicked out of the inner wall.

On paper, Chloe was officially put under house arrest inside Kugamayama city. However, Inabe somehow managed to lift the house arrest. Inabe gave the reason for it being a bad idea to place someone from the Lion Steel Founder Family under house arrest for so long.

Udajima thought it was Inabe's plan to use that as a pretext to remove Akira's monster designation. Thus, he made a counter suggestion during the officer's meeting to not retract Akira's monster designation. In the end, Inabe was forced to back down and was only able to get Chloe's house arrest lifted.

However, it went as Inabe had planned. The reason why Inabe was acting as if he was about to remove Akira's monster designation was simply to shift Udajima's focus to that matter. Now that Chloe was no longer under house arrest, the city had no reason to shelter her. Thus, Inabe could demand protection money from Chloe.

It was already known that someone with a 50 billion Aurum bounty was aiming for her life. Furthermore, Akira was scheduled to get front-line equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry. With the ongoing battle between Lion Steel's Third and Fourth ward, there was a good chance that the city would be engulfed in it if Chloe stayed in the city. Thus, for all these reasons, Inabe was charging as much as possible for Chloe's protection fees.

On the first day, it was only 100 million Aurum. Soon, after multiple negotiations, it was jacked up to 1 billion Aurum per day. He planned on increasing it until he could push Chloe out of the city. It might even reach trillions of Aurum a day.

As for Kugamayama city, the higher the protection fee, the better it was for them. Once Chloe decided to leave the city, there was no need for Akira to try to force his way into it with his front-line weapon anymore. Those who wanted the city to stay neutral and those who preferred to stay out of the fight, supported Inabe's idea because of this reason.

As expected, even the Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward branch could not continue to pay if the protection fees kept going up. It was only a matter of time before Chloe had to leave the city.

"Because of this, the third branch had gathered their military forces in the facility near Higaraka to escort Chloe to another city. To be more precise, they are using this as an excuse to gather soldiers there. Judging from the

scale, it would not be strange for them to suddenly attack Kugamayama city. Though, they continue to claim it as a necessity to fight back against a 50 billion bounty target who has the support of the Fourth branch. Well, City Management keeps pushing the protection fee up using the threat from you as an excuse. So, the third branch can't really complain about the fees."

Akira nodded and asked Shirou a question.

"By the way, how did you get all this information?"

"Well, through a lot of means. The details are confidential."

"I see. Putting that aside, it's quite impressive for you to gather that much information. You're pretty amazing."

"Yup, that's right, I'm indeed amazing, yeah?"

Shirou had pride in his own skill. However, the fact that Akira was not amazed by it up until now was a thorn that continued to bother him. Now that Akira complimented him, Shirou replied back with bolstered smugness.

"Though it might be weird for me to say this myself, information is the key to ruling the world. I was specially trained in the Sakashita facilities to be victorious in any information warfare. I was even receiving special treatment. I'm just that great, you know? That information that I told you just now was something that no normal person could get a hold of. Just to remind you, you owe me one for this."

Akira questioned if he had somehow provoked Shirou in a strange way. He decided to simply continue the conversation in a more soothing manner.

"I know, I know. I owe you one for that. So, when will they make their move? I bet something will happen soon. To be exact, just how soon would that be? A few days? Tomorrow? An hour from now?"

Akira lightly joked as he asked, but Shirou unexpectedly replied with a serious expression.

"…Exactly this instant."

“Hah?”

“They just made their move. They just dispatched a squad from their facility in Higaraka. It’s about 20 large-sized armed vehicles… No, thirty… Wait, there’s more?”

“Armed vehicles? Like tanks?”

“Hmmm, they look more like mobile missile pods. Ooh, they’re stuffed full with missile launchers.”

“Either way, it’s not something that would be normally used near a city.”

“I don’t care about such flimsy rules. The only thing that I care about is the fact that they are bringing out all these weapons from Higaraka to Kugamayama city. This includes powered suits and APCs. So far, that’s all I know.”

Akira pondered with a severe expression. It was completely dependent on their side, whether they would use force to assault the city. Even if it meant antagonizing the city, Akira fully expected them to continue their pursuit.

Lion Steel was a huge company. There was no telling how far it was willing to go against Kugamayama city. The Hunters did try to attack Akira when he was in the midst of negotiations with City Management. However, it was still understandable considering that he had a huge bounty set by Lion Steel. Additionally, although it was located right next to the city, the slums were treated as a part of the wasteland. Thus, there was no reason for them to hesitate in blowing up the whole place if it meant taking him down. Akira’s thoughts narrowed down to – ‘they will definitely attack’. He started to ponder over methods to deal with the upcoming large assault.

“Alpha, what do you think? If they attack the slums, it might be better for me to go out and face them out in the wasteland instead, no?”

“No. Let’s prepare to face them in the slums. They might hesitate if we’re in the slums. After all, their attacks might damage the city. City Management would have to send out the city defence squad as well. So, it

would be better if you can stay within the slum on your bike but not be in this base.”

“Alright, let’s get ready then.”

Although he said that, Akira had already prepared his bike to be refitted with weapons. In other words, he was already fully prepared. The only thing he had to do was warn the others about the upcoming assault.

However, the only one that he could inform was Carol. After all, no one else knew about Shirou’s existence. He could not afford to tell the others. As he was pondering over a way to inform the others, Carol casually came up with a solution.

“Alright. I will slowly let the other people know.”

“Eh? Would that be alright?”

Seeing Akira’s worried expression, she smiled with optimism and said.

“Didn’t I tell you before? Why I’m close to Viola? It is exactly for times like this. It won’t be strange for me to know things that normal people wouldn’t know.”

Akira tilted his head and smiled.

“Ah, you’re right. Alright then. I’ll leave it to you”

“I’ll get it done right away, so just wait for a bit.”

“No, I’m heading out alone. Carol, you stay in the base.”

Carol immediately pouted.

“You’re leaving me behind? Are you saying you don’t need my help anymore?”

“That’s not it. I want you to stay in the camping vehicle together with Shirou. If things go wrong, I will have to return back to living in the

wasteland. Sorry, but I'll leave the camping vehicle and safety of the base to you."

Even after he explained, Carol still seemed displeased with his decision.

"…So, it's not like you don't want to rely on me anymore, right?"

"I'm relying on you. Otherwise, I won't be leaving the camping vehicle, filled with ammunition to you, right? That is my lifeline in the case I have to live out in the wasteland again, you know? I have no plans to spend the night out in the wasteland with an empty rifle."

Carol's usual confident smile returned.

"Of course, you can leave that to me!"

She then stared at Akira.

"Akira."

"Yes?"

"Don't die."

"Of course! You too."

Akira and Carol said in a joking manner, but it was all their honest feelings.

Afterwards, Carol went to let Sheryl's group, Reina's group, as well as Shikarabe's group know. As for Akira, he returned to the garage and hopped on his bike, and left the base. Once he was distant enough from the base, so that it would not get involved, Akira picked one of the nearby buildings. He went to the rooftop and gazed toward the open wasteland.

The wasteland still looked the same as usual. It was as decrepit and lonely as ever. However, for Akira who knew about the force that was dispatched from the Higaraka ruin, it felt like the silence before the storm.

That was when suddenly Alpha confidently smiled and assured him.

“Don’t worry. I’m right here with you. I’ll be alright.”

“You’re right. I’ll be counting on you this time as well.”

“Just leave it to me.”

Alpha was smiling as confidently as usual. Akira was affected by her and smiled back. Just like always. Just like what he did every time. It was as if this was an essential ritual to achieve victory. Once again, he renewed his resolve.

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Among the forces dispatched, Pamela too was present. She looked happily at Latis as she declared.

“Latis, it’s finally time. Let’s do our best together.”

As expected, a dead man could not respond. Even so, Pamela was ecstatic.

A maid who was also from the Lion Steel Eastern District Third Ward Branch, Totra, saw Pamela and frowned with a rather ominous expression.

“…Say, Begg, is it really okay to leave her like this?”

Begg was a butler who was working together with Totra, he whispered back without any change in his expression.

“Let’s not comment on it… You should already know what is expected of us when the branch manager sends us out like this. We just need to do our job. If things go well, our evaluation will go up. That’s already good enough, right?”

“That might be true. They were even willing to open the Rank 9 warehouse. But… it doesn’t feel right to have her as the commander, you know…”

“If you have any complaints, go and tell the branch manager. Don’t go venting it out on me.”

Totra hesitated for a bit before eventually deciding to call Beltram. Once the communication device connected through, Beltram's image appeared inside her augmented vision.

"What is it? Are there any problems?"

"Well, what can I say… I am actually worried about the psychological state of Pamela as the leader of the whole force…"

Totra was using a communication device that would prevent her voice from leaking out while she was speaking with Beltram. Moreover, she also mentioned that if it was possible, she wanted to take over the leadership position in place of Pamela.

Beltram simply listened to her without any change in his expression. Once Totra was done, he then casually said.

"I'm sure you already know by now. This is exactly why your loyalty toward the company is a very important aspect. If you make it the basis of your existence, you would be able to stay calm even after the one closest to you is killed."

"Of course. But, if I may, I don't think it is wise to leave the command of this force to her. We are well armed with weapons from the Rank 9 warehouse. Weapons capable of assaulting a city. I don't believe it is a good idea to leave the command to her."

"…If it's about that, use your skills and loyalty to deal with it. Your duty is to support her. It includes taking command in the case she is deemed no longer able to fulfill her duty as a leader. It is best for you to find a way to improve the situation as much as possible. That also includes making the decision you are proposing."

"I understand."

After she closed the call, Totra smiled. She now had Beltram's word that she could take command when she deemed there was no other choice. Thus, her mind shifted toward what to do in order to remove Pamela. After

coming up with a few ideas, she believed that she should just isolate Pamela using her weakened psychological state as an excuse. Thus, she immediately started to make her move.

But right at the next moment, Totra's head got suddenly smashed into the wall behind her. Although she was immediately knocked unconscious, she did not fall from the wall. After all, her head was still held up by an invisible hand.

When the person holding back Totra's head removed their camouflage. A maid appeared out of nowhere. It was the maid who was working under Pamela. She got killed back during the fight against Akira. Currently, she was being controlled remotely by Pamela, just like Latis.

Begg was shaken up by what just happened. He inadvertently looked toward Totra. The moment Begg noticed that there was someone else nearby, he already found Pamela right next to him. She was close enough for Begg to feel her breath. She peered expressionlessly at him, as if looking deep inside his soul.

"Don't get in my way, okay?"

"…But of course. The branch manager also ordered us to give you support. We were not ordered to get in your way."

Pamela was staring emotionless at Begg, who was getting anxious. She paused for a moment before smiling and muttered.

"…I see."

She then returned back to Latis and started talking to the corpse, which did not respond. The automaton under her control started walking again. It still had Totra in its hand, dragging her along as the group moved. The blood dripping from Totra's head slid down to her leg and painted a long red line on the floor.

Begg stood frozen and heaved a huge sigh.

[The ability to control automatons. We didn’t notice its presence at all… and the way she suddenly appeared in front of me out of the blue. Even in that psychological state… she is still a servant serving under someone from the founding family, huh…]

Begg then reminded himself: Put aside everything and just focus on the duty.

Latis sacrificed himself since he thought that leaving Pamela alive would be more beneficial to Chloe. Excluding her psychological state, Latis’ decision was definitely correct.

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Akira saw a cloud of dust at the very end of what he could see. The source of it was Pamela’s team. He could clearly see tanks equipped with large missiles, as well as multiple powered suits and APCs.

Akira directed his information-gathering device to scan that direction and frowned.

“So, they’re finally here, huh… That aside, if they seriously use those things here, the city will definitely not let it slide? Are they really going to go through with this?”

Alpha smiled, it made her look relaxed even in this situation.

“Well, the very person who made a similar irrational decision is over here after all. So, it should not be surprising to find someone else making similar decisions, no?”

“U-uhh, well, about that, hmmm, you got a good point.”

Akira laughed awkwardly, trying to wiggle out of that topic. Thanks to that momentary distraction, he did not seem anxious anymore.

“I bet they will claim they need such a force to escort Chloe. She is on the brink of getting kicked out of the city, after all. It can be seen as being precautious, considering how dangerous the wasteland is and the fact that

someone with a 50 billion bounty on him is after her, it's understandable for them to prepare such powerful escorts."

"If that's really the case, I would be thankful though."

With everything that happened recently, Akira had calmed down considerably. Enough for him to consider going after Chloe only after receiving his new front-line equipment from Sakashita and completing Alpha's request.

However, that plan quickly got abandoned. The missile launchers inclined up and released their payload into the sky, above Kugamayama city.

"Whoah! They've actually started shooting!"

Akira inadvertently gazed up, following the trajectories of the missiles.

Goutol's team was assigned to watch the border between the slums and the lower district. They were able to clearly see the missiles as well.

"Captain, they really started shooting in this direction…"

"Maintain formation. Shoot down any missiles that veered off from the region that they have designated beforehand. Otherwise, don't do anything about them."

"Roger that. But are you sure this will be enough? If we are late in intervening and it ends up damaging the city, it will be horrendous, no?"

"Those in the upper echelons have made the decision. It's not like I can do anything about it, so just stop worrying and do as we are told."

Although it might hit the city, it would still be outside the inner wall. Thus, it was still tolerable, or so Goutol believed as he knitted his eyebrows.

Even after seeing more missiles fill the sky, Goutol's team still only stood guard, not doing anything.

The missiles that were shot up above the city's sky reached the sky directly above the slums. They suddenly changed direction and dove straight down. The initial missiles then exploded, releasing multiple smaller missiles which scattered all over. They covered the whole area from the wasteland to the slums.

Akira thought that the explosions would raise hell on earth. However, that did not happen. The missiles that fell close to the slums were all mini-missiles. None of them exploded.

Akira found it to be strange. He then noticed a change in his vision and tilted his head.

"What was that…?"

The view of the wasteland suddenly blurred to the point where it was difficult to see its buildings from where Akira stood.

Alpha immediately noticed the reason for it.

"Those missiles are discharging jamming smoke. The jamming causes the same effect as thick colourless mist. There's a good chance they also have speed filter effect as well."

"Wait, isn't the use of such smoke pointless in an open space? Since it would disperse right away?"

"If you're using the usual amount, then yes. But with the amount they're using, the effect would retain for a while. Well, it's not like they need it to be thick enough to stop bullets like back in the inter-city transport mission. I bet they're only using enough to ensure no stray bullets would reach the lower district."

Akira finally understood the role of those missiles. If the blast from a huge-scale battle in the slums damaged the city, the city defence squad would be dispatched to remove the threat. That would end their assault. In the first place, that was the reason why he was staying in the slums. By adjusting the

reach of their weapons with speed filters, Pamela's force would be able to avoid that problem.

As more and more missiles anchored onto the ground and released jamming smoke, eventually, the area around Akira got enveloped by it.

At that moment, Alpha's expression suddenly turned solemn.

"Akira! Keep calm and quickly go to the next building!"

The bike was already racing. Akira headed to the rooftop so that he could jump to the next building just like what Alpha had advised. However, a moment later, Alpha suddenly vanished. Akira's connection with Alpha got cut off.

"Alpha!?"

Although it caught him off guard, Akira kept his cool. He headed to the other building. After he jumped and landed on the nearby building, he hid deep inside it. He quickly went inside one of the rooms and closed the door.

[…this is only a temporary solution, what next?]

If the jamming smoke hindered Akira's connection to Alpha, then he should be able to regain connection by preventing the smoke from surrounding him. Thus, he thought that closing the door in an enclosed room should at least allow him to reconnect.

"Alpha…?"

Akira anxiously called for Alpha. After a short pause, Alpha reappeared in his vision.

"Akira, are you okay? Keep calm, alright?"

"Yeah, that made me nervous for a bit."

Akira softly smiled and confessed. Watching him act like this made Alpha smile in satisfaction. She continued to elaborate on their current situation.

“Alright, let me explain the situation once again.”

At the moment, Alpha had to focus her resources to maintain their connection through the jamming smoke. Thus, she might not be able to give Akira her full support during the battle. Hearing that his support would be handicapped, Akira frowned and asked.

“What a pain. In that case, wouldn’t it be better if I go above the effective range of the jamming smoke?”

“Unfortunately, that would not be possible. Look up.”

Akira looked up just like he was told to. Normally, he would not be able to see anything except for the ceiling he was facing. However, his augmented vision allowed him to see past the ceiling and right to the sky above the slums. For some reason, that sky was dyed red.

“Hm? That red colour. It’s an area that I’m not allowed to enter, right? I didn’t know they consider the sky above the slums as a part of the lower district.”

“To be more precise, it’s an area where it’s feared it would bring damage to the city if you entered it.”

If Akira went high enough outside the effect of the jamming smoke and the speed filter, there was a good chance that the bombardment would reach the lower district. Thus, Alpha explained if he used that to his advantage, he would basically be using the city as his shield. City Management would definitely see that as a hostile act toward the city.

“Argh! What a pain! Then, I have no other choice but to meet them in the wasteland, right?”

“I don’t recommend you do that. If you head out, they will have no need to worry about the risk of damaging the city anymore. Overall, it will only worsen your situation.”

“Then… in that case…”

“Yeah, we have no other choice but to fight from here. I will try my best to maintain connection even when we’re outside, so be careful.”

“Yeah. I’m counting on you.”

Akira heaved a huge sigh and smiled wryly as he jokingly muttered.

“Or is it that? Are we in this situation because I did not buy equipment from Shizuka-san’s shop this time?”

Akira was partially serious. After all, the things he bought from Shizuka had always proven to be useful to him during all the incidents he had gone through.

Alpha lightly giggled and jokingly replied.

“You might be right. Maybe we should buy a good luck charm the next time we visit her shop.”

“Yeah. You’re right. Let’s do that.”

In order to survive and get that chance, Akira declared in excitement.

“…Alright!! Let’s go then!”

Akira then accelerated his bike away and resolved himself to jump into the battlefield. He was headed towards a place where he might lose his connection to Alpha at any point in time.

The slums regained its silence, it seemed like the missiles stopped. However, that was not the reason why it was silent. It was simply because the jamming smoke had dulled sound propagation, a mimicked effect from the thick colourless mist.

Akira stopped his bike in the middle of an alley.

“Alpha, any enemy?”

“I detect nothing within my scanning range. But don’t drop your guard. The jamming smoke might be preventing me from detecting enemies. After all, it also reduces the support that I can give you. If you feel something is up, trust your intuition.”

“Roger that!”

Akira gathered his focus and sharpened his senses. He probed for information impossible for the five senses. With the help of his information-gathering device under the effect of the jamming smoke, he processed it as his sixth sense, searching for the presence of enemies.

In the next moment, he could feel something coming toward him, and he was facing it.

“Alpha… There’s something ahead…”

“Yeah, I noticed it too. Be careful.”

After noticing someone ahead, Akira carefully moved forward. Based on his scanner, it seemed to be of a humanoid shape. The signal seemed to be approaching him at normal walking speed. However, judging from how it was moving, it did not seem like it was an enemy. Akira was watching carefully as it was approaching him. Since it did not show any sign of hostility, he did not attack.

As the shadow started to get clearer, the figure of a maid showed itself. She was someone Akira had met before. It was Pamela. Even under the effect of the jamming smoke, she was walking casually toward him. Even after they were close enough to recognize each other, she still showed no sign of hostility.

“Stop!”

Akira promptly ordered, Pamela came to an immediate halt, just like she was told to. Akira was wondering if she had come to negotiate. Thus, he ordered her to stop. Pamela smiled and greeted him.

“Long time no see!”

“What is it now?”

“Oh, Shiori and the others are not with you? I thought they would be somewhere close to you, but… well, I guess you should do just fine.”

Akira felt an odd fear after being exposed to hardly any killing intent exuding from Pamela when she worded out her intention to kill him. He was uncertain how he should react to her statement, which lacked the will to kill him.

Either way, it did not change the fact that it was an enemy. As Akira quickly aimed his rifle at Pamela, she reacted accordingly by quickly closing in on him.

Suddenly, a blade appeared and hewed down on Pamela’s neck, cleanly cutting it off from her body. As the head rolled on the ground, the headless body fell limply to embrace the earth.

Akira was taken aback but noticed something strange in front of him. The blood flowing out from Pamela’s beheaded body was green.

Shiori glanced at the decapitated head. But when their eyes met, Pamela’s lips slowly curled up into a smile. Unlike when she was talking with Akira, her gaze showed a clear desire to kill.

“There you are… Found you… I knew you were nearby.”

The mood tensed up. It was a suffocating level of killing intent. However, in contrast to the surprised Akira, Shiori was completely calm.

“Thought so.”

The headless body quickly returned back on its feet and went straight for Shiori. However, before it could reach Shiori, it was suddenly sent flying. It got struck by something invisible on its abdomen.

Kanae stood right where Pamela's body was a moment ago. She had turned off her camouflage and revealed herself. The body-less head turned towards Kanae and smiled ominously.

"You're here too… Don't worry, I'll kill you too."

Shiori sliced the headless body into 4 pieces while Kanae crushed the head under her feet. A gory mix of flesh, blood, and machinery got scattered all over the place.

Akira, who was still a bit confused at what just happened, asked Shiori and Kanae.

"So, can anyone tell me what is going on?"

"That was a remote-controlled automaton controlled by Pamela. As you can see, it can still move even after severing its head. Though it will make it more difficult to control the body, so cutting off its head is not pointless."

"I-I see."

"Also, that must be a declaration of war. I bet she won't feel satisfied with assassinating us. That's why she went out of her way to make a declaration of war. So, her goal isn't merely our death. She wants to kill us with her own hands. That must be the main reason why she didn't use explosive missiles. After this, I'm sure that she will send in swarms of remote automata to kill us."

"O-okay… Uhhh, is Reina and the others somewhere nearby as well?"

"Milady is staying back in the base."

"She was raring to go though. But since we don't think we can protect her during the fight this time, we asked Milady to stay behind."

After briefly explaining, Shiori and Kanae turn towards the wasteland. Akira also followed suit. He knew that there was a huge force coming from that direction.

“That maid seems more motivated to kill you instead of me though. Did you do something that offended her?”

“That seems to be the case indeed.”

“Though, we didn’t expect her to act like this.”

From the wasteland, they could see dozens of remote automata on air bikes storming the slums. Their goal was to get Shiori and Kanae. All these automata had Pamela’s face on them. They also wore the same expression, a grim smile which showed their anticipation, delight, and excitement for the opportunity to kill Kanae and Shiori.

A moment later, Akira and the others were attacked from all directions. Some of the automata jumped off the air bikes and assaulted Akira’s group with their rifles. Those who stayed on their air bikes used machine guns installed on the bikes to do the same. They quickly went to their respective positions and worked together like a well-oiled team.

Akira, Shiori, and Kanae fought back with their respective weapons and equipment. Sounds of explosives and gunfire signalled the start of war within the slums.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 283, Annihilator Warhead

Index

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Akira's new HC31R augmented suit, code name Los Carden, was a huge upgrade compared to his previous augmented suit. One suit cost as much as 5 billion Aurum. Although he bought it at wasteland price from Katsuragi, it was still worth its price. It was stronger than a powered suit. It was also normally used by high-ranking Hunters who worked further to the east of Zegelt city.

When it came to such powerful equipment, it did not simply augment the physical prowess of its user. It was more correct to say that it transformed its user into a super-human.

It had an advanced support-adjustment system, which corrected the gap in the user's will and their bodily movements. It would enable a complete beginner to run full speed on a 10 centimetres width beam. It also worked in tandem with the user's reaction and unconscious movements, correcting them and making them more precise. It would enhance the skills of its wearer to a level comparable to an expert. It could output enough power to be able to kick a large vehicle up into the air like a pebble. Naturally, with such power, it was fitted with precise output control.

It could also work together with information-gathering devices to sharpen its users' senses. It could help users with extrasensory abilities to extend their senses to cover all 360 degrees. This would not improve one's vision, but instead, the ability to feel presence in all directions. It would remove blind spots and any possibility of getting caught in an ambush. Its user would even be able to feel disturbances in wind pressure.

It was further equipped with extremely powerful forcefield armour, which could project outside. Combined with the data from the information-gathering device, it could project precise forcefield armour to block incoming attacks.

As for the rifles, Akira changed his rifles to RL2 multi-rifles. It was compatible with various types of ammunition. It could change its barrel depending on the calibre of the bullet. It could even use special bullets that no normal multi-rifle could use. It cost 1 billion Aurum per rifle and Akira bought 4 of them. One was fixed to his bike while he carried the other three.

The medicine that he was already using was of the expensive type which cost 50 million Aurum per box. The medicine doubled as battle stimulants. Its healing effect was stronger and lasted longer. It would close major wounds and maintain the body of its consumer in its best state. It allowed extended time for high-speed maneuvers and prolonged the duration its user could fight at their full potential.

Akira's bike got upgraded with various modifications as well. He took off the AF anti-material cannon and replaced it with the newly bought TGP laser cannon. It was unusable unless it was connected to the bike's large-sized energy tank but was extremely powerful. Furthermore, it was easier to use than the AF anti-material cannon.

Including the medicines and the ammunition, all in all, Akira spent 16 billion Aurum in total. It could be said that after the upgrade, he had finally gained suitable firepower for a 50 billion bounty target. Though, it was a bit late into the game.

With all his new equipment, Akira was still hard-pressed against the onslaught from Pamela.

Akira was shooting C-bullets continuously through the small opening between buildings. He accomplished such precise shots while he was flying around with his bike, when up and down held no meaning. The C-bullets, charged with more energy, were faster and stronger than before. They formed a wall which flew toward their targets.

As expected, the remote automata that Pamela controlled could not fully avoid his bullets. However, it was possible to defend against them. They used their forcefield armour and forcefield shield on their air bikes. Even using their maid uniforms to defend against the bullets.

Even when that forcefield armour and shield got shattered by a single shot from the TGP laser cannon, those remote automata did not get completely obliterated. They could still move without their heads. Similarly, even if a part of their bodies got blown off, their remaining limbs would still continue to fight. They needed to be ripped to pieces, to the point it was no longer physically possible to fight. Otherwise, these remote automata would continue to fight under Pamela's will.

All of the automata moved like skilled fighters. They were all very well-equipped. Furthermore, they were fighting together with impeccable teamwork, pressing forward with no fear of death. It was as if their lives were to be sacrificed for a singular goal. That was just how terrifying the group attacking Akira was.

"Woah! They're really strong! Were they always this powerful!?"

Akira was unconsciously comparing them to the maids he had fought previously. Their individual strength, teamwork, equipment, and scale were on another level compared to before. He was feeling the pressure from their exchange. He had thought that he would have no problems facing his enemies with his new equipment. However, that naive belief was immediately swept away.

Even when his bike was moving haphazardly under Alpha's control, the enemy's air bikes were able to keep up without an issue. In the middle of their high-speed chase, both parties were shooting at each other while blocking and evading shots. The buildings engulfed in the battle were

falling apart, unable to withstand the intensity of the battle. The crumbled pieces got blown apart even before they were able to fall to the ground.

“Stop complaining and just keep shooting! Next! On your right!”

“I know, I know!!”

Due to the jamming smoke, Alpha could not provide her usual full support to Akira. Thus, he had to compensate through hard work.

Akira compressed his time perception even further. Inside the slowed-down world, falling rubble hardly moved. It would take hours before they reached the ground. Akira’s senses were sharpened to the point he could basically feel the presence of every slow piece of falling rubble.

Even with his compressed time perception, the remote automata were still moving relatively fast. He fixed his aim against those automata and shot at them with the rifle in his right hand. At the same time, he identified the bullets coming for him and actively shifted his position away from where they would travel. Rather than recognizing the incoming shots as a wall of bullets, he accurately identified each individual bullet and predicted their trajectories. He squeezed his body through the small openings between the bullets. At the same time, Akira released a barrage to completely destroy the human-shaped automata, creating mashes of green blood and a mix of metal and flesh.

“Next! Below you!”

“Geez! There’s just no end to them!”

Akira aimed his left RL2 multi-rifle below and released a swarm of mini-missiles. The mini-missiles flew straight toward the maids that were trying to attack Shiori and Kanae. However, the mini-missiles flew way slower than the C-bullets. It exchanged speed for its guiding system. Thus, it did not have enough firepower to break through the automata maids’ forcefield armour and shield.

However, the action of blocking his missiles created a fatal opening for Shiori and Kanae to exploit. Shiori quickly seized the opening and sliced the maids to pieces while Kanae crushed them with her powerful punches. They used effective means to completely destroy the remote automata; which only those with a high degree of knowledge over automata could perform.

Although Akira was fighting at a disadvantage, it was not like he had no chance of winning. He could emerge victorious because Pamela was more focused on killing Shiori and Kanae instead of him. Thus, Akira's priority was to support Kanae and Shiori instead of destroying the remote automata. He would shoot whenever he saw an opening, which happened quite often as the automata were constantly trying to land a fatal blow on Shiori and Kanae. In the end, Akira was able to destroy more automata than the other two.

Pamela's narrow focus was beneficial to Akira, which caused him to be curious about it.

"Say, Alpha. Why is that maid so fixated on Shiori and Kanae? Wasn't it me who tried to kill Chloe from the start? As a matter of fact, I'm still aiming to kill her right now. Wouldn't it be better to prioritize me instead?"

"She must have her own reason for doing something like this. It's not our place to be worried over her reasons. Look. If Shiori and Kanae get killed, you would be next on her list, you know? You should be more worried about that."

If Kanae and Shiori got killed, all the remote automata would go after him, all at the same time. Thus, although it was strange, ensuring Shiori and Kanae survived meant his survival.

"You're right, I'll focus on that."

The TGP laser cannon swept through his enemies. Although the laser was relatively small, it was able to cleanly vaporize the maid automata together with the buildings behind them.

However, some of them managed to put up their forcefield shield to block the laser. They pushed its power output, concentrated the area covered by the shield, and managed to protect themselves.

Unfortunately for them, that was not the end. Akira quickly followed the laser sweep with a barrage of bullets. The forcefield shields got greatly weakened from receiving the laser and could not withstand the barrage. They were broken to pieces when faced against a barrage of C-bullets. A moment later, mini-missiles came in and struck their targets almost at the same time. This resulted in a spectacular explosion, which blew his enemies into chunks.

Akira quickly shifted his attention to his next target. He reminded himself that he did not have the leeway to be thinking about unnecessary things. In order to preserve his life, he needed to desperately provide support for Shiori and Kanae.

Down on the ground, Shiori brought down her blade. It was towards a remote automaton coming at her from the front. Powerful forcefield armour extended from the contact point of the blade, and broke through the enemy’s forcefield armour, splitting its head cleanly into two.

But even after cleaved it into two, the automaton still stared at Shiori. It moved as if it was going to throw a counterattack. It somehow maintained its balance with only one leg as it aimed its rifle at Shiori.

Shiori, who had already anticipated this, quickly jumped to the side. She moved away from where it was aiming and swung her blade horizontally. The body, which was already cut into two, got horizontally sliced apart together with its rifles. Only now did it get rendered completely harmless.

Meanwhile, Kanae drove a powerful kick into one of the remote automata. Her maid augmented suit was provided by the Lion Steel Eastern District Fourth Branch. Her equipment required permission from the branch manager to be borrowed. Thus, she was able to easily break through the forcefield armour and obliterate the upper body of the remote automaton.

As if they were waiting for that opening, two other remote automata released a strike to the left and to the right of Kanae. They were aiming for Kanae's head. However, Kanae quickly swung her arms and countered them, blowing them away. Although the automata were clearly out of her reach, she used the speed filter to send shockwaves from her punches.

As expected, the power was weaker than a direct hit. It only managed to blow them back. It was not enough to destroy their bodies. Nonetheless, it was an opening for Akira. He did not let that chance slip and shot them to pieces.

To prevent damage to the city from bombardment and gunfire, the jamming smoke was mixed with particles that created a speed filter effect. Although it was able to fulfill its original goal, it also provided Kanae and Shiori, who specialized in melee combat, with some level of support.

"Ane-san! Are you going to be okay?"

Shiori was using a powerful accelerator drug, which had minimal side effects. Kanae's bright voice could be heard through the communication device, which made it possible for them to communicate in a similar manner to telepathy.

Shiori replied with a rather curt voice.

"If you have the time to worry about me, you should stop with that smile of yours and take this fight seriously!"

"Well, I can't just remove this side of me, you know!? It would also be the end of me if you get killed here! I'm sure that Akira-boy also knows it. That's exactly why he's providing us support!"

"If you understand that, put more effort into it so as to not cause him unnecessary worry!"

"Yeah yeah! I'm doing my best over here! Though, this is basically the opposite of what we originally planned!"

Shiori’s group had offered Akira to fight against Chloe together, but he rejected it. They would be in trouble if Akira got killed. Thus, they donned their camouflage and hid around him. They originally planned to provide him support if he got into trouble, which would make him more likely to agree to their offer. In the end, a maid automaton appeared. To eliminate it, they had to expose themselves. Afterwards, everything went completely opposite of what they had in mind. Akira was the one providing support.

Though it did not change the fact that they were fighting together, albeit, their current situation being that Shiori and Kanae acted as the decoys.

“But still, those things they are using are meant for attacking a city, right? I didn’t expect them to bring that out, you know!? No matter how much the third ward branch is siding with Chloe, I never thought that Beltram-sama would give the permission to use those weapons just to kill a bounty target, you know?”

“Mention of the bounty target is just an excuse. The request from branch manager Flip to assassinate Chloe too. Half of it is probably an excuse. Fear of a war between branches is also an excuse.”

“Do you mean… that there’s a good chance branch manager Beltram and Flip are actually working together behind the scenes?”

“If that is indeed the case, it would explain why branch manager Beltram allowed the use of the Rank 9 warehouse. That way, they can make this incident bigger. Of course, this is nothing but just my guess.”

Kanae thought Shiori’s guess sounded a bit too far-fetched. She smiled wryly and replied.

“If that’s true, they really threw Milady and Akira-boy into a massive mire of trouble.”

“I’ll have Chloe-sama take responsibility. After all, she started all of this.”

“Well, I will do my best to make her take responsibility as well!”

During the battle, Shiori was obviously livid while Kanae was smiling wryly.

Both worked together, offence and defence, destroying the remote automata one by one. Although the size of the enemy was massive and each automation was strong, their number was dwindling. If they could keep it up, it was only a matter of time before they got the upper hand. Just when Shiori and Kanae started to see the light at the end of the tunnel, the situation suddenly changed.

Akira, who was fighting somewhere not too far away from them, suddenly landed his bike on the ground. He accelerated it toward Shiori and Kanae. He was in such a rush that he was willing to toss away his advantage of mobility. He chose to race on the ground, instead of up in the sky, where he could freely evade.

Shiori and Kanae, who noticed his action, were taken by surprise. They understood that he was subtly warning them to get out of this place as soon as possible. They unhesitatingly jumped on board Akira’s bike.

A moment later, after Akira and the rest left the area, a sudden full-scale bombardment rained down. It obliterated everything in that area. No buildings were left standing.

A large multi-legged vehicle was slowly approaching the border between the slums and the wasteland. A hundred-meter-long cannon was perched on top of its chassis. It would not be strange for a cannon of that size to be installed on an inter-city transport vehicle. Its gargantuan body was supported by thick powerful legs that could easily crush everything in its way as it moved forward.

There was a straight line of destruction drawn from its large muzzle till deep into the slums. Normally, this line would have extended into the lower district. Thanks to the effects of the jamming smoke, that line stopped in the middle of the slums.

Akira was desperately racing out of the area exactly because of that cannon shot.

As he drove to the other side of a dilapidated building, using it as a shield. He could not help but frown when he caught sight of the multi-legged vehicle, through the gaps between the buildings.

“What the heck is that thing!? Are they planning to attack the city or something!?”

Shiori also frowned when she saw the multi-legged vehicle.

“I heard that they opened the Rank 9 warehouse, but to bring that out here… it’s overkill…”

“Rank 9 warehouse?”

“It’s a particular term used within Lion Steel. It refers to a facility that houses weapons capable of assaulting a city.”

“So, they’re planning on attacking Kugamayama city?”

“I heard that they’re originally dispatched as escorts or as a deterrent force. Lion Steel has many enemies as it is one of many large companies in the eastern district. Thus, it is necessary for it to have such a mighty force.”

Kanae smiled and joined in on the conversation.

“Akira-boy, that’s not important right now. Whatever their reason is, it doesn’t change the fact that they brought that thing out to this battlefield. Now, the important thing is how to bring it down.”

Akira frowned. Although it was indeed exactly as Kanae said, he could not help but still be bothered by its presence.

“…You’re right, so, how to destroy that thing? Do you know its weakness?”

“Nope. I don’t!”

Akira still had his eyebrows knit as he shifted his gaze to Shiori.

“I’m not much knowledgeable about that unit. But I will at least tell you what I know about it.”

Forcefield armour protected its large frame at any given moment. It used a huge amount of energy with each large-sized laser cannon fire. Furthermore, its constant forcefield armour took a lot of energy to maintain as well. However, it could replenish its energy wirelessly from the other vehicles around it. Thus, there was close to zero chance of depleting its energy reserves. Although the cannon could not angle to shoot the area high above and under it, there were smaller cannons installed to cover those areas. Therefore, trying to attack from those angles would be equivalent to suicide. With Shiori’s explanation, Akira understood just how powerful the opponent was. He was stuck, unsure of how to deal with it.

Alpha, who was controlling the bike, suddenly made a sharp turn and accelerated. Everyone on the bike, including Akira, was flusteredly trying to maintain their balance. They were trying their best to not get thrown off the bike. None of them offered a single word of complaint. They all already knew why they had to be extra cautious in their current situation.

The multi-legged vehicle once again released a shot. The laser cannon consumed a colossal amount of energy. It released a pillar of light, which evaporated everything that got caught inside it. It drew a clear straight line through the slums. The buildings that made the slightest bit of contact around the circumference of the laser got blown up high into the sky. It took some time before they fell back down like rain, back into the slums.

To evade the falling rubble, Akira had to drive the bike erratically. Thus the trio’s expressions were grave.

The buildings in the slums served as excellent covers for Akira, enabling him to slip away from the laser cannon. However, if it kept shooting like that, it was only a matter of time before he ran out of cover. As the vehicle was slowly but surely moving forward, Sheryl’s headquarters would eventually get within its range.

“Wait. Didn’t you say they won’t use missiles to crush us earlier?”

“About that… well, in the end, it’s nothing but my own guess. If Pamela can do something that flashy to eliminate us, she would be satisfied with that, right?”

Watching how Kanae speak with a wide smile on her face, with no sign of malice, Akira, for some reason, got convinced. He lightly sighed, glanced back at Shiori and asked.

“Honestly. I don’t think that huge thing would only aim at us while ignoring Sheryl’s base though. Any good ideas?”

Shiori knitted her eyebrows.

“Akira-sama. My apologies, but I can’t think of anything else other than to get close enough to infiltrate the vehicle. We can only destroy it from the inside.”

The reason why Shiori apologized was because it was the same as asking Akira to take a suicidal approach.

Although Shiori’s blade and Kanae’s fist were equipped with powerful anti-forcefield armour, it was still not enough to break through the multi-legged vehicle’s forcefield armour. In the first place, it was not easy to slip past the bombardment to get close enough to use their blade and fist. After all, they had to deal with its cannon and the bombardment from the other surrounding tanks in the area. The closer they got to the wasteland, the more intense the bombardment would be since the enemy would not need to worry about damaging the city by accident. There was a good chance they would die before they managed to reach the multi-legged vehicle.

However, at this rate, the encroaching force would get close enough to hit Sheryl’s base. That was where Reina and the others were at. To prevent that from happening, Akira had no other choice.

He could not afford to let Sheryl’s base get blown away. Thus, he was stuck in between Shiori’s suggestion and one other alternative.

“…Alpha, how many should I use? Just one shot would be enough, right?”

“I will do the calculations until the time it takes to shoot. In the meantime, get closer while I’m gathering information through the scanner.”

“…Alright.”

Akira heaved a huge sigh. He had no other choice but to use his trump card. Thus, he pushed his two RL2 multi-rifles to Shiori, as if he was handing them over to her.

“We will charge right into that thing after we avoid its next shot. Try to shoot at it once we get close enough.”

“Sure, I don’t mind. But in all honesty, I’m terrible with rifles, you see.”

“I know. That’s why I’m giving you the one equipped with mini-missiles.”

“Oh, thank you Akira-boy.”

Kanae smiled brightly and thanked him. Even if Akira agreed to go with them after listening to their explanation and suggestion, that did not change the fact they were going to suicidally charge toward the enemy. Even so, Kanae was still smiling amusedly.

Although Shiori was thankful as well, she was still confused as to why Akira passed her two of his rifles.

“What about you, Akira-sama?”

Akira did not reply. He simply switched to his third RL2 multi-rifle. It was obvious from his expression that he was going to do something that he absolutely did not want to do. However, he had no other choice given the situation he was in.

It was not difficult for Shiori to guess that rifle was Akira’s trump card. Something he did not want to use if it could be helped. She was grateful he was willing to go as far as to use his trump card.

“Very well then. Leave the counterfire to us.”

“Yeah. I leave it to you.”

To get away from the enemies’ attacks, the bike was racing haphazardly through the slums. The three were extremely anxious, just as much as they were focused.

Then, the time finally came. The multi-legged vehicle released a shot from its large laser cannon. This time, it was sacrificing some of its firepower by sweeping it sideways. Instead of drawing a straight line of total destruction, it left a mark which looked like a fan.

However, Alpha had taken that into account and calculated a method to avoid it. The bike went up to the sky, escaping from the gigantic beam. The bike kept going higher, only stopping right before they entered the red area, where Akira was not allowed to enter. The bike then made a sharp turn and ran while being upside down. It was as if the bike’s tires were running on the border of the red area.

Although the multi-legged vehicle had an immensely powerful laser cannon, it could not shoot in consecutive succession. Akira used that opening between the shots to get as close as possible. He accelerated the bike at full speed, which also reduced its ability to evade.

However, the multi-legged vehicle was not exactly vulnerable between each shot. Its smaller cannons and missile pods were actively firing during that time. Although the smaller cannons were easier to avoid, the missiles were equipped with homing devices. Since they were slower, the speed filter did not affect them. Akira, who was prioritizing speed over dexterity, had to come up with a way to deal with them.

“Here they come! I’m relying on both of you!!”

As Akira stated with a solemn expression, Shiori gathered all her focus. She was serious as usual while Kanae was still smiling as usual.

“Understood!”

“Roger that!”

While the bike was travelling at top speed, Shiori swung her blade, which glowed dimly with light particles. It released a wave of light that flew from the blade, which sliced through the speed filter particles.

The guidance system of the incoming missiles was thrown off due to that gap. It pushed their trajectories away from the bike. After the bike flew past those missiles, the jamming smoke caused the missiles to detonate a moment later. The bike extended out its forcefield armour behind, to protect it from the explosion. Meanwhile, it used the shockwave to accelerate even faster.

Shiori quickly switched to the rifle and started shooting the missiles in front of her. The C-bullets flew towards their target.

Naturally, the speed filter greatly reduced the C-bullet's range. However, it only prevented them from sniping from afar. It still retained enough firepower to deal substantial damage in mid-range. Even if the speed filter reduced its speed, the C-bullets still contained energy, enough to cause damage. As such, it was sufficient enough to shoot down the incoming missiles.

The missiles veered off their original trajectories before exploding. To avoid these explosions, the bike expanded out forcefield armour under its wheels to pave its path forward.

Just like Shiori, Kanae was using a mix of her fist as well as Akira's rifle to shoot down the missiles. She used the shockwave from her punches to deflect and throw the missiles off target. Meanwhile, using the rifle, shoot down the other missiles.

The bike's TGP laser cannon and RL2 multi rifle swept sideways. The laser and barrage of C-bullets shot down missiles, protecting the bike as it approached the multi-legged vehicle.

With heavy fire flying in all directions, Akira held his RL2 multi-rifle firmly with both hands as he carefully aimed it.

Currently, Alpha could not provide her full support to Akira. Thus, he requested her to focus on shooting down and evading the incoming missiles. Basically, he would handle this shot all by himself. After all, currently, even his augmented suit did not have Alpha's support. This meant there was no aim correction support.

In this situation where he could not afford to miss, Akira sharpened his focus to its utmost limit.

"Akira, it's about time, I'll start the countdown."

"Alright!"

Akira pushed to gather his focus even more. He rerouted most of his processing capabilities to sharpen his senses. As all unnecessary information for the sniping was omitted from his mind, the world started to turn colourless. Eventually, the world blurred out from his vision. Only the multi-legged vehicle he was focused on looked more vivid. Its whole structure became clearer in his eyes. As this artificial world he had created in his mind became even more accurate, the differences between the real world and the artificial world shrank to zero.

"Five… Four… Three…"

The bike was intensely swaying left and right as it evaded the incoming attacks. Akira gathered his focus and compressed his time perception. The swaying slowed down until it suddenly came to a complete stop.

"Two… One…"

The time came to a complete halt. The contour of the multi-legged vehicle was starting to blur. Now, the only thing that looked crystal clear in Akira's view, was the trajectory line between the muzzle of his rifle and its target. Akira stared at his target as if giving it a death verdict.

"Zero!!"

At the same time Alpha gave the signal, Akira pulled down the trigger. It was perfectly timed.

The released shots went straight, destroying everything in its way. It was as if the warheads were boring a hole through space and time. In total, Akira released five shots. All 5 shots did not slow down at all. It was as if they eradicated the particles that caused the speed filter effect. They mowed down everything in their way and eventually reached their target.

Right at that moment, the warheads struck, and a spectacular explosion occurred. It was as if the warheads themselves, and everything they stuck had been converted into pure energy. Although all five warheads landed at different locations at different times, the explosions compounded into one colossal ball of fire. It further enhanced their overall destructiveness as the explosion devoured the multi-legged vehicle.

The shockwave was so powerful that it compressed the surrounding jamming smoke. It triggered a phenomenon that only happened from a highly dense pressurized colourless mist. The pressurized jamming smoke formed a dome, which contained the energy of the explosion. Thanks to that, the explosion had nowhere to go but inside, multiplying its destructive power manifolds.

In a state where the dome partitioned out the rest of the world for a few seconds, the explosion continued to rage within it. The explosion eventually condensed so much energy that it leaked through the weakening dome.

The explosion, which originally was a large fireball, got concentrated and confined within a small space. The moment a crack appeared, the energy burst out, creating a powerful gust of wind that blew everything around it away.

When the dome finally dissipated, nothing was left inside it. It was as if that area had been ripped off from space and time.

Akira used 5 annihilator warheads at the same time. It brought about the result he had anticipated,

Akira sighed as he gazed at the destruction that he just caused.

“I did it… annihilator warheads… 5 of them…”

Seeing Akira’s reaction and the aftermath that it left, Shiori could understand why he did not want to use all his annihilator warheads. However, his next words made her realize that she was misunderstanding things.

“Dammit, one shot cost me 100 million Aurum…! And I had to use 5 of them…!”

Akira was lamenting the cost. When Shiori noticed, she could not hide her stupefaction.

“Uhhh, Akira-sama. Putting aside how you got that ammunition; annihilator warheads are something that you can only use if you receive special permission. In the worst-case scenario, you might get arrested for carrying one…”

However, Akira replied back too nonchalantly.

“Hm? Well, Kugamayama city had already declared me to be a monster. They are also treating me as one. So, I don’t see any reason to be worried about that now.”

“I-I see…”

Shiori was slightly taken aback by Akira’s unthinkable response. While on the other hand, Kanae was laughing her ass off.

Silavin: Ahh Kanae, never change. Same to you, Akira. Well, if you are carrying a few annihilator warheads, I doubt they would even try to arrest you. They would probably just try to keep you out of the city again rather than risk an engagement.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 284, Checking Firepower

Index

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As Akira, Shiori, and Kanae were busy fighting somewhere close to the border between the slums and the wasteland, another battle was taking place. Back in Sheryl's HQ, an intense battle was raging.

Erio was running through a partially destroyed alleyway when roars of chaos reached his communication device.

"Hurry!! Do you want to get blown to bits!?"

"I know!! I know!!"

Erio replied, shouting. He was already pushing himself to run in an augmented suit that he was not that familiar with. Yet, the moment he reached his destination, he was told to hurry up and go somewhere else.

"Keep moving people!! Just because you're under jamming smoke doesn't mean you're hidden. You'll still get discovered if you keep still!!"

"I said, I got it already!!"

As Erio screamed, he extended both of his hands forward. The AF anti-material cannon behind him immediately slid forward. Erio firmly held onto it and somehow managed to hold it up with the help of the CA31R augmented suit. He then carefully took aim.

“Aim correction, done!! Fire!!”

As soon as Erio received the signal, he pulled the trigger. A pillar of light got released. At the same time, Erio got blown back from the recoil.

Even so, the AF anti-material cannon still hit its target. The pillar of light drilled a hole through the body of a large augmented suit. A moment later, it fell to the ground. The missiles that it just launched lost their guiding system and hit the nearby buildings, turning them into a pile of rubble. Meanwhile, the other heavy augmented suit nearby flusteredly tried to get away from the area as fast as they could.

Seeing the aftermath, Erio thought that it was a huge success. He yelped in excitement.

“I-I did it!! I shot it down!!”

“Get on your feet! Do you have a death wish!?”

Erio could not help but pout. That harsh reply was basically a scolding. It completely ignored what Erio had just accomplished. Though, his facial expression quickly changed. His lips returned back as his expression turned to one of anxiety. He noticed that someone was aiming their rifle at him.

Erio pushed his body back up in a panic. He followed the indicator guidance shown inside his helmet’s display and leapt into a nearby building. A barrage of bullets struck the location right where Erio was a moment ago. Fortunately, he was no longer there. Thus, that area was only left with ricocheting bullets flying all over.

“Whoah. That was dangerous.”

“Don’t give me that! Shoot back at them immediately!”

The display on his helmet showed enemy locations behind the wall. That display was also accompanied by two orders: ‘shoot at them, use LEO multi-rifle’.

Erio grabbed his LEO multi-rifle with both hands and released fire toward his targets. It seemed more like haphazard fire instead of precise fire. Although the walls were relatively thick, they were like a sheet of paper when faced against the C-bullets. They had no problems piercing through and successfully hit their targets.

“A-alright…! With this… I can finally… Get… A break…”

“Next! Get moving! Quickly!!”

The display on Erio’s helmet indicated that it was administering medicine continuously. Thanks to that, he was able to maintain his physical condition. Even so, the non-stop action and the consecutive orders exhausted him, psychologically.

“Just let me take a small break, will you!?”

“The others would die if you take a break now! If you’re fine with that, then be my guest!!”

“…Goddammit!!”

Erio cursed and immediately started running again.

“I know that Carol-san was the one who introduced you! But can’t you do something about the enemies!?”

“I’m doing my best here to provide you support. It’s your job to handle the fighting, right!?”

Erio’s face twitched. In truth, it was only thanks to the other person’s support that he was able to fight this well. Therefore, he could not find a counter to his stated point.

The person providing support to Erio was Shirou. Other than being someone Carol brought in as support, Erio knew next to nothing about him. Erio guessed Shirou was a skilled Hunter, who unfortunately got trapped in Carol's grasp. That he was being blackmailed by her to help out.

Nonetheless, Erio still recognized his skills. Currently, the jamming smoke prevented the coordination support system of the augmented suit from providing any support. Without that support, they were basically close to useless. However, after Shirou started providing them support, Erio and the other children were able to recover their connection.

Moreover, even with the jamming smoke, which prevented information-gathering, they were able to accurately pinpoint enemy locations, past walls and other obstructions. The support was even better than their original coordination support system.

In order to provide support, Shirou had been ordering Erio and the other children to install a copious number of information-gathering devices all around. He issued so many orders that it seemed like harassment. Under normal circumstances, those devices should have been rendered useless under the jamming smoke. However, with Shirou's technique, he was able to create and adjust his own communication network. The reason why Erio and the others were still able to communicate with each other was because of his communication network. Furthermore, he hijacked the enemy's communication network to accurately ascertain their exact position.

In the first place, for the past few days, Erio and the others had already been installing information-gathering devices around the area. They were placed in a manner to be used in tandem with the base's security system and the coordination support system. It was fortunate that they were also located in excellent places for Shirou's use. Thus, he managed to be able to provide Erio and the others with great support.

It was exactly because of their prior setup, that even in the face of an overwhelming number of enemies, Erio and the others were able to control the flow of the battle. They turned the jamming smoke to their advantage.

Furthermore, Erio was using the equipment that Akira had used before. Thus, he was technically stronger than any normal Hunter in the area. The heavy augmented suit that he just shot down could easily crush any normal monsters around Kugamayama city. Even so, he was able to defeat it with only one shot.

Since he had overwhelming firepower, he was assigned to take down any powerful enemies; enemies that the others could not handle. Naturally, that meant Erio had to work the hardest among his peers.

“Good grief! You guys are on Akira’s team, right? You should put more effort into this, you know?”

Erio was already exhausted, though it was not physical fatigue. Even so, Shirou continued to berate him, asking him to move like Akira. Because of that, Erio inadvertently replied.

“…No, we’re not on Akira-san’s team!”

“Oh? Is that so?”

Shirou was honestly taken aback. Due to the stress, Erio could not help but harshly explain.

“Yeah, we’re not on his team! I don’t know what Carol-san has told you, but Akira-san is only helping our boss as an individual. We’re only receiving benefits from him through our boss. Akira-san is not even a member of our gang. He already stated he has no plans to join us. So, in the end, we’re just working under our boss, Sheryl. We’re not working under Akira-san… We are not part of his team. But I guess it’s no surprise that others often misunderstand.”

“Ahhh, I see.”

After hearing Erio’s explanation, Shirou now understood why their movements were this horrendous. Up until now, he had thought that Erio and the others were a squad from Tsukisada Construction. That they were disguising themselves as a slum gang, working under Akira. He

hypothesized that Akira was so proactive in helping the gang because it was part of the plan. To build up Tsukisada Construction's forces here.

If his hypothesis held true, their origins did not matter. Be it sent here from another place or recruited from the slum, as long as they were a military squad from Tsukisada Construction, they should be able to fight to some extent.

With such an expectation in mind, Shirou kept berating Erio and the others for obvious mistakes. When he discovered his hypothesis was far from the truth, that they were really just amateurs, he felt guilty. He had been too harsh on them.

"I see. Sorry, I expected you guys to be able to fight better if you were directly under Akira. I'll change my approach then. For now, just keep following my orders."

"…? Alright."

Erio found Shirou's sudden change in attitude to be a bit strange. Nonetheless, he hurriedly followed Shirou's instructions. After he changed location, his next order was to hide. From behind cover, a half-destroyed building, he could see tanks and powered suits slowly marching into the slums.

Erio frowned. He suspected Shirou would tell him to defeat that whole squad. Although he was currently wearing Akira's equipment, he still saw this as a suicidal attack.

Unexpectedly, the next order was for him to stand by. Erio felt that something was off. It was a completely different order compared to the rest that he has been receiving up till now. However, the jamming smoke suddenly got incinerated. A laser swept through, taking out the tanks and powered suits in one strike.

Erio was astonished. He turned toward the source of that laser. It was from atop of a building, far away from where he was. It was from a huge laser

cannon; held by someone he knew. It was Carol. She glanced at Erio and waved at him before moving to another building.

Erio was still recovering from the shock when Shirou contacted him again.

“See? I thought that you would at least be able to do that if you’re part of Akira’s team.”

“Like I said… don’t compare me to Akira-san… In the first place, I don’t have the equipment for that…”

“Oh? That should not be a problem though? Akira did shoot down a powered suit with the equipment you’re wearing.”

“Again! Don’t compare me and Akira-san!”

Erio had no wish to deny that one could do amazing things with amazing equipment. However, he was reminded there was a limit to that. There were things that could not be compensated with exceptional equipment.

The group attacking Sheryl’s base was large. However, they were not well organized. Their individual strength varied from ex-Hunters to high-ranking Hunters working further to the east. In other words, it was nothing more than a motley group of Hunters. Even so, with that many, they completely overwhelmed Sheryl’s force. Thus, there were many in the assaulting group who were certain of victory.

What’s more, the majority in the assaulting group had casually decided to join the group. They heard a vague rumour and accepted an assault request. For some reason, before anyone noticed, a strange rumour with no clear source had spread. It stated that they just had to act as a diversion. Alternatively, they just had to lightly attack Sheryl’s base. Do any of these, and they could gain a connection to the Lion Steel company, receive monetary support, or get paid for this task. Though it was hopeless to pick a fight against Akira, if it was only this much, to them, it seemed completely doable. Thus, many joined to launch an assault.

Some joined, seeing it as the perfect chance to kill Sheryl and completely decimate her gang. Even if Akira survived this battle, if they could get Sheryl, her gang would not be able to survive. Many struggling for influence in the slums were not able to mess with her, fearing retribution from Akira. However, with this many involved in this assault, it would be difficult to pinpoint the blame if Sheryl got killed. Thus, they sent manpower and funding to support the assault.

However, it did not end there. Some remnants from the Ezont and Haurias families had gathered together. They were hoping for their gang to rise from the ashes. They also received monetary support secretly from Udajima. This allowed them to purchase tanks and powered suits. If they were able to destroy Sheryl's gang, it would throw a wrench in Inabe's plan to amass his fortune. Furthermore, many survivors of the Ezont family had a grudge against Akira since he was the one who destroyed their gang. Meanwhile, the Haurias family was doing this in return for Udajima's support, which they would use to recover their gang. For all sorts of reasons, they formed a coalition — one normally impossible to be formed in the slums.

Carol was going around Sheryl's base. She was facing the ongoing onslaught while carrying her large cannon. She prioritized destroying tanks and powered suits, which were completely out of Erio and the children's league.

"Well, as I thought. Even if they bring out tanks and powered suits, their skills only amount to this much."

Carol gazed at the leftover destroyed tanks and powered suits. She mumbled so with a smile plastered on her face. She realized that her standard had substantially increased after she said that. Her smile quickly turned bitter. Although they were way weaker than the opponent that she and Akira had fought against, it did not change the fact they were tanks and powered suits. If it was the past, she would not have looked down on them this much.

Suddenly she noticed the presence of an enemy and jumped to the side. She avoided its bullets as she aimed and fired her laser cannon. However, this opponent was particularly strong, and could quickly evade her laser beam.

Normally, they would immediately continue the fight. However, when both recognized the others' faces, their battle came to an awkward halt. Both were equally surprised while facing each other.

"Oh, so you're also participating in the attack, huh?"

"You too, what are you doing here? And here I thought you went somewhere far away after buying that camping vehicle."

It was someone that Carol knew from her side job. She knew that he was a high-ranking Hunter, who earnt a good amount. Thanks to that, he was well equipped and pretty skilled. He was stronger than the powered suits that Carol had just destroyed.

"Well, I have my reasons, you see. Ah, now that you mention it, how about switching sides? Since we're in this situation, I will not charge you that much money."

Carol said so and smiled bewitchingly. However, the man frowned and seemed apologetic as he replied.

"Sorry. I would be more than happy to accept that offer if it was before I accepted this job. But I can't do that now. So, it would be great if you can just leave. I won't chase after you if you do so, yeah?"

Toward that guy who still looked apologetic, Carol lightly shook her head.

"Sorry, I'm also doing this because it's my job, you see. So, I can't do that."

"I see."

Carol could not withdraw because it was something that Akira had asked her to do. The Hunter could not withdraw because he was faithful to his job. As such, there was only one choice.

"I won't be holding back. Be careful not to get killed, alright?"

"You too. Just so you know, I'm pretty strong right now."

Seeing Carol speak with an amused smile, the guy raised his eyebrows in surprise. However, his lips quickly curled up.

“I see. Here I go then!”

“Take this!”

Carol quickly jumped and aimed her laser cannon. The man reacted accordingly and aimed his rifle. Two people, skilled enough to kill the other, exchanged shots in the middle of the slums.

Tanks, heavy augmented suits, powered suits, and even high-ranking Hunters were among the attackers. To deal with them, Babalod and Levin were working as a team. Both were sold to Viola because of their debt. They were ordered to kill the other if the other guy attempted to escape. Since both had no plans to escape, they were diligently working their butts off.

Putting Babalod aside, fighting such a strong force was practically suicide for Levin. The reason why he was able to keep up so far was because Kiryou had partially sponsored him.

In exchange for their sponsorship, Levin’s debt went past 1 billion Aurum. He was pressed between getting killed because of a lack of suitable equipment or getting better equipment by borrowing more money. Naturally, he ended up choosing the latter.

Levin was amazed at how Babalod fought. Unlike him, who was compensating for his lack of power with equipment, Babalod was originally a member of Zelos’ team, a high-ranking Hunter team.

“You’re pretty good, I guess your Rank 50 is not just for show, huh?”

“Hm? Well, I can at least do this much.”

“If you’re that strong, there’s no need to get into debt in the first place, right? Just how much exactly do you owe?”

Babalod frowned and went silent. Thus, Levin lightly prodded a bit further.

“Well, I won’t force you to tell me. Ah, by the way, in my case, it’s about 1 billion Aurum. Just when exactly would I be able to pay it all back…”

“…10 billion Aurum.”

“Haah!?”

Levin could not hide his shock, which only worsened Babalod’s mood.

“It’s complicated.”

“I-I see…”

Although Levin was interested in what was complicated, he did not have the courage to ask.

Right at the next moment, Babalod suddenly grabbed Levin and jumped away. A moment later, the building next to them was sliced. It crumbled down to something unrecognizable. Levin was taken aback by this sudden attack.

“An enemy!? But there’s nothing on the radar!?”

“If you’re talking about the information sent through the coordination support system, it’s based on the information-gathering device on our side. With a fight this big, it would not be surprising that some of them got destroyed. It would create holes in the radar. You should also do the scanning yourself.”

“B-but I also don’t see any signals from my own information-gathering device…”

“That’s why I’m telling you. Do the scanning yourself. This is what will happen if you leave the setting on auto.”

While Babalod was lecturing Levin, he was also showing him the real skill of a high-ranking Hunter. Suddenly, the two who just tried to ambush them revealed themselves.

The two people who thought that anyone other than Akira was nothing to be worried about, were impressed to find that their ambush had failed.

“Oh, you got yourself out of that, huh? Not bad.”

But the other guy was surprised to see Babalod there.

“…Hm? Wasn’t that guy from Zelos’ team?”

“Really? That’s strange. I’m sure they said that they’ll not get involved this time. I heard they’re still trying to rebuild the team after one of their members betrayed them and wrecked the team.”

“I bet he just joined their side to get some pocket change. Well, it doesn’t matter. Either way, keep your wits. If he’s really from Zelos’ team, even if he’s a new blood, he must be pretty strong.”

“Roger that!”

Babalod, who quickly noticed the change in aura coming from his opponent, knitted his eyebrows and warned Levin.

“Hey, give me support like your life depends on it. Those two are not like the rest. If we’re unlucky, just one of them might be as strong as me.”

“D-do we have any chance of winning?”

“Stop thinking about unnecessary things and focus on giving me your full support. If you get killed, then that’s it. Even if we die here, we will still die fighting. It’s a far better way to die for Hunters drowning in debt, don’t you think?”

Babalod smiled wryly there as if he just discovered a newfound resolve. Watching him get motivated, Levin frowned and pulled himself together.

“L-let’s do this then!”

Levin knew how awful it was to be drowning in debt. However, he also knew how much worse it would be if he selfishly ran away from the front-

line. It would be the same as resigning his worth as a human. As he stepped into the arena, where he could either choose to die valiantly or give his all and hope to survive the day, Levin made his resolve.

As both sides showed signs of now taking it seriously, they started exchanging bullets. Although they were aware of the speed filter, they had bullets with enough firepower to lay waste to the area around them.

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Meanwhile, somewhere near Kugamayama city's inner wall. Inside a restaurant on the first floor of the Kugama building, which was basically integrated as a part of the wall. Elena was gazing outside with worried eyes.

She then glanced at her information panel and heaved a huge sigh.

"…Sara, it has started."

"…I see."

Sara had the same look as Elena. Seeing the same expression on her best friend, Elena looked down.

"Sara, are you angry?"

Similarly, when Sara saw Elena's expression, she gave a slight smile and shook her head.

"I'm not angry. Though, I don't think I can just get over it. In the first place, I did leave the decision to you, the team leader. There's no need for you to feel responsible for everything."

"…Thanks."

Elena was finally able to smile back, though it was a faint one. However, that did not change their situation. She then gave another sigh and wondered.

"I wonder if Akira is doing alright…"

“…He’ll be fine… Probably…”

Elena and Sara already knew what Akira’s situation was when they decided not to help him. There were many reasons why Elena decided to do so.

First, they were still in the middle of a job, which was to be Hikaru’s bodyguards. Since Hikaru was traumatized, she found it difficult to go outside of the inner wall. She stayed within the inner wall, never stepping out ever since she returned. Even so, their job had not ended yet. Thus, Elena and Sara were on stand-by in case Hikaru wanted to go outside.

Elana and Sara were still Hunters. They could not afford to disregard their current job and go help Akira. Moreover, Akira did stress to them, to do their job properly as Hunters.

Furthermore, Hikaru ordered Sara and Elena not to help Akira. Judging from Akira’s reaction back in the wasteland when they got ambushed, he did not want to get Elena and Sara involved. Thus, using that as an excuse, Hikaru convinced Elena and Sara not to go. Otherwise, it would cause Akira to get anxious.

Even if Akira somehow managed to overcome the battle with Elena and Sara’s help, and either of them got killed, there was no telling how far Akira would go for revenge. In the worst-case scenario, Akira might take on the whole Lion Steel company.

If it had come to that point, that would spell the end of him as well. If his target was only Chloe, and he was able to successfully eliminate her, everything could be brought to a close. That was why Hikaru ordered Elena and Sara to not go to Akira’s side this time.

There was also the issue of equipment. Although they received powerful equipment from Hikaru as the upfront payment for the bodyguard mission, those would only become their personal belongings once the mission came to an end. This meant, at the moment, if they went to help Akira and abandon their current job, they had no right to use their current equipment. From the ethical and professional point of view, it was not something that they could do.

If they went to help Akira with their previous equipment, they knew they would only be a burden to him. They might forgive themselves if they went, risking their lives to help him. However, they could not forgive themselves if they went there just to slow him down.

With that in mind, after a lot of thought, Elena eventually decided not to go. Sara was fine with it since Elena had made the decision. However, neither was completely fine with that decision.

That was when Shizuka called them. She called with the simple intention of inviting them to go have a meal together. However, Elena, who was crushed under the feeling of hopelessness, ended up telling Shizuka everything. It was as if she was trying to find a way to forgive herself. She finally threw a question that she had no answer to.

“…Say, Shizuka, what do you think we should do?”

“Hmm, I think you just need to do what you want to do; don’t you think so?”

Although Shizuka’s reply was merely her opinion, Elena seemed a bit taken aback by it. She broke out a smile as if she had found her answer.

“I should do what I want to, huh… That’s right! That’s just what it means to be a Hunter!”

Hunters do their job, charging into the wasteland filled with death on their own volition. Be it for fame, money, or glory. Even if their goal was something else, they could achieve anything by being bold. They had to understand the danger and press on in order to achieve their desires. That was what it meant to be a Hunter. Elena was once again reminded that she was one of those Hunters.

Shizuka’s intuition told her that it was best for Elena to follow her heart.

Elena thought of what she had to do. One thing for certain, sitting there, depressed with her friend, was not what she desired. Neither was it the best

course of action. Now that she had found her answer, Elena quickly decided on what to do next.

“Alright then. Shizuka, sorry, but we suddenly have a business to take care of.”

“Is that so? Okay, be careful.”

“Of course, and thank you!”

Elena ended their conversation and then contacted Inabe. After she conveyed her situation to Inabe, he replied with a rather excited tone of voice.

“So, you want to abandon your current bodyguard job for Hikaru and go help Akira. The issue now is that you can’t get permission to use the equipment you have on you?”

Elena was fully expecting Inabe to refuse her request. She did not expect Inabe to react in such a manner.

“Very well then, go. You can make full use of your current equipment. I will also pay for the ammo and medicine as well. Feel free to go as hard as you desire.”

“…Are you sure you’re fine with it?”

As Elena inadvertently raised her voice, Inabe calmly replied.

“You’re still planning to go even if I say no, right? In that case, it’s better to send someone well-equipped to help, you know? Moreover, if I took away your equipment knowing that you’ll still go, what do you think Akira would do later? Well, I will just add it to be part of the documented request. I will take care of the paperwork and corrections, so you don’t have to worry about it.”

It also served as an excuse to give to Akira later. Even if Elena and Sara got killed, they went there on their own volition. Therefore, Inabe could not be held responsible. Though, it was a fact that as a city officer, Inabe could not

openly declare that he was helping a bounty target, one that might even attack the city. Thus, this was the limit in terms of aid Inabe could give.

Despite his position, Inabe was entirely on Akira's side. Elena, who realized this, thanked him.

"Thank you very much!"

"Don't mention it. Be careful out there."

Elena then closed the call and looked at Sara. Her best friend smiled at her as she spoke.

"Sorry, Sara, I've changed my mind. As I thought, we should go."

"Right. If the team leader has decided, it's not like I have any other choice."

"Geez, don't say it like that. If I may add something, this is also our last chance to show up as Akira's senior Hunters, okay?"

"I see. Well, if I'm being honest, I do feel a bit irritated. We keep being on the receiving end like this. This is a good opportunity to show what we can do as his senior Hunters."

Elena and Sara looked and smiled at each other. They knew where they were heading. It was a battlefield where a 50 billion bounty target was being hunted. Death was just a mistake away. Nonetheless, to achieve what they desired, they decided to go.

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Inside a rest area in the Kugama building, Shizuka was nibbling on a portable meal for Hunters. High-quality portable meals were not cheap, they were delicious and designed to reduce digestion waste products. It was designed to support Hunter's life out in the wasteland. Though, many wealthy individuals inside the inner wall often opted to buy these instead of having a light meal.

"This is actually pretty good. I wonder if I should stock some in my shop."

Though, even if Shizuka stocked some in her shop, the only Hunters that would be able to purchase them would be Akira, Sara, and Elena. That was just how expensive it was. Even so, she still thought that it might be a good idea to have them in her shop.

Furthermore, her muttering indicated she was not there to sample goods for her shop. Hikaru had used the meal as an excuse to have Shizuka placed inside a safe area within the Kugama building, which was treated as part of the area within the inner wall.

Previously, Hunters who were after Akria did try to attack him while he was negotiating with City Management. If they were even willing to go that far, it would come as no surprise they would go as far as to kidnap someone important to him. Hikaru, who suspected that might be the case, did some research. She concluded there were four possible targets: Elena, Sara, Shizuka, and Sheryl.

Since Elena and Sara were Hunters while Sheryl was the boss of a slum gang, which was actively receiving support from Inabe, they should be able to defend themselves.

However, Shizuka was only a normal civilian. The most that she could do was pay for some bodyguards from the private security company in the lower district. Hikaru believed it to be too dangerous. Thus, she decided to evacuate Shizuka to the safety of the Kugama building. At least until things settled down.

However, by doing so, it meant that she was helping out a 50 billion bounty target. A monster recognised by the city, which feared he might attack it. This was not something that Hikaru could do as a staff member of the city. Thus, to circumvent this issue, she came up with many excuses. All just to invite/lure Shizuka to the Kugama building.

After Shizuka received Hikaru’s invitation, she closed her shop and started to temporarily live in the Kugama building.

Once Elena and Sara left, Shizuka received a call from Hikaru.

“Shizuka-san, I just have a small question. What did you say to Elena-san and Sara-san? Just now, I received a message saying that Elean-san and Sara-san are going to help Akira…”

“Hm? Nothing important, they just asked for my opinion.”

“I’m sorry but could you please not do that.”

Hikaru was only barely able to convince Elena and Sara to stay after expending so much effort. Thus, she was disgruntled that they suddenly changed their minds.

However, Shizuka just made a small smile and replied.

“They made their decision on their own. I did not encourage them.”

“That does not change the fact that they changed their minds.”

“I was also trying to be considerate of you too though.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I don’t know what exactly is going on, but one thing I know for certain. You’re in a rather difficult situation, right? If things somehow manage to calm down, to the point negotiations could be held, I’m pretty sure you will be chosen to represent City Management. After all, you are a staff member from City Management. You’re also acquainted with Akira. You even spent quite a lot on bodyguards. Now that you don’t have any escorts, it might be difficult to…”

Hikaru went silent. However, from her silence, it could be felt that she was simply too astounded to speak.

“But if you insist, I can still call them and ask them to stop and rethink it again…”

“Ah, no, that won’t be necessary… Ah! Sorry! Something came up so I have to end the call here! Bye!”

Hikaru ended the call with a blatant lie. Shizuka smiled bitterly and mumbled.

“I’m sorry but I believe this is for the best.”

Though she muttered that to herself, Shizuka was not sure what was ‘for the best’. She knew that she might have done something that she should not. However, even so, instead of just sitting there and doing nothing, she thought that it would still be better for her to do something to push the conclusion in a better direction.

Shizuka wished that her intuition today was still as accurate as ever as she prayed for Akira and the others’ safety.

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Inside a large armoured wasteland vehicle, Pamela was looking over how the battle was going on. She watched how Akira’s group was faring against the automata that she had dispatched and smiled. Although she had lost the multi-legged tank, which was her greatest firepower, Pamela did not seem anxious at all.

“I guess that should do it…”

She had finished checking out the opponent group’s fighting capability through long-range remote automata – the large-sized multi-legged tank, and the reinforcement automata. She had identified the people on the opponent’s side, their equipment, as well as their trump cards. Once Pamela had decided that she had sufficient information, she grabbed Latis’ hand.

“Latis, it’s time. Let’s go and kill them altogether.”

Pamela then left the large room which also doubled as the command centre. She wore a huge smile on her face as she had her hand tangled together with the emotionless Latis. They both left with the goal of killing Shiori and Kanae. Joy and hatred were all mixed into one. It was to a point it was difficult to differentiate them as Pamela directed all her killing intent toward Shiori and Kanae.

For Pamela, this was where things got serious.

Silavin: Dude. Meals that make me poop less? Sign me up. Those wealthy merchants sure know how to live. Have you seen public toilets? I smell the foulness of the underworld whenever I enter a cubical.

Also, My god this chapter is long. It’s nearly 1.5x the length of the chapters in the hundreds.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 285, The Green Liquid

Index

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Shikarabe and his squad from Drankam were repelling the attackers around Sheryl's base. Frustration could be seen on all their faces, and it was not because of the enemies.

"…Those guys' from the Katsuya's faction are still nowhere to be seen… I guess I am getting a bit too paranoid, huh?"

If they were going to attack Akira, this would be the perfect chance for them. That was why Shikarabe and the others were there. Kurosawa, the group's leader, had thought that the opposing faction would take this opportunity to act. They originally planned on slipping into the battle, quickly identifying those in the Katsuya's faction and eliminating them. Afterwards, quickly slip away from the battle.

However, they could not see anyone from the Katsuya's faction. Meanwhile, the attackers would not go out of their way to differentiate Shikarabe's squad and ignore them. Thanks to that, they were forced to fight against them.

That was when Kurosawa suddenly called Shikarabe. At the moment, those from Drankam were borrowing the communication line from Erio and the

others. Thus, they were still able to receive calls even under the jamming smoke. Shikarabe could not help but frown after receiving Kurosawa's order.

"…Return to the base? What do you mean?"

Even though Shikarabe did question the order to withdraw back to Sheryl's base, he understood the intention behind the order. Regardless, they had concluded that the Katsuya's faction was not currently present. There was also a possibility that they had fought enough for the Hunter Office to recognize their effort to honour the peace treaty. Either way, Shikarabe also saw no worth in staying there any longer.

However, withdrawing from the fight would mean escaping from the slums to a more contentious area. There were bound to be more enemies back at the base compared to here. It was the main target of the attackers after all. Thus, it was paradoxical to return back to the base if it was for safety. This caused Shikarabe to look rather bewildered by Kurosawa's order.

However, Kurosawa's vague answer was, strangely enough, enough to convince Shikarabe.

"I have a bad feeling."

The moment he heard that, Shikarabe knitted his eyebrows.

For a Hunter, Kurosawa was someone who tended to go with the safer approach. Unfortunately, many Hunters thought of him as a coward because of that. However, thanks to his cautious nature, Kurosawa was often able to notice things that others would normally miss. Of course, many of his guesses ended up as mere speculation. But even so, he always trusted his guts when he led his team, and many Hunters were saved by that.

It was the same this time again. If his gut was right, that would mean Kurosawa felt that it was too late to try to break through the slums. Which meant, their only option was to hunker down in Sheryl's base.

"…I understand, we're returning right now."

As a fellow Hunter who risked his life trusting his gut, and also the man who requested Kurosawa to take the command, Shikarabe made the fastidious decision to abide by the order without uttering a single word of complaint.

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After Akira spent 5 annihilator warheads on the multi-legged tank, he hoped that finally, the enemy would withdraw. Though, that possibility did not help his tremendous lament – the massive amount he had just spent.

Akira believed the multi-legged tank to be his enemy's strongest weapon. Now that it was gone, it would be enough of a reason for them to call a retreat. However, his guess was way off the mark. Enemies that were surrounding the slums, located around the wasteland, dispatched automata in his direction. Moreover, they started shooting missiles filled with jamming smoke once again. The destruction of the multi-legged vehicle only served to help the jamming smoke spread across the slums.

As Akira drove his bike up into the sky, he threw a question to Kanae and Shiori.

"I don't know all the details, but aren't they supposed to be in the same company as the both of you? Do you know how much damage they will need to take until they kindly withdraw?"

"I'm really sorry, but I can't really tell."

"Well, I guess there's no other choice but to wipe them down to the last person, no?"

Shiori replied seriously, but in contrast to that, Kanae only replied jokingly with a smile. Akira heaved a sigh. The response was more or less what he had expected.

"I see. It seems that a large number of those in Lion Steel are diligent. As expected of a large conglomerate."

Akira tilted his head and smiled bitterly. However, lines could be seen on his forehead. Enemies were coming at him without any regard for their lives. They would continue fighting unless he devastated their bodies till they could no longer move.

Shiori and Kanae understood Akira's feelings and also smiled bitterly. They then saw automata spreading out down below.

"Akira-sama, we will be taking those on the ground. Please provide us with support if you happen to have extra firepower to spare."

"I'm leaving the sky to you."

Shiori and Kanae returned his rifles, which they had borrowed. They quickly jumped off the bike. On their way down, Shiori lightly lowered her head to thank Akira. Meanwhile, Kanae was waving at him with her signature smile. After they safely landed, they quickly moved between the rubbles, using it as cover while slowly chipping away the enemy force.

The automata on the ground and in the sky started shooting at Akira. However, he was able to skilfully evade with high-speed dexterous driving.

"Alpha, we don't need to use annihilator bullets on them, right?"

Akira asked with the hope that the answer was 'yes'. However, Alpha simply gave a teasing smile before replying.

"Let's check if it's needed or not first."

"Good idea."

Akira aimed the two RL2 multi-rifles he just received back with his TGP laser cannon. The C-bullets, the mini-missiles, and the laser cannon landed on their respective targets. They broke through the enemies' forcefield armour and pierced their bodies before causing a spectacular explosion.

"Alright!"

Akira inadvertently exclaimed in joy knowing that cheap bullets would do just fine. So, he quickly resumed the fight in a good mood.

Shiori and Kanae quickly continued to take down automata one by one after they landed. They blazed through the thick jamming smoke on the battlefield littered with wreckage and rubble, closed the distance to their target, and attacked. Their might managed to close the gap between mere humans and giant human-shaped automata.

Shiori jumped and heaved her blade on top of the 5 metres tall automaton. One swing was enough to break through its forcefield armour. The horizontal slash separated its body into lower and upper halves, which slid in the opposite direction and collapsed to the ground.

Kanae's fists were her main weapon. It was powered with her augmented suit and her enhanced body, equipped with powerful anti-forcefield armour. Each time she delivered a straight punch into an automaton's body, it creates a deep dent, driving a shockwave inside. The internal damage caused it to explode a moment later.

Both Shiori and Kanae had no issue fending off the automata. However, that was the exact reason why they were worried.

"…Ane-san. What do you think?"

"…No idea, at least not for now."

All the newly dispatched automata were strangely weak. Although they were not that cheap, they were not something that one would use to hunt a 50 billion bounty target.

It was understandable if they sent every single automaton they got in one go but for some reason, they were sent in waves. They might have been sent to buy time while the controllers were withdrawing. However, there was no sign of the other groups leaving the battlefield.

"For now, let's take down as many of them as possible."

“Roger that!”

Shiori and Kanae continued fighting with solemn looks on their faces. They took down as many enemies as possible, still not knowing what the enemy was planning.

Right around that time, Akira, who had already destroyed many of the automata, was still riding on his bike in the sky, and had the same worried expression.

“Alpha, do you think this is a trap?”

Akira wished he did not have to fight against any strong enemies. He was glad he did not need to use annihilator warheads to destroy the automata. However, considering that he had to fight a colossal multi-legged tank and take on a swarm of Pamela’s remote automata after, it felt strange. He could not help but feel weird now that his enemies were weaker.

Alpha also did not wear her usual smile. She replied with a severe expression.

“I’m sure it’s some kind of scheme. Either way, they now know that you can’t shoot annihilator warheads as you wish.”

Akira had shown his trump card, the annihilator warhead, to the enemy. The automata that were sent to pursue him in the sky were spread out. They were in a formation where the use of an annihilator warhead would significantly reduce its effectiveness. Since he decided not to use the annihilator warhead, it meant two things. Either he did not have many reserves of it, or he was not able to freely use it.

After listening to Alpha’s explanation, Akira replied.

“Hmmm… So basically, at the very least, I no longer can bluff my way out and act like I have that many left, huh? These automata are just expendable pawns to confirm that…? Hmm, but still…”

Although it made sense, Akira was not fully content with Alpha's conclusion and frowned.

"Akira, don't drop your guard down just yet. We have no other choice but to continue to fight right now."

"You're right. Let's do this."

Overthinking was counter-effective. Akira told himself so and quickly changed gear, refocusing back on the battlefield.

Even in the midst of everything that was going on, missiles were still spreading out jamming smoke. Since it was even thicker than before, it completely shrouded the whole battlefield.

Shiori and Kanae started to get worried about how thick the jamming smoke was. That was when Kanae suddenly noticed an enemy presence from beyond the jamming smoke. She quickly turned in that direction. Shiori also did the same albeit a little bit late.

Not too far away from the two maids, right at the border of their perceptive range, their incoming opponents also felt their presence and went straight at them.

The moment they recognized who it was, Shiori's and Kanae's eyes narrowed as they knitted their eyebrows. They immediately went after the new hostile force.

Their opponents were Pamela and Latis. Although Shiori and Kanae knew they were being lured, they could not afford to stand still while Pamela and Latis were there. Especially since the other two were heading straight to where Reina and the others were.

While in the midst of fighting, Akira's targets suddenly came to a sudden halt. They fell one by one, crashing straight to the hard ground.

"W-what was that? What just happened?"

Akira was dumbfounded and Alpha was visibly concerned.

“It’s difficult to ascertain what is going on under this jamming smoke. All of them crashed instead of safely landing on the ground. They didn’t even use forcefield armour to reduce the impact. The crash, at this height, with their mass, would mean all of them got disabled.”

“I see…”

Although they did know what just happened, one thing was certain. The number of enemies got reduced and there were no reinforcements. In the end, things ended well, Akira told himself as much and shook his worries away.

“Alpha, how are Shiori and Kanae doing? Can you tell from here?”

“I can’t really say with utmost certainty. However, I don’t detect any incoming signals that suggest they are still in battle. I believe they are in the same situation as we are.”

“In that case, I guess I’ll go visit them after returning back to the base for now. I want to replenish my ammo…”

Akira said so and turned his bike toward Sheryl’s base. However, suddenly, he frowned. The moment he directed his focus towards the direction of the base, he unconsciously used his information-gathering device in the same direction. The result was extremely worrying.

Alpha was not able to provide Akira full support due to the thick jamming smoke. Nonetheless, the moment he realized the position of the enemies, she quickly shifted her focus to searching for them as well. She immediately understood what was going on. Pamela and the others had broken through the defences of the base and were heading there. Meanwhile, Shiori and Kanae were pursuing them.

“…What? Since when?”

“Alpha! We’re going!!”

Akira quickly accelerated his bike. The thick jamming smoke was much denser on the surface than in the air. It caused the slums to be separated into two areas, the upper and the lower regions. Akira accelerated his bike and rode above the border. The condensed jamming smoke made it seem as if he was driving on top of clouds. Due to the speed filter effect of the jamming smoke, the bike's forcefield armour was enhanced. It managed to create a path under the tires from frozen and hardened jamming smoke. The tires spun intensely on top of those platforms, pushing the bike forward even faster, managing to leave a large trail of smoke behind it.

"So those automata were only a diversion, huh?"

"That might have been the case. But let's focus first and save that for later."

"You're right. Alpha, can you help with the aiming?"

"If it's possible, you should rely on your own skills. The jamming smoke effect is getting stronger. If I divide up my resources to assist your aiming, my ability to evade attacks would be greatly reduced."

"Alright then, I'll leave the evading to you."

"Yep, you can leave that part to me."

Akira aimed his TGP laser cannon carefully at Pamela and the others. Although he was sniping on top of an extremely fast-moving bike, it should not be a problem for him. The cannon muzzle released a powerful stream of energy. The jamming smoke did reduce its firepower, but it still travelled straight towards its target. Drilling its way toward Pamela and the others.

Pamela noticed that laser shot but she simply laughed it off. The automaton created off Latis' corpse made a 180-degree turn and lightly jumped, putting both of his arms in the way of the laser beam. He created a forcefield board of equivalent power. It managed to deflect the laser, bouncing it back towards Akira.

Akira flusteredly swerved to get out of the way. The laser had already lost most of its firepower and got further halved as it returned back to him.

Moreover, Alpha had placed all her resources into evading, thus, he had no reason to be worried at all. However, that incoming laser still caught him off guard.

“Whoah! That was dangerous!”

“Well, aren’t you glad that you chose to assign my resources to evading?”

Alpha was smiling confidently while Akira chuckled bitterly.

“Yeah, you’re right. But still, what the heck was that? How did he bounce the laser cannon back!?”

“Albeit difficult to put into practice, it is completely possible in theory.”

“I see, I see! Then how about this!?”

Akira directed all three of his RL2 multi-rifles, two on his hands and one on his bike, at Pamela. Countless C-bullets and mini-missiles cut through jamming smoke toward their targets.

However, Pamela casually received his barrages with only one arm. She hopped, turned around, and projected a forcefield shield with one arm to receive the barrages. The forcefield shield’s hardness was enhanced by the jamming smoke, managing to perfectly block the bullets and the mini-missiles.

Afterwards, Pamela kicked the shield. The hardened forcefield shield, which looked like a solidified smoked glass, deflected the incoming bullets as it flew toward Akira.

Akira was caught off guard again and pulled the bike up into the sky. The translucent forcefield shield passed by him, slowly dissipated energy as it continued to zoom behind him.

“…That doesn’t work as well! Dammit!!”

Akira spat out curses in reaction to the horrendous situation he was in. Not only did his shots get blocked, but he was even forced to take evasive

maneuvers. Pamela used that opening to get further away from him. The further the target, the lower the might of his bullets. Worst, the stronger the forcefield armour his opponents had, the harder it would be to detect them.

The jamming smoke enveloping the area was beneficial for those who were trying to get away from the battlefield. Shiori and Kanae were also being obstructed by Pamela's forcefield shield. It prevented them from catching up with Pamela, even as they tried their hardest to chase after her.

"The annihilator warhead… I guess that is a bad idea, huh?"

"Yep, Akira, you can't use it right now."

"Thought so."

Not only would he get caught up in the explosion, but Shiori and Kanae would also get caught. Furthermore, annihilator warheads were not something to be used against another human. Thus, Akira held himself back from using it.

Alpha also agreed with his decision, but she had a different reason.

"Last time you shot it in the direction of the wasteland, that was why the city defence squad decided to let it slide. If you shoot it toward the direction of the city while already this close, Kugamayama city will definitely respond. Let's wait until you get your new equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry first before assaulting the city."

"Y-yeah."

Although Akira agreed with her hypothesis, he was a bit taken aback that Alpha had a completely different reason. A reason completely different from his own.

Either way, it did not change the fact that they could not use that warhead this time. Now, Akira understood why Pamela used those weak automata as a diversion.

“So, we fell right into her trap. We have no other choice. Alpha, for now, let’s meet up with Shiori and Kanae before heading back to the base.”

“Don’t forget that I might lose connection to you due to the thickness of the jamming smoke close to the surface.”

“Yeah. I’ll be careful.”

Akira accelerated the bike and headed down. As Akira plunged into the thick smoke, Alpha suddenly vanished from his view. Even so, he still went deeper into the dense jamming smoke. The moment he saw Shiori and Kanae, he quickly turned the bike in their direction.

“I’m heading back to the base and will just ignore them for now. Do you want a ride?”

That would mean if Pamela was not heading towards Sheryl’s base, they would lose her. Due to the jamming smoke, it would be difficult to find her again. Furthermore, since they did not know what Pamela was trying to do, this might be a fatal mistake.

Shiori and Kanae understood as much. However, they still decided to follow Akira. As long as Pamela was not trying to directly attack them, they already knew their priorities. It was more important to return back to Reina instead of chasing after Pamela. This was regardless of the danger Pamela might cause. Thus, Reina and Shiori took a glance at one another and quickly jumped on board Akira’s bike.

“Thank you very much!”

“Thanks, I’ll take up on that offer.”

Right after Shiori and Kanae got on the bike, Akira quickly pulled up, flying up once again. He only stopped when he was on the border of entering the red area, which he was barred from entering. Once at the highest point, he turned the bike and drove straight towards Sheryl’s base. His terminal velocity was greatly limited when he was close to the surface,

but now he was far above, the effect of the speed filter was greatly weakened, allowing him to move much faster.

Even so, the speed filter effect was not completely gone. Akira still had to push his bike, to force his way against the speed filter effect.

The remote automata with Pamela's face as well as the weak automata that Akira and the others had destroyed were all in large pools of green blood. Some of them got evaporated by the laser cannon from the multi-legged tank. Those that still had any remains, were all gory pieces scattered around.

They were all already biologically dead. If they were machines, they would be considered broken. The green liquid they were in, was medicinal drugs. The remains were absorbing it, causing the pools to gradually shrink.

Over time, the lump of flesh inside the green pool became chunks. Some even managed to grow out a mouth.

Those that managed to develop mandibles went around consuming flesh and metal alike – anything leftover from the automata. With every piece it consumed, it grew larger.

Eventually, those chunks grew limbs.

They started to walk on their legs. Meanwhile, their hands went around reaching for items that their mouths could not directly reach. They kept munching and devouring everything they took in. The more they ate, the bigger they grew. Eventually, both their size and the number of limbs increased.

The same exact thing was happening all over the slums. After all, Akira and the others were fighting the automata while moving around the slums. Thus, leftovers were scattered all over the place. Eventually, these chunks became clumps, large enough to start devouring larger leftover pieces of automata.

Some automata even had their bodies eaten from the inside. The green liquid broke out from inside and formed a mouth that devoured everything

in its reach. As if it was infected by a parasite, its generator and forcefield armour projector were slowly consumed from the inside.

The jamming smoke was of no help to onlookers as no one was able to notice what was happening.

The jamming was originally meant to weaken the firepower of the powerful weapons used in battle. Thus, it was not easy for those, aware of the purpose of the thick jamming smoke, to notice something unusual was happening.

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Reina was sniping from the top of Sheryl's base. Shiori had stopped her from joining them, who were going to hide in close proximity to Akira. She managed to convince Reina by stressing how dangerous it was. However, it would also be unacceptable for Reina to stay holed up at the base, alone. Thus, compromises were made.

A large-sized rifle spewed out a bullet that pierced through the jamming smoke and hit its target. It drilled a large hole through the torso of a heavy augmented suit, instantly killing its user.

Togami could not help but be amazed by Reina's sniping.

"You can still hit your target even under this situation, huh? That's impressive."

Even with his compliment, Reina just smiled bitterly. She lightly changed the subject.

"Well, I'm getting information of their precise location, after all. There's no way I can do something like this completely on my own."

If she was all on her own, Reina would not be able to ascertain the enemy's position. However, by connecting to the coordination support system that Shirou had assimilated with, Reina could see the enemy's exact location through her enhanced vision.

“To think that there’s someone who can get such accurate information in this situation…”

Reina and the others knew nothing about Shirou. They only knew him as someone brought in by Carol, to help in the fight. Even so, they still recognized Shirou to be an extremely skilled person.

However, knowing the enemies’ position did not mean that it was easy to hit them. Furthermore, with the speed filter, the trajectory of a speeding bullet would often meander slightly away from the straight line of fire. It was thanks to Reina’s skill that she was able to hit her targets. Togami was praising Reina for that feat. Nonetheless, after hearing her response, he simply smiled wryly and tried to match the conversation.

“…Ahh, you’re right. This world is filled with so many amazing people.”

Reina pouted, but it quickly changed to a small smile.

“Well, I’m planning to join their ranks sometime in the future though. How about you, Togami?”

Seeing Reina’s smile of challenge, Togami chuckled.

“…Yeah, that’s the plan for me too. Though, in my case, that’s something in the near future. Or more like, something real soon.”

“Oh? Is that so? Well, it’s a race then.”

Reina declared with a smile on her face. There was a wish mixed in her words, to be able to stay close enough to Togami for it to be a race.

They suddenly noticed someone else’s presence nearby and quickly turned in that direction. Togami stood in front of Reina, to shield her. He pointed his rifle in the direction of the presence.

The source of it was Pamela and the others. They were running toward Reina, trying to get onto the base’s rooftop.

Togami opened fire at once. However, Pamela immediately deployed her forcefield shield, which easily blocked the bullets. Without any time to bark out orders, Togami simply pointed at the rooftop's door. It was an indication to Reina, immediately retreat.

Reina understood what Togami meant and immediately headed for the door. Since this base was where relics from Tsubaki's area were housed, it was designed and built to be especially robust. Its whole structure was not something that should be found in the slums. The walls were protected by forcefield shields and once the door was shut, it would be extremely difficult to break through. This was the reason Shiori allowed Reina to provide support from the rooftop of the base.

Naturally, Pamela noticed and quickly threw the forcefield shield toward the door, blocking Reina from reaching it. Although the forcefield shield would dissipate after a few seconds, it was more than enough time. Pamela could reach Reina and Togami.

Reina knew that the situation was grave. Even the slightest bit of delay could spell her end. With her escape route being completely blocked. Reina froze for a second. However, that was when another signal suddenly came from above, causing her to look up reflexively. Her train of thoughts immediately returned after she saw what was above.

Akira and the others were coming. They were all on Akira's bike, heading in her direction. Shiori and Kanae quickly jumped off the bike and created a forcefield platform, accelerating themselves faster toward where Reina was.

Naturally, Pamela intercepted their attempts to group up. Pamela's group suddenly changed where they were headed. Now, they moved to intercept Shiori and Kanae. Pamela and Kanae made contact with their fists while Latis and Shiori made contact with their swords.

When Reina saw this, she immediately knew what she had to do. She quickly ran toward the end of the rooftop and jumped off. The best thing she could do to help Kanae and Shiori, was to get away from this place. To ensure that she was safe so that they could fully focus on the fight. To create an environment, they did not have to worry about her.

Togami immediately understood what Reina was planning and followed after her. He also jumped off the rooftop. Meanwhile, the automata that were behind Pamela's group, went to chase after them.

Akira was not sure where to go as the situation had quickly changed right in front of his eyes. That was when Shiori sent a glance, to signal him to go to Reina. Thus, Akira made the decision and drove in Reina's direction.

Shiori and Kanae as well as Pamela's group touched the rooftop. Unlike Pamela, who was smiling like a maniac filled with killing intent, Shiori was solemn. This was despite the fact they managed to protect Reina from Pamela.

"I guess I should say I made it in time… or rather, I got invited just at the right time, huh?"

Pamela casually confirmed Shiori's question with a smile.

"Oh? So, you do understand, huh? It's two on two, just like last time. But this time, I won't be pulling Latis down."

Due to her failure last time, Latis got killed. Which had led to this situation. Pamela's smile was filled with the insanity deep inside her.

However, even when faced with her insanity, Kanae chuckled and mockingly asked.

"Two on two? It's one on two, no?"

Pamela's smile immediately vanished.

"…It is two on two."

As she glared at Kanae, Pamela's expression started to get dyed with hatred.

However, that did not affect Kanae at all.

"Well, it doesn't matter. It was all because of my mistake last time that you managed to get away. So, this time, I'll get serious."

Kanae’s smile vanished. Her glowing eyes of excitement whenever she looked forward to an upcoming fight disappeared. Her expression turned cold. There was no semblance of respect for her opponent. She looked at Pamela with a freezing cold glare, as if she was looking at a mere obstacle to her job.

“Now die!”

“I’ll kill you this time!”

Both uttered words to express their respective desire. Both sentences were similar but vaguely different as they sprang into action. To turn what they said into reality. Shiori and Latis matched them and stepped forward as well.

Four people, or three people to be more precise, started their deathmatch. It was fuelled by their respective emotions: loyalty, hatred, and desire to kill. With the help of their augmented suits, they swung their fists and blades with all their might. It was as if the speed filter of the jamming smoke did not affect them at all.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 286, Curse From The Dead

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As Reina was falling, she looked up and saw an automaton behind Togami, chasing after them. She immediately grabbed her rifle and aimed at the automaton's head. The bullet travelled straight towards its target and blew its head off.

However, she was caught by surprise when she saw the headless automaton continue to move. It took a stance in mid-air and aimed its rifle back at her.

Togami also turned around and shot at the automaton. Even after being riddled with bullets, it was not enough to destroy it. However, it was barely enough to temporarily stop it from moving. Reina used this opening to fire more shots. She went for the limbs first, breaking them apart using her powerful bullet. Afterwards, she took shots at the body, smashing it apart.

The destroyed automaton splattered its parts all over the place. Green liquid, mixed with flesh and metal was everywhere. While everything was falling, Reina created a slanted platform to ride down on using her forcefield armour, which also serves to reduce their velocity. When she saw Akira's bike coming close, she jumped onboard.

"Akira! What's going on? What happened!?"

“I don’t know the whole situation myself. But since we have no time right now, I will just tell you this. You have two choices: evacuate to somewhere safe, or get away from this place and provide support for Shiori and Kanae from afar.”

Reina hesitated for a second but she quickly made up her mind and glanced at Togami, who would be dragged in by her decision. Thankfully, Togami gave a firm nod.

“I’ll provide support.”

“Alright then.”

Akira made a sharp vertical U-turn, barely touching the ground, bouncing quickly back up.

After regrouping back with Togami and Reina, Akira then thought.

“Alpha, that automaton that they just shot down, it’s pretty weak, don’t you think? Or is it just my imagination?”

The automata that Akira and the others had desperately fought back were much stronger than the one Reina had just taken down. A part of Akira was questioning if he had misjudged Reina and Togami’s strength. If that was really the case, he wondered if his judgment had been clouded.

Thankfully, Alpha denied his worries.

“No. They’re indeed of pretty bad quality. My guess is that they’re moving horrendously because the one controlling them is busy fighting.”

“I see. Then as I thought, the one on the top is the real Pamela, right?”

“I can’t confirm it, but there’s a good chance that the assault will let up if we manage to kill her. So, let’s hurry back up.”

“Yeah, let’s get this done.”

Since it was a conversation through telepathy, it did not take much time and the rooftop was still a bit further ahead. Even so, it would not take that much time for Akira to reach a location where they could provide Shiori and Kanae support.

That was of course if everything went well. As usual, there were obstacles. Akira quickly noticed that something was approaching. He immediately suspected it to be just another automaton on an air bike. Thus, he opened fire.

However, when the source of the signal showed itself, it appeared from behind the jamming smoke. Its whole appearance alarmed him.

It turned out that his first suspicion was partially correct. The one riding the bike was not an automaton, but a mass of flesh which had assimilated with machines. It had multiple hands growing out of its body, equipped with multiple rifles.

Akira's group and the strange mass of flesh exchanged bullets between them.

Although their bullets packed enough power to kill each other, the deciding factor was the ability to evade and shoot. In this regard, Akira's group had the upper hand. The first barrage stripped the mass of flesh its parts as blood was sprayed into the air. However, even after taking all that damage, it was still pulsating and alive. It took a second barrage for its form to completely collapse to pieces and fall to the ground.

Akira, Reina, and Togami were able to easily grasp victory. However, they were not pleased at all. Instead, their expression displayed clear unsettlement. Reina inadvertently yelped.

"Akira! What was that!? Did you bring them here!? What exactly were you fighting against back there!?"

"I didn't see anything like that before though. Just what in the world is going on?"

Akira seems really confused. That was when Alpha suddenly warned him with a grave expression.

“Akira, more of them are coming. Get ready to engage.”

Akira could see more strange-looking similar masses of flesh heading in his direction from afar. They were of many different variations. Some of them had a portion of the flying bike assimilated into their bodies. Some with more limbs than the others. Some with headless upper bodies sticking out. All of them were of a distorted spherical shape, and all of them looked horrific. Although they seemed to be trying to imitate a humanoid shape, it was clear that they were failing spectacularly. Furthermore, they were obviously targeting them.

“Reina. Togami. We’ll take them down before they can reach Shiori and Kanae. Assume that I have no leeway to help you out and try to do your best on your own.”

Reina smiled confidently. Meanwhile, Togami made a faint smile. Both were fired up.

“Of course!”

“Well, I’m Reina’s bodyguard, after all. So, I have no wish to push that duty onto you.”

“Alright then, let’s go.”

Akira suddenly accelerated the bike and went straight up. Afterwards, they went past the roofs of most of the buildings there and raced around the base at high speed. Due to the speed, any normal person would have been thrown off by the centripetal force. However, Akira and the others were able to easily hold on, and continue using their respective rifles to shoot down the new wave of strange enemies swarming the place.

The green blood splattered around as those monstrosities were shot down. However, many managed to quickly recover after they got shot down.

Those that crash down would fly up again. With more of them coming, none really defeated, shooting them only seemed to be a waste of bullets.

At the moment, Akira's group seems to hold the upper hand in that right. However, it was clearly only a matter of time before the table got turned.

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By Shirou's command, Erio and the other gang children retreated back into the base. At first, many were displeased since it meant they had to leave the defence line that they had been maintaining. A defence line that had come at the cost of some of their friends. However, after seeing that the team from Drankam had also returned, they were able to accept Shirou's retreat order. Now, they were confused as to what was going on outside.

Closing all entry meant strengthening the building's defences. However, they would be simply taking hits without being able to shoot back. It would only be a matter of time before their defences got broken through. Furthermore, the forcefield installed in the base would not be able to buy that much time. To prevent the worst, they have been outside, striking surprise attacks – that was until Shirou issued his retreat order.

Now, the entrance and exits were closed and barricaded. Each person got posted to their respective positions, all ordered to point their rifles outside. Erio and the others tensed up, believing that they would have no other choice but to take hits fired by tanks and powered suits.

However, their anxiety was quickly replaced by shock and confusion. There did not seem to be any attackers coming.

"Erio, what is going on?"

"…Well, if I may make an optimistic guess, I would say that Akira-san has won and the enemies are retreating… Or something like that?"

"Oooh! I see!"

Erio had nothing to support his claim. However, it did help to raise the morale of the other children. Thus, even Erio started to believe his baseless guess. That was right when he saw something falling from the sky. It had completely betrayed his hopeful wish.

“W-what is that thing!?”

Erio flusteredly aimed his rifle. Horrifying-looking masses of flesh with multiple limbs were raining down from the sky around the base.

“M-Monster!? W-why are monsters here…!?”

“They’re still moving!!”

Erio and the children’s bewilderment got shaken off when they heard that. The monsters were still trying to clump up and return back to its original form even after being sprayed with bullets. However, at a certain point, it could not move anymore. It took on too much damage and its regenerative capability was not able to keep. In other words, it had used up all the green liquid in its veins and finally stopped moving.

However, that was not the end. Since Akira and the others were still shooting more down from the sky, these monstrosities were basically raining down to the ground for Erio and the others to fight.

Erio shouted to the other children, who were in a state of disarray and chaos.

“Calm down and shoot at them! They’re not unkillable!”

The other children finally calmed down and returned back to shooting. With the help of the coordination support system, they were able to perform very well and hold the upper hand. This helped raise their morale.

That was when suddenly, another strange thing happened. The attackers that were hiding suddenly showed themselves. As expected, it was at the worst possible time. However, the children’s fright was quickly replaced by

bewilderment. After all, the incoming enemies were also attacked by the monsters.

“Seriously… What the heck is going on…?”

Although the strange situation continued on, Erio and the others had no other choice but to keep fighting back.

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As Akira was racing about above Sheryl’s base on his bike at high speed, he looked around his surroundings.

“Alpha, those things… Basically, the ones with greater speed are reaching us first and there are actually even more of them coming, right?”

“Most probably, yes.”

They were similar to monsters like the greedy crocodile, which assimilated things that they ate. Thus, the ones Akira was facing right now were those that managed to consume and assimilate with air bikes. They were more mobile and were able to get here sooner than the others. This meant that there were still others out there, headed here. Worst, there were most likely even stronger variants. After all, some must have devoured the automata.

Akira could not help but frown at the thought.

That was when Reina suddenly asked with a grave expression.

“Akira, those things are monsters, right?”

“Eh? Well… I think so…”

Akira was a little bit confused as to why Reina asked that question. After all, the answer was obvious. However, Reina took Akira’s words extremely seriously.

“You think so too, right? Then let’s tell the city defence squad. Although they’re taking a neutral stance in the conflict between you and Lion Steel,

I’m sure they would dispatch their men if it’s against a swarm of monsters this close to the city. Togami and I will go and inform them.”

Akira took some time to figure out what to do. Although it was a fact that they were fighting against monsters, it was hard for him to simply accept that monsters came here in the middle of the fight with such timing by pure coincidence. These monsters definitely had something to do with the Lion Steel company. Or at the very least, something to do with Pamela. Asking for help from City Management would mean getting them involved in his problem due to his selfishness. It was not something that he would like to do.

But in the end, this was something Togami or Reina volunteered to do. Although it was something he would never do, it was also not his place to force them not to involve City Management. It took a moment, but Akira finally realized something. That Reina knew exactly what she was doing, that her question and future actions were self-serving ones.

Even if it meant using monsters as an excuse, even if it meant getting City Management involved, as long as it might help Shiori and Kanae, Reina would not hesitate to do it. Akira finally understood and he gave his permission.

“…Alright, I’ll let you borrow my bike. Good luck.”

Reina, who was originally planning to go on foot, was shocked by Akira’s proposal. Since they had to directly go make contact with City Management due to the jamming smoke, the area that they had to go to was well within the red area where Akira was not permitted to enter. Thus, Reina thought that there was no other choice but to go on their own. Reina knew that they would have to split here but she did not expect Akira would offer to lend them his bike.

“Are you sure?”

“Well, they did help me out back then. So, I’ll have to somehow pay that favour back, right?”

Akira knew that Shiori and Kanae expected him to protect Reina when they sent him to chase after her. Now that they had to move separately from here, Akira believed that he should at least do something to help Reina. Thus, he thought of lending her his precious bike.

“Thank you. I’ll be borrowing it for a while.”

Of course, it was safer for Akira to have the bike around. Even so, Akira allowed Reina to borrow it. She could imagine just how grateful Akira was to Shiori and Kanae, for him to go this far. Thus, as Shiori and Kanae’s master, Reina decided to take full responsibility and gratefully accepted his offer.

“By the way, don’t break it, okay?”

“I’ll be careful.”

Akira and Reina faintly smiled at each other before Akira jumped off the bike.

Now that Reina was on the steer, she immediately accelerated forward.

“Togami! Now that Akira is not here, make sure to protect me, okay?”

“I know it already! Geez! Give me a break!”

Although most of those strange monsters that could fly got shot down, there were still those that were walking on the ground. Some had deformed arms, without skin, exposing its broken bones held together by enhanced muscles. Large-sized rifles seemed to sprout out from their bodies, while some were held, all of which aimed at Reina.

Reina and Togami slipped in between the warheads as they quickly left the battlefield.

After jumping off the bike, Akira was falling while shooting at the monsters around the base. Alpha, who was floating next to him, seemed obviously concerned.

“Akira, I think lending your bike to them in this situation is overkill.”

“Well, I will manage somehow. I’m also almost out of ammo, by the way.”

Akira smiled bitterly while he jokingly said, to which Alpha responded with a huge sigh.

Finally, Akira did deplete his reserve ammo. Even when both his rifles suddenly stopped shooting, he calmly kicked the air and accelerated down.

On the ground, the camping vehicle leapt out of the base through remote driving. Once Akira landed, he quickly entered the already opened back door and finished replenishing his ammunition before jumping out through the opened skylight window. Without missing a beat, he started shooting as if to empty the extended magazine, which surprisingly held numerous bullets for its small size.

The weird monsters got overwhelmed by the storm of bullets and basically got obliterated in an instant. Hundreds of mini-missiles, the size of a bullet but with the homing capability, filled the area like a tsunami. They sought their respective targets and blew up. This was just the stark difference between how many bullets one could carry on a bike compared to a camping vehicle. Akira used that to his advantage as much as he could.

“I bet they don’t have anything like that huge tank. For something like that, I require a bike to avoid getting shot. So, let’s just keep things up like this. Eliminate them before they can shoot at me. That way, I won’t really need my bike.”

Akira said and smiled, Alpha turned towards him and made a deep smile.

“Akira, do you know what ammo expense is?”

“…I used 5 annihilator warheads back then, the rest would not change my total expenses by that much.”

“Is that so? Well, if you say so, then it’s not my place to say anything”

Akira chuckled as if to push that away from his mind. Meanwhile Alpha just smiled amusedly at him.

Akira went around the base on the camping vehicle, obliterating any hostile entities that he encountered. In the middle of that, he glanced at the rooftop of Sheryl's base. The homing bullets went in that direction, but those strange monsters jumped and sacrificed themselves to block the homing bullets.

[…As I thought, they are deliberately throwing themselves in its way.]

The masses of flesh in the area were obviously focusing on him. However. it was not like they were targeting him because of who he was. They were targeting him because he was trying to help Shiori and Kanae. In the first place, these strange monsters were not being controlled by Pamela. They were simply attacking anyone who was trying to get involved with the battle on the rooftop of Sheryl's base.

[So, basically, they're telling me not to get in the way, huh? Just what is going on with them?]

Akira thought that this was indeed strange. However, he simply continued to focus on the enemies around the base without trying to go to the rooftop. There was a good chance that those strange creatures would swarm him if he tried to force his way up to the rooftop. That might only cause more chaos, which could distract Shiori and Kanae. With that in mind, Akira prioritised cleaning up the monsters in the area first.

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Kanae's punch split the air. Her fist was filled with killing intent. It was not the usual killing intent since she had decided to stop playing around. Her killing intent right now was more apathetic. It was as if she was just doing her job, to crush an insect. It focused more on efficiency instead of emotions.

That high-speed punch created a thick solid wall of air resistance between her and her target, which was not even one meter away from her fist.

However, that did not stop her. She broke through that wall with her skill, scattering shockwaves in all directions.

Pamela managed to nimbly evade. She was smiling while being devoid of emotion, just like Kanae except for her smile. Their role between attack and defence got reversed.

Pamela threw a punch at Kanae. Just like what Kanae did. It was also filled with killing intent. However, unlike Kanae, it was steeped in hatred, hoping to cause her target to die a horrible death. She used the technology to manipulate bodies along with her skills of controlling dozens of automata at the same time. Her attack unleashed a blow which deformed her body to increase its power without any concern for her own life.

Unfortunately for Pamela, Kanae somehow managed to avoid her punch. Pamela's face twitched when Kanae managed to avoid her punch. Nonetheless, it was a close call for Kanae as well. It was obvious from her grave expression that she could not dodge such an attack every single time it was thrown.

"…She's strong! As I thought. I should have killed her back then…!!"

As Kanae lamented her past mistake. She used that regret to fuel her attacks.

Meanwhile, on the other side, Shiori swung her blade. The combination of her powerful augmented suit and the skill that she had polished over the years gave birth to a masterful slash that demonstrated her unyielding loyalty to her master and her duty to eliminate her enemies.

However, it was blocked. She was equipped with items which warranted permission from a branch manager to use and that was also the case for her opponent as well. It was a fact that the empty husk of what was once Latis no longer had any concept of a will or loyalty. What was left of him only functioned by Pamela's hatred. Pamela used all her processing power, which was normally divided among multiple automata just for one body. Because of that, Shiori was having a hard time against Latis, and his counter was already coming for her.

Shiori somehow managed to block it. As their blades made contact, the energy that was dispersed into the air created sparks.

[He’s even stronger than before…! To think that she could do this while fighting Kanae…! No wonder he decided to save Pamela back then…!!]

Shiori thought back, that this would not have happened if she had focused on killing Pamela last time. She was impressed by Latis’ calm and rational decision. To spare Pamela even if it meant sacrificing his own life. Meanwhile, it also showed Shiori’s inadequacy since she made such a huge mistake.

However, Shiori had no desire to give up. She could not do so. If they were defeated here, Pamela and Latis would then go for Reina. That was something that Shiori could never permit. She had no other choice but to win for Reina’s sake. Thus, Shiori made her resolve and shook off thoughts of her inadequacy. She stepped forward to face her opponent.

Shiori and Kanae were already using battle stimulants with side effects. They were already accelerating their information processing and sharpening their senses. They could even see flying bullets and were able to evade them by pure instinct. However, even so, they were not able to fight evenly against Pamela and Latis. They were barely clinging on to their lives while they fought back.

Similarly, Pamela and Latis were hard pressed against Shiori and Kanae. Just like them, Shiori and Kanae were taking huge risks in order to win. However, the difference in what they would refer to as a ‘win’ started to affect Pamela in a bad way.

Shiori and Kanae were fighting in order to protect Reina. Thus, as long as they could defeat their enemies, even if it meant that they had to sacrifice their lives, it would still count as a win for them.

Meanwhile, Pamela was fighting in order to clear her regrets. Deep regret of getting Latis killed because she was slowing him down in their previous fight. This meant that it would be pointless to kill their opponents if they also got killed. That would count as a loss for her.

In order to create the same two-on-two fight like back then, Pamela had to sacrifice almost all of the equipment that she brought from the Lion Steel company. Moreover, she had ordered the strange-looking remote automata, which originally had a humanoid shape, not to intervene in this battle. Due to her hatred, she went as far as to recreate the same situation. Therefore, it was unlikely for her to change her mind now that she had come this far.

However, the fewer advantages she had, the harder she had to push herself. This meant that she was getting more fatigued, which would eventually affect Latis' movements. Thus, they were hard-pressed and unable to win.

Finally, the flow of battle changed. Shiori and Kanae knew that the effect of their battle stimulant was running out of time. They knew that now was their only chance to win. Thus, they decided to put everything into their next strike. They made their resolve, gathered all their strength, and stepped out. They renounced any defence and went all out in their attack. They stepped into an area where life and death were separated by a single thread. With the loyalty to throw their lives away, they paved their way forward. Even if it might be a mistake, Shiori and Kanae glanced at each other and put everything they had into their next strike, both at the same time.

Pamela tried to receive their attack, but unfortunately, she did not have the same resolve as Kanae and Shiori. Although she was not afraid of death, she could not throw away her life just for the sake of her own goal. That difference caused Pamela to be at a disadvantage. She took a punch from Kanae as Latis took a strike from Shiori.

Since she believed that Latis got killed because of her, Pamela unconsciously invested more of her attention into Latis.

Thanks to that, Latis was able to perfectly receive Shiori's strike. Shiori knitted her eyebrows and gritted her teeth, believing that even the attack that she had staked her life on, was not enough to finish off Latis. At this point, Shiori had no power left to react to the next attack. A counter would come, and it would definitely end her life. With that in mind, Shiori's last thought was an apology. She wanted to apologize to Reina for not being able to fulfill her duty.

But for some reason, that counterattack did not come.

Kanae's attack reached Pamela. Pamela did try to fend off the attack, but since she was more focused on Latis, she was not able to react perfectly to Kanae's attack. Naturally, Kanae did not let this opportunity slip. Her punch broke through Pamela's forcefield shield, even the armour plating on her arms. It managed to bend her arms backwards as the punch went through and reached Pamela's head. The punch had lost most of its power, so it could not smash Pamela's head to pieces. However, the shockwave was more than sufficient to fatally injure her brain.

Pamela was dead in an instant. She staggered backwards and finally fell. Kanae, who had hit her limit, fell to her knees a moment later.

Seeing how things played out, Shiori also fell to her knees. Meanwhile, Latis stood there, frozen.

"K-Kanae… D-did you… Get her…?"

"Y-yeah, somehow… H-how about you?"

"W-well… Latis is… already dead… Right from the start… though…"

"Ahh… That's right…"

Shiori and Kanae were panting. They slowly calmed down their breathing and after a short break, Shiori eventually managed to barely stand. Although she still had to use the sheath of her blade to help her up, she continued to move forward. She then raised her blade and spoke.

"Well… It's better to be safe than sorry."

Shiori thought that it might be better to render Latis harmless before he could move again. Thus, she swung her blade down.

Even in her exhausted state, Shiori had enough power to cut down a non-moving target. However, her blade could not cut Latis down.

"Wha-!?"

Latis blocked Shiori's blade.

Kanae immediately threw a punch to help Shiori. However, since she was also exhausted, her movement was greatly dulled. Shiori's face turned grave seeing Latis start to move as if he was about to strike back.

If Latis attacked them now, Shiori and Kanae would definitely meet their end here.

"…What?"

But instead of striking back, Latis jumped back and left the area. He then started running away from the place.

Shiori and Kanae were shocked. It was Shiori, who first to returned to her senses as she turned her gaze to Pamela with suspicion. A moment later, she glanced at Kanae.

Kanae, who understood what Shiori was about to ask, shook her head.

"I'm sure that this is her real body. Otherwise, we would have been killed by now."

"…You have a point."

Shiori was suspicious if Pamela had swapped Latis' brain with hers. That she was using Latis' body. However, if that was really the case, Latis would have killed them instead of running away. Pamela was already dead. It was thanks to her death that Latis stopped moving. That was the reason why Shiori was still alive.

"But Latis is running away though, what do you think, Ane-san?"

"Now that Pamela is dead, Latis can't move through external control. The emergency measure of his augmented suit might have recognized that its user had lost consciousness and evacuated its user to preserve his life… Maybe something like that?"

“Ahhh. That would explain why it suddenly started moving and ran away instead of trying to attack us.”

“We don’t know for sure if that is really the case though. But let’s just leave it be for now. It’s not like we have any strength to chase after him. It’s more important to return back to Milady. Kanae, can you still move?”

“Geez, give me a break. I can barely even stand, you know?”

“It’s nothing compared to Milady’s safety.”

Kanae could not help but smile bitterly. It was not like Shiori could not understand how bad Kanae’s condition was. As a matter of fact, Shiori was also barely able to stand. Thus, Shiori understood that she was basically asking Kanae for the impossible.

“If only Akira-boy would do that for us… We did leave that to him, after all… Hm?”

Right when Kanae said that, Akira suddenly jumped onto the rooftop. It seemed like he had scaled the wall to get there.

“Hmmm, not sure if I should say you came at the right time or I wished you had arrived a bit sooner.”

Kanae mumbled with a bitter smile as she saw Akira walk toward her.

Akira eliminated numerous strange-looking monsters thanks to the large amount of ammunition he had. He was focused on reducing their number to a manageable level. That way, if he went up to where Shiori and Kanae were, he would be able to take care of those that pursued him up to the rooftop.

But due to the unending reinforcements, it took more time than he thought. Since he was worried for Shiori and Kanae, he eventually started to think of forcing his way to the rooftop.

That was when the enemies suddenly stopped coming at him. Every single one that was still alive suddenly started to retreat from Sheryl’s base.

Naturally, Akira thought that this situation was abnormal. However, it was a good opportunity for him, so he took off to the rooftop. He was glad to see Shiori and Kanae were still alive. Judging from what he saw, he believed that Shiori and Kanae had already won and slowly approached them.

“It’s good to see you two are fine… Well, at least, still alive. I have medicine, want some?”

“Oh, thank you!”

Akira handed over a still-sealed medicine box. Kanae took it, tore it open, and pour half of the contents into her mouth. She then passed the other half to Shiori, who also downed it the same way.

Akira frowned. He did not expect them to do something like this.

“Oh! It’s working! Akira-boy! This must be pretty expensive medicine.”

“Y-yeah.”

“No wonder it’s working right away. I feel better already. Ahh, but at this rate, the overdose effect will kick in once its effect runs out.”

Since the battle stimulant’s effect had run out, they would normally not be able to stand due to the side-effects. However, thanks to Akira’s medicine, they were now able to fight again to some extent.

However, Akira’s medicine did not neutralize the side-effects of the battle stimulant. It only allowed them to not temporarily feel it. Kanae had noticed that she would faint if she lowered her guard. Thus, she was certain she would stay down for the next few days from the fatigue if she relaxed.

“Akira-sama. Thank you very much for the medicine. I will reimburse the cost on another day. So then… Where is Milady?”

“She went to the city to let them know about the monsters’ attack. I let them borrow my bike, so they should be fine. They should be able to run away if things go south.”

Shiori understood the situation just from his short explanation. She wanted Akira to stay with Reina to protect her. However, Akira was barred from entering the city. Thus, he could not do so. She judged that under such circumstances, it was commendable that he loaned Reina his means of transportation.

“Thank you very much for loaning Milady your bike.”

“Don’t mention it. So then, what happened over here? You won… Right?”

“Pamela is dead. I believe that the commander from the third ward branch’s side was Pamela. But I can’t say for certain they will pull their force back with this…”

“Ahhh, I see. It would be great if they would pull back though.”

Akira believed that although the situation got better, it was still too early to let his guard down. A voice suddenly echoed, which confirmed Akira’s belief.

“I lost, huh…”

That voice came from Pamela. Akira and the others immediately looked in her direction.

“Kanae!?”

“No, I made sure that she’s dead, you know!?”

“Alpha!?”

“She’s dead. It seems like that voice has been pre-recorded and set to be played if she dies.”

Pamela was definitely dead. Akira and the others had reconfirmed it. However, the voice did not stop.

“So, in the end… I’m still nothing but a burden… I had hoped to kill you together with Latis… It is indeed unfortunate…”

Even after her descent to insanity, Pamela still thought of a scenario where she got killed. She had set Latis to escape if that happened. The reason why Latis's body quickly left the area after Pamela was killed was because she had set him up to do so right from the start.

"I guess there's no other choice then…"

She had thought of a way to continue her revenge in case they got defeated again. A scenario where she was still a burden to Latis.

"Then, you shall die by Latis' hands."

That was her final curse after her death. That faint mumble was filled with hatred. It was recorded imagining her defeat. Thanks to that, her ominous last words were extremely clear.

Akira and the others frowned and looked at each other.

"…Say, isn't that Latis guy the one that you've already killed?"

"We did. But his body was maintained in a state where Pamela could freely control him. We just fought against him a moment ago while Pamela was controlling him. Although, in the end, he managed to get away from us."

It was obvious from their expression that they had a bad feeling about what was about to happen.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 287, Allies

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Reina and Togami were able to safely make contact with the city defence squad. They were able to inform them of the monster attack. However, things did not go as they had expected.

“What do you mean the defence squad will not send anyone?”

She was talking with Goutol through a display. It was clear that he was frowning.

“We can only wait until it causes direct damage to the city. Or at least we believe it will cause damage to the city. This is something that those at the top have decided upon. As long as they don’t approach us or attack us, we cannot do anything about it.”

“But they’re just right there, you know? Wouldn’t that be enough of a threat? Normally, you would have sent you men at this point.”

“If you’re talking about threats, we’ve allowed a 50 billion bounty target recognized as a monster to get this close. So, there’s not that much of a difference with those monsters around.”

Reina went silent. It was an excellent point. However, she could not simply give up here and tried to come up with something else.

“In that case, can you connect me to your boss? We fought against those monsters, so we will try to convince them that it’s a real threat.”

“…I’m sorry, but I can’t do that. They won’t easily accept a call if the source is someone from the Lion Steel Company. In the first place, I don’t have the authority to do that.”

The battle near the city was recognized as a conflict between branches of Lion Steel. There was a struggle for influence between the city officers, Yanagisawa, and the third and fourth ward branches of Lion Steel. However, externally, City Management wanted to present themselves as a neutral third party, maintaining their position as observer, to not be involved in the battle.

Goutol added that if the city defence squad sent its men due to information from someone affiliated with the fourth branch, it would endanger its neutral position. Thus, they could not make any moves based on information from Reina.

Reina knitted her eyebrows. She did not push any further since it was obvious that Goutol was also not happy about the order he had received. Even when the men on the field were displeased, it was still not enough to change the higher-ups’ decision. It would be meaningless no matter what she said. Thus, she decided to try to think of another way.

Unfortunately, she could not come up with any good ideas.

[Not good…! We didn’t come here to evacuate…!]

She did consider returning back to Shiori. However, that would be nothing but her own selfish wish. After all, they did flee from the battle against Pamela. That sole action was more than enough to ascertain their position as protection targets instead of extra reinforcements. It was only natural for the protection target to stay somewhere safe. Going to a dangerous location of their own volition would only cause Shiori and Kanae more trouble.

[If we’re going to return, we should at least bring something to help them. Otherwise, it would be meaningless to return back…]

Originally, she planned on getting an extra hand from the city defence squad. However, that plan did not go well. Thus, she had to find aid from another source. Reina started to get impatient, trying to think of who and how to convince them to help her. That was when someone suddenly called out to her.

“Oh, Reina, long time no see.”

Reina inadvertently turned toward the source of that voice and was taken aback. It was Chloe and she was smiling triumphantly at her.

Reina was surprised to find Chloe there since she should have been inside the inner wall. However, the thing that surprised her more was the maid and the butler next to Chloe. They were not people she knew. Though, one thing for certain, they were wearing first-class maid and butler uniforms. These outfits could only be used by high-class servants. They must either be directly affiliated with the Lion Steel main branch or were serving under a member of the Lorentz Family of high position.

Chloe had those servants next to her as she smiled triumphantly. It was a huge shock to Reina.

Seeing how shocked Reina was, Chloe laughed and said.

“Well, I will at least let you know this. As you can see, I have bodyguards dispatched from the main branch. I know you want to kill me, but I don’t recommend you to do anything foolish.”

Reina frowned and glanced at the maid. The maid then confirmed what Chloe said.

“It is the truth. We are here to protect Chloe-sama. So please be careful. Trying to pick a fight here means picking a fight against the main branch as well.”

“M-my apologies.”

Judging from the maid’s reaction, Reina understood that they were indeed highly likely to be from the main branch. She flusteredly bowed and apologized as she started panicking inside.

[…No way… That can’t be… So, not only the third ward branch, but the main branch is also taking Chloe’s side…!? This is bad… really bad…]

As Reina turned around and thought that she should at least let Shiori and Kanae know about this, someone from the main branch suddenly coldly spoke to her.

“Reina Rilard Lorentz. The representative is calling for you. Please come with us. Since the jamming smoke is preventing communication, we understand that you could not reply to the message from the main branch. Nonetheless, do be careful of what you choose your next action to be.”

“C-certainly, of course…”

That was just how high of an authority someone from the main branch had. It now was definitive, that they were moving under representative Alice’s will. Thus, Reina could not refuse their demand. Seeing Reina’s bitter smile, Chloe chuckled mockingly at her.

Reina of course noticed Chloe’s chuckle. However, she could not do anything. She gritted her teeth and held herself back from saying anything. Worse, she still could not find a way to better her situation.

Right at that time, Togami, who had been silently walking behind Reina, suddenly casually asked.

“Anyway, it seems like Reina doesn’t need a bodyguard anymore, right? In that case, Reina, I will go return Akira’s bike.”

Reina did not expect Togami to suggest that. She turned around to see Togami lightly smile at her, with a wink.

Thanks to his support, Reina managed to regain her calm. She then glanced in Chloe's direction and lightly stated.

"…You're right. Please give him this too."

Reina then handed over her ammunition and rifle to Togami. She then took a glance in Chloe's direction again.

The person from the main branch did not express any reaction at all. However, Chloe's smile immediately vanished as her expression turned stern.

Seeing that, Reina was able to show her usual smile.

"Thanks, Togami. I'll leave it to you."

"Sure. I'll get going now."

Togami smiled back at her, turned on the bike, and went off.

After Reina saw Togami off, she turned to Chloe and smiled triumphantly at her. Chloe was obviously displeased by how things developed and pouted.

Even when Reina told Togami to return the bike, to take her ammo and rifle, as well as the information of Chloe's whereabouts to Akira, those from the main branch did not show any reaction at all. That showed the main branch was not exactly on Chloe's side. If they were, they would never allow such detrimental information to reach someone who was obviously after Chloe's life. This meant that Chloe almost succeeded in fooling Reina, acting like those servants from the main branch were her own.

[That was dangerous. I was so surprised that I almost got fooled. Togami, thanks!]

As Reina had calmed down, she once again tried to analyze the current situation. She immediately noticed something strange.

"Chloe, by the way, why are you here?"

“I have no obligation to answer that question.”

Reina frowned and tilted her head. She interpreted her answer as Chloe not knowing why she was here. One thing that she knew for certain, was that Chloe was trying to meet Alice. If it was a meeting with Alice, it was only a given for them to go to where Alice was. It was impossible for it to be the other way around.

However, it should not be here. It should be somewhere inside the inner wall. Otherwise, it would be at a place suitable to host a meeting with a higher-up from a large company like Lion Steel. At the very least, both Reina and Chloe agreed that it was strange and had doubtful looks on their faces.

Unfortunately, those from the main branch refused to give any information.

—-*—-*—-*—-

Elena and Sara, who had decided to help Akira, quickly completed their preparations and went straight into the slums. However, right now, they were in a rather difficult situation.

In order to help Akira out, they had to first meet up with him. Unfortunately, they did not know where Akira currently was. They did try to call him, but the thick jamming smoke prevented their call from reaching him.

Therefore, they decided to head to where Akira might be. Sheryl’s base. However, due to the thick jamming smoke, they were not able to detect enemies that well and were forced to drive slowly and with caution.

Naturally, with Elena’s skill in detecting enemies and Sara’s firepower, they were able to detect and eliminate any enemies that came their way. Even so, they still had solemn looks on their faces.

“Say, Elena… Akira is fighting against the Lion Steel company, right?”

“Yeah. He should be fighting against Lion Steel and those that they’ve hired.”

“So then, just what is this thing?”

“…No idea.”

The enemy that Elena and Sara had just shot down was a strange-looking monster. Its outer appearance was akin to that of a multi-legged monster. However, its legs were made of thick flesh, which supported its large body. Its cannon looked like it came from a powered suit, which was growing out from its body, it was as if it was forcefully installed there. For some reason, even with its size, it was still able to nimbly move and jump around. Its quick movements also did not hinder its aim by that much, evident when it fired shots at Elena and Sara. It was clearly not the type of monster they would normally find around Kugamayama city.

Naturally, it still did not pose much of a threat to Elena and Sara with their new equipment. Their equipment was an upfront payment from Hikaru, for escorting her to meet Akira in the wasteland. At that time, Hikaru had considered the risk of fighting against Akira. Thus, in fear, she got extremely powerful equipment for Elena and Sara to use. It was powerful to the point no monsters around Kugamayama city could stand up against it.

Just like the monsters that Akira fought against, the monsters that Elena and Sara fought were originally Lion Steel remote automata. Although they were no longer able to follow detailed orders, they were still able to follow simple instructions.

Pamela had ordered these monsters to surround Sheryl’s base. Thus, they slowly converged there. It was to prevent anyone from leaking information about what was going on inside the jamming smoke. Which would grant the monsters more time to devour more objects and grow stronger. They consumed the deceased, abandoned equipment, tanks, powered suits, and even those trying to get out from their encirclement. As time passed, they kept growing in number and size.

However, not all of them grew in strength at the same rate. Their growth in power depended on what they ate. Moreover, it was not like the more they ate would necessitate them being stronger. If they devoured only weak equipment, the combination of such items hardly increased their strength. As a matter of fact, it might actually weaken them as a whole. Assimilating with items meant using up their green liquid, which would reduce their vigor. If the outcome of assimilation was not beneficial enough to outweigh this, they would become weaker.

Because of these factors, Elena and Sara did not face any trouble when dealing with them. Their only issue was the number of monsters, with some being exceptionally strong. At least, strong enough to slow Elena and Sara down.

Naturally, Sara and Elena could not just charge through the swarm. They did not know the exact location of all the enemies. Furthermore, they would have to use their ammo to cut a path through the swarm. They feared they would run out of ammo the moment they found Akira. Though Inabe was paying for their ammo expense, they still had a limited supply. However, that was mainly due to Elena and Sara rushing out, not spending any time on getting extra ammo as they immediately headed out to the slums.

Although they were in a rush, Elena and Sara were still moving carefully. To remain calm, they kept reminding themselves, [We are going there to help him. it would be meaningless if we only serve to cause him more trouble.]

“Sara, more signals ahead. It’s coming this way. Be careful.”

“Roger that!”

Elena and Sara aimed their rifles forward. A moment later, they saw a huge humanoid monster, which was in the middle of fighting against Carol.

⎯*⎯*⎯*⎯

The high-ranking Hunter who fought against Carol had known her through her side job. His name was Dores and he got defeated after that intense

bout. Dores found himself lying face up, on the ground with his whole arm blown to pieces. In front of him was the muzzle of a rifle.

“This would be my victory, right?”

“Yeah… It’s my loss.”

Carol smiled and lowered her rifles. Dores sighed and pushed his body up.

“You sure you don’t want to finish me off?”

“I can say the same to you.”

Killing their opponent was not their main goal. Although they were fighting as if trying to kill each other, it was merely to win. If someone got killed, both parties would accept the outcome. However, if possible, they did not want to kill unnecessarily. This line was how Dores and Carol prevented themselves from going insane after having so much blood on their hands.

Dores, who got completely defeated, smiled bitterly and questioned.

“If you’re that strong, there’s no need for you to take on that other job of yours anymore, right? Or are you still planning to continue?”

Dores knew that his question was not something someone who just got defeated would normally ask. Thus, he expected Carol to randomly answer. However, Carol replied with something that he did not expect.

“Hmm, well, I’m still thinking about it.”

Carol only answered as much and smiled in an amused fashion.

“I see…”

Dores raised his eyebrows. He couldn’t guess what had happened to Carol such that she would respond with such an answer. Thus, Doros simply accepted it and pursued that subject no further.

Carol then turned around and walked away, slightly wobbly.

[…I need to at least resupply before I head out again.]

Carol had an enhanced body that continuously consumed nanomachines. If she ignored her nanomachine consumption, she could achieve super-human strength albeit only temporarily. However, she would quickly run out of nanomachines if she did that. Thus, she had to carefully adjust her power output and nanomachine consumption. Since Dores was strong, she could only win by sacrificing a large portion of her nanomachines.

For now, she was trying her best to keep up her appearance with her remaining nanomachines. She was planning to return back to base to refill her nanomachines. She took out her nanomachine reserve when suddenly, a swarm of monsters appeared. They were strange looking, a mesh of flesh and metal, seemingly machines with fleshy legs and arms growing out of their distorted bodies.

Normally, they would not pose any threat to her. However, their appearance at this very moment was horrendous. If they had appeared a bit sooner, she would have temporarily stopped fighting with Dores and dealt with them first. If they had appeared a bit later, she would have had the chance to refill the nanomachines in her body and regain some of her fighting capabilities. However, she got ambushed right as she had depleted her nanomachines, without an opportunity to refill yet.

Even so, Carol still immediately reacted and started firing. Dores saw the swarm and quickly reached for his extra rifle and started shooting as well. Although he lost the fight, he still had enough strength to hold and fire a gun. Unfortunately, both were exhausted and were unable to make any difficult moves. Thus, the swarm was slowly pushing them back.

That was when Carol was caught off guard, one of the weird-looking monsters got close enough to leapt toward her, jaws agape.

“Oh crap…!!”

Carol could not evade the incoming attack due to her exhaustion. She could only grit her teeth, and prepare for the incoming pain.

However, Dores suddenly jumped in between them. The monster's fangs were able to easily pierce through his augmented suit, and into his organs. Dores, still fully conscious, shoved his rifle at the monster and held down the trigger. A portion of his body got chomped off, trading it in for a few shots.

Eventually, he was able to kill the weird monster. Unfortunately, since its fangs had dug deep into Dores' body, he was not able to free himself from it. This was when he turned to Carol and casually said.

"Go on. I'll buy you some time. You've won after all. This is the least that I can do for you."

Carol understood that staying behind would only get both of them killed. Right now, she could not allow herself to die together with Dores. Thus, the only thing she could do was convey her feelings to him.

"I am sorry…"

"Don't be. This is normal for Hunters like us. If it's for the sake of sparing the life of a girl I fancy, this is actually not that bad."

Dores smiled before returning his gaze back to the enemies.

Carol immediately left the area. Some monsters tried to attack her, but Dores prioritized shooting them down first. That meant he allowed other monsters to get close to him. However, that did not matter. He was not planning to survive after this. He managed to continue for some time as his impending death approached. He did not hold back and used everything that he had to hold them off.

As expected, his end was near. Before he ran out of ammo, his arm got chomped off. He had lost any means to fight back and was only able to allow the monsters to take bites out of him one at a time.

"Haaah, I should've tried to hit on her sooner…"

Dores smiled bitterly and muttered before he met his end.

Thanks to Dores, Carol was able to hide in one of the abandoned buildings. She used that opportunity to quickly take out her medicine and extra nanomachine to heal her wounds. It was not enough to return her back to 100%, but she, at the very least, would be able to put up a good fight.

“But still… Why are there monsters in this area…?”

Carol inadvertently mumbled, to then quickly shake her head.

“Let’s put that aside for later. First, I need to think of how to get out of this mess…”

She wanted to return back to Sheryl’s base and fully refill her nanomachine reserve. However, fighting against Dores forced her to move around a lot. Thus, the base was quite far for her right now. Although the distance itself was not much of an issue, it was highly likely that she would have to fight monsters on her way back.

However, she could not afford to simply wait here, hiding. It would mean there was no meaning to her coming with Akira to the slums. She reminded herself of the reason and made her resolve. She stormed out of the abandoned building.

Outside the building, there were battles scattered all around, especially in the alleys. The whole place was veiled in thick jamming smoke, but Carol could still tell none of the battles involved those on her side or those that were neutral. Erio and the others from the gang nor Shikarabe and his team were involved. Her enemies were the ones facing the monster swarm. Screams of terror and confusion echoed through the area, which indicated that even her enemies did not expect the monster swarm.

Carol was taken aback when she sighted one particular strange-looking monster. It was enveloped in a heavy augmented suit, as if a bundle of flesh in a distorted humanoid form had been stuffed into an augmented suit. However, its figure was not the thing that caught her eye. It was the familiar laser cannon that the monster carried.

“…That cannon… Isn’t that mine…!?”

During her fight against Dores, she had lost her laser cannon. Since it was hard to use it in a high-speed melee fight, Carol had no other choice but to let it go. After all, it was not designed to be used against human targets.

That laser cannon was secured. Thus, only its registered user can use it. However, once the monster noticed her, it suddenly released a shot using that laser cannon.

Carol leapt aside by pure reflex. A moment later, the laser cannon swept sideways in an arc. Buildings in its way were sliced open as if sliced by a huge blade. They crumble on their own weight and collapse.

Carol, who was able to get out of its way just in time, frowned and thought.

[It just took a shot…! So, these monsters assimilate with everything it consumes just like a greedy crocodile! I bet they're multiplying by devouring everything they can find in this area! This is bad. Really bad!]

The monster realized that it was not able to hit its target. Thus, it grew missile pods out of its shoulder. Mini missiles flew out and scattered all over the area.

Under relentless countless explosions, Carol was only able to keep running away.

That was when Elena and Sara saw her. They quickly aimed their rifles at the huge monster behind Carol. Their powerful bullets drilled holes into the monster and blew up. It was blown to pieces, obliterated so that no semblance of it was left behind. The small pieces were scattered all over the buildings around the area by the shockwave.

Carol thanked them, while still heavily panting.

"T-thanks, you really saved me there."

"You're welcome, but what exactly is- Sara, up!"

"Alright. They just won't give us a break. Now wha-… Hm? Isn't that Akira's bike…?"

The rest immediately looked up and saw Akira's flying bike. Though it was ridden by Togami at the moment. However, some strange monsters were latching on to it as the bike was slowly descending.

Elena and Sara immediately shot down the monsters. Once the monsters were taken out, the bike was able to regain its balance. Unfortunately, it was not able to brake on time and crashed rather spectacularly not too far away from Elena and Sara.

"T-that was close! I don't know who you are, but you really saved me there… Hm?"

"Akira! Are you okay!?… Hm?"

Togami was surprised since he was a little familiar with the two who just saved him. Meanwhile Elena was taken aback to see that it was actually Togami and not Akira.

Afterwards, Elena, Sara, Togami, and Carol quickly exchanged what they knew.

Since Togami was in a hurry to return to Sheryl's base, he ignored the monsters and flew a bit too close to the ground. Although these monsters could not fly, they could still jump. Some managed to latch onto the bike. When that happened, Togami managed to keep moving while he fought against those on the bike.

But unlike when he was together with Reina, it was difficult for him to simultaneously drive while he fought. Thus, he was about to get thrown off the bike.

Since Togami was also headed to where Akira was, he asked Elena and the others if they could move together.

Carol pondered it over for a bit and eventually decided not to join. She believed that she was more likely to be a dead weight. Or at the very least, she would not be able to give any meaningful support until she could return

back to the base. There was also no guarantee that they would be able to reach Sheryl's base.

The nanomachine reserves she had left might not last if she faced another attack. Thus, she decided she would support Akira indirectly and chose to leave the slums.

Carol then earnestly requested Elena and Sara, who were already on Akira's bike.

"I'll leave Akira to you."

"Of course!"

Elena smiled reassuringly at Carol before accelerating the bike. After seeing Elena off, Carol then headed out of the slums. She moved through the path Elena and Sara had made.

__*__*__*__

Considering what Pamela had said as her parting gift, Shiori, Kanae, and Akira decided to stay on the roof of Sheryl's base to watch over the surroundings. However, there was nothing worth noting. The strange-looking monsters were already retreating from the area. Meanwhile, voices of Erio and the others starting a counterattack could be heard coming from below.

"Alpha, did you find anything?"

"I do not see any signals that suggest enemies are approaching. If there's anything to be worried about, it would be how the jamming smoke is dispersing faster than it should."

"Faster than it should? What part of it is not normal?"

"Even if we were to consider the fact that we're out in the wasteland, the rate of dispersion is abnormally higher than the natural rate of dispersion."

Akira gazed out into the wasteland and squinted. He could see further, although only slightly.

“…It would be great if it’s because they no longer wish to continue and stop pumping out jamming smoke but…”

Akira said his wish, though he knew it was unlikely to come true.

That was when Togami finally entered his sight. Akira, who saw Togami, was surprised to see some others on his bike. Two individuals he would never have expected to come.

As Togami moved to park the bike on the rooftop, Akira was a bit nervous that Shiori and Kanae were looking at him with scrutinizing gazes.

[…This is not my fault, right?]

Due to their division of roles on their way to Sheryl’s base, Togami was sandwiched between two beauties on top of Akira’s bike. Togami knew Elena and Sara were close to Akira. Furthermore, he considered his relationship with Reina. With all these factors, he could not help but feel horrified when Akira and the others’ gazes were sent in his direction.

Akira thought that Togami was acting a bit strange as he threw out a question.

“Togami. Where is Reina? And also, why are you with Elena-san and Sara-san…?”

“Ahhh, about that… you should ask them yourselves. As for Reina, there’s something important I need to tell Shiori-san, so…”

Togami spoke, rather flusteredly. He had also used Reina as an excuse to get away from Akira.

Akira got even more weirded out by how Togami was acting. However, he decided to just leave matters be since he did not have the time to be asking irrelevant questions.

“Elena-san, why are you here?”

“Well, we’re here to help you out… Or more like, we want to keep up our appearance as your seniors.”

“Hah?”

Akira was flabbergasted after hearing what Elena said with a wide smile on her face. The situation did not stop there as Sara also spoke up with a smile.

“We’re a bit angry that you left us on the side when you’re in this kind of situation. That’s why we’re barging in to help.”

“Haaah!?”

Akira flinched back. Although both women were staring at him with smiles, there were traces of anger in their eyes.

“I admit that you’ve become even stronger than us. Still, I don’t like how you don’t even see us as people who can help.”

“That’s why we came here to help. Though you didn’t ask for it. Well, sorry about that.”

Each word they said gradually cornered him. Elena and Sara were basically stating that they were here to help him due to their own volition and pride.

Although they were exposing their true feelings, they never mentioned the biggest reason. They came here because they were worried about him.

No one would help him even if he asked. Akira had experienced this for far too long. It had become a habit that had not changed. He never asked since asking for help from others would only mean causing trouble for someone else who was not even involved in his problems. Aware of his flaw, Elena and Sara spoke using such words, that they came because they wanted to.

Akira had grown enough to notice that it was their way of being considerate. Although he was grateful, he believed the situation was too dire to accept their goodwill.

“But, Elena-san. Even if you say so I…”

“Ah, by the way, we rescued Carol on our way here too. She was too exhausted to continue. Other than that, she’s not in any immediate danger.”

“I see… Thank you very much.”

Akira smiled and lowered his head to them. His expression also displayed his gratitude toward Carol, who had pushed herself this far for his sake. It also contained his relief, hearing that she was alright.

Immediately, Sara and Elena sighed and pouted.

“Akira, you asked for Carol’s help, but you didn’t ask for our help. Why? Since when did you get this close to Carol?”

“Eh? Well, a lot of things happened, you see…”

“A lot of things? A lot of things, huh? What exactly happened? Though it’s embarrassing to say this myself, I believe we’re also rather close to you. Did something happen between you two that made you close enough to her? To be able to ask for her help but not from us?”

“Well, uhh, actually, it’s not what you think. I do think both Elena-san and Sara-san as friends. Also, it’s not like I’m treating Carol differently, you see…”

Akira was not sure why he was making excuses to answer Sara’s question. That was when Elena intervened as she wryly smiled and stated.

“Akira, in that case, you should just accept our help, alright?”

“Ahhh… Okay.”

Akira gave a firm nod. Although it might be something for him to worry about later, he decided to accept their offer. This would make him more indebted to Elena and Sara, to who he already felt indebted. At the same time, he finally noticed, with albeit of surprise, that he had already gotten

this close to the two of them. When he discovered how he felt, he was jovial about it.

Elena and Sara also smiled happily now that Akira had agreed to accept them.

To properly help him, Elena tried to confirm the current situation with him.

“So then, Akira. Can you tell me what’s the situation right now?”

“Of course, well…”

[Akira, look at the wasteland.]

Alpha suddenly interjected and warned with a grave expression. Akira noticed and quickly turned toward where Alpha was pointing. Elena and Sara followed suit, and a moment later, Kanae, Shiori, and Togami gazed toward the wasteland as well.

They could see something gigantic and humanoid coming in their direction. Due to the jamming smoke, they were only able to see the blurry contour of the giant, but it was enough for them to confirm that its knee was even higher than most of the buildings in the slums.

“Just what is that thing!?”

The moment Akira mumbled; the giant’s mouth suddenly flared. Elena, Sara, Shiori and Kanae quickly stepped forward and deployed their forcefield shield. A moment later, the light ray released by the giant reached Akira and the others, devouring them. It even took in the whole base.

Once the light died down. Akira and the others were fine. Mostly thanks to the powerful forcefield shield and the jamming smoke that weakened the attack. The base also survived due to its forcefield armour along its outer walls. However, the other buildings in the area got completely obliterated.

Akira and the others could not help but frown. [To think its attack could reach us even from that distance!]

“Akira, I have another question… What exactly are you fighting against?”

“It should be those from Lion Steel… though… I’m not sure anymore at this point.”

Akira also did not know what or who exactly was that giant. However, Pamela’s last words somehow suddenly came to mind.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 288, This Is Where Things Get Serious

Index

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Thanks to the emergency defences they set up, Akira and the others somehow managed to survive the giant's sudden long-range laser beam.

However, their situation remained dire. The giant was too far for them to attack. On the other hand, it was able to freely shoot its powerful attack toward them. Akira was once again reminded of the curse that Pamela had left behind after her death.

"…Shiori-san. I have a question. That thing… it's not Latis, right?"

Shiori knitted her eyebrows and seemed troubled. She seriously considered that possibility before answering his question.

"If that's the case, that would mean she somehow turned Latis' corpse into that giant. Though, I don't really know why and how she did such a thing. Akira-sama, why do you suspect that giant to be Latis?"

"Well, I've fought against someone I was certain I've killed. When I got attacked by humanoid monsters sometime back, I fought against a giant monster, which resembled a human. There was even a time I fought against someone I thought was human. He suddenly grew multiple hands out of his

body. Well, what I'm trying to say is that I've gone through all those almost strange and seemingly unthinkable scenarios, you see… So, I just thought that this might just be another one of those."

The strange-looking monster, automata with Pamela's face on them. The giant that Akira fought back in Kuzusuhara ruin and Tiol, who grew out multiple arms from his body. All of them had green liquid in their blood. Akira noticed this similarity and had an ominous feeling about it.

However, it was not like he could just run away. Thus, he gave a sigh and composed himself. He stepped back onto his bike and jumped off from the top of Sheryl's base. He managed to land inside the camping vehicle, where he quickly grabbed his supplies, and returned back to the rooftop. The moment he returned, Akira presented Elena and the others with a smile. He simply spoke to them while still floating in the sky.

"Elena-san, Sara-san. One thing I know for certain is that thing is hostile, so I'll go off for a bit to take it down. Elena-san and Sara-san, for now, please provide me with… I guess that would be rude of me, huh? Please help me while I attack it. I don't exactly know what the both of you should do so I'll leave that to you. Please use your experience as my senior to help me."

Although he spoke in a more casual tone than usual, Elena and Sara could feel that he was earnestly asking them for help.

Thus, Elena bitterly smiled and half-jokingly stated.

"Alright, but well, you know, we don't have any experience fighting something like that."

"Is that so? Actually, I fought one before. This would be my second time."

Akira mentioned it with a prideful smile. This signified his leap over the wall he had erected between him and the two. It was a wall created unconsciously due to his belief that they had once saved his life. That feeling of debt created a barrier which made him not want to trouble them in any way. His statement indicated how their relationship had changed. It was meant not only to Elena and Sara, but also to himself.

Elena was a bit surprised by that, but she understood why Akira did that as both of them smiled confidently at each other.

“Good grief, you’ve grown pretty cheeky, right, Sara?”

“Yep, you really have.”

“Is that so? Well, I guess that just shows how much I’ve grown. Now then, I’ll head off.”

“Good luck!”

“Make sure to speak up when things get difficult, okay? We’ll be there to help.”

Akira and Elena smiled jokingly at each other. Just like that, in a situation where the giant could eliminate all of them in one perfectly executed attack, Akira travelled all the way back up to the roof to state what he felt was necessary.

Their conversation would eventually come to an end as Akira quickly accelerated his bike away. Freshly charged, the bike flew like a bullet through the sky.

After both women saw him off with a smile, Elena then frowned and questioned.

“Shiori-san, what are you planning to do? If you‘re available, it would be great if you could help Akira as well, but…”

“We will provide support as well.”

“Is that so? Reina is not here though?”

“Milady is safer over there, so there should be no problem.”

Elena was a bit surprised by Shiori’s response, but since it was beneficial to her, she did not say anything back.

Although Shiori's response was an honest one, she hid a few things from Elena. She did not mention anything Togami told them. This included the fact that they failed to receive help from the city defence squad. The fact that Chloe was in close proximity to Reina and those from the main branch had apprehended the two of them. If she brought it up, Akira might somehow get wind of it. Fearful of the consequences of Akira attacking those from the main branch, she refrained from sharing.

Shiori had to also remind herself that the main branch was maintaining a neutral position. That they were not taking sides with either the third ward branch or the fourth ward branch. That her decision would be more beneficial to Reina once Akira ended everything with his victory.

"Since we are not in our best condition, we might not be able to help much."

"I don't plan to be dead weight. Though I have to admit, I'm pretty fatigued. The last fight was against a rather strong opponent, so yeah, sorry if I end up being a burden."

Kanae smiled and spoke nonchalantly. Even if she tried to stay strong, Elena and Sara could easily notice her exhaustion.

Sara smiled at the two maids as if to reassure them. She gave a firm nod and stated.

"It's fine. We came fully prepared, so we'll take on most of the load. Well then, Elena, I will leave the command to you."

Elena smiled.

"…Sara, it's true that taking command is a part of my job, but you're basically just throwing it at me, you know?"

"That's just how much I trust your leadership."

"Yeah yeah, well then, let's get going."

They did not know just how powerful that giant was. Judging by its size alone, it was out of the ordinary. Even so, Elena and Sara were smiling confidently. They were more fired up than usual as they went out to provide Akira support.

After Akira flew off from the rooftop, he did not go straight toward the giant. Instead, he took a long detour.

“Alpha, why are we circling the giant?”

“It’s to confirm something. Though it shot at us before, I want to check if it’s acting based on its will or some other trigger.”

Since Akira’s expression showed overt bewilderment, Alpha then further elaborated.

When the giant shot at them, it did not seem like it acted by coincidence. Basically, it knew where Akira was and intentionally fired at him.

If it was a properly aimed shot, that meant the giant had an extremely powerful detection ability. This was considering the existence of thick jamming smoke in the area.

If it achieved that without being able to detect where Akira was, that would mean it had prior knowledge of where he was.

It was unlikely that the giant was scanning for information under the influence of such thick jamming smoke. Thus, there might be something else there that informed it of Akira and the others’ whereabouts at that time.

“If that’s the case, the next step would be to identify what’s helping it…”

Akira was able to understand what Alpha meant thanks to her explanation. He frowned and questioned.

“They are from Lion Steel. Latis’ corpse had run away. The monster swarm had suddenly stopped coming and that giant might be one of them… Or maybe it’s all of them!?”

“Yep, exactly.”

The giant’s mouth flickered again. A moment later, it released another beam of light. It burnt everything in its way as it spread out in all directions. Although it was weakened as it travelled further, it was still able to reach Sheryl’s base. Even so, the base was fine. At least for now. However, it would only be a matter of time after taking a few more hits that it collapses.

“Since it’s still firing in that direction, I guess that means it’s the latter, huh?”

Akira took a long detour. He was still approaching the giant. If it was originally able to detect Akira when he was back in Sheryl’s base, it should still be able to detect him by now. There was no way the giant would ignore him when he was quickly approaching it. This meant that the giant was unaware of his location. That it was only attacking the base, believing its enemies were still over there.

“…In that case, let’s ambush it and kill it right away! Alpha! We’ll be using it!”

“Roger that. Since the jamming smoke has thinned out, I can give you better support now. So, leave it to me!”

Akira aimed his RL2 multi-rifles. It was loaded with his trump card, the annihilator warhead. He did not have that many left, and each one cost 100 million Aurum per shot. Thus, he felt reluctant to use it. However, in this situation, he did not hesitate. He knew when he needed to use it, and would do so even if his heart bled from the cost.

The enemy was in the direction of the wasteland. There was no need to worry about hitting the city by mistake. If the giant was Pamela’s trump card, Akira believed that he should shoot it down before it could do anything else.

Thanks to Alpha’s support, Akira could see a zoomed-in image of the giant through his enhanced vision. Even from Sheryl’s base, he could only tell

that the giant had a humanoid figure. However, after he got closer and the jamming smoke got more dispersed, he was able to clearly see its true form.

Its limbs were distorted amalgamations of machines and flesh. It resembled a cyborg made from random metal it scrapped from around. The flesh underneath the metal seemed to protrude out from its body as if its rampaging cells forcefully broke through the armour plating covering its body.

To prioritize power, it completely forgo aesthetics. Either that or it was intentionally designed to be grotesque to terrorize its enemies. It was possible that its appearance could be the result of both.

Akira looked straight at the giant. Even so, he did not feel anything. His gaze was locked onto it without any hint of fear. Together with Alpha's signal, he pulled the trigger.

The bullet left the muzzle at high speed. It was further bolstered by his momentum as he sped through the air on top of his bike. Thus, once it left the barrel, it immediately broke through the sound barrier and flew straight to hit its target.

When Akira shot the multi-legged tank with his annihilator warheads, he had to fire under the bombardment of weaponry made to assault a city. Thus, he released 5 shots at roughly around the same time to guarantee his attack had enough firepower to destroy the multi-legged tank.

Furthermore, within the family of annihilator warheads, the ones that he bought were relatively cheap and had relatively low firepower. It took 5 annihilator warheads exploding at the same time, precisely calculated by Alpha to explode at points that would increase their effectiveness to destroy that multi-legged tank.

Since Akira only used one bullet this time, it did not produce the same level of explosiveness. Even so, the explosion was strong enough to blow everything around it away. The shockwave it released launched the upper half of the giant into the sky. Meanwhile its lower half made a loud boom

when it crashed onto the ground, drowning under the sea of flesh, machine parts and green liquid.

The shockwave was quickly preceded by a powerful gust of wind. Akira squinted his eyes as he made a rather conflicted expression.

“That was rather anti-climatic… Or so I want to say, but each shot cost 100 million Aurum…”

Akira knew that he was forced to spend a huge amount of money just to defeat an opponent that would not cover his cost. He heaved a sigh; his regret only grew bigger. It showed how he felt more exasperated than delighted from his victory.

That was when Alpha came with bad news.

“Akira, we’re not done yet.”

“…What? But we killed that giant, right?”

“That one, yes, but look over there.”

In front of a confused Akira, Alpha pointed towards where the giant was before it blew up. The whole area was drowned under a disgusting mesh such that Akira was not able to see the dirt beneath. That was when he noticed something that looked like a human rising from it. That human-like figure gradually turned to look more human-like and grew. It seems like it was creating another giant.

It did not stop with just a single body. As Akira watched on in shock, another body raised up, creating another giant.

“What in the world is going on…?”

“It is nothing more than just my guess and it won’t change the situation, but if you still want to know, I can tell you if you want.”

“…Yes, please.”

Even if he might not be able to understand anything, Akira chose to attempt to know. At least he might have a chance to get out of this situation, where he was getting repeatedly surprised as events unfolded. Alpha nodded and conveyed her hypothesis.

Among old-world medicines, some could recover lost limbs. That was so powerful it could no longer be regarded as something like healing. It was more so in the region of regeneration and reconstruction treatment. Instead of increasing the natural ability of the body to heal itself, these medicines gathered information and determined the normal state of the body. It would then reconstruct the body to approach that ‘normal’ state. Using such a medicine, even if the user was a cyborg, it would forcefully return their body to normal flesh and bones.

By modifying the information the medicine contained, one could set the giant to be its normal state. It was possible to force the body to continuously reconstruct by obeying said information. Moreover, those strange-looking monsters devoured all kinds of things in the slums, which added more different materials into its body. When combined with the green liquid, the monsters managed to grow to an enormous size but were fragile.

“Hold on, Alpha. Let’s just say you’re right and those giants were originally those strange monsters. It’s weird that it managed to shoot that huge laser beam though. Did it grow that laser cannon with the regenerative ability of the drug? That the drug was instructed to consider it as normal?”

“It’s true that it’s difficult to create that laser cannon from scratch, but it is manageable using materials that they can find in the area, no?”

“Someone brought such a thing here? That huge laser cannon?”

As Akira pondered, he somehow got reminded of the 5 annihilator warheads he shot, which destroyed the multi-legged tank. When he considered the possibility, he shook his head. The thought of those strange monsters consuming what remained of the multi-legged tank and turning it into a laser cannon was way too far-fetched.

“But we basically obliterated that multi-legged tank, at most, it would only leave unusable wreckage, no?”

“That thing, huh? They might still have more of it, you know?”

Alpha then pointed toward the direction of the wasteland. The Lion Steel tanks stationed there were gone.

Alpha further elaborated that it would have taken a huge amount of medicine to be able to create three giants. It would be impossible even if they gathered all those strange-looking monsters in one place and amalgamated them. In the first place, those strange-looking monsters were also using a green liquid, which was only able to create their demented shape. Thus, they would not be enough to create these giants.

That was where the Lion Steel tanks became important, Alpha believed that those tanks were filled with medicine. When Akira blew up the multi-legged tank, the other tanks plunged themselves into whatever remained. They released the medicine stored up and created a pond filled with material, ready to be used. If the construction of those giants needed more energy, they could gather more by absorbing the jamming smoke in the air and transforming them into pure energy. This would be the reason why the jamming smoke suddenly thinned out.

After hearing her explanation, Akira could not help but frown.

“Wait for a second… They used jamming smoke to reduce their reach, right? After all, it would be bad if they somehow hit the city by mistake. So, if they thinned out the jamming smoke…”

“That was probably just an excuse.”

“What?”

Alpha then continued to explain.

Information greatly affected the development of any battle. Spreading out jamming smoke that would prevent information gathering right next to the

city would normally be considered a hostile act. They made use of an excuse, stating that the jamming smoke was meant to protect the city. It was a battle against a bounty target this close to the city after all. So City Management allowed the matter to slide.

Thus, reducing the effective range was nothing but an excuse. Their real goal was to hide the strange-looking monsters and the giants. Now, there was no longer any need to keep hiding them.

As Akira was listening to her explanation, he suddenly recalled what Shiori had said. It was something about a Rank 9 warehouse, used to house equipment designed to assault a city. This sudden recollection made Akira's expression turn grave.

"So, all the fighting before was just preparation? And now, they have completed all their preparations?"

"Most likely. It might be nothing but my hypothesis, but if that really is the case, then this is where they will get serious."

Akira's ominous feeling was right. He took a deep breath and gave a long sigh.

"Akira, let's change the ammo in your rifles. Conserve your annihilator warheads. If your opponents are those giants, we don't need to use them."

Akira changed the ammunition and aimed both of his RL2 multi-rifles at the giants. While in the midst of reloading, the bike was already approaching those giants.

"It would be disadvantageous to fight those giants from a distance. Let's use the difference in size to our advantage and fight them up close. Just leave the bike to me and focus on shooting."

"…Roger that!"

His enemies were still alive and kicking. That was all he needed to know and focus on. He made his resolve to bring death onto them.

The closest giant suddenly grew a huge blade out of its palm. The blade seemed to be a forceful amalgamation of tanks, vehicles, and powered suits, which was rooted onto its palm.

That metallic blade started to glow and melted down, changing its shape closer into an actual blade. It then glowed even brighter as the forcefield armour used to solidify its shape started to break apart. The blade, still glowing, was suddenly swung down.

Due to its size, it seemed as if the giant's movements were slow. However, the tip of the blade was in fact moving so fast that it released sonic booms. It seems as if the giant was trying to slice the whole world apart as its blade raced towards Akira. He only somehow managed to evade it thanks to Alpha's dextrous control over his bike.

Rather than just getting out of the blade's way, the bike passed by, right next to the huge blade. The forcefield armour did protect it from the shockwave, but it still managed to push the bike to the side. Thus, the bike had to use its brake extensively, which left trails of brake marks on the forcefield armour projected under its wheel.

Once Akira evaded the blade, zoomed right towards the giant. He managed to land on it and continue to grind the wheel against the giant's skin, racing up. At the same time, he aimed his rifles at another giant and released a barrage of bullets in its direction.

Although it did not pack as much power as compared to the annihilator warhead, a single shot was powerful enough to obliterate any normal monster. Moreover, Akira released the barrage at an astonishing rate. He managed to strip the giant off its flesh and mechanical parts, sending shockwaves into the giant's body.

However, the green liquid that leaked out from where he struck quickly healed its wounds. The gigantic hole he created from his barrage also swelled up for a moment and got quickly filled up. With how horrendous its body looked; Akira could not tell if he had left any damage on the giant.

As he was racing on top of the surface of a giant, it tried to crush him by flailing around its large arms. Akira simply made short bursts of speed and sharp turns to avoid getting crushed. However, its attempts still managed to release powerful shockwaves. Whenever its palm landed on its body, it transmitted a strong wave, which eventually managed to throw Akira's bike off.

Thankfully, it was only temporary as the bike did not need a solid platform. With its ability to fly in the sky, he managed to quickly return back to the giant. However, another hand was already prepared for him, which came at him the moment he landed.

"Akira, we'll launch a counterattack."

"Alright!"

Akira reached for his blade, which was installed on the bike. Once he pulled the handle out, a huge amount of liquid metal spilt over from the bike's tank. It quickly solidified into a blade with the help of forcefield armour. The blade then started to glow and formed an enormous, long sword.

Akira swung his blade, toward the incoming palm. Up close, the palm seemed like a wall of flesh that got randomly mixed with metal. Before he struck, the TGP laser cannon fixed on his bike released a shot. It was fired exactly where the blade would make contact. The two combined attacks sliced open its palm, and went through way past the arm, slicing its limb off.

"Whoah! So the blade is good enough to cut through its body! Then it might be better to use a blade instead of a rifle… What!?"

As the amputated arm fell to the ground, suddenly a large swarm of drones came out. They were all racing off from the sliced surface. They seemed to be made from powered armoured suits that had flying devices installed. They moved in sync and pushed the arm up, helping it float in the air and turn. The fingers of the amputated arm transformed into ginormous muzzles that were all aimed at Akira.

“It can even transform an amputated arm into a weapon if I don’t completely destroy it!? Give me a break already!”

“Stop getting impressed and start shooting.”

“I know, I know!!”

Akira flew in between the barrage of bullets released by the floating arms. He took aim, ready to fire, but before he could, a large shining round struck it. It came from the ground. After that one shot, the gigantic arm broke into pieces and burnt to a crisp, falling to the ground.

A call reached an astonished Akira a moment later.

“Akira, can you hear me?”

“Elena-san!?”

“Oh! It’s connected! Akira! We’re here to help!”

The source of that shot was Elena and the others. It came from a large portable cannon that once unpacked, it could not be packed back without help from a specialist.

“It seems like I can contact you from this distance. We should be able to maintain a decent enough communication line if the jamming smoke has already weakened by this much.”

Although Akira was talking through telepathy via Alpha, the communication line was still established using his information-gathering device. It showed just how much the jamming smoke had dispersed. Akira connected his information-gathering device with Elena’s to share information between them and increased their overall information-gathering capability.

“We’ll provide you support, so go all out.”

Akira broke out a natural smile in reaction to her reassuring line.

“Thank you very much!”

“Akira, just a question. What happened on our way here? Why are there multiple giants now?”

“…Uhhh, I’m not really sure myself. While I was fighting that giant, they multiplied before I realize it.”

The only thing he knew was what Alpha had conveyed to him. Otherwise, he would have no clue as to why it happened. If he were to share her hypothesis, it might seem a little misplaced. Thus, he acted none the wiser.

Akira was a bit overwhelmed when he challenged two giants all by himself. Now, with help from the others, he was able to gain the upper hand.

Elena’s team was moving like a mobile turret, attacking the giants. Their main attackers were Elena and Sara, who were shooting out those bullets that shone.

They exhausted a huge amount of energy with each shot, prioritizing power. Using some energy, the bullets maintained their round shape using forcefield armour. Once they landed, the forcefield armour immediately collapsed, exposing all the concentrated energy inside. The explosion sent shockwaves which devoured huge chunks off the giants.

Naturally, the giants could not simply ignore them. They swung their huge blades at Elena’s team and released beams from their jaws.

However, Akira prevented their attacks from hitting. With the help of Alpha’s calculations, he regularly fired at the giants’ mouths and arms, throwing their aim off. This greatly aided Elena’s group’s attempts to evade. Meanwhile, Elena’s team worked together with him in sync to pre-emptively move to evade the attacks.

Elena’s group was able to avoid a direct hit from the blades. As for the laser beams, they dealt essentially no damage to them. The laser beams prioritized covering a wide area, which greatly weakened them. Though

that made it unavoidable, it was weak enough to be fended off with the combination of their forcefield armour along with Shiori's forcefield shield.

Akira and Elena's groups were repelling the giants' attacks in such a manner. However, other monsters in the area were also trying to attack Elena's group. These monsters came from those pieces that were blown off the main gigantic main body. They grew out of the sea of green liquid and slowly grew in numbers to form a swarm which went after Elena's team.

The cannons used by Elena and Sara were not the appropriate weapon to be used against these monsters. Despite their smaller stature, these monsters were much too strong for common Hunters to contend against. Thus, Elena's team was having a hard time against them.

However, with Shiori and Kanae aboard, they managed to repel them. Shiori used her blade, while Kanae used her fists. They were slicing and crushing those smaller monsters coming at them. Since these monsters were not as strong as Latis and Pamela, Shiori and Kanae had no problems fending them off.

Elena and Sara worked perfectly in sync with Kanae and Shiori. They executed their respective roles perfectly and increased the overall effectiveness of the team. On top of that, with Elena's superior ability to gather information and ability to maintain constant contact with Akira, she could deliver effective orders. Thus, the team was extremely effective.

Together, they were overwhelming, even against the two giants. This was even despite the difference in sizes. The giants on the receiving end of the assault eventually lost their limbs and crumbled into the pool made of their own flesh and blood.

"We did it!"

Elena inadvertently yelped in victory. Sara also had a huge grin on her face. Meanwhile, Shiori and Kanae managed to relax as they gave a soft sigh.

However, Akira's tense voice immediately reached them.

“Elena-san! Don’t drop your guard! They might still be alive!”

“What!?”

Elena quickly checked her information-gathering device and scowled. A new giant was rising. And now, there were four of them.

“Akira… What’s going on?”

“I would love to know the answer to that question as well…”

Everyone was equally surprised. It was only when the new giants took on their new form that they managed to snap back to reality and returned to attacking.

To help with the morale, Akira lightly asked.

“Elena-san, is it okay for me to rely on my seniors a bit more?”

“Of course, just leave it to us.”

Even after the increase in the number of enemies, Elena and Sara still smiled, filled with confidence.

That was when the situation took another turn. From behind them, a huge swarm of mini-missiles appeared and flew straight toward the giants.

A moment later they saw a squad led by Goutol flying above. This greatly shocked Akira and Elena’s team.

“The city defence squad…? But I thought they were not going to send anyone…”

Akira, still reeling from the surprise, suddenly had someone connect to him through the general connection line.

“Akira, thank goodness you’re alright.”

“Carol?”

“Sorry, I couldn’t protect the base although you’ve asked me to. I had to go against someone pretty strong, so I had no leeway to protect the base. However, I got the defence squad to act in place of me. I hope you’re fine with this.”

After Carol left the slums, just like Reina, she asked the city defence squad for help and was turned down the same way. However, something changed after that.

To prepare herself in case information about her being an old-world connector one day leaked out, she greatly enhanced the physical capability of her body. She had even gone against her usual principle and took in non-Hunter clients for her side job to earn more. Among such clients, some were high-ranking city officers.

Thus, Carol called those men and requested them to dispatch the city defence squad. She even contacted Viola to add extra pressure.

With reward and threat, they had no other choice but to do as Carol had requested. Although, as expected, they could not simply dispatch men from the city defence squad because an outsider requested it of them. Thus, they chose to send out Goutol’s team, who were already posted nearby as observers.

Goutol, who had been grinding his teeth, holding himself back from going out, was more than happy to follow an order to dispatch. He immediately took the squad under him to the slums. It did not take long for him to grasp the situation that was hidden under the jamming smoke. This made him switch the mission from reconnaissance to extermination.

Akira smiled and thanked her.

“It’s good enough, Carol. Thank you!”

“You are welcome. I will head there as well once I’m done with my preparations, so please hold on for a bit.”

“I know it has not been easy for you, so there’s no need to push yourself too hard, okay?”

“No, you just wait over there, alright?”

Carol then ended the call. The last line that she said had a rather uppity tone in it.

That was when Alpha, who was in front of Akira, suddenly turned around and showed a wide smile.

“Alpha, what’s wrong?”

“Akira, isn’t it great that we have more allies now, aren’t you happy?”

“Yeah, isn’t that obvious?”

Akira casually smiled back without knowing Alpha’s smile was an ominous one.

“I see. Well, let’s not leave everything to them and get back to work as well.”

“Yeah, let’s go!”

Seeing Goutol’s team already joined in to assault the giants, Akira got fired up and resumed his attack.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 289, The Super Giant and Spectators

Index

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Thanks to Carol, Goutol's squad got dispatched to the battlefield. The difficult fight against four giants had shifted, giving Akria the upper hand.

Goutol's squad was posted on standby close to the wall. Their placement had taken Akira, a 50 billion Aurum bounty target, into account. With the risk of Akira being so close by, attacking the city, they were well equipped to handle him.

Therefore, their intense assault quickly reduced the giants to pieces. With the extra support from Akira and the others, they were able to overwhelm the enemies.

In other words, they were only able to get the upper hand because of the additional force. The moment the giants multiplied to eight, that was the end of it.

Akira inadvertently shouted.

"Stop multiplying already!"

Every time they destroyed one giant, two more came out to take its place. However, none could be left alive.

“Alpha! There’s no end to them!“

“Don’t worry. They will no longer regenerate once they run out of material, medicine or jamming smoke.”

“And when would be exactly?”

“No idea. But it’s not like we’re doing something pointless. That is one thing that I can say for certain.”

“…Well, it’s not like I have any other choice.”

Although the situation seemed to only get worse, they were undoubtedly inching closer to victory. Even when everyone was getting worn down, Akira still believed that they could win and desperately continued to fight back.

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Far away from the battle, on top of a certain abandoned building, a group of people were observing the fight.

One of them was a girl clad in an old-world dress. She was called Haruka. Haruka smiled politely at the others present and asked.

“So, what do you think?”

However, the others reacted pretty duly to her question. Olivia was the first to convey her opinion with her business smile.

“Even if you ask. My deepest apologies, but please refrain from trying to make any unrelated offer to the company while I am in the middle of an escort mission.”

The next one was Tsubaki, who had left Kuzusuhara ruin to come there.

“I was the one who made the decision to come here. But from the contents proposed, all I can say is that it was a mistake to grant myself permission to move outside my managed region, even if this is just a spare body.”

Finally, Alicia, who was accompanied by her servants, who doubled as her escorts, smiled bitterly and spoke up.

“Well, I guess we will put this matter on hold then. Though, if you want me to judge you based on the outcome, I can only say that it would be unlikely for me to continue to support you.”

“I-I see.”

The harsh reaction from her supporter, and other potential supporters, made Haruka try her best to force her stiff smile into a more amicable one. However, her attempt only made her smile look more awkward. She then glanced at the guy next to her, Yatsubayashi. But Yatsubayashi then curtly asked.

“…What?”

“Uhh, don’t you have anything to say as its creator?”

“No, I don’t remember ever creating something like that nor ever publicly presenting the method to make such a thing. Hah… using someone else’s data without permission… how rude…”

Seeing Yatsubayashi mumbling curses, Haruka decided not to ask him to try and convince the others.

(Silavin: Just in case you don’t remember and was wondering:

Yatsubayashi – mad scientist, Tiol incident

Haruka – new character)

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While back in Sheryl's base, Shirou was watching Akira's battle from afar. He was amazed at how they were managing themselves despite the huge difference in size compared to their enemies. However, his expression was grave.

[…Are they really winning?]

There was no doubt that they were performing really well. Even so, it did not seem like they were winning. The giants had already multiplied to twelve. From Shirou's point of view, it seemed like the giants were mercilessly overwhelming Akira and the others.

He could even overhear their conversation from the intercepted communication line used by the city defence squad.

"Where are the reinforcements!?"

"We've already sent reinforcement requests numerous times!"

"Are those guys at the top seriously going to just ignore this situation!? You gotta be kidding me! I'll freaking kill them once we get back!"

Even in this situation, City Management was still turning a blind eye. However, Shirou did not see that as something unexpected.

There was pressure from the Lion Steel company. On top of that, some within the inner wall believe that for the sake of guaranteeing safety, there was a need to regularly destroy the slums outside the inner wall.

Naturally, there were some who believed that there was still time even if they sent out the city defence squad only after Akira got killed. After all, City Management recognised Akira as a monster. There were also those who would benefit from Akira's death, especially those who were in the faction opposing Inabe.

Shirou understood all of this and thought the situation was getting worse by the minute.

[This is bad… Is there anything we can do…?]

When one did not have enough information to find a good solution, what they needed was to gather more information.

With the jamming smoke thinning out, Shirou thought that he might be able to get his hands on some new information. Thus, as he closely scanned the slums, he found a particular signal.

[…Hm? This place… There's something there. Did someone send them to gather information about this battle?]

However, Shirou was shocked when he found that signal came from the representative of the Lion Steel Company.

[Wait… Isn't this the representative from Lion Steel?! And … The AI… It's from Kuzusuhara ruin..!? Why are they in such a place…!? There are others too, but this dress, it is an old-world dress…]

Shirou tried to hack into one of their equipment. However, his location was suddenly traced back, and he quickly cut the connection by pure reflex.

[…Whoah! That was dangerous!]

His pale and anxious expression, and heavy breathing demonstrated just how abnormal this situation was.

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Yatsubayashi, who still had a sour look on his face, tilted his head.

[…Oh? Someone tried to hack into my equipment. Not bad. Considering that no one would normally even be able to detect my position…]

Hearing that, Haruka pouted.

"Chief, what's wrong?"

"Nope, nothing… Ah, also, don't call me chief. If you want to keep calling me that, then give me back my authority."

“Even if you say as much…”

Haruka seemed a bit troubled as Yatsubyashi just shot a displeased face at her.

__*__*__*__

Those on Akira’s side and the giants were still locked in a heated battle. Carol, who had returned back to join the fight, provided support from the camping vehicle. While driving around the battleground she would throw ammo at Akira from time to time. He would replenish his ammo by doing so multiple times. Thanks to that, he did not have to worry about running out and was able to continue fighting.

However, their fighting continued, and the giants multiplied to 16. Naturally, Akira had enough of it already.

“Alpha, they’re not slowing down at all! The situation doesn’t seem to be improving!

“That’s true. Though to be more precise, each giant is getting weaker and weaker.”

“So, quantity over quality, huh? Which means the first giant was the strongest one then. I guess it was a good thing that we took it down.”

Akira believed that the situation was not that dire, but his expression remained solemn.

His trump card, the annihilator warhead, was perfect for destroying a single powerful monster. However, it was not the right weapon to take down a swarm of moderately strong monsters. Furthermore, he did not have that many left.

As for the other weapons, they were not that effective on the giants. However, it might change once the giants weakened a bit more, which would mean more of them.

Akira preferred if the giants stayed powerful and did not multiply. For him, it was much easier to deal with a single strong one than a swarm of weak ones.

However, that was exactly why the giants multiplied and slowly formed a swarm every time one of them got killed.

The giants swung their blades and released laser beams. Akira slipped past through the openings and fought back. Every time he shot one of them down, the number of attacks kept increasing. Although the giants' firepower was reduced, Akira still could not ignore them. With more of them on the battlefield, it was getting harder to keep evading them. Thus, he was slowly getting pushed back.

That was when Shirou's telepathically reached him.

"Akira, are you still alive?"

"I'm busy right now, what is it?"

"I got a piece of information that may have something to do with those monsters you're fighting. I can send it your way if you want."

"Does it say anything about their weakness? Wait, what do you mean 'may have'?"

"I can't say for certain until I fully analyze the data. You might be able to find their weakness. However, that's a big 'might'. It might have nothing to do with those giants at all."

"Then analyze it first before sending it to me! Seriously… do you really understand my current situation!? Or are you telling me to analyze it while I fight!?"

It was a natural response considering Akira's current predicament. However, in response, Shirou also raised his voice.

"It's not like I can analyze something like this with my current equipment. I could if I used one of Sakashita's facilities, but they'll find out where I am!

So, you should do something about it yourself by using Tsukisada's facilities!"

Shirou's explanation highlighted his deep misunderstanding, which helped Akira calm down.

Both of them were old-world connectors. If it was to transfer data, they could do so without any issue. This was regardless of the data format. If Akira was really someone from Tsukisada Construction, then he should be able to connect to one of the Tsukisada facilities to analyze the data. Although it was a little late, Akira finally understood what Shirou wanted from him due to the latter's misunderstanding.

However, Akira was not from Tsukisada Construction. Thus, it was not like he could do anything about this piece of data if analysis required a facility from one of five big companies. Meanwhile, if he was really from Tsukisada, he should really want this data. Thus, he was not sure how he should respond.

That was when Alpha smiled and stated to him.

"Akira, I will do the analysis, so just get him to send it to you."

Akira did think that this came out of the left field, but seeing Alpha's confident smile, he gave a simple smile and nodded. He then reconnected to Shirou.

"Sorry, I'll do it then. Just send the data to me."

"Alright, I'm sending it now."

A stream of data came from Shirou. Akira did not have the slightest clue what it contained. However, he did feel the sensation of receiving a stream of information.

Akira could actually read the content if he wished. However, that was different to understanding it. He would have to decode its encryption first.

However, that was something only a specialist could do, something impossible for him.

However, it did not pose any challenge to Alpha. Not only did she decode the encrypted data, but she was also even able to fill in and fix the corrupted data, created when Yatsubayashi noticed Shirou trying to hack his equipment.

More importantly, the data contained information that would turn the table around. Thus, Alpha immediately made a smile of victory. Her confidence-filled smile was showcased to Akira, as if to let him know of her findings.

“Akira, we’ll do something reckless again, get ready.”

Strangely enough, her statement had completely calmed him down. Akira then confidently smiled back at her.

“Roger that! Let’s go!”

Akira’s bike suddenly accelerated right toward the giants. It was as if he was declaring that this next exchange would be the end of everything.

Even in the midst of the chaotic fight, Akira’s group and Goutol’s group were able to work together perfectly. They were spread around, surrounding the giants. Thus, when Akira broke through the encirclement and went alone toward the giants, they would naturally focus their attention on him.

The giants swung their blades and released their laser beams at him. Their high-speed blades created powerful gales, superheated by the lasers as the air particles moved. Akira barely avoided the scorching heat as he pushed forward.

Elena and the others were surprised by Akira’s sudden change in movement. They knew that he would not do something pointless when he was being this reckless. Thus, they knew that he must be doing something that might turn the tide of the battle and end it. They quickly followed suit and provided him support. Meanwhile, Goutol’s squad reacted, believing it to be some kind of strategy, they also went to help Akira.

Akira followed Alpha's instructions and aimed both his RL2 multi-rifles. Although he had no idea why and what he was aiming at, he did not hesitate to pull down the trigger. A wall of charged bullets were released, which were accompanied by mini-missiles and a laser beam. However, instead of aimed at a giant, they were aimed at the sea of green liquid that all giants were in.

The moment the mini-missiles landed, they exploded and blew the sea of gore and metal in all directions. Flesh and mechanical parts were blown up into the air. It was quickly followed by a laser that swept and completely evaporated everything in its path.

However, from Akira's point of view, there was no noticeable change. Even after that attack, it seemed to only create a wave in the sea of green liquid, which travelled to the edge. Eventually, it would return back to its original state as if nothing had happened.

In the first place, they've already shot numerous bullets and missiles into that green fleshy sea while the battle took place. It did not seem to slow down the giants. Thus, those there perceived it to be a meaningless attack.

Even so, Akira was certain that Alpha had some kind of objective. He slipped in between the giants and kept shooting at it.

"Alpha! I don't think it's working; just how much longer should I keep shooting?"

"Just keep on shooting for now. According to my calculation, it should be around here… Akira! Over there!"

Akira could see something forming under the green fleshy sea thanks to his enhanced vision, which enabled him to see under it. Although it was just a blurry contour, it was more than enough for him to fire at it. Up until now, he was shooting around haphazardly with his two RL2 multi-rifles. This time, he had a target and released a barrage at it.

The bullets had enough firepower to easily pierce through the flesh, metal and green liquid. They would even manage to hit the ground beneath. That

was normally the case but for some reason, this time, the bullets could not even reach his target. The fleshy mixture around it quickly gathered up and released a forcefield armour, one strong enough to stop his bullets.

“It got blocked…!?”

While Akira had his eyes widened in disbelief, the target suddenly broke into smaller pieces and went in different directions.

“Alpha! Which one should I go for?!”

“Wait for a second… That one!!”

All the smaller, split-up signals in Akira’s enhanced vision vanished except for one. He quickly accelerated his bike to chase after it. As the bike ran on top of the uneven fleshy greenish sea, in a straight line toward his target, he kept shooting at it. It was an attempt to try and thin out the thick fleshy wall around it, while also trying to hit the target. The barrage struck the forcefield created by the fleshy wall, which was absorbed and transformed into energy. It converted whatever Akira threw at it into flashes of light that enveloped the area.

Akira was completely consumed by that blinding light. Even so, he did not stop shooting until his extended magazines ran out. In exchange for all that he had released, Akira was able to see some form of a reaction from his target. Once he stopped shooting, the blinding light died down. It allowed him to see his target, which was visibly exposed, protruding out of the fleshy sea. Unfortunately, it still seemed to be completely healthy.

“That didn’t work as well! Whoah!?”

A couple of giant blades smashed toward him. Some were even thrown by the giants that were far away from him. Even if the large metal blades did not hit him, they crashed into the ground, creating shockwaves that were strong enough to throw him off course. Even the grotesque sea was not spared as the metal blades pierced through and hit the ground beneath.

Thanks to Alpha's assistance, Akira was able to nimbly avoid a direct hit. The blades sliced through the sky at a high speed, even when he compressed his time perception. He could see beads of water falling in slow motion, while those blades zoomed past him. He managed to avoid them with the slightest of margins, squeezing past where the blades travelled. He could not help but frown at how the enemy suddenly attacked him so aggressively.

"Alpha! What's going on!?"

"All the giants are prioritizing on attacking you right now! I will do my best to avoid them so hold on tight. Make sure you don't get thrown off the bike!"

"So basically, they don't want us to attack that thing no matter what, huh! Alright! I'll leave that part to you!"

The giants had focused their attacks on him. The ones nearby swung their blades while those that were far from him threw their blades. Without a weapon in hand, they started to run towards him, releasing lasers from their japing jaws while they were at it.

Elena and the others were trying their best to stop the giants. Seeing how frenzied the giants were acting, they knew whatever Akira was trying to do was critical. Therefore, they quickly prioritized helping him.

Elena's group focused all their firepower on the giants that still held onto their blades, targeting their arms to disable them.

Some powered suits flew and stood on top of the giants' shoulders but were completely ignored. This allowed the powered suits to be able to release a point-blank barrage, which threw off the giant's aim.

With all the assistance he was receiving, the attacks on Akira abated.

Even so, it did not change how dire the situation was. Due to the overwhelming difference in the numbers, Akira still had to charge through the attacks as if he was planning to sacrifice himself to end the fight.

As blades collided with each other, sparks of fire were scattered into the air. Countless arms tried to grab onto him. Another giant from a different direction charged in between the rest of the giants, straight toward Akira. Even when the other giants got sliced by a frenzied giant flailing its blade, they were still trying to reach Akira with their arms.

Even in that situation, Akira was still fixed on his target. The bike was moving nimbly at a high speed thanks to Alpha's control, but he still fired. Akira once again emptied his rifles at his target. However, the target was still vigorously moving around.

"…Alpha!! Don't you think it might be better if we call a temporary retreat?!"

"No! It's still too soon! Just keep shooting!"

"How about we retreat and snipe it with an annihilator warhead?!"

"We can't do that yet! Save the bullet for now!"

"…Alright alright!!"

Akira got a little bit frustrated but kept on shooting. The faster he shot, the faster he emptied his magazines. At this rate, he would run out of ammo in no time. That anxiety caused him to frown.

That was when something changed. The grotesque sea suddenly gathered around his target. At the same time, the giants in the area suddenly threw themselves at him. When he looked up, it was full of darkness. The sky got completely blocked off by the giants.

As expected, Akira thought that this was his end. But a sudden sharp pain snapped him back to reality. The bike suddenly accelerated away at full speed, completely ignoring the burden it placed on its rider and its generator.

Due to his compressed time perception, the giants' fall was exceptionally slow. If they were just the size of normal rubble or debris, Akira would

have been able to easily avoid them with his bike. However, any one of them was large enough to completely block out the sky. Thus, even if his bike would break down, he had to push through to escape.

“Alpha! Are we going to make it!?”

“Just hold tight!!

The ceiling above eventually crashed down. The shockwave created a miniature earthquake, which released a cloud of dust high into the sky. A moment later, Akira jumped out of the dust storm. He got out on time, but not his bike.

Right before the giants landed, Akira and Alpha knew that they would not make it. They immediately chose to forgo the bike. Akira stepped on top of the handle. Using the full power of his augmented suit, he leapt off the bike. A moment later, an explosion occurred behind him. That combination of both forces propelled him forward, barely getting him out of the falling ceiling.

Akira eventually slowed down and landed on top of a nearby abandoned building.

“W-whoah…! That was close! Alpha! Did it go well?”

“Yup, take a look!”

Alpha smiled and pointed at the giants lying below. Akira, believing that he finally won, also looked down. However, he was surprised by the spectacle.

The giants piled on top of each other were melting, slowly becoming one with the rest of the grotesque fleshy sea. They then gathered and formed into a single giant.

“Alpha… I thought you said it went well?”

“Quality over quantity this time, so it prioritizes power now.”

Alpha explained nonchalantly. She then proceeded to tell Akira the rest of her plan.

After Alpha analyzed the information from Shirou, she quickly concluded that the whole fleshy sea was some kind of monster. It was neither a swarm nor an individual. Rather, it was made of two monsters. These two monsters were the cores that controlled the rest of the giants. The one Akira chased after was one of these two cores.

The first one got killed by Akira's annihilator warhead. Thus, the second one decided to opt for more giants instead of better giants. After all, it was too costly to keep producing giants that required a huge amount of materials and medicines, which would just get shot down with a single annihilator warhead. Thus, it decided to produce many weaker giants as it stayed hidden under the fleshy sea.

However, Alpha was able to detect and ascertain its position. After it received a direct hit, it decided that numbers would not be able to protect it. Thus, it decided to form a better, more powerful body. However, creating the same giant as the last one would only get shot down the same way. Thus, it improved the quality of its body to its very limit.

After hearing Alpha's explanation, Akira looked at the new giant and exclaimed.

"So… That is the strongest body that it can create, huh…"

The current giant was smaller, as if it was the child version of the other giants. However, there was no longer a fleshy sea under it. It had used all its materials to create this body.

"Alpha… Shouldn't we target the core, use an annihilator warhead before it completes its body?"

"Before its body is fully formed, I am not able to confirm if the signal is real or just a decoy. Moreover, we do not know for sure how tough the new body is, so we shouldn't spend annihilator warheads when we might actually not need to. Now that its body has fully formed, we know for

certain that the core is really there. Since it has hardened its body, that should prevent the core from moving around."

Although its body was tough, Akira could obliterate it with an annihilator warhead. It was an easier opponent when compared to fighting a swarm of giants. That was why Alpha made it return to prioritizing quality over quantity. This was the worst choice the monster could make, even so, it could not fight against its settings, instinct, and programming. Alpha knew that the monster would try to protect its core even if it meant it had to sacrifice all the other bodies.

Akira thought that did make sense.

"I see. By the way, Alpha, I feel like I've seen that thing before somewhere…"

"Now that it prioritized on quality, I bet its outer appearance now reflects its core better than before."

"I see… Then, as I thought, that must be Latis, huh?"

This special giant's appearance was no longer distorted. It had completely reconstructed Latis' face, and it even had Latis' hair as well. Its body, which was an amalgamation of flesh and metal, now seems like an augmented suit. It no longer had the twisted gory outlook the other giants had.

Akira then remembered Pamela's last words.

"So, this is what she meant…"

Although they were horribly reconstructed, all the giants that they fought against up until now had the same reference point. Akira finally understood that they were all supposed to look like Latis.

The new giant Latis grew a blade out of its palm. The blade was basically a lump of metal forged into a blade, with enhanced sharpness using forcefield armour. It faintly glowed when energy flowed into it and was long enough

to slice apart a tall building. Latis then took a stance with that blade and released a slash.

Its first target was Goutol's squad. They temporarily stopped when the new giant was forming. However, once it started moving, they immediately reacted. They threw everything that they had at the new giant. Since they attacked it first, it prioritized its attack on them. Although Goutol's squad tried their best to get away from its attack, some still got caught.

That single slash sliced the slums apart. It even reached Kugamayama city's inner walls. This was accomplished by a single powerful energy wave that the slash released.

Thankfully, the city's inner walls were unharmed due to its powerful forcefield armour. Unfortunately, that was not the case for the tall buildings in the lower district, which were taller than the city wall.

Akira was flabbergasted.

"What insane power and range…"

But in contrast to his reaction, Alpha was smiling as per usual.

"Well, that is indeed powerful. However, it will run out of energy in no time if it keeps that up. After that, only death awaits."

"At the very least, it should have enough energy to completely destroy everything around here though."

"That's true. So, let's take it down before it destroys everything. Judging from the attack just now, it seems like it doesn't know our location. So, you can calmly take your time to aim."

At that very instant, Akira was able to receive Alpha's full support. Thus, his augmented suit's camouflaging capability was fully maximized. As long as he did not make any mistakes, he would stay hidden. Even though the possibility of getting detected was not zero, it was enough to assure him

that Latis would not aim for him. If he got discovered, Latis would definitely prioritize eliminating him first.

Akira finally understood why Alpha waited until Latis made the first move. At the same time, used Goutol's men as distractions.

"I bet you will get discovered after you use the annihilator warhead, so let's end this with one shot."

"…Yeah, I know."

Akira felt bad about using Goutol's men. However, he knew that he did not have the leeway to be complacent and suppressed those feelings. He swapped the ammunition in his RL2 multi-rifles and loaded it with the annihilator warheads. He took aim and mumbled his honest thoughts which suddenly popped up.

"It's pretty amazing for you to work this hard even after death, but let's end this. I'll use the rest of my ammo in exchange."

With that opening, Akira pulled the trigger.

"…Farewell."

Akira shot out four annihilator warheads. They split the air and flew straight. They landed on points which would maximize their combined firepower according to Alpha's calculation.

The fireball created by all four devoured the giant. However, it was still alive. Due to its size, everything under its knee remained intact. Everything inside the fiery sphere got annihilated, with nothing left behind. Meanwhile, everything around it was blown away by the shockwave.

Akira lowered his rifle while still standing on top of the abandoned building. The shockwave even managed to reach him before eventually dying down. Finally, the view of the slums from where he stood returned. It was back to how it looked. Seeing such a scene, Akira heaved a sigh.

“And that was 400 million Aurum… Well, I guess that’s cheap considering that it allowed me to destroy that thing.”

That was Akira’s honest feelings.

“Alpha, just to make sure, it’s dead, right?”

“Yep, you defeated it. Though, there are pieces of it scattered around. Its core has fully stopped functioning so it should be alright.”

“Alright then, that’s it I guess… Though, it’s not the end of everything.”

This battle had come to an end. However, his real goal had not progressed at all. His relationship with Lion Steel was still hostile and Chloe was still alive. Akira knew that it was too soon to state this to be the end.

Even so, he expected nothing would happen for the rest of the day. Thus, he heaved a sigh filled with fatigue.

“Well, I guess we are back to waiting for my new equipment from Sakashita then. But if this will happen as long as I stay in the slums, it might be better for me to hide in the wasteland while I wait for my new equipment.”

“You’re right. Let’s think about that while you take a break… Hold on, Akira! Keep your guard up!!”

Alpha, who was smiling a moment ago, suddenly turned solemn as she warned Akira to put his guard up. Akira immediately got into a fight-or-flight state.

Akira’s information-gathering device detected multiple signals around him. All of them were obviously approaching him and they eventually formed an encirclement around him.

All of them were wearing maid and butler uniforms. It was obvious that they were from the Lion Steel Company. Akira scowled, but the main reason for that was not because of their attire.

After all the fighting that he had to go through, he was able to make a good estimate of how strong someone was. Although his judgment was polished in an unconventional manner, according to it, he knew that those surrounding him were at least as strong or maybe even stronger than Hammerz.

This current situation was far more dire than when he was surrounded by giants. Then one of the maids stepped up and smiled politely at him.

“Please don’t worry, we are not here to fight you.”

“…And you are?”

“I am the representative from Lion Steel company eastern district main branch, Alice. Pleased to meet you.”

“Eastern district… Main branch…?”

“Yes, I am here as the head of the Lion Steel company. I’ve come to negotiate with you.”

Alice smiled politely at him, who was obviously troubled by her while also being extra cautious of her.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 290, Negotiation with Alice

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Even after they saw Latis' defeat after taking four annihilator warheads, Tsubaki and the others did not show any reaction. They knew that the battle had come to an end and went on their respective business.

"They took it down. That would mark the end of this presentation, I presume. Now then, please allow me to excuse myself."

Tsubaki declared to Haruka and vanished without even waiting for Haruka's reply.

Next, Alice smiled at Olivia and asked.

"I believe this showcase is more than enough to make your decision, or do you still need more?"

"…We have gathered enough information from this ordeal, the rest would depend on how the aftermath is handled. If there are no problems with the aftermath, I can promise that we will consider your offer in a positive light."

“Thank you very much. Well then, we can talk about the details another day.”

Alice gave a light bow to Olivia before turning to Haruka.

“I have another thing to attend to, so please excuse me. Ahh, also, although it ended in defeat, you need not worry. We will still continue to support you. Until next time then.”

Similar to Tsubaki, Alice immediately left together with her servants without even waiting for Haruka to reply.

Haruka then sighed exasperatedly.

“…I guess we should go back home as well….”

“Yeah yeah, just leave already, go home.”

Yatsubayashi said so while lightly waving his hand as if to shoo Haruka away. Haruka sighed again, this time, it was heavier than before.

“You, come with me too.”

Yatsubayashi clicked his tongue and left the area together with Haruka.

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Akira was locking eyes with Alice, who had suddenly appeared. It was as if they were glaring at each other. It was because this was the only thing Akira could do. He knew that he would be killed the moment he tried to reach for his rifle.

Akira did not question Alice’s intentions after she had stated she had no wish to fight him. After all, he was still alive.

He knew Alice could easily kill him if she wanted to. It was also the reason why he knew she was not lying. At the same time, he knew that she could change her mind at any point in time.

Thus, he tried to approach this problem peacefully this time.

“…So, what do you want to talk about?”

Seeing that he was willing to negotiate, Alice smiled and pulled out a white card.

“I want you to relinquish all your rights regarding this white card.”

“That card again!”

Akira inadvertently frowned the moment he saw the white card, which had given him so much trouble.

“As I’ve said so many times before. I’ve given that card to Shiori. So that is not mine. If you have something you want from that card, go talk to Shiori.”

“You just need to say that you’ve relinquished all your rights regarding this card. That would be good enough. If it is no longer yours, it would mean nothing more than ascertaining the fact that you have given it away. I believe there should be no problems with you just stating this fact.”

Akira thought her argument was sound. It also informed him that she had no intention to cause him any problems. Judging from this situation, it was clearly in his best interest to do as she said.

However, if he was someone obedient, who would accept others’ demands, he would not have found himself to be in this situation.

“There is no reason for me to do that just because you asked me to.”

At the very least he was able to calm down and manage not to straightforwardly refuse. Even so, that was enough for Alpha to facepalm.

“Just so you know, it is Lion Steel’s fault that I have a 50 billion Aurum bounty on my head and got recognized as a monster by Kugamayama city. Do you really understand what you put me through when you are requesting something of me?”

“To be more precise, it was something that the third branch did under its own discretion. It does not have any connection to me as the representative of the eastern district main branch.”

In his current situation, Akira’s attitude was akin to suicide – even from the point of view of those in the eastern district. There was a huge gulf between Akira’s and Alices’ power, whereby the other party held full control over his life and death. This was the gap between a single Hunter and Lion Steel, a large company well renowned even in the eastern district.

However, even after Akira showed an attitude against her, Alice did not show any noticeable reaction.

“I see. How about this then? We will erase that bounty as well as that monster designation. Moreover, we will also reimburse all the expenses caused by this incident. What do you think?”

Akira was completely taken aback. He was obviously confused as he questioned.

“…It’s not like you will kill me if I say no, right?”

“If you want me to, then certainly.”

“Ah, no thanks, I’m fine without that.”

“Then, will you take my offer?”

“Eh? Ah, well, uhh…”

Akira could not understand why someone who could easily overwhelm him with power was offering such a good offer. That confusion only caused him to become suspicious. He felt that things might get worse if he accepted Alice’s offer. Thus, he pondered hard over it and finally thought of something before asking.

“That is actually a great offer for me, but… Is that because you want me to give up on Chloe?”

He had put off dealing with Chloe only after his new equipment from Sakashita arrived. Naturally, it did not change the fact that he would still kill her if he got the chance. Thus, his suspicions made him question if Alice offered such a deal to peacefully resolve the situation relatively cheaply. This was after considering the damage he could cause when he assaulted anything that housed Chloe after he got his front-line weapons.

Although he was the one who came up with this possibility, for some reason, he was not that fully convinced of it. After all, he understood if Alice had planned on protecting Chloe, it would have been better for her to just kill him. He had no clue as to why Alice did not take that option.

After she heard what Akira said, Alice tilted her head as if she was pondering over something. It took a short while before she immediately made her decision.

“Chloe, huh? Very well, please wait here for a bit.”

After she made her request, her group moved away, leaving Akira there, waiting. Meanwhile, the one waiting seemed more perplexed than wary.

“Alpha… What’s going on?”

“No idea. But it seems like they seriously have no desire to fight against you. That’s why, don’t get too emotional and stay calm alright, Akira?”

“Y-yeah.”

Not too long after, one of Alice’s servants returned with Shiori and Kanae in tow. Both were obviously as perplexed as Akira.

Then, another group of maids came from the direction of Kugamayama city. They stopped beside Alice, bringing with them two particular people, Chloe and Reina. Both were perplexed, but unlike Reina who seemed troubled, Chloe was smiling victoriously.

Unfortunately, both their reaction did not give him any clues as to what was happening; thus, he was even more confused than before.

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After Akira killed Latis, Elena's team immediately tried to contact him. However, for some reason, they could not reach him. Although it seemed strange, they believed the annihilator warhead might have caused disruption to the communication line. Therefore, they decided to go to where Akira was instead.

But before they could reach him, two maids suddenly appeared in front of them and signaled with their hands to stop Elena's group.

"My deepest apologies. Negotiation with our company is going on. Please refrain from coming any closer."

The maids then politely bowed to Elena and Sara.

Elena tensed up. She knew just how powerful the maids were judging from their current attitude and equipment. She glanced at Sara, signaling her not to make any sudden movements.

"Just a question, you are from Lion Steel company, right?"

"Indeed, we are."

"A Hunter and a friend of ours by the name of Akira should be over there. When you said 'negotiation', is your company negotiating with him?"

"We're really sorry, but we can't answer that question."

Elena frowned and sighed. She then glanced at Shiori and Kanae, who should be also from Lion Steel, like those maids. She wanted to ask if they knew anything about this. But she quickly noticed that both looked even more worried than Elena, herself.

"Shiori-san?"

Shiori was snapped to reality when Elena called her name. However, her stern expression did not change.

“…My apologies. But I also don’t understand what is going on. As such, I can only give you my rough hypothesis.”

Shiori explained to Sara and Elena that those maids were affiliated with Lion Steel company’s eastern district main branch. They were strong enough to kill everyone here in a blink of an eye. With those maids out here, it meant that the negotiator would be someone of a high position. Thus, she warned Elena and Sara with a grave expression.

“So, please be extra careful with your actions. In the worst-case scenario, it might be interpreted as a hostile action against the main branch.”

“…Okay.”

Naturally, Elena had no desire to pick a fight with the Lion Steel company as she gave a firm nod.

Shiori then hesitated for a second before stepping forward.

“I am Suzuhara Shiori affiliated to Lion Steel company eastern district fourth ward branch. I heard that my master, Reina Rylard Lorentz-sama, is under the main branch’s custody. If I may, would you please tell me-”

“Silence!”

One of the maids snapped at her. There was no amiability in her expression. Not even if it was directed to someone from inside the company.

“Don’t get in the way of our duty!”

It was a warning from the maid, stating that she would see Shiori’s actions as a disturbance and deal with it accordingly the next time she did that.

“…I’m really sorry.”

Shiori deeply bowed and stepped back. Kanae’s face turned pale as she whispered to Shiori.

“Ane-san… Isn’t this…”

“It is as you might fear… Just what is going on here…”

Although these maids here were from the main branch, they must be of a lower position. They were posted to watch the area instead of being allowed to be present during the negotiation. However, even when Shiori was being careful with her words, that reply was rather harsh. This hinted that even the maids were on edge, which would only happen if the negotiator was someone of an extremely high position. Kanae and Shiori believe only representative Alice could cause the maids to react in such a manner. Thus, they believe Alice had come directly to meet and negotiate with Akira. This was extremely abnormal.

Soon, another maid appeared. Judging from the attitude of the two maids posted as watchmen, the new maid was of a higher position than them. She walked towards Shiori and Kanae before ordering.

“You two, come with me.”

Shiori and Kanae frowned and seemed troubled. However, they did not have a choice. They had to do as they were told. When they reached the premise, they did not expect Alice to be really there, especially with Reina and Chloe.

Chloe was surprised to see Akira there too. However, she quickly came to a conclusion when she saw Alice was in the midst of negotiating with him and smiled.

[I won…!]

She was delighted, believing that she had made the right decision and won her bet. Naturally, she hid her excitement from her expression.

Back in Mihazono ruin, Alice had given Olivia some information regarding the current Lion Steel company. However, for the old Lion Steel company, the new Lion Steel company was a completely separate entity and any information provided from Alice’s side had been deemed to be without credibility. Thus, Olivia decided there was a need for an investigation.

All these incidents that were started by the white card were part of Olivia's investigation. It was to show the old Lion Steel company that the current Lion Steel company was indeed a large conglomerate just like Alicia had stated. The bigger the incident got, the better it was to show how powerful and large the current Lion steel company was.

That was the reason why Alice gave such a vague order to those in the area – to deal with the matter regarding the white card on their own. If she had preferred not to cause any more incidents, she would have given precise instructions. She would have told Shiori, who had the white card at that time, to obey the head of the third branch, Beltram.

And as Alice had planned, Chloe went on a rampage, which triggered a chain reaction. It ultimately led to a huge battle next to the city's inner wall, where an officer from one of the five big companies, Sakashita Heavy Industry, was located. Alice believed that she had demonstrated enough power of the company to Olivia. Thus, the next thing she needed to do was show that she had the power to bring the chaotic situation under her control.

It was not like Chloe knew Alice's whole plan. However, she had guessed it to some extent. When she saw Alice negotiating with Akira, she believed it to be whether he would surrender or get killed. Chloe believed that eventually, Alice would deal with the source of the incident, Akira, to show Lion Steel's might to both those inside and outside the company.

[Now that we're going into the cooling-off phase, there's no need to cause any further incidents! This means, there is a good chance that negotiations between Olivia and the representative Alice went well! There's no doubt that it is all thanks to my contribution! Since I'm the one who helped smooth the deal with the old-world Lion Steel company, it won't be strange for me to be promoted to the main branch! I did it! I won my bet!!]

Although she had to cross many dangerous bridges, all those dangers she faced only added to how great her achievement was. Chloe was drunk, imagining what kind of bright future awaited her.

Alice then stood in front of Chloe and swung her hand. The shockwave from her hand hit Chloe head-on, turning her into minced meat in a blink of

an eye.

After Alice killed her, she then looked at Akira, who was thunderstruck by the sudden change of events. She smiled at him, with the same smile she had since the start of the negotiation.

“Will this be good enough?”

Akira snapped back to reality. Although he was still as confused as before, there was a slight tint of reproach in his eyes.

“…Isn’t she supposed to be on the same side as you?”

“That’s exactly why we took care of it ourselves. To not cause any more trouble, and to show that we are sorry for what had happened. It is much better for us to take care of her ourselves.”

Akira thought that Alice made a good point. If he was the one to kill Chloe, it might become a seed for another conflict with the Lion Steel company. However, if Alice was the one who did it, this would simply end as the company taking care of its own internal problem. Thus, it was a very convincing way for Alice to show that she was apologetic to him.

Even so, Akira still felt that it was a bit of an overkill.

Seeing Akira’s troubled expression, Alice then continued.

“Was that not enough? In that case, should I also do the same to this side as well since they’re the ones responsible for getting you involved?”

Alice then directed her arm to Reina’s group.

Shiori and Kanae quickly stepped in front of Reina. Although they knew that it was futile, that they would get turned to dust along with Reina, they still could not sit still and stay silent.

“W-wait!”

Akira inadvertently tried to stop Alice. Although she turned toward him, her hand was still directed at Reina's group. Thus, Akira continued to try to calm her down.

"…They helped me quite a lot. So, you don't have to kill them as well. It's already good enough, so just stop here."

Alice lowered her hand and smiled at him.

"Will that be everything then? If yes, if you may, please."

Akira realized that by saying that, Alice had basically successfully steered the conversation. It was as if he had accepted the offer that she had made. But on the other hand, since he was the one who stopped Alice, he felt that it was not right for him to state that he had changed his mind at this point. Therefore, Akira simply gave it up and heaved a huge sigh.

"I relinquish all my rights regarding that card… Is that good enough?"

"Thank you very much! Now then, please let me excuse myself. I look forward to working with you in the future if the chance presents itself."

Alice tucked the white card back and activated her camouflaging device to immediately vanish. The other maids and butlers also did the same afterwards. Although Akira was still able to detect them retreating from the area through his information-gathering device, their signals vanished soon enough.

Akira immediately let gravity take control of his body and collapse to the ground with a thud.

"Just what in the world was that…?"

And as expected, no one there could answer his question, which came from the depths of his heart.

After Alice and her servants left, the isolation of the area was immediately lifted. Not too long after, Elena, Sara, and Carol appeared in front of Akira. They were so glad to find he was still fine. They did try to ask him what

had happened, but Akira was just as confused as they were. Therefore, for now, they decided to return back to Sheryl's base together with Reina's group.

Once Akira returned, the area was under a strict watch from the city defence squad. Their excuse was to maintain the safety of the area. When news of Latis' attack reached the inner wall, as expected, City Management could not afford to ignore it any longer. Although they did not go as far as to arrest Akira and the others, the group was advised not to go outside of Sheryl's base. After all, their main goal was to maintain neutrality. It would be counter-effective to arrest Akira, Though, thanks to their presence, Akira's group need not worry about another attack for the time being.

Personally speaking, Akira wanted to bathe. However, Alpha warned him not to. After all, he was too exhausted and would most likely relax too much, enough to drown. Thus, he had no other choice but to take a mere shower. After he finished showering, Akira threw himself on top of the bed in a room that he borrowed from Sheryl. The moment he relaxed, fatigue assaulted him. He allowed it to take full control and lull himself to sleep.

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Inside a certain meeting room within the inner wall of Kugamayama city, Inabe slammed his fist on top of the table.

"Goddammit!!"

It was amazing how he was able to hold himself back until all the officers from the Lion Steel company had left. However, because of how much he had bottled up, the moment he let it out, it was powerful enough to dent the table.

All the city officers of Kugamayama city, including Inabe, were informed by the Lion Steel company. They were all told that everything that had happened, the chains of incidents, the strange monsters that appeared near the city, and even the attack from the mutated Latis that hit buildings within the inner wall, were all not the will of the company.

This was a humongous incident. It was created from the combination of multiple factors. There were two main ones, namely, one of their servants went on an insane rampage after the death of her coworker and the unexpected effects of the medicine used during the battle. Overall, it was just one large accident, and the company did not mean for it to happen. That was the formal statement provided by Lion Steel.

As expected, Inabe and the others did not believe this to be the truth. It was impossible for such an incident to occur if some parts were not pre-planned or agreed upon. Thus, they already knew that part of it was completely intentional. However, they had no other choice but to accept it. If they declared this statement to be false, it would spark a war and the opponent would be the Lion Steel Company Eastern District Main Branch. Kugamayama city had virtually zero chance to win.

Lion Steel was willing to take responsibility for this incident and offer the city payment for the damages that they caused. However, that would make it no different than sweeping everything under the rug for money! The situation whereby the city could do nothing but accept was extremely humiliating, causing Inabe to be livid.

One of Inabe's men tried to calm him down.

"Chief! Please calm down. Most do chalk this incident up as rude treatment by the Lion Steel company to Kugamayama city. Also, the matter with Akira has come to an end with this. Although it was not publicly declared, it could be seen as him forcing Lion Steel to withdraw the 50 billion bounty placed on him. Recognising a connection with someone like that, your influence will greatly increase. And Akira's reason to attack the city has completely disappeared. This could be seen as a resolution that was achieved due to your contribution."

"…You're right."

Inabe took a deep breath, trying to regain his calm.

"…Send a request to the other departments. Get everyone to calculate the total damages incurred. Include the expense from dispatching the defence

squad and the damage to the lower district as well. Just include everything, and I mean everything you can find."

"Right away!"

His men gave a light bow and quickly got to work. Seeing them leave, Inabe also tried to change his mood and got back to his own duties. However, due to a specific person, his expression was still tinted with irritation.

"…But still, to think that he didn't even attend the officer meeting just now. Just where is he now?"

Although he was a very important person who could manipulate Kugamayama city to his will, Yanagisawa was nowhere to be seen during the city officer meeting.

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Inside one of a room under the area owned by Sakashita Heavy Industry, located in the upper district of Kugamayama city, Sugadome, who was a high-ranking officer from Sakashita Heavy Industry, was listening to the explanation regarding the recent incident from the branch manager of Lion Steel company third ward branch, Beltram.

"…Very well, I understand that this was an accident. Our company has no wish to say anything regarding the matter if both Kugamayama city and Lion Steel company are fine with this conclusion."

"Thank you very much!"

"But still, about the medicine that you mentioned before, would it be possible for us to get the data as well? If it's possible, I also want to know how you managed to lay your hands on such a medicine and why you have it stockpiled. I want to know everything."

Beltram, who was conversing with a polite smile, froze for a moment.

"…Is it something really necessary?"

“Yes. If such a medicine that could cause such a huge accident were to be found in our possession, it would be extremely dangerous, no? So, in order to prevent something similar from happening in the future, don’t you think it would be wise to share this piece of information?”

Beltram once again went silent. He then thought about what might happen if he refused. After considering the gains and losses for the Lion Steel company, he then said with a smile.

“…Very well. But the data is under the possession of the main branch. As such, I cannot send you the data right away. I will have to contact the main branch and the process would take some time, would that be alright?”

“Yeah, it’s fine.”

“Thank you very much, we shall send you the data at a later-”

“Also, if it’s difficult to send the data to us since it is highly confidential, I don’t mind receiving the data through another method.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve actually sent a request for anti-rebuild personnel, you see. You can deliver the information through that request. They are affiliated with the Corporate Government and we have some of our men among them as well. Naturally, the main aim is to prevent the rebuild. So, even if you conveyed a corporate secret on such a platform, there would be no need to worry that it might leak to Sakashita. After all, it is under the strict watchful eyes of the Corporate Government. Would that work for you?”

Beltram’s amiable smile vanished for a second since that suggestion completely came out of the left field. However, he quickly returned back to his usual smile.

“Personally speaking, I don’t think there’s any need to go that far, but the one to decide would be the main branch. I will at least convey that suggestion to the main branch.”

“I see.”

Beltram and Sugadome looked at each other with mutual respect as fellow high-ranking officers from their respective companies and ended their conversation there.

As soon as Beltram ended the meeting and left the room, Sugadome quickly made a call to Kuzusuhara ruin. He ordered with a solemn expression.

“It’s me. Investigate why representative Alice from Lion Steel came to this place right away.”

“Hasn’t it been confirmed that it was for the sake of negotiations with the old-world Lion Steel company…? We have also confirmed that is the reason why Kugamayama city was dragged into the recent incident. Considering that this even warranted representative Alice to come here as well, I believe there is no need for any suspicion.”

“Redo the investigation. There’s a good chance they are hiding something behind that seemingly perfect excuse.”

“Very well. If I may ask, what is the basis of this suspicion?”

“The head of the third ward branch reacted when I mentioned the anti-rebuild. Furthermore, the assault group that attacked the city came from their facility in Higaraka residence ruin, which was built right before the incident regarding the white card.”

“…Which means that they may have planned to attack the city even before the matter with the white card came up?”

“It’s just to be safe.”

“We will redo the investigation right away.”

Sugadome then ended the call with someone by the name of Matsubara. Judging from his tone, it seemed like Matsubara was able to understand the gravity of the situation.

Sugadome then sighed with a frown on his face.

“I hope that it’s nothing but unfounded fear.”

The ‘rebuild’ referred to in the ‘anti-rebuild’ was the reconstruction of civilization. And the first phase of the reconstruction process included wiping off existing civilization first. Basically, the rebuild meant completely destroying the current civilization and forcing it to join a part of the old-world. The anti-rebuild was formed to prevent this from happening. It was one of the rare occasions in which the 5 biggest corporations in the eastern district, who were hostile against each other, were willing to work together.

Although the current Lion Steel company under Alice was focused on trade across the eastern district, it still was deeply related to the old-world. After all, it was led by Alice, who originated from the old-world. If the need ever arose, Sugadome was concerned that she would initiate the rebuild without hesitation.

Furthermore, with Shirou’s escape, everything seemed to be connected in Sugadome’s mind.

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After Beltram left the inner wall, he made a call to the main branch from inside the car. Inside his augmented vision, he could see Alice and Flip, the branch manager from the fourth ward branch.

“Beltram, Flip, report!”

After listening to both reports, Alice lightly nodded and declared.

“Very well. I will prepare the data to be sent to Sakashita. Regarding the fact that he mentioned the anti-rebuild, let’s ignore it for now. Whether it’s a bluff or not, does not matter. Continue with your usual duties.”

Inside the virtual space, Beltram and Flip bowed. After they exchanged a glance, Beltram then asked.

“Representative Alice. Personally speaking, we both agree that Reina and Chloe did very well for the sake of the company. Especially Chloe’s contribution toward the company. It is enormous. but you’ve killed her, was there some kind of mistake in how we evaluated Chloe’s achievement?”

As the branch manager of the third ward branch, he had to be careful with how he treated those from the same faction as Chloe. With Alice eliminating her, it would definitely affect that faction. Since Alice’s evaluation seemed to deviate from his, there was a need for him to fix his evaluations.

However, Alice did not deny Beltram’s opinion.

“No, they both did very well. Give their group and faction the reward that they deserve.”

Chloe was already dead. Thus, Alice was suggesting they take her death as her sacrificing her own life for the sake of the company. In which case, the faction to which she belonged would reap the reward for what she did.

“Understood… If I may, in that case, why did you kill her?”

“Because there was a need to.”

After Alice had demonstrated the power of the current Lion Steel company to Olivia, the only thing left was to deal with the aftermath. Alice thought that using more power to calm down the situation would only lower Olivia’s evaluation of her.

The reason why she had Akira give up all his rights regarding the card was because it was the source of all the conflicts. It was also Alice’s way to put out the fire of the conflict. Moreover, she wanted to have someone in her own company have ownership rights for the card.

Normally, once the original owner of the card had given up their rights, the card would be simply returned. However, Akira gave that card to Shiori, and although it was not through the correct procedure, Shiori did accept it.

With Akira relinquishing his rights, as per protocol, the ownership of the card had transferred onto Shiori.

Although the death of the owner would also free up ownership of the card, Alice did not kill him. The reason being her main goal was to calm down the situation. Otherwise, she would have killed him.

With that goal in mind, Alice decided to kill Chloe so that Akira would agree to relinquish his ownership of the card. If necessary, she would have killed Reina's group as well. As a matter of fact, Alice took Reina and Chloe under her custody in case they were needed as sacrifice.

Naturally, Alice did not care whether Chloe lived or not. If Chloe had somehow managed to survive or Akira somehow got killed, there was a good chance that Chloe would have got promoted to the main branch due to her achievements.

However, Akira survived, and he mentioned Chloe during their negotiation. Thus, Chloe's death was set in stone.

After Alice gave an explanation, Beltram nodded deeply. There was no need for him to fully understand Alice's reasons for why she did what she did. The most important thing for him was to be in line with her way of deciding reward and punishment.

Chloe was able to accurately predict Alice's will, but she made a mistake in the very end.

Even if Chloe won her bet, even if she was able to leave a great achievement inside Lion Steel, that did not guarantee that she would be spared. She would indeed be greatly rewarded had she been alive. However, that was all there was to it. For Alice, making the deal with the old-world Lion Steel company was worth more than preserving the life of the Lorentz family.

Alice made her decision based on her priorities. That was all there was to it.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 291, Strength and Weakness

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The next day, Akira slept through the morning and past the afternoon due to fatigue. After he woke up, he went to get something to eat and went to take a bath, inside the base's great bath.

He entrusted his body to the warm water, which sapped away his exhaustion. Normally, he would enjoy such a warm bath without any worries. However, this time, he still seemed rather tense. His sighs were not from the bath but from exasperation.

Seeing that, Alpha, who was also in the bath with him, could not help but ask.

"Akira, are you alright? Do you need more sleep?"

"No… Well… It's true that I'm still tired, but that's not it…"

He no longer had a bounty on his head, his monster designation got removed and Chloe was dead. Even so, Akira still was not content with this outcome. It continued to weigh down on his spirit.

Alpha smiled and tried to cheer him up.

“In that case, let’s take the whole day to recuperate. You worked hard yesterday. It can’t be helped if you still feel tired after going through all of that.”

“…Yeah.”

Akira gave a deep nod and tried to brush off that feeling. However, he was not able to do so and slowly returned to his previous state.

That was when a call from Shizuka suddenly reached him. Akira picked up the call via telepathy with Alpha.

“Akira, it’s me. It seems that you’ve gone through quite a lot recently, but I’m glad that you’re fine.”

“Thank you very much and sorry for making you worry, Shizuka-san.”

“You really did make me worry, good grief. Can you imagine how shocked I was when I found out that one of my shop regulars became a bounty target?”

Shizuka was speaking in a joking manner, which Akira then tried to lightly laugh off. At the very least, he was able to make a chuckle, albeit an awkward one.

“Uhh, about that, because of this, I will soon go purchase ammo and medicine from Shizuka-san’s shop, so please let this slide.”

“Good grief, it can’t be helped then.”

They then continued to chat about how they were doing lately in a buoyant mood. The flow of the conversation naturally cheered Akira up. Right around the point where he sounded a little springier, Shizuka’s tone changed to a scolding one.

“Akira, this might be nothing but my imagination, so just ignore it if you think that it’s just my misunderstanding.”

“Eh? Ah, okay.”

Akira was taken aback by this sudden change but gave a firm reply. Shizuka continued slowly and clearly.

“I’m sure you’ve gone through a lot lately and I’m sure you’ll have to face a lot of things in the future. If it’s something that you are going to do for your own sake, please do so without holding back. You’ve simply become someone with the capability to do that.”

Akira was expecting Shizuka to be scolding him because of what had happened. Thus, he was surprised by those unexpected words. Shizuka then continued by putting more emphasis on her words.

“But, if by any chance you do it for our sake, you should stop. Please don’t make us the reason for you to use force.”

Akira had gone through multiple rampages in the past. Most of the time, it was because of revenge or self-defence. He reacted extremely violently when triggered, he was like a landmine, completely docile in other circumstances.

However, he was slowly changing. Previously he only recognized those around him as either hostile or not hostile. Now, he started to recognize others as friends and allies. It was indeed a good thing, but at the same time, it also gave Akira more trigger points.

If it was for the sake of self-defense, Akira would stop once he was able to protect himself from the enemies. However, if it was for the sake of revenge, the aim was to kill, not to protect. To annihilate his enemies, in such a scenario, it was possible for Akira to never stop. His retribution could grow larger due to hatred, fear, or regret. He might even start to hunt anyone with the slightest relation to his target down to the very last person.

There was no doubt that Akira would meet his end eventually if he went down this path. However, how many people would he drag down to hell before that happened? The world was not naive enough to let him go on a rampage forever, such destruction would be massive, and it would be his own undoing.

With that worry in mind, Shizuka conveyed her warning clearly to him. She firmly wanted to prevent Akria from going down this path. The first and foremost way to prevent him from doing so was to draw the line of avenging those important to him.

“It’s just something I think we all share the same sentiments on. It’s not like I’m telling you to not care about us. We are happy that you think of us. But I want you to stay calm, think things through, and consult with others more… Akira, are you listening?”

When Shizuka called him, Akira snapped back to reality. He gave a bitter smile and replied with his usual tone.

“Yeah, I’m listening. I’m sorry for not consulting with you. But, Shizuka-san, as expected, it’s not an easy subject for me… Like, I don’t think I could have done what you suggested, Shizuka-san. I had become a bounty target, wouldn’t it be difficult to ask for advice at that point?”

“Hmm, you have a point. I don’t know what to say if you put it like that.”

“Right? As I thought… that’s why I did that…”

Akira then continued talking casually with Shizuka. As they conversed, he could feel the weight in his heart slowly being lifted.

The source of that feeling was his inability to process the feeling of helplessness. Although it all started when Chloe threatened him, the two main reasons why he did not back down were because Chloe looked down on him and that she threatened those he had identified as his friends.

Akira then tried to solve both issues with his own power. He decided to do so because he thought he had the power to accomplish it. He had to admit there was a level of pride and ignorance mixed in this decision of his.

However, in the end, Akira basically failed to accomplish both. Although it had come to an end, Alice could have easily killed him and left the other side alive. And Chloe was killed by Alice, which was more than likely out

of Alice’s whim. In the end, his actions and wishes did not have anything to do with the outcome.

Akira had already thought that he was no longer his old self. That he had grown stronger. To prove that to himself and to others, he used violence fuelled by his strong emotions. However, his opponent did not even see him as someone worthy of being considered an enemy. Even the target of his violence got taken before he could swing his fist. This gave Akira the feeling of helplessness.

Even so, the fist that he had raised was still up. In the worst-case scenario, he might go and look for another reason to bring that hammer down.

Akira then realized something. After listening to Shizuka, he was about to distort his originally pure intentions. The fist that he had raised was originally done so to protect his friends. Now, he had almost ended up using his friends as an excuse to use his raised fist.

Now that he had realized it, stopping himself was easy. It also helped him accept the fact that he was indeed still weak. To put it in another way, it gave Akira the strength to admit that he was still weak.

“…So well, with that, I ended up using quite a lot of my ammunition. I have to resupply soon so, I’m sorry, but is it okay if I place my order now?”

“Sure, but as expected, I can’t get you any annihilator warheads. So please don’t expect me to have those.”

“I know… Now that I think about it, I wonder how did Katsuragi get those…?”

“There are these kinds of amazing merchants out there, huh? I have to work hard to make sure my regulars don’t run off to them.”

“Don’t worry about it. I will be visiting your shop sometime soon, so I’ll be in your care.”

“Alright, I’ll be looking forward to it. See you.”

Shizuka then closed the call. Akira stretched out his body and smiled. It was as if he had accomplished a huge task. He was finally able to put a lid on the previous incident.

“Alright then… I guess I should get out soon.”

But Alpha sighed and looked exasperatedly at him.

“…What?”

“You always listen to everything Shizuka has to say. In all honesty, after watching how you’re so obedient to her every word, I would prefer it if you did the same to me as well, you know?”

Akira looked away from Alpha’s gaze and laughed awkwardly.

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Although no one knew the full details of what had happened, in the end, Akira won, and his bounty was taken down. He was also no longer recognized as a monster by the city. For Sheryl’s gang, that was a huge win. They were elated that they had won a battle where they were greatly outnumbered and were in a tight spot. At the same time, they were also greatly saddened by the death of their comrades, who had lost their lives in that battle. The whole gang was flooded with emotion, but after a single night, they calmed down to some extent.

However, for Sheryl, this was not the end. She was swamped with work as the boss of the gang. She was so busy that she could not head straight to the bath immediately after she heard that Akira went in after he woke up.

When she finally found an opening to wedge in some free time for herself, she immediately went to the bath. However, when she entered the changing room, Akira was already in the middle of wearing his clothes.

“Akira… you’re already done?”

“I did take my time though? I’m pretty sure I’ll pass out if I spend more time inside the bath.”

“I see…”

Akira was not lying, He did spend quite a long time inside as he took his time chatting with Shizuka. However, that did not change the fact that Sheryl had missed her chance to get in the bath together with him. That regret was obvious from her expression. Now that Akira was no longer recognized as a monster, he no longer had any reason to be staying in her base. The more she thought about it, the more awful she felt. That the next opportunity was so far away, making her regret missing this opportunity even more.

Once Akira finished putting on his clothes and had left the room, Sheryl simply silently followed behind him.

“Hm? Sheryl, aren’t you going to take a bath?”

“I wanted to get in with you, but since you’ve done, I’ll take one later.”

“I see.”

They had gone together multiple times before. It was definitely bold of her to do so, and she almost said something bold in response to his question. That ‘every chance to get into the bath together with you is a precious occasion’. However, she did not end up saying it. She just sighed as per usual at how nonchalant he was.

“Akira, do you like older girls?”

“It’s not like I have any particular preference, but… That was out of the blue, where did that come from?”

“Nothing, it’s just that I saw you with Elena-san, Sara-san, and Carol-san. I just thought that you have quite a lot of mature women as your close friends.”

“Isn’t that simply because there are a lot of adults among Hunters?”

“…Yeah… That must be it… Yeah…”

Even if she acted a bit jealous, as she had expected, Akira's reaction was as dry as ever. Sheryl could not help but sigh again.

"Akira, I just remembered. Shijima said he wants to meet you face to face. What do you plan to do?"

Akira tilted his head. It seemed like he had completely forgotten who Shijima was. Thus, Sheryl had to remind him that he was the boss of a gang. Thanks to that, it refreshed his memory.

"Ahhh, that guy, huh? If it's about the gang, tell him to discuss that with you."

"About that, he said that it has nothing to do with gang business. When I asked him what he wanted to talk about, he said that he can't tell anyone else other than you. So, I have him waiting in the guest room. Should I just send him off?"

At one point in the past, Sheryl was just the boss of a small gang in the slums. Meanwhile, Shijima was the boss of a medium-sized gang. At that time, Sheryl was in a lower position in terms of power. However, that power hierarchy had been completely overturned. Furthermore, with Akira emerging victorious from the recent battle, it only served to widen the power gap between the two gangs.

Even so, the two gangs have gotten along for a long time. Therefore, Sheryl was not willing to shoo Shijima away or used force to make him state his business with Akira. Furthermore, since he mentioned it had something to do with Akira, she had to act with more precaution. Sheryl told him to wait in the guest room, and that there was no guarantee that Akira would meet him.

"…Well, if he's already here, might as well meet him before I leave."

Akira was in a good mood after talking with Shizuka. Therefore, he just simply thought that it would not hurt to see Shijima for a bit.

When Alicia told Shijima, who was waiting in the guest room, that Akira would meet him soon, Shijima inadvertently frowned.

[And he's seriously going to meet me…!? You could just say that someone like me isn't worth your time, you know!? Why the heck are you earnestly coming to meet me?!]

Although he was the one who asked to see Akira, he was hoping to get rejected. The reason why he chose to come here today was because he thought there was a good chance Akira would refuse to meet him.

However, despite his wishes, not too long after, Akira came into the room together with Sheryl. To add salt to the wound, Akira was planning to head back home as soon as Shijima's business with him was done. In other words, Akira was carrying all his equipment. With a 50 billion bounty target standing fully armed and ready to fight anytime in front of him, as expected, Shijima tensed up. Thinking that it was counter-effective to be overly cautious and scared, he tried his best to give off the same aura as back when Akira was just a small, unknown Hunter and he was a boss of a medium-sized slum gang.

Akira sat face to face with Shijima.

"So, what is it?"

"If it's possible, I want to be covert about this…"

Shijima said so and glanced at Sheryl. However, Sheryl did not show any reaction to his glance.

"Tell me why you are here first. If it's about gang business, I will leave it to Sheryl and go back home."

"…It's about the third ward branch of the Lion Steel company, are you okay with her listening?"

As Shijima expected, Sheryl's face turned dire. This was why he had refused to explain why he was there to her beforehand. In the worst-case

scenario, he might get killed the moment he tried to explain.

Akira thought for a bit before turning to Sheryl.

“It’s up to you, I don’t mind either way.”

“…Just to be safe, I will take my leave. If it’s something that is okay for me to hear, please tell me what it is later.”

“Alright.”

Sheryl gave a light bow and exited the room. Shijima saw Sheryl off with conflicted eyes. Being left alone with Akira meant that he might be able to slowly manipulate Akira with words. However, at the same time, it also meant that there would be no one to stop Akira if he went on a rampage. To help calm himself down, Shijima forced himself to see this from a positive point of view.

“So, what is it?”

Akira threw the same question as before, Shijima made his resolve before opening his mouth.

“The Lion Steel Company Eastern District Third Ward Branch wishes to make peace with you. So, I’m here today as a negotiator sent from their side.”

Akira raised his eyebrows and tilted his head; He did not expect that at all. However, Shijima could not help but see that as him being irritated. From Shijima’s point of view, it was only natural because he had mentioned Lion Steel third ward branch in front of Akira. He tried his best to put a lid on his welling anxiety.

The conflict between Akira and Lion Steel had met its end. However, to be more precise, it was forced to end in peace due to the intervention from the main branch. At the moment, although they were not fighting against each other, those from the third branch still saw Akira as hostile.

The manager of the third ward branch, Beltram, thought that there was no need to prolong this conflict any further. At the very least, as long as there was no order from the main branch to continue the fight, Beltram had no wish to continue the third branch's conflict with Akira.

However, it would be naive to assume that Akira also had the same opinion. From the point of view of common sense in the Eastern District, picking a fight against the Lorentz family was simply unthinkable. Although they were certain that Akira would not do something as pointless as attacking the main branch, they feared he would have no problem causing a battle of the same size as before if it was against a branch.

Furthermore, Akira was scheduled to get front-line equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry sometime soon. He might avoid engagements at the moment, but there was a good chance that he would try to attack the Lion Steel branch once he got his powerful equipment.

Naturally, if it ever came to that, unlike last time, Beltram would use the full might of the third branch to fight back. Compared to the incident with Chloe, it would be a force that was incomparable in size, which would have no problems eradicating Akira. However, considering the expenses needed to create, deploy, and manage such a force, Beltram wanted to avoid this even if it meant that he had to be the one who directly worked on it.

To do that, the third ward branch needed to negotiate a peace treaty with Akira. However, the third ward branch still needed to keep its prestige and still act as a large company. Thus, they could not simply declare that they had backed off because of a Hunter. If they did that, other companies would look down on them and it might become a trigger for more conflicts. Thus, considering both ends, the money and manpower needed to fight against Akira and to prevent other hostile companies from acting up, they needed to make it look as if Akira was the one who sued for peace.

Naturally, Beltram knew that this was an extremely difficult feat to pull off. If Akira was someone who would listen to others' demands without trying to fight back, he would not have fought against Chloe.

However, even so, they still could not afford to continue this fight. They had to negotiate for peace. Thus, Lion Steel used its resources to look for someone who could act in their stead. They came up with one person. Someone who started with a hostile relationship with Akira, and just like Chloe, went as far as to threaten Akira's friends, but somehow managed to find peace with Akira by paying a huge sum to him.

It was extremely easy for Lion Steel to scare Shijima into doing their bidding.

Shijima continued the difficult negotiation, which placed his own life in danger. If he was able to handle things peacefully, Lion Steel would owe him a favour. However, if he failed, only death awaited him. The only difference would be whether it would be Akira killing him now or Lion Steel killing him later. With that in mind, Shijima desperately continued to negotiate.

"…So, uhh, the third ward branch wants to make peace with you but… They want you to pay a small sum to them… Wait, calm down, listen to everything I have to say first, okay?"

Akira's expression only showed bewilderment and doubt. However, Shijima could not help but perceive his expressions as him being on the verge of exploding. Naturally, that would be horrendous considering Akira had the firepower to literally blow up the whole slums. Therefore, Shijima was desperately trying to convince Akira while preventing him from exploding.

"So then, about the money, they asked for three hundred Aurum."

On top of the unexpected subject, Shijima worded out an unexpected number. As expected, it only got Akira to feel even more confused and unsure of how to react.

"…Three hundred? Like, three hundred million Aurum? Or three hundred billion?"

"No, it is just three hundred Aurum."

After Shijima repeated, he put three 100 Aurum coins on top of the table as if to establish what he said further.

“This much.”

As Akira’s expression slowly turned into pure bewilderment, Shijima thought that he was close to succeeding and made the push to seal the deal.

“I know that you don’t like being looked down on, so this negotiation is basically the opposite of that.”

Shijima then said with a livelier expression as if to entice Akira.

“I know people say there is nothing more expensive than free stuff, but that is a huge lie. As expected, free stuff is cheaper than having to pay, you see, there is something cheaper than free. There are things that would lose their original value by putting a cheap price tag on them, you know?”

People’s actions do not always coincide with the rule of law. Some actions were not to be committed, not because it was written in a book. Rather, it was common sense not to do so. When a law gets enacted with a fine in place, it is declaring a price tag for said offences. People’s perception of such offences might shift from common sense not to commit, to monetary acceptance – they could do so as long as they could pay the fine. As such, more of such offences might take place, especially if the fine was cheap.

“Even after all you’ve done against the Lion Steel Company, you can get out scot-free only by paying 300 Aurum. Don’t you think it’s an excellent offer to mock them? You will also be able to have a peace treaty with them, you know? Isn’t it just perfect?”

Shijima believed that no one was insane enough to refuse such an offer. Even though he offered with a lively attitude, he was trying his best to hide his desperation. Shijima knew his words were nothing but cheap trickery. If Akira were to refuse, he had no other way he could think of to convince him.

“Hmmm, but still…”

Seeing Akira mumble, Shijma's voice started to tremble.

"I-Is there something that you don't like?"

"Not really. It's just… let's leave me aside for now. Do you think they will be okay with me mocking them like this? Don't they need to convince their men for this deal?"

"Ahh, I see, about that. Don't worry. In the end, this offer is just for the company to keep up appearances. If you accept, they can make a public statement, stating that you paid a sum of money to form a peace deal. They will definitely not state the exact amount of money that you paid. Those who don't know the details would naturally assume that you have paid a huge sum."

"…Is that so? Is that how things work?"

"Yeah, it is as simple as that… But well, as expected, they wouldn't want you to go around leaking the amount you've paid. I'm sure they'll bring that up later. To keep it a secret. But that would be a different negotiation at a different time. The only thing that they asked me to do is this… So, what do you think?"

Akira hummed for a bit before finally nodding.

"Alright, should I just transfer the money? Because of what had happened, it has become extremely difficult for me to carry around this small of an amount… I did live out in the wasteland for quite some time after all… Wait, in the first place, where should I transfer the money to?"

Shijima immediately pointed at the three hundred Aurum on top of the table and offered it to Akira. He wanted to strike before Akira could change his mind.

"I'll give this to you, so you can pay it right here, right now."

Akira's expression immediately turned serious as he shook his head.

"No, if I'm going to pay, I will do it properly."

Shijima sighed deep inside his heart after watching Akira's problematic side come up. However, to not sour his mood, Shijima decided to let Akira do as he pleased. He took out his information terminal and told Akira where to transfer the money.

"Transfer it to this address, you don't mind if it's my account, right? Since I'm the negotiator from their side this time."

"It's fine."

Akira took out his own information terminal and completed the transfer. Once he received notification that the transfer went through, a peace treaty between Akira and Lion Steel Third Ward branch was formed.

Shijima was tottering as he was leaving Sheryl's base. Fatigue immediately struck him in one go after he had concluded the deal with Akira. The whole time, he felt like he was walking through a minefield. The feeling of elation from being able to get out alive supported his shaking legs as he returned back home.

For a negotiator, who had successfully concluded his deal with a highly dangerous opponent, Shijima was extremely gloomy. He knew he had gotten lucky. That he was able to handle it just fine this time. However, if there was a second time, there would be a third, fourth, and so on. Thus, Shijima had no confidence that he would live if he was asked to do something like this again.

For now, he decided to not think about it as he heaved a huge sigh and waded through a portion of the slums which had been turned into a mountain of rubble.

After Shijima left, Akira gave Sheryl a brief explanation before he left the base to head back home. He informed Sheryl that he had made a peace deal with the third ward branch, but did not share that he had to pay 300 Aurum to do so. Hearing that, Sheryl sighed in relief.

Once Akira arrived back home, he put his equipment down and stretched his body.

“I’m finally back.”

The feeling of finally being home hit him. He was finally able to relieve the tension he felt, which latched onto him during the days when he was aiming to kill Chloe. The feeling of freedom was overwhelming.

Even Alpha was smiling happily as she said.

“It is indeed great. Since you have made peace with Lion Steel, there’s no need to worry about ambushes and you can take a good rest… But still, it was rare for you to be willing to make a compromise like that. It was quite unexpected of you.”

During his negotiation with Shijima, Akira was asked not to say anything about the amount to outsiders. He easily agreed to this, which took Alpha by surprise. Akira simply gave a soft smile and explained.

“Well, I don’t want any more trouble than this. It might be weird for me to say this after going through everything, but it would be really troublesome to have Lion Steel staring at my back all the time. So, I am least willing to make that much of a compromise.”

Everything he said were all his honest feelings. However, it was also true that such a conclusion was reached only because of his conversation with Shizuka beforehand. Had he not lowered his fist before he negotiated with Shijima, Akira might have used this as a reason to bring it down.

On top of that, the 300 Aurum price tag played a small role in changing his heart.

That 300 Aurum was a small amount for him right now. At the same time, it was the same amount he first received after he officially became a Hunter.

On one hand, it was a small amount of money, but on another, it was the first amount he had earned through risking his life. The mere fact he was able to form a peace treaty with a large company like Lion Steel filled him with mixed emotions. A conflicted feeling of accomplishment.

“I see. Either way, being able to avoid any unnecessary conflict is a good thing. We can now just wait patiently until your front-line equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry arrives.”

“You’re right.”

Right at that time, a notice from the Hunter Office reached his information terminal. When Akira read through the content, he could not help but knit his eyebrows.

“Bounty target notice, it says that it’s a notice for a new bounty target…?”

Akira told himself that it should not have anything to do with him as he slowly read through the notice.

The new bounty target was not Akira. However, he was slightly surprised to see the name written being someone he knew.

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Yesterday, around the time when the city officers, including Inabe, were receiving an explanation from the Lion Steel company about what had happened, Yanagisawa was not in the city. He was staying inside a particular room in the Seranthal building back in Mihazono ruin.

“If you’re done with your investigation, it would be great if you can deliver my agreed-upon payment already.”

“Very well, as I have promised, here is your reward.”

Seeing Olivia declare with a nod, Yanagisawa was smiling, satisfied.

Yanagisawa was helping Olivia in her investigation. Everything from slowing down the Kugamayama City Management’s reaction to allowing Akira to stay near the city. Naturally, the huge battle that took place was also part of the investigation as well.

And as payment, Yanagisawa was to be given a certain piece of information.

Yanagisawa, who was smiling happily up until now, suddenly turned solemn.

“Now then, I want to get information about the people who are working together with those AIs.”

“That would be rejected.”

Yanagisawa tensed up; his face turned stern.

“…What do you mean? That’s not what you had promised.”

Yanagisawa’s voice was filled with intimidation, enough to freeze even veteran Hunters in the vicinity.

Even so, Olivia was not bothered by it at all.

“I agreed to share information with you, but I’ve never said that I will share everything we know. The quality and the amount of information that we’re willing to share depends on how well you did your part.”

“…I’m pretty sure I worked pretty hard back there.”

“That does not concern us. Our company is willing to adapt our decision depending on the current situation. Since we were forced to share national military-grade information with someone outside the company, that alone took away most of your achievements.”

Yanagisawa had no other choice but to withdraw after Olivia stated such a thing to him. He then carefully chose his words to ask her.

“Then, how about you tell me what I am allowed to ask considering my contribution to your investigation?”

“That will also be rejected. The method that we use to decide the value of information is also a form of information. Moreover, not giving you the information that you’re looking for can also be interpreted as giving more information than what you’re asking for. That would mean paying more than what you deserve.”

Yanagisawa scratched his head, he understood Olivia's argument. If he kept asking questions regarding what information he could get, Olivia might treat it as a part of his payment, which would inevitably cause him to spend his achievements. Yanagisawa understood that doing this might lead him to end this rare opportunity without being able to get any valuable information.

"Then just tell me if those AIs have people working with them around here… No, right now, in the deeper part of Kuzusuhara ruin… No, do those AIs have someone working under them who is strong enough to go to the deeper section of Kuzusuhara ruin? Not on the route made by Kugamayama city. No, scratch that, can you recognize those people? Wait, no, can you find any individual with over 90% chance?"

"Yes."

Yanagisawa's expression grew even sterner.

[So there are, huh…! And they must be pretty powerful! Did those AIs strike some kind of deal with high-ranking Hunters who are coming to Kugamayama city lately? But Hunters are not allowed to go too deep into Kuzusuhara ruin. We made use of it being an area under Tsubaki as an excuse… Did they break through all the restrictions we have set up?]

"Can you tell me their name?"

"No."

Yanagisawa could not hide his shock.

[So, she won't even tell me their name, huh!? Does that mean this person is very important to the old-world Lion Steel company? Is it their patron? Wait, it might be someone from the current Lion Steel company. Since Olivia's negotiation with representative Alice went well, they might have made information regarding that person a secret…? No, that can't be. If it is connected to the current Lion Steel company, the number of people working with those AIs would increase significantly. Telling me the names of their

important employees would be extremely valuable information. Is that why she refused?]

Yanagisawa did not know how many more questions he could ask. With that in mind, he carefully chose his next question.

“In that case, give me the current picture of just one person that satisfies my conditions. You can zoom out as much as you want with that person in the middle. Well, do so till you can show that picture to me.”

If Olivia refused, then Yanagisawa must have made a fatal mistake in his estimation. However, even if he exhausted all his achievements with this one request, it would give him enough information to readjust his next moves. Yanagisawa concluded as he waited for Olivia’s reply.

“Certainly.”

Olivia then showed a 3D image in front of Yanagisawa, but the person in that image was not someone that Yanagisawa expected at all.

“This person… She’s from Katsuya’s…?”

It was the picture of someone who was in Katsuya’s faction, Airi, taking an aim at Akira.

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There were few from Katsuya’s faction who agreed to join Chloe’s side. They acquired powerful equipment thanks to the funds provided by Chloe. However, they were rallied under Airi due to their local network and not the Lion Steel company’s third ward branch. Due to their strong desire to kill Akira, just like Airi, it was easy for her to take over the local network, and command them.

After Airi was done gathering allies, she quickly left Kugamayama city using the opening created when Akira and the others started fighting under the thick jamming smoke.

Inside Airi’s enhanced vision, Alias pouted her lips as she stated.

“I’m pretty sure that our original agreement was not only for you to gather manpower, but also to provide him with support.”

“Absolutely not. There’s no reason for me to help the person who killed Katsuya. At least I’m holding myself back from attacking him.”

According to her contract with Airi, Alias even had the permission to interfere with her self-identity. Even so, Airi could still refuse Alias’ request due to her deep-seated hatred.

Alias sighed.

“It can’t be helped then, but you should do the rest properly as per our contract.”

“I know.”

Airi had not been turned into Alias’ remote terminal even when the latter had the ability to alter Airi’s self-perceived identity. Alias knew this had something to do with Airi’s deep-seated hatred. Therefore, Alias had to be careful when dealing with matters related to it. For now, since she could not do much about it, she decided to just let it slide.

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After Shirou returned to his hideout, he quickly proceeded to analyze the data that he gathered in the slums. Not only did the data confirm Tsubaki’s and Olivia’s presence, but it also held the key to defeat those giants back in the slums. He hurriedly checked the data to see if he could extract any other important information from it.

However, without the help from an old-world AI like Alpha, and without access to Sakashita Heavy Industry’s facilities, he needed more time to analyze it. Even so, he was able to process the data at a relatively good pace.

In the middle of processing, he received information about a new bounty target.

“Lion Steel has put up a bounty for someone again, huh? Oh? It’s for a group of Hunters with someone by the name of Airi leading that group, huh…”

The reason for this bounty was because the group had abandoned their contract with the Lion Steel company. Seeing that, Shirou frowned and mumbled.

“Contract? I bet it’s about attacking Akira, right? So, those who abandoned their accepted request will get a bounty on their head, huh? But I’m pretty sure the third ward branch has already made peace with Akira though…”

It was indeed as Shirou had thought. The third ward branch did not put up that bounty due to their own will. It was something that Yanagisawa had requested. There was a time lag between when the bounty was placed and when Yanagisawa discovered Airi from Olivia. Yanagisawa did not want to make any unnecessary waves that might cause those from anti-rebuild to notice him, that was why he waited for some time before putting up the bounty.

“Well, I bet the bounty was put up because of something different.”

In reality, Shirou’s guess was spot on. Nonetheless, he simply pushed matters related to this bounty aside and continued analyzing the data.

Not too long after that, once he was almost done decrypting the data, he suddenly froze in shock. He was able to clearly see an image of the girl next to Tsubaki and Olivia.

“Haruka…?”

Shirou knew Haruka.

“Haruka… Why… Are you there…? W-what’s going on?”

Shirou was greatly shaken and confused. The girl in that picture was a friend that he wanted to save. He wanted to save her so much that he was

willing to betray Sakashita Heavy Industry. Never would he have imagined her to be somewhere so close.

__*__*__*__

The slums had turned into ruins after the battle. However, renovation and rebuilding were already starting. The heavy construction machines that Inabe sent were working hard to remove the rubble.

Among one of the mountains of rubble, no human nor machine was nearby. It looked completely ordinary, like those around it until it suddenly moved. An arm broke out of the rubble, followed by a human scream. It was Levin.

A moment later, Babalod also emerged. Both were buried under the rubble in the middle of the battle and just woke up after being knocked unconscious. Thanks to the rubble on top of them, they were spared from the energy wave released by the giants.

Babalod lightly scanned the surroundings and sighed.

“I don’t know what’s the situation, but… At least we are still alive.”

“…Yeah, we’re alive… We’re alive?? We’re alive!! We survived!!!”

Levin shouted in delight. His happy voice echoed through the slums. At the very least, until he realized that his debt had just multiplied after his equipment got completely ruined.

Silavin: RIP Levin.

I would actually like to see Akira take on the whole of Lion Steel. Well, we only have like 5 chapters left till we catch up to the raws. Also, this chapter is ~6.8K words!

This is > 1.5x a regular chapter!

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Rebuild World – Chapter 292, A Summon from Kibayashi

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After Akira's conflict with the Lion Steel company had come to an end, he was no longer recognized as a monster by Kugamayama city. His bounty was also taken down. He finally returned back to the situation where he could wait in peace until his new equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry arrived. That was when he received a message from Kibayashi, to meet him in a particular restaurant on the first floor of the Kugama building.

When Akira arrived, he could see Kibayashi wearing casual clothes sitting at a table. He was waving at him with a wide grin. It seemed like Kibayashi had already ordered food before he had arrived.

"Man, that was another hell of a fight. I was so disappointed when I noticed that you were not going to tear down the city's wall and bring havoc to those within the inner wall. Still, you did use annihilator warheads, and that swarm of giants that came out of nowhere was also interesting. What can I say? You really never cease to amuse me."

Akira looked apathetically at him.

"Yeah yeah, I'm glad to hear that you're happy."

Naturally, Kibayashi completely brushed past Akira's remark and continued.

"Of course! I always knew you would pull it off. But still, to think that you can do that much damage even before you got your new equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry. Just what kind of crazy things do you have in mind after they arrive?"

"Nothing. I have no plans on getting caught up in any incident."

In contrast to Akira, who had a curt expression, Kibayashi was smiling like a Cheshire Cat. It was as if he was saying that it would be impossible for you and that he knew the exact reason why that was the case.

Akira sighed it was a rather deep one. He knew he was partially at fault for the previous incident.

"…Putting that aside, you have my thanks for getting me ammo and equipment through Katsuragi. Things would have gotten way out of hand had you not done that. So, I'm really thankful for it."

"Don't mention it. It's not like you're a stranger to me. As long as you do something to amuse me with the things I send you, it's all good."

Akira did not want to get into a situation that would amuse Kibayashi. His emotions were in full view on his face, which had turned sour. Unfortunately, that only served to amuse Kibayashi even more. Akira sighed once more and decided to put that aside for now. He changed the subject.

"But still, how did you get those annihilator warheads? It's not something that you can get your hands on easily, right? I was still recognized as a monster by the city back then. Normally, no one would think it was acceptable to give me that kind of ammo, no?"

"Ohh, about that. I was also surprised."

“You were…? But weren’t you the one who provided me with those annihilator warheads?”

“Well, that statement is partially true. To be more precise, it wasn’t exactly me. I’m sure you know about those annihilator warheads very well, since you shot a few yourself, those warheads packed a lot of firepower. If it’s only me, I would never be able to get those for you no matter how hard I try.”

“…Then, how did you get them for me?”

Akira looked at him in confusion while Kibayashi’s smile widened.

“Since it’s not something that I can get you, myself, it just means that someone else pulled some strings behind the scenes. Considering your situation back then, I bet that person wanted you to shoot those warheads at the city’s inner wall. I don’t know who they are and why they did that, but one thing is for certain, they knew that those warheads would end up in your possession. Well, I bet that’s their main goal.”

“So basically… Someone got those warheads for me hoping that I would use them to attack the city’s inner wall?”

Akira could not hide his surprise while Kibayashi continued to elaborate on his hypothesis of what might have happened.

“Well, this is nothing but just my guess. My original plan was to make you wait until equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry arrived. At least wait and hide long enough to get your equipment before you actually start fighting. The reason why I provided you with equipment and ammo is so that you don’t get desperate and do something reckless. I even told the city that it was for the sake of holding you back as an excuse. When you get your new equipment, I plan on announcing the precise time you’ll attack the city so that the city can prepare itself. I was even anticipating someone from the Nationalist offering to help you. That would no doubt result in a bigger fight. But before that came to fruition, someone managed to foist those annihilator warheads through the delivery I had set up and…”

If this unknown person's plan came to fruition, that battle would have been so big that it completely obliterated both sides. Nothing outside the inner wall will be left after such a fight. However, seeing how Kibayashi was excitedly talking about destruction and mayhem, Akira could not help but get weirded out. Akira knew he was the reason why Kibayashi could come up with such crazy ideas. After all, he was the one who started it, so he could not blame Kibayashi for it. Thus, Akira spoke up to change the subject.

"By the way, you're actually a part of City Management, right? Is it really okay for you to do something like that?"

"Hm? If you're talking about the method I used, nope. It was absolutely not okay. No matter what the reason, I gave access to annihilator warhead to someone who was officially recognized by the city as a monster. It won't be strange if City Management decided to put a bounty on my head."

Akira was exasperated after hearing this. He then tilted his head and asked Kibayashi a question.

"So, it's not okay, huh… Then why would you do that? Did you get fired or something?"

"Nope, as a matter of fact, I got promoted."

"…What? How? Why?"

"Regardless of what I did, the incident did come to a rather decent conclusion. Though I did provide you with annihilator warheads, you didn't fire it towards the city. Also, it had allowed you to defeat those giants, which has helped reduce the damage to the city."

"And it's fine just because of that?"

"Yup, exactly. Organization-wise, the process and method I have used would never be in their guidelines. Rather, everyone would be warned of how dangerous my actions were. So, my actions can't exactly be seen in a good light just because the results were great. However, it must be stressed

that if I were to go by the book, and the results were deemed a failure, would my actions not be pointless? Doubly true when failure causes a huge loss.”

It was a very pragmatic way of thinking, in the end, Kibayashi was able to deal well with someone as dangerous as Akira and the damage to the city was kept at a minimum. Or at the very least, that was the evaluation of City Management toward Kibayashi. Officers who kept their hands off this matter up until now could say anything they wanted, but in the end, the results spoke for themselves. None of their sharp comments could change the final evaluation. Neither could they fault Kibayashi for the damages.

Meanwhile, City Management did not want to lose someone competent in dealing with dangerous individuals such as Akira. Thus, considering that something similar might happen again in the future, the evaluation of Kibayashi’s actions tilted in his favour. The fact that he was able to suppress and resolve the situation weighed more heavily than the fact that he supplied Akira with items that might cause considerable damage to the city. Not to mention his eagerness to push for such provisions were seen as decisiveness.

In the case of Hikaru, her ability also got praised by City Management. They considered her to be competent in dealing with Akira as well. Thus, City Management had also decided that in the case something similar happened again in the future, they would first go to Hikaru to handle it.

Food that Kibayashi had ordered beforehand started to be placed on the table. Before they started eating, Akira asked another question.

“Well, the food is here, so let’s get to the main subject right away. I’m sure you did not call me here just for some silly banter, right?”

“Sure. The house that you’re living in right now, it is still the same house that I introduced you to in the past, right?”

“Yes, why?”

“Sorry, but can you move to somewhere else?”

“…Sorry?”

Akira thought that Kibayashi had called him here to talk about some business connected to Kugamayama city. Therefore, this request completely caught him off-guard. Seeing how Akira’s facial expression twisted into something he anticipated, Kibayashi laughed merrily and continued.

“Today’s meeting is for my personal business, you see. Had I called you as a staff of City Management, I would have told you to come to one of the restaurants on the upper floors. It’s just too expensive for me to go there on my own dime. Ahh, but if you want to go there now, I don’t mind.”

“No, it is just that what you said came out of the blue. Why are you suddenly asking me to move out of my house?”

“The housing agency came crying at me, you know? Asking me to get you to move out to somewhere else.”

“Ahhh… I see.”

Even Akira, who was usually dense, was able to understand why that was. After all, he got into a fight with Lion Steel, which had completely flattened a portion of the slums. As expected, no housing agent would want the area under their management to be the next battleground for such a battle. It was not that hard for Akira to understand why they would be in tears.

“They’re willing to pay the expenses for your move. Well, I do have a good relationship with them, that’s why I brought it up. Though it’s not like I’m forcing you to move out. It would nonetheless be of great help if you were to move out to somewhere which would not cause any trouble.”

“It’s not like I’m refusing, but what will be the outcome if I refuse?”

“Well, it’s not like we can do anything about that, right? There are not that many people who have the courage to live next to you. So, I bet they would start cutting their contracts. The housing agency won’t dare try to evict you by force. So, I’m sure that the most that would happen is the housing agency crying to sleep every night while they await bankruptcy.”

“I-I see…”

Naturally, Akira would turn hostile if he was harshly ordered to get out. Similarly, he would feel guilty if they came at him, pleading while crying. Kibayashi noticed his feelings of guilt and made use of that opening.

“It’s not like you have any grudges against the housing agency, right? So just be nice to them and move to somewhere else. In the first place, that housing area is originally meant for Hunters with Rank 30 and below, you know? It’s no longer suitable for you to keep living there. If you’re willing to move out, I can at least help to find another place for you.”

Akira gave up and softly sighed.

“Alright.”

“That’s great then! In that case, you can sign here.”

Kibayashi then pulled out a document. Akira did ask Alpha to check the contents. Once he received confirmation that the document was okay, he signed it. Now that he had Akira’s signature, Kibayashi returned the document to his bag and smiled.

“We have a deal then. With this, others’ evaluation of me will go even higher.”

“What does me moving out have anything to do with their opinion of you?”

“It’s complicated. It has something to do with the inner workings of City Management. I can’t really say it to an outsider. But well, since it’s not like we’re strangers, I don’t mind telling you. But in exchange, make sure to not cause any trouble and just move out, alright?”

Akira was indeed curious about what lay under Kibayashi’s smile. Considering that he had already signed the papers, Akira gave a nod.

“Alright, so, why?”

“There is actually a plan to build up a second wall. Well, to be more precise, that plan had already been around for quite some time now. However, due to unforeseen circumstances and other priorities, it had been delayed indefinitely.

But after the previous incident, Kugamayama city suddenly received a huge sum of money from Lion Steel. It was to reimburse for the losses caused by that battle. Because of how dangerous it was, the number of people who wish to get into the inner wall suddenly shot up, so the plan immediately got pushed forward.

That battle caused considerable damage to the lower district, but the area inside the inner wall was unharmed. In other words, the populace started to understand the price of safety. Many had previously thought that living within the inner wall was nothing but a status symbol. They thought that reputation aside, living in the lower district was safe enough.

Now, these people are flusteredly trying to move inside the inner wall. Thanks to that, the land prices inside the inner wall skyrocketed. It’s quite extreme.

There were even people who were living within the inner wall who got kicked out to make space. Well, granted that they were barely qualified to be inside in the first place.

Anyways, even if we try to make more houses to accommodate the newcomers, in the end, it is surrounded by a wall, so the available land would not increase no matter what we do. Some demanded to build vertically, but there’s a limit on how tall the buildings can go. That’s why, by building a second wall, everything can be solved.”

“Ohhh, I see.”

“So basically, we will get the lower district surrounded by a wall as well, but naturally, once the wall is erected, land prices within that wall would jump up. Although it’s still in the planning stage, they’re already securing lands that are highly likely to be chosen.”

Kibayashi paused for a bit and smiled.

“So that’s where you come in. Except for you living there, the area where you’re living is actually a pretty good area.”

As expected, that was enough of a hint for Akira.

“Ahhh, I see now.”

The request for Akira to leave was because the housing agency wanted the land under their management to be chosen. Furthermore, City Management wanted to avoid having Akira inside the second wall. Therefore, Kibayashi, who managed to get Akira to peacefully leave, would be better appreciated both by City Management and the housing agency.

Kibayashi broke out his trademark amused smile as he said.

“So there, you have it. Well, since they’re willing to pay for the moving-out expense, you can build yourself a luxurious home with that amount.”

“Alright alright… Hm? Wait, build? Not rent?”

“Yeah, you can build your own house. Just to let you know, I bet there’s no housing agency around here willing to rent property to you. I’m sure you know the reason, right?”

Since Akira knew why, as expected, he could not think of any counter-arguments. He just bitterly smiled with a troubled expression. In contrast, Kibayashi was still smiling as usual as he continued.

“Don’t worry. Although their cases are not exactly the same as yours, many Hunters have gone through what you are going through. As I promised, I will help you find a new home, so I will at least tell you how to deal with your current situation.”

“Well, thanks, I guess.”

There was a tint of irritation in Akira’s voice, but even so, Kibayashi’s smile still stayed the same.

Kibayashi advised Akira to build his own home on the outskirt of the city. It was the common choice taken by Hunters who could no longer live inside the city due to certain reasons. Naturally, the condition for this was the Hunters' relationship with the city, which had to at least be amicable. Not strained enough for the city to issue a military hunt if the Hunters got close. At the same time, these Hunters must be strong.

The Hunters must be strong because the outskirts were not a safe place. There were monsters from the wasteland and robbers from the slums. Thus, the Hunters who were in this situation had to be strong enough such that those monsters and robbers posed no problem to them. As a matter of fact, they could even add security value to the area around where these Hunters lived.

Although they had to pay security to guard the house while they were off to hunt for relics or monsters, it was not that different from when they lived inside the city. In the city, they still had to pay for the security of their homes. This deposit would be paid to private security companies, which would be held responsible for keeping the area where their houses were safe.

When an individual hired a group of guards, there were cases where they got along and performed really well. Some formed a new private security company, which would contribute to the long-term safety of the area around their houses. As the safety level increased, others would naturally flock there. The price of land would naturally increase, and the economy of the area would develop.

After it reached a certain standard, eventually, that area would be recognized as a new portion of the lower district of the nearest city. When it reached that point, the original Hunters who first started establishing their homes there would be recognized to have contributed greatly to supporting a new economic area. This would be reflected in their track record, which in turn would allow them to rent a house in the city again – if they wish, of course.

Furthermore, Kibayashi recommended Akira to use those from Sheryl's gang as his guards. That way, there was no need to start a new private

security company from scratch. It was already known to be an organization formed under Akira's support. Thus, it had enough power to keep an area safe even within the slums. Furthermore, it was connected to Inabe, a city officer. It was a perfect choice. Meanwhile, before his new house got completed, he could live in Sheryl's base.

After listening to Kibayashi's advice, Akira left and went to Sheryl's base. As expected, Sheryl was extremely happy when she heard about this plan. Her smile was dazzlingly bright as she said.

"Of course! Just leave it to us! We can take on the guard duty and we're more than happy to have you live inside the base. To be honest, I don't mind if you use this base as your new home, you know? You can pick any room that you want. We'll empty it for you. We can also change the layout of the base if you want…"

"Thank you for your offer but it's alright. As expected, I want to have my new house properly built somewhere else."

"I see, In that case, how about next to this base? It'll be convenient to have it nearby."

"…I will carefully ponder it over. I will also have to think carefully about the blueprint for the house as well…"

"Indeed. It's not like you can just change the layout once it's built and you find something unsatisfactory. I think it's best to take your time to plan it out before deciding."

The longer Akira had to plan, the longer he would have to stay in her base. That was why Sheryl carefully and fervently encouraged him with her charming smile.

"You're right. I will take my time to think about it. I need to think about how much money I have to set aside for this as well… Ah, by the way, Sheryl. If Viola is around, tell her to come and meet me. There's something I need to talk to her about."

“Of course!”

Sheryl was not really sure how his expenses would have anything to do with Viola. Nonetheless, she quickly called Viola over. Since Viola had something to do in the base at that time, she quickly came over to see Akira.

“Akira, long time no see. I heard you have something to talk to me about.”

Viola came and smiled amicably at him as she spoke. However, her expression was slightly tense.

Akira had almost killed her after she got him involved in an incident in the slums. It was after she negotiated with him, that he agreed to spare her life in exchange for helping Sheryl’s gang.

The previous time she met Akira was back in Mihazono ruin, when he threatened her to tell him about Chloe’s whereabouts. To repay her for the information, he stated that he would not regret sparing her life. Before he left, he reminded Viola, to hope that Chloe was really there.

Viola had no idea if Akira was able to find Chloe with the information she gave him. If he was not able to, that might be the end for her. Akira might kill her right now. Although it was now removed, Akira had a 50 billion Aurum bounty on his head and even tried to kill a member of the founding family of the Lion Steel company. Though no one knew for sure if he was the one who did it, Chloe’s death was already widely known. Akira was someone who would not hesitate to kill when he decided to. It was regardless of who that person was. Naturally, Viola could not maintain her usual calm in front of such a person.

However, Akira did not notice how she felt as he casually asked Viola.

“Say, Sheryl is basically indebted to me, right? If I’m not mistaken, it’s about me being a Hunter supporting her gang. Furthermore, you’re helping the gang to repay that debt. So, about that, how much of that debt is left? A rough approximation is enough.”

Hearing his question, Viola sighed in relief as her usual smile returned.

“Let’s see, probably somewhere about 50 billion Aurum?”

“50 billion, huh…”

That amount was the highest Viola could come out with which she would not get Akira to be suspicious. At the same time, it was also to push Akira to keep sparing her life so that she could help Sheryl’s gang repay the debt.

Although Sheryl did think that amount was a little exaggerated, she did not say that outright. She only sent an easy-to-notice questioning glance at him to let Akira know.

However, since Akira was rather inept in that kind of thing, and with it being the same amount as his now-removed bounty, he did not question it at all. He simply declared.

“I see. Well, Sheryl, considering all the things that I put your gang through during my conflict with Lion Steel, let’s take it that we’re even. You don’t need to pay me back anymore.”

Sheryl and Viola were equally surprised to see Akira casually let go of such a huge sum. He then continued.

“As for the debt that you have for me backing your gang, well, considering that your gang will guard my house soon and with other things like investment for the relic shop, what do you call that, again? Stock? We can call that even as well. I hate having to deal with debts and stuff like that.”

After hearing that, Sheryl’s surprised expression quickly turned into a big smile. In a sense, that debt was her only connection with Akira. If it was taken away, she would have felt more anxious than happy. However, with Akira mentioning about guarding his new home as well as investing in the relic shop, it meant that they were still connected. This helped relieve her anxiousness. It also allowed her to know that Akira believed that she had been a great help during his fight with the Lion Steel company. This made her on cloud nine.

“Of course. Akira, thank you very much. I will be in your care in the future as well.”

“Yeah, I’ll be relying on you. Uhh, now that matters with you are done, next would be Viola.”

“S-sure, what can I help?”

The reason why Akira let Viola live was so that she could help Sheryl repay that huge debt to Akira. Now that Sheryl’s debt was gone, as expected, Viola could not hide her unease.

“I brought up what you owe to me back then when I asked for information about Chloe’s whereabouts. I did that because I didn’t have money back then. But now that I have money, as I thought, it’s better for me to repay you that way, right?”

“…I’m pretty sure I did say that it would at least cost a few million Aurum. It might be with a few more zeros though, do you remember?”

“I do. If it’s only a few hundred million Aurum, I can pay you. Depending on how many zeros you add, I might still be able to pay for it.”

Akira really did have that much. Lion Steel did not raise any issues when it came to his compensation for what he had lost in that battle. Thus, it was processed quickly. The whole thing included all ammunition used, his new equipment and the bike that he had lost. It all totalled to 20 billion Aurum.

Representative Alice stated to Akira that the Lion Steel Eastern District Main Branch would compensate for all the losses from that incident. Naturally, Akira did not expect them to just simply pay 20 billion Aurum without saying anything. This just reminded him how powerful these so-called large companies were.

Akira did convey his thoughts on compensating Shirou back the amount. He asked Shirou if it was better for him to return the 16 billion Aurum back. However, instead of getting told that he could just return the money,

Shirou got angry at him. Shirou warned Akira that he should prioritize his request, just like what their original deal was.

Thus, Akira was able to get the money to pay for Viola's information. Considering that he had to build his new home, he thought that it was better to pay for the information first. Although his housing options would be limited if he had to pay more than 10 billion Aurum to Viola, he believed that paying for that information took priority since it was accurate.

"So then, how much is it?"

Viola winced back. The fact that Akira brought that up meant that there was a high chance he would actually pay with money. Viola at least knew that much. However, if he paid with money, it would mean that the thing Akira had put up as collateral would be returned. Namely, the thought of not regretting sparing her life.

On the other hand, if she said some impossibly huge sum just to make sure Akira would not be able to pay it, he would see through her intentions. Otherwise, Sheryl would point it out. That would definitely worsen her situation.

Viola then smiled with her usual mysterious smile as she said.

"…But before that, I want to ask you a question first. How much value did my information provide compared to my debt to you? Back then, you told me to hope that you would find Chloe there, nothing more. As I said, Chloe was actually there, right? So, with that information being correct, we need to first admit the value of that information. So then, how much is it valued?"

"Hmmm, let's see…"

Akira pondered. Seeing that, Viola's smile widened. However, it was only from the outside, on the inside, she got even more tense. Akira eventually made his decision.

“If Sheryl asks me to dispose of you, I will at least ask for the reason first and think about it before actually disposing of you, I guess? After all, it is thanks to your information that I was able to find Chloe.”

Viola felt like she was freed from shackles when she heard those words. It meant that Sheryl would no longer be able to simply decide her life and death. Viola could not help but to leak out an honest smile.

“In that case, that is good enough for the information. That was our agreement back then, so I don’t need you to pay me anything.”

“Is that so? But you did ask me if I can pay it or not… So wouldn’t money be better…?”

Seeing Akira uncertain, Sheryl intervened with a smile.

“Akira is right, money is better. If you’re holding yourself back because of how expensive it is, the gang would help pay it too. You don’t have to worry about it. Moreover, we can also ask Inabe-san if need be…”

Sheryl was thinking of disposing Viola once she was done with her. Now that her debt to Akira was mostly gone, she did not see any issue with getting rid of Viola considering she no longer had a need for her.

With a Hunter as powerful as Akira, who would go as far as fight against a company like Lion Steel, there was no longer any need to have Viola handle relationships with other organizations.

If Akira resolved this matter with money, then he would really have no reason to keep Viola alive. That was why Sheryl suggested Akira to resolve the matter with money.

Seeing Sheryl pushing that option, Viola quickly interjected.

“No, that would be a horrible idea. No matter what the reason, it’s not good to turn back on the deal that you’ve made. Trust is extremely important for a strong Hunter. So, it would be horrendous if you did that, you know? Since we made a deal, we need to honour it. If people start questioning your

integrity, you won't be able to make deals with anyone anymore, you know? Even if it's a deal that would benefit the other side, they won't believe your words. After all, there's an example of you not honouring a deal in the past. Such a mark would completely tarnish your track record."

Akira understood what Viola was saying. It reminded him of how Shirou refused his offer to repay the 16 billion Aurum. It was a large sum of money to him. Thus, he agreed that if the other party said that there was no need, he should not push it. Besides, keeping it was more beneficial to him as well.

"You have a point, alright, that will be all then."

"Is that so? Well, I'm busy right now, so please let me excuse myself."

Viola smiled, turned around, and left the room. She could hear Sheryl click her tongue behind her. In the end, Viola managed to get through this meeting safely, though, only barely. She was still alive. It was a fact which made her break out a gentle smile in celebration.

Sheryl looked at Akira with objection.

"Akira, was the information from Viola that valuable to you?"

"Hm? Well, yeah, pretty much."

"I see…"

Sheryl smiled and was determined to learn how to gather information to reduce Viola's usefulness to Akira.

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Akira then returned back home. He enjoyed his last dip in the bath of that house.

With the vacate document already signed, he planned on bringing his stuff to Sheryl's base the next day.

The first time he took a bath after he moved in, it felt extremely luxurious. However, after multiple dips, it felt normal. After he had experienced the more luxurious bath in Sheryl's base, he was now not able to fully appreciate his own bath. Even so, since this would be the last time, he felt a bit saudade having to not be able to take a bath here ever again.

As Akira thought of all that had happened to him up until now ever since he rented this house, he spoke in a contemplative voice.

"But still, a lot has happened since I moved into this house."

Alpha, who was also in the bath together with him, was acting as usual. She smiled at him.

"You can say that again. A lot of things have happened up until now."

"It was one hell of a journey."

"Indeed, it was. But just a bit more. Once your new equipment from Sakashita Heavy Industry arrives, we can finally go to explore our target ruin."

To be honest, Akira was not thinking about that. However, once Alpha mentioned it, he could not help but think about it too.

"…I see, it's finally soon, huh?"

"Yup, it really took a long time. Though, it did not take as long as I had thought it would. What do you think?"

"Hmm, can't really say for sure. Either way, we can only go once I have my new equipment. We still have to deal with Shirou's request as well. Though what we have to do right now is just wait, I wonder when they will actually arrive…"

That was when Akira received a call from Kibayashi. The moment he took that call through Alpha, he could hear Kibayashi's voice being suspiciously uppity.

“Yo there, Akira! I have three pieces of news for you. One bad, one good, one a bit good.”

“…I bet what you mean is one bad news, one really bad news, and one not really good news, right?”

Considering that it was Kibayashi, Akira could not help but get cautious.

“Don’t worry, it’s not that bad. I will start with the good news as proof.”

“Is that so? What is it?”

“The vehicle carrying your new equipment is already somewhere close to Kugamayama city.”

Hearing that, Akira could not hide his surprise. However, that also completely changed.

“So… What is the bad news?”

“It is about the vehicle transporting your new equipment. For some reason, it got caught in an accident and had to stop in the middle of the wasteland. There are still no clear estimates as to when they can continue.”

“Knew that something wrong would happen, seriously…”

Akira sighed. But hearing that, Kibayashi’s voice seemed even happier.

“Don’t get too sad. I still have one more piece of good news, you know? I’m sure you’ll cheer up once you hear it.”

“I hope that is indeed the case, so, what is it?”

“Just because it’s originally for you, doesn’t mean they will hand over your cargo even if you go there yourself to pick it up. Well, those are frontline equipment we’re talking about. They are regulated under very strict rules. So, as I said, even if you go there to pick it up yourself, they won’t hand it over to you. Confirming your identity is not going to help. Even if they are

directed to you, the cargo is still owned by Sakashita Heavy Industry. Saying that it is yours will not help."

"So? Where is the good part of this news?"

"Be patient. The good news comes right after this. If you want to get your new equipment immediately, I can arrange it such that you can pick them up yourself. Basically, you will be taking on the role of a transportation personnel. Isn't that great? Well, if it's too much trouble going there yourself, feel free to just wait until they arrive. Tell me, isn't this good news?"

"What will happen to my stuff if I say that I will just wait?"

"They will arrive late, that's all. Though, I can't really say for certain how late they will be. You keep asking me when they might arrive, so I assume you want them as fast as possible, no?"

"…That's true, I'll be counting on you then."

"Of course. Just leave it to me. I will get to work right away. You should also prepare yourself when you go pick them up, alright? Until then, later."

After Kibayashi ended the call, Akira frowned and seemed rather troubled. It was indeed great that he could pick his stuff up himself. However, the fact that an inter-city transport vehicle got stuck in the middle of the wasteland was rather suspicious.

Akira had once travelled in an inter-city transport convoy from Kugamayama city to Zegelt city. At that time, there was also an incident. However, the transport convoy did not stop at all. Therefore, something big must have happened for an inter-city transport vehicle to stop in the middle of the wasteland. Kibayashi's fervent encouragement for him to go there only served to prove his worries.

Alpha made her usual smile as she spoke.

“Let’s hope it’s nothing big. We can prepare as much as we can before going there to pick up your new equipment.”

“…Yeah, let’s do that.”

Akira smiled bitterly. He already knew that his wish would not be granted. It was clear Alpha also shared the same thoughts. Otherwise, she would not have added ‘prepare as much as we can before going’.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 293, That Akira

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Inside a certain room in the upper district of Kugamayama city, Sugadome, an officer from Sakashita Heavy Industry, was looking solemnly at the person in front of him

“Welcome… Or so I want to say, but is this everyone from the investigation team? Just you? Alone?”

Even in the face of a high-ranking officer from Sakashita Heavy Industry, that man, Maruo, was still completely calm.

“The anti-rebuild is working very hard every day to ensure the survival of the eastern district. As such, we’re always short on people. It’s not easy to adjust our posting, you see. It seems like they had to go through a lot of trouble just to send me here. I hope you can understand.”

“Thank you and I apologize. I know you must be very busy.”

After that short exchange, it had clearly shown their standing toward one another. Sugadome then stepped into the main subject.

“Well then, please start the investigation right away. If you need extra help, we will send some of our men as well.”

“Very well. Ah, by the way, just to make sure, this Shirou-kun, who is mentioned in the documents, do you have any objection if we deal with him ourselves?”

Sugadome squinted his eyes.

“Of course, but please only do so when there are no other alternatives. If you kill him unnecessarily, we will see that as a hostile act toward our company.”

It was a firm warning from one of the five biggest corporations. Everyone in the eastern district knew just how frightening crossing them was. It was not an exaggeration, nor an overstatement. It literally meant picking a fight against one-fifth of the whole eastern district’s economic zones.

Even so, Maruo was completely calm.

“No need to worry about that. Well then, we will start the investigation right away. Please let me excuse myself.”

Maruo slightly lowered his head and left the room. Sugadome saw him off and sighed.

The anti-rebuild had the duty of protecting the eastern district. Among them, there were those who were extremists. They saw everything as minute when compared to the sake of protecting the world.

“…I can only hope that things would get resolved peacefully.”

Acting based on caution did not always go along with being effective. As a high-ranking officer of Sakashita Heavy Industry, Sugadome always reminded himself of that fact. He understood that he had no other choice but to use such people with great caution. Nonetheless, Sugadome still had a migraine whenever he saw how these kinds of people around him continued to increase.

Maruo left Sugadome’s room and walked past Yanagisawa in the hallway.

[That must be Yanagisawa, huh… Well, my priority right now is to investigate Shirou-kun. Let’s put matters related to him for later.]

[An investigator from Anti-rebuild, huh… It seems that I must hasten the plan.]

Though both recognized each other, they did not say anything as they walked past each other.

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Akira took the camping vehicle that he received from Carol to drive through the wasteland. His destination was where the inter-city vehicle got stuck.

After he spoke with Shizuka and spoke with Katsuragi, Akira prepared as much as he could. Though, as expected, he could not retain his previous bike, the one he bought from Zegelt city. Likewise, he could not get more annihilator warheads.

At the very least, he was able to refresh his supply and do some maintenance for his augmented suit and rifles. With all the supplies that he stuffed into the vehicle, the insides felt stuffy even when only two people were on board. Akira and Shirou.

“Shirou, there’s no need for you to come with me, you know?”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? As per our agreement, I will have you complete my request first after you obtain your new equipment. So, coming with you would mean there will be no need for you to return back to the city first.”

“Yeah. You’re right, but why are you in such a hurry?”

“I’m sorry, but I’m a little desperate right now. But it’s not like I’m doubting you or anything.”

Akira also had something else to do once he got his frontline equipment. Thus, he understood why Shirou would insist on coming along, to make sure Akira would prioritize his request first.

Moreover, it was true that Shirou was in a hurry. He only had 3 days out of the 1 month grace time that Sugadome had granted him. Thus, he could not afford to waste even a single second.

As Shirou re-evaluated his current situation, he heaved a sigh.

"…I didn't even have any spare time to create a negotiation route to Tsubaki like Sugadome had asked. If I return back without having done anything, they will really treat me as a renegade from Sakashita. Say, Akira, if it has come to that, can you please find a way to reserve a place for me in Tsukisada?"

"No."

"Whoah, you don't even need to think about it, huh? Just so you know, I'm pretty amazing. You should take more time to think about it."

"Absolutely not."

Shirou sighed once again since Akira showed no signs of willingness to negotiate. Though, it was just a huge misunderstanding on Shirou's part. Akira actually had no connection with Tsukisada construction; thus, he was incapable of fulfilling Shirou's request.

"In that case then, Akira. How about I focus on creating a negotiation route to Tsubaki and…?!"

Shirou was only saying so jokingly, but he stopped middle-way when he noticed Akira's face twitched.

"…You… Don't tell me you already have a route to contact Tsubaki!?"

"I don't…"

"That's a lie! Then what is with that reaction!?"

“I negotiated with Tsubaki before, that’s all. But that has already been concluded. So, it’s not a lie. I have no negotiation route to Tsubaki.”

“Concluded? Then how are you still alive? Sakashita tried to negotiate with Tsubaki before. After conveying the contents of our offer and its demands, she killed everyone there. This included the negotiator and his escorts. The negotiator even got his whole body sliced into minced meat you know? Well, except for their head.”

Hearing that, Akira was once again reminded of how precarious the situation was back then. His face turned slightly pale.

Meanwhile, on the other hand, Shirou could relent as this was an unexpected opportunity.

“Although the negotiation ended in failure, you were able to still negotiate. Heck, you’re still alive, which means, you do have a route to contact Tsubaki. Please! Help me make a negotiation route to Tsubaki!!”

“No.”

“What? Why?! Does it have something to do with Tsukisada?! If yes, I’m willing to talk with Tsukisada about this…”

“It’s not that simple, alright? Let’s just put this matter for later, the inter-city transport vehicle is coming into view.”

Since the gigantic inter-city transport vehicle was visible from afar, Shirou decided to acquiesce to Akira’s demand and give up for now.

“…I’ll definitely bring this up again later.”

Akira sighed.

“Alpha, Shirou is asking for that… So, what’s the actual situation? Can you find a way to make a communication route to Tsubaki?”

“That will depend on how they define this route. If it’s only a single opportunity to negotiate with Tsubaki without any guarantee for their safety,

then yes. But to be honest, I don’t see why we have to do such a thing for him.”

“That’s true.”

As the inter-city transport vehicle was getting closer. Suddenly, a call through the general-purpose communication line reached Akira.

“I am a representative of the private military contractor, Brunkel. Under the agreement with Kugamayama City, Mirukakewa city, and Tarkein city, the area ahead is closed off due to various reasons. I’ll send you the exact area that is closed off. I apologize for the inconvenience, but please take another route.”

“This is Akira, a Hunter. I have some business with the Atlas D2771 inside that enclosed area. I already have permission from Kugamayama city. I will send you the documents, so please check them.”

Akira forwarded the documents. The guy on the other side checked them and exclaimed in surprise.

“I’ve confirmed the documents. So, you’re that Akira, huh? I have things that I need to explain first, so stop your vehicle at the designated location.”

“Sure.”

Akira closed the call and made a bitter smile.

“Welp, it seems like it has come to a point where they recognize me as ‘that Akira’, huh…”

“That just shows how great your track record is.”

“I guess you’re right.”

Alpha said with a smile, to which Akira was only able to agree.

Akira stopped the camping vehicle pretty close to one of the inter-transport vehicles. Its large size was barely able to fit into his view.

Around him, soldiers from Brunkel were patrolling around the closed-off area to secure the inter-city transport vehicle. Akira, for some reason, found them to be strange.

“Alpha, it might be just my imagination, but aren’t they posting more soldiers within the enclosed area instead of around its outskirts?”

“That seems to be indeed the case.”

“Just what is going on…?”

Akira frowned, considering that Kibayashi sent him there with such a huge smile, some kind of incident was bound to happen.

Seeing some men from Brunkel approaching the camping vehicle, Akira stepped out. Those men looked at Akira with interest.

“So, you must be Akira, right? I’ll give you the map information for Atlas D2771. Your stuff should be in there, so you can go to pick them up yourself. I’m sure there’s no need for me to warn you, don’t take others’ cargo, alright? We might suspect you of trying to steal something if you go outside the indicated areas. So, don’t go around entering places. Just only go through the doors that are open.”

“Alright.”

Up until that point, that warning was pretty reasonable. After Akira received the map information, the explanation took a strange turn.

“I don’t mind if you decide to fight against enemies, but as expected, it would be great if you can avoid using annihilator warheads. The damage to the vehicle will be too big and it might damage the other cargo as well.”

For Akira who was there only to pick up his cargo, he did not expect to find words like ‘enemies’ and ‘fight’.

“…What exactly is going on inside the vehicle? Or more like, why did an inter-city transport vehicle get stuck in the middle of the wasteland like this?”

“You didn’t hear anything from Kugamayama city?”

“Yeah, I only heard that the cargo I’ve been waiting for quite a long time got stuck in the middle of transport. I was advised that since it might take a long time to arrive, I should go pick it up myself.”

“I see. In that case, I’m sorry. I can’t tell you anything, I don’t have the permission to do it.”

“It’s fine… in that case, if the situation is really that awful, just tell me what you can tell me.”

The guy tilted his head and hummed before speaking.

“We are here basically to take over the job to close the area around Atlas D2771. Most of the team members present have Hunter Ranks around 60. Though we were offered the job to storm into the vehicle, we refused. It just doesn’t seem to be worth the trouble.”

Basically, there was something dangerous inside the inter-city transport vehicle. It was so risky that a group of Rank 60 Hunters refused to go in. Though Akira was very thankful for that information, it did not change the fact that he was heading there. He knitted his eyebrows at the thought.

“…Thank you for the valuable information.”

“You’re welcome.”

Akira returned back to the camping vehicle. The guy saw Akira off with an amused smile.

As they watched Akira drive his camping vehicle toward Atlas D2771, the men from Brunkel talked about their impressions of him after seeing ‘that Akira’ up close.

“So that was Akira, huh? The Hunter who had a 50 billion Aurum bounty on his head. He doesn’t look that strong so I wonder just how strong he really is?”

“Yeah, that was Akira. I heard that he obliterated a group of Hunters that tried to kill him all by himself. I bet the right amount for his bounty should be way above 50 billion Aurum.”

“I would bet on that as well. You have to consider the fact that he dared to pick a fight against a branch of the Lion Steel company and survived. So, there’s no doubt his bounty should be way more.”

“Also, he’s still young, you know? I bet Hunters who eventually manage to go to the frontlines are just like him.”

“Well, I don’t know all the details but we should just enjoy his fight from here.”

The Hunters from Brunkel were much stronger than any Hunters around the area, and they showed a deep interest in Akira.

The colossal inter-city transport vehicle was so huge that it might change the definition of a vehicle. The ramp that came out from inside it was 10 meters wide and it led up to a height taller than a 3-storey building. It was wide and long enough to give sufficient space for cargo to go in and out of the inter-city transport vehicle. It was guarded by many soldiers at its sides.

Akira stopped the camping vehicle near the upper part of the ramp.

“Shirou, by any chance, can you tell what is going on inside this transport vehicle?”

Shirou raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“You… Don’t tell me you came here without knowing anything? Wait, the information about the lockdown by Sakshita might not have reached Tsukisada yet, huh… I don’t mind telling you but be careful with what I’m going to say. It’s basically secret information. I’m sure you know what will happen if they discover their secret information got leaked outside of the big five corporations of the eastern district.”

“Alright, I’ll be careful. So then, what is going on?”

Shirou hesitated.

[Is this really going to be okay…? It doesn't seem like he is good at keeping secrets or lying. Just like back then when I noticed that he was an agent from Tsukisada, it was easy to judge what he was thinking from his expression. Someone with zero subtleties like him is not suitable as an investigation agent, so just why did Tsukisada send him out? Considering his ability to fight, did Tsukisada send him here because there is high probability combat will be involved in this mission? Is that why he came all the way here to pick up his frontline equipment?]

Shirou got even more confused than before. However, he quickly cut it off there and wrapped it up as Tsukisada construction having its own reasons. Considering how losing Akira here would not help with his goal, Shirou finally decided to tell Akira what he knew.

"…It's not confirmed yet, but it seems like Atlas D2771 is transporting the cube and it got attacked by people who are aiming for it. Although they were unable to repel the attack, they somehow managed to lock the attackers inside the vehicle. The cube itself is still safe while the attackers are still locked inside, even now."

The cube, some people might also call it the seed. It was a device with parts resembling cubes. It was found underground, and if activated, it would bloom like a flower and create something from the old world. These were the reasons why it was called the cube or the seed.

It was thought to be a nanomachine cluster with regenerative capabilities, originally an old-world production device. Rumours say it could create all kinds of things using its supplies from where it was activated. It could create humans, biological living beings, machines, houses, factories, or even old-world cities complete with its own denizens.

In the past, one cube fully rebuilt an old-world military base. That military base then sent out soldiers to clean up the illegal occupants around the area. In other words, clean up people from the current world, and eventually caused significant damage. Though, there were also records stating how those from the Corporate Government had dispatched men to control the

situation. They somehow managed to extract the old-world technology used by that military base, which ended up creating more profits than losses.

Thus, it became widely known that if it bloomed uncontrollably, it would turn into a huge problem. Though, if the ones using it were able to accurately predict what it might produce and prepare accordingly, it might turn a problem into a blessing; netting them a huge amount. This was why it was still considered to be a highly valuable relic.

Akira was listening to Shirou's explanation while also listening to extra information from Alpha. This greatly helped him in understanding what he was facing. However, that did not change how dire the situation was as he knitted his eyebrows.

"Say, is it normal for an inter-city transport vehicle to get attacked like this?"

"Well, it would be a biased opinion since I used the opening left behind when the inter-city transport vehicle got attacked to escape. It is actually a very rare occurrence. Rather, it almost never happens. Even if the attackers are capable of damaging the inter-city transport vehicles, it would still be suicidal."

"Then why do the ones that I get involved with always get attacked?"

"There's no way I would know the answer to that. Isn't it simply just because the area under Kugamayama is not normal? I heard that recently, many huge incidents have occurred around Kugamayama city, you know? That is not normal at all."

Akira unconsciously looked away. He knew that he was involved in most of those huge incidents. No one would believe him if he said that he was roped in by pure coincidence. In some cases, he was even the main source of such incidents. That was why Akira inadvertently reacted to Shirou's words.

Shirou noticed that and found it strange.

“…Say Akira, by any chance, were you dispatched here to investigate those huge incidents?”

“…Maybe.”

Since him being an agent from Tsukisada construction was a misunderstanding he wanted to keep, Akira curtly replied.

Shirou did not pursue it any further. Even if all those incidents were related to Akira, he did not have the leeway to care about it at the moment.

“Well then, I’ll go pick up my stuff then.”

“Alright, be careful. If the attackers are really aiming for the cube, they must be strong. Though, it’s kind of redundant to state that since only those with sufficient might would attempt to attack an inter-city transport vehicle.”

“Yeah, it’s not like my aim is to fight them anyway. I will just quickly leave once I get my new equipment.”

Akira prepared himself to go inside the inter-city transport and left the camping vehicle.

Up the ramp, it led into the cargo compartment of Atlas D2771. The squad sent to secure the transport vehicle were securing the junctions that connected to multiple compartments. Akira walked through the cargo sector A7 and eventually stopped in front of a door. He gazed at it as if he was trying to peek through it.

Akira’s information-gathering device noticed what he was trying to do and prioritized its computational power to analyze the information coming from in front of him. Though it reduced the area under its watch, it greatly increased its accuracy. It was to the point that a normal wall would seem transparent to him.

However, Akira could not see through the door.

“It didn’t work, huh? Alpha, can you give me a hand?”

Though he was not able to do it using the power of his information-gathering device, it might be possible with Alpha's help. That was why he asked for her support. Though it would serve as excellent training if he relied solely on his own ability, it would be meaningless if he lost his equipment in the process. Thus, Akira was planning not to hold back. He was willing to rely on Alpha's support whenever necessary.

However, Alpha shook her head and explained.

"Akira, unfortunately, I can't see through it as well. This transport vehicle is divided into multiple sectors with each sector being protected by a powerful forcefield armour. Due to the abnormally high power being discharged to keep up these forcefield armours; information is blocked from leaking out."

"Ahhh, so it is one of those that prevent the propagation of information, huh?"

"Yeah, no matter how much my support increases the power of your information-gathering device, it is still limited. I can only improve the quality of the software and how it processes information. I can't increase the quality of its sensors, which is its hardware. If the sensors can't even pick up signals from the other side due to interference, I won't be able to do anything about it."

"I see, alright then. Please provide me with support for the other parts. No matter what is going on inside the transport vehicle, I really need to pick up my new equipment no matter what."

"Of course! Just leave it to me!"

Seeing Alpha's usual smile filled with confidence, Akira pulled himself together and smiled back at her.

The locked door between the sectors prevented him from going any further. However, Akira already received permission to unlock them. Once he informed the guards nearby that he was going to open the door, a vehicle-wide announcement was made. It warned everyone in the area that the door was about to be opened.

There was fear of the attackers waiting behind that door. Everyone in the area was tense as they readied their rifles, this included Akira. The door slowly opened, and information started to get leaked through the small opening. Akira quickly acted and analyzed whatever he could. Any result was shown in his enhanced vision. He could even see the route that laid in front of him, and fortunately, no enemies were detected.

"…It seems alright. I'm going in."

Akira went through the opened door and into the hallway. Immediately after he entered, the door automatically closed, once again isolating that sector.

As he proceeded deeper, he was ambushed by enemies in the form of a swarm of small multi-legged drones. They were able to freely run along the ceiling, walls, and floor. Some were even capable of flight as they shot Akira with their laser cannons.

However, with his current equipment, they were basically harmless. Akira accurately predicted where their shots were going to land. He easily avoided their barrage and shot them down with charge bullets using his RL2 multi-rifles. The bullets, charged with energy, formed a wall, which annihilated the swarm. The drones did not stand a chance against the might of his bullets and got blown to pieces in a blink of an eye. Nothing was left, except for their remains scattered on the floor.

However, more of them were coming from the front. Worse, they started coming from behind as well, forming a pincer with Akira in the middle.

Akira calmly dealt with them. With two RL2 multi rifles in his hand, he could shoot his front and back at the same time. Without anywhere to escape, the barrage crushed the swarm with no mercy. Even if they were protected by powerful armour, a single charge bullet easily pierces through them. It even blew them up to smaller pieces.

As Akira was shooting down the swarm, they were also shooting back at him. Some of the drones used their defeated counterpart as shields. They managed to survive barely long enough to shoot back at him. Their laser

cannons released a concentrated beam of energy that even scorched the air. The beams melted through metal as they went straight for Akira.

However, Akira remained unfazed. He completely saw through where those rays were going and evaded them. Meanwhile, the heated air from the lasers was completely blocked off by his augmented suit's forcefield armour.

The battle only lasted for a few minutes. In that short time, countless lasers and bullets were exchanged in that narrow hallway. Akira, the winner, was completely unharmed. Even his breathing remained steady. Meanwhile, the swarm got completely obliterated.

Even Rank 60 Hunters were not willing to go inside this vehicle. That ambush Akira had just received clearly showed the reason why. However, he handled it flawlessly. As a matter of fact, he seemed to be a bit disappointed. They were weaker than he had expected. Especially when his enemies were aiming for the famous, invaluable cube.

"…Is that it?"

Seeing how he reacted, Alpha smiled and said.

"That's because of my support, so it only amounted to this much."

"Well, you have a point."

Akira did not retort and simply agreed to what she said. Alpha's smile turned softer and kinder.

"You've also gotten stronger."

As expected, after surviving the fight with Lion Steel, Akira had indeed become stronger than before. So much so that even Alpha had to truthfully admit he had done well.

"…I see."

Akira smiled, he seemed happy. He felt both a sense of accomplishment and happiness since before he realized it, he had become strong enough for

Alpha to recognize his strength.

His personal strength and his frontline equipment, Akira had satisfied one of the two requirements to go and do Alpha's request. Furthermore, it would not be long before he satisfied the other requirement.

That was when Alpha lightly teased him.

"But Akira, no matter how weak your enemies are, you should not hope to fight strong enemies, right?"

"I know. I also prefer weak enemies. I've been fighting so many strong enemies up until now… It's great to have an easy battle like this from time to time. Alright. Let's go."

Akira smiled bitterly and went deeper.

After he left the hallway, a change suddenly occurred. Some of the scattered pieces leftover melted to form a liquid and started combining into a single object.

This green liquid spread along the floor, consuming any other pieces it made contact with. A large green puddle gathered in one place and started to solidify, as if it was using the metals that it had consumed as materials, eventually, forming a humanoid object.

Once no more liquid was left on the floor, all the wreckage around already got consumed by it. The only thing that remained was a girl formed out of that liquid. It was a young girl clad in an old-world augmented suit. She glanced in the direction where Akira went, and then a moment later, she started running in the opposite direction.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 294, Shirou's Surprise

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Two groups of Hunters just arrived in the cargo sector A7. This was the sector that had become the only way in and out of Atlas D2771. They came to secure the inter-city transport vehicle and eliminate the attackers. One of the teams was headed by Tatsukawa and Melshia, while the other team was led by Zelos.

Tatsukawa seemed fired up as he heartily laughed.

"Good grief, if only they had hired us to escort the inter-city transport vehicle itself. This would not have happened. Now, they're calling for us when it's already too late, am I right, Melshia?"

"The offer did reach us before, though. In the end, we could not agree on the reward they offered."

"…It did? But well, if we could not agree on the reward, then it was still their fault, right?"

"The offer came in a rush. We were going to do it when it came. I did say that I don't mind accepting it, but you got a little annoyed and demanded a

huge amount, remember? Saying something like ‘they should have offered at least this much for interrupting our good time’.”

Tatsukawa finally remembered what had happened after Melshia pointed it out. He was only able to laugh awkwardly as he tried to move away from this topic. Noticing his obvious attempt, Melshia giggled and spoke.

“Well, thanks to that, they eventually agreed to hire us with a huge amount. So, it was not all that bad.”

Tatsukawa quickly decided to ride on the wave she gave and nodded along with her argument.

“R-right!? Alright then, let’s get started! With how much we were offered, let’s do this seriously.”

As Tatsukawa was about to enter the inter-city transport vehicle, Melshia suddenly grabbed and stopped him.

“We’re not done coordinating with Zelos-san’s team yet, so wait for a bit.”

Zelos, who had been listening to their conversation, sighed and changed the subject.

“Are you done now? Well then, about the sectors that our respective teams will secure…”

Zelos’ team and Tatsukawa’s team were hired separately. Therefore, their chain of command was not the same and they were moving separately. To make sure there would not be any conflicts between their teams, including gaps between firepower and contribution to this mission, it was important to discuss everything beforehand.

Of course, they had completed the majority of their discussion before they came here. The only thing that remained was a final confirmation for what was agreed upon prior, and actions taken under certain circumstances. As high-ranking Hunters, Zelos and Melshia were already used to it. Thus, they

quickly went through everything and were about to conclude their discussion.

That was when Zelos suddenly added one extra condition.

“I don’t know all the details, but it seems like Akira is inside Atlas D2771 as well. In the scenario we somehow encountered him, I want you to handle the talking. I’m sure you already know that my team has a history with him.”

Back then when Akira still had a 50 billion Aurum bounty on his head, Zelos’ team broke into two factions. The vice-captain, Gelgus, wanted to join the bounty hunt while Zelos was against it. In the end, Zelos could not prevent the faction under Gelgus from splitting up and leaving the team.

Gelgus’ death and his team’s defeat simply showed how Zelos’ prediction about Akira was right. It was unfortunate that both sides could not peer into the future and knew about this outcome. Thus, it could even be said that both sides had their own valid reasons which caused the team to split into two factions. Since they did not split up because of a fight, Zelos still recognized Gelgus as well as those that left the team under Gelgus as his friends. Had Gelgus won against Akira, it was highly likely that the split teams would merge back again. Though, at that point, the leadership would shift to Gelgus.

It was only natural that Zelos would be hostile against the person who had killed Gelgus and destroyed his team. Although they had no wish to harm Akira, and they knew that as Hunters, taking revenge on him would be misplaced vengeance, that did not mean they could just forgive him. As such, Zelos wanted to keep his team away from Akira as much as possible.

Melshia understood that as well. However, she still threw a question to Zelos.

“I can understand what you are trying to say, but that means you’re going to throw this issue at us, right? So, what’s in it for us?”

“If we somehow ended up fighting against each other, you would get involved as well. And I don’t believe Akira is willing to take the trouble of differentiating between our teams. I believe you can prevent that from happening. Well, frankly, I don’t mind either way. I won’t force you to talk to him.”

Now that it was up to Melshia, she hummed for a bit and glanced at Tatsukawa. Meeting her eyes, Tatsukawa casually stated.

“There should be no problems accepting his condition, don’t you think? I’ve also always been wanting to talk to him if I ever get the chance since that day.”

“Well, if you say so, then I don’t mind.”

“Sorry and thank you. Now that’s out of the way, let’s get started.”

After both teams completed their preparations, they stormed the transport vehicle and started securing the insides.

The team under Tatsukawa and Zelos were slowly fighting through the force that attacked the inter-city transport vehicle. Putting aside the level of danger they faced, their job was a simple one. They had to go into each sector of Atlas D2771. Each sector was protected by powerful forcefield armour, and they had to check, kill any enemies that they discovered, and secure the sector before moving to the next sector. They had to do this until they’ve completely secured the whole inter-city transport vehicle. Of course, the attackers would all get eliminated through this process.

Unlike Akira, who was only there to pick up his cargo. The team under Tatsukawa and Zelos were hired to eliminate the enemies inside Atlas D2771. Thus, they had to diligently go through each sector and check every nook and cranny to make sure that no enemies were left.

The main firepower of the team, like Melshia and Tatsukawa, blitzed through the sectors and destroyed the drone swarm. They did this until it was safe enough for the rest of the team to come in. The rest would sweep through the entire sector, checking to see that they did not miss anything.

Afterwards, they would set up a portable barricade to the other hallway as well as do other finer details to secure the sector. Along the route that they had already secured, the rooms were turned into forward-bases, where large amounts of medicine were stocked. This was done so that they could quickly heal any injured member of the team.

Their systematic process was proceeding extremely smoothly. Tatsukawa was even able to smile casually after fighting a swarm of drones.

“That was easy, though they’re quite numerous, they aren’t that strong.”

Although Melshia also had the leeway to smile back at him, she still warned Tatsukawa.

“Danger comes soonest when it’s most despised, you know? You always get ahead of yourself too quickly.”

“No no no, I’m doing better lately though. Back then, I only did that because we wouldn’t be able to succeed unless I got a bit reckless, you know?”

“Well, I wonder about that. Anyway, it’s my job to kick you when you get too carried away, so feel free to do whatever you want.”

Melshia made a half-teasing smile. Tatsukawa only smiled bitterly in response to what she said and apologized

“Sorry, I know I keep causing you trouble. But as I said not too long ago, our team has grown this big and it’s mostly thanks to your leadership and management skill. I have no plan to throw that down the drain now. But don’t worry. If something goes wrong because of you, we can always start again and rebuild it.”

“…Yeah yeah.”

Melshia slightly blushed, Tatsukawa was basically saying that he did not mind losing the team that they had brought all the way here through their hard work if it was for her sake.

“If you really mean it, make sure to not drop your guard. I don’t mind starting from zero again in a new team, but that would be a lot of work, right?”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

As they proceeded to secure the sector, the rest of the team witnessed Melshia’s and Tatsukawa’s flirty exchange. Those two were the spearhead of the team so the rest just exasperatedly ignored them, thinking that it was just as usual.

Tatsukawa’s team, which had secured two sectors and was in the middle of securing the third sector, once again encountered a swarm of the multi-legged drones. Although it was another easy victory for him, Tatsukawa felt something was off. His expression turned solemn.

“…This is strange, Melshia, what do you think?”

“Strange? What’s strange?”

Even Melshia, who was good at reading between the lines, could not understand what Tatsukawa was talking about. Tatsukawa pondered over what he felt and spoke nonchalantly.

“The hallways and rooms are way too pristine. There’s no wreckage left by the drones. Isn’t that weird?”

There was an original escort team that was sent inside to secure Atlas D2771. Thus, there had to be some signs of battle against the attackers. This meant that there should be pieces of the multi-legged drones on the ground, if not, corpses of the deceased team. However, even after they had already gone this deep, they have not encountered anything like that. As expected, Tatsukawa found that to be worrying.

Melshia gave it a bit of thought before explaining a possibility.

“Including the dummies, there are 12 special sectors designed to house the cube inside Atlas D2771. Although that is all that they can share with us

since we're basically outsiders, I bet the original escort team, the attackers, and the original suppression team affiliated with the transport knew of the correct location of the cube. So, it is possible there are no leftovers around because the battles only occurred near the sector housing the cube. We might still not be there yet. Or at least, that is just my guess. Do you have any other possibilities in mind?"

"Well, that's a good guess, but…"

Tatsukawa agreed with Melshia that it was a plausible explanation. However, something still felt off and he could not bring himself to accept it like this. His face was still as solemn as before. After a moment of hesitation, he decided to contact Zelos. Normally, the powerful forcefield armour protecting each sector would prevent them from contacting each other, but since they kept some of the doors open, and placed relay devices along the hallways, they were able to reach each other.

Tatsukawa gave a short explanation regarding his worry, and then Zelos replied.

"The situation is the same for us over here as well. The only ones on the floor are the ones that we have defeated. So far, we've only encountered those weak multi-legged drones. We have not found anything that might be from the original attackers."

"I see."

"By the way, have you encountered Akira yet?"

"Nope."

"…Then I'm afraid it is as you feared. Something is indeed not right. Even if Melshia-san's guess is correct, that the attackers were gathered somewhere near the sector where the cube is stored and that these multi-legged drones are only sent for reconnaissance, we've encountered so many of them. Akira and the other Hunters who went in before us must have encountered them as well. So, why don't we find any leftovers from them? Does it mean that Akira did not encounter them? That is highly unlikely."

If it was only them, then it might still make sense. However, considering Akira had gone in before them, things became extremely suspicious. Basically, there was something that they did not know happening inside the transport vehicle. Both Tatsukawa and Zelos proceeded with more caution.

__*__*__*__

Akira continued going deeper into the transport vehicle. He was following the route to the sector where his stuff was located. Although he encountered multiple swarms of multi-legged drones along his way, he was able to deal with them with no difficulty at all.

Akira checked the map, which showed the insides of the transport vehicle and sighed. He had just confirmed that it would take him some time before he could reach sector B28, where his cargo was housed.

“The route they gave us takes a rather long detour, don’t you think? It would be great if they can allow us to use a shorter route.”

After Akira leaked his complaint, Alpha casually stated.

“Well, it’s understandable considering the situation.”

The new equipment that Akira had ordered through Sakashita Heavy Industry was all frontline equipment. Naturally, they were expensive and extremely dangerous. Although there was no need to keep them in a secured sector, as secure as where the cube was kept, they were still located inside a sector that was more secure than the other normal sectors. Such a sector was protected by multiple layers of forcefield armour and was located deep inside the transport vehicle.

However, the attackers were also inside the transport vehicle. To prevent them from escaping outside Atlas D2771, they strengthened the already powerful forcefield armour. Excluding the A7 cargo sector where Akira entered the transport vehicle, there was no other way to get out of the vehicle. Thus, it effectively locked the attackers inside the transport vehicle.

As an outsider, Akira had received limited permission thus, his access was strictly limited. He was not allowed to go into most of the sectors. Furthermore, with strengthened forcefield armour, some of the sectors were even rendered completely inaccessible.

Because of all these factors, although sector B28 was easy to reach from another exit, Akira had to go through a rather long route to reach it.

After Alpha explained all these points, she then elaborated further.

“Most probably, the reason why this inter-city transport vehicle is not moving is because it’s diverting all its energy to fuel its forcefield armour. It no longer has the capacity to accelerate the transport vehicle. I bet they prioritized supplying the forcefield armour protecting the cube, meanwhile, making sure that the attackers are trapped inside as a secondary objective. This way, they could send in a strong team later to secure the transport vehicle and resolve the situation.”

Akira frowned and asked.

“…That strong team you’re talking about… That’s not me, right?”

“Even if someone hoped that you would do that for them, you didn’t receive such a request. So, let’s not worry about it. You just need to pick up your stuff, and get out of here as soon as possible.”

Alpha smiled as she spoke. Hearing that, Akira’s frown vanished and was replaced by curved lips.

“You’re right, let’s just get this over with.”

Akira pushed that thought aside for now and just focused on reaching the cargo sector B28. As he reached the door to the next sector, he readied his rifle and cautiously opened the door. The power forcefield armour turned into a layer that was impermeable to information. Thus, when Akira slightly opened the door, information from the inside of that sector started leaking out. It was quickly analyzed and displayed in Akira’s enhanced vision.

Immediately, he tensed up. There was a signal indicating someone else was nearby.

“Who’s there!?”

Akira raised his voice, prompting a reaction from this unknown person. He rested his fingers on the triggers, ready. With his rifles positioned, he waited for the moment this person jumped out from behind the door. If there was no answer, then Akria would consider that signal hostile. The time limit Akira gave before he began to take the initiative to attack, was immediate once the door was fully open.

But right before the time limit, before the door was fully opened, a voice responded to his question.

“Right back at you, who are you? If you’re not a part of the attackers! Show me your identification code! I will shoot you if you can’t do that!”

Akira glanced at Alpha, so she broadcast using a short-range communication frequency Akira’s identification code, which was provided with the map information he had received. A moment later, the other person also sent back their identification code.

“…It seems like you’re not one of the attackers. Okay. I will step out, so don’t shoot, alright?”

“Alright.”

Akira lowered his rifle. After a short pause, as if they were confirming the situation, the other person stepped out from behind the door. Akira was a bit surprised to see it to be a girl that looked around the same age as him.

The girl also seemed surprised when she saw Akira. She fearfully asked.

“…You… By any chance, are you that Akira?”

“…Just to be safe, which Akira is ‘that Akira’ you’re referring to?”

“The one that had a 50 billion Aurum bounty on him.”

“…Then yes, I am that Akira.”

“I-I see…”

The girl’s conflicted expression obviously indicated that she had regretted showing herself. She did not want to meet someone like Akira, who she did not want to get involved with. Meanwhile, Akira was uncertain as to how he should deal with her.

Eventually, he came to a decision. To just ignore her and walk past her.

That girl’s gaze went back and forth between Akira’s back and the direction where he came from. A moment later, she loped behind him. The moment she caught up with him, Akira asked.

“What?”

“Uhh, uhmm, can I come with you? I don’t feel safe going around alone inside the transport vehicle, so…”

The girl stated that she originally came here together with another team to secure the transport vehicle. However, they were ambushed by the attackers. She got seriously injured and got separated from the rest of her team. Currently, she was in the middle of escaping. Once she explained her situation, she asked Akira for a favour.

“Please don’t misunderstand my intentions. I’m not hoping for you to do my job for me. You can just continue to secure the transport vehicle as per your request and profit from it. I will help during the fight, and I won’t complain about whatever my share of the reward is, so yeah, it’s okay, right? Right?”

“Sorry, I don’t have the leeway to accept an escort request.”

“E-escort? It’s not something like that…”

The girl looked away and awkwardly smiled. She started blabbering, trying to make excuses. Explaining that it was not like she was hoping Akira

would be her escort, but her awkward attitude did not convince anyone. Akira simply sighed.

“If you’re going to come along, feel free to do so, but just don’t get in my way.”

“Of course! I will never do something like that! Ah, by the way, my name is Rebecca, nice to meet you.”

“Right, I’m Akira.”

As Akira gave the expected reply to people who just met each other for the first time, Rebecca walked next to Akira and giggled.

“I know.”

“Yeah, right.”

Akira bitterly smiled and rushed ahead.

In the middle of going through the hallway, Alpha suddenly warned Akira.

“Akira, I don’t mind having that girl come along with you, but don’t drop your guard. Don’t forget that she’s still a stranger that you’ve just met in a dangerous area. If we get attacked, there’s a good chance that she’ll use you as a diversion and run away. She might shoot haphazardly when she panics as well. So, keep in mind that she adds an unpredictable factor to this situation. Leaving aside her skill, her equipment is not that bad. So, it would be troublesome to deal with her if it came to it.”

After Alpha gave her warning, Akira glanced at Rebecca and scanned her equipment. She was using an augmented suit that looked like a leotard with some holes on it. The holes seem to have some unknown function other than needlessly showing skin. Furthermore, she was using a dress with a large slit, which was her defensive coat. Both were of the old-world design. She was also carrying a rather large rifle with her.

“Rebecca, that equipment, are they old-world equipment?”

“Do they look so?”

“At least they look relatively strong.”

“Is that so? Thanks. But they are not. Though, they are still pretty powerful.”

Rebecca then smiled rather smugly. But Akira instead noticed something strange.

“You said that you fought the attackers and got defeated right? So, what kind of enemies did you fight?”

“Multi-legged drones equipped with laser cannons. I bet they were brought here by the attackers. Not only are they strong, but there were also billions of them…”

“…And your team was defeated although you have that equipment? You were in a team, right? Not alone, right?”

Judging from the drones that Akira had fought and considering Rebecca’s capability to fight based on her equipment, Akira found it to be weird. Especially when he considered her team members to be equipped with the same level of gear.

[How did such a team get defeated by such weak enemies?] Akira inadvertently shot a suspicious glance at Rebecca.

But unexpectedly, Rebecca exasperatedly said.

“Haah, well, you did survive even after having a 50 billion Aurum bounty on your head. Your evaluation of our fighting capability is completely off. I’m sure you said that based on your own experience fighting those drones. Was it really that easy of a win for you?”

“…At least, I wouldn’t say that it was hard.”

Rebecca sounded a bit offended as she replied.

“Well, that would explain everything. But don’t worry. Although I’m super weak compared to you, I will at least make sure not to get in your way if we get attacked.”

“O-okay.”

Akira thought that he made a mistake there since he ended up saying something that sounded like reproach with a hint of mockery. Thus, he only managed to awkwardly reply with that short ‘okay’. Moreover, he had become strong enough for Alpha to admit it. Furthermore, Rebecca did not have Alpha’s support. Thus, he reflected on his evaluation and believed that it was awful of him to use the strength of the enemy to evaluate someone else’s fighting capability.

The sour mood stayed for quite some time before Rebecca opened her mouth.

“Sorry, I said something rude. You are the one allowing me to come along with you. Though I almost got killed during the fight and I’m worried for the rest of my team as well. So, I guess I’m a little bit more stressed out than I thought. Yeah, sorry. But I was being honest when I said that I won’t get in your way and help you fight too if we got attacked.”

Akira lowered his shoulders.

“Okay, I’m sorry for suspecting you. I think I got a little bit paranoid since I’m only here to pick up my cargo. Instead, I got roped into this troublesome mess.”

But something in Akira’s apology piqued Rebecca’s interest.

“Pick up your cargo? What do you mean?”

“It’s exactly as you heard. Ah, right. I’m not here to secure the transport vehicle, I’m here just to get my stuff.”

“You do know that there are attackers inside this transport vehicle aiming for the cube, right? But you still decided to go to such a dangerous place

just to pick up your stuff?”

“Yeah.”

Seeing exasperation on Rebecca’s face, Akira added an extra excuse.

“I have my reasons, alright?”

Rebecca found Akira’s attitude amusing and giggled.

“As I thought, your common sense is completely different from us.”

“Oh shut it. I’ll leave you behind if you keep saying something like that.”

Akira paced his steps faster; Rebecca was still giggling as she lightly jogged to follow next to him.

On their way to cargo sector B28, Akira and Rebecca once again encountered a swarm of multi-legged drones. Akira was able to handle it all by himself. Therefore, now that he had an extra helping hand from Rebecca, the swarm did not give them any trouble at all.

Rebecca smiled smugly after drilling holes through those multi-legged drones with her laser cannon.

“So? What do you think? I’m pretty good, right?”

“Yeah, not bad at all, you’re pretty strong.”

Although Akira agreed with her statement, he had a conflicted expression on his face. Naturally, Rebecca noticed it.

“You don’t seem that happy though? I know that I’m not as strong as you, but still…”

“That’s not it. I just thought that although you have other allies who are more or less as strong as you, you still couldn’t win against the attackers. You’ve just only barely managed to escape, right? Or are there other stronger enemies present?”

“W-well… That is… Yeah, there were other enemies, and they are super strong.”

Rebecca was visibly flustered. Akira did find that strange and Alpha immediately warned him.

“Akira, let’s forget about the attackers and just focus on getting your new equipment. As for the attackers, we will take them down if they try to attack you. So, there’s no need to think too much about them. In the first place, your main goal here has nothing to do with eliminating them.”

“You have a point.”

His equipment came first, Akira reminded himself.

“I see, anyway, let’s hurry up.”

“Ah, yeah, right.”

Akira went ahead, Rebecca, who followed him, made a sigh of relief a moment later.

After Akira left the hallway, the dead drones once again melted into a pool of green liquid, consuming the metallic wreckage around it. This time, they gathered in two different places and created two female humanoids. Those two glanced in the direction where Akira went and quickly left in another direction.

After that, Akira did not encounter any more enemies and safely reached cargo sector B28. He thought that he was finally there and was about to open the door but for some reason, the door would not open.

“Hm? That’s weird.”

Akira thought he must have made a mistake. Thus, instead of inputting the data through his enhanced vision, he pulled out his information terminal and sent the procedure to open the door through the terminal. But unfortunately, the door only returned an error message and would not open. Akira rubbed his head and mumbled.

“What the heck is going on…?”

“What’s wrong?”

“I actually have the permission to open the door, but…”

“So, the door won’t open, huh? Well, this is troublesome. The guy who gave you the code to open the door is outside, right? What do you plan to do now?”

It was not like he could just tear down the door. He would have to return back to those from Brunkel and ask them to assist him to open the door.

Akira turned around and knitted his eyebrows. It was not easy to get here. At the very least, he would have to go back and forth once. Now, no one could say how many round trips he would have to make until he could open the door. Naturally, he really did not want to go through all this hassle.

That was when Akira thought of something else.

“Shirou, are you free right now?”

“What is it? Did something happen?”

After Akira gave a brief explanation, Shirou then confidently said.

“Alright, I’ll use you as a proxy to do some investigation. You can pick two choices. Either to tell me a safe entry point to connect or to set up a temporary circumvention route for me to connect.”

Akira had no idea what Shirou was talking about, but since it would be weird for him to ask Shirou, he confirmed with Alpha first before replying.

“It’s fine. Just connect to me.”

“I’m in.”

Shirou dove into Akira’s old-world connection as an old-world connector and put himself in the system, making it as if he was there. It did not take

long for Shirou to notice what was wrong.

“It says that it can’t confirm the code you gave.”

“I did get the permission, though? The code was able to open the door to the other sectors as well…”

“Sector B28 seems to house really valuable cargo, so its security level is much higher than the other sectors. Even if you have permission to open it, if you’re going in together with someone else without permission, the door will not open. Are you there with someone?”

“Yeah, I met this girl named Rebecca on my way here. So, if I leave Rebecca behind, I should be able to open this door, right?”

“No, once that code gives an error, it is rendered invalid. Judging from the identification method, you will either need to return back to have it unlocked or to get another unlock code.”

“Whaaat!?”

Akira sounded extremely frustrated. Since it was through telepathic communication, not only his words, but his emotions were also fully conveyed.

Shirou, who was on the receiving end of that call, laughed.

“But you do have the permission, right? Don’t worry, I’ll open it for you, I’m actually pretty good at this kind of thing, you see.”

“Oh! Thank you!!”

“Yeah, just leave it to me. Aren’t you glad you did not leave me behind and brought me along with you?”

“You can say that again, thanks.”

In contrast to Shirou’s voice, which was full of confidence, Akira’s voice sounded a bit wry. Though, it was his true feelings.

From inside the camping vehicle, Shirou immediately got to work.

“…With this system, it’s easier to fake an identification code instead of hacking the locking system. Akira, I’ll be borrowing your information-gathering device. I need the information used for the identification code to create a fake identification code for that girl, Rebecca.”

“Don’t break it, okay?”

After hearing Akira’s short warning, Shirou immediately accessed his information-gathering device and prioritized its scanning target at Rebecca.

Akira’s powerful information-gathering device would normally be able to see through under the target’s outer clothes and even pass the skin down to the blood vessels and organs. Of course, an expensive augmented suit would be equipped to prevent that. Thus, with a good enough augmented suit, it would be impossible to see all those details. That was why, although Akira’s information-gathering device could only gather information about Rebecca’s appearance, Shirou did not find that to be strange at all.

[I can’t really see the face though. It’s needed to make the identification code. Does the sonar sensor not work well because of the forcefield? I guess I will have to use the camera to get a clear-]

Once Shirou used the information-gathering device’s camera to see Rebecca’s face, he was in absolute shock.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 295, A Certain Girl

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Akira, who asked Shirou to help him open the door, believed in Shirou's skills. Akira expected him to open the door with ease. But strangely enough, the door was still locked even after a few minutes and Shirou did not say anything.

"…? Shirou, what's wrong? Is it giving you trouble?"

"Eh? Ah, no, it's fine. I'm opening it now."

The door started to slide open. Akira was so happy that with this, he would finally be able to get his front-line equipment. Because of his jovial state, he was not able to notice Shirou's surprise when he called out to him.

There were several containers inside the cargo sector B28. The sector was well-made to defend against attacks. The containers were also strong and robust. To guarantee the security of whatever was inside those containers, different containers were only able to be opened by certain people with specific authorization. Moreover, the authorization to open one of these containers was completely separate from the authorization of the transport vehicle.

As expected, Akira's equipment was inside the container owned by Sakashita Heavy Industry. He already received the lock code from Kibayashi before coming here. So, if his lock code was rejected again for some reason, he would have to return back to Kugamyama city to report it. Just to be safe, he asked Rebecca to stay next to the door while he went in to pick up his new equipment alone.

As Akira was walking through the room, Shirou spoke to him through telepathy.

"Akira, just a question. How did you end up with that Rebecca girl?"

"She said something about getting separated from the rest of her team and…"

Akira then explained how he met Rebecca to Shirou. At the end of his explanation, Shirou just muttered.

"…I see."

That short answer was somehow strongly laced with conflicting emotions. So much so that even the usually emotionally inept Akira was able to notice.

"Shirou? Is there anything wrong?"

"…It's nothing."

"But you don't sound like it's nothing."

"Akira, just focus on getting your new equipment for now. Once you're done with that, I will have you do my request first, you did promise me that after all, right? So go and quickly get your stuff."

"…That's true, alright then."

Even Akira knew that Shirou was simply avoiding the subject. Nonetheless, he completely agreed with what Shirou just said. It was only a few more steps before he could finally get his frontline equipment. Therefore, Akira

thought that he should hurry up and just do that before anything bad happens.

As Akira stood in front of the indicated container, he carefully opened the door. There were four large-sized cases inside the container. Those were his new equipment. His mouth curled up into a smile, his new equipment was finally within reach.

Akira tried to open the case.

But it did not open.

“Excuse me…?”

Akira was flustered. He thought the case should open normally. He never heard that the cases needed some kind of identification code to open.

Of course, Shirou, who was looking at him through Akira’s information-gathering device, noticed Akira’s reaction and found it to be weird.

“Akira, what’s wrong?”

“The case won’t open.”

“Well, that’s normal. Although they are your new equipment, to be more precise, they are still Sakashita Heavy Industry’s cargo, set to be delivered to you. Since your authorization is limited to just transporting the cargo in place of the transport company, you don’t have the permission to open it.”

“…So that’s why, huh?”

Akira thought back upon his conversation with Kibayashi and finally understood what Kibayashi meant back then as the latter wryly smiled.

“Don’t worry, if you bring them to me, I can open them for you.”

“Really? Can’t you open it from there? You were able to open the door remotely.”

“I can, but I don’t want to if it can be helped. It might cause trouble later, you see.”

Shirou refused and gave Akira his reasoning.

The inside of any inter-city transport vehicle was basically treated as a part of a city, and Atlast D2771 was no exception. The whole space inside the transport vehicle was treated like the lower district. Meanwhile, special locations, like where the cube was stored, were being treated like the upper district. Normally, someone like Akira would never be allowed to enter those areas.

The reason why Akira was able to get authorization this time was most likely because of Sakashita Heavy Industry’s influence. That frontline equipment was Sakashita Heavy Industry’s reward to Akira after repelling the Nationalists. Therefore, the longer those equipment could not be handed off to Akira, the greater the chance that it might damage Sakashita’s reputation. This was the main driving force that eventually allowed Akira to be granted special authorization to enter this area.

But as expected, his permission only went as far as to enter the transport vehicle, nothing more. Basically, he was not able to receive permission to open the cases that housed his frontline equipment. This also meant that he was not able to enter areas treated as a part of the inner wall. Giving such authorization meant being his guarantor as well, and there was no reason for Sakashita Heavy Industry to go that far for him.

If Akira opened the cases in this situation, there was a good chance that the transport vehicle’s security system would attack him. For someone who had even picked a fight against the Lion Steel company and just received frontline equipment, the transport vehicle’s security system could not afford to underestimate his power. In the worst-case scenario, he might be suspected of trying to get the cube as well.

That was why they did not want Akira to open the cases inside the transport vehicle. They wanted to avoid that possibility at all costs. After Shirou explained, Akira finally relented.

“I-I see, fine…”

After being told as much, Akira did not have any other choice but to step back. He finally understood why people recognized him as ‘that Akira’.

Shirou then added.

“To be honest, I was surprised that you even got the authorization to enter Atlas D2771. The guy who provided you with that authorisation, Kibayashi, was it again? He must be one hell of a guy. He also somehow managed to get you ammo and medicine during your fight with Lion Steel.”

“…You have a point.”

Akira inadvertently made a wry smile. He felt conflicted since he had to admit that he was indeed often helped by Kibayashi’s amazing skill. However, he was also often thrown into trouble thanks to that man.

And this time, Akira was here because of Kibayashi. Even now, he could not tell if it was a fortunate situation, or if he got thrown into another mess again. It could even be both. Nonetheless, he decided to stop worrying about it for now and just kept moving forward.

Akira used the case’s mobile function to set it to follow him. Four legs unfolded out from the case, which had wheels equipped on the end of each leg. The cases then formed a small group as they lined up behind Akira. He was a bit entertained when he saw them trailing behind him as he walked back to the door into the sector where Rebecca was waiting.

Rebecca squinted her eyes and stared at the four cases following Akira.

“Are those yours? What’s inside them? Don’t tell me it’s the cube.”

Rebecca said so in a light joking manner, so Akira replied with a light smile.

“Not even close, they’re just my new equipment.”

“Your equipment? That does sound super strong. Can I take a peek?”

“Sorry, due to certain reasons, I can’t open them here.”

“Aah, I see. Hmmm, that’s too bad. Well, let’s put that aside for now and just get out of here.”

During their casual exchange, Rebecca did not think Akira was lying and just let the matter slide.

Even so, Akira found Rebecca’s reaction a bit strange. However, since it was just a faint feeling and Alpha did not say anything, he thought that there was no need to worry about it. He tried to open the door, but just like last time, the door would not open, which really surprised him.

“…Again? What’s going on here?”

Akira sighed and called Shirou.

“Shirou, the door won’t open again, can you check it?”

“Sure, wait for a sec… You’re not receiving an error from the identification code. It’s an emergency lock. The danger level of the area around that place went up.”

“What’s going on?”

“Basically, there’s an ongoing battle behind that door.”

Akira inadvertently looked at the door.

__*__*__*__

Zelos was running through the hallway, trying to catch those who attacked the transport vehicle while exchanging shots. He was against 2 people. Both were girls with augmented suits that looked like a leotard, covered by a defensive coat that looked like a dress. Both were carrying laser cannons. They were not that strong, but they kept running away. Since they were neither that fast nor that powerful, Zelos decided to pursue them.

Bullets and laser beams flew from both sides, filling the narrow hallway. Normal Hunters and monsters would get blown to pieces by now.

But both sides managed to put up a good fight. They evaded each other's attacks. Deflecting the laser with forcefield armour or blocking the bullets by temporarily increasing the power output of the defensive coat's forcefield armour.

Naturally, the battle ended in Zelos' victory. He was mostly unharmed as well. He had managed to tear off the enemy's arm, which was far from fatal. When they approached a turn along the hallway, they managed to escape and hide from him.

Zelos knitted his eyebrows.

[…They got away again, huh? I pursued them quite far from my main group. This is bad, did I get baited to come here alone?]

Zelos' team encountered these enemies when they were trying to secure a new cargo sector. However, those that faced them were not the main force. They were the team left behind to secure and reinforce the conquered sectors. With a wide gap in firepower, the team was able to barely hold their position thanks to the walls and other structures they had set up. It was only when the main force arrived, did they manage to quickly seize the upper hand and repelled the attackers. Afterwards, the main force went to pursue the attackers as they tried to flee.

However, Zelos' team quickly lost the upper hand the moment they pursued the attackers to a different cargo sector. This sector was not secured yet, which meant that they did not know where the attackers might try to ambush them. Unlike the multi-legged drones, which seemed to have been sent for reconnaissance, the attackers were pretty strong. To prevent an ambush and to secure an escape route, it was of great importance that they secured the hallway first. However, that meant dividing up their force.

If the attackers were slightly stronger, Zelos would have decided to retreat. Unfortunately, the enemies were not that strong, which caused Zelos to insist on the pursuit. As the pursuit continued, Zelos got baited to go deeper

inside the transport vehicle. Eventually, the rest of his men were assigned to secure the hallway while he was left alone to pursue the enemies.

Zelos looked down on the floor, the arm that he had shot off the attackers was oozing green liquid.

[This blood… Is it recovery medicine? Well, it's true that replacing blood with medicine would greatly increase fighting capability. But it's impossible to reconfigure the body to produce medicine instead of blood. It would cause a lot of trouble in everyday life. They really put everything they had into this attack, huh? Well, they are trying to get the cube by attacking an inter-city transport vehicle, so I guess it's not that surprising that they would go this far…]

That was when suddenly a call from his men reached him.

"Zelos, how's our situation over there?"

"Not good. They just got away from me again."

"…Should we send some people over?"

"No. Make sure that we have an escape route. We ended up over-extending, creating a rather long route through sectors that have not been secured yet due to my command. I'm sure that it's not easy, but it would be bad if we don't have a safe place to retreat to in case something bad happens. I'm seriously counting on you, alright?"

"Roger that. Don't get too reckless, yeah?"

Although they were speaking casually, it was clear that they deeply trusted each other. Zelos then continued the pursuit. According to his information-gathering device, the enemies were just waiting on the other side of the turn, which Zelos found weird.

[Again, they're not just simply running away. They're just keeping their distance from me as if to lure me. That location doesn't seem like an

advantageous area to fight me. They don’t seem to be waiting for reinforcement either, so what exactly are they doing…?]

Zelos’ mind wandered to one vague term – high-functioning people. Zelos did find that term strange, but for some reason, it was compellingly convincing. He shook that off his mind and ran through the hallway to face the enemies not too far away from the corner.

Suddenly, a few dozen flat objects flew out from behind the corner. These boards were able to reflect images as if it was made of glass. Zelos quickly reacted by shooting at them as he quickly threw a smoke grenade at the corner.

A moment later, the attackers shot lasers from behind the corner. Normally, these lasers would not be able to make a turn and hit Zelos, but that was where these plates came in. Reflecting off the plates’ surface, they could make a turn and head towards Zelos.

Zelos, who had already expected this attack, destroyed some of the plates before the laser beam was shot. Using the gaps he created, he avoided the incoming beams. He then pushed forward, past the corner, and shot at the enemies.

They quickly reacted to aim their cannons at him. However, the smoke grenade that Zelos had thrown beforehand, already bounced off the corner, landed close to their feet and finally started releasing smoke.

The smoke was infused with particles to counter energy weapons. It was able to effectively disperse and damp the laser cannon, greatly reducing its firepower. It was to the point where even if Zelos got hit, it would not be able to deal that much damage.

Since the smoke only affected a limited area, normally, enemies could just step back out of the affected area while keeping their distance. Thus, it was meaningless to use such smoke grenades from afar. However, in an enclosed space like this where they were in close range, the smoke was highly effective. Although the effects would only linger for a few seconds,

it was enough to decide the battle. Zelos was certain that he had already won.

[You had spent too much effort adjusting your shots with the reflecting plates that you've made the mistake of adjusting your distance from me! This will be your end!]

Zelos stood still and released a relentless assault. He stood with a stance that prevented him from evading as they exchanged an intense barrage. The result for both parties greatly differed. Zelos got a slight burn on his cheek, while the enemies did not even retain their original shape. Zelos knew that the medicine inside their blood could bring them back from death, that was why he executed such a risky move. It was to ensure that his enemies were completely obliterated.

Zelos lowered his rifle and sighed. Pieces of the enemies were scattered on the ground. It was impossible to reconstruct their original form from such a state.

"Alright, that should do it. You really gave me a hard time."

Zelos pinched off the scorched skin on his cheek and applied medicine paste to the area. Once he was done, he called his team. But, he suddenly noticed a sudden change in his radar.

It was at the end of the hallway. Normally, Zelos would have readied himself and not gotten flustered, but the location completely surprised him.

"No way…!"

The signals came from behind, to be more precise, it was from the hallway, behind the corner where Zelos had just come from a moment ago. This completely caught him off-guard. There should be no enemy there.

Still, Zelos managed to quickly react by taking a shooting stance. The enemies were behind the corner, so he did not have a clear sight of them. Worse, he had used most of his ammo to make sure that the previous two enemies were dead for good. Thus, he was also worried about his ammo

reserve. With the signals quickly heading towards him, he had no time to reload. Thus, instead of relying on his rifle, he put them back and unsheathed his blade before running toward the corner.

Zelos knew that at this rate, they would end up engaging at the corner, in close combat. Therefore, he could just use his blade and that range and finish up his enemies. And as he had predicted, they did make contact at the corner.

"…Wha-!?"

As Zelos swung down his blade, his face was filled with shock. The enemy was a huge bundle of flesh, which completely blocked the hallway. Judging from the size of the signal, Zelos had expected it to be something close to humanoid. However, this huge fleshy mess of a monster in front of him caught him off guard.

Naturally, the monster did not let any opening get unexploited and lunged to bite Zelos.

The wide-open jaw clamped hard, only to take out a piece of air. Zelos narrowly jumped away. He managed to use the opening of its jaw being close to launch a strike, slicing the monster cleanly into two. The carcass simply rolled over on the floor, without any further response.

Zelos did not stop there and quickly proceeded through the hallway.

[That was too weak! So, its frightening appearance is just for show, huh? But what the heck with its size!? The signal was not that huge! Just what in the world…]

As questions regarding the current situation ran in his head, the calm Hunter part of him urged him to hurry up.

Putting that aside, he was flanked in a one-way hallway with no branches. His team was left behind to secure the hallway. They should have prevented this from happening. Even so, he got flanked. This meant that the monster had broken through the secured hallway.

He just contacted his men a moment ago. Thus, there was fear of the monster killing his men so fast that they could not even afford the time to plead for help. If the monster broke through the secured hallway without killing his men, there was a good chance that his men were still alive.

Zelos prayed for the safety of his men as he hurried back to his men, if they were still alive, he might still be able to save them.

Zelos' men were busy securing the hallway, they were surprised when they saw Zelos running at them. However, Zelos did not notice their bewilderment as he shouted.

"How is the situation!?"

"…? Nothing in particular over here."

"…What!?"

"Eh?"

Zelo and his men exchanged a confused look.

"Zelos, what just happened?"

"…Wait for a sec… So, what exactly was that?"

His men were fine. They did not even encounter that huge monster in the first place. Zelos, who finally understood that, immediately turned solemn. He realized how bad the situation was.

"Everyone, retreat back to sector A7!"

"What? We're pulling that far back? Are we going to just abandon the sector that we have secured? We will have to redo them again, you know?"

"That's fine. Just forget about the sectors that we have secured. Think of them as unsecured sectors. I will tell you the reason later. Just get moving! Now!"

With that one order, everyone’s expression immediately turned serious. Although they still did not understand why Zelos would give out such an order, they knew that something must have happened. In other words, he had no other choice but to give such an order. They placed their trust in Zelos and they immediately started retreating.

With that, Zelos took his men and pulled out of the area.

The monster that Zelos had sliced into two and left behind started shrinking. When it had stopped shrinking, it returned back to its original form. It was the arm that Zelos had shot off the humanoid enemies a moment ago.

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Akira was rubbing his head in front of the locked door.

Due to the ongoing battle nearby, the warehouse was put on emergency lockdown. Akira thought that it might be the security team fighting against the attackers, which was understandable. He did not mind joining the fight, but in order to do so, he would have to open the door in front of him first. However, because of that battle, the door could not be opened.

“Shirou, can you do something about this?”

“Even if you ask, this lock is no longer a simple identification lock.”

Akira frowned after hearing what he had said. It seems like Shirou could not help him this time. In the worst-case scenario, he would be locked inside this sector for some time. Akira sighed and mumbled.

“Well, this sucks…”

That was when Rebecca suddenly asked.

“You can’t open the door?”

“Yeah, it seems like it’s locked because there’s an ongoing fight occurring somewhere nearby.”

“I see… Uhmmm, in that case, how about we go out through the wall instead of the hallway? There’s actually an exit right over there…”

“Is that even possible?”

“Is it not? Did the operator say so?”

Akira raised his eyebrows. He did not expect her to say something like that. Seeing how he reacted, Rebecca frowned and apologetically said.

“Ah, you just said that the door won’t open because there is a battle nearby, so I just concluded there must be someone who told you that. So, that means, you must be in contact with an operator or something to open the doors… Sorry, were you trying to hide it?”

Judging from what she said, Rebecca noticed that he was talking to someone. However, it seemed like she was still unaware of him being an old-world connector. After all, there were information-gathering devices that could access the old-world domain and Akira had heard Hunters near the frontline had these kinds of information-gathering devices. Thus, he believed Rebecca must have assumed that he had one and calmed down.

“Ahh, right, just keep it a secret.”

“Okay. So then, is it not possible to get outside the transport vehicle?”

“Shirou, how is it?”

Akira threw that question just to at least hear Shirou’s opinion, but there was no reply.

“Shirou?”

“…Alright, let’s try that.”

Shirou paused for a bit before finally answering.

Akira stood in front of the door that led outside the transport vehicle.

“Shirou, I’m already in front of the door”

“I’m on my way there, just wait for a sec… Alright, I’m here, opening the door now.”

The door to the outside slowly slid open. That door was for human use and not to transport cargo, thus, it was a relatively small door. Still, it was big enough for Akira and his cases to pass through. The door that opened up by falling forward, turned into a pathway to the outside.

Akira stood on that door and extended both of his arms forward. The multi-legged cases that were following behind him up until now leapt forward and stacked themselves on top of his arms. What Akira needed to do now was just to jump off with his cases. Although it was from a height that might even be taller than that of a building, it was not a problem at all for the current Akira. When he peeked down, Shirou already moved the camping vehicle there as he was looking up, waiting for him.

“Rebecca, just to be safe, you can jump on your own, right? If not, we can jump together.”

“I’m okay.”

“Alright, I’ll be going first then.”

Akira jumped off, but on his way down, he passed by Shirou, who was travelling up.

“Eh?”

As soon as Akira landed, he immediately looked up. Shirou jumped up to where Akira was a moment ago using the power of his augmented suit.

Rebecca could not hide her shock the moment she saw Shirou suddenly appear in front of him.

“…Shirou?”

“Haruka!”

Shirou smiled happily toward the girl who named herself ‘Rebecca’ in front of Akira.

No matter how much special treatment Sakashita Heavy Industry had given Shirou, opening an inter-city transport vehicle door to the outside was a huge crime. After all, it created a security vulnerability to the cube. In the worst-case scenario, Sakashita Heavy Industry might completely see him as an enemy. Even so, Shirou still did it. It was for the sake of rescuing his precious friend, even if it meant picking a fight against the five largest corporations of the eastern district.

The thought that he had finally made it was fully expressed on his face. Meanwhile, Haruka’s expression was one mixed with surprise and struggle.

“Shirou, why are you here? You should be in Sakashita’s research facility…”

“Yeah, I slipped out.”

Haruka, who understood what such an act meant, was aghast.

“What do you think you are do-!?”

“I’m here to rescue you.”

Hearing those words, Haruka was taken aback. She would never imagine that Shirou would go this far for her sake.

“And I can say the same thing to you too, why are you here? How did you get out of that place? Ah, no, that doesn’t matter now! Since you’re already here, I’ll take care of the rest! So, let’s go.”

Shirou extended his hand to Haruka. Her expression was filled with happiness as she extended her hand to reach out for his. But she suddenly stopped as her expression started to turn dark.

Shirou believed that Haruka was just getting worried, so he firmly declared.

“It’ll be alright. Although I look like this, I’m actually pretty amazing. I will handle the rest. Don’t worry. Trust me.”

However, Haruka could still not accept his hand. She managed to make a small and weak smile before she replied to Shirou.

“…Shirou, thank you, I’m really happy, I really am.”

Her expression then turned forlorn.

“…I’m sorry.”

Haruka then kicked Shirou off the platform.

Shirou had waged everything to come here to rescue her. The rejection hit him hard. His face turned sorrowful as he fell.

“Haruka… Why…?”

Haruka was watching Shirou fall with an equally mournful expression.

Seeing Shirou get kicked off the platform and show no signs of preparing to land, Akira flusteredly caught him.

“Shirou, what are you doing?”

Akira’s confused voice pulled Shirou out from the shock of his own powerlessness and emotion took over his body. He thought that he should still be able to make it. Thus, he immediately tried to chase her. He quickly got off Akira’s arms but, the moment his feet landed on the ground, he stopped. [In terms of strength, I am no match against her. It will be impossible for me to make her talk with force. I would only get kicked down again if I tried…]

Shirou gritted his teeth as he cursed his own powerlessness. However, he quickly realized that there was someone who could do that for him.

“Akira! Get back to her! Please!”

“Get back? I don’t know what’s going on here, but she’s going to jump down, no?”

Akira said so and looked at Haruka. She was standing on top of the door, gazing down at Shirou. She then turned around, went back into the transport vehicle, and closed the door. Akira tilted his head in confusion. That was when the ground suddenly started to tremble. It was from the transport vehicle revving up its engine.

“Whoah, what the heck…?”

Akira was still confused by the rapid sudden change of events; Shirou suddenly grabbed Akira’s shoulder and shook him.

“Akira! Just go and get back to her! Otherwise, Haruka will be gone!!”

“Haruka? Isn’t that girl, Rebecca-”

“That doesn’t matter! Just go!? I don’t have the time to explain everything right now!!”

Akira was about to be spurred to action as Shirou kept hurrying him up like that, but Alpha stopped him with a solemn expression.

“Akira, no. Your equipment is more important.”

Thanks to that, Akira was reminded of his equipment and was able to regain his calm.

“Shirou, open the cases first. I’m here to get them in the first place. And, make sure to tell me the rest later.”

“Like I said, I don’t have the time-”

Akira turned and glared at him.

“My equipment first.”

With that, Shirou finally calmed down. He then glared back at Akira and asked.

“You’ll do my request first once your business here is done, right? That’s the promise.”

“And I’m here to get my equipment. I have the cases, but not what is inside. If you won’t open them here, I will have to go back to Kugamayama city first to open them. I’ll only do your request after that.”

Shirou glared hard at him, but Akira was unfazed.

“And also, although I will prioritize your request, it’s not like I’m willing to do just about anything without any information. If you want me to properly fulfill your request, you should properly explain everything to me first.”

In the middle of them speaking, Atlast D2771 started to move slowly. Shirou buckled under the pressure and relented. The camping vehicle started to accelerate under Shirou’s remote control, to race after Atlast D2771. Meanwhile, Shirou did as he was told.

“I’ll open the cases and give you an explanation while we chase that transport vehicle! Get on, now!”

Akira and Shirou immediately jumped into the camping vehicle.

After Haruka returned back inside the transport vehicle, her expression was dark. It was deeply clouded by the feeling of guilt for rejecting Shirou. She reminded herself of her duty and gave an order to the rest of her men.

“…Change of plans. We’re not going to wait until the retrieval team is here. We’re going, now!”

With that order, the transport vehicle that was stopped up until now, started to move. It was the proof that Haruka had seized complete control of the Atlast D2771.

[Shirou, how did he know that I was here? Was he sent by Sakashita Heavy Industry? If he came here because he received information from Sakashita

Heavy Industry, Sakashita would send their army here too…]

Haruka then sighed and mumbled.

“Shirou, why are you here… At this timing…?”

Shirou was here to rescue her, and Haruka was equally happy and sad at the same time because of his sentiments.

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Rebuild World – Chapter 296, Shirou's Objective

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The camping vehicle was moving as fast as the transport vehicle. Inside it, Akira and Shirou immediately started working on opening the cases.

"I'll tell you this beforehand, they won't open right away. They are cases used to secure frontline equipment after all. It's obvious that they're locked extremely securely to protect the dangerous objects inside them."

Akira nodded. He knew that Shirou wanted to chase after Hikaru as soon as possible. Therefore, he had no reason to suspect Shirou would spare any effort in opening these cases.

Shirou put his hand on one of the cases.

"You might think that I'm not doing anything here, but I'm properly working hard to open these cases. So don't complain, okay?"

Akira nodded again.

They both went silent for a few seconds. Shirou still had one of his hands on top of the case as he was staring at it. Although he seemed to be doing

nothing from the outside, it was obvious from his expression that he was doing whatever he could to open the case as fast as he could.

“…I’ll give you a light explanation while I have the chance. Everything that I’m going to say from here on out is all just my guess. There’s no guarantee that they are correct. But my thoughts are based on my own investigation. So, I believe it is accurate… That girl is Haruka, ‘Rebecca’ is just a fake name. Well, ‘Haruka’ might also be a fake name, but, basically, my objective is to rescue her.”

Shirou then stopped. Akira waited for him to continue. Seeing that, Shirou slowly knitted his eyebrows.

“…Akira, is that not enough?”

Akira’s face turned stern.

“That doesn’t explain anything to me. So, you want to save Rebecca… Well, it’s Haruka, right? But it doesn’t seem like she wants to be saved though? Didn’t she kick you down back there?”

Shirou’s face also turned stern.

“I don’t understand why she did that. She might not believe me. But I am absolutely serious. I just want to rescue her, and I have prepared myself to be able to negotiate even against the big five. Even if that doesn’t work, I can at least take her with me and go on the run. Though, looks like she still does not trust me.”

“I see, so then, what should I do after I get back inside Atlas? Should I take her here by force?”

“No, I want to try to convince Haruka through your information terminal. That’s why I want you to get close enough to her.”

“Ahhh, I see.”

“Is that good enough?”

Akira thought for a bit before shaking his head.

“No, as I thought, you should explain to me more. What exactly do you mean by rescuing her? And you did say something about going on the run from the big five companies, so who exactly is she? And you want to save her from what exactly?”

“…I’ll be honest, it’s better if you don’t know. Once you know, you won’t be able to claim you were acting unaware of the situation.”

“Let me ask you this question instead, is it going to be a situation where people would accept it if I said, ‘I don’t know’?”

“At least, it’s easier for you to say ‘you don’t know’ when you really don’t. At the very least, you would be able to claim that you got tricked by me. I know that I’m roping you into my own issues when I hired you, but if you don’t know, you can at least make an excuse. You can even claim that you did it because I am an agent from Sakashita Heavy Industry. But once I tell you this, you won’t be able to use that excuse anymore. Are you sure you’re fine with that?”

As expected, Akira hesitated. But he immediately made his decision and said with a serious tone.

“Just tell me already.”

Akira did not feel like he owed Shirou that much, At least, not enough to warrant him to do anything Shirou asked without knowing anything. Likewise, to engage in a fight while ignoring the doubts festering in him which came from that lack of information. Alpha was the only one that Akira would go that far for. So, with that resolve, he told Shirou to just tell him.

With that, Shirou finally gave up.

“…Alright, but promise me two things. First, don’t tell Tsukisada about what I’m going to tell you, and second, you will still help me no matter what you’re going to hear from here on out.”

“I won’t tell Tsukisada, I can promise you that. But I can’t promise you that I will still help you no matter what. I don’t know what exactly you want me to do, and I don’t have the obligation to do whatever you ask me to. After all, I will not kill myself even if you ask me to.”

Shirou hesitated. There was no guarantee that Akira would still help him after he revealed everything to Akira.

However, Shirou knew that Akira would not help him unless he explained. Likewise, even if he told Akira, the worst that would happen was for Akira to not help him. He did not believe Akira would turn hostile against him.

Even though they had not worked together for long, from the time Shirou had spent with him, he knew him well enough to know Akira would not cross that line. Thus, he finally made his decision.

“Alright, that’s good enough. Akira, I won’t take responsibility even if you say that it’s better for you not to know afterwards, okay? I did warn you, after all.”

As the mood suddenly turned heavy, Akira thought that Shirou would say something very important and inadvertently nodded. And so, Shirou went to the main subject.

“This is just my guess, but there’s a good chance that Haruka is a part of the rebuild research laboratory. Although I don’t know for sure if she’s one of the test subjects or the researchers, my bet is that she is the former.”

Shirou first met her inside the virtual space within the old-world domain. He was in the middle of strict training at that time, to polish his skills as an old-world connector. When he was training there day in and day out, he found Haruka inside one of the old-world domain’s virtual spaces that he was connected to by pure coincidence.

At first, Haruka would not tell Shirou anything, not even her name. During their exchanges, they looked at each other with suspicion. Still, for Shirou who was in the middle of such gruelling training, being able to talk with

someone from outside Sakashita Heavy Industry's facility was like an oasis in the middle of a desert.

Haruka's common sense was slightly abnormal as was Shirou's. He had spent all his life inside a strictly secured facility that was isolated from the outside world. Thus, it was normal for his common sense to be abnormal compared to someone from the eastern district. Both of them were old-world connectors, so Shirou thought that Haruka was also in a similar situation as he was. In the middle of their jam-packed schedule, they made sure that they would have the time to meet up in that virtual space. There, they discussed about their skills as old-world connectors, taught each other, and praised each other. As time flew by, their relationship deepened.

The closer they got, the more they wanted to know about each other. But it was not like they could simply confess their personal information to each other. Thus, what they did was use their skills as old-world connectors to investigate each other. It could also be interpreted as them wanting to know the other person's real identity before they considered whether to continue their relationship or not.

The desire to know Haruka more greatly fuelled Shirou's motivation. He put more effort into his training and became so skilled that it even surprised the staff of Sakashita Heavy Industry. This eventually led to the preferential treatment that he had been receiving.

Even so, Shirou was the first one to crack as he was the first to open up about his personal information to Haruka.

"…The first one who suggested trying to investigate each other was Haruka. Now that I think about it, I bet she thought that there was no way I would be able to gather any information about her. Well, it was indeed not easy. The reason why I was able to get her personal information was mostly because of luck… Haruka was connecting to that virtual space from a rebuild research laboratory. I bet it was from a renovated facility in the middle of some ruin."

Shirou then heaved a big sigh.

“I thought that she was inside a facility owned by one of the big five corporations, just like me. I never thought that it was from the rebuild research laboratory. It was a huge shock for me at that time. I immediately completely erased that information from Sakashita Heavy Industry’s log, if they found out about her, her life would be in danger.”

Shirou’s expression then turned serious as he turned to Akira.

“My original request was to ask you to help me sneak into the rebuild research laboratory and rescue Haruka from that place. I have the confidence if it is for hacking or something similar, but that alone won’t be enough. I need someone who can fight against those guarding that place. That is also why I stocked up on Chrome. I thought Hunters, who are strong enough and can be trusted with such information, cannot be paid only by Aurum.”

Shirou let out a small sigh.

“But well, in the end… I had no other choice but to use all my Chrome to get away from Hammerz. After that, when I was looking for someone that I might be able to hire to accomplish my goal with my emergency Aurum, I found you, Akira.”

After he finished his story, Shirou then stated to Akira in a serious tone.

“There, I’ve told you everything. Now that you know everything, I will have you help me.”

“Hm? Sure.”

Although Akira gave his affirmation, he said it too nonchalantly. Shirou, who did not expect such a response, was caught by surprise.

“…Wait, what?! What is with that reaction!? Were you even listening to my story!?”

Akira winced back from Shirou’s sudden outburst, but it was not from fear. He was simply weirded out by that outburst.

“I-It’s fine, I did properly listen to your story. Basically, you want to save your friend who is trapped inside a dangerous place, right?”

“Well, if you put it that way, that’s true. But your reaction is just wrong, you know!? Do you have a heart made of steel or something…!? No wonder you have no problem picking a fight with the Lion Steel company…”

Shirou exasperatedly sighed. Nonetheless, Akira’s bold response did help him to calm down. That was just as he managed to open the first case, inside it was an augmented suit. Shirou shot a serious gaze at Akira, who just saw what he did.

“I opened the first case. Akira, I’m sorry, but as expected it will take some time for me to open all the cases. Haruka will get away in that Atlas if you wait for me to finish opening all the cases. So please.”

Shirou lowered his head to Akira, who gave a light smile and casually said.

“Alright, make sure to open the rest before I’m back, okay?”

“Of course! Akira, thank you, I’m counting on you!”

Shirou firmly thanked Akira. He was completely shocked and was thrown into disarray when Haruka rejected him, but he was fine now.

Although Atlast D2771 could not quickly gain speed due to its size, its maximum speed was still above the camping vehicle. Due to their conversation, they were a bit late in starting their pursuit. Currently, the camping vehicle was already running parallel to the very last section of the transport vehicle.

Akira leapt from the camping vehicle’s rooftop and landed on the side of the transport vehicle. He then started walking up the wall to the rooftop of the transport vehicle.

“Alpha, I know that we’re in a hurry, but isn’t it better if I put on that augmented suit?”

Although he finally got his frontline equipment, he was still not using them.

“It’s better like this. After all, we don’t have the time for me to modify that augmented suit. Moreover, our objective is to get close enough to that girl so that Shirou can talk to her. Coming here with powerful equipment would only needlessly make her feel uneasy.”

“You have a point.”

Akira eventually reached the rooftop, he then looked around for a door to get inside the transport vehicle. But for some reason, he could not find it anywhere.

“Shirou, I’m fine with searching for Haruka inside the transport vehicle, but I don’t see any gates to get in. Can you find me a way in?”

“Sure, wait for a sec. That gate would be… No luck, the control pattern has been changed, I’ll look for another way in…”

“Wait, didn’t you open a similar door before?”

“It’s not that simple. I’m in a hurry right now, so I don’t have the time to explain it to you.”

“Ah, now that I think about it, Haruka is also an old-world connector, right? Can’t you contact her through telepathy too?”

“No, it’s not that simple. If I can do that, I would have done that by now.”

“I-I see.”

“…There’s a hatch about 300 metres away from you. Try that hatch first, if that doesn’t work, I will look for another door.”

“Roger that.”

Akira followed Shirou’s instructions as he walked on top of Atlas. Although he still had some questions, he thought that it would be bad to sour Shirou’s mood even more. Thus, he threw his questions to Alpha instead.

“Alpha, what do you think I should do to find Haruka?“

“I’m sure that without trying to find her, once she notices that you’re around, she’ll come to you. After all, from her point of view, a dangerous person that she had just expelled from the transport vehicle had returned.”

“Expelled? What do you mean? Was I expelled from the transport vehicle by Haruka?”

“Yes. My guess is that back then, she had done something to that door so that someone from the outside could easily open it.”

“Why would she do that…?”

“She doesn’t want you to get in her way of stealing the cube.”

Akira raised his eyebrows.

“Wait for a sec, so she is the one that attacked the transport vehicle?”

“Yep, although, it’s just my guess. She is not just one of the attackers, I am willing to bet she’s actually the leader of the attackers.”

“…Why didn’t you tell me?”

“You won’t be able to hide it. You couldn’t even pretend that you didn’t know something, right? If she noticed that you know about her real identity, she might stop pretending to be someone from the team trying to secure Atlas. To avoid unnecessary hostility from her, I was not able to tell you. It’s not like she’s your enemy, so there’s no need to fight her when there’s no real reason to.”

Although Akira completely understood Alpha’s point, he still could not help but to make a complicated expression.

“But still, she’s one of the attackers, right?”

“Yes. But she is not your enemy. You are only here to pick up your equipment. You never accepted any request that needed you to fight the attackers. So, there is no reason for you to pick a fight with her. Though it’s true that she is the one who sent those multi-legged drones to attack you, it

would be strange if you don’t get attacked there instead, right? Furthermore, she did help you fight too, afterwards. I thought that it was better to let her know that you’re not worth the problem so she would let you finish your business there and get out of the transport vehicle as soon as possible. I believe you can at least understand that much, right?”

“…Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

Although Akira was still displeased with what had happened, at the moment, he was working for Shirou. Thus, he decided to focus on the task at hand for now.

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Inside the transport vehicle which had suddenly started moving, Zelos’ team was faced with an intense battle as they were slowly pulling back. Zelos, who was standing right at the front, spearheading the team, shouted to his com.

“Don’t chase them too deep! Focus on pulling back! We’re retreating to sector A7!”

Their enemies were small girls with weapons. These girls had the same faces and they looked exactly the same as the ones Zelos had killed before he called for a retreat. Everything from their fighting capability, equipment, and green blood, were all the same. At that time, Zelos was fighting them while they were running away from him. However, this time, they were the ones pressing an assault on his team. All of them had flat emotionless eyes. Even when their friends got killed or blasted to pieces, they did not show any reaction.

Their emotionless faces were ominous and creepy. All of these girls had this exact look, and all of them looked like Haruka.

The hallway was filled with the laser beams released from the girls’ laser cannons. Zelos’ team used the portable walls that they had installed, to secure each sector. to block the lasers as they were slowly pulling back. Whenever Zelos’ team found even the smallest opening, with Zelos as the

main firepower, they would quickly attack and decimate those that were open.

However, they were still feeling the heat from the assault. No matter how many they took out, the enemies kept coming without an end in sight. Their numbers were not reducing at all.

After Zelos took out a nearby enemy, he knitted his eyebrows and turned toward his men.

“How’s the situation?”

“We have three badly injured, but everyone is still alive. We also have secured a route to retreat back to cargo sector A7. The badly injured are prioritized to retreat first.”

Zelos’ stern expression relaxed after he heard that report.

“Alright then, just continue retreating. No need to worry about your ammo. Make sure to stay in the hallway until we can regroup at cargo sector A7. Never try to set up a barricade inside a room even if the fight gets tough. Make sure that everyone understands it.”

“Of course! After all, we’ve investigated where exactly these girls came from. It turns out that they were coming out from the rooms that we had secured beforehand. Just how exactly did they get in there…”

Suddenly, another man spoke with a stern look.

“I bet they were hiding.”

“But we made sure to sweep the sectors when we had secured, you know?”

“I bet we just checked if there’s someone inside, right? I witnessed it myself, you know? The moment when they formed from a locker. I’m not saying that they came out from inside the locker, but the whole locker itself turned into one of these things.”

Hearing that fantasy-like statement from his friend, the other guy knitted his eyebrows and exclaimed.

“The heck are you even talking about…?”

But Zelos looked convinced.

“I see, so that’s why. They were disguised as a part of the transport vehicle!”

“…You gotta be joking with me!?”

“It would be great if it is really just a joke though, let’s go!”

Zelos and his men were slowly pulling back from the front. But the number of enemies did not go down at all. They were shot down and sliced to pieces, drowning the floor in a puddle of green liquid. However, the enemies behind just ignored the puddle and kept charging forward.

In the middle of battle, Zelos noticed the connection between the girls.

[Wait… I see now, so that’s it!]

The reason why Zelos called for a retreat was because he was worried that there were secret routes inside the transport vehicle.

When Zelos was attacked by that large monster, he was worried whether his men had the route to retreat secured. After all, that monster attacked him from somewhere supposed to be secured.

But his men were safe. Which could only mean that the monster suddenly appeared in between the small opening between where his men were posted and him. Out of all the possibilities that he had thought of, he concluded that there must have been a secret route leading to where it had appeared.

If there were indeed secret routes inside the transport vehicle, then it was too naive to think that the sectors that they had secured were really safe. Fearful of getting ambushed through such secret routes, he decided to redo

everything with the assumption that there were secret routes. Thus, he called all his men back to cargo sector A7.

However, if the enemies were disguising themselves as part of the transport vehicle, then even if there were no secret routes, it would not be strange for them to suddenly appear out of nowhere. Moreover, Zelos knew that no human could do this. This meant that the opponents he was fighting against were monsters taking human form.

His thoughts then reached the next conclusion. The opponents were biological monsters taking the form of a little girl. That they were pumped full of powerful medicine. The reason why they were so tenacious and powerful was because of the medicine. It was also the reason why they kept coming back up even after he had already killed several of them.

That was also the reason why they could not find corpses or any leftovers from the team that stormed the transport vehicle beforehand. It was because these monsters ate them. Although it was nothing but just a hunch, Zelos was convinced that he was right.

[Now that I take a good look at the hallway, I don't find any leftovers from the multi-legged drones that we had destroyed. Those drones were also equipped with laser cannons, just like these girls, is it just a coincidence? Or did these girls get their laser cannons from eating those drones? If it is the latter, it would mean that these girls are of a monster type that would devour and assimilate anything they can consume. In that case, they can increase their numbers by consuming materials. No wonder they just keep coming. They're eating their dead friends to produce copies!]

Fortunately, Zelos knew how to deal with these kinds of monsters. He simply had to completely obliterate them until they had no energy or material left to reconstruct themselves.

"…This is an order to everyone! Start the counterattack! The green liquid is probably an extremely powerful medicine! There's a good chance that they'll be able to heal themselves unless you completely destroy them!"

With that signal from Zelos, his team started to ramp up their counterattack. Faced with an intense assault that completely destroyed every single part of the monster's body, the girls' attacks started to weaken.

Zelos used that chance to quicken the retreat of his team back to cargo sector A7.

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Haruka, who was commanding the biological weapons, seemed solemn as she saw the changes in Zelos' team.

"That was fast… Is it normal for them to be able to adapt this quickly? Well, it is basically the same thing that had happened in Kugamayama city, so I guess that's why they know how to deal with it."

Haruka shook off her worries for now and decided to focus on controlling the biological weapons. But something else caught her attention that made her knit her eyebrows.

"…Your business here is already done, right? So why are you coming back?"

In her enhanced vision, Haruka could see Akira walking on the rooftop of the transport vehicle.

Akira was in the middle of looking at a door on the rooftop when he suddenly stopped. Not too far ahead of him, a certain part of the rooftop was slowly opening.

"Shirou, is that it?"

"No, that's not me."

Suddenly Haruka jumped out of that opening. The moment she landed on the rooftop, she stood face to face with Akira. The smile that had adorned her face when he was with her while they were inside the transport vehicle was nowhere to be seen.

“What are you doing here? You have no business anymore here, right?”

“True, but it seems that’s not the case for Shirou.”

Shirou’s voice immediately came out from Akira’s information terminal.

“Haruka! Just listen to what I have to say! Why can’t you come with me? If you’re worried about what will happen after you run away, it’ll be fine! I have a hideout that even Sakashita Heavy Industry cannot find. I’ve also prepared negotiation materials so that the Corporate Government won’t arrest you even if you’re someone from the rebuild research laboratory. So please…”

But Haruka ignored Shirou’s plea. She bit her lips, eyes full of pain as she looked straight at Akira.

“…Leave. I have no wish to fight you, but if you get in my way, then I will have no other choice.”

“Well, I can say the same for me as well. So, can we at least talk?”

“No, Leave! I don’t want to hurt Shirou’s friend. But if you give me no choice, I will use force.”

Haruka’s presence started to show readiness to fight, she was no longer trying to pretend to be weak.

“Just to let you know, I’m pretty strong.”

Although it was nothing but a bluff, her words sounded as if she had enough power to force even Akira to get serious.

“…Shirou, what’s next? Should I just leave? Or fight? If it’s the latter, I have no guarantee that she will come out alive, you know?”

Shirou could not help to raise his voice after hearing that depending on the situation, Akira would go ahead and kill Haruka.

“Akira! You-!”

“Shirou. The opponent is someone who came here to steal the cube, just so you know, I’m not that strong to be worried about not killing her. I will try, but I give you no promises. I know that I’m working for you right now, but I have no obligation to go that far for you. So, which one is it?”

Shirou could not find any words to rebuke Akira. That was when Haruka intervened.

“Then just leave. I don’t know how much Shirou is paying you, but if it’s money, you can just give it back. I can guarantee you, fighting me is not worth the trouble.”

“Unfortunately, I can’t just do that. A job is a job. It won’t erase my responsibility just because I return the sum. Well, that might erase my obligation to Shirou tied to the reward but that doesn’t help resolve my other debts to him. Debts that are not tied to money. I’m planning to properly repay all my debts to Shirou.”

Haruka was taught that under the Corporate Government, everything that was done through money could be undone also through money. So, she was surprised to hear Akira respond in such a manner.

“You’re a rather righteous person…”

“I’m just doing my best. Shirou, what’s your answer? Just to warn you, if the transport vehicle gets too far away from the camping vehicle, I will head back, my stuff is over there after all.”

The transport vehicle was going too fast for the camping vehicle to keep up. It was already speeding away from where Shirou was. Even so, Shirou could not decide to tell Akira whether he should fight or leave.

The one who broke the stalemate was Haruka.

“Shirou, can you hear me?”

“Y-yeah!”

“Let me tell you one thing. You might think that I’ve escaped that place, but that is not correct. I still have not escaped that place.”

“…What do you mean?”

“I can’t tell you more. But, as long as you don’t know why, you won’t be able to rescue me. So please, just leave.”

Haruka seemed honestly happy and sad at the same time as she threw a smile at Shirou through Akira’s information terminal.

“I’m really happy that you have gone this far for me. It’s already good enough. So please, just leave.”

A sad silence pervaded. It was Shirou who finally broke that silence.

“…Akira, return back.”

“…Alright.”

Akira walked to one end of the rooftop. He then turned around and looked at Haruka. She was only standing there as if struck by helplessness.

Akira let out a sigh and jumped off the transport vehicle.

Haruka then headed back inside the transport vehicle. All the emotions she felt were left here. It was taken by the wind created by the speeding transport vehicle and carried away.

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After Akira landed on the ground, he waited for Shirou to pick him up. Even before Shirou came, he could no longer see the transport vehicle. Akira jumped onboard the camping vehicle and went to check up on Shirou, but contrary to his expectation, Shirou was doing okay.

“Akira, I’ve opened all the cases.”

“O-okay, thanks. So then, what’s your plan after this?”

“Just as I planned, we will still go and rescue Haruka. Our target is the rebuild research laboratory. This is where things get serious, so let’s get ready.”

The camping vehicle accelerated even faster under Shirou’s remote control.

“…Say, Shirou. Didn’t Haruka say something along the lines of it being impossible for you?”

“She didn’t say anything like that. What she said is that she still has not escaped from the rebuild research laboratory. Well, I still have not fully understood the meaning of her words there. Akira, what do you think she meant by that?”

“Hmmm. Something like that body of hers being a remote terminal that she’s controlling from the laboratory?”

“No, that one is not a remote terminal. That is the real Haruka. There is no doubt about that. I can guarantee you that. It’s normal practice to prepare a body double when an important person goes on-site. So, I’m experienced in both faking myself and seeing through fake bodies. That’s why I can tell. That was the real Haruka.”

“Then what did she mean by that?”

“…I don’t know. But, if she’s still under the control of the laboratory for any reason, then I will go and rescue her. We might be able to find the reason if we go to the laboratory, it’s worth checking.”

“Hmm, it still sounds like we’re just going with the flow.”

Shirou heard that and made a rather smug smile before speaking.

“At least not as bad as you thought.”

“You have a point.”

Akira could not do anything but chuckle in reaction to that.

“So then, how long will it take before we reach that laboratory?”

“It’s about 5 hours from here.”

“Alpha, is that enough time for you to familiarize yourself with the new equipment?”

“Yep.”

“I see. Although this rebuild laboratory sounds like some super facility, I have my frontline equipment with me this time, so I guess it should be fine.”

“I’m really counting on you for this. It is a secret laboratory, so it might look like it’s undefended from outside, but it should at least be as secure as a Sakashita Heavy Industry facility.”

“A secret lab, huh?”

“Yeah. It wasn’t easy to find it, you know? I’ve been trying to find it even using the information that I got from Viola, but that turned out to be useless, so it was really not easy.”

The camping vehicle continued running through the wasteland and into the rebuild research laboratory that even Shirou had a hard time finding.

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Back in Sheryl’s base, Sheryl was fearfully receiving a visitor.

“U-Uhmmm, I heard that you have some business with Viola… U-uh, m-may I ask what it might be?”

“It’s nothing serious, I just have a few questions for Viola-san regarding some of her past dealings. It would be great if you would cooperate.”

The guest was Maruo. Inabe, as an officer from Kugamayama city, already told Sheryl beforehand that Maruo was someone from the Corporate

Government and warned her not to do anything rude to him. That was why she was so nervous.

“So then, where is Viola-san?”

“S-she’ll be here in a minute. S-so please wait for a bit.”

Although she had Akira’s support and her gang had become a rather untouchable organization in Kugamayama city, they were still nothing compared to the Corporate Government. Thus, it was not strange for everyone in the gang to be nervous with the current guest around.

A moment later, Sheryl’s men came in with Viola. Viola sat in front of Maruo as she was trying her best to keep her usual smile.

“I heard that you have some questions for me, so, what might it be?”

“I want to know in detail about your deal with someone by the name of Gorou in Mihazono ruin. We have investigated and it seems like you gave him a certain piece of information, what did you give him?”

“I see, so you want to buy that information? In that case…”

In order to get into her usual rhythm, Viola tried to start negotiations in her usual fashion. But Maruo stopped her.

“I will give you the gratitude amount, but let’s negotiate a later date. I want to know that answer first and foremost. I know you like to complicate the discussion. So, let me state this. I can actually just ask your brain directly, but that will require certain preparations first. So, to not have to go through such a troublesome thing, it would be of great help if you can just tell me honestly. Would that work for you?”

In front of Maruo, who said that with nonchalance and a peaceful smile, Viola got overwhelmed by the pressure and told Maruo everything.

Silavin: That is it for the web novel. Not sure when the author will continue to write. It was a great adventure. I seriously wish this to continue. I want to envision how the rebuild research laboratory is like. How Shirou will save Haruka. What those Old World AIs plan to do.

If there are more raws, we will pick it up. For now, we would like to thank you for your support. Till next time.

We also hope that you all will continue to support the author by buying his novel at Rebuild World (Light Novel) | J-Novel Club

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